

DANCING DOWN THE FLOOR:
EXPERIENCES OF 'COMMUNITY' IN A 'WEST AFRICAN' DANCE CLASS
IN PHILADELPHIA

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Dance

by
Julie B. Johnson

Dissertation Date July, 2016

Dissertation Approvals:

Dr. Kariamuwelsh, Dissertation Advisor, Dance
Dr. Karen Bond, Dance
Dr. Patricia Melzer, Women's Studies/German Studies
Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, Theater

©
Copyright
2016

by

Julie B. Johnson
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

'Community' is a multivalent concept, subject to a plurality of contexts and constructs that can alter and shift its meaning. As a dance artist, I have encountered myriad understandings and manifestations of 'community' through dance practice, and perceive an intrinsic relationship between dance and 'community.' A 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia — designated as a 'community-based' class by the instructor — provides a rich opportunity to excavate this relationship. The class, one of several offered throughout the city, is located in West Philadelphia. It is an intergenerational class attended by a diverse demographic of participants (race/ethnicity, gender, profession, class, age, ability, etc.) with an array of motivations and goals for participating in class (as made evident through conversations and interviews). All are welcome to attend, regardless of previous experience or skill level in 'West African' dance.

My dissertation is a qualitative research study that examines participant experiences and interpretations of 'community,' with attention paid to the socio-cultural/political context of 'West African' dance in the United States, specifically in Philadelphia. Methodologically, this study is situated in sensory ethnography, philosophically oriented in community based participatory research, and draws from phenomenological strategies towards gathering lived experience data. Lived experiences of 'community' are placed in conversation with literature concerned with theories and constructions of 'community' from a range of disciplines, as well as texts that interrogate the historical, sociocultural and political contexts which frame 'West African' dance within the United States. As a member of this particular 'West African' dance class, I situate my own ex-

periences within that of the collective, migrating inward and outward between personal reflection and participant narratives. As such this investigation lies at the intersection of subjective, intersubjective, and cultural knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was little, my mother would ask me about my day when I got home from school. My response (according to her) would often involve a dizzying dance around the room, twirling and rolling on the floor, leaping up, and zipping back and forth. I must say, not much has changed. What I have come realize is that, quite often, in order to conjure the words to express that which my body knows, I have to *move*. And when the words don't come easily, I move more. Every word in this dissertation is the result of a rigorous, arduous, yet completely rewarding process of conjuring words through movement, exploring and loving the space that I perceive between my embodied knowledge and verbal articulation of ideas.

I am thankful for the many people who have affirmed, supported, and inspired this process, and who have helped to create the conditions that made it possible. I thank my mom, Ann Johnson, for instilling in me the idea that art and creativity are ways of being, empathic pathways of understanding, bridges connecting us to other human beings. I could not have endured this process without her cheerleading, boundless enthusiasm, and always being at the ready, waiting to jump in and lend a hand. I thank my dad, Calvin Johnson, Jr., for chasing me around the house with his dissertation when I was very young, insisting I look at how he formatted his footnotes. Every day, he showed me that unwavering focus, dedication, and a really weird sense of humor are incredibly useful life skills. I thank my siblings, Laura and Joseph, for making me feel whole. I am not me without you. I am appreciative for my family's love, and their pa-

tience and understanding during the many moments my doctoral work kept me away from home.

Working with the doctoral dance faculty at Temple University has been truly transformative. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from them; their diverse perspectives have deepened my connection to dance in ways I never thought possible. It has been an honor to work with my dissertation committee. Dr. Karen Bond deepened my connection to experiential research, and to the rigor and beauty of poetics. Dr. Patricia Melzer challenged me to consider broader perspectives in order to more deeply interrogate my own. Their thoughtful feedback, inspiring body of work, and unique approach to research has informed and shaped this study, and has motivated me to do my best work. I am honored to have been able to work with Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, my external reader, whose celebrated work in cultural anthropology, theater, and journalism is inspiring. I am forever indebted to my advisor, Dr. Kariamuwelsh, for the wealth of experience and knowledge she has shared; for helping me navigate the balance between cultural studies and personal experience within the realm of African Diaspora culture and performance; for the time and energy she so willingly gave; and for leading by example what it means to be strong.

This process would not have been possible without generous funding from the Temple University Graduate School's Dissertation Completion Grant; and with funding that supported my coursework, including the Future Faculty Fellowship and funding from the Boyer College of Music and Dance. I am also very appreciative of Toni

Shapiro-Phim and Selina Morales of Philadelphia Folklore Project (PFP) for providing access to the PFP archives, and generously sharing their time and insight.

I am eternally grateful to my partners at Evolve Dance Inc., Dr. Jane Alexandre, Karenne Koo, and Dr. Annie Tucker, who continuously encourage, instigate, perplex, and interrogate in ways that make me feel both grounded in support and aflight in possibility. I am also incredibly thankful to all of my friends near and far, particularly my Philadelphia friends who have become family and have helped make this city feel like home. Sharing meals, stories, dances, tears, and laughter has meant the world to me. And to all of the participants of this study who so generously shared their perspectives and experiences with me, on and off the dance floor, I simply cannot thank you enough.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	xii
A Note About Labeling 'West African' Dance.....	xix
 CHAPTER	
1. CHAPTER ONE: SITUATING THE RESEARCH/ER.....	1
My Embodied Journey in ‘Community’.....	1
Comforts & Contradictions: Researcher Emplacement.....	9
Purpose and Motivations.....	16
<i>Contributing to Literature and Bridging the Gap</i>	17
<i>African Diaspora Dance Literature, Practice, and Social Justice</i>	19
"Monday Night Class:" Research Site.....	24
2. CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY.....	33
Ethnography.....	35
Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR).....	39
Method.....	43
<i>Participant Observation & Conversations</i>	43
<i>Core Participants</i>	45

<i>Community Elders & Leaders</i>	46
<i>Additional Research Participants</i>	47
Analysis.....	48
Delimitations.....	49
3. CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXTUALIZING THE MONDAY NIGHT CLASS.....	51
West African Dance in the U.S.....	51
African Diaspora and Tradition.....	52
African Diaspora Performance Aesthetics & Community.....	59
Civil rights, Black power, Identity.....	64
African Diaspora Movement Arts in Philadelphia.....	70
4. CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUALIZING ‘COMMUNITY’.....	74
Definition.....	75
Aesthetic Community.....	78
Difference.....	83
Spatial Dynamics.....	88
Individual & Cultural Identity.....	90
Participation & Practice.....	93
5. CHAPTER FIVE: SENSE PERCEPTION IN THE MONDAY NIGHT CLASS.....	98
Spatial dynamics in the Monday Night Class.....	100
<i>Material Space</i>	101
<i>Social Space</i>	104

<i>Learning Space</i>	110
<i>Taking Up Space</i>	113
<i>Circle Space</i>	117
Cognitive Awareness & 'Letting Go'.....	120
“Marriage” and the Music/Dance Connection.....	127
Extra-Sensory Experience.....	134
<i>Honoring An Ancestor: Emotion, Empathy, and Embodiment</i>	139
6. CHAPTER SIX: UNDERSTANDING ‘COMMUNITY’.....	149
Shared Practice.....	150
Support and Family.....	153
Cultural Knowledge and Membership.....	161
Social Justice.....	169
Challenges in ‘Community’.....	178
7. CHAPTER SEVEN: FINAL REFLECTIONS AND ‘THE OTHER SONG’.....	195
The ‘Other Song’.....	195
Summary.....	197
<i>Shared Practice</i>	200
<i>Support and Family</i>	202
<i>Cultural Knowledge and Membership</i>	203
<i>Social Justice</i>	205
<i>Challenges in ‘Community’</i>	206

Implications for Further Study.....	207
<i>Emergent Theory</i>	209
<i>Future Research</i>	212
Final Reflections.....	213
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	217
APPENDIX	
A. INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	227
B. IRB APPROVAL.....	228

INTRODUCTION

On a cool fall night in 2014 in West Philadelphia, I was sweating in a hot dance studio with approximately 40 other people. About fifteen dancers moved through the space, another ten stood around the perimeter to observe and wait for their turn. Ten or so musicians were situated at one end of the room, seated or standing, filling the air with percussive energy. Several on-lookers, having wandered in from the Powelton Village streets or pulled away from their activities elsewhere in this old community building, were likely drawn to the space by the music, laughter, and shouts of encouragement projected through the walls and windows. The moment, documented in a reflective journal entry, is offered below. The memory though, still so vivid and vibrant, lives in my body such that I can conjure it at any moment.

My knees are bent. My torso is pitched forward with my chest almost parallel to the floor. A rhythmic pulse is riding up my spine like a wave. I shift my weight side to side with a slight shuffle step from right foot to left. I dip my head and, as each foot returns from its shuffle, I thrust my hips back. My arms push out over each step, as if shooing away some invisible nuisance. Right and left, right and left, a constant rhythmic bob. The air is thick but I cannot smell it; I feel immersed in the musty dampness collectively created by the moving bodies in the room. The heat of effort opens my pores, I can feel the sweat beading on the surface of my skin. The thirty minute warm-up at the beginning of class prepared me for this moment, raising my heart rate and

pumping the blood through my body. I feel ready to take on the movement... to let the movement take over me. Effort in this moment doesn't feel like hard work. Instead, I am swimming in a sensation of 'aliveness.' In my periphery, I see a few of my classmates dipping their heads and pushing their arms, riding the same wave. The dim floodlights hanging from the ceiling and the pencil-colored wooden floor work together to cast a golden hue around this old dance space. Splashes of bright colors and patterns enter my view as I turn my head and see all the lapas, the wrap skirts we usually wear to this 'West African' dance class¹, tied around the waists of the women bobbing along with me. Syncopated movement of colors - greens, golds, and pinks, deep indigos and corals - offer visual layers of rhythm driving our dance. There are about 15 people on the dance floor (including one man) of various shapes, sizes, ages, and skin tones, all filling the space with their unique movements... uniquely riding the same rhythmic wave.

The instructor tells us that this dance, "N'gri," is meant to evoke the feeling and image of a jumping gazelle. It is also called "Wassolonka," named after the Wassolon region in Mali where this dance emerged.

I hear the 'break' in the music that gives us the cue to change to the next step. I lift my torso slightly upwards, but remain pitched forward. My spine continues to undulate as my shuffling feet propel me a little further side to side. My hands are held behind me

¹ I place the terms 'West African' and 'community' in single quotation marks to acknowledge the multivalency of their meanings in this context. I use 'West African' dance as a broad label that refers to a genre of numerous dance techniques and styles derived from, and/or influenced by, myriad cultures, ethnic groups, and practices of the western region of Africa. I mine this term later in the dissertation.

now, against the small of my back. I see the drummers in front me, their arm and chest muscles contracting with each strike and release. Their heads tilt back, sideways, or forwards, as if in response to some secret surge of energy emitted from their drums that only they can comprehend. They play the 'break' again. My shuffle instantly changes to a lift of the knee with each step. I spiral my torso alternately right and left, opening my chest and arms wide. "Ay!!!" the instructor yells out, as if to provide guidance and encouragement through one powerful intonation. The rhythmic pulse is constant; it now feels less like a wave and more like explosive bursts launching me upward. I am jumping! I feel the wooden floor under my bare feet, the grooves and the seams of the slats rub against the skin on the balls of my feet upon take off and landing. Every push off the floor releases pent up energy and somehow recharges me. I feel a synchrony with the dancers, our bodies create new rhythms to add to the already intricate percussive pattern that fills the air...

For over three years, I have attended a 'West African' dance class in West Philadelphia, while pursuing my PhD in dance at Temple University. My doctoral research is driven by a phenomenon that I have experienced time and time again: the feeling that through the practice of dance, I have become part of (or created with others) something larger and deeper than the dance movement, something that I identify as 'community.' My participation in this 'West African' dance (a label I deconstruct later in this dissertation) has made this even more evident. I want to understand more about this perceived relationship between dance and 'community.' I desire to know if other participants have

similar curiosities. I am intrigued that fellow dance practitioners have shared this perception with me, and perplexed that this aspect of dance is so often ignored in scholarly discourse.

I have become frustrated with trends in the professional field of dance in the United States - including artists, arts organizations, funding institutions and policy-making entities - that extract 'community' from dance and create a binary in which there exist practitioners who orient their practices towards 'community' and those who orient their practices towards the stage. This rift is palpable in the 'contemporary dance' field within the United States when artists who have innovated artistic practices that challenge this binary — such as Anna Halprin, Liz Lerman, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar — are colloquially referred to as 'community-based' artists.² Or when Lerman explains that she must "keep one foot in the community world and one in the concert world" (2011, p. 244). Or when dance scholar Nadine George Graves, with her in-depth examination of the 'contemporary dance' company Urban Bush Women, demonstrates ways in which the binary operates as Artistic Director Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and the Urban Bush Women dancers negotiate the "spaces between concert dance and community-based work" (2010, p. xi).

What does 'community' mean in these instances when it is presented as an entity that exists outside of dance, towards which artists and organizations can direct their dance practices (as in "community outreach") or diverge away from, or ignore altogether

² I use single quotation marks here to acknowledge 'contemporary dance' as a contested term, which serves to distinguish certain dance forms from others based on false temporal boundaries.

-er? Are dancers and their practices not part and parcel of 'community'? Do they not engender 'community'? In anthropologist Kate Crehan's (2011) *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective*, she 'teases out' the concept of 'community' as a romantic notion related to the German concept *gemeinschaft* - a vague and dreamlike imagining of an ideal nation that once existed sometime in the distant past. She also asserts that these narratives have led to the commonly vacuous use of the term 'community,' which people "use without feeling any need to define it, and yet exactly what defines a particular group of people as a 'community,' and in what sense they constitute a distinct entity can be hard to pin down" (Crehan, 2011, p. 40). Crehan (2011) explains that it is this ambiguity that makes the term so easily employed as a euphemism for marginalized populations and economically depressed neighborhoods, stating, "... community seems rarely to be evoked in the context of rich neighbourhoods" (p. 41). While this vagueness can be divisive, Crehan (2011) states that the term 'community' can also be useful in challenging elitist practices within the art realm, but one must be careful not to fill the empty term with false assumptions about the realities of the actual communities with which one works.

Furthermore, I feel at a loss when scholars and practitioners' dialogues about 'community' and dance privilege concert dance performance and overlook the myriad modes and manifestations of dance that exist beyond the proscenium stage. And I am acutely aware of missed opportunities to examine 'community' from within the dancing participants' experience, when I encounter perspectives that focus solely on the spectators' point of view - on representation rather than experience. Taking the stance that

both those dancing and those watching a dance event can be considered participants in that event, I wonder how 'community' is *embodied* by dancing participants, and then how that embodiment can be read or felt/embodied by spectators.

I am excited when dance scholars such as George-Graves (2010) and Judith Hamera (2011) bridge this gap with investigations of linkages between participation in dance practice and community. Hamera (2011) examines the relationship between dance technique and the sociality, spatiality, and corporeality of dancing communities, situated in the perspective of the dancing participant. There exists also, a growing body of work within folklore studies and ethnomusicology that address intersections of participant experience, dance and music practice, and constructs of 'community' (Hast, 1993; Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001; Norris, 2001). Norris (2001) looks specifically at how contra-dance participants experience and embody 'community.'

I am inspired by conversations with fellow scholars and dance practitioners who share experiences about the capacity of dance to manifest 'community,' in whatever way they choose to define and identify with this very broad and multivalent term. And I am motivated by examinations of works by dance artists that explore the performative nature of participation in dance, rather than just the presentational, that is, what the dance does for the dancer as well as for the spectator. Alia Sutton-Bey, a 'West African dance' practitioner and former director of the Hawthorne Cultural Center in Philadelphia where many 'West African' dance classes were held in the 1990s once explained to me, "Our whole mission is so much more than just a dance class for us. It's always been about community" (Sutton-Bey, personal communication, 2013). She related the notion

of 'community' to the connection of one's local practice to a broader cultural tradition - and the feeling of belonging she associates with this connection. Cachet Ivey, the instructor of the 'West African' dance class in which I participate, taught at the Hawthorne Center early on in her teaching career. Cachet explains that basing her class on 'community' means making it inclusive:

Yes, it's dance class, and it's technique, and it's timing, and it's all these different things, but the key to me is that it's a community-based class... And to me, that's important for people when they come and peek in, it's important to me that they see all these different generations, different body types, and even different people from different places. (Ivey, personal communication, 2014).

I find that the term 'community' is often employed in scholarly and professional literature without contextualization, with no provision for the conditions of its use, disregarding the plurality of contexts and constructs that can alter and shift its meaning. The dynamic range of 'community' expression offered by participants of 'West African' dance in Philadelphia demonstrates the rich opportunity to excavate this phenomenon. What follows is a collection of participant understandings and experiences of 'community' in dance practice, and not an attempt to fix a universal definition. I situate my own experiences within that of a collective, emphasizing the one *and* the many, balancing subjective and intersubjective generation of knowledge, migrating inward and outward between personal reflection and participant narratives.

A Note About Labeling 'West African' Dance

African dance, West African dance, Djembe dance, and African Diaspora dance are just some of the names that the dance class at the center of this research has been referred to in different contexts. For the purposes of this study, I refer to the class as 'West African' dance to acknowledge that the majority of the material taught in class is associated with countries, ethnic groups, and cultural practices of West Africa. While some dance classes take the name of one particular form (like Sabar dance, a social dance form from Senegal, for example) and focus on one particular dance style or technique, the class in this research study covers a wide range of dances and rhythms. The label 'West African' dance, in this sense, is not intended to diminish, homogenize, or overlook the rich diversity of dance forms that have emerged (and continue to emerge) from the region, but to acknowledge the vast repertory of work addressed in the class.

CHAPTER ONE: SITUATING THE RESEARCH/ER

My Embodied Journey in 'Community'

Settling in at a coffee shop with a caffeinated beverage, snacks, and a stack of books, has become a daily ritual. I click-clack away on my iPad while a playlist of tunes wafts through my earbuds, carefully selected to keep me engaged and focused on my work, drowning out the chatter of other cafe dwellers. Time flies as I reflect on my inquiries about the nature of 'community,' and its relationship to dance. The pang of irony occasionally stirs me from deep thought — I realize that as I think about 'community,' I sit alone feeling quite isolated. I occupy this space with many other people who are also 'alone,' withdrawn and intensely focused on their mobile devices and caffeinated beverages. For me, this atmosphere of collective detachment, this 'alone together' practice, does not feel like 'community.' It is something quite different than the feeling of belonging to something meaningful and larger than myself. 'Community,' for me, is the antithesis of individual isolation. And dance has provided me with 'community,' time and time again.

As I have experienced dance as a mode of understanding, creating, maintaining, and being in 'community,' I wonder how it manifests in my dance practice - in my daily life? How might other people perceive 'community' and what connection do they find, if any, to dance? How might our ideas intersect or depart? These questions have driven my artistic practice for longer than I can remember, and it is no surprise they have seamlessly worked their way in to my doctoral research. In order to examine relation-

ships between 'community' and dance, I need to better understand how my own experiences in dance have informed my understanding about 'community.' And so, with another sip of jasmine green tea, I focus my reflection on the earliest memories of my dance experience, I dig through the mental crates of childhood memories... me and dance go way back.

I recall watching grainy old home video reels of my older sister as a toddler doing a Charleston-esque jig in her crib while wearing her one-piece "footie" pajamas. The reel-to-reel action skips and speeds up, adding a comical tempo to her dance. My family and I guffaw as we watched these images projected onto the wall - Laura's little legs kicking vigorously and wiggling her diapered baby bottom with abandon. I wasn't yet born when she was performing these nightly rituals of sleep resistance, but I came along soon after and, true to second-sibling form, I followed her every move. She loved to dance, and so did I. She played the piano and joined several girls' sports teams at school. I did too. But I knew very early on that dance, above all else, would be my life's focus - an ineffable feeling of passion and desire that just felt 'right.'

My family, my 'community of origin,' has always supported this passion. When I was three years old, my mother ran a day care program out of our modest Park Heights home in Baltimore, Maryland. Fun-filled days with neighborhood children included sing-alongs, backyard nature adventures, and plenty of interactive learning games to stimulate our developing minds. But what stands out in my memory the most is the dancing. Playtime often included dancing with abandon to my father's Motown-era records: the Temptations, Four Tops, Smokey Robinson, and The Supremes, to

name just a few. And at some point, my mother hired a dance instructor to teach us creative movement. I recently asked my mother why she hired the dance teacher. She explained that it stemmed from her belief in the arts as integral to learning, to affirming and expressing our existence in this world, and to carrying out meaningful conversations as a way to share our human experiences. So, before I even began primary school or enrolled in an official dance program, I was introduced to the idea that dance could be a way of being in the world, and sharing that state of being with others.

During this same period, my father was pursuing his doctorate in respiratory therapy, while working a full-time job. He spent long hours in his home office, click-clacking away on his 1980s word processor (I often feel as though I am channeling him as I type on my keyboard throughout my doctoral studies). Later, after he graduated and secured a position as a faculty member and Administrative Dean of Natural and Health Sciences at a community college, he would use my sister and I as an audience to practice his lectures. He would sit us down in front of his dry-erase board and lecture to us about things that were at that time way over my head. I was seven, what did I know about "the evaluation methods for aptitude tests of respiratory therapy students"?

What I did understand from my father over the years was that knowledge is a lifelong pursuit, a process to be experienced rather than an object to be obtained. And during the journey, that process provides ample opportunity to share the pursuit with others. He would often give presentations to local colleges and public schools about the contribution of Black scholars, doctors, and inventors to the sciences. As a self-trained genealogist and our family historian, he traced our lineage back several generations,

prior to the abolishment of slavery. He searched archives and found decades of our family members' pitfalls and triumphs, heartaches and achievements, mapping our journey from slavery and the ways in which the branches of our complex family tree are all connected. He created an organization to help others search for their roots. Though he died before he was able to get the service up and running, he did write a book that serves as our personal archive for our family and documents his genealogical journey to discover our ancestors. He wished to share his process with the hope that it could be of some use to others. To be in service to others is a value that my parents shared, that underscored their parental philosophies. Reflecting on this, I understand that these instances of family, arts, service, and learning, represent the early antecedents of my 'community-oriented' world-view.

As I grew older, I attended regular dance classes at various neighborhood dance schools, and my training progressively expanded to include ballet, pointe, modern, jazz, improvisation and composition. When I moved with my family to New York at age 7, we found a dance studio that aligned with my mother's belief that dance, as an art form, can affirm and express self while serving to connect with others and be artistically rigorous. My training at Humphrey Dance, which later became Tappan Zee Dance Group (TZDG) infused in me the understanding that dance can be inclusive. All were welcome to attend, regardless of ability to pay. There were classes for all ages, even adults who were just beginning to dance or who had not danced in many years (such class offerings were rare in this location, and continue to be hard to find). There were classes for everyone regardless of skill, physical ability, or prior experience with dance.

At age 14, my teachers encouraged me to find a place where I could pursue more intensive training. I left home in New York to live with my grandparents and attend the Baltimore School for the Arts. This marked the beginning of my conservatory training, which went on to include the Ailey School and SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Dance. Training at these institutions, which included long hours of daily technique classes (primarily ballet, pointe, modern, and jazz, improvisation, and composition) and rehearsals for frequent performances, further established a strong work ethic, appreciation for technique, and understanding of artistic rigor. It was also framed by the philosophy that artistic excellence is an exclusive and elite endeavor.

It was not until I returned to TZDG to teach dance, and eventually becoming Assistant Director at the age of 26, that I fully understood how my conservatory training conflicted with my community-oriented ideals. Returning to TZDG allowed me to develop understandings of how artistic rigor and inclusivity can unite in dance practice. My experiences at TZDG bolstered my sense of 'community' as that which supports the affirmation and expression of identity, sharing and connecting with others through art, learning, service, and inclusivity.

In 2006, I co-founded Evolve Dance Inc., a nonprofit dance company, and the Y Dance Program, a comprehensive dance training program, with Dr. Jane Alexandre, Karenno Koo, and Dr. Anne Tucker, former colleagues from TZDG. The magnitude of the responsibility of establishing and directing these organizations prompted me to pursue a master's degree in nonprofit management in order to gain an understanding of the scope and depth of the nonprofit sector and how the arts, and dance specifically, can be

situated within this realm. My eclectic professional and academic background informs my belief in the multivalency of dance — whether sitting in an office, a coffee shop, dancing on stage, creating in the studio, or collaborating with folks in a community center—the multiple layers and facets of the work of dance serve to create the integrated whole of my creative practice. And as such, I have focused my practice on what I refer to as 'community interaction'³ — the ways in which dance can shape and be shaped by relationships between individuals and collectives, and the ways in which communities' unique interests, goals, and needs can be addressed through dance.

Evolve Dance has provided the opportunity to actualize this philosophy, and my work with Evolve significantly informs my understanding of how dance and 'community' can intersect. Our mission is to pursue the understanding, advancement, and realization of the human experience through dance. On a weekly basis in New York, I would rehearse with the company, women of all shapes and sizes and geographic origins, ranging in age from early 20s to 30s. Together, we would collaboratively develop choreographic works to present locally and regionally.

Aside from company rehearsals, my week was full of teaching dance classes to children, teens, and adults at the Y Dance Program, as well as being an independent artist through Arts Westchester, our local arts council. I would interact with hundreds of students each week through instruction, administrative functions, and assessment and advisement as the Y Dance Co-Director. Dance filled my weeks and fulfilled me as a

³ 'Community interaction' as a term referring to the relationship between individual artistic practice and collective voice and well-being was first introduced to me by independent dance artist, Celeste Miller, at the 2008 Jacob's Pillow Choreographer's Lab.

human being. While I encountered some people only within a dance context, some others extended beyond it; but all of them constituted the members of my community and together we operated within overlapping dance spaces: the Y Dance studio; the Tarrytown Music Hall which housed our festival; the many dance studios of New York City where many of us trained and rehearsed with other dance artists; and streets and public spaces of Westchester County where we held frequent performances and workshops open to the broader community.

In reflecting on this aspect of my practice, another important element of my understanding of 'community' comes to light: space/place. I believe that the physical environments in which we operate, the processes that open 'space' for creative production and interchange, the spaces within and around our dancing bodies, and the metaphorical spaces of dance practice (i.e. 'making space' in one's life for dance class), are all integral to my understanding of the 'community'-dance relationship.

Over the years, we gradually focused our activities on collaborations with social service groups and educational entities throughout New York and beyond, exploring how dance can address their myriad and unique interests and goals. This included, for example, schools wishing to utilize dance as a supplement to academic development (arts-in-education programs); neighborhood community centers seeking creative outlets for their constituents, such as newly arrived non-English speaking immigrants exploring dance as a way to express themselves, connect to people, acclimate to their new home, and build community; and international NGOs wanting to establish dance programs for survivors of human trafficking. Our latest endeavor, The Dancer-Citizen, is

an online open-access, peer-reviewed scholarly journal exploring the work of socially engaged artists (Dancer-Citizen). Evolve Dance's work blends art, activism, recreation, and education, among other things, and simultaneously affirms my belief in the intrinsic relationship between dance and 'community' while raising questions about it.

The relationship between 'community' and dance has long been percolating in my consciousness, driving my dance practice and motivating my research. Upon applying to the PhD program in Dance at Temple University, I discussed how my experiences as a dance artist led to an awareness "...of the internal and external constructs of a community and how dancers move within, around, and through them..." and how I understood 'community' to be a connecting element between all aspects of dance, from artistic creation to administration, from education to production, from the studio to the stage, and everywhere beyond and between. Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University welcomed my research pursuits, and I abruptly halted my life in New York, uprooted myself, and moved to Philadelphia.

When I moved to Philadelphia, the void felt tangible. I found myself disconnected from my family and friends and the activities that previously served to frame and organize my life. Chief among them, I was disconnected from my dance practice. As a transplant, an outsider, I was unfamiliar with the landscape, the people, and the social and cultural intricacies of the artistic community. I felt totally detached from 'community' as I previously knew it. So, I immediately set out to find ways to put into effect the elements of my dance practice that have served to create vital connections to people, communities, and creative processes. During my time here, I have interacted

with numerous people, places, and organizations that overlap and intersect, and are part of what comprises the Philadelphia dance scene. Through all of this, I have begun to understand how to navigate both the physical and social structures of the city's extensive and diverse dance environment, I have made new professional connections to Philadelphia-based artists and organizations, and I have made meaningful friendships. I feel that I now belong to something that is larger than myself, and my individual dance practice. I feel part of the Philadelphia dance 'community.'

This sense of belonging has been significantly bolstered by my participation in the 'West African' dance class in West Philadelphia. This class is situated at the nexus of two deep-seated desires: to immerse myself in a physically and intellectually stimulating learning process inspired by intimate connections between danced movement, its cultural context and history; and to explore the relationship between dance and 'community.' My dissertation research examines this relationship: how my dance practice informs and facilitates my understanding of, and participation in, 'community;' and how participants in the class experience and understand 'community' through dance practice.

Comforts & Contradictions: Researcher Emplacement

As a woman of African American and European American Jewish descent, 'West African' dance allows me to explore movement, music, and connections to African Di-

aspora cultures that feel simultaneously familiar and foreign.⁴ To investigate, at what feels like the cellular level (tuning in to what I sense in my body), genealogical trajectories of Diaspora culture and the ways they have intersected with my own ancestral and artistic lineages, is to experience a bodily awareness of comforts and contradictions. These paradoxical relationships of the comfortable and contradictory, the familiar and foreign, arise in a multitude of manifestations that merit deeper examination.

First, I often experience comfort and contradiction concurrently within a discrete dance movement. Having trained in ballet, modern, and jazz dance (each of which has intersections with 'West African' dance, but also stark distinctions), I can luxuriate in syncopated and multi-centered body movements while also feeling stymied at how to align my head and arms—fighting the desire to place them in a balletic *épaulement*, or unconsciously pointing my foot when it should remain in a neutral and relaxed position.⁵ I have loved how ballet, jazz, and contemporary modern dance felt, despite my struggle with chronic injuries such as tendonitis in my shoulder and hip joints. Practicing ballet is now accompanied by severe pain.

I believe that because there is less emphasis on external hip rotation in the movement of the Philadelphia 'West African' dance classes that I attend, I have not ex-

⁴ This self-constructed identity is based on my lived experience migrating through socially constructed concepts. In terms of race, I acknowledge the paradox that while I situate myself within the vast spectrum of Blackness, this claim is both questioned and affirmed in certain contexts due to colorism (I am 'light-skinned') and my multi-racial parentage. As this dissertation at times addresses experiences of Blackness as related to West African dance practice and 'community,' I feel it important to acknowledge the possible ways in which my position can be perceived as inside or outside of this paradigm.

⁵ *Épaulement* is a French term meaning "shouldering." In ballet, it is used to refer to the placement of one's head, shoulders, and arms, including specific positions of a tilted head, extended arms, and slightly spiraled torso such that one shoulder is placed forward of the other (Mara, 1966). According to Google Translate, *épaulement* also means "retaining," which accurately describes the way I contain my movements in the 'West African' dance class when I struggle with figuring out how to let my head and arms move organically, or, in response to the rest of my body and without placing them in a specific position (<https://translate.google.com/m/translate#auto/en/epaulement>).

perienced the same sort of pain and discomfort (though the spine undulations and unbounded movement of the neck and head have introduced new pains to my body). Additionally, in this 'West African' dance class, women's flesh and curves are often celebrated; the instructor will frequently encourage us to shake our hips and jiggle our breasts for certain steps, and will praise the more amply endowed women who accomplish this without any apparent inhibition. This is a new and welcome experience for me, since my prior training often involved constraining extraneous movement of flesh, and binding my breasts with confining sports bras to diminish jiggle. I believe my body is fully accepted here.

Second, comprehending the complex 'West African' musical rhythms can be a struggle. However, as a child of the 1980s and 90s, I am relatively fluent in hip hop culture and was raised on 1960s soul and rock and roll. Much of this was developed within or influenced by music of the African Diaspora, and I am elated when I hear a rhythm in a West African dance class made familiar to me by the music of my youth (DeFrantz, 2010; Malnig, 2009). In these moments of elation, I feel consumed by the experience such that I can let go of the strain of trying to consciously figure out how to execute the mechanics and proper technique of the movement.

Third, I find comfort in connecting to African Diaspora culture and embracing 'West African' dance as an expression of my identity. To me, this means the opportunity to explore many facets of myself, such as my gender, sexuality, age, and race. As a woman I often experience discomfort (as I imagine many women do) around the social expectations of femininity. Many of the 'West African' dances that I have learned are

associated with an assigned male or female gender and I enjoy exploring stereotypical hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity. For example, *Yankadi* — derived from Guinea and associated with the Susu ethnic group — is a social dance characterized by flirtatious movements between men and women. I find pleasure in exploring exaggerated sensual movements of my hips and waist, soft wrists and flowing arms. *Soli* — also derived from Guinea and associated with the Baga ethnic group — is an initiation dance for young men, after circumcision. With this dance, I become more firmly grounded to the floor, taking a wider stance with my legs, balling my hands into fists, and directing tense energy through my chest, arms, and shoulders.

In terms of race, I understand that there is no one 'Black experience;' the diversity within the African Diaspora is vast, yet the differences I perceive between my experience and others' at times cause me to pause and question how these differences came to be. I experience, for example, a sense of contradiction when several of the African American participants of the 'West African' class share their experiences with the Black Power/Black Arts Movements and/or modes of thought that centralize African or Black culture, such as Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism (directly, or indirectly through their family members and/or friends). These political/cultural movements emerged during the 1960s, 70s and 80s in which African Americans in the United States turned to African cultural/artistic expression as a means to claim and assert a collective identity in the face of oppression and racial injustice in the United States (Sandri, 2012; Washington, 2013; Welsh, personal communication 2014.) I am unaware if any of my African American family members participated in these movements to any degree. My

father's interest in Africa is documented in his book, *Who came before me: the search for my Tomes and Lightfoot roots, and what I found* (Johnson, 2009). He mentioned his disappointment that in all of the genealogical documents he found (i.e. birth certificates, census records, and last wills and testaments bequeathing our enslaved ancestors to new owners) there was no information that helped to directly link our family to Africa (Johnson, 2009). But I do not recall any conversations or visible indications to confirm his direct participation in Afrocentric movements in his youth, and since his passing in 2009, these are conversations I will never be able to have with him. I wonder how the cultural knowledge of participants' experiences with Afrocentrism informs their participation in the 'West African' dance class.

My parents worked tirelessly to ensure that I could have access to as much dance training as possible, but 'African' dance was only a part of that equation if the classes were already included in the curriculum of a program that I attended, which was rare.⁶ As an adult, I sought out classes in New York City, and occasionally attended classes with the renowned teacher, Youssouf Koumbassa. At the age of 30, in 2009, I attended a month-long dance and cultural exchange in Accra, Ghana with my dance company, Evolve Dance. In 2011, I studied intermittently with a Ghanaian musician and dancer in Spring Valley, New York.⁷

⁶ For example, at age 15 and 16, I participated in 'West African' dance classes as part of the Summer Intensive Program at The Ailey School. These classes were electives that I chose to supplement the assigned schedule of ballet and modern classes.

⁷ Jerry Kzoto was the former Artistic Director of Chiku Awali African Dance, Arts, & Culture, Inc.

I have heard numerous stories of the lengths some participants of this study had to go—the many miles and hours spent traveling to other cities—to access African dance classes on a regular basis because they were (and still are not) visible or available in many cities. As children, teens, and adults, many Monday night participants have made African dance a focal part of their lives. Even as my overall dance training aids my progress in learning the movement and technique, I imagine that many of my fellow participants in class have accumulated much more knowledge than I have about the history of 'West African' dance as a genre, and the protocol and structure of class; I often feel that my understanding is woefully inadequate compared to those who spent their lives actively searching for, building, and participating in this community. This, however, solidifies my dedication to learning more, informing my understanding of how this learning serves to build community and fueling my commitment to being a part of it.

Finally, the concept of 'community' itself elicits a sense of paradox. My work lies at the intersections of art, community-building, and social justice, and has been heavily influenced by my family's emphasis on community service-based work and their belief that supporting others and contributing to the betterment of society is not only a good deed, it is a moral obligation. Interrogating this work, I find that it is undergirded by a utopian ideal of 'community;' one based on inclusivity, reciprocity, and shared leadership (Melzer, 2002). These attributes, however, may not always account for the political dynamics and power differentials integral to the construct of 'community' (Lorde, 1984; Melzer, 2002). The instructor, for example, makes space for reciprocal

relationships in class in which the participants' lives influence and are influenced by the class. Yet pedagogical/spatial dynamics in which spots on the dance floor are often assigned according to age, ability, and frequency of attendance, assert a more one-directional, hierarchical authority within the community. Additionally, the pace of the class and level of difficulty (despite the instructor's effort to modify the movement for beginners) creates a barrier to entry that not all prospective participants can push through.

I have come across several people who shared with me their reticence to return to class after trying it once or twice because of how overwhelmed they felt. I recall my earlier experiences in the class, standing in the back of the room, feeling disconnected from my fellow participants as I struggled to attain the choreography, yet fully immersed in the overpowering stimuli of the music, the stunning visual of the blur of their dancing bodies and percussive drum strikes whirring in front of me. For me, this compelled me to return for more. The subsequent classes, the cyclical experiences of comfort and discomfort, being lost and finding my way, have all been part of an overall satisfying and life-affirming process of being in 'community.'

I relate this paradoxical shifting of position and experiencing of a mobile and multiple identity to social psychologist Michelle Fine's (1998) notion of the 'hyphen,' the murky space between Self and Other, full of ambiguity and complexity. Fine (1998) draws on feminist scholar bell hooks' (2003) notion of the *politics of location* to discuss the co-construction of identity through the Self/Other relationship. Our multiple, ever-changing, shifting, and contradictory identities give us mobility to align with multiple, ever-changing, shifting, and contradictory political and social contexts. This mobility

allows us to position ourselves to create our own identity at a given moment within our spaces and contexts. This shifting positionality may be strategic or incidental, in response to a shift in context. This same mobility works from without, as identity construction may be imposed or read on bodies through any number of various lenses, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, age, or any other social construct significant to a given community (Fine, 1998). I wonder how other participants in this dance class navigate their individual identities within the collective. And what experiences and understandings of 'community' might we share? Where do we intersect and where do we depart?

Purpose and Motivations

While the overall exploration of relationships between 'community' and dance will forever remain a driving force in all that I do, I believe there are specific and significant implications in the research of participant experiences and understandings of 'community' in a Philadelphia-based West African dance class. This includes 1.) contributing to scholarly discourses in dance studies that examine 'community;' foregrounding the perspectives of dancing participants; and bridging a gap within dance paradigms predicated on ambiguous notions of 'community,' 2.) contributing to the growing body of literature as well as wealth of embodied knowledge and oral histories that examine and archive African diaspora practice, particularly West African dance practice in the United States, and specifically in Philadelphia; and 3.) upholding this practice as a social justice practice.

Contributing to Literature and Bridging the Gap

First, foregrounding the perspective of dancing participants can illuminate what constructions of 'community' may be informing, shaping, or operating within a given dance context, whether on a stage, in a studio, in a club, on the street, in places of worship, or anywhere in between. This has useful implications for dance pedagogy, performance, dance activism and action research, dance history, cultural studies, and more.

In my search for literature, I have found a growing collection of work stemming from and focused on the genre of community dance practice, which supports my understanding of the relationship between dance and 'community,' yet serves to set up and perpetuate a binary between 'community dance' and other forms of dance. Works specifically geared towards claiming 'community dance practice' as a professional genre, such as Amans' (2008) *Introduction to Community Dance Practice*, are useful in that they bring attention to questions around communal identity; connections between artistic practice, social service, and political issues; and inclusivity and exclusivity. And they provide artists with practical tools to conceive and implement ethical 'community-oriented' projects. However, I find such texts ultimately perpetuate a distinction between dance practices that focus on building/serving communities and all other forms of dance. This distinction does not represent my experiences and is antithetical to my understanding of dance and 'community.'

I have found works that bring to light how contemporary choreographic dance practices that utilize participatory dance frameworks can unsettle boundaries between public (read 'community') and private (read 'artist') realms and shift authorial power in

the creative process (Kolb, 2013). I have found works that subsume 'community' within political civic engagement and excavate performance practices that have forged communal identity, culture, and political agency (Garafola, 1994; Giersdorf, 2013). These works centralize spectator engagement and performance analysis, and I am still left with a desire for literature that makes space for participants' embodied experience and interpretations of 'community.'

As a dance practitioner, I perceive a rift between 'contemporary' concert dance and 'community' dance practice as artistic genres and professional fields, a rift that marginalizes dance practice claiming community-oriented inquiry or interests as its focus. These practices (in which African dance is often included) are relegated as amateur forms of art and deemed less artistically rigorous or viable by those outside of these practices (and sometimes by those within them, as well). (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Fitzgerald, 2008; Lomas, 1998).

While this rift is not a central focus of this study, I believe it is a pertinent issue that points to the importance of looking at dance-community relationships in any context. Examining dance-community relationships (without limiting dance to those practices only subsumed under the category of 'community dance') can shed some light on how notions of 'community' operate within dance contexts, and how they might actually work to shape or inform those contexts. This study contributes by examining understandings and experiences of 'community' in a West African dance class in Philadelphia.

African Diaspora Dance Literature, Practice, and Social Justice

As the archiving of West African dance practice in the United States in general, and specifically in Philadelphia, is well established as an embodied form (passed along primarily through practice) yet relatively under-represented in academic scholarship, I aim to contribute to the growing body of literature. I am encouraged by the emergence of dissertations focused on African dance practice in the United States, including Dalili's (1999) *'More than a sisterhood: " Traditional West African dance in an contemporary urban setting*; Davis-Craig's (2009) *Building community: African dancing and drumming in the little village of Tallahassee, Florida*; Sandri's (2012) *Performance, politics, and identity in African dance communities in the United States*; Diouf's (2013) *Staging the African: Transcultural Flows of Dance and Identity*; Nance's (2014) *Brothers of the 'Bah Yáh!': The Pursuit of maleness in the Umfundalai tradition of African dance*; and others.⁸

Davis-Craig's (2009) study particularly resonates as it examines 'community' within African dancing and drumming. Though it did not serve as a model for my study, her findings resonate, particularly in regards to emergent themes of 'community' as generated through participant conversation. Theoretically framed by Mcmillan and Chavis' (1976) criteria for 'sense of community,' Davis-Craig's study clearly delineates a participant constructed community in Tallahassee, and provides thorough historical context for the development of African dance and drum practice in this location. While I distinguish my study methodologically in that I did not enter it with a particular theo-

⁸ Among this collection, I also include Jasmine Johnson's dissertation, *Dancing Africa, making diaspora*, though it has not been made publicly available at the time of this writing.

retical framework, I center it on a specific class, and offer a collection of experiences and understandings of ‘community’ rather than shaping a definition, our resonant findings support our collective research and make a compelling case for experiential examinations of ‘community’ within African dance practice.

The artists and practitioners who worked and struggled to establish West African cultural practices in the United States— particularly as a means of survival and resistance to racial oppression—inspire, inform, and motivate this work, and so this research aims to uphold West African dance as a social justice practice. Dancing for Justice Philadelphia (DFJ Philly) provides a timely opportunity for an examination of the dance-community relationship that centers African diaspora performance as a social justice practice. DeFrantz and Gonzalez (2014) examine such relationships through the lens of Black performance theory, which they explain as "an enterprise of labor and the senses..." that "excavates the coded nuances as well as the complex spectacles within everyday acts of resistance by once known a/objects that are now and have always been agents of their own humanity" (DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 2014, p. viii).

In 2014, DFJ Philly brought together people of various social, professional, and ethnic/cultural backgrounds (whether they identify as 'dancers' or not) to fight for human rights, thus highlighting the human capacity for dance as a connective tissue between various practitioners, genres, and modes of practice (Alexandre, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2008). DFJ Philly began as a response to a series of human rights violations of people of color in the U.S.

In August 2014, many people gathered in Ferguson, Missouri to protest the killing of an unarmed Black man by a White police officer (Smith, 2014). Protest movements spread across the nation, as several other killings similar in nature occurred in other cities within weeks and months after the Ferguson occurrence, and the police officers involved were not held accountable by the legal system. Many people of color and white people alike have participated in protest actions, riots, and community gatherings aimed at raising awareness of police brutality that is part and parcel of institutionalized racism (Smith, 2014; Chenowith and King, 2014). "The deaths of unarmed black men and women have sparked days of racial tension and unrest in Ferguson, New York, Chicago, Miami, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Philadelphia and other U.S. cities" (Chenowith and King, 2014).

DFJ Philly provided an opportunity, through movement, to represent, reflect on, and express feelings about the violence done to people of color. DFJ Philly is part of a national Dancing for Justice movement to mourn for Black people who died at the hands of police violence, to experience and express emotions, and increase public attention to this issue through dance (Chenowith and King, 2014; "Flyground"). Two writers from a Philadelphia-based online dance journal who participated in the event offered a poetic collaborative description, drawing from their own experience and those of participants they interviewed:

Dance entertains but dance also mirrors the imbalances in society.
Politics danced as we organized our bodies to encircle freedom.
Freedom danced as we worked to change the landscape of hate.
Moving within a movement, our choreographed bodies broke
through the restrictions of tyranny as we boldly cried out for justice.

The power of the moving body can serve as a vehicle for social change.
Change that uses differences to highlight commonality.
We danced for justice. We danced for equality.
We danced for our ancestors and our children. (Chenowith and King, 2014)

This event provided an opportunity to process thoughts and feelings through movement, whether marching, gesturing (e.g. the "don't shoot" gesture with both arms up), laying down (as if dead), or standing huddled together with other participants in what Gonzalez (2004) might call a 'community clump,' "...a tight choreographic composition of bodies huddled together, to physically and visually demonstrate the communal unity of the artists" (p.256). Not only is it representational, Gonzalez (2004) explains that through close physical proximity and the sense of touch, the clump manifests solidarity amongst the dancers. They experience a heightened sense of awareness and connectedness, a collective intelligence from which they can assess each other's (and their own) "emotional temperature" in the moment (Gonzalez, 2004, p. 257).

Lela Aisha Jones, the lead organizer of DFJ Philly is the founder of a Philadelphia-based dance company/artistic incubator (Flyground), a choreographer working in African diasporic movement practice, a former member of Urban Bush Women, and well-known amongst African dance circles in Philadelphia. She, along with collaborators, infused the protest movements with expressions and mechanisms of African Diaspora cultural performance such as a New Orleans-based dirge (a specific processional dance of simultaneous mourning and celebration), call-and-response singing, and a circle in which dancers could enter and improvise while being supported by the surrounding people forming the circle. She and the core organizing committee (of which I am a

member) facilitated a collective embodied response to injustice that created a powerful synchrony in which there was space for participants' individual expressions of emotion and thought processes. DFJ Philly builds on the work of artists and practitioners of social justice movements of the past, particularly those who manifested artistic and cultural practices as integral to resistance of marginalization and survival amidst racial oppression.

Reflecting on the collective embodiment of the DFJ Philly protest—on moving with nearly one hundred Philadelphians (including several dancers and musicians who participate in the Monday night class), crouching down low with our hands behind our backs as we steadily moved towards City Hall in the freezing December air—I think about transformation and how change at the level of the body might lead to social change (McGregor, 2013). Choreographer, activist, and member of Urban Bush Women Paloma McGregor (2013) explains that, "... dance practice is fundamentally a transformative act: an idea becomes an action becomes a practice becomes a way of being. The change is incremental over time...." (p. 3). I think about how collectives can foster support and protection for fellow human beings; that joining together, *moving* together, towards shared goals and interests amplifies the voice of an individual otherwise muffled or silenced by dominant oppressive narratives. Alternately, these dominant narratives demonstrate the ability of collectives to exclude, to marginalize, to violently oppress.

Considering this continuum of forms and functions of 'community,' I find that examining its myriad understandings and complex dynamics is a vital undertaking in the effort towards creating social change. Examination of participant experiences within

the 'West African' dance class in West Philadelphia serves as an entry point to this investigation; the diverse population of the class is rich with subjective and intersubjective experiences situated within the complex socio-cultural context of 'West African' dance in the United States, with a deep and intricate cultural and political history embedded in the African Diaspora. This history, as recent events have shown, is fresh, present, and continues to impact how practitioners of this dance form build and sustain community, fight against marginalization, secure a creative home for their activities, obtain funding, and thrive amidst the racial injustice against men and women of color.

“Monday Night Class”: The Research Site

I sit on the wooden floor, moving through some gentle stretches while waiting for class to begin. A few women enter the studio, take off their shoes and wrap their lapas around their waists. Through the windows I can barely see the Center City skyline behind the recently erected Drexel University buildings, looming manifestations of a rapidly changing cityscape. Cachet begins the warm-up with head and shoulder isolations. As I turn my head from side to side, I let my eyes scan the room. I see a couple of men, musicians who have just arrived, setting up their drums. More women enter the room, not in any particular hurry, even though the class has already begun. They put their belongings down in the back, put on their lapas, and join in. I see young children, perhaps as young as four or five, orbiting their mother like little planets as she rotates her shoulders and ribcage, they pause their orbit occasionally to join in the movement of the warm-up.

Jogging in a circle around the perimeter of the studio, I feel the sweat running down my face as Cachet commands, “Knees up!! Knees up!!” I lift my knees higher with every step, trying to remember to breathe, knowing that this intense burst of cardio means that the warm-up is nearly over. At this point, many more students have joined in the class, as well as a few more musicians. We take our jog back to the center of the room, and face the musicians. We reach to the ceiling, taking a deep inhalation, and on the exhale, drop our heads and roll downward through our spines, reaching towards our toes and then slowly rolling back up to a standing position as the music ends. A few gulps of water and I’m ready for more.

The above reflective journal entry, written in the spring of 2014, offers a glimpse into my lived experience in the West African dance class at the center of this research. The class is held at the Community Education Center (CEC), a nonprofit arts incubator housed in a former Quaker meeting house and school. The building now houses dance studios, practice/meeting rooms, offices and a theater. The CEC was established over forty years ago in 1973, and has been a significant institution in the Philadelphia dance community, offering dance classes, workshops, performances, rehearsal space, and other support services for artists (“CEC Arts”). West African dance classes, workshops, and rehearsals for performing groups have been held at this location since 1989, and have been facilitated by several artists, including Youssouf Koumbassa, a much sought after dance instructor, performer, and choreographer from Guinea and former member of the National Ballet of Guinea, as well as local practitioners such as

Vena Jefferson and Gregory Hodari Banks (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Ivey, personal communication, 2015; Sandri, 2012; Shockley, personal communication, 2015).

The instructor for the class in this study, Cachet Ivey, is a 34-year old African American woman with caramel-colored locs (hair twisted to form ropes of various thickness) often sculpted into beautifully intricate updos and secured with a colorful scarf while dancing. She sometimes wears political t-shirts with Black empowerment messages and brightly colored African print *lapas*. She has a somewhat deep voice that can carry throughout the large studio, even over the loud percussion instruments playing at full volume. Her rhythmic vocalizations mimic multiple instruments at once, and help us stay on beat. Her dancing has been described as fiery, fierce, and powerful - and I agree. She has an athletic build, and is not much taller than 5'6, but her presence when she dances is much, much larger. Watching her dance is sometimes like watching fireworks.

Cachet choreographs, performs, and teaches African Diaspora dance (focusing on dances of West Africa and Yoruba-based Orisha dances) throughout Philadelphia and beyond, both as an independent artist and as a member of Kulu Mele African Dance and Drum Ensemble.⁹ Kulu Mele, a Yoruba phrase that translates to "speaking for our ancestors," was founded in 1969 and is one of the oldest dance companies still operating in Philadelphia.¹⁰ Baba Robert Crowder, the company's founder, trained many Phil-

⁹ Orisha dance is associated with religious systems derived from Yoruba cultures in West Africa and across the diaspora in the Americas, particularly in Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. Dances are organized around spiritual divinities, and dance/music performance "suggest myths, retell cultural stories... [and] charter and encourage social behavior in present everyday lives" (Daniel, 2005, p. 1)

¹⁰ According to Cachet, this translation has been contested by some who believe the founder, Baba Crowder, may have misinterpreted the language.

adelphia-based artists and practitioners of African Diaspora dance and music (“Kulu Mele”; Brown-Danquah, 1994). Cachet received much of her dance training in Philadelphia, D.C., and New York. She studied intensively under Youssouf Koumbassa, and eventually became his replacement at the CEC, teaching his 'West African' dance classes when he began to focus his work more on New York and touring around the country. Cachet continues to train with professional artists locally and nationally (Duncan; Fourth Wall; Ivey, personal communication).

Cachet’s class, which she has been teaching for at least 16 years, is offered weekly at several locations in Philadelphia. My focus is on one of these offerings, the Monday night class.¹¹ She has designated it as an open level (or 'mixed level') class geared towards intermediate and advanced dancers; while pedagogically focused towards dancers with some previous experience in West African dance, all are welcome to attend. Participants include dance students and an ensemble of musical accompanists, all who attend at varying rates of frequency, from regular to sporadic. Though the consistency of attendance for each participant is variable from week to week, the class has a strong following and rarely has less than 15-20 dancers and musicians in attendance (and often upwards of 30).

Though there are participants who have been consistently involved in the class for many years, the demographic make-up is difficult to discern, complicated by the unpredictable flow of participation and attendance. To generalize, the population includes males and females, from the very young to the elderly. Dancers are primarily

¹¹ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to this class as the "Monday night class".

female, while the musicians are primarily male. I do not know how each participant self-identifies in terms of race and/or ethnicity; I assess the racial/ethnic makeup of the class on any given day as primarily black, African American, or people of color, with several white participants in attendance on a regular basis. Among the participants, I also include the random visitors and invited guests who often sit and observe the class. ‘Visitor/spectator’ and ‘participant’ categorizations are porous, since it is not uncommon for visitors to spontaneously join in, and for active participants to stop and observe. Additionally, in order to appreciate the fluidity of the boundaries of the physical and social space of the class, it is important to note that this class is closely associated with the other West African dance classes that the instructor teaches throughout Philadelphia, and intersects with other networks within and beyond Philadelphia through various performances, classes and workshops, and social events.

A typical class structure entails a warm-up focusing on flexibility, strength, and increasing the heart rate, and to develop stamina and rhythmic acuity. We then take a brief pause to line up and pay the class fee of \$15.¹² Warm-up is followed by the lesson of a particular dance hailing from a specific region or ethnic group in West Africa, and associated with a particular musical rhythm(s). Cachet will usually continue to teach over a series of four to six weeks before moving on to another dance. At the beginning of a series, she will spend time demonstrating the technique of each movement, discussing the various historical, geographical, and cultural contexts of the dance.

¹² At present, a discounted rate is available for those who pay for 10 classes at a time. Children under 12 are free, with the request from Cachet that parents/guardians donate what they can to the musicians at the end of class.

The lesson is often referred to as “the dance,” “the phrase,” “the blueprint,” or sometimes, “the combination,” or “choreography” if Cachet has begun to manipulate the sequence of movements choreographically (which she sometimes refers to as “chopping it up”). This portion of class usually begins with the introduction of the name of the dance, its region and/or community of origin, its purpose (e.g. male or female initiation ceremony), and the rhythm and associated instruments. Occasionally, Cachet will teach choreography comprising a mixture of dances that might be more likely to appear in a social/improvisational context like at a dance club or a party. In these instances, Cachet reminds us that the ability to mix and blend dances in such a way is made possible through a deep understanding of the ‘foundation’ of the dances and music. Her conversation around these foundations are often centered on the genealogical complexity of music and movement within the African Diaspora, and the implications of colonization, cultural exchange and appropriation, and variances between dances performed in social/community settings and concert stage settings. Contextual information about the dance is offered to us repeatedly throughout the series of weeks the dance is taught. Cachet will often encourage us to record this information in notebooks or on our mobile devices.

The lesson is then followed by “down the floor,” in which dancers execute specific steps of the dance while traveling linearly from one end of the room to the other in rows of two or three (always progressing towards the musicians). This may conclude the class, or it may culminate with repeating the dance in its entirety in the center of the room, or with a *Bantaba* circle, in which the dancers improvise in the middle of a circle

of fellow dancers. In this class, *Bantabas* are typically reserved for the acknowledgment and celebration of a community member's achievement or milestone, such as birthdays, new jobs, graduations, etc. Before leaving the dance floor, we honor the musicians, either symbolically with a gesture (that might include kneeling or lowering down and touching one's hand to heart, then the floor near the feet of each drummer), and/or monetarily with a donation of a few dollars. This is referred to by some as *dobale*, a Yoruba term for 'gesture of respect,' in which the dancers honor the musicians with a kneeling gesture and hand placed on the floor in front of the musician's drum or feet (Welsh, personal communication, 2014).¹³ Oftentimes, as people pack up their things to leave, Cachet or other participants will make announcements about upcoming events (e.g. performances and classes), important social issues (e.g. registering to vote), or they will promote their business ventures (e.g. selling handmade clothes or jewelry).

Cachet's teaching style, in my estimation, references what Dor (2014) considers to be Western/conservatory pedagogical strategies and what Dr. Kariamuwelsh notes as teaching methods common to African dance practices (Dor, 2014; Welsh, personal communication, 2016). Drawing upon pedagogical methods common to United States studio/conservatory dance education, Cachet breaks movements down step-by-step, often using coinciding beats of the rhythm (either as vocalizations or numbered "counts") to help us grasp how to coordinate our bodies with the movement. She encourages questions at any point in the class, and most especially during the 'lesson.' African

¹³ As the structure of the class shifts in subtle ways due to a number of factors (including the unpredictable flux of attendance) the description offered here is to provide a general understanding of the class structure, with the acknowledgement of its limited representation and analysis of the research context that is fluid and ever-shifting in relation to the participants.

teaching methods, can center on non-verbal modeling of the movement (with no “breakdown” by step) repeatedly until the students obtain the technique. The instructor and/or advanced dancers may dance in front of, or next to, less experienced dancers while the dance is in progress to teach by example. Dancers that are new to the experience learn by practicing the dance repeatedly with little to no verbal instruction (Welsh, personal communication, 2016).

This aspect appears in the Monday night class as we repeat dances while progressing down the floor. Cachet (and occasionally other dancing participants) will sometimes dance beside or in front of dancers who are struggling, to help them obtain the movement and rhythm. Sometimes, Cachet will pull one or two dancers out of the lines, modify steps for them if they are really struggling, and dance with them down the floor. Alternately, she will sometimes pull dancers who are doing well out of the lines and have them demonstrate the dances down the floor by themselves. In both occasions, she encourages the rest of the participants to clap for the dancers and spur them on as they move down the floor.

Important to note about the Monday night class is the fact that it continues throughout the year. It is not held as a series (eg. weekly for four weeks), or by semester. Cachet often cancels the class during major holidays, but other than that, participants can count on the class being available each Monday night every week, every month, year after year. There is no culminating event, such as a class performance or year-end party (though some members do choose to gather together after the last class before New Year’s eve, but such events are not scheduled in to the class). So, unlike

many other classes that I have experienced, there are no clear temporal benchmarks by which to assess my progress in the class. There is, however, a repertory of dances that are revisited, not in any particularly order. So when, for example, *N'gri* reappears in the repertory cycle, I perceived that I have progressed because I remember the rhythm a little better, I can recall movements that might go in the dance phrase, and my muscle memory kicks in such that I can work less to apprehend or understand the technique. My body knows what I have done before, so I feel able to build on that by taking in nuances and details that I did not (or could not) understand before.

Within the class structure of the Monday night class are multiple access points for engagement. Whether through physical and/or technical rigor, creative immersion, stress relief, camaraderie, or all (or none) of the above, dancers and musicians who participate in the Monday night class have identified ways to connect that are meaningful to them. My research process allowed me to connect more deeply with my fellow classmates and investigate the nature of our individual and collective experiences in class, as well as our understandings of 'community.'

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Power! Power! Power!

My power stance way down low,

grounded with feet far apart and thighs parallel to the floor.

Pelvis east, torso north. I could go anywhere from here.

Polyrhythmic arms thrash amid the constant pulse of ribs and shoulders.

Hips stir the air, dust particles whip in a twirling frenzy.

Rapid-fire foot stomps like a drum roll, open palms towards the drummers as their palms strike the skin.

My own skin dances atop muscle and bone, another layer of rhythm.

Dancers' feet depart from the ground inducing a moment of airborne togetherness.

I am infected.... addicted before my feet even return to the floor.

I wrote this poem almost immediately after I took my first class with Cachet in the Fall of 2012. The poem draws upon my sensorial experience, and as I read it I can sense it all again — what I saw, heard, touched, how I moved, what I *felt*. I was eager to learn how others experienced this class, and what, if any, of their experiences related to what I perceive as an intrinsic relationship between dance and ‘community.’

At first, inquiry into participants' lived experience and the sociocultural and historical contextualization of the Monday night 'West African' dance class at the CEC appeared to send me along two distinct research paths. However, I find that through methodologically situating this work in sensory ethnography, philosophically grounding it in community based participatory research, and applying phenomenological strategies

towards gathering lived experience data, this investigation lends itself to a cohesive examination of the subjective, intersubjective, and the cultural.

In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Emerson, et al (1995) explain that the task of the researcher is "... not to determine the 'truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives" (p. 2). As such, I seek out a collection of participants' lived experiences of 'community' — not to be quantitatively analyzed for statistical significance, but to contribute to an intellectual/literary discourse around 'community' and dance practice. I make room for the possibility of non-experience; I do not assume that participants experience or find themselves in relation to 'community,' and the perspective of such participants is valuable and vital to this research. Participants' experiences are juxtaposed with my own participant observations and experiences as a member of the class.

Like dance scholar Deidre Sklar (2001), I attend to any differences and similarities through what she refers to as "kinesthetic movement analysis" in which my embodied movement experiences (documented through written journals and audio recordings) serve as an empathic tool — a means to relate to and reflect on the movement experiences of other participants. I cannot truly *know* the experiences of others, but when I, for example, talk to classmates about *N'gri*, a dance associated with the Wassalon region of Mali meant to evoke the image of a gazelle, I can find connections to my own experiences dancing it in class. I can recall how the movement began low to the floor with our torsos pitched forward, and how the rhythm evoked a wavelike head bob and undulation of my spine. The movement gradually progressed into an explosive jumping

step and I recall seeing my classmates' bodies propelled vertically into the air. I can remember how my feet felt against the floor as I pushed off to jump, or how the sweat poured from my skin, and how our unified bobbing and undulating to the rhythm made me feel part of a collective – how I felt happy and fulfilled in that moment. These experiences open up opportunities to find connections; embodied participation makes possible the ability to ask questions and generate dialogue based on having danced this dance. In turn, sharing our experiences with each other allows us to recall, reflect, re-imagine the moments, and re/create the meanings we associate with them. Embodiment provides empathic opportunities - moments to relate and reflect - in ways that disembodied (solely intellectual, perhaps) participation could not.

Furthermore, as a member of this class (prior to and concurrent with this research) and as this study is centered on 'community,' intersubjective interactions with fellow classmates are central to the production of knowledge. Therefore, our experiences are not merely juxtaposed, but intertwined, overlapping, and co-relational. Thus, I find that community-based participatory research, in which participants are understood as co-researchers, is an important method for this study, and works in conjunction with ethnographic and phenomenological strategies for the gathering of research data.

Ethnography

Genzuk's (2003) "A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research" examines three methodological principles of ethnography: naturalism, understanding, and discovery. Naturalism is centered on the aim of capturing human behavior that occurs naturally in

the social world, rather than focusing on inferences or hypotheses, which is accomplished through first-hand interaction with the behavior. Understanding centralizes the examination of behavior of interpretation (the researcher's and the subject's) of stimuli and the ways in which responses and meanings are constructed and culturally situated. Discovery upholds the research process as inductive, emergent, and generative, rather than being limited to a specific hypothesis or theory (Genzuk, 2003). Hammersley's four criteria for ethnographic study include: the study of people within their 'normal' environment (where 'normal' refers to environs or conditions which were not constructed specifically for the research); collecting data from multiple sources, with an emphasis on observation and informal conversation; focusing on a single research setting, group, or context; and centering analysis on interpretation (Crowley-Henry, 2009, p. 46). Embracing the methodological principles outlined by Genzuk (2003) and employing Hammersley's criteria, this study falls within ethnographic research, and privileges reflexive researcher participation.

Sensory ethnography is a form of qualitative research, housed within the broader category of ethnography, that examines connections between sense perception, embodied knowing, and cultural knowledge. As such, it is well suited to support this research. I take inspiration from the work of anthropologist Paul Stoller (1997), dance scholar Deidre Sklar (2001), and anthropologist Sarah Pink (2009) who undertake embodied research of Self and Other—of the intersections and differences between personal experiences and inter/subjective experiences with research participants. As in Sklar's (2001) germinal work, *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of*

Tortugas, New Mexico, my own personal questions about the relationship between 'community' and dance prompted this embodied research study that traverses subjective and intersubjective modes of experience and production of knowledge. In Stoller's (1997) pivotal work, *Sensuous Scholarship*, he asserts that the scholar's perception of smells, tastes, textures, and sensations can serve as a mode of inquiry and knowledge production that may "... reawaken profoundly the scholar's body by demonstrating how the fusion of the intelligible and the sensible can be applied to scholarly practices and representations" (xv). In being aware of, and documenting, my sense perception in experience, I can open pathways to connecting to the experiences of other participants, and vice versa. And, to use Geertz' terms, through the 'thick description' of the experience in writing — including the sweat I felt on my skin, the colors I saw in the room, the sounds I heard, etc. — my aim is to offer the reader an entry point to relating to my experience through their own recognition of these sensual markers.

Sklar (2001), Stoller (1997), and Pink (2009) extend the postmodern notion of the 'body-as-text' (both 'written' and 'read') to include the 'body-as-felt' (always perceiving and experiencing). Pink's (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography* provides a comprehensive methodological guide to the theory and practice of sensory ethnography and serves as an essential reference for this study in terms of applying methods of sensory ethnography to research. The *felt experience* of dancing, is crucial to a fuller investigation of experiences of 'community' in the 'West African' dance class. Reflexivity provides access to this felt experience. Like Sklar (2001) and Stoller (1997), Pink (2009) stresses researcher reflexivity about subjectivity and positionality, emplacement of the

researcher within the research community, and situating embodied experience in conversation with cultural texts. Elaborating on the purpose and process of ethnography,

Pink (2009) explains that it is,

... a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (p. 5).

Therefore, it is crucial that the researcher's positionality and subjectivity be accounted for within the research (Madison, 2005; Crowley-Henry, 2009). Sensory ethnography approaches this from the starting point of human perception, multisensory embodiment (Pink, 2009). Sensory ethnography is a particularly befitting mode of inquiry for this study in that it privileges the "experiencing, knowing, emplaced body," the importance of sensorial experience to perception, the relationship between people, and between people and their environments/place/space (Pink, 2009). For example, reading the reflective journal entry at the start of this dissertation, I reflect on the sensual experience of dancing *N'gri* — the sights, sounds, textures, smells. I connect my embodied lived experience to a moment and place in time (the Monday night class, fall 2014, at the CEC); to the people and spaces within that moment (my fellow dancer and musicians); and to the ways in which that moment was socio-culturally situated (learning a West African-derived dance that has been embedded with various cultural and political markers during its geographical and temporal journey from Wassolon, Mali to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.)

These relationships — between the social, spatial, and embodied/sensorial — are central to this study. They are key to understanding how my subjectivity (referring to the self) and positionality (my self in relation to others), informs this work, as Michelle Fine suggests with her notion of the ‘hyphen’ (Fine, 1998; Madison, 2005). Madison (2005) expounds, "... we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to the Other* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other" (p. 9). I have experienced a constantly shifting position in the West African dance class; I influence, and am influenced by, the participants present in the dance studio. While this may be true of any dance class, what is unique is how acutely I feel this mobility, and how that has influenced my understanding of 'community.' And furthermore, it is not true that in every dance class or context that I feel part of something 'larger,' part of some reciprocal relationship to which I can belong and contribute which in turn sparks the desire to have it be a significant part of my life. It is true for me in the Monday night 'West African' dance class at the CEC.

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR)

This desire for ‘community’ — to experience reciprocal relationships and be part of some larger entity — brings to mind the irony I experienced when conducting community research while sitting all alone in a coffee shop. I am acutely aware that while I have understandings and experiences of 'community' prior to my introduction to the 'West African' dance community in Philadelphia, my understanding of the notion of 'community' in relationship to this particular class has been significantly influenced by

my classmates, the environment, and social context in which we are situated. In order to collect and examine experiences of 'community' in this context, it seems apropos (if not ethically imperative) that I acknowledge the reality of co-constructed knowledge/meaning/experience, the socio-historical context in which it germinates, and undertake this research in *collaboration* with my fellow participants rather than to situate myself as the lone researcher observing from a distance.

As one of a number of methodologies that incorporate collaboration with participants, who are considered co-researchers, community-based research (CBR) emphasizes this relationality and democratic participation in research (Finley, 2008, Guta and Roche, 2014; Herr and Anderson, 2005). One offshoot of CBR, Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a term for research that takes place with and within the community being studied (Finlay, 2008; Herr and Anderson, 2005). I situate the current study within CBPR.

CBR and CBPR developed through the contributions of popular education (influenced by adult education and critical education models, and the writings of Paolo Freire and other scholar activists), indigenous studies, ethnic community studies, and feminist theory. Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is "[aimed at] decolonizing ways of knowing and understanding the increasingly globalized world... that stress[es] the importance of subjective interpretations of human experience, ethnic diversity in experience as the foundation for learning, and commitment to scholarship that linked research, pedagogical praxis, and community service" (Finley, 2008, p. 3). Participatory, action-centered, service-oriented research was championed by W.E.B. DuBois, and

made a resurgence in Black/African American studies in the 1960s and again in the 1990s and focused on improving the lives of people of color. Black/African American studies and feminist studies' contribution to CBPR emphasized a service orientation to ensure reciprocal benefits for both academia and society.

CBPR engenders social justice via creating and facilitating space for diverse involvement in research practices, and promoting critical reflection of, by, and for a community (Finley, 2008; Stanton, 2014). Feminist epistemologies emphasize the self-other relationship in defining situated knowledge, and privilege the participant perspective and meaning-making process over the researcher's. Finley (2008) explains,

In serving the community, feminist researchers strive to redefine the role of the researcher from one of distant impartiality to structure research through interactions and relationships based in empathy, mutuality, and respect for the expert knowledge of the participant (p. 4).

Black feminist thought emphasizes this redefinition by reclaiming the ideas of the silenced, embracing and lifting up knowledge stemming from marginalized and oppressed voices. Collins (2000) discusses identifying alternative locations of knowledge, outside of academia and "...alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals" (p. 17). Black women intellectuals, she explains, "... are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class. Instead, all U.S. Black women who somehow contribute to Black feminist thought as critical social theory are deemed to be 'intellectuals'" (p. 17).

Aligned with this strain of thought, CBPR facilitates research approaches in which researcher and community members are co-equals, co-research partners in a

process that is driven by the situated knowledge generated within a community, by community members, for the benefit of that community. Research roles amongst academic and community partners may range from leadership to facilitation, depending on the community's capacity for undertaking research (Roche and Guta, 2014). In this study, I work closely with the instructor, Cachet. It was through our ongoing dialogue that the research plan emerged, centering on a core group of selected participants from her class whose lived experiences, meanings of, and questions about 'community,' significantly shape this study. Furthermore, my frequent conversations with Cachet in particular, as well as with fellow classmates, have significantly informed my research process.

I adopt the CBR-based guidelines for research in aboriginal communities as set out by indigenous studies and music therapy scholar Carolyn Kenny (2006) which establish that research be accessible, include respectful consultation and feedback with research participants (or co-researchers), be participatory in nature, be community based, and bring benefits to the community. I endeavor to uphold the values of CBPR as outlined by Stanton (2014), specifically, that researchers should recognize and value community partnership, be collaborative, and should strive to benefit all partners. I apply feminist and Black feminist thought in recognizing the 'West African' dance class as a site of knowledge production in which participants are invited to collaborate in the research process, and where I understand them as experts and co-researchers.

Method

Participant Observation & Conversations

As a member of the Monday night 'West African' dance class at the CEC, the regular activities of my dance practice provide the focal point for data collection methods, and privilege reflexive participation. This includes active participation in the dance class and related events, informal (impromptu) conversations with fellow participants, journaling, and written and audio-recorded note taking (similar to field notes), with an attention to sensorial perception. This serves as a means to gather and reflect on my own lived experiences as a member of this class, and the lived experiences of my fellow participants. In dancing in the class, I am engaged in a continuous process of experiencing, observing, and reflecting. Close observation, according to van Manen (1990),

...requires that one be a participant and an observer at the same time, that one maintain a certain orientation of reflectivity while guarding against the more manipulative and artificial attitude that a reflective attitude tends to insert in a social situation and relation. (p. 69)

While close observation allows one to find significance and meaning in an event while it occurs, interviews are focused on collecting data after the event, to be analyzed for emergent themes (van Manen, 1990). Planned discussions with participants, individually and in groups, outside of the dance setting served as a significant method for gathering information about lived experience and contextualizing 'West African' dance in Philadelphia (See Appendix A for the Interview Guide). In CBPR, research methods are applied with the aim of empowerment and political agency. Research is

typically a collaborative communal project in which all participants, including both the researcher and the researched, acknowledge that they bring social, historical, familial, and other diverse social constructions into their research interpretations. (Finley, 2008, p. 5)

As participants are understood as co-researchers, 'conversations' are facilitated, rather than 'interviews,' in order to promulgate a more horizontal plane of authority. The hierarchical structure in which the 'expert' or 'authoritative' researcher leads a participant in an interview is not conducive to collaborative inquiry (Finley, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenological interviewing (or conversation), lends itself to this philosophy as a method for "exploring and gathering experiential narrative material" and as a "vehicle to develop a conversational relation" with a research participant towards the exploration of experiences and their meanings (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). van Manen (1990) elaborates,

A true conversation comes into being... a conversation is structured as a triad. There is a conversational relation between the speakers, and the speakers are involved in a conversational relation with the notion or phenomenon that keeps the personal relation of the conversation intact...The conversation has a hermeneutic thrust: it is oriented to sense-making and interpreting of the notion that drives or stimulates the conversation (98).

van Manen (1990) suggests that when researcher and participants fully commit and engage in this triad relation, when they 'speak like friends' (in alignment with Socrates' understanding of the "fundamental structure of the conversation"), and willingly involve themselves in co-inquiry, rather than just an exploitative extraction of information, both become more invested, and experience a moral obligation to participate and collaborate (p. 98).

Core Participants

Individual conversations and group conversations were facilitated with a core group of selected participants who attend the class regularly. This core group consists of seventeen men and women, who either participate as dancers or musicians (with one who occasionally does both). Most of these participants have been involved consistently with Cachet's classes generally, and/or the Monday night class specifically, for upwards of two years, and approximately half the group for at least ten years. The ages of those in the core participant group range from 19 through early-sixties. Though children attend class every week, and their perspective would be very valuable to this study, there are no children who attend consistently. The core group includes ten women (all of whom dance in class, with the exception of one who is a musician who dances only on rare occasions), and seven men (all of whom are musicians for the class, with the exception of one man who dances). This group consists primarily of people of color, who identify as African American, Black, or indigenous, and three people who identify as White or Caucasian. Participants' professional backgrounds are diverse; the group includes professional dancers and musicians, educators, nonprofit administrators, urban gardeners/farmers (one of whom also works as a nanny, and the other as a contractor/welder), a lawyer, a nursing student, an operating engineer, and a mechanic. Aside from race, age, gender, and profession, the ways in which core participants self-identify are richly diverse and complex. While it is clear that I can only touch the surface of con-

veying who these folks are within the limited scope of this research, it is my desire to attend to their representation in this work ethically, with mindfulness and respect.¹⁴

Community Elders & Leaders

In my informal conversations with classmates over the last three years, I have often been advised to seek out community elders and/or leaders who have helped to establish and/or participated in the Philadelphia 'West African' dance community. It is understood that these individuals hold the historical and cultural knowledge about this community that cannot be found in literature. I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Kariamuwelsh, renowned dance artist and scholar, and creator of the Umfundalai dance technique; Terri Shockley, director of the CEC and former member of Urban Bush Women; Baba Mawuli Nkrumah Yaw (also known as Andre Forrest), an established musician/master drummer and respected elder, who often plays for the Monday night class along with his one of his sons; Alia Sutton-Bey, and former director of the Hawthorne Cultural Center where she cultivated a space for African dance and music practice; and Arlene Lee Johnson (Mama Arlene), a longtime member of the West African dance and drum community in Philadelphia, who is also included among the core participant group.

These conversations were facilitated with the goal of obtaining information about the history and sociocultural context of the Monday night 'West African' dance

¹⁴ Throughout this research, I refer to generally to the participants of this study collectively as 'participants,' and when differentiating them from other attendees who were not involved in the study, "research participants" or "core research group."

class, as well as their own lived experience as practitioners. Additionally, archival material from the Philadelphia Folklore Project informed this work, with emphasis placed on materials from and/or about their *Honoring Ancestors* exhibit featuring the perspectives of elders, leaders, and practitioners of West African dance and music in Philadelphia (PFP Honoring Ancestors).

Additional Research Participants

Two pre-dissertation experiences are relevant to this study. As part of my doctoral coursework in 2012, I conducted an 'auto-ethnographic study — an autobiographical examination of personal experience within a broader socio-cultural framework — focusing on my somatic awareness within the 'West African' dance class as new participant entering a dance community (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). I followed this in 2014 with an ethnographic study centered on participant experiences of participation. Field notes, journal entries, and audio-recorded interviews obtained in these studies are data vital to this current research. And as the activities of my involvement in this dance class include informal and impromptu conversations with classmates, before, during, and after class, these discussions are also included in this research.¹⁵ Additionally, the group discussions were open to any other participants of the Monday night 'West African' dance class who wished to attend; these perspectives have also informed my research.

¹⁵ All encounters and discussions with fellow classmates inform my research. Any discussions that are referred to or directly quoted in this dissertation are done so with the consent of the participant.

Analysis

Gathering and analyzing lived experience data are not separable processes; researchers can vacillate between the two modes within moments, and/or operate within both modes simultaneously (Kvale, 2009; van Manen, 1990). The conversational interview, for example, entails collecting information through dialogue and reflecting on/interpreting that information. The revealing, sharing, creating and interpreting of information is a constant and collaborative process (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). In order to further analyze lived experience description obtained through conversations after they occurred, I transcribe audio-recorded sessions and employ theme analysis, which refers to "... the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78).¹⁶

This was a two-fold process, entailing holistic analysis (reading and reflecting on the entire 'text' with the aim of formulating a phrase that expresses the meaning of the fundamental significance of the text), followed by selective analysis (listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts several times for statements that stand out as "particularly essential or revealing" about the experience being described) (van Manen, 1990, p. 92-93). Themes identified from individual interviews were useful tools for reflection, structuring, and orienting collaborative inquiry through hermeneutic conversations (i.e. group discussions with the core group) (van Manen, 1990). They also provided means to verify interpretation of research participants' responses. I used the themes to conduct repeated and more focused analyses of the transcripts, which helped to iden-

¹⁶ Transcripts were sent to research participants for verification. Four responded with small corrections.

tify patterns in the data and additional salient themes. Themes helped me to organize and condense the rich collection of lived experience description (from my own reflections on participation as well as that of the research participants generated through conversation).

Delimitations

I delimit this research to the data gathered in the context of the Monday night 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia, which includes activities during class, as well as any artistic or social practices associated with class in which the research participants and I engage. I do not intend to generalize beyond this context, though readers may interpret and connect to meaning with other 'West African' dance classes. I limit the research to the lived experiences of the research participants and examine the socio-cultural context in which they are situated, which I address in the following chapter. A comprehensive historiography and/or cultural analysis of 'West African' dance in Philadelphia is a rich and complex topic, with the sort of amplitude deserving of an entire dissertation, and as such, is beyond the scope of this research.

Part of this complexity involves a social matrix of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and religion. I attend to these issues if/when they are raised by participants in relation to their experience, and in relation to contextualizing the Monday night class within the broader realm of West African dance practice in the United States. This research is not intended to critically analyze participant experiences specifically through these elements. Additionally, though there are always children

present in the class, the perspective of children participants is excluded from this study due to the sporadic nature of each individual child's attendance. However, I believe the child perspective of 'community' in this context would provide an important area of inquiry for future research.

Finally, the research participants self-identify as participants or members of the Monday Night class community, and have demonstrated a commitment to maintaining some level of involvement (though frequency of attendance in the class varies). People who regularly attend but were not able to participate in this study, those who have at one time attended the class but have chosen not to return, or those who do not (or no longer) self-identify as participants or members, may have valuable perspectives in regards to 'community' understanding and experience within the class (or lack there of). I have come across several such people over the last three years, and the sentiments that they have shared with me inform my research, but by and large this population is not included in this research. The research is focused on the core group of 18 current and active participants.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXTUALIZING THE MONDAY NIGHT CLASS

West African Dance in the U.S.

As one of many classes in Philadelphia associated with dances of the African Diaspora (a term I address further in this chapter), the Monday night West African dance class at the CEC is situated within broader socio-cultural and historical contexts of West African dance in United States, as well as within the general dance community of Philadelphia. In this chapter, I examine historical, cultural, and political developments that have shaped and continue to shape 'West African' dance in the U.S. broadly, and in Philadelphia, specifically.

I frame this contextualization with three elements (not intended to represent any linear temporal relationship): African Diaspora identity and tradition, performance aesthetics and the relationship to 'community,' the significance of the civil rights movement and Black liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s to the development of African dance practice in the United States, and the artists and organizations influential in establishing and sustaining African Diaspora dance practice in Philadelphia. I draw primarily from Africana/African Diaspora studies, theories of African American and Black performance aesthetics, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies with a focus on music and dance of the African Diaspora. As there is very little written about the African Diaspora dance practices of Philadelphia, this body of literature works in conjunction with primary resource materials from elders and leaders influential in the development of Philadelphia-based African Diaspora dance practice.

African Diaspora and Tradition

Benita Binta Brown-Danquah's (1994) "African Diaspora Movement Arts in Philadelphia: A Beginning Resource List" is a survey of artists, dance companies, and marching groups associated with African Diaspora movement and music that were in operation at the time of publication in Philadelphia. With this document, she attempts "to trace some of the ways in which African Dance is evolving here in Philadelphia" (p. 6). This record compiles and documents the presence of these organizations and artists, who she credits with developing the African Diaspora dance and music community in Philadelphia. As such, it serves to orient my examination of the contextual framework for African Diaspora dance practice in Philadelphia. Efia Nomalanga Dalili's (1999) dissertation, *"More than a sisterhood:" Traditional West African dance in an contemporary urban setting*, supports this orientation. Experiential research and interviews with Philadelphia practitioners and pioneers elucidate practitioners' relationship to each other, and to the development of African dance and music practice in Philadelphia.

First, I start with the term 'African Diaspora.' This label refers to African-derived cultures as they have developed beyond, and in relation to, the African continent. 'Africa,' more than a continent, is a complex and continuously reconstituted idea based on race, colonization, economies, nations, and ethnicities, and so 'African Diaspora' becomes an equally unstable concept (Gilroy, 1993; Washington, 2013; Zeleza, 2010). Zeleza (2010) explains that "...the idea of 'Africa' is an exceedingly complicated one with multiple genealogies and meanings. African identities, peoples, and cultures are

often mapped, and differentiated, in racial, geographical, historical, or ideological terms” (p. 6).

Scholars such as Zeleza (2010), Washington (2013), and Sandri (2012) argue that Africa is both a material and imagined space. In "African Diasporas: Toward a Global History," Zeleza (2010) explains that Africa provides a "physical, political, psychic, and paradigmatic reality for the peoples who lived within or are molded from its cartographic and cultural boundaries, who themselves are subject to spatial shifts and historical transformations" (p. 6). Like the term 'community,' what "Africa" means, how it is imagined, how cultural markers are used to access it in the space of the Monday night class, may be vastly different for each participant and dependent upon the inter-subjective dynamics of the class as a collective on any given day.

Furthermore, the term 'African Diaspora' denotes a process of migration, spatial construct, and periodization that is complex and convoluted - location, scale, and temporal boundaries of what constitutes the "what" and "who" of the African Diaspora are not fixed, they shift, and are multiple (Zeleza, 2010). Carol Boyce Davies (1999) asserts that much of the discourse around diaspora is uni-centric, anchored by an intellectual, economic, political, cultural, and/or geographic center from which all else emerges uni-directionally. Whether Eurocentric, Afrocentric, or 'U.S.-centered,' concepts of diaspora construct a singular linear narrative that fails to take interchange, interaction, and mobility into account. In "Beyond Unicentricity: Transcultural Black Presences," Davies (1999) argues for a framework of diaspora that is multi-centered, overlapping, multi-directional, and generative:

A fully transcultural paradigm, in my view, has to pursue and account for a range of relations of African peoples internationally as they interact with a variety of cultural spaces... Crosscultural African Diaspora discourses, as I define them, speak to the variety of movements ushered in by migrations and the consistent reproduction of different modes of being in the world. Rather than a giant, monolithic, traditional African culture, then, we can assert multiple, transcultural presences within and outside of Africa. Thus, crosscultural, transnational discourses are also 'transformational'... In other words, by this means we actualize the idea of related spheres beyond unicentricity. (p. 106)

Within African Diaspora culture, the African American experience is also multifaceted, multi-centered, and mobile. In a dissertation entitled *Performing Africa: Memory, Tradition, and Resistance in the Leimert Park Drum Circle*, Washington (2013) discusses political scientist William Safran's definition of the concept of 'diaspora' and argues that it does not adequately take into account the detachment of African Americans from Africa as an ancestral homeland (as a result of enslavement and racial oppression). The determinants that Safran sets forth, such as imagining one's return to homeland or a commitment to the maintenance/restoration of one's homeland, as a condition of 'diaspora' may not universally apply to the African American community. It cannot be unequivocally stated that all African Americans have such imaginings or commitments (Washington, 2013). In *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Brazilian Candomble*, Yvonne Daniel (2005) explains that through an ongoing process of interaction and interchange, once in the Americas, neighboring African-derived cultures experienced an intermeshing or intra-syncretism, and furthermore,

...well before coming to the Americas, continental Africans were accustomed to having dual or multiple religious loyalties, in addition to dual or multiple cul-

tural allegiances. This has made the study of American contexts difficult when searching out origins and distinctions. (p. 2)

Paul Gilroy (1993), in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, argues that attempting to fix an Afrocentric identity is antithetical to a Black Atlantic Diaspora culture that is multiple and generative. From a multi-centered perspective, African Diaspora dance practices do not fit into any linear structure of time or space that expands out from the continent of Africa. 'African Diaspora dance' as a category can instead be understood as a multiple and overlapping temporal, geographic, and cultural relationship of dance practices within and beyond Africa. The Monday night 'West African' class at the CEC provides a weekly space for these relationships to manifest. We learn dances and rhythms associated with various nations and ethnic groups, with histories that range from what has been described as 'pre-colonial' to contemporary iterations that are constantly reimagined in and through dance practice. I speculate that Cachet's own teaching is filtered through her experience with teachers and artists from countries such as Guinea, Senegal, Cuba, and Brazil, as well as the United States.

Musicians in the class are touted by Cachet as some of the finest, highly trained artists in the tristate area, with backgrounds in music genres and techniques from all over the world. I am not musically astute enough to know when and how they may blend or traverse these rhythms in our 'West African' dance class, but I know that it can and does happen occasionally. Cachet explains that in order to "stir it up," to bend, blend, or play with musical genres and dance movements, one must have a deep understanding of, and profound respect for, what she refers to as the 'foundation.' I interpret

this 'foundation' as the methods and structures of musical rhythms and dance movements as they have been passed through generations — which include the ways in which they may have transformed in different contexts (e.g. repetitive movements of sacred rituals or rites of passage to virtuosic and spectacular movements staged for the theater).

This is in line with Gilroy's (1993) critical assessment of 'tradition' as conceptualized by Afrocentric thought, which asserts a linear historical continuity of African culture as a means to establish a unified racial identity.

...the ideas of tradition is so often also the culmination, or centre-piece, of a rhetorical gesture that asserts the legitimacy of a black political culture locked in a defensive posture against the unjust powers of white supremacy. This gesture sets tradition and modernity against each other as simple polar alternatives as starkly differentiated and oppositional as the signs black and white. (p. 188)

Chernoff (1981) elucidates the concept of 'traditional' in the context of African music, stating that

In traditional African music-making situations, the music is basically familiar, and people can follow with informed interest the efforts of musicians to add an additional dimension of excitement or depth to a performance. Relatively minor variations stand out clearly and assume increased importance in making the occasion successful. Thus while artistic activity reaffirms and revitalizes tradition, people expect their traditional arts to be continuously vital forms. A 'traditional' piece of music can therefore still be open to innovation. (p. 61)

Kariamuwelsh Asante's (1994) *African dance: An Artistic, historical and philosophical inquiry* includes several essays from authors writing on the relationships between 'traditional,' 'neotraditional' and 'contemporary' practices in African dance. In one such essay, "African Dance: Tradition and Continuity," Robert Nicholls explains these

contexts as existing on a continuum of living, evolving practices, while simultaneously arguing for conservation of 'traditional' culture (as opposed to 'preservation,' in which these forms would be fixed within a historical archive rather than a fluid paradigm allowing for growth and change). 'Traditional' African dance is what he refers to as a "psycho-social device" inherent to the commemoration of significant life events, benchmarks, and transitions. It is generally participatory, involving members of the same communities; serves a societal function; ritualistic; and intertwined with other artistic modes such as music, visual elements, and storytelling. 'Neo-traditional' includes those traditional practices that have been influenced by mass media and pop culture, "uprooted from their customary social context in time, place and motivation... sometimes significantly modified to suit the imagined tastes of the metropolis" (Nicholls, 1994, p.51-52). For example, a 'neo-traditional' dance may include elements from two or more unrelated dances (in terms of social function or ethnic origin).

In another essay within Welsh's (1994) volume, "African Dance: Bridges to Humanity," Tracy Snipe describes 'contemporary' African dance as traditional dances that have been reimagined through creative practice. Through cross-cultural interchange and modernization, they have become secularized and fused with other dance and music forms (Snipe, 1994). In an interview in the *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Welsh offered an in-depth look in the contemporary African dance technique that she created in 1970, Umfundalai, which has been promulgated throughout the U.S. and overseas. "Umfundalai," she explains,

means 'essence' or 'essential' in Kiswahili.' As a Pan African dance technique, the Umfundalai technique draws up on key movements from different ethnic groups and many nations in Africa, along with the movements of black cultures in the United States, Caribbean, and South America... Umfundalai strives to teach students the neo-traditional dances of Africa and the Diaspora... The particulars of the Umfundalai technique lie in its application and viability in its ability to prepare dancers and choreographers for creative research using movement vocabulary from African and African Diaspora dances. (Glocke, 2011, p.258)

The deliberate selection of specific movements from various African ethnic groups and cultures within the continent and across the diaspora in connection to choreographic practice and creative expression has allowed Welsh to honor 'traditions' without feeling the need to remain beholden to them (Glocke, 2011). In a dissertation entitled *Staging the African: Transcultural Flows of Dance and Identity*, Esailama Diouf (2013) explains that 'tradition' is not fixed, and 'traditional' dance practices of Africa

breaks the false binary of 'contemporary' versus 'traditional.' Traditions, in order to survive, must move through bodies, space, and time, and body movement will inevitably change. Thus, as traditions are passed down onto contemporary bodies, tradition itself, while surviving, also becomes contemporary. (p. 26)

Our conversations in the Monday night 'West African' dance class about traditions and transformations, the process of reinventing through/with music and dance, and the openness to exploring and creating with a multitude of music and movement forms in the midst of striving to honor and preserve the lineages of African traditions from which they emerged is indicative of multi-centered African Diaspora dance practice that is generative and mobile.

African Diaspora Performance Aesthetics & Community

In *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, DeFrantz (2002) explains that there is a dearth of literature around the development of African American dance performance and aesthetics, earlier scholarship is influenced by racist attitudes and racial segregation, causing 'misreadings' of African Diasporic cultures. His critical review of more recent volumes that discuss African origins of African American dance forms emphasizes the common qualities that characterize African American dance, much of which builds on Robert Farris Thompson's influential article, "Dance and Culture: An Aesthetic of the Cool" (DeFrantz 2002). Thompson (1966) explains that music and dance are intrinsically linked, and so the qualities found in musical aesthetics are also found in dance. The concept of the inherent connection between African music and dance is addressed in the works of numerous scholars working in a range of fields, including dance, music, ethnomusicology, and art history (Bebey, 1975; Dor, 2014; Chernoff, 1981; Karolyi, 1998; Nketia, 1974; Thompson, 1966; Washington, 2013; Welsh, 1994).

Jacqui Malone (1996) echoes this analysis, positing, "Africans' strong attitudes toward music and dance — and of the vital links between them — set the stage for the dancing and music-making cultures to come in North and South America" (p. 21-22). John Miller Chernoff (1981) expounds further, stating that since art is integrated into social context, arts would inherently "...manifest the same aesthetic concerns, but it is especially through the dance that music and its context are brought together" (p. 143).

Important to this discussion is the concern of comparative views between Eurocentric and non-Western perspectives. Ashenafi Kebede (1982), in *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*, explains that

European scholarship has almost always attempted to understand aesthetic experience of non-Western peoples largely through the development of terminology that accurately explains the word *art*, its function and expression, and even the psychology of creativity in the context of its own European cultural values. (p. 105)

Explaining African concepts in non-equivalent Western/European terms can lead to misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation. One example of this, according to Kebede (1982), concerns the concept of aural perception and music. In African contexts, music is not just heard, but is perceived through all of the senses. This is reflected in Stoller's (1997) sensory ethnography of Songhay sorcery of Mali and Niger focused on attaining and understanding embodied knowledge through the senses, as well as in Welsh's (1985) article, "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation," examining the aspects of sense perception within aesthetic dimensions of African dance, which contributes to its "enormous complexity" (p. 145).

Kwabena Nketia (1974), a premier ethnomusicologist and composer from Ghana, provides a thorough introduction to musical traditions of Africa in his book, *The Music of Africa*. He begins his volume with a discussion of the myriad cultural distinctions found within the broad genre of African music, and the ways in which they relate and overlap, commenting on the "common features of internal pattern, basic procedure,

and contextual similarities" (Nketia, 1974, p. 4). Diversity, he asserts, is the most significant characteristic of African music and dance. Despite this diversity, many scholars agree that commonalities can be discerned (DeFrantz, 2002; Thompson, 1966; Nketia, 1974; Glocke, 2011). These commonalities are centralized in Welsh's Umfundalai technique, "...predicated on the premise that there are common aesthetic elements in African dances regardless of the region of the world that the movement comes from" (Glocke, 2011, p.258).

In his 1966 essay, "An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African dance," (published again in 1999 in *Signifyin(g), sanctifyin' & slam dunking: A reader in African American expressive culture*) Thompson describes five primary commonalities in pan-African dance and music performance. These include percussiveness, multi-metered (polyrhythm), apart playing and dancing (the dancers and musicians are individual parts of a whole ensemble in which they converse with each other), call and response, and songs and dances of derision. The 'cool' to which Thompson refers in his work describes a sort of composure during performance that masks pleasure as well as intense effort (Thompson, 1999). In the 1990s, characteristics of Black performance aesthetics were re-articulated and conceived as 'Africanisms,' which are "...discernible in concert dance [and] are qualities of design and execution based on insistent rhythmicity, angularity, percussive rupture of underlying flow, individualism within a group dynamic, and access to a dynamic 'flash of spirit' that simultaneously confirms temporal presence and ubiquitous spirituality" (DeFrantz, 2002, p. 14-15). DeFrantz (2002) acknowledges that this analysis implies a singular 'African Dance' schema while emphasizing its use-

fulness, arguing that these "...hallmarks of African-derived performance provide a theoretical framework for the identification and interpretation of diasporic traditions of art-making..." (14-15). These characteristics inform, and do not define, instances of African diasporic performance "...that may be employed both by African diaspora artists and, significantly, by others following this tradition" (DeFrantz, 2002, p.14-15).

While this framework is useful for historically and culturally situating the Monday night West African dance class and participants' embodied experiences of the movement and music practices within this class, I am particularly interested in Thompson (1999), Chernoff (1981) and Malone's (1996) discussion of the relationship between African dance/music aesthetics and 'community.' Thompson (1999) discusses how polyrhythm lends itself to conversation between musicians, between dancers, and between musicians and dancers, thus helping to reaffirm a sense of community:

Multiple meter essentially uses dancers as further voices in a polymetric choir. The conversation is additive, cool in its expressions of community. The balance struck between the meters and the bodily orchestration seems to communicate a soothing wholeness rather than a 'hot' specialization... Dialogue in apart performing... [and in] call-and-response... [is] a means of putting innovation and tradition, invention and imitation into amicable relationships with one another. (qtd. in Chernoff, 1981, p. 149).

Chernoff (1981) explicates the 'realization of community' (a statement I will further address later in this chapter) as another commonality of pan-African aesthetics, which entails the motivations, ethics, and enjoyment of both performer and audience towards a united communal experience. An important aspect of community, Chernoff (1981) explains, is the witness; the music and dance event is incomplete without audiences and

spectators. I am interested in how this notion might bump up against what might be considered a 'Western contemporary dance' model of dance training in which spectators are not typically allowed in the studio on a regular basis, and also where the use of mirrors in the studio are more often utilized for students to examine their own bodies as they strive to learn and execute technique. In my experience, I have found that mirrors can provide a perspective of the whole class, allowing me to situate myself with and within the collective of dancing bodies in the room, and it can also direct my focus towards my own body and the simultaneous embodied/aesthetic (subjective/objective) perspective of the execution of technique rather than remaining attune to, or in energetic conversation with, fellow participants and spectators. In the Monday night class, the mirror is rarely used, and visitors are often in attendance, observing us (and, as previously mentioned, sometimes joining in to dance or play drums for a moment).

Malone (1996) builds on Chernoff's ideas, noting that music and dance of the African Diaspora are considered integral to life and human activity, and are used to "...celebrate life and death... compete with one another... recite history... initiate spiritual encounters... teach social patterns and values that foster social development... and praise or criticize the behavior of community members" (p. 9). Furthermore, African Diasporic dance and music are often used as "meta commentary" (DeFrantz, 2002) in response to social concerns and events of daily community life (DeFrantz, 2002; Malone, 1996; Thompson, 1966).

Beyond representation and commentary on daily life, enslaved Africans in the U.S. utilized dance and music as symbols of agency and freedom, and active modes of

resistance. The practice of dance and music (done in secret or masked in other accepted cultural practices) served as a means of rebellious freedom in the midst of enslavement in which cultural and artistic practices were suppressed and outlawed, and as calls to action during escapes, slave revolts and uprisings. African dance and music has an established history of serving as a mode of social thought and action in the United States (Dor, 2014; Emery 1988).

Civil rights, Black power, Identity

Social consciousness, specifically in regards to Black empowerment in the face of racial injustice and oppression, is a recurrent theme in terms of the mission and motivations for many of the artists and organizations profiled in Brown-Danquah's (1994) article. The Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s and 70s centered on the affirmation and assertion of a collective Black/African American identity. The Black Power Movement called for self-determination, and the Black Arts Movement was a response to this call, generating artistic works that expressed Black historical and contemporary realities, as well as artistic processes that engaged communities and addressed social concerns (Collins and Crawford, 2006; DeFrantz, 2002; Philadelphia Folklore Project, 2014; Juang and Morrissette, 2008). DeFrantz (2002) cites art historian Richard J. Powell assertion that

...many artists viewed the recuperation of 'black' as a mark of identity during the 1960s as an 'emphatic proclamation of an oppressed people's psychological re-orientation.' In dance, this decidedly nationalistic reorientation emphasized connections between everyday experiences and art-making to embrace multiple

movement idioms and a range of expressive approaches in the representation of 'blackness.' (p. 6-7)

The encyclopedic text, *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*, edited by Juang and Morrissette (2008) describes the interrelationship of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements as parallel efforts that emerged from the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States, with foundations in fighting for equality and justice for African Americans. These movements, occurring during the mid-1960s through to the mid-1970s, expanded on the civil rights movement with the aim of establishing and promoting a collective racial identity for Black people (a label introduced at this time to affirm self-worth and resist the term 'Negro'). They were a means to instill a sense of racial pride and self-worth, and to empower Black people to resist against socially engrained prejudice and racial oppression. The Black Power Movement was a call to action focused on igniting change from within the Black community, connecting political action to self-determination. The Black Arts Movement was one response to this call in which an entire realm of artistic and cultural practice and production blossomed — in the form of dance, poetry, literature, music, visual arts, and more — that served to reflect and mirror the complex landscape of the Black experience, envision a new future, and inspire change (Juang and Morrissette, 2008).

One of the features that distinguish the Black Power/Black Arts movements from other such movements within a long and well-established history of revolutionary and radical work aimed at equality for African Americans in the United States, is its focus on a Black cultural nationalism. In turning attention to Africa as site of cultural

heritage and tradition, African aesthetic expression was one marker of these social justice movements (Collins and Crawford, 2006; Juang and Morrisette, 2008). The connection to, and preservation of, African cultural and artistic practices was a means of imagining and creating unification as a Black community and was a significant feature of both the Black Power and Black Arts Movement, creating fertile ground for the emergence of Afrocentrism in the 1980s and 1990s, which began as an "...ideological and educational movement supporting and promulgating pride in peoples of African descent..." (Juang and Morrisette, 2008). Molefi K. Asante, known as the main proponent of this movement with his seminal work, *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987) explains Afrocentrism as a shift in thought necessary to counter the ways in which Eurocentric discourse distorted African history and "...devastated fundamental centers of African wholeness" (Asante, 1991, p. 132). While Afrocentrism has been criticized for essentializing Africa and African cultures, thus minimizing the rich diversity of identity and experience, its lasting impact is that it centralizes African ideals within any analysis that involves Africa in order to interrogate conceptions of dominance and re-orient intellectual discourse through the lens of Africans and people of African descent as autonomous subjects, rather than objects (Asante, 1991).

Afrocentrism, and the Black Power and Black Arts Movements' influence on the Black/African American community is reflected in the work of the artists and organizations featured in Brown-Danquah's (1994) article, who were founded between the mid 1960s and 1980s. Groove Phi Groove Social Fellowship, for example, is a national Greek letter organization founded in 1962 that "...started as part of a cultural revolution

and Black Power Movement where people were looking towards their Afrocentric roots in pride and principals..." The University of Pennsylvania chapter's Groove Phi Groove Steppers utilize African dance movement to reflect their political consciousness, raise awareness of African cultural traditions, and resist Eurocentric frameworks that marginalize people of color - as in the prejudice many Black men experienced at the hands of Greek letter organizations in colleges. This is one of many organizations in Brown-Danquah's (1994) survey that identified African Diaspora dance and music as means to support and uplift people of color in Philadelphia.

While not all African American artists aligned their practices with the Black Arts movement, many perceived and established a connection between their art and politics of the Black Power movement, and "sought to create a coherent 'black aesthetic' inspired by, about, and for black people" (DeFrantz, 2002, p.5). Artists such as Asadata Dafora (from Sierra Leone, who founded the Shogola Oloba company in 1933), Ladji Camara (an original member of Les Ballets Africains, credited with popularizing Malinke dance and music in New York City), Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu (who founded Dinizulu Dancers, Drummers, and Singers in 1948, and The Aims of Modzawe dance school), and Baba Michael Olatunji (a preeminent musician from Nigeria who influenced generations of African dance and music practitioners), helped to establish a strong African Dance practice in New York and other American cities by the 1950s (Heard and Mussa, 2012). Heard and Mussa, authors of "African Dance in New York City" in DeFrantz' (2002) *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, explain

The Black Power movement of the 1960s brought many African American youth in search of self-discovery to the music and dances of Africa. African dance offered the recognition of an ancient, precolonial self and was supported as a viable vehicle of cultural revolution by leaders of the Black Power movement. During this era, African dance classes and performances became staples of African American political events, community center programming, and college courses, a legacy that will continue in the twenty-first century. (DeFrantz, 2002, p. 126).

Dalili (1999) explains that "West African dance in Philadelphia continue[s] to reinforce the blossoming of African pride during the radical Black Power Movement" (p. 31).

"Honoring Ancestors: Notes from an exhibition," an article published by the Philadelphia Folklore Project in conjunction with the community-curated *Honoring Ancestors* exhibit, features the testimonies of Philadelphia-based African dance and music practitioners, and discusses relationships between practice and social justice.

Identifying with African cultural traditions and asserting dignity and strength against overwhelming odds, pioneers of African-rooted dance and drumming were in the vanguard of those struggling for cultural equity and social justice in 1960s and 1970s Philadelphia. People actively countering racism, disenfranchisement, and violence took real risks. Dancer Ione Nash and drummer John Wilkie are among those who tell stories of police harassment for using (and even carrying) African drums. Artists who embraced cultural nationalism describe dealing with racism and retribution... (2014, p. 5)

The simultaneous liberation movements throughout Africa — particularly Senegal and Guinea — further helped to propel African-oriented practices in the United States during this time (Dor, 2014; Washington, 2013; Sandri, 2012).

In *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*, dance scholar and ethnographer Francesca Castaldi (2006) explains that upon decolonization and independence, many African countries created dance

companies as a means to build and promote a national culture, and to "[reconfigure] local dance traditions as a vehicle of historical memory and continuity" (p. 9). The National Ballet of Senegal was founded immediately after its liberation in 1960, by the country's first president Leopold Senghor (Castaldi, 2006; Sandri, 2012). Senghor, a poet and scholar, played a significant role in promoting Negritude, a literary movement emerging from Paris in the 1930s. He theorized it as a pan-African ontology, "the sum-total of the cultural values and expressions of the black world" which could counter the colonial attitudes towards Africa (Asante and Mazama, 2005, p. 3). The national ballets across Africa served as a way to highlight intercultural linkages and collectivity while simultaneously asserting Westernized notions of nationalism to an international audience (Sandri, 2012).

Negritude ideas about shared Pan-African identity helped leaders foster cultural and national ties between disparate ethnic groups, yet simultaneously reified colonial notions that all Africans belonged to one hazily defined tribe. Thus Euro-American colonial narratives conceived of Africa as a place in which dance was timeless, innate to Africans, and central to ethnic identity, while West African nationalist rhetoric also focused on all African people's inherent connection with dance as proof of their shared ethnic identity and the integrity of their cultural heritage. (Sandri, 2012, p. 28)

The National Ballet of Guinea, popularly known as Les Ballets Africains, was founded after Guinea's independence in 1959 by its first president Sekou Touré, with the goal of acquainting foreigners with "Guinea's cultural values and artistic riches..." and to garner respect on an international level (Sandri, 2012, p. 42). Both Senegal and Guinea's dance companies focused on stage performance, integrating and reworking myriad social and ritual dances from various ethnic groups into dances suitable for the

stage. Touré emphasized that these dances were not meant to be literal displays of traditional dances, but "... artistic representations of Africa and the life of African people," an idea very much in alignment with the Pan-African ideology of the Negritude movement (Sandri, 2012, p. 43). Diouf (2013) notes a poignant intersection between the revolutionary movements of Black liberation in the United States and Guinea. Stokley Carmichael (also known as Kwame Touré), an activist in the U.S. civil rights movement, involved in leadership roles in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and The Black Panther Party, lauded Sekou Touré who supported and utilized traditional culture and values to help shape and drive Guinea's nationalist movement. Dance, music, and other art forms were understood as vital to building character and pride, and bolstering revolution (Diouf, 2013).

The national ballets toured around the world, including the U.S., and many dancers and musicians remained to teach classes and establish dance companies of their own, and connected with Black artists who were invested in connecting to African traditions as a mode of art production and creative practice. 'West African' dance gained a foothold in the United States during the Black Power/Black Arts Movements as an embodiment of African aesthetic expression, racial and cultural pride, and community.

African Diaspora Movement Arts in Philadelphia

The thirty dance organizations and artists covered in Brown-Danquah's (1994) survey represents a wide range of African Diaspora dance practices, including (but not limited to) 'West African' dance (associated with the countries, regions, and ethnic

groups in West Africa), American modern dance traditions, Yoruba Orisha dance (with religious/ritual foundations of Orisha worship from African and Cuban Yoruba cultural traditions), college fraternity stepping, and hip hop.¹⁷ Brown-Danquah (1994) acknowledges that the survey was not fully representative of what was occurring in the field, as new organizations were founded and several folded at the time of publication.

Regardless, it provides a detailed record in the form of profiles of practitioners and organizations active during this time period, as well as an insightful perspective on the interrelationship amongst them and their connection and significance to the development of what Brown-Danquah (1994) refers to as the Philadelphia Africa Diaspora Movement Art, or alternately, the African dance community. She identifies two main organizational categories for the profile entries: stage performance, or artists and organizations focused on creating performance for the theater setting for the purpose of entertainment; and community-oriented work that "tends to stress the everyday uses of dance and drum, the significance of dance for the individual and community, and the participatory context" (Brown-Danquah, 1994, p. 6).

While she identifies these as two distinct 'poles,' she also asserts that overlap exists. Community-oriented dance organizations, for example, may perform in theater settings, though their overall philosophy regarding audiences may be different than organizations centered on stage performance (this difference in philosophy, however, is not further elaborated). Brown-Danquah (1994) identifies two community-oriented artists who played a significant role in developing this tradition in Philadelphia: Saka

¹⁷ Brown-Danquah's survey includes both dance organizations and marching groups. For the scope and purpose of this study, I delimit my focus to the first section of her survey, "Movements of African Dance in Philadelphia."

Acquaye from Ghana and his protégé in the U.S., Baba Robert Crowder, who went on to found Kúlú Mélé. Crowder's name appears frequently throughout Brown-Danquah's survey, which illuminates the genealogical aspect of this document. It reads much like a family tree, many artists and founders of the organizations have worked together, and lineages of training and study can be traced. Brown-Danquah (1994) explains,

...the existence of many different artists and companies working in different settings have influenced subsequent generations of dancers, and contributed to the vitality of Philadelphia African American dance... artistic descent and 'kinship' is a complex matter. For example, artistic descendants of Arthur Hall include Kofi Asante's group, and Jaasu Ballet [which], in turn, heavily influenced both Spirit of Sankofa and Ibeji Performing Arts Group. Artists work in different groups, maintain friendships, and develop new formal and informal associations. Traditions and influences continue to emerge. (p. 6)

Numerous artists listed in the article have either collaborated with or trained under Crowder, including Cachet Ivey. The relationship between Crowder's community-oriented philosophy and the community values promoted by Cachet in the Monday night class are an important thread of inquiry in this research. Likewise, Brown-Danquah's mention of Arthur Hall is pertinent in that he and his company, The Arthur Hall Afro-American Dancers, and his arts center and rehearsal space, Ile Ife (located in North Philadelphia), also significantly impacted countless artists of various genres and Philadelphia residents for decades (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Dalili, 1999). Arthur Hall's repertory fused modern dance, ballet, jazz, and African dance aesthetics. Brown-Danquah calls Hall's ensemble, "one of the first and most important African dance troupes in Philadelphia..." and, as her survey shows, was influential in the dance and music training of many performers who went on to focus on West African music and dance

practice (Brown-Danquah, 1994, p.8). Also included in Brown-Danquah's survey is Ibeji Performing Arts Group, created by Jeanine Osayande and Greg "Hodari" Banks in 1991 (no longer active). Cachet was a member as a child and performed Ibeji's repertory focused on dances of West Africa, Haiti, and Brazil. Cachet has noted the great impact these early performing experiences had on her dance career.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUALIZING 'COMMUNITY'

Learning Kassa, a Malinke dance from Guinea connecting rhythm and movement to the labor of harvest... Cachet reflects, "support the people that you want to harvest for you." I contemplate how I/we can encourage and support laborers and leaders doing the hard work that benefits us all. I wonder how I can share the load, remembering how my dad would sing "we mow the hay, and we rake the hay, and we carry it away together..." I feel thankful for the dancers, musicians, teachers, friends and family who inspire, challenge, and motivate me.

This reflective journal entry was written in December 2014 after first learning *Kassa* and listening to Cachet describe how this rhythm and movement work to unite members of a community for a moment in time. She explained that everyone has a role in the harvest; whether collecting the crops or supporting and encouraging the farmers by accompanying their labor with music and dance. Each role contributes to the collective effort to sustain a community (Chernoff, 1981; Nketia, 1974; Thompson, 1966)

This message was at the core of the song my father would often have us sing together as a family on road trips (which turns out to be an old English drinking song that somehow made its way into his eclectic musical repertoire). It begins, "With one man, with two men, we mow the hay together. With three men, with four men we rake the hay together" and would progressively accumulate in number as the song went on. As I sang with my family I imagined all the different people who would come together to work

on the farm. When I revisit this journal entry and think about the experience of learning *Kassa*, I am reminded of what I felt when I first began taking the Monday night class - the feeling of being a part of something larger, something I associate with ‘community.’

‘Community’ is a term open to many interpretations and applications; whether it refers to a social group, a geographic location, a feeling of camaraderie - its meaning can shift with its context. How ‘community’ is formed, sustained, and entered, and what conditions and structures form and shape its borders, are questions that have been posed by many scholars and practitioners. In this chapter, I introduce ‘community’ theories and investigations that have informed my research from a wide range of disciplines, including: psychology, aesthetics philosophy, community dance practice, dance studies, feminist and Black feminist theory, African Diaspora studies, sociology, and phenomenology. Organizing this work into fixed categories based on any firm conceptualizations of ‘community’ is precarious, and so I begin with a common theme appearing throughout the literature - the notion that there cannot be one fixed or universal definition. I follow with literature focused on ideas of aesthetics, difference, spatial dynamics, individual and cultural identity, and participation and practice.

Definition

Dance practitioner and scholar, Diane Amans (2008), explains ‘community’ as a ... slippery idea that fails to sit comfortably, or quietly around any complex praxis. Perpetually challenging previous definitions of the notion, ‘community’ has been used as a principle upholding a particular way of acting or living by divergent commentators. (Amans, p. 14)

In a paper entitled "Tensions in the Definition of Community Dance" presented at the 5th Study of Dance Conference at the University of Surrey, author and community dance practitioner Linda Jasper (1995) charts the development and state of the field of community dance in the U.K. in the mid-1990s. She explains this genre as emerging through the influences of American contemporary dance, educational dance, and the community arts movement. Community Dance, she explains, seeks to expand definitions of the 'artist;' utilizes pedestrian/everyday movements; and strives to demystify dance and make it accessible to broader audiences (as spectators and active participants).

The 'tensions in definition' to which Jaspers (1995) refers in the title involve the motives and uses for 'community dance' practice, including education, youth and community services, outreach initiatives by professional dance companies, dance therapy, and leisure and recreation. She does not, however, discuss any tensions of definition within the term 'community' itself. The only proximal discussion is Penny Greenland's (Director of Jabadao) concept of 'true community' in reference to the space between dance therapy and Community Dance practice. True community, Greenland states, is or creates an environment in which people can grow strong, powerful, and effective. True community "can be built through people's commitment to each other and to the struggle for 'personal disarmament'" (Jasper, 1995, p. 187). To say that there is 'true' community suggests that there is 'false' community, but this idea is not examined in Jasper's article.

While there may be no strict universal definition for 'community,' political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests that, "Communities are to be distinguished... by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 6). His theory is centered on 'nation-ness,' and proposes nationalism as an ideology constructed by imagination that can concurrently imbue camaraderie and solidarity and promote exclusivity and imperialism. Though his theory is focused on a historical analysis of the political and economic forces that shaped geographical nations across the world, applying it to community theory opens up ideas about how imagination might connect with community formation, identity, and maintenance - how members' ideas and ideals serve to build, frame, and protect their communities. Anderson (1983) explains that collective identity forms social bonds which are celebrated through fellowship, but which also inherently form social barriers that must be protected and maintained.

This barrier can also be understood in terms of the distance caused by ideas and assumptions projected and imposed onto communities. In *Community Performance: An Introduction*, community dance scholar and practitioner Petra Kupperts (2007) explains 'community' as a complex concept involving tensions between individuals and collectives, inclusion and exclusion. What she refers to as 'warm and fuzzy' definitions of community can lead, she warns, to "mis-recognition[s] of the world we live in" (drawing from the work of Iris Marion Young). Such ideal notions of community

privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of one's understanding of others from their point of view. Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic... because those

motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify. (Kuppers, 2007, p. 10).

I identify as a member of the 'West African' dance class 'community' in Philadelphia after three and a half years of participation, a process that felt much like a slow and gradual breaking down of personal and social barriers through my sustained commitment to the class. In my perceived (imagined) membership, I am aware of the complexities of belonging - of inclusivity and exclusivity, perhaps further perpetuated by my own predilection for the 'ideal community' to which Kuppers refers. Conversations with fellow classmates provided ample opportunity to explore how this notion is simultaneously upheld and challenged in the Monday night class.

Aesthetic Community

Aesthetics philosopher Arnold Berleant (1994) argues that society is too broad and varied to be generalized; its inner workings cannot be fully explained but can be organized according to the various modes by which communities operate. One such mode, the 'aesthetic community,' strives for "connectedness within a whole rather than a link between discrete parts" (Berleant, 1994, p. 267). It encompasses relationships based on reciprocity and inter-dependence, a connectedness that allows for diversity. Art, he asserts, "... carries a more subtle sense of connection that illuminates the aesthetic significance of community, a bond best described by the similar though not cognate word, 'continuity'" (Berleant, 1994, p. 267). Dance scholar Karen Bond's (1991,

1994, 2008) empirically grounded construct of 'aesthetic community' draws on Vera Maletic's (1982) analysis of choreographic style, which distinguishes between *aisthesis* (multi-sensory, bodily receptivity; individual perception) and *aesthesis* (perception based on cultural values), and on anthropologist Victor Turner's (1982) theory of 'communitas,' a pattern of social interaction that arises through a ritual process.

As practitioner-researcher of an intensive person-centered dance program for nonverbal children with deaf-blindness and their adult carers, Bond (1991, 1994, 2008) observed the emergence of 'aesthetic community,' as evidenced in heightened individual focus and group affect, shared performativity, work ethic, and participants' creation of a collective style of movement through acceptance and embodiment of individual movement preferences. Bond suggested that for this multi-generational, multi-ability population, dance fostered a synthesis of *aisthetic* and *aesthetic* modes; expressive moving and dancing created aesthetic community out of the dancers' individual aisthetic values. The pedagogy at the core of the dance program endeavored to equalize or reverse typical power relations within a ritualized structure of dance. Through this process, Bond theorized that aesthetic community resembled Turner's (1982) 'communitas,' a place where human capacities are freed from normal constrictions status and roles (Bond, 2008, p. 417).

I am particularly struck by the description of the program's ability to facilitate, through somatic and improvisational dance practices, accommodating each with their own unique needs (physical, cognitive, emotional, social) and "aisthetic style." (Bond, 1991, p. 410). This is the way I have strived to work in my own practice, and what I

truly appreciate in the practices of other artists. I recognize this process in Cachet's pedagogical approach in the Monday night 'West African' dance class. Students need not 'sink or swim,' nor is the class watered down to such a basic level to merely accommodate any participant. And it is not just a matter of skill level or ability, but also of interest and embodied engagement in the artistic, the cultural, and interpersonal. It seems there is some access point for all who attend to engage and find meaning. One of the most advanced 'West African' dance practitioners that I know who attends the class has shared with me that it is not necessarily engaging to participate in a class that focuses on many of the dances that she already knows, but she is stimulated by the physicality required, the engagement with the music, and interaction with peers on and off the dance floor - and what this *does* for her, how she experiences some sort of transformation.¹⁸

While Berleant (1994) discusses the intersections and differences between experiences of spectator and participant (artist), the spectator/participant/art object relationship is privileged in his discussion. As such, the opportunity is missed to understand how this triad relationship can be encompassed within and/or actualized by one's own body (as some dance scholars might argue). In *Dance and the lived body: A descriptive aesthetics*, for example, Sondra Fraleigh (1996) discusses the intrinsic integration of dance and self, the dancer/dance cannot be separated from the dancer's body; dance/body/object are one. Bond's (1991, 1994, 2008) 'aesthetic community' the experience

¹⁸ This participant's identity is anonymous.

and creation of dance by the dancing participant, the process, and the perspective of the witness, and suggests how this relationship is generative of 'community.'

In "Anna Halprin's 10 Myths: Mutual Creation and Non-totalizing Collectivity," Tusa Shea (2011), offers a significant shift from discourses that emphasizes art object to art *process*, and challenges dialogue that privileges aesthetic representation over embodied participation. Shea (2011) critiques the limitation of the avant-garde/community art model in that it

...cannot account for communalist events that neither presume relations of abstraction nor adhere to definitions of performance. In other words, it cannot understand works that do not seek a representational presence within the visible public sphere of communal identity. (p. 20)

Shea (2011) is specifically looking at dance artist Anna Halprin's participatory events in which the public is engaged to participate in structured improvisations. She suggests these events be understood as manifesting through "the somatic transactional body" rather than through representation, to connect embodied experience to collectivity (p. 21).

Dance scholar Kariamu Welsh (1994) offers an additional perspective to consider - the function of dance and individual/collective embodiment within and for a community. Important to this perspective are the ways in which dancing bodies can be perceived (and often marginalized) through a Eurocentric, patriarchal lens. In "Images of Women in African Dance: Sexuality and Sensuality as Dual Unity," Welsh (1994) discusses the integration of social, sacred, natural and supernatural functions of the body in African cultures and its implications in how African women's bodies are perceived

(and invented) in dance. Her examination of “invented bodies” - the discourse around women's bodies in African dance stemming from the colonial gaze - clearly highlights two important issues: the potential for a vast divide between dancers’ intentions and observers’ perception of African dance given the integration of biological and cultural functions implicit in the movement; and the notion that eroticism and sexuality as Western constructs are not encompassing of all world views, which may expand the divide between intention and perception (Welsh, 1994). Women's breasts, for example, may be emphasized and celebrated in an African dance, not as objects of sexual desire (as they might in the United States), but as part of a holistic integration of function and beauty (beauty underscored by good that women's bodies do for the community, through childbearing and rearing). Such movements taken out of this context may read much differently, as the connection between body and community may be lost.

The role of 'community' in African performance aesthetics emphasizes the individual/collective relationship. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson's (1966) influential work, *Aesthetic of the Cool*, provides another lens to view the notion of 'aesthetic community.' In his observation of the nature of ‘apart’ playing and dancing in African dance, members’ individual roles are in conversation with the others in such a way that contributes the larger whole (Thompson, 1966). Ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff (1981), who builds on Thompson's (1966) theories, explains that individuals dance “... to join a diversified assembly with a separate contribution, for dancing is a reminder that one is only part of the whole” (p. 150). He states,

In the African context, performance in music and dance responds ultimately to a single aesthetic concern, the realization of community, and 'moral edification and entertainment, excitement and decorum' can coexist as united aspects of an aesthetic display which thus has profound implications to the people for whom music and dance are essential to the proper observance of any important event. (Chernoff, 1981, p. 149-150)

According to Berleant (1994), "...our engagement with art creates a unity of experience that joins artist, appreciator, art object, and performer into a heterogeneous field of continuous forces. This, in fact, is the qualitative source of the aesthetic community" (Berleant, 1994, p. 269). M. Scott Peck (1987), a psychiatrist and author of *A Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, explains, "Community, like a gem, is multifaceted, each facet a mere aspect of a whole that defies description... The facets of community are interconnected, profoundly interrelated. No one could exist without the other. They create each other, make each other possible" (Peck, 1987, p. 60-61).

Difference

These notions of 'community' that emphasize themes of reciprocity, interdependence, connectedness, wholeness, and diversity may suggest the possibility of the ideal or utopian community. Utopia operates in opposition to reality, projecting the imagination of better time and place (Dolan, 2001). Scholar of theater, English, and feminist studies Jill Dolan (2001) explains that the imagining of the ideal does not necessarily actualize utopia, but inspires actions towards its potential. In "Performance, Utopia, and 'Utopian Performative'" she examines how the utopian promise can be manifested in performance. In her discussion of three components of performance — performer, au-

dience, and labor — she finds that utopia can present itself on and off the stage. Audiences participate in the rituals and activities of spectating, collectively acknowledging (and co-implicating) the performance as a "special" time and place; performers participate in preparatory activities (eg. rehearsals or classes) framed by a set of social/political/cultural values; and labor is manifested through the striving for a successful process and outcome (Dolan, 2001). Something utopic happens when the striving for something to 'work' is successful, when all stakeholders know it has 'worked' or come to fruition (Dolan, 2001).

In speaking specifically about rehearsals within a theatre framework, Dolan cites director Anne Bogart who explains, "rehearsals are the moment of utopic expression in theatre, when a group of people repeat and revise incremental moments, trying to get them right, to get the to 'work' (Dolan, 2001, p. 457).

Dolan (2001) emphasizes, however, that true utopia is not ideal for theatrical performance. It is harmonic, balanced, and therefore static and without conflict or tension. That tension, she argues, is necessary for engagement and interest (Dolan, 2001). The utopian performative is an embodied and intersubjective expression of utopia that is open to opposition of the ideal and reality, working the contrast and the conflict between the two. Dolan (2001) draws from Richard Dyer (1992) who asserts that utopia is embodied; it is presented through feelings/affect and operates at level of sense perception, specific to cultural modes of production.

Intercultural performance and ethnic studies scholar Anita Gonzalez (2004) explores embodied utopia in her discussion of *The Urban Bush Women*, who she

explains, "...collectively create an idealized space, realized in their dances by physical contact between the performers' bodies" (p. 250). The dances include physical groupings as manifestations of communal unity that provide, "...a space in which dancers/performers can experience the utopia of communal support even as they perform their individual parts" (Gonzalez, 2004, p. 250). She further explains,

Zollar uses dance movement to communicate the experiences and embodied histories of these diverse African women. The project is more about alliances than essentialism. Because the company is so varied, blackness as an essentialist concept is deconstructed. Performances feature a cross section of African womanhood bonded through dance...". (p. 251)

Gonzalez (2004) examines the utopian embodied experience as existing both on and off the stage, specifically through one work in the UBW repertoire, *Shelter*, in which the process of creating and performing the dance unites the dancers in a "common (visceral) experience of the collective African-American woman's past" (p. 250-251).

This aligns with Dolan (2001) and Hamera's (2004) conceptualizations of the utopian performative as emerging through shared experience. Dolan (2001) states that it is "...the lucid power of intersubjective understanding" (Dolan, 2001, p. 460). Hamera (2004) explains that the utopian performative is a shared experience that binds performers to each other, audience members to each other, and performers to audience members. It can be found on the stage and also in the daily mechanisms--the rhetoric and the rituals-- that produce performance in specific communities (Hamera, 2004, p. 290). This powerful intersubjectivity, however, is not without risk. Assuming shared or common perspective of performers and/or audiences is problematic. In works such as *Shel-*

ter that are framed by specific social and political values, Dolan (2001) explains that the individual politics of performers are not guaranteed to mesh with those at the core of the project, with other performers' politics, or with the audiences (or vice versa). How this difference is taken up in utopian spaces is vital to understanding how utopian performatives can operate.

Feminist scholars call for a deeper examination of how difference is negotiated in utopian spaces and the implications of the political structures embedded within the individual/collective relationship (Melzer, 2002). Writer and activist Audre Lorde (1984), speaking specifically from the reference point of a Black lesbian challenging operatives of difference as it relates to interdependency amongst women of color, and Black people at large, discusses how difference is complicit in 'community:'

Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist. (Lorde, 1984, p.112)

The prevalent "all are welcome" narrative of the Monday night class amongst participants suggests a sense that there are indeed vast 'differences' amongst us in terms of how we might identify along a broad social spectrum, including gender identity, sexual orientation, political leanings, economic status, etc. Yet, these differences are not neces-

sarily voiced, and those ‘differences’ without visibly identifiable markers may become masked, as Lorde warns.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000; 2012) addresses this through her discussion of intersectionality as it relates to individual and community identity and the empowerment of historically and politically marginalized peoples. And in *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2000) discusses differences in community models (capitalist exchange and family-oriented) and the necessity of negotiating differences between the two as enslaved African Americans were freed and entered into wage labor. She states,

In a climate of state-sanctioned racial violence, Black solidarity became highly important and worked to suppress bona fide differences among U.S. Blacks. As a result, African American definitions of community emerged that differed from public, market-driven, exchange-based community models. (Collins, 2000, p. 59-60)

Understanding this difference and how it may complicate dance classes such as the 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia which are identified as 'community-oriented' and also work within a system of labor and exchange is useful to this research, as is the understanding of the complexity of how non-racialized dance practices (dance practices of West Africa are typically associated with ethnic groups, rather than race), become racialized in African Diasporic spaces outside of the continent, and how that might relate to meanings of 'community' (personal communication, Welsh, 2015). In Carole Boyce Davies' (1994) examination of migratory subjectivities and community, she connects to Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community' as a helpful framework to understand how identities within the African Diaspora are defined, policed, and resisted, while also

drawing from scholars Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer who critique Anderson's notion as essentializing, absolutist, and incomplete in its lack of discussion of how diaspora resists hegemonic notions of nationhood. Davies' (1999) concept of a multi-centered diaspora makes space for difference, raising into question the relationship between space, identity, and community - the role of the interchange between space/place and sociocultural production in meanings and constructs of 'community.'

Spatial Dynamics

In dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar's (2001) in-depth ethnography of the annual Fiesta of the Virgin in Tortugas, New Mexico, she examines individual and communal embodiment, and the different ways in which cultural meaning is experienced through movement within common spaces. Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, (1992) and philosopher/social scientist Michel de Certeau (1984) examine the relational production of self and space. Social space, as defined by Lefebvre (1992), consists of interaction and assembly (harmoniously or otherwise) of everything within the space, including people, objects, and work. Space shapes and is shaped by community, "space implies, contains, dissimulates social relationships... space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)" (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 82-83).

Feminist and queer theorist Sarah Ahmed (2006) and philosopher and performance artist David Abram (1996) provide phenomenological perspectives of space and orientation. Ahmed's (2006) emphasis on the linear relationship between objects and dis/orientation, however, raises questions for me about the multi-faceted, multi-direc-

tional, and ever-shifting nature of identity, space, and movement, which seems to be more clearly accounted for in Abram's (1996) description of Husserl's notion of the 'life-world' as an "interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies... [an] intertwined web of experience" (p. 65). Ahmed's (2006) discussion of historically created bodies shaping and shaped by space, however, complement Lefebvre (1992) and de Certeau (1984). Additionally, her theory of *disorientation* as a mode of knowledge production connects with hooks' (2003) notion of dislocation as a mode of empowerment — not knowing where we are, or where we are going opens us to new ideas, creative problem-solving, and new ways of knowing.

Anthropologist Paul Stoller (1997) explains that space can be considered social text through which social meaning can be read, however, space is not static. There are no true boundaries, and spatial relations entail a migration through space, time, place, and culture. For example, one evening in the Monday night 'West African' dance class, Cachet paused her instruction to share with us that as she was leading one little girl down the floor, she had a nostalgic moment. She learned 'West African' dance in this very same studio, from an instructor who taught her when she was a young girl, who happened to be in attendance that night. Several elders in the room who attended that night shared in her memory; they remembered Cachet as a young girl, dancing in this room. In that moment, I was aware of how the old and new converge in this class, both in the space and in the bodies present. It is constantly in flux - dependent upon the subjectivities of those who attend. Public space entails multiplicities that confound conventional social analysis (Stoller, 1997).

It seems then that dis/orientation and dis/location present useful lenses by which to examine complex, shifting locales of interaction, as in the 'West African' dance class which is inherently connected to the historical, political, and sociocultural complexities of the African Diaspora, African American cultural performance, and the field of dance in Philadelphia. As Stoller (1997) suggests, ethnographers must account for the interaction of the political, cultural, and embodied.

Individual & Cultural Identity

Sklar (2001) and Stoller (1997) examine identity in terms of cultural memory and embodiment, while dance scholar (and former company member of Urban Bush Women) Nadine George-Graves (2010) discusses the notion of resisting fixed identity, “unsettling notions of blackness,” and collective individuality (p. 6). Though her discussion focuses on Urban Bush Women, a dance company centered on the experiences of women of color and collective identity via the African Diaspora, it is interesting to see how it applies to the 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia--how the process of un/settling identity applies to this context that is primarily attended by women of color, but also some men, as well as a significant number of women who might not self-identify as racially/ethnically associated with the African Diaspora. George-Graves (2010) cites gender theorist Judith Butler who explains that aspects of identity emerge through power negotiations between the individual and the hegemony; identity is a process played out in the body (George-Graves, 2010). Dance scholar Sondra Fraleigh's (1996) phenomenologically oriented concept of how “self-body-dance relations” — in which

the self is created in dance—provides a counterpoint to the cultural emphasis of identity construction in dance. Discourse around ‘communities of practice’ (discussed further in the following section) offer a possible bridge between these notions, and scholars such as Hast (1993), Hamera (2011), and Jordan-Smith and Horton (2001) examine individual and collective identity formation through participation in dance practice. Dance anthropologist Elina Seye (2014) addresses this in "Performative Participation: Embodiment of Identities and Relationships in Sabar Dance Events," an ethnographic study of recreational Sabar dance events (a popular form of social dance practiced in Senegal and taught throughout the United States). She connects this dance practice to the creation of identity and social spaces. Seye (2014) states,

There are undoubtedly more dimensions to the cultural knowledge embodied in sabar dance events than what has been discussed here, but I hope to have demonstrated that sabar events create a social space where people negotiate cultural norms and values embedded in the sabar tradition, as well as expressing their identity and their relationships to other people through performative actions. (p. 72)

Cultural performance studies scholar Giavanni Washington (2013) and folk studies scholar Sarah Sandri (2012) investigate the construction of individual and collective identity through the performance of ‘African’ dance and culture and provide an important foundation for the discussion of identity within this research. Sandri (2012) provides in-depth information about the emergence of 'West African' dance in the United States and how these dance practices serve to uphold, perpetuate, and/or challenge Western concepts and assumptions of 'Africa.' She raises important critical questions about the relationship of commodification of cultural forms and dance training, racial/

ethnic identity and differences, and colonial discourses and attitudes in regards to 'West African' dance in the United States. She asks, for example, how one can be assured that their place in class is based on genuine acceptance rather than economic benefit to the instructor? And what is the role of U.S. students' perceptions of Africa in their motives and purpose for attending 'West African' dance classes, especially when so many have no first-hand knowledge of the continent?

Washington's (2013) ethnographic study of a 'West African' drum circle in Los Angeles focuses on identity construction connected to a re/imagining of 'Africa' via the drum circle practice. While Washington (2013) asserts the imagining of 'Africa' as a significant element of identity within her site of research, Sandri's (2012) study demonstrated that some participants claimed an ambivalence towards 'Africa' and a disconnection between any interest or perception of Africa and their participation in 'African' dance classes. Sandri (2012) does, however, express skepticism about these claims. Both Washington (2013) and Sandri (2012) mine the role that representations of 'West African' dance plays in identity construction. The significance of one's perception of 'Africa' in their purpose, motivation, and interest in participating in 'West African' dance is an intriguing area of inquiry.

While this particular topic has not been addressed directly, conversations with fellow classmates have revealed a wide array of purposes, motivations, and goals for attending the Monday night 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia. Some musicians come for the opportunity to play with musicians more skilled than they, or the chance to play for dancers, which is a different (and more challenging, some have argued) experi-

ence than playing without the active involvement of dancers. Some dancers come for physical exercise to stay in shape, to learn about African cultures and/or affirm and express their cultural heritage, or for the camaraderie and fellowship of fellow participants. All or none of these may be true for some participants; the nature of participation can be multifaceted and it can shift and evolve over time.

Participation & Practice

Education scholars Thomas, Whybrow, and Scharber (2012) explore the meanings and etymological roots of ‘participation.’ The noun ‘participate,’ refers to the “condition of sharing in common;” a “partnership, fellowship;” or “the condition of being related to a larger whole” (Thomas, Whybrow, Scharber, 2012, p. 597). The verb refers to the act of having a share or taking part in/of something, raising questions of action, ownership, agency, and collaboration. Hast (1993), Hamera (2011), and Jordan-Smith and Horton’s (2001) discussions of participation and community formation, as well as Bond and Etwaroo’s (2005), Frichtel’s (2012), and Bond and Gerdes’ (2012) studies of students’ experiential meanings of ‘engagement’ and ‘community’ in an undergraduate general education dance class, provide entry points to reflecting on how elements of action, ownership, agency, and collaboration work to invite, deter, engage or disengage active involvement amongst the diverse population of students within the Monday night 'West African' dance class.

As previously stated, Thompson (1966) and subsequently Chernoff (1981) and Malone (1996) discuss the role of participation in African dance and music aesthetics,

highlighting individuality within collectivity as an important aspect - a 'whole' in which everyone can play a part. Chernoff (1981) explains, "In almost any account of an African festival or dance, the witness will note that the occasion is not complete without spectators" (150). Participation, then, can be accessed through multiple points of entry, whether as a dancer, a musician, or a spectator (Thompson, 1966; Chernoff, 1981; Malone, 1996).

Active participants, Amans (2008) explains, "... are the keys to establishing a sense of community," by engaging in processes that foster communication through collective creativity, reciprocal exchange, cooperation/sharing, and communion (Amans, p. 15). The process of participation and the experience of the participants are central to dance scholars Sarah Houston (2005) and Judith Hamera (2011) and ethnomusicologist Dorothea Hast's (1993) discussion of 'communities of practice' and their investigation of embodiment, intersubjectivity, and community building through dance participation.

Jordan-Smith and Horton (2001) point to the term 'communities of practice' as employed by Etienne Wenger to refer to "groups united by a common activity, which in itself may not have any importance to its members..." (p. 103). According to Hast, the dance event, whether a class, social gathering, and/or performance, provides opportunity for individual experience and group interaction. These "micro-entities," or small-scale interactions (in scale, not necessarily in significance) are microcosms representative of larger community forms and cultural networks (Hast, 1993, p. 23).

The dance event, built around the sequenced performance of individual dances, forms the social context through which community is created. Not only does every dance event gather a unique and complete community of its own, but

through the experience of performing, participants are drawn into wider networks of communication, activity, and association that often grow and develop outside and beyond the dance. (Hast, 1993, p. 23)

A key feature of The Monday night class is that it opens doors to social interaction outside of the studio setting. Cachet and other participants occasionally extend invitations to the class, the brand new or regular attendees alike, to gather for potlucks or barbecues in the park or at someone's home, or attend parties, performances, and educational events. I do not suggest that the invitations alone engender social networks outside of the studio, nor guarantee that participants will feel welcome or will attend these events. Furthermore, the opportunities to socialize do not ensure that participants will share an affinity for one another, but they do serve as an entry point to social networks that extend from, or intersect with, the Monday Night class.

Jordan-Smith and Horton (2001) recognize the formation of collectives based on "shared enjoyment and participation in traditional music and/or dance and who self-consciously construct themselves as 'community'" (p.15). Continuing with Wenger's definition, communities of practice "develop a stable network of interpersonal relationships and a common body of semantically important resources for producing meaning" (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001, p.105). Hamera (2011) explains that dancing communities are comprised of "interpersonal micro-practices" that construct and organize relationships, open communication, and produce opportunities for interaction.

In dancing communities, politics of sociality, including friendships, are set in motion by myriad daily practices which serve as rhetorical and corporeal tools for interpersonal and intercultural communication and cooperation. The opera-

tions, in turn, organize complex, heterogeneous, productive social formations onstage and off... (Hamera, 2011, p.17).

In this sense, shared practice foregrounds an understanding of 'community' that requires relationships, rather than a single activity, as its core. It needs the interchange of attitudes and/or feelings towards self and between members, a concern for the well-being of the whole (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001).

The 'whole,' however, need not be clearly delineated as a distinct entity in terms of fixed participation, or level of interest in the principle activity. While 'communities' can be understood as endeavors of those interacting together "based on an ideal that becomes, or is made, the unifying factor within a group," and thus lead to a sense of 'community,' the common activity in and of itself may hold varying levels of interest in its members (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001, p.105). In my pilot ethnographic study of the Monday night class in 2014, I asked classmates to describe their motivations for participating in the class. Answers included: interest in West African dance forms, learning about the movement's historical and cultural context, the music, fitness, friendships, and stress relief (Johnson, 2014). Most participants, in that earlier study and now, also reference the opportunity to more deeply engage with other participants by celebrating with them, honoring ancestors, marking significant moments, or just socializing recreationally, in and out of the dance studio.

Jordan-Smith and Horton (2001) explain that individuals, over time, may co-create "techniques and practices independent of those stipulated for the principal activity," as in the case of the Monday night class with its complex array of social events

within and beyond the class (p.105). This network of social bonds, and activities are key in producing meaning within groups formed through shared practice. "They are 'communities of practice,' even if the feelings of communality do not define in full the lives of their individual members" (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001, p.106). This complex and emergent network of activity, participation, interaction, and social bonds helps to frame 'communities of practice' as processual, shifting, and fluid (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001; Hast, 1993).

Participant references to shared practice that describe a sense of interpersonal connection through participation in the class, bring to mind Sklar's (2001) discussion of embodiment and sense perception. She explains that 'body' is the material and 'embodiment' is the action of perceptual engagement with the world. She cites anthropologist Thomas Csordas' notion of embodiment and social interaction, stating "the term 'somatic modes of attention' [refers] to 'culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others'" (Sklar 2001, p. 100). The participants' perceptual engagement provides a vital entry point to examining their experiences of the Monday night class (Bond, 1991).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SENSE PERCEPTION IN THE MONDAY NIGHT CLASS

A Sensorial Poesis of the Monday Night Class

*big old brick schoolhouse with scruffy wood floors
 windows with cityscape views reach high to the ceilings
 where the flags hang all around
 wide open space with natural yellow light
 pouring onto the dance floor*

*densely populated, vibrant sea of people
 smiling, jumping, spinning, down the floor
 row after row of body accents, feet mark the dun
 African prints, bold and bright
 a colorful blur*

*musty perfume-oiled air, taste of salty hard work
 moving fast, sweaty hugs
 cool breeze against hot skin
 carrying echoes of music and laughter
 permeating the walls*

*in the front of the room with multiple drums
 the brothers are sweating
 smiles and nods
 watching the placement of the music within the dance
 energy growing, moving bigger and bigger*

*moments of feeling transported
 catch it, get lost in it
 surrendering
 letting go
 from thinking to moving, find joy*

This poetic transcription, created from the words of 18 research participants in their discussions about the Monday night class, offers a glimpse into sensorial experiences of the class: the building, the studio space, where the drummers play, how the

dancers move within the space, and the light, colors, and sounds that fill it. It demonstrates a collective ‘somatic mode of attention,’ highlighting the ways in which we participants perceptually engage with the Monday night class that includes sensory, social, and cultural interaction — the attention to our bodies, our space, and each other (Sklar, 2001).

Participants’ discussions about sense perceptions — what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and how we move — generated narratives through which we could share our lived experience and bring to awareness any commonalities, departures, and new insights. Our lived experience descriptions are offered throughout this chapter (in italics).¹⁹ Sources include ethnographic field notes taken over the last three years, excerpts of conversations with participants, and poetic transcriptions that further illuminate our modes of somatic attention and our “shapes of intersubjectivity,” the ways in which our individual perspectives and experiences intersect, entangle, or depart (Glesne, 1997, p. 204). I organize this collection around interconnected (and in no way mutually exclusive) elements that I find encapsulate commonalities throughout our experience.

In this chapter, I begin with spatial dynamics, focusing on the ways in which we experience the material structures of the room, the social interactions within the space, and learning processes, as well as the significance of our use of circle space within the class. I follow this with a discussion of cognitive awareness and the ways in which we experience “letting go” of inhibition and release of emotions. I then address the com-

¹⁹ With IRB approval and participants’ consent, I use real names in this study. When excerpting conversation from the transcripts, for the most part, I aimed to maintain the flow, structure, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of participants’ speech, except when instructed by the participant to address any grammar errors. At times, for the sake of clarity, I omitted extraneous words and vocalizations such as “like,” “and,” “um,” “uh,” etc.

plex music/dance connection in the Monday night class, referred to by some as a “marriage,” and the ways in which it impacts participant experience. I conclude the chapter with extra-sensory experience, an umbrella term to discuss the participants’ expression of ineffable sensations that include the distinct (yet often used interchangeably) terms: energy, vibe, and spirit.

Spatial dynamics in the Monday Night Class

Conversations with participants about sensory experiences often included vivid descriptions of the material space of the dance studio on the second floor at the CEC. Discussions of the physical structure of the building and the room evoked memories of experiences within that space, including social interactions, learning processes, and the somatic experience of occupying or taking up space with our bodies. Additionally, usage of the term ‘space’ as a metaphor for consciousness, cognitive awareness (as in ‘cerebral space’ or being ‘in our heads’) revealed ways in which self-awareness impact our experience in the class. This may include a sort of pre-occupation with grasping technique, or of our own stress or discomfort (particularly around ‘being seen’ by others). This often emerges in the circle, moments in class (usually towards the end) where we stand together in a circle, inside of which we can perform improvised dances in the midst of being observed by our fellow participants. Investigating these components of space in Monday night class — the material, social, learning, somatic, and circle space — makes clear the significance of the role spatial dynamics play in participant experience.

Material Space

Sara: I think spatially the CEC is such a great place to have class because it's a big spacious room with a really high ceiling, and it feels like an abundant amount of space [with] high windows with a view to the outside... I like being in a community center, I like being in a big open space, I like the wood floors, I like the way the floor feels, I like the way the sound echoes, I like how big we can get and still everybody has enough room to dance. And just the tone, the lighting in there, everything is like, soft. And the wood, it's all kind of like, earthy...

Alexis: I often want to be near a window so that I can feel a breeze on my skin. [And] I'm aware of the floor under my feet... the floor is the main thing that I'm physically coming into contact with...

Markita: Walking into that class, it's the wood for me. The wood is very visceral because when you first walk into the space from the outside, you see this scruffy wood floor and you wonder what the upstairs is gonna be like. But when you hit the upstairs, it's kind of like every step you make, the quality of the wood gets better, and that's the floor you're gonna be dancing on. So, I'm always conscious of that with my feet... The lower part of the building is a little lower, the ceilings are lower, they're dropped. The space feels a little more tight, the colors are not terribly lively, the lighting is not lively.

But as you ascend up the staircase it's like you start to feel the energy before you hit the door into the main dance space. And when you walk into the main dance space, it's like a completely different space unto itself. It feels disconnected from the rest of the center in a way. The ceilings are very high, it's very airy, the windows almost go from mid-way from the floor to the ceiling, so much natural light... It just feels natural... I always get this feeling of yellow light just pouring into the space, no matter what time of day, just yellow bright light. And the wood along the walls, the wood on the floors, the wood around the windows, the drums themselves are made of wood, so it's very earthy. And with the sunlight, it feels like it's part of the earth, a natural extension of the earth.

Jabar: [Since the renovation in 2011] the floors now are way better. There was absolutely no air conditioning. They did a lot. I mean, you can't really tell because CEC still looks like an old school house from the 1900s, but it's a lot better now than it was, visually. Some of the walls got painted... [and] the theater was not there like that, the theater was just a space. Now there's a small theater set up, they have curtains and this and that. So, visually, the space itself has gotten a little better, and it could get a lot better.

For me... I always like to see things in their natural beauty, and CEC has that... You know you're walking up the steps and you hear [makes creaking sounds], you know? So, it does have a... seasoned vibe... Of course it could be spruced up, but it just feels like a place that probably is worn just because it's been there so long, and there's been so many feet on the floor, and so many music sessions, you can just feel that type of vibe when you walk in, that some stuff has been going on in here artistically for a long time, you know? So, that's comforting.

Jabar is a builder, welder, urban gardener and professional musician who plays regularly in the Monday night class. He has been active in the African dance and music scene in Philadelphia and the surrounding area (including Baltimore, D.C., and New York City) throughout his adult life. His comment suggests an awareness of material space as historical archive - the perception of the past within the present in this dance studio. For me, this brings to mind Albright's (2013) essay on the history of contact improvisation at Oberlin college, in which she suggests that dance practice is palpable in the wooden floor, and that “separate histories intersect to create dance pedagogy based on past legacies, an enduring sense of place, as well as new visions of a community...” (p. 213).

The CEC is a physical space with more than 40 years of history of social interaction through artistic pursuits. The history is embedded in every nook and cranny, its presence is uttered in each creak and groan of the wood. Historically and presently, this interaction is facilitated by the space (Albright, 2013; Lefebvre, 1992). It can emerge as a temporal bridge between past and present selves, and past and present others, in this space that is constantly in flux - dependent upon the subjectivities of those who attend.

For example, in Chapter Four, I described a moment when Cachet felt compelled to pause her instruction to share with us her nostalgic moment she experienced as she led a little girl down the floor - past and present had just collided in one moment through dancing in this space. Cachet learned 'West African' dance as a young girl in this very same studio, on this very same wooden floor. That instructor, an elder, happened to be in attendance that night. Several elders in the room who were also in attendance that night shared in her memory; they remembered Cachet as a young girl, dancing in this room. It was significant for her, and for the elders, that she had come "full circle," teaching a little girl who was just like her in the same space and in the presence of the some of the same folks who used to teach and/or mentor her. In that moment, I was aware of how the old and new converge in this class, both in the space and in the bodies present. I felt suddenly transported back in time, experiencing the space, the people, and the dance through the perspective of a young Cachet, reminding me that space is not static. There are no true boundaries, and spatial relations entail a migration through space, time, place, and culture (Stoller 1997).

Social Space

Social interaction on and off the dance floor figures prominently into participants' experiences (as I will discuss further in Chapter Six). It follows then that perceptions of the material space are interconnected to its ability to accommodate collective movement and the ways in which a multitude of bodies interact in the studio at the CEC. Our discussions of this connection typically occurred by recalling the space, drawing upon earliest memories of the class, which often called up an awareness of the people in the room. The word 'colorful' was used to describe the people that occupy the studio space in terms of their vibrant *lapas*, headwraps, and other articles of clothing and adornments. Sara, an architect in her thirties, and Somalia, a 19 year old nursing student, dance regularly in the Monday night class and describe the vivid colors of the space.

Sara: Well... there's color, right? Like the color of people's lapas, and just, like, of everything that people wear. That's incredible to see that, to see people jumping and spinning and moving. It's vibrant, it's just vibrant. We're certainly not all in the same costume, we're not in anything toned down. The colors — specifically the African prints — are so bold and so bright, that's also kind of an incredible... moving picture.

Somalia: It's colorful. It's really colorful. The people (and a lot of times people come in there with their best lapas) sometimes they're like, "Oh, this old thing? I've had this for years," Everybody comes in different [clothes] from lapas to t-shirts, hair, hair color, hair ties, things really colorful and vibrant.

Additionally, the physical features of the space (including high ceilings, tall windows, a large, open floor plan, an 'earthy' feel of the wood) work in conjunction with non-material attributes (such as sounds of music and laughter, as well as Cachet's open class pol-

icy in which students of all skill level and experience are invited to attend) and the engagement with fellow dancers and musicians to contribute to the experience of the class as a welcoming space:

Alexis: I think [the space] has a particular energy that's partly because of the room itself and definitely because of the music and the musicians and what they bring. And... I think Cachet sets a tone of inclusivity... I've always felt very welcome there by her and I see how that's just the way that she is with people. I think that encourages us to be welcoming to each other, too, as participants in the class.

Somalia: [The space] invites - you want to go in there. People who are always standing by the door, I know they want to come in. They're like, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't," but, they want to, it draws you in. And the music, of course, it's always phenomenal. [Observers are] just like, "Oh, this is really cool," and they're outside of the classroom jamming.

Brytiece: I mean the music [is] good. It's nice music. It's warming... it's good music. It pulls you in, it brings you in, it brings the people in, so, it's welcoming music.

Nicole: Her class is always open, and she's always embraced people to come in. So if she sees anyone standing in the doorway, she will always invite them in to the room to come into the space so that they can actually partake — and even if they're just standing on the side — partake in everything that's going on with the room. Most people get curious and want to try, so then she'll coax them in to taking their shoes off and coming on the floor, and then, join in and be able to do whatever they can do going down the floor... Her class has [a] welcoming feel to it. No matter who you are or whether you've never danced a day in your life or you've danced twenty five years, whether you're old or a small child or middle-age like me, it has a very, very embracing welcoming feel. So I always feel comfortable and have always felt comfortable in her class. Even when I was a beginner, I always felt comfortable, always. Even when I didn't know what I was doing, half the time I still don't know what I'm doing, I still feel comfortable in her class.

This welcoming environment, created through the relationship between spatial dynamics, the music, and the dance, is further reflected/enacted through various gestures of support. As dancers progress down the floor, for example, participants waiting their turn on the sidelines will often clap, shout, or touch the floor to encourage the dancers and/or musicians, and to acknowledge their effort. Davis-Craig (2009) explains that in African-derived dance settings, “restrained contemplative behavior is not expected, nor is it assigned any particular value” (p.33). In the Monday night class, if a dancer’s movement is particularly inspiring, someone may run up next to them, and place their hands to the floor next to their feet (a form of *dobale*). Since the dancers on the floor are oriented towards the musicians in this space, and the other dancers observing are off on the peripherals and somewhat out of view, moving closer to them to offer the encouraging gesture to the floor next to their feet ensures the movement can be recognized by the dancer on the floor, as if to say, “See me, seeing you.” These claps, cheers, and gestures set a supportive tone in the class.

Nicole, a high-level administrator in a multi-state medical practice and mother of a 19-year old daughter, also sees herself as a sort of mother within the Monday night class. She, and Alexis provide examples of behaviors in class that provide encouragement and create a welcoming atmosphere.

Nicole: When the kids were coming down [the floor], I was clapping ‘cause they looked so good... I mean, I feel like clapping for them is a source of encouragement, no matter what they’re doing. I think it just helps them come down the floor a little bit easier.

Alexis: I like how Cachet will sing the rhythms for us [laughs]. Also, just the different notes or sounds that she'll make to indicate to switch to a different movement, or of just general encouragement, like, "AAYY!!" which I kind of take to mean "Good Job!!" That's how I hear it.

Cachet: [The "Yip!"] can be used for many different things. It can be used to get your attention, it can be used as... confirmation, like you're co-signing what somebody's doing. It can be something that, you know if the music is hot, that's how you're expressing your approval of that. It could be a million different things, and people have different ways of doing that.

Taken separately, actions such as clapping and cheering are not specific to West African dance classes. As whole, however, I understand the clapping, cheering, "Yip!"s, "Ay!"s, and particularly, touching the floor, as cultural markers of this genre. Within African dance and music practice, verbal and physical responses are accepted and encouraged (Nketia, 1974). In the United States, this may connect historically to the Ring Shout, a ritual practice developed by enslaved Africans in the United States involving handclapping, stomping, and vocalizations (Dor, 2014; Emery, 1988). Dor explains that “intermittent ululation [is] ubiquitous to many African ethnic communities” (Dor, 2014, p. 18).

Alexis: I really like calling other people out when they're just killing it, you know? And, I like that that's something that we do. Just when you're watching somebody and they're just slaughtering some move... I just kinda make a loud "whoop!" [laughs] Or sometimes I'll go up behind them and put my hands to my chest and then put them to the floor like, "You're the queen right now." That's how it feels to me. Or I'll just say their name, like, "Okay Julie!!" Oh yeah, and I like when people say, "I see you!" [laughs] I like that.

I have always loved clapping and cheering for fellow dancers in any dance class that I've taken, to let them know that I see them, that I am acknowledging their effort

and skill. And I have been mindful of when such protocol is acceptable behavior and when it isn't - in some classes, it is most respectful to remain quiet. This is not the case in the Monday night class. While it is not compulsory to cheer, clap, or gesture to the floor, these modes of participation are welcome. I clearly remember in my earlier experience of the class, a process of observing the gestural and auditory responses of encouragement and support and feeling incredibly enlivened by it. And I remember gradually finding comfort with participating in it. I didn't find my "Yip!" right away, and in fact, I felt a little intimidated to try it out. But, with continued involvement in the class, social interaction with fellow participants, and with that, genuine emotional investment in our collective well-being, the "Yips!" and "Ays!" came naturally and wholeheartedly, as did my gesture to the musicians, touching my hands to my heart and to the floor by their feet and then to my heart again.²⁰

Sara: When we touch [the floor near] the drummers, I'm very in tune to touching my heart and touching the floor. That feels really important. And then also, if we hug at the end of class, we're all really gross and soaked in sweat... At any other time I wouldn't be into that [laughs]. But it's okay in that moment and it feels very connecting in that moment to hug.

Alexis: I love at the end of class, often we'll kind of kneel down. Something feels really good about having that contact with the floor. And in particular I like having the palms of my hand and my forehead touching the floor at the end of class. And for me that's always a time when I'm just giving thanks for the experience of being in that space, for the people there, for the music, and for getting to move like that. And in that moment of gratitude, for some reason, there's something powerful to me about having my head

²⁰ The "Yip!" is also a common practice in Umfundalai performance, both onstage as part of the dance, and offstage in the form of a cheer from the audience. Attending such performances throughout Philadelphia also contributed to my adoption of this ululation in the Monday night class.

touching the floor... [And also] that class has definitely made me comfortable with very sweaty hugs [chuckles].

Discussing these attributes of class culture, six dancing participants in the core research group included hugs as a significant social feature of the space. And since physical contact between dancers occurs rarely (perhaps never, actually) as part of the actual movement repertoire, hugging stands out, calling up notions of support and family.

Nicole: Hugging people, I like to hug. I'm a hugger [chuckles]. I hug people all the time, people I haven't seen, you know, since last week [laughs]. People I haven't seen in a couple days, just my friends. That class is like family, like you, I've been coming for so long. There's so many people in there. I know so many people in the class, like, outside of the classroom. It's like hanging out with your family. So, I like to hug people, that's how I greet a lot of people.

I spend time before, during, and after each Monday night class exchanging hugs with friends, and even folks I don't know so well. Oftentimes, as participants enter the class late (sometimes well after the warmup), I offer what I call "long distance hugs" or a hug-like gesture from across the room, making connections through the space without actual contact. Nketia (1974) credits interpersonal bonds in such settings to the power of collective art-making, specifically in relation to engaging in African-derived music practice. He states that social interaction that

bring the members of a community together provide an important means of encouraging the social bonds that bind them and the values that inspire their corporate life. The performance of music in such contexts, therefore, assumes a multiple role in relation to the community: it provides at once an opportunity for sharing in creative experience, for participating in music as a form of community experience, and for using music as an avenue for the expression of group sentiments. (Nketia, 1974, p. 22)

This spatial connection to social bonds and gestures of support also appears as an important element in participants' experience of learning. Along with using the space for repetition to grasp technique, or understanding the space as an ideal learning environment (to feel supported, to feel safe to make mistakes and try again, etc.), it is also the connection with each other within the space that influences our learning processes.

Learning Space

The pedagogical elements of the class include the ways in which weekly lessons are spatially structured, and the way Cachet utilizes space to facilitate students' learning processes. Folasshade, a 39 year old dancing participant in the Monday night class who has been a West African dance practitioner since college, expresses an awareness of this spatial dynamic in her learning process when repeating movements while going down the floor. For her, the class is a unique learning space that provides room to make mistakes, to learn from failure and improve with every new repetition of the movement.

Folasshade: So, I've been in this new [head] space where every moment is a new moment, and... [Cachet's] class is a nice time for me to experience that. So, whether we're repeating a dance again, or going down the floor, or even if I get it the first couple of moves down the floor, and I screw it up, I have another chance to fix it or try again or just keep going through. I am allowed to fuck up in her class, but its okay... for me. Some people probably don't feel that way, but me I'm like "I gotta do it again!" You know? And I'm usually able to smile through it, and... it offers, I don't know, replenishment, rejuvenation, opportunity. Try again, it's okay to fail, you can always get better. That's a real tangible space that I get to feel that. If I mess up at work, it's, you know what I mean, it's like, no do-overs. [In Cachet's class] you get your do-over!

Cachet often will have the lines do two or three iterations of a specific move or phrase, and with the length of the studio (and depending on the rhythm), each iteration allows the dancer to execute the move/phrase multiple times down the floor. Each dancer, in each line, also gets to decide how far to travel with the movement, or how much space to take up with each move. This is mediated by one's line partners, because ideally, you stay together as you progress down the floor.

Troy, a man in his early forties who has practiced African dance for at least 16 years, has been involved with Cachet's various dance classes since she first began teaching. Folassshade is a Philadelphia transplant from Brooklyn, New York and has been participating in the Monday night class for about six years. In Troy's comment below, he connects the aspect of repetition and learning to the experience of dancing with others down the floor. Both Troy and Folassshade appreciate the opportunity to use repetition in taking up space in order to more fully engage in the learning process.

Troy: For me personally, I work to get as many repetitions as possible going down the floor because I want to master that step in that moment. I'm glad we do it twice, because there's some classes where they only do it once, and to me that's more irritation. Because if [my line partner] rushes down the floor and I only get the chance to do it once (maybe twice) down the floor, then how can I take that and put it into my repertoire? I'm here to learn.

The spatial/pedagogical relationship also appears in how the lines going down the floor are made, how people are paired with line partners and in which line they stand. While Cachet asserts that there are no designated spots — meaning, no person should be able to claim ownership over one particular place on a line or on the floor in order to occupy that same spot every week — she does perpetuate a hierarchical value

in the lines by placing responsibility on the first line to quickly and accurately model the movement for the following lines:

Cachet: It's funny because, you know, another reason why most of the time I'll ask certain people [to stand in the first line] is usually the first line, they have to catch it, and then they have to be examples, you know. So, it depends on who's in the class that night, because sometimes there'll be certain people that come and I know that they're gonna try to step up to the front line and that they shouldn't be there.

This protocol, though not directly communicated, seems to be understood by regularly attending members of the class, contributing to a sort of 'line politics' in which dancers either vie for front line position, or avoid it, depending on their perception of their own skill level and their desire to take on the required responsibility or pass it along to others. Additionally, Cachet has observed that some 'veteran' dancers prefer the last row so that they have more space to dance (rather than being sandwiched in by rows ahead and behind them), or in other cases, it might be because this position allows them to be seen by the majority of the class and gives them the opportunity to "show off." And some dancers prefer to dance in a line with their friends, regardless of whether that line is in the front, back, or middle. For these reasons, when the lines are formed to go down the floor, jockeying for position often causes momentary tension or confusion.

Sara prefers to avoid the front line so that she can watch and learn from dancers she believes to be more experienced and skilled than she. Being behind others creates the paradoxical experience of feeling simultaneously comfortable and uncomfortable. By watching those ahead of her, she can see and mimic the movement and timing. This,

however, limits the movement of her head in order to let her eyes continuously track the bodies in front of her, rather than moving freely in accordance with the dance (an important technique component of the movement repertory learned in this class).

Sara: I'm always watching the people in front of me as I do the move, which inhibits the move 'cause you can't [turn] your head where it needs to go... because of not really having a background in dance, the experience of moving your head wherever it needs to go is like really foreign to me and it gives you a completely different view of everything around you, actually as you're moving.

Learning new movement, for me, is often connected to the amount of space I occupy with my body. When I am still unsure or unfamiliar with the mechanics of a movement, I tend to move smaller. Like Sara, I tend to at first keep my eyes tracked on those who know what they're doing so that I can follow along until I become steadier and surer of myself, thus constricting my movement. I feel that keeping this tendency in check, and finding moments to look away, move big, and trust myself to learn by making mistakes, helps me to grasp movement material. I advise my own dance students to “move big,” and “take up space” when they are unsure, which helps them to push through self-consciousness and ultimately aids in their process of obtaining the movement. To take up space, to occupy the dance studio with our bodies, emerged in participants' discussions around self-awareness and confidence.

Taking Up Space

Prior to going down the floor in rows of two or three, we work on the dance phrase in the center of the room. In this section of class, after the phrase or choreography has been broken down, Cachet delineates the space by splitting the entire group

into two smaller groups (sometimes three if the class is larger than usual), who then alternately executes the dance phrase one group at a time. While one group dances, the other group stands around the perimeter of the room and observes. This gives the dancers in this smaller configuration a chance to practice the movement with the music while dancing fuller and taking up more space. In 2014, Sara and I discussed the notion of taking up space at great length.

Sara: I notice that practicing African dance really taught me how to take up space in a certain way, and not be closed off and... tight. Like, I know I never moved my body in any other context like that. And... it's just like a connection... to your body that I don't get anywhere else.

In 2015, the notion of taking up space remained a prominent part of the conversation around her experience in the class.

Sara: The movements are so big, and you take up a lot of space and it really challenges you... At least that's what it's always done for me, and how to kind of experience your body like you never have a chance to experience. Again, that's what it is for me because I don't do dance in any other context... I sit in a chair all day. So, when I'm dancing, it's like a joyous, exuberant, empowering experience... just because I have an office job and I sit a lot of the time [and] just because my own physical history and history of physical activity is just to make myself small, you know? And so, it's a space in which I don't feel like I have to do that, and I feel like I can do the opposite, and that's really freeing.

Sara shared that her childhood/adolescent experiences included a sort of socialization geared towards inhibiting her spatial occupation - she was taught to take up as little space as possible. The socialization of women's bodies often affirms the act of *not* taking up space. Girls are taught not to engage in full-bodied movement, to take up as

little space as possible (Albright, 2011; Young, 2005). Albright (2011) suggests that “by teaching movement forms... that give girls an experience of mobilizing their own weight, not to mention taking up space...” they can achieve a deeper understanding of their own physical power (p. 9)

Dancing in alternating groups allows us to take up space with our bodies, and engage in supportive behaviors. It also allows us to observe each other and pick up any nuances we may have missed. It represents a shift from the warm up and lesson in which we are typically focused on Cachet and on our own movement, to moving fuller and being more aware of each other — observing and being observed. Alexis connects the idea of learning something new with an anxiety about taking up space and being seen.

Alexis: Just learning something new in a space where you're seen, I think for me, has definitely been uncomfortable.

There are spaces in the room where one feels more or less "seen," and new students may equate this with safety or respite when they feel overwhelmed or intimidated. Albright (2013) explains that “Often the very architectural conditions of the room help to determine the social dynamic of the bodies that inhabit that space” (p. 251) and that the “...physical contours of a learning environment can help [teachers] recognize... psychological patterns so that we can use the physical space we occupy more consciously” (p. 252). Cachet observes that some new students retreat to the back corners of the room in order to "hide." She makes a conscious effort to give them attention, dance with them, and make them feel comfortable.

Cachet: I also see sometimes there's one or two [students] who may be new, who at a certain point [will] try to fade off to the very far corner of the back of the room, you know, because they're afraid or nervous or intimidated. So, I always make sure that if I don't see them going down the floor in a line, that I look for them and... get them, and motion to them, "I'll help you, come on."

For me, standing in the front and back of the room evoked comfort and discomfort for me for different reasons. When I first began in the class, I often stood in the back of the room. It was not an overt attempt to hide, but rather, I wanted to be surrounded by people who I could watch and mimic. As I felt more comfortable over time, I moved my position closer and closer to the front of the room. In the front of the room, I felt exposed. I was acutely aware that other students might have been looking to me to model the movement, just as I had when I first began. Now, I am less aware of being watched when I stand in the front (though sometimes fellow dancers jokingly pressure me to do well by warning me that they are watching me). Primarily, I stand there out of habit, a comfort in and of itself. I also stand there because I can see Cachet more clearly (I am near-sighted and do not wear my glasses when I dance). Also, I like to stand near the window where I am more likely to feel fresh air. And in the rare moments when I do stand in the back these days, the discomfort I feel has more to do with not being able to see Cachet demonstrate the movements clearly (worrying that I am missing nuances in the movement) and less to do with being seen or not seen, myself.

The spatial element of dis/comfort around being seen is also often visible in those young children who either attend infrequently or for the first time, who stay close to their parent/guardian or other children, as well as those more familiar with class

whose use of abundant space seems connected to a sense of uninhibitedness. Cachet, as well as Jaléssa, a professional musician and policy researcher at local university, commented on both of these occurrences.

Cachet: There may be a parent who's participating in the class, and sometimes... if the kids are new to coming, it'll be this thing where they're a little apprehensive about moving away from their mother and, you know, joining the rest of the kids.

Jaléssa: I love seeing the progression when [children] first start going down the floor and they're so shy, and dance really small, 'cause they just feel like, "All these adult people are watching me," but then by the time they do a couple rounds...

The spatial dynamic of comfort within the class — where minimal space is taken up with feelings of apprehension and more space is occupied as comfort and/or confidence grows — is mediated through the delineation of space and formation of lines and circles. Dancing participants have the opportunity to take up less space in certain areas of the room and in dancing together in large groups, and more space when dancing in smaller groups and down the floor in rows. Additionally, when there is a circle at the end of class, dancers can choose to enter it and dance alone or with a few other dancers.

Circle Space

The circle provides a space in which dancers can support each other, observe each other, and be observed when inside the circle. It is an important element of African cosmology (Davis-Craig, 2009; Welsh, personal communication, 2016). The circle in African Diaspora dance in the United States has its roots in the Ring Shout, a sacred

dance created on plantations by enslaved Africans, performed in a circle that included, in many cases, shuffling steps, clapping, singing and/or chanting, and swaying (Dor, 2014; Stuckey, 2002; Emery, 1988).²¹ This deeply complex practice retained elements of African ancestral ceremony, and was a means of forming a “cultural oneness...” that Stuckey (2002) explains suggested a “certain wholeness that encouraged the spirit of community” (p.44).

Folasshade: Some... things that happen in [Cachet's] class that I think illustrate or showcase community is that she honors birthdays, she honors when people are having trouble, we'll usually dance for them or make a circle for them...

Alexis: Sometimes we will get in a big circle at the end [of class] and different people will have the opportunity to dance in the middle of the circle. It's not always the case, but often it will happen on a special occasion — like on someone's birthday — we do that, for example. And... that image [stands out to me] of someone dancing in the middle and being surrounded in a way that feels like very supportive and positive.

While participants show support and encouragement for those dancing improvised solos or group dances inside the circle — typically through clapping, shouting, smiling, touching the floor, kneeling, or even joining in the movement — the prospect of entering the circle can induce anxiety. Crystal, a professional dancer and seamstress, is a regular participant in the Monday night class that I would describe as highly proficient in West African dance. She was first intrigued by dance as an elementary school

²¹ Stuckey (2002) argues that while these are generally accepted characteristics of the Ring Shout, this practice varied by environment, dependent upon the dynamics of the plantation where it was performed. Additional elements of the Ring Shout in some cases also included twisting, leaping, and soloing.

student when she saw Ione Nash perform.²² She later began to take classes throughout Philadelphia before eventually finding Cachet's classes. According to Crystal, she is very comfortable with soloing, yet describes an experiencing anxiety in regards to the circle earlier on in her dance training.

Crystal: It used to feel like my heart would be racing, like, "Oh, my goodness, it's time for me to do a solo. They're pushing me out there, I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm going to draw a blank." But then eventually, I learned how to just laugh at myself if I don't know all the moves or can't find the correct breaks. So, if it's some dance that I'm not really familiar with, or I forget the moves, I just tell myself, "Im a go out here and have fun and do whatever I feel like doing." So, it's fun. It's just fun to laugh at yourself. So, yeah. 'Cause I feel like you're stressed out, could be stressed out during the day, you take so much stuff seriously, now it's just time to do something silly and have fun with it. And then, if it's a dance that I really like, then it's "Oh, I'm about to go out here and show off now to these drums."

The circle becomes a space where one can simultaneously experience support and social pressure, joy and anxiety. For me, all of these experiences are in and of themselves compelling reasons to enter the circle. The anxiety works as a barometer for my progress in class. Like Crystal, the more I improve my technique and build my confidence, the less anxiety I feel at the thought of entering the circle. Yet, after three years, I still do not feel confident enough to enter the circle on my own (though I sometimes force myself to do it). I usually enter the circle by joining in the movement of other dancers who are entering or are already inside. On the occasions when I have

²² Ione Nash is a Philadelphia-based pioneer of dance that fuses ballet, modern, and African dance. She worked with artists such as Saka Acquaye (from Ghana), Arthur Hall, Baba Robert Crowder, and many more. She founded and directed the Ione Nash Dance Ensemble (no longer active), and continued to teach into her nineties (Brown-Danquah, 1994).

tried to solo, I either quickly "blank out" (forgetting what steps go with the rhythm), and/or I enter a state of such anxiety that I cannot hear the music at all to know whether the movement I am doing is connected to the rhythm. For me, occupying the circle space can be paralyzing, or it can be an opportunity to figure out how to let go of inhibition, self-consciousness, and fear.

Cognitive Awareness & 'Letting Go'

Sara discusses the awareness of the presence of other dancers (who she perceives as more advanced) as an impetus for self-consciousness. She suggests that "letting go" is means to improving her dancing; it is a process of finding comfort with her own abilities, as well as with being observed by other participants in the class.

Sara: I think most people have a healthy degree of self-consciousness. If you walk into a space where there's people that are really excellent at what's going on in that space, and you want to join in that activity and you know you're a novice, that's intimidating. I don't ever feel dissuaded or anything, but sometimes... I wish I could let go like that, I wish I could move like that, I wish I had that flexibility and, you know, and speed... So maybe... 'intimidating,' isn't the right word? Maybe it's really a place where I need to get comfortable with just being... just doing what I can do... But, yeah, I just think there's some really phenomenal dancers in that room every single time. And you're dancing up to the drummers, too, who are like staring straight at you all the time, you know? And that doesn't actually get to me as much, but it's just letting go of the fact that people are watching you do what you're doing and you're not the best or even always very good at it. [chuckles] It's really, every time, an exercise in letting go of that.

While she seems to suggest that her self-consciousness impinges her dancing in the Monday night class, she also explains that the space is a place for her to feel "mentally

connected,” which allows her to let go of self-consciousness. During a moment in our conversation in which we discussed what feels successful in class, Sara pointed to this sense of connectedness and its relationship to letting go of worry about possible judgment from others who may be watching.

Sara: ...When I feel like I'm mentally connected and not so worried about how I look precisely or not so worried about other people looking at me, then that's when I feel like I'm successful on my own terms, in terms of the dance. It's funny because African dance and, well, really architecture, are the two things in my life that...make me feel whole in a certain way. Things that I've just not ever been able to give up or quit. They're kind of anomalies in my life because I'm very actually introverted and pretty self-conscious and, you know, grew up like — I don't want to go too deep or personal on you — but just grew up very, very self-conscious, and from middle school-age traumas just ended up kind of withdrawing and quitting a lot of things. And it just continued through college, and then I found West African dance, and it's such a thing where you really have to put yourself out there to experience it...when I'm able to have those moments where I feel very mentally connected to it, and I physically do the move okay, that feels the best to me.

Folasshade describes being very conscious of the tension - emotional and physical - that is stored in her body when she enters the Monday night class. She discusses ‘letting go’ as a sort of release of this tension, which is a significant element of her experience in the class.

Folasshade: I usually leave feeling exhilarated... I usually come [to class feeling] really bound, really tense, shoulders tight, you know, I usually just have had it at that point. It's the beginning of the week [laughs] it's not working! I'm running around, I'm trying to get there, I'm always trying to get there... and I'll just go and I'll feel better and I'll get to exercise. I'll get to be cool, to learn something new. I'm usually tense, and so when I leave I'm usually like, “Aaah,” happy and exhilarated, like, “Wow.” My muscles... are

usually freed up... and there's a weird tingling that I usually have. It's like, "ooh, I'm about to go through it!" But it's good. I'm like, "ooh," and, "that was worth it."

Another dancer, lawyer, and mother of two young boys, Markita, first began taking West African dance at the CEC as a 17 year old in the early 90s. She has been studying with Cachet for approximately 6 or 7 years, and refers to the Monday night class as a sacred and meditative space, an invaluable opportunity to temporarily shed the tensions and burdens of everyday life.

Markita: It's completely selfish, it's... one of the few spaces where I don't have to concentrate on being absolutely present. I am absolutely present without even trying. I am so engaged in the space, in the moment, in the people, in the energy of it, in the drums, that I don't think about my husband, I don't think about my children, I don't think about my extended family, I don't think about work. I think about nothing else but that space and there are very few times in my life where I have that singular focus... So for me, that class is a meditation, it's a prayer, it's like my complete solitary space. I could be dancing by myself, you know, I might get the energy of everyone else but I really could be dancing alone.

Throughout our conversations over the last three years, Alexis has described several different states of consciousness, using space as a metaphor, both physical and mental. In the first comment below, she describes a “cerebral space” in which she is aware of her cognitive process of learning new dances.

Alexis: It's kind of more cerebral... But then, and often like the first class of a new dance, I'm kind of in that space for most of the class, you know?

In this next comment, she describes a difference between the head space of daily life and the physical space of the dance studio.

Alexis: In my daily life, I'm always thinking about something, I'm always trying to work something out in my head. So it's a chance to have a break from that... it's more about taking up physical space.

Finally, she describes the Monday night class as a space where conscious awareness of others dissipates.

Alexis: I can get into a space where I'm not thinking anymore about the other people in the room or anyone watching me or what would this look like to someone else who saw me dancing.

Alexis has had extensive ballet and modern dance experience, and is relatively new to West African dance and considers herself a beginning-level student in this genre (though she feels she has made significant progress over the years). During our conversations, she conveyed a sense of entering and exiting mental space, where entering this space meant a conscious awareness of learning and executing proper technique of the movement, and exiting meant letting go of that concentration. She explains, "...the place where I definitely get the most joyful, is where this transition happens out of thinking and into just moving." We discovered a shared perception of fitting our bodies into the space of the movement technique, and that the conscious attempt to figure out where/how to move our body parts can eventually transform into a feeling of just letting them move - and it feels "right." Dance ethnographer Diedre Sklar (2001) refers to this somatic doubling of doing and knowing as aesthesis. She explains, "In a somatic mode, one's body becomes a laboratory of proprioceptive details, and thinking itself an aesthetic embrace," an interpretive process through doing that inevitably "changes the doer" (Sklar, 2001, p. 187). My cognitive awareness of my own dance as I am dancing

changes my dance, becomes part of it. It is sometimes in the moment of letting go of this awareness that I find, as Alexis says, joy.

Alexis and I discussed how this transformation can be achieved when we reach a deeper level of bodily knowing, or a somatic understanding of how to execute the movement without having to think too hard about it. In the Monday night class, we find this typically occurs in the fourth or fifth week of learning a particular dance. “Taking up space,” in this sense, can mean full-bodied/fully embodied grasp of technique, which then allows for taking up space through movement on the dance floor.

My own experience of this in this class has, at times, been mediated by the spatial orientation towards the musicians, the movement progressively narrowing the distance between us going down the floor and my perception of being seen by them (regardless of whether this perception is accurate). My earlier experiences in the class included a profound intensity in relation to eye-contact, as depicted in the following poetic I wrote after class one evening in spring 2014:

*We're going down the floor...
riding our rhythms to the other end of the room... where they are.
Though their sounds fill every inch of this space, their bodies at first seem a mile away.
My feet hit the floor in an alternating down-to-the-ground triplet step.
Shoulders propel forward, shimmy and shake... arms extend out as if to clear the way ahead.
I am traveling forward, getting closer to them.
Torso pitched forward, knees bent. Fleshy reverberations signal contact between soles and wooden floor.
Halfway across the room now.
The women before me have had their fleeting encounters and have since dispersed...
did they look, I wonder?
Only a few bodies occupy the space between me and the end of the line where I will have to decide.*

*The intricate layers of slaps and tones intensify as I draw near.
I can feel their eyes on me now.
I see my feet zigzagging... driving me onward.
I see a whirl of hands moving too fast to match the sounds they create.
I see pulses of contracting muscles and beads of sweat.
I can see blurred faces that might become clear if only I would just look.
Close enough to touch... I cannot meet their eyes.*

Whether or not to make eye contact with musicians is a question that I have heard raised by many dancers in several different West African dance classes that I've taken over the years. For me, even now, the question may cross my mind in an instant, only to be forgotten or even disregarded as soon as another thought takes its place in my consciousness; it certainly does not begin to define my dancing experience in this class. Yet, when I first began taking the Monday night class, meeting a drummer's gaze — so simple and brief an act — had the potential to evoke a complex array of intense emotions.

Zakiya Cornish, a professional dancer artist, instructor and choreographer of West African dance, and my close friend who first introduced me to the Monday night class, explained that in many (if not most) West African dance classes in the United States that she has experienced, the movement is oriented toward the musicians. Dance phrases progress down the floor travel closer and closer to them, until dancers and musicians are eventually face-to-face. As she moves down the floor, she has at times felt very aware of their gaze. Some participants in this study mentioned a similar awareness of the musicians' gaze, but also suggest the possibility that it may be imagined, or if

they are looking, it may be a ‘soft gaze’ in which they are looking at the dance, rather than the dancer as an individual.

Omar, an educator and accomplished musician who plays for performing groups throughout Philadelphia (such as Kulu Mele and Spoken Hand Percussion Orchestra) regularly plays the *dunduns* for the Monday night class. He explains that musicians appreciate eye contact and smiles, as part of the exchange between musician and dancer during the class. Reflecting on Fraleigh’s (1996) stance that the dance cannot be separated from the dancer, I asked him whether he sees individual dancers (as in, “here comes Julie down the floor”) while he is playing, or if he just sees the movement, the dance. He explained that it can be one or the other, or both, depending on the energy he perceives in the dancers. A livelier and more engaging energy may help him to register who it is that is dancing.

Jabar, another accomplished musician who plays regularly for the class, posits that dancers are the visual aesthetic and drummers are the aural aesthetic. The drummers watch dancers, the dancers listen to drummers - that is the exchange.²³ Jabar believes at the heart of the awkwardness in the meeting of the gaze is a fear of the intense intimacy of the shared sensorial relationship (Johnson 2014). In discussing this sort of intersubjective relationship, social anthropologist Franca Tamisari (2005) uses the term “intercorporeality,” which allows “... the performer, and with her, the spectators to enter into an empathic space where the other person is encountered at a deeper level of intensity” (p.49).

²³ In my experience, and from the sentiments shared by the participants in this study, dancers not only hear the music, but can also feel it physically in the body.

Participants in the class, both musicians and dancers, have expressed the reciprocal and intrinsically linked nature of music and movement, and its impact on their experience. Some participants have referred to this relationship between musician and dancer, between music and dance, as a “marriage.”

“Marriage” and the Music/Dance Connection

The first time I heard the term “marriage” in relation to the connection of African music and dance, was during a conversation with Baba Mawuli Nkrumah Yaw (Andre Forrest) in the winter of 2014. He has been playing in the Philadelphia area since 1978, and is also a drum maker. He explains,

Baba Mawuli: For the dancer and the drummer, it's a marriage. You can't have one without the other. You can't have the dance without the drum, you can't have the drum without the dance, collectively, because it's a communication... If there is a change in the mood of the music, there is a change in the mood of the dance. So, it's real important that both of them be on the same accord. The drummer looks at the dancer, and we “marry” her on the floor. That means we communicate... we read each other. We see the happiness, the sadness, the different types of emotions expressed.

Washington (2013) discusses the impossibility of separating dance and music in “expressive cultures from Africa,” and borrows the term “dance drumming,” from Ugandan folklorist Moses Serwadda and ethnomusicologist Hewitt Pantaleoni to contrast the more commonly used “dance and drum” (p. 11). Researcher and music scholar Doris Green (as cited in Washington, 2013) explains, “there is an inseparable relationship between the dance and the music. The music to these dances is rooted in drum languages,

which are replicas of the spoken languages of the people” (p. 11-12). Karolyi (1998) explains that music and dance

...are seen to be indivisible... In a way dancing is rhythm made physically visible. One could, moreover, postulate that a good dancer not only dances to rhythm but contributes to the rhythmic expression by adding rhythmic patterns not necessarily articulated by the music itself. (p. 6)

Embedded in this exchange is a dialogue, the drum communicates to the dancer, which may include when to start the dance, when to transition to a new phrase, when and how to change tempo or rhythm, and when to stop (Davis-Craig, 2009; Karolyi, 1998; Thompson, 1996). The dancer responds to the music, and in turn the musician can reflect or respond to what they are seeing in the dance.

Nicole: So yeah, the music is so... I don't know, the music for me is spiritual in a way, it makes you move. I can't separate the music out from the dance. It's all together for me, it's all one.

Alia: I would see it as a marriage. I used to always say, there's no dance without drum, there's no drum without dance. It has to be seen as a marriage because you're in tandem together, it's a togetherness. And granted, the more the merrier because it's so polyrhythmic.

In the essay, “An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance” Thompson (1966) discusses the interaction between musician and dancer as a mirroring and a dialogue. Discussing the difference between playing music within and outside of a dance class as part of my 2014 pre-dissertation study, Meko Freeman (a musician who frequently plays for Monday night class) explained that the rhythm takes on new dimensions when playing for dancers. In watching the dance unfold before him as he plays, he sees what he refers to as “the life of the music” (Freeman, personal communication, 2014).

Participants convey a sort of embodied/internalized experiencing of the music, suggesting a blurring of the boundary between dancer and musician, between self and other. This reflects Norris' (2001) discussion of inner/outer experience, in which she states

Inner experience is affected by outer phenomena in concrete ways. Our feeling is touched through certain sensory perceptions and our emotions are felt in the body: the separation between outer phenomena and inner experience is indefinite. One consequence of this is the dissolution of the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer,' which is seen in the ability of perceptions of the outer world to affect our inner states (Norris, 2001, p.114).

The notion that dancer and musician are one in African-derived dance practice is widely accepted (Davis-Craig, 2009). Abram (1996) explains, "... particular places and persons and powers may all be felt to participate in one another's existence, influencing each other and being influenced in turn" (p. 57). The interaction between the self and that which the self perceives is the foundation of participation (Abram 1996). This interaction-as-participation in terms of music and dance has been referred to by several participants, particularly musicians, as a 'marriage.'

Jaléssa: *"Marriage," yeah, I don't know, it was first introduced to me by [an elder/teacher] and then it just made sense, it made sense in my head. You have to have it all, it has to mesh, it has to have a certain level of harmony, you know?*

Jaléssa discusses "marriage" between the drums, particularly the *dunduns* (or "dun" for short), a type of West African-derived bass drum, and the "floor" (the dancers). She describes what happens when the connection is successful and when it isn't. When something is 'off,' it is heard in the music, it is seen in the dance, and it is felt.

Jaléssa: Yeah, it's like this very weird sort of vibe. If you can't marry there, it's like you definitely can't marry to the floor. Like, if that doesn't sound good... you feel it. You can't find it, whatever the 'it' is, right? You can't find the groove, or you can't find even your placement in it. It's at this point where it sounds funky... It has to marry on so many levels, like within the dun ensemble itself, and then [it has to] match the floor, 'cause if not then it feels like a divorce, right? [laughs] Like, it feels like you can't find your way, it doesn't make sense half the time... You can tell something is off.

Cachet: Yeah, yeah. It is very interesting, you know, to look at the dynamics that are going on over there. Especially when there's a lot of them. There has to be some type of order, especially when there's a lot of djembes because it can quickly turn into noise if everyone is not on the same page... Perfect example: if you're dancing right — and let's say we're at the point where we're waiting for a break to change — the only way that they can take a break is when the dunduns finish their cycle. If they play it before that, you're gonna have that "What the hell?" feeling because you're not finished your [movement] cycle. Because we are dancing, the dunduns is where we are... that's where we are. So, you know, you get that thing that feels uncomfortable when the break is coming in a weird place. It's all because it's coming before the dunduns are finished the [rhythmic] cycle.

And when the marriage is successful, it too is *felt*. Participants describe this success as a collaboration, a reciprocal exchange in which dancers and musicians respond to each other.

Jaléssa: There's moments where the marriage is... so peaceful. And that's organic stuff that comes up. The drummers are in their place, and they're playing and having fun and going off of each other. And then the dancers are in their place... everything just kind of soars together. The dancers are flying off the floor, the drummers' sticks are flying all over the place. That's what you want in a peaceful marriage...

Brytiece: When we drum we're all together. It's not like, "oh, he's playing solo and that's his backup drummer." We all come together. So,

everyone's happy, they seem happy. It's what they love, it's what they love to do. So, I would say that I see drummers being happy and... the happiness it brings to people... the joy. You can tell by the way a person dance, or how a person takes a certain rhythm.

Jaléssa: The dancing helps me hear the rhythm, if that makes any sense. Because your body accents it in such interesting ways, especially your feet often mark exactly what the dun is doing. So, sometimes if I find myself lost in the rhythm, I'll look at [the dancers'] feet and see where I'm at... I'm like, "okay, okay," and I can find the "one" in your body movements.

The instance in which Jaléssa was able to depend on the dancers' movements to help her stay rhythmically in sync and find her way through the music further demonstrates how the music/dance relationship can manifest. Likewise, Cachet depends on the musicians to help her instruct new or less experienced students as they come down the floor, by slowing the tempo or accenting certain beats to help the dancers figure out how to coordinate their movements with the rhythm.

Cachet: I like watching how the musicians engage everyone, but also the new people, too. That's like a thing... They're not talking verbally, but, if I'm kinda escorting some new people down the floor, if you listen to the music, sometimes whoever is playing the lead djembe, instead of doing a whole bunch of soloing, they'll come and they'll play the time [claps out an even beat], kinda with the dunduns, so that those people can hear where they should be. And then after they finish then they might go back to that soloing thing because the more experienced people are coming down [the floor].

As a participant who considers herself a less experienced dancer, Sara confirms this relationship from her perspective learning the movement in connection to the rhythm.

The complexity of the polyrhythmic music can be difficult for unfamiliar ears, it can be

difficult to discern how to coordinate body and beat. I often struggled with this early on in the Monday night class (and sometimes still do).

Sara: You learn how to actually hear the drums. And sometimes you have to tune in to a very specific drum or beat and tune out the others, um, to be able to key your moves to the dance, and I think that takes time. And there's still some dances we do where I have no idea where the break is, like, I can't hear it at all. So, the kind of polyrhythm that's always happening is something that can take some getting used to but is something that is really great, too.

Markita, a more experienced dancer, describes how the musicians' soloing and playing more intricate rhythms impact her dancing. Two musicians, Omar and Jabar, discuss what happens when musicians and dancers 'arrive,' when the marriage or connection is most acutely felt.

Markita: For me, when [the drummers are] on fire, it's nothing like that. And... Jabar, one the lead djembe players, for certain rhythms he'll, like, do what seems like a bit of a hip hop beat. And you can tell he's just completely into it, and it sets all the other drummers off in that same space. And then they start going faster, they increase the tempo. The more invested they get, they increase the tempo, which then causes us to dance harder and more on top of the tempo, and that's when class is just pure fire, pure fire.

Omar: [Drummers can] look at each other and smile, because we feel it, we know it. You can't say it, and there's nothing to really to talk about, but you just know, if I see someone coming down the floor and it appears like they are so taken... To me, there's an authentic look that a dancer has when they come down the floor. And when we've 'arrived' and they come down the floor, I can tell by the visual that they're there with us, you know, and it's magic. It's special, it's special. But, when I see a dancer, you know, row after row come down... I can look at a dancer and play. I'll see you coming down the floor and I'll play for that dancer because I'm interpreting it as they're there with us, so I want to keep that thing going. And then I'll look at the next row, you know, then I'll look at the

next row and lock in, next row, lock in, next row, lock in. And it just never stops, you know what I mean?

Jabar: You're hearing one sound. instead of this guy, that guy, this solo, that solo. We're putting polyrhythmic sounds together to make one sound and one flow, one vibe, one feeling, you know, based on what we're seeing the dancers do, you know? So that's what Cachet's saying when she says, "These drummers are drumming for you, the dancers," because we're all putting... our genius together and accentuating everything that we can for the dancer.

Upon hearing the word “genius,” I was initially puzzled, as I believe I have typically associated this word in relation to individuality, rather than the collective context to which Jabar refers. The role of the “genius” in West African dance and music practice is not relegated to a single individual, but achieved in concert with a collective (Karolyi, 1998). Karolyi (1998) explains,

One of the many striking aspects of African traditional arts, including music, is the lack of preoccupation with the individual as genius. The genius is there all right, but without the cult of the individual. A work of art is created by an individual (all works of art are at first conceived by a single person, whether folk or not) finally manifests itself as part of a shared functional statement of the community. The singular is submerged into the communal. (p. 51)

In Jabar’s comment, the collective creative process includes the musicians as well as the dancers. Referring to his theory of exchange of visual and aural aesthetics between dancer and musician — a constant and cyclical flow of sight and sound — Jabar experiences each dancer as having a distinct color. They splash their colors onto the canvas like a painting.

Jabar: If you listen to it, just listen to it, you can really understand that this is one hum that has waves of blue colors and red colors and yellows and whatever, but it's one rainbow. And it's because the drummers are not about themselves, we're about us as drummers

and then we're about the dancers... We're saying, "Let's play something from our heart." We're not here to impress anybody, that's not the goal. And a lot of drummers, that's what it is... a show, you know? For us, it's not a show.

According to Jabar, when he is playing he sees the dancers' energy as a color and provides each color with a tone from his drum to match and/or represent that energy, which, along with the other musicians, works collectively to create a whole. This process is reciprocal, the level and character of the dancers' energy affects how he plays. Likewise, he can influence the dancing with his own energy. While not expressed in terms of colors, every participant shared experiences about this sort of reciprocal exchange and connection, an extra-sensory realm of experience which has been referred to as 'energy,' 'vibe,' and 'spirit.'

Extra-Sensory Experience

Energy, spirit, and/or vibe, though distinct concepts, emerged in conversation as interconnected and often employed as interchangeable terms to describe important perceptual elements of experience in the Monday night class. Difficult to describe yet clearly felt, participants offered these terms in relation to the space, the social interactions, the artistic and cultural material, and their own embodiment within the class. Felt through the perceivable yet immeasurable textures of the music and dance, I place energy, spirit, and vibe in the realm of African dance aesthetic that Welsh Asante (1985) refers to as the dimensional sense, centered on "extra senses" (p. 148). She posits,

These extra senses, in addition to the universal aesthetics of all cultures, provide the African aesthetic with its complexity and the reasons for its nondocu-

mentability in strictly Western terms... The nonmeasured, but ultraperceivable senses are difficult to define by virtue of their frequency, complexity, and place in society. (Welsh Asante, 1985, p. 148)

Yvonne Daniel (2005) explains that embodied practices within African diaspora cultures include energy and spirit as kinesthetic senses. 'Kinesthetic accumulation' is the process of building intensity through a composite of physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual experience (Daniel, 2005, p. 19). In his essay in *Black Performance Theory*, Carl Paris (2014) discusses 'spirit' as irreducible to a single definition, and it is this vagueness that is essential to understand about its existence and the way the term is used in various contexts (p. 99). Paris explains,

In the African diaspora view, spirit is understood variously as an unseen power, such as G-d, a divinity, a generative life force, a soul force, and a cultural ethos of a people, all of which have distinctive interpretations across different cultures... It follows then, that in African diaspora religion, culture, and performance, spirit functions as embodied knowledge and contributes to and underlies meaning on deeply metaphysical, cognitive, and somatic planes (Paris, 2014, p.100)

During our discussions, the majority of the core research participants offered 'energy,' 'spirit,' and/or 'vibe' as an important mode of sense perception. John-David is a musician who was first introduced to African drumming three years ago and began playing in the Monday night class in 2014 while taking private lessons with various artists. He uses the term 'energy' to describe a sort of unification of collective effort that occurs in the class, echoing Daniel's (2005) notion of energy as a process of building intensity. Rell, who has been playing drums since he was a young child, uses the term 'spiritual' to describe the transformative power of African music and dance. During

conversations with Somalia, we discussed her experience as a young adult in the class who has studied with Cachet and others throughout Philadelphia since she was a young child. She uses the term 'vibes' to describe the interpersonal connections that can occur through dance.

John-David: It builds, it's like a build-ing, it's like a rising. I mean, it feels good to just be in that space... once you've been there for a bit, and the music gets [inaudible] and everybody starts dancing, it's just, there's an energy about the space that changes and... it feels, it feels... unified. Like, there isn't any more separate things, it's just, there's a lot of separate things that are happening all at the same time. It feels like, a million water droplets that have all collected to form a stream and it's just one.

Rell: I would definitely say that there's a very spiritual element. Because, for me, or even just how I was taught, djembe and African dance and music in general, is that it is more than just music. It is a spiritual journey. And I was always taught that the drums can change, change people, it can change you, it can change environments, you know. The same thing with dance. It can change, it can change people, it can change environments. It's all about what you do with it. So, for me, more so, over everything, it's a spiritual journey.

Somalia: I connect with these people. Like, in one way or another we have a connection. For some people, I dance with you, I don't see you outside of this, unless it's at some kind of [dance-related] event. Like, that's the only time I see these people and that's how we connect and vibe. Other people I see at dance class. I see them in the grocery store, I might hang out with you. So, it's just, that's how we connect. Some people, like, that's our connection. We dance together. And that's okay, it's good, it's cool. But, that's just what it is. But, it's a good thing. It's like, I connect to you because we dance and this is something that we share together and we enjoy together. That's what I mean with the vibes.

For Troy, energy can be understood as a pedagogical tool in which instruction foregrounds participant's contributions to the class, and integral relationships between

the dance, the dancers, and the musicians. As someone who was present at the inception of this class at the very start of Cachet's teaching career, he has observed how the class has evolved and grown. He credits Cachet's facilitation of energetic relationships for the popularity of the class.

Troy: Because who would have known. I mean, look at it now, I mean, her class is 30-40 strong easy on a Monday. And compared to the other classes in our area, there's no class [in our area] that can even compare. And it's not just about her ability to teach, it's her understanding to recognize the energy that's being brought from the drummers, relative to the dancers, relative to her teaching. So, it's not just her teaching, it's allowing everyone to be honored in the space for the element that they bring, if that makes sense.

Jabar discusses this importance of expanding beyond somatic perception in order to fully understand peoples experiences in the Monday night class.

Jabar: You're expressing yourself, you're challenging yourself, and you're allowing through movement (and drummers, too) through movement to tap into something that is more than physical. It's more than sense of touch and feel and sight, it's more than that. You're tapping into something that we call spiritual, but it is intrinsic to who we can be as humans. It is recognizing that there's more than just a physical layer. So, for me, that would be it, that's why I go to Cachet's class. Because, I know that there's an opportunity to receive, to get my energy heightened for the week... and receive [energy] by giving energy.

Tapping into the spiritual, or connecting to an energetic exchange, as Jabar described, has the potential to evoke intense emotions, which can be overwhelming. Participants have alluded to their emotional responses or connections to various experiences in this class, which appear throughout this dissertation. The discussion of spirit and energy, however, elicited direct and specific descriptions of emotion, encompassing

a wide spectrum of feeling. Markita, who relates spirituality to prayer, describes feelings of intense gratitude, while Nicole assigns weight value to her emotional response and spiritual awareness. Both describe these experiences as overwhelming.

Markita: There's a spiritual, ethereal feeling... I pray at the end of the class. Sometimes I'm conscious about it, sometimes it's completely involuntary. I think I'm probably at my most spiritually open at the end of that class. I've taken other classes, I've danced in other spaces, but I don't get the same feeling where I just have this overwhelming feeling of gratitude - intense, intense gratitude for the ability, my health, for a conscious, dance, and the space... a thankfulness for my life and my existence. I am always thankful for every single musician, every dancer... I am just a ball of gratitude in that moment.

Nicole: And the other, if you want to call it a sense, it's just the spirit that's in the air. So, sometimes when I come in to class, that spirit is... overwhelming. Sometimes it's very overwhelming to me. Sometimes I have to step off the floor, um, depending on what we're dancing and why we're dancing and what we start talking about or when the drums start playing, sometimes it just becomes very overwhelming emotionally for me, I have to step off the floor. Other times, like tonight, it was just a very, very light feeling. So, whatever spirit or spirits were there in that space, it was really very uplifting... very, very up-lifting.

Nicole's notion of spiritual uplift is echoed in Jabar's experience of heightened energy, which is, he explains, made possible through interaction and creative exchange in the class.

Jabar: There's the exchange of energy, just like when we have a conversation, you know? We're putting our ideas together, but when you're having a conversation with someone that is supportive of you, and you are equally supportive of them, you start to exchange energy and that energy gets heightened more than you as an individual or me as an individual... We're supporting each oth-

er, there's a back and forth. We're both driving and we're both lifting, and whatever's going on, we're both doing it. Now you multiply that by eight of us doing the same thing, our energy level just got heightened even more and we feel it, we feel it. We're absorbing energy because we're giving it, too. So you have eight to ten drummers, and then you have young drummers, too, who just have so much of it to absorb and give, it's just ridiculous. We're all doing this together, we're exchanging energy. So we're heightened, as individuals we're heightened... Now, you add thirty dancers, so, everybody in the room is feeling — either consciously or sub-consciously — feeling themselves energized because of this exchange...

In his essay in *Black Performance Theory*, King (2014) defines spirit as "energetic good feelings between artists bent on getting together and sharing together," able to defy authoritative structure that might otherwise quell exuberant collective creativity (p. 188). I find that one of the ways this notion of coming together, this sharing, collectivity, and connectivity, is clearly demonstrated is in an event that has occurred in the Monday night class twice - paying homage Cachet's deceased father. Once in 2014, and again in 2015, we dedicated the class to honoring the life of a man who meant so much to our instructor.

Honoring Cachet's Father: Emotion, Empathy, and Embodiment

Reflecting on the process of engaging with fellow participations throughout this research process, some of the most riveting and thought-provoking conversation emerged in response to the questions: "Is there a particular class or moment in class that stands out most in your memory?" and "Are there any moments you recall in class that demonstrate your understanding of 'community'?" Eight of the core research partici-

pants' responses centered on the two classes dedicated to honoring Cachet's father. Participants offered descriptions rich with imagery and emotion. I offer only a glimpse into these experiences here to demonstrate the ways in which interpersonal connections can be embodied in the Monday night class. I share participants' descriptions of these events through poetic transcription created by weaving together words or phrases from participants' responses. Each word or phrase selected represents a common sentiment expressed in conversation by various participants, and as a whole, reflects the tone of the occasion and embodied experiences of those involved.

The first word in the following poetic, "connected," refers to the profound physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual connections between participants expressed during our conversations about honoring Cachet's father during class. These felt connections appeared in relation to the movement and music, to the context of the dance through an acute awareness of the particular purpose of our gathering, to an empathic conjuring of emotions connected to loss and the bitter sweetness of remembering those who have left this earth, and to omnipresent spirit(s) (which some described as the presence of ancestors in the space). This connection has been described in terms of spirituality, emotion, and energy. The clearly articulated and understood goal as the impetus for our involvement in the class on these particular occasions — honoring Cachet's father — was weighted with importance and seemed to intensify feelings of shared purpose and common experiences of connectivity or shared somatic states.

connected
we bring our joys and sorrows
our celebrations and our grief
this feel good space
all is welcome here

homage
dance for Cachet
dance for her father
somber concentration
passionate precision

open
crying and dancing
with pain and love
in tears and movement
like an offering...like healing

feeling
the energy of her dance
trying to hold it together
beautiful, loving
saying "thank you..."

powerful
lines down the floor
dance a little bit harder
see something happening
physical bodies, mentally connected

electric
currents running through,
every muscle attune
like a shudder, it goes through the class,
through everyone in that room.

purpose
thinking of loss
helping to pay homage
to care and honor
we carried her pain

heaviness
missing people who have passed...
feel them standing there
overwhelming
cannot stop the flow of tears

spirit
in the circle, the energy took form
feeling like family
embodying ancestors
happy, joyous...connected to loss

grateful
attentive silence
kneeled down on the floor
as the tears stream down
thankful for a space to honor, together

Cachet credits her father, who was an active musician, with introducing her to the Philadelphia West African dance and music scene as a little girl.²⁴ Mama Arlene, an elder in the class who has practiced West African dance in Philadelphia since 1976, recalls how he used to play for various classes and performing groups throughout the city, sometimes with a young Cachet in tow. This, according to Mama Arlene, is how she

²⁴ Per Cachet's request, I omit personal details about her father, including his name.

first met Cachet. There have been only two instances that I am aware of that Cachet has dedicated the Monday night class in his memory, honoring his life. Both classes (one in 2014 and the other in 2015) took place around the anniversary of his death (or his 'transition' to ancestor, as some say). These classes created space for folks to come together for a larger purpose: to support our instructor and each other while we paid homage to her father. In doing so, some of us were reminded of the loved ones we have lost, and in doing so, perhaps we danced in honor of them, as well.

I was in attendance for the first of the classes dedicated to honoring Cachet's father in 2014. It began as usual, with the warm up leading into the lesson of a dance in the center, then taking the movements down the floor. The musicians were in their usual positions at the front of the class, the full ensemble consisting of regular and infrequently attending drummers were there. Cachet's loss was in the back of my mind as we danced, but it wasn't until we gathered in a circle that I truly *felt* the loss in a visceral way.

I was out of town for the second occasion during the summer of 2015 and could not attend. Cachet put the word out in advance via social media directed at friends and regularly attending participants, inviting us to join her in honoring her father during class. I felt a sense of responsibility, wanting to be there for her and the class, and frustrated that I could not. Through conversations with folks who were attendance, I learned that most of the regularly attending participants that I have come to know over the past three years were there, and folks came out to dance or drum who hadn't been there in quite a while. This suggests to me that some participants may also have felt a

sense of responsibility, perhaps prompted by friendship or a perception of obligation predicated on participation in the class.

Participants conveyed that purpose and responsibility heightens the level of performance - we want to dance or play our best. In Sara's case, this sense of purpose enhanced her performance. Purpose trumped the need to get the movement "right" and she was able to connect (or "click") with the movement more so than usual.

Sara: I wasn't sinking into [the movement] as well, but I cared less that night than I usually do because I felt the purpose of the dance a lot more than at other times.... I think as soon as Cachet said, "This is gonna be to honor my dad," everybody got a little extra tuned in. I felt that everybody felt that way... everything felt like it clicked.

She and others described how responsibility tied with feelings of empathy for Cachet's loss spurred a collective focus, an embodiment of support and care. This was made evident through more intense dancing described by Sara as passionate and visible through sobs and tears pouring down the faces of many participants. It also appeared in the shift in energy throughout the class that occurred without any verbal cue or direction, going from celebratory exuberance while dancing down the floor, to somber weightedness in the circle, to a reverent silence at the end of class as everyone kneeled down to offer *dobale*, with foreheads touching the floor and arms extended outward. Emotion as body knowledge allows us to know each other, the world, and ourselves. Through sense perception, emotions are immediate and polysemic, allowing us to communicate and connect with each other before words are even spoken, thus supporting opportunities for shared somatic states (Norris, 2001). Embedded in our collective

engagement in honoring Cachet's father, situated within our shared music and dance practice of the Monday night class, is the potential for shared embodiment through empathic interchange of purpose, responsibility, and emotion.

For me, the overwhelming emotion brought on through empathic connection to Cachet and fellow participants, and the touching show of support, was accompanied by a profound somatic response. In the 2014 class dedicated to her father, I recall tingling in my limbs, warmth flushing over my face, frenetic energy in my torso that I directed out through my limbs like lightning bolts as I danced. I recall the sinking feeling in my chest as I observed a fellow dancer collapse to floor in tears, followed by an urge to run and physically lift her up as I instead chose to lift her up through my dance, projecting my energy to her.

Troy, a dancing participant and longtime friend of Cachet, describes feeling the weight of emotion. He suggests "holding" and "carrying" that weight as a sort of shared empathic responsibility on the part of the participants. He went on to describe how he witnessed several other dancers trying their best to hold back tears, and eventually succumbing. The class moved through a range of emotion, eventually leading up to a collective catharsis, expressed through movement, music, and tears. The circle seems to create an intimate space for participants in which they can openly express emotion. I imagine that for any newcomers in the space, it may have been difficult to process without the familiarity of the cultural context and social relationships in the class. Personally, I find it difficult to emote in such a way in public, but this class has created a sense of safety and intimacy that enables me to connect more comfortably to emotion.

For this reason, I imagine that this experience may be as significant for others as it is for me. Over the years I have seen folks enter and become overcome, while being supported by the rest of us standing around them. This was true for Nicole, who described support from a fellow classmate as helping her overcome her reluctance to enter the circle in the midst of her emotional release.

Nicole: I was totally overwhelmed. I had feelings and thoughts of a multitude of people who had passed [away] running through me. So, I wasn't even gonna go out in the circle and dance because I couldn't stop the tears from crying. It was [another dancer] who said, "Nickie you need to just go, whether you're crying or not just go out in the circle." So, as the tears are streaming down my face, I just went out. I couldn't even tell you what I did when I went out in that circle... the feeling was so overwhelming. And it wasn't just me. [Another dancer] started crying, she started thinking about her dad, and Troy started tearing up. It was a bunch of people in the class, the feeling was so strong, I don't even know what to say.

Somalia explains how the collective showing and experiencing of emotion engenders support and familial bonds in these instances.

Somalia: It makes me feel good, that people feel comfortable coming into that particular space with these particular people and doing that. Like, they feel comfortable. That makes me feel like a part of your family, so to speak. 'Cause a lot of people don't open up about those kind of things, they don't want to invite people into that sensitive area of their life. So, that makes me feel good, it makes me feel like I'm helping... like, you want me to come in here... to help you pay homage to somebody that you really care about. That makes me feel good, and I feel honored that I can help you do that, and I can make you feel better.

Our experiences call up similarities to some African ritual or sacred ceremonies in which dance and music create “intense physical, emotional, and spiritual outpouring which enable the worshippers to establish contact with the ancestors and a higher be-

ing” (Snipe, 1994, p. 68). While not everyone may have experienced this particular occasion as spiritual or sacred, coming together to grieve, to participate in collective catharsis, to celebrate and affirm life, and to experience emotions together are common occurrences in the Monday night class.

Dance as a medium between life and death, the living and the deceased (or yet to be born), is an element of African Diaspora cultural and artistic expression of ‘community’ (Snipe, 1994, p. 63; Dalili, 1999). Honoring ancestors in this context is rooted in African cosmology that understands humanity as existing in four stages: youth, adult, elder, and ancestor (deceased). Each stage plays a role in community life. Ancestors, though no longer physically present on earth, guide us and pass along wisdom, and so we honor them and show our gratitude in a multitude of ways, including music and dance (Chernoff, 1981; Dalili, 1999; Daniel, 2005; Diallo, 1989; Welsh, 2002).²⁵ Additionally, through music and dance, we are affirming our personal relationships to our ancestors and to relationships with each other.

Dancing at funerals, for example, does not necessarily express only sorrow or grief; it may also indicate tribute to the dead or group solidarity in the face of crisis. ... dancing at burials is a symbol of clan membership as well as an expression of interclan relationship. (Nketia, 1974, p. 208)

When people transition to ancestor in many African diaspora cultures, the grieving process is often accompanied with a celebration of the life they lived, the wisdom they have and will continue to share, and a request for facilitation of their passage into

²⁵ According to Dr. Kariamu Welsh, considering ancestors to be those distant relatives from generations past is a Western perspective, while the inclusion of close relatives who recently passed away (like a parent) is in line with African cosmology and is a widely accepted viewpoint in many African dance and music practices in the United States (personal communication, 2016).

their new role as an ancestor in the community. In honoring Cachet's father, the participants noted the shift of energy alternating between light and celebratory to heavy and somber. This shift was most markedly noticeable with the *Bantaba* circle, where most people's full range of emotions manifested physically through tears. In referring to the 'dirge' as both a powerfully universal practice of lament as well as a particular tradition maintained in Africa (and I would add African Diaspora cultures) Karolyi (1998) states, "Lament is a universal expression of humanity. But so is defiance, the metamorphosing power of hope" (p. 50-51).

I can relate to the notion of lament, defiance, and hope as interconnected. It brings to mind a particular time during the Monday night class, in the winter of 2014. We poured libations, an African Diaspora ritual practice stemming from cultures throughout West Africa, in which water is poured onto a plant while speaking aloud the names of ancestors and/or those who have recently passed. In this case, we began with the names of unarmed people of color who were recently killed by police, folks such as Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Akai Gurley, Rekia Boyd, and Ezell Ford (Aymer, 2016; Madhani, 2015; "Mapping Police Violence").

Pouring libations provided a way for participants in that class to mourn these tragedies. Making space for this ritual felt to me like a collective renunciation of unjust violence. In his quote above, Karolyi's (1998) use of 'defiance' refers in part to the inability of colonialism, chattel slavery, nor any other form of cultural oppression to suppress "African rhythmic sense of expression and freedom" (Karolyi, 1998, p. 7). 'Hope' refers to that which is "left unbroken in the spirit and integrity of Africa [which] is man-

ifest in its music and dance" (p. 7). Through our lament, we are powerful. And through this lens, then, I understand honoring ancestors through dance and music to be a mode of activism, a practice of social justice.

The physical and emotional interchange that takes place in the Monday night class (as demonstrated in the example of the classes dedicated to honoring Cachet's father) is "central to the complex social arrangements in dance..." though which 'community' is imagined (Hamera, 2011, p. 18). In the Monday night class, we draw on the capacity of dance to facilitate this process. Honoring life (birthdays, milestones, achievements) and death (paying homage to those who have transitioned to ancestors), and coming together in times of crisis inherent in both of these stages, allows for participation that facilitates embodied connection and supportive empathic exchange that may contribute to one's perception of 'community' within this space.

CHAPTER SIX: UNDERSTANDING 'COMMUNITY'

“What does community mean to you?”

These words, printed on a bright yellow poster that once hung on the door to the dance studio at the CEC, shaped my early experiences of the Monday night class. As I acclimated to this new experience, I was at the same time transitioning away from my dance community in New York and exploring my new artistic environs in Philadelphia. My initial conversations with classmates deepened my own contemplation of what 'community' meant. The word 'community' was often central in our discussions about what stands out most in their experience of the class, what initially drew them in, and what motivated them to continue participating:

Alexis: The vibe amongst the dancers, in terms of people... greeting each other and clearly, being happy to see each other. And just a feeling of friendship and community... as soon as you walk in the door.

The collection of 'community' understandings shared by Monday night participants is a dynamic collage of meaning and experience that illustrate ideas connecting to artistic practice, social bonds, responsibility, inclusion, identity, and culture. I found that many of these intersect around four salient themes: shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice. These themes did not emerge, however, as mutually exclusive categories of ideas - they are co-related and inextricably intertwined.

Shared Practice

Omar: Well, if you break it down, it's common unity [laughs]. That's really basically what it means to me. You and some others share this interest and you move forward as one body. You move forward together, you do things together, or you do things for the interest of the group because you share in this identity. You share a common identity, you know, that ties you.

Folasshade: Gosh, it's big and small. Smaller 'community' means a group of individuals and sometimes things like artifacts and structures, but we'll stick with people 'cause it's not so abstract. ['Community' means] a group of individuals who have shared values and norms, have a language that they understand and value and uphold. Shared practices, right? So, the way in which you eat, and how you dress, and how you behave, is what makes 'community' to me. So, a group of people who share a set of experiences. And for me, I would expand that by saying — and you'd have to agree on this — but who also welcome others.

Alexis: I think that often 'communities' are formed around not just caring about each other, but caring about some common thing. So, it could be, you know, it could be dance, or it could be a cause, or it could just be like, we like to do the same thing, like an activity.

Sara: I guess generally, the term 'community' means a group of people that one shares a common interest or cause with. So I guess it's commonly like you live in the same neighborhood, that's like kind of what people think of as community - or if you go to the same school. But I think it's also like, in terms of Cachet's class, we feel like a dance community because I think 'community' also implies that everyone's well-being is inter-linked in a certain way? It doesn't have to be dramatic, like your lives depend on each other, but any element of your well-being, you know, physical, spiritual, emotional. And so, I think that Cachet's class specifically — and I'm sure for some people, the West African dance community in Philly — feels like a community in terms of our well-being being inter-linked.

The idea of sharing, and specifically, the inter-connection to which Sara refers, emerged as a prominent theme in this research, appearing throughout conversations

with thirteen of the core research participants. Omar, Folassshade, Alexis, and Sara suggest that shared interest in and/or practice of West African dance can provide the gravitational pull that draws the elements of community together. Individual participation in this class opens pathways to experiencing a collective embodiment - intersubjective relationships that include the dance, the music, the space, and social networks on and off the dance floor (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001; Hamera, 2004; Hamera, 2011; Hast, 1993). Collective embodiment can include what Norris (2001) refers to as ‘shared somatic states’ (borrowing from John Blacking), or the process of learning with and through others as a social body, crucial to understanding and communicating our own ever-shifting identities in relation to the world and people around us (p. 115).

On the floor, the musicians and dancers work to contribute their individual effort, skill, and energy towards that of the ‘whole’ (Thompson, 1966; Chernoff, 1981; Malone, 1996; Dalili, 1999). We participate in the rituals of this weekly encounter, from the warm up all the way through to *dobale*. This ongoing participation and personal investment in the rituals — the mechanics of the class (movement, pedagogical structure, and social protocols), repeated in the same space and time — is generative of communal meaning-making (Bond, 2008; Dalili, 1999). The particulars of these rituals (i.e. what dance is taught, whether or not the musicians find a groove together, how fast/slow/detailed Cachet takes us through the lesson, how many times we repeat movement down the floor, for example) are all determined by who attends on a given day. The experience of every Monday night is shaped by intersubjectivity, grounded in practice, to create a collective embodiment of the ‘whole.’

Off the floor, group interactions are microcosms of the ‘whole,’ reflecting through social behaviors that which has manifested in the dance, and vice versa (Hast, 1993). Nine participants shared with me that socializing together outside of the class significantly informs and shapes their experience *in* class, referring to examples such as potlucks and celebrating birthdays in the lower level of the CEC, attending festivals, or dancing at clubs. I have attended numerous social events that extended from, or intersected with the class, and I have even hosted a few. Though I don’t enjoy cooking, I have happily made my signature sweet potato fries (a recipe given to me by a fellow Monday night participant) to bring to potlucks at Cachet’s house, for example. I enjoy eating, drinking, and chatting with fellow participants (musicians and dancers), who bring their friends, spouses or significant others, and children.

Alia: The beauty is that [by] coming to the class, what you’ll find is that any cultural events you’ll go to, even if you don’t have someone to go with, you’re going to go. ‘Cause you know you’re gonna see somebody from dance class.

Spotting Monday night participants at performance events around Philadelphia is sometimes like running into long lost friends, though I may have seen them just a few days ago in class. As I write this right now, I am acutely aware that many folks from the Monday night class are sitting in an audience at a small performance venue in West Philadelphia, supporting the choreographic work of Lela Aisha Jones, a dynamic artist and organizer whose work intersects with African diaspora dance and music circles throughout Philadelphia.

Sharing these experiences with folks off the dance floor, for me, makes the experiences we share on the floor feel that much more meaningful. Reflecting on this significance, and that I have come to perceive the existence of the Monday night class outside of its spatial and temporal boundaries (7:30 - 9:00pm in the large dance studio at the CEC), I relate to the sentiment that these social experiences can be part and parcel of what makes this class feel like a 'community.'

Support and Family

Brytiece: Love, respect, honesty, togetherness, [there are] a lot of words that come to mind when I think of 'community.' Like, it's genuine. 'Community' is genuine. And basically looking out for each other, helping each other out in any way possible. And... love.

Crystal: Mmmm... when I think of 'community,' I actually think of a group of people that's actually there supporting one another.

Alexis: I definitely... put a positive association on it. So, I want to say...it's a group of people who have something in common and who care about each other, you know. There's some element of support and care. Like, you think about someone and they matter to you, but also through physical acts. So, if someone needs something, then you bring them food or call them on the phone or whatever it is.

Folasshade: I think that challenges are probably what help to make the grit of a community, like help to define [it]. And people are going to react and behave and support one another. It might even bring people closer together.

Markita: Um, so, you know, to be a member of the community you have to hold up your end of the bargain, you have to be supportive, not just get support. You have to contribute meaningfully. You have to work towards sustaining the community, and that means teaching, passing on whatever skills you have.

The manifestations of support in the Monday night class take place through the rituals of the class and the social interactions within and beyond it. Embedded throughout, is the notion of achieving an ‘ideal’ community through the contribution of individual labor and a sense of responsibility towards the ‘whole’ (Dolan, 2001). Participants’ discussions of support and family reflect experiences of collective work towards the effort to create and sustain a utopian community.

Crystal: ...Something happens to a friend, whether it's positive or negative... we say, "Okay, this next dance is for this group of people or for this person," and it's like, okay, wow, we're coming together to dance and share our positive energy and thoughts... Then other times we have, like, different potlucks after class or somebody might bring a cake or something to celebrate a birthday. Even when the different vendors come in [to sell goods after class], you're supporting other people that's in your community.

Folasshade: [The musicians] are trying physically... and they listen. I think I've seen them listen to each other and try again... They're encouraging one another, and they practice, and also support... I am trying to be more articulate verbally about my appreciation to the drummers, 'cause it's really nice when they all show up. So, I usually say thank you to all of them. And they all say thank you back, which is really cool, you know? It's just sort of this exchange that's happening between them and us. Like, they may be — and I'm gonna make another assumption here — excited if our energy is really high because I think it may be rewarding for them. And sometimes I think we're rewarded... they start going faster and I'm like, "Wait, I think they're really feeling it and now they're going really fast." And so that's something else that not only I see, but I hear and I feel that shows just the community as the drummers are playing and supporting us, which I think is lovely.

Brytiece: I mean it's little things like, for instance, that one time [a dancer] had her car towed and instead of everyone leaving, we stayed until

she found her ride. And there's plenty of times, like, if a person gets exhausted and faints, you don't just leave that person there, or you don't just tell that person to sit to the side. Everybody calms down and makes sure that person is okay before they move forward with class. And that's community, that's love.

Omar: Well, inside of class, of course, it's the participation in the art form. Outside of class, there are certain situations where people were called on to support each other, and we were there for each other. We all lead busy lives, but when we are in need we do come to each other's aid, and that's what demonstrates 'community' to me. For example, my father passed, we had a memorial for him, and I had the support of the drummers, the dancers, to come [perform] a number at the memorial. Cachet's father passed and we were there for her. Not just at the time of death, but like, you know, for parties, for gatherings and just different events, different occasions where we come together. Even outside of the art form we've come together to help each other out. You know, there were financial difficulties that someone had... assistance was given to the person in need. People have helped people move. So, you know, all those little things, they add up, they mean a lot. They may sound little but they mean a lot when you really think about it. It shows 'community,' that's what 'community' does... Even giving a brother or sister a ride home, picking them up, those are all signs of 'community' to me.

Participants' discussions of embodied support reflect experiences of collective work towards the effort to create and sustain a utopian community. These include ways participants take up space on the floor, feeling free to move with more energy and boundlessness than they would during their everyday ordinary activity; or negotiating space as a site of comfort/discomfort - soloing alone in the circle, visible to all and encouraged with fellow dancers' claps and shouts of "Yip!" and "Ay!" Or seeking out invisibility and 'safety' by standing in the back of the room, or in close proximity to oth-

ers. Troy explains that dancing with line partners down the floor is an opportunity to support and be supported.

Troy: The cue for me [that] someone's dancing with you, is when we're dancing in the line, we keep up with one another. Meaning that if I see you falling behind or struggling, I slow down and let you catch up. Or if you're going full throttle, you recognize that I'm not going full throttle and it may be because I'm confused with the step, it may be because you're too far ahead of me. So, for me, it's that cultural dynamic of seeing one another, it's that cultural dynamic of dancing together and having fun. But then it's also the aspect of me looking to learn. I feel like I'm more kinesthetic in my learning style, so I enjoy what we do together. And if we're doing it together in a congruent manner, I learn better...

His phrase “dancing with,” in this context, refers to a communal connection.

Keeping up with one another, being aware if someone is ahead, falling behind or struggling with the movement, and then responding accordingly, is a meaningful emergence of communal support. Another participant shared that she experiences the exchange of support when standing with others to form a *Bantaba* circle, to celebrate achievements, acknowledge milestones, honor ancestors, or uplift someone in need (further addressed in the next chapter).

This collective show of support, physically and/or in attitude or spirit, all require individual contribution and effort toward being together. Our labor, through dance and music, is given, it's ‘worked,’ on the floor. We give what we have and work together every Monday night, bounded together, however briefly, through shared practice. It seems then, not so alien to work for each other outside of this space. Or, we seek to expand this space, to continue to experience what we feel on the dance floor. We are able

to extend the temporal bonds experienced within class to moments off the floor (Gonzalez, 2004).

Considering this extension, I find the participants' connection of 'community' to the concept of family particularly relevant.

Nicole: There are people who weave in and out [of class]. So, you see them, you know, sometimes in class and then at other functions. And the community here is not that huge, it's not that big. There are a lot of people that just kind of know each other because it's a small community. But I do perceive the community and the idea of family as opposed to just 'community' as in I guess the other concept in my mind.. like buildings, or something along those lines. I see 'community' here as family members. So, we try, I think, to do a lot to support one another in and outside of the classroom. So, if somebody is performing somewhere or if somebody is traveling or if somebody's having something at their house, or somebody's ill/sick, or somebody's kids graduated, I think we all try and do a very good job of supporting one another in life, which thus makes us family and leads back to my idea or concept of 'community.'

Rell: Community,' in small terms, is like a team effort. It doesn't always mean family, but still family...Because a community can be considered your family. Like, Cachet's class is a community but we're not all family, we're not all tied together, but we treat each other as such. You know what I mean?

Alexis: I think about the places in my life [where] I felt like I had 'community,' and I think the word 'family' comes to mind, both in origin but also the family you create, the people who you choose to have in your life.

Somalia: I think of the people in my community as my family, for real for real. 'Cause most of these people I've met have been around all my life. Like, before I really knew who they were, they knew me, they knew my mom. That's how it is. I've been here pretty much all my life, and then leaving was a heart breaker, 'cause I didn't want to be in a new community. I didn't want to jump into a new family, so to speak. But it was cool because I got to see how other communities do what they do, how they operate. And, sometimes, [the Mon-

day night class] has a homey kind of feel to it. Like, I'm supposed to be there, I feel comfortable in being there. Like, everybody in there is a big sister, an auntie, a mama, a something to me. So, it's family and it always feels good to be in there.

Crystal: Anybody can say, "Oh, yeah, we're family and I'm there for you." But family is not always a community to me. They might not be family by blood, but I feel like sometimes your community can actually be like that family or that support system.

Troy: From an energetic standpoint, I enjoy [the Monday night class] from so many different levels. I enjoy the people. When I come in and see your smile, really, it just makes a difference for me. You know what I'm saying? When I see [everyone], it's like a family reunion. Yes, it's like a family reunion. But it just happens every Monday. So, literally, I'm looking forward to getting there. Even when I don't feel like dancing, I wanna see you. So it goes beyond the dance when it comes to community and culture because I'm not just coming for me, I'm coming for the connection and the energy that's there that lifts me.

Markita: ['Community'] is an extension of family. It's funny, I was just having this conversation with my kids the other day about doing chores, and how chores are a way to contribute to your family and teach you how to contribute to your community. I say that to them all the time, that "I'm not having you do chores for the sake of doing chores. Yes, it's helpful for you to clean up in the house, but also I'm teaching you how to be a productive contributing part of a larger community because no matter what you do, you're going to have to do that at some point." So, 'community' to me is a place where you're nurtured, where you're surrounded by love, but it also has the other side of responsibility. So, to be a member of the community you have to hold up your end of the bargain. You have to be supportive, not just get support. You have to contribute meaningfully. You have to work towards sustaining the community, and that means teaching, passing on whatever skills you have. So, it's just an extension of family, a collection of people like-minded, sometimes not, but they all have kind of a common goal or common world vision that unites them.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains that the political and economic oppression of Black people in the U.S. cultivated a connection between ‘family’ and ‘community’ as means of solidarity and support. “Within Black civil society, notions of interpersonal relations forged during slavery endured — such as equating family with extended family, or treating community as family...” (Collins, 2000, p. 59). This is reflected in Crystal’s comments about her experience as a new mother. While in labor, women from dance class came to be with her at the hospital. They acted as surrogate family, supporting her and staying with her for hours (and days), dancing with her to help her through what turned out to be a complicated delivery process. And as a new mother, Crystal experiences a new sense of responsibility towards the children who attend the Monday night class, helping them down the floor and with navigating class protocol.

Though Collins (2000) suggests the practice of forming extended family networks within Black communities has eroded over time, I observe its presence in the Monday night class. I see frequent and consistent care-taking of children by adults who are not blood relatives. We sit and eat together at the table on the first floor of the CEC, feeling like a family sitting around a dining room table. When I hear a fellow participant say to everyone after class, “Goodnight, dance family!” I feel a part of this constructed family, and I carry that feeling with me outside of the dance space. This feeling, for me, is bolstered by the use of familial titles in the class, such as “Sister,” “Brother,” “Mama,” and “Baba” - an established cultural practice within West African dance and music in the U.S.

Nicole: I'm going from 'sister' to 'mama,' that's what's happening to me right now. So, I'm crossing over that age threshold where I'm moving into another space... I have some of the younger ladies in the class starting to call me 'Mama Nickie.' ... Outside of the class, I'm a different person. I'm a high level administrator in a multi-state medical practice.

Collins (2000) connects the notion of the 'othermother' to the practice of creating 'extended' social families within Black communities, and its role in the development of Black women's intellectual tradition within Black communities. Mamas are revered in Cachet's class (as are the Babas), and whenever they are present, Cachet makes sure to create opportunities for the class to learn from their wisdom and experience.

Cachet: The elders, yeah, they really amaze me. They do. You know, they don't really miss a step... I love when there's a whole line of them. I like to have them demonstrate so that people can see that there's a lot of different approaches, right? It doesn't always have to be, you know, this explosive, jumping high in the air kind of thing. It's not always that. And because they can't do that anymore, they tend to get those subtle nuances better, because that is basically more of their strength at this point than jumping all over the place, which is fine. There's beauty in that, too. So, I like when I can kind of, you know, have them demonstrate so people can see that. I also see that just because you're a certain age doesn't mean because you're not jumping in the air what you're doing is somehow less valuable, you know. That's not the case, because they have those nuances. And it's nice when you see multiple elders, and you see how the musicians respond to them, too. Because they're gonna accentuate more of what they're doing with the nuance [demonstrates undulating spine movement].

The mamas, babas, sisters, and brothers, are included in what Yvonne Daniel (2005) refers to as ‘fictive kin,’ who, through drumming, dancing, and singing, engender reciprocal relationships (Daniel, 2005). Dalili (1999) explains,

The family and community are the focus of traditional West African dance artistic activity. The family is valued as the organizing principle performed musically and choreographically... Family for these groups of artists means order, balance, and harmony... one dances with others as a member of an extended African family, whether that role is as a mother, sister, daughter, child, baba, etc. (p. 207)

African Diasporic experience and wisdom are embodied in music and dance practices that have been used by Africans in the Americas to “save and protect their individual spirits, their dignity as humans, and their sense of a cosmic family” (Daniel, 2005, p. 64). As a U.S.-based West African dance and music practice, the Monday night class is situated within a larger cultural framework that draws from African Diaspora cultural experiences.

Cultural Knowledge and Membership

Troy: Okay, so, that feeling that’s like “Oh my G-d” is what I get from dance class. Like, if I’m stressed, if I’m feeling down, if I’m feeling hurt, if I’m going through emotional distress, all I need to do is get to a dance floor and dance... The African dance floor, I believe what it’s done for years is created a family dynamic that now extends into other aspects of our lives. So... if I miss Monday night, I’m almost physically sick because I’m missing Monday night. And there’s nothing in the world that I would, if it were my choice, that I’d give up a Monday night for.

Nicole: So ‘community’ to me kind of goes back to the concept of family and extended family. You know, historically, if you go back to how communities kind of evolved in the Diaspora, specifically on the

continent, it really was your family. Like, it's mostly your family and members of your family or people inter-married into it. You're all family, you're all in the same community, so the community is set to support one another in totality, so, as to not have people just kind of hanging out there by themselves and left to their own devices without support. I feel like, the class itself has evolved into its own community.

Nicole and Troy's comment creates a deliberate link between broader conceptualizations of 'community' as support and family, to a specific cultural connection to Africa. 'Africa' is often evoked as an ideological concept, complex in its complicity in social, political, and cultural identity construction (Zezeza, 2010; Washington, 2013). In this class, one of the connections to African cultures and community can be felt through the lineage of dancers and musicians who helped to establish and sustain West African dance practice in Philadelphia by forming and/or participating in performance groups and teaching classes (Brown-Danquah, 1994, Dalili, 1999). Cultural knowledge and membership, in this sense, is undergirded by a genealogy of artistic practice, which is highlighted in Benita Binta Brown-Danquah's 1994 survey of African Diaspora movement arts, as well as in Dalili's (1999) dissertation *"More than a sisterhood:" Traditional West African dance in a contemporary urban setting*, both situated in Philadelphia.

Through this artistic practice, a sense of African culture has burgeoned that is discernible yet not easily defined. It includes that which has been retained through the transatlantic slave trade and passed on through generations, that which has been adapted through social interaction and encounters in new environments, that which is tacitly understood through epic memory, that which has been invented and created daily

through lived experience, and that which has been re/learned through travel and the availability of technology (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Dalili, 1999; Washington, 2013). Brytiece, Rell, and David Lee, three musicians (Rell prefers the term ‘artist’) in their twenties who play regularly in the Monday night class, describe being “born into” this culture. Brytiece’s first introduction to Cachet was as a young child, and he only has a foggy recollection of it. His father, Baba Mawuli Nkrumah Yaw, a respected elder and master drummer, trained and performed with Baba Crowder (founder of Kulu Mele) among many other well-established leaders in the field. Rell’s grandfather, and David Lee’s father, Baba Joe Bryant, another respected elder and master drummer, had a similar training background, performs with numerous African Diaspora music and dance ensembles in the tri-state area, and works with Dr. Kariamuwelsh playing and composing for her Umfundalai technique classes.

Brytiece: [My father] started [playing drums] when he was 12, so it was like something I grew up [with] from a baby. I was born into it and, from there I’ve just been going. He was my first teacher... he taught me how to drum, he taught me how to walk stilts, he taught me how to make drums and a lot of things... Growing up, like my family we wasn’t too... too together. Everybody over there doing that, doing that, doing that. And um, in African culture, that’s where I knew I could... like, I felt like I belonged. I felt love. It was a good feeling, it was a good feeling.

Rell: [My grandfather] would take me with him to rehearsals, or to his classes, or to performances, just to nurture [me], get me in tune to hearing music. And then, once I got to a comprehension-able age he gave me a drum. And then it was just like, small coaching day by day, year by year. As I got older, it became more intensive and he introduced me to other musicians to help my technique or different skills that he might not have been able to show me. So, I say

he gave it to me just as a way of [passing] it on to the next generation.

David Lee: [African culture] was just part of the lifestyle growing up. You know, mom and dad. I grew up in the projects, so what my parents did to keep me away from the streets, they exposed me to culture. And I had a church background, as well... So, I rarely was on the "block" running the streets. So, that kept me away from that. And, my grandma was a musician, my mom was a singer, you know, there's art there. And then my dad was a musician within the African community. So, it's like, you know, he would take us to gigs with him, and particular classes.

Danquah Brown (1994) explains that descendants of the Philadelphian African Diaspora movement arts pioneers include both biological and artistic kin. "Artistic descent and kinship," she expounds, "is a complex matter" (Brown-Danquah, 1994, p. 6). The ways in which practitioners worked together, for each other, and separately, generated an intricate web of influence that is not easily traced, especially as the "family tree" has never stopped evolving or changing. Several of the more visible lines of this web within the Monday night class, however, include those stemming from Baba Robert Crowder and Kulu Mele (Cachet and several of the dancers and musicians perform with Kulu Mele); Spirit of Sankofa, founded in 1988 (no longer in existence, this performing group was influential for several of the musicians in the Monday night class), and Ibeji Performing Arts Group, founded by Jeanine Osayande and Hodari Gregory Banks in 1991 (also no longer in existence, it was a pivotal component of Cachet's early dance training and performing experience) (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Dalili, 1999).

The primary artistic content for these particular groups is/was is composed of dances and rhythms of Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Haitian, Brazil, Nigeria, Cuba, and North America (particularly African American dance forms such as hip hop). Many Monday night class participants pointed to learning about the cultural context of West African-derived music and dance as a unique pedagogical component of the class,

John-David: [Taking the Monday night class] was a lot different compared to another class that I had been to where no one would describe in detail what we would be doing, to just starting the music and dancing... To understand the cultural aspect of it, to actually see the importance of the music and the dance, that it's not just music — and it can be, people play the music or dance for their own reasons — but it goes much deeper than "that's a really nice move you just did," or "this is a really nice sounding rhythm," you know?

For Folasshade, this component represents a significant aspect of her experiences, it evokes feelings of responsibility towards the ‘whole,’ and connects to her understanding of ‘community’ within the class.

Folasshade: Learning about the context of the dance is interesting. It makes me very curious about the way I interpret it when I'm actually moving. I think I become more aware of, "am I doing it right?" Where, before I think I was just so inside of feeling the rhythm and letting it flow through me and just get, like, that whole... euphoric experience... So, when I'm thinking about the history or I'm learning about the movement, the purpose of it, the meaning behind it, the history behind the culture, whatever Cachet is giving us, it makes me feel less free when I'm dancing... It makes me try harder to get it right. I think that's my own personal desire to really be connected to what's happening, to really demonstrate, illustrate, what it means. So, I think it makes it more tense for me, actually. Um, more pressure. At that point I usually become more robotic and less free... But to be able to be inside the technicality and under-

stand the culture and then also ride the music, which is what my interpretation of what [Cachet] is doing, my admiration is stronger and my desire to do well as a member of the dance community is higher. And so I try harder but I probably look worse [laughs].

Her sentiment also reveals an embodied sense of culture intimately tied to technique, physical dis/comfort, and body image. Both she and Crystal shared that, culturally, West African dance provides an opportunity for them to dance and move in a way that feels more natural to their bodies than other ‘Western’-derived dance forms such as ballet.

Crystal: I remember I had a teacher at Philadanco, and she told me, “When you stand in first position, it’s supposed to hurt,” because she said ballet wasn’t made for Black women’s bodies. So, if you stand and you don’t feel like, “Ouch,” or a pinch in your butt, then you’re not doing it right. So, I kept thinking, “Why the heck are we doing this type of dance if it wasn’t made for us?” So, what was made for us? I don’t want that to deter people who really like dance. [I don’t want them] to then say, “Well, okay, [ballet] is the only style of dance that’s out there, I can’t do it so I give up.” No, there’s other stuff out there, so learn about what your body is made to do so you don’t feel weird when you dance and say that it’s not for you.

Folasshade: I think, it’s definitely probably cultural... I think I’m just a bigger person, and this is probably gonna sound weird because there’s a lot of jumping, but physically, I feel more capable of doing West African dance. And being a Black person, again there’s something spiritual about [feeling like] my body can do it just naturally. And, then there’s something about my history and culture, just being so disconnected and under-informed about Africa in general that I think there’s a cultural piece of like, “Hey, this is natural to me, it’s my people,” you know? I want to learn and I want to continue, I can do it. I don’t feel like I have to be a certain size to do it.

While ‘cultural embodiment’ is in and of itself a scholarly discourse worthy of attention, yet much too expansive to address comprehensively here, it is important to note its role in the Monday night class experience and understanding of ‘community.’ The participants of the class co-create a social space where cultural norms and values are negotiated and embedded in the rituals and mechanisms of class, as well as in the expressions of cultural identity within social relationships in and around the Monday night class (Dalili, 1999; Seye, 2014; Hamera, 2011; Washington, 2013). When we dance, for example, feminine dances associated with girls’ initiation ceremonies, we are encouraged to move our hips and breasts freely, without fear of the ‘extraneous’ movement of the flesh that is often perceived as vulgar in other contexts (and why, for example, many women wear bras in the United States). And when larger women with ample breasts and/or buttocks dance in such a way that emphasizes these features, that create additional layers of body rhythm in the movement of flesh on top of bone, the entire class cheers and applauds. Cachet and other participants may run up and dance alongside or around these women, as a show of admiration, approval, and support. In my experience, this is a unique feature of West African dance culture in the United States, I have not experienced it in any other genre of dance class.

In their respective studies, Washington (2013) and Sandri (2012) mine the role that representations of ‘West African’ dance plays in identity construction. The significance of one’s perception of ‘Africa’ in their purpose, motivation, and interest in participating in ‘West African’ dance is an intriguing area of inquiry. While this particular topic has not been directly addressed, conversations with fellow classmates have revealed

a wide array of purposes, motivations, and goals for attending the Monday night 'West African' dance class in Philadelphia. Some musicians come for the opportunity to play with musicians more skilled than they, or the chance to play for dancers, which is a different (and more challenging, some have argued) experience than playing without the active involvement of dancers. Some dancers come for physical exercise to stay in shape, to learn about African cultures and/or affirm and express their cultural heritage, or for the camaraderie and fellowship of fellow participants. All or none of these may be true for some participants; the nature of participation can be multifaceted and it can shift and evolve over time. Troy discusses his motivation as participating in culture that is centered on connection to others:

Troy: Culture is participation and literally pouring into one another's life. You know, I'm giving a limited perspective... it's so much more but in the context of this dance community, to me that's what creates our culture. [Not] just, "It's about me." No, it's about me connected to Julie connected to Alexis, connected to Folashade ... then you get to Omar and Jabar and the drummers... it's culture coming together. Community is a group of people coming together to experience culture. 'Cause community and culture, they go hand-in-hand. You can't have a culture without a community, but you can have a community that doesn't have culture. Community is where you live, where you're by, where people come together, but just because I live somewhere in a community doesn't mean I have to take part in that community. [Culture] is a little different.

Troy is often the only male dancer in the class. Sometimes there may be a handful of male children, or one or two other adult men, but this is rare. When dancing the down the floor, the men go last. Since he is usually the only there, sometimes this means he dances alone, without line partners. When I asked him what it is like to be the

only man, he explained that the women in the class make it enjoyable because he finds we often support him, either through encouraging gestures (cheers and clapping), or by coming to dance alongside him if it seems he is struggling with a movement. He connects this to culture and community.

Troy: And that's where you get into community and culture. I didn't have to say, "I don't want to do this by myself." People recognize I'm struggling and I don't know if they know why I'm struggling. It's not because I can't do the movement sometimes. Sometimes I don't want to dance by myself... And it's an interesting dynamic... you may not like everybody... but it's okay because I'm loving being here, you're loving being here... I don't have to like you, I can still respect you and love you. And that's the beauty that I love in African dance... So, you know in order for us to take it to another level and maintain the culture, we have to show up. So, I'll be here until another man shows up. And then he'll be here and more will come, and eventually [claps].

Social Justice

This culture to which Troy refers is perceived as endangered. In a group conversation involving nine participants, much of the discussion centered on the threat of diminishment or total erasure of African dance and music in Philadelphia. It is felt in the sparsity of available spaces to practice; the rapid gentrification happening around Philadelphia, and specifically around the CEC; and the lack of, or low visibility of, African Diaspora dance representation in concert performance and class offerings; and the inconsistent presence of youth in West African dance classes. For this reason, several participants' discussions about culture revolved around the need to preserve it:

Crystal: To keep [African dance] going... you want to grow it. You want to expand your knowledge, and I feel like more people should know about African dance. 'Cause I can tell you for me, when I first started dancing, of course it was with ballet and jazz. And I felt like, okay, this is the only style of dance. I never really knew anything about African dance, but why shouldn't I know about my own culture? People know more about ballet and, you know, that's of the European culture... So, I think the importance of new people coming in is so that way you keep it going, you spread the knowledge, the information. We spread rumors and all that other shenanigans on Facebook, why not spread something positive?

Jabar: There's a gap between those Babas who are very, very well-versed in several different techniques and areas [and young musicians]... there's nothing else behind them. I would say, there's very few young drummers who are picking up that torch and continuing. [There's no] exposure [for] those people who aren't necessarily inclined through their family members and friends to be a part of the community.

Mama Arlene: [Participating in West African dance classes] was a way to connect to my heritage, my African heritage. And, I was very much into the African culture [in the 1960s and 70s]... This is what I considered to be a part of my identity because of our African lineage. So, I just continued to dance, and that's how I've been dancing all of these years. This was a part of our expressing our connection to the African culture, to our heritage, to try to bring it forth, try to perpetuate it, continue it, keep it alive as opposed to just [letting] it die, you know. But this was our means, our medium of expression of African heritage.

Mama Arlene shared that, to her, 'community' means the gathering, connection, and collaboration between spirits to survive, and thrive. This aspect of survival — addressed directly by some participants and indirectly by others — was connected to conversations around social justice, specifically in terms of resisting systemic racial oppression.

Mama Arlene's entry into African culture was very much linked to social justice and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. She worked with activists at WRTI and WKEU — two local predominantly Black operated radio stations in Philadelphia — with the mission of broadcasting shows focused on the political and social struggles of the Black community. They also hosted local regular cultural events, through which Mama Arlene became acquainted with practitioners of West African dance and music throughout Philadelphia. Prior to this era, African dance and music was not associated with public demonstrations. But during the mid-1960s and 70s, political rallies and protests often included African dance and percussion, which served as a visual and aural expression of defiance, an artistic means to arouse and invigorate protestors and on-lookers, and a celebratory expression of cultural and racial pride (Welsh, personal communication, 2016).

According to Dr. Kariamuwelsh, during this era, being involved in African dance meant you were an activist (personal communication, 2016). Mama Arlene shared that she felt a sense of community with these folks in their collective search for, creating of, and participating in, a shared identity centered on promulgating a positive understanding of Africa, African culture, and Blackness in America. It was a means of resistance against racist structures that operate by separating Black people from their history and lineage, pushing negative cultural/racial stereotypes.

Dr. Kariamuwelsh, and several of the Monday night class participants, assert that negative stereotypes about West African dance and music (i.e. it is 'wild,' 'savage,' requires no skill or technique and is therefore 'low art') still persist today, even amongst

people of color (Shockley, personal communication, 2015; Welsh, personal communication, 2015). Rell, a musician in the class, feels that these pervasive notions have distanced his generation from African culture. He shared that his relationship with the *djembe* and learning about African music has served as a means of survival,

Rell: I'm in the generation of young people [who] distance themselves from anything African. So, just the [djembe] alone, just being an African instrument, it's like, "Nah, I'm okay." At the same time... I'm just a regular person that learned the instrument, another young man can do the same thing. It's nothing more than learning an instrument, just like somebody would learn saxophone or violin or whatever. It's the same thing.

The reason I appreciate the djembe so much, it was banned at a particular point, when it came to America... So, to be able to play this instrument in America... it is a great accomplishment to just have that instrument. I'm proud of it, I'm proud to have it, proud to know what to do with it... I feel like it can definitely do things as far as pro-Blackness or civil rights, or just the Black empowerment or movement...Honestly, I don't know where I'd be without it, you know what I mean? 'Cause it's helped me in so many ways. Especially being here in Philly, it's helped me stay out the streets. It helped me to maintain focus in a way. It's really a life saver, and I think if more young people in general had a relationship with the instrument or with music in general, it would help them.

The Monday night class provides an opportunity to learn about some aspects of African Diaspora culture through West African dance and music as it has developed in Philadelphia. It is commonly understood amongst participants that all are welcome to partake in this opportunity. Seven core research participants noted Cachet's encouragement of inclusive participation, using words and phrases such "welcoming," "inclusive," "inviting," "open," and "fosters warmth." This encouragement fosters a

class culture where participants take up the mantle to welcome newcomers into the space. The perception this creates for me, is that the class is a safe space to enter. Cachet connects the idea of welcoming all into the class with opportunities to learn about African cultures, following the examples set by the national ballets in Africa whose activities were driven by the aim of repairing the damage of colonial views of Africa, dispelling negative stereotypes of African culture, and promoting positive images.

Cachet: That's the reason why those companies were created. Because people were thinking African people were walking around naked with lions. So these [dance companies] were created to share this culture with the world. If you read any of the mission statements from any of the ballet companies — National Ballet of Guinea, National Ballet of Senegal — they always talk about how they wanted to share the culture with the world, and a lot of it is to knock down those preconceived things that were pushed by media.

As cited in Sandri (2012), Sékou Touré (the first president of Guinea) explained that the National Ballet of Guinea promulgated Africa as a site of cultural and artistic wealth, aiming to make Africa “known and esteemed” (Sandri, 2012, p. 42). This work was framed in such a way that both challenged and aligned with Western notions of artistic value, as with labeling the national companies ‘ballets,’ for example (Sandri, 2012). The national companies employed African dance in such ways that “signi[fied] Africa’s cultural treasures for Western audiences [that] continues to influence the way traditional African dance is currently taught and performed in the U.S.” (Sandri, 2012, p. 42).

This understanding of African dance as a source of cultural pride and antithesis of negative stereotypes aids in The Monday night class’ ability to create a space where participants can safely escape from and/or actively work against the multitude of social

oppressions that marginalize and oppress us outside of this space. In particular, it is a space where participants (of a range of social identities, including race/ethnicity and nationality) can participate in and benefit from, as dancing participant Somalia put it in one of our conversations, “Blackness, Black growth, and Black empowerment.”

Cachet: See this is a very touchy thing sometimes because if you're talking to Black people in America, we use words like 'community,' but some will argue that it doesn't exist as a tangible thing, right? But, you know, for the sake of trying to describe this thing, I call them 'bubbles.' There are bubbles that exist where you have, like, us here, we will do things [together] outside of dance class.

Doing things together, for Cachet and other participants, includes cultivating a collective economy through various means of financial support. This entails paying for class, donating to the musicians, going to each other's performances, and sometimes buying goods from vendors (who are often also participants in the class). And when one cannot directly support monetarily, participants commit to spreading the word about each other's efforts by word of mouth, making announcements in class, and posting information to social media outlets.

Cachet: If Crystal can sew, she'll come and sell her stuff, we'll buy stuff from her. If [another dancer] makes earrings, we get earrings from her. So you have to also go into the economic part of this thing 'cause that's the only way the community can survive and keep going, if the money is circulating inside of it... if a community is gonna work, if a village is gonna work, there's got to be some type of exchange going on, whether it's services or whatever.

The exchange to which Cachet refers seems a simple and direct show of support that can bolster understandings or experiences of 'community.' Some participants, however,

have called attention to the complex dynamics of individual socio-economic factors at play within and around the collective of the Monday night class that challenge this notion (which I address further in the following section).

In one group conversation, participants discussed the connection between cultivating a collective economy, the sense of an endangered culture, and ‘community’ in and around the CEC. The neighborhood in which the CEC is situated, Powelton Village, is quickly transforming into what is known as ‘University City,’ through sweeping land/property takeovers occurring at an alarming rate by two large university systems: Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania. Cachet and other participants recall a time when the area was primarily a Black residential neighborhood with several local public schools (colloquially referred to by longtime residents as the ‘Black Bottoms,’ or just ‘The Bottoms’). The CEC served many school children through educational and artistic programs. These programs are no longer in existence on site at the CEC, as many of the area schools have been shut down, gentrification has pushed many families out of the area, and the demographic of Powelton Village has shifted to include a high number of undergraduate and graduate students living nearby in student housing.

Cachet explains that with more student housing comes more police and campus safety officers. These officers, she feels, deter many Black children who still live close enough to walk to the CEC from doing so, citing a long history of mistrust between the Black Philadelphians and police officers. To encourage children to attend her class, Cachet waives the class fee for young students, and just asks their parents/guardians to donate what they can to the musicians in return. In the group conversation, participants

agreed that providing opportunities for children to participate in West African dance and music is beneficial for everyone.

Jabar: We want to perpetuate what's going here. We want to make sure that somebody... finds dance and gets from it what we got from it.

Nicole: And we want to make sure it's readily available, there's space for it, and it's open for people to be able to enjoy it. Sometimes you do have to tackle the issue yourself, sometimes you have to take the onus on your own shoulders and decide you want to make a difference, you have to physically do something about it. So, you know, that was [the impetus] for that one fundraiser I did. It was during that year the CEC was really struggling. Funding is next to non-existent for the arts, and then when you start talking about cultural programs that are beneficial to African Americans, there is no money. You can't wait for people to give you money. So if you want your space to continue to be there, and if you want to be able to enjoy your classes and instructors, sometimes you yourself have to physically get up and go do something about it.

Nicole's fundraiser for the CEC was a collective effort that included in-kind donation of artistic services, food donations, and volunteers. Dancers and musicians came together to teach classes, perform, and sell goods, food, and drinks.

Nicole: It is the reputation that those individual instructors and those drummers have in the community that brought the people out who very happily came and spent an afternoon at the CEC. So, then I was able to then turn around and turn that money right over to [the director]. When you think about grassroots efforts, and you think about longevity, and what you want to be there for the future, I think more of those types of things will just have to become the norm... I just think we have to become self-sufficient. I don't think we can think about relying on anybody else, I don't think we can do that. So, I think we have to become a little bit stronger in that regard and think of ourselves as a communal collective.

The self-sufficiency and self-determination suggested by Nicole and others echo the core messages of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s and 70s, as well as those of the artists who established West African dance practice in Philadelphia as a means of cultural empowerment prior to, during, and after these social justice movements. The current field of West African dance and music practitioners in Philadelphia is a “powerful validation of the imaginations, visions, sacrifices, and labors of countless local people, going back sixty years” (Philadelphia Folklore Project, 2014).

I feel this through participation in the Monday night class, and also I also experienced it through participation in the first Dancing for Justice Philadelphia march in December 2014. Afro-Brazilian percussionists led the way with their drums as we marched, danced, and sang. I found myself moving through Philadelphia streets with strangers, friends, and some classmates from the Monday night class. The march culminated in Dilworth Park located on the grounds of Philadelphia’s City Hall with a giant circle, much like a *Bantaba*. Protesters of various ages and sociocultural backgrounds, those familiar and unfamiliar with African dance forms, entered the circle dancing or moving however they desired (several choosing to do African dances such as *Lamban*).

Such collective manifestations of empowerment, however, are not without challenges. On the surface, the elements of shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice might suggest a harmonious consensus amongst core participants of this study of how ‘community’ is experienced. Further

probing led to conversations around concepts and experiences shared by participants that suggest deeper layers of complication or tension than what has been addressed thus far.

Challenges in ‘Community’

In discussing challenges or tensions in relation to the concept of ‘community’ or to the Monday night class specifically, I encountered a sort of reticence on the part of some participants. Any shared experiences or observations of tension, social rifts, new and old wounds unhealed or unresolved, were often spoken about in the periphery of discussions of ‘community’ meaning. Recognizing a need to resist my own affinity for focusing on idealistic or optimistic conceptualizations of ‘community,’ deeper levels of questioning eventually led to some conversations about experiences that seem to depart from the more harmonious narrative described throughout this chapter. Such departures include the perception of a lack of community in the space, primarily due to what is perceived as the absence of accountability on the part of participants to support each other through financial means or volunteer labor; cliques and social exclusion; ambiguous perspectives of cultural membership; and a lack of investment in social justice.

David Lee describes himself as a musician, part-time student and “blue collar guy” who comes from a family of West African dance and music practitioners in Philadelphia. He expressed that he perceives a lack of ‘community’ in the Monday night class in part because of the failure of some participants to donate money to the musicians at the end of the class.

David Lee: Historically, music and/or the drum is a major part of African culture. It begins an event, it's the start and finish to a lot of events... ceremonies, it's a way of life, pretty much. So, for people to neglect that... it's disrespectful to me as a musician in this particular genre. In a specific setting, like the dance class, you will see ignorance and disrespect because the people who know to honor the drummers, you'll see it symbolically but on the monetary end (which is also a symbol) there's a disconnect.

This donation, David Lee suggests, is more than a show of respect, it is a form of spiritual exchange between dancer and drummer. Discussing the role of the musician in community as it pertains to African music practice, Francis Bebey (1975) explains that "...it is rare to come across anyone in traditional African society who thinks of his music as his sole means of livelihood" (p. 33). Musicians' "extraordinary talents" are shared beyond their immediate social circles with anyone who wishes to partake (Bebey, 1975, p. 33). While this text is forty years old and dynamics may have changed, he does highlight how this spirit of generosity led to a practice of exploitation of musicians by European recording companies. I have observed how many musicians (as well as dancers, and artists of all genres) are often requested to provide services pro bono, perpetuating a tension between a love of the art (and sharing it with others) and feeling of being taken for granted or exploited.

David Lee shared that while he understands some participants may face financial struggles that make it difficult to donate consistently (or at all), he speculates that some other participants may perceive the musicians as merely part of the service of the class. The "honor" of the donation is not only monetary support for the musician, it is acknowledgement of their work, their skills, and their humanity.

David Lee: The notion I'm receiving [from dancers] directly and indirectly is... "I'm paying you for a service," instead of I'm giving you a blessing because you've given me a blessing. Because music is a healing aspect on any and all levels, whether you perceive it to be or not, that's just it.

At the end of class, Cachet encourages students to “show love to the musicians,” and with that statement makes a gesture with her fingers that symbolizes money. She often sings their praises at the end of class, reminding us all of their skill and knowledge, and of how fortunate we are to have them play for us. It is difficult to discern how effective these speeches are, but there are always at least a handful of participants who donate after every class. Embedded in this exchange is a relationship of power differentials: the musicians are integral to the Monday night class; the dancers discern what (if any) donation they give to the musicians. Additionally, Cachet pays the musicians a portion of the proceeds from class fees, only to the regularly attending musicians though there may be others who drop in to play on any given night (I am not privy to the details of this arrangement). Further complicating issues of power dynamics in this exchange is the unknown economic status of the dancing participants, whether or not they have the means to donate, and how the inability to donate for those under financial strain may possibly be a source of discomfort or disempowerment.

Every musician that I have spoken with as part of this research has other means of income, from jobs within or outside of the arts. However, it is unknown to me how much (if at all) any of them are financially dependent on donations from the class. The fact that the Monday night class is so often well-attended by musicians, and that those

in the core ensemble continue to participate regularly, suggests that they get something from the class (financial or otherwise). David Lee's perspective about the significance of monetary support to the establishment of 'community' seems to be isolated, most musicians shared with me that their experience in the Monday night class is not incumbent upon financial gain. Yet, he is not alone in suggesting that the pay-per-class model may play a role in creating a disconnect to participants' sense of responsibility towards the 'whole.'

Terri Shockley, the director of the CEC, laments what she perceives as a diminishing involvement amongst participants in efforts to sustain the center through donations as well as volunteer activities. The CEC, like many nonprofit community arts centers, is under constant financial strain. She observes that there are "pockets" or disparate hubs of community housed within the CEC (the various dance and theater classes and performing groups who rehearse in the space), she feels there is a disconnect in each group's investment in manifesting a collective CEC community, citing low attendance to volunteer events and unsuccessful crowdfunding campaigns. Despite efforts such as the previously mentioned fundraising event that Nicole coordinated, Shockley sees each hub as concerned with its own interests, and perceives a lack of accountability of members of each hub as patrons of the CEC (Monday night participants included), to financially support it and care for the space to ensure its survival.

Terri: I struggle to get any sense of community amongst the people who are here, not just West African dance, but any of them. You know, if we have a clean up, none of them will show up. If they really understood the kind of 'community' that I'm talking about.. it wouldn't be such a huge leap to understand that this organization

needs people to get involved and support it rather than turning a blind eye.

She suggests that the pay-per-class model in which participants go to their class, pay their teacher, and need only interact with the other people in that particular class, plays a part in perpetuating a disconnect between folks and other people/classes who share the space, as well as those who run and maintain the space. Referring to President J.F. Kennedy's famous inauguration speech in 1961, in which he stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," Terri suggests there is a level of social responsibility missing from those who utilize the spaces within the CEC.

Terri: I wonder, can you understand and be part of a community in this pocket and that pocket and this pocket, and then totally not get a real understanding of what it is to be a part of [the CEC] community?... If you don't have to call on yourself to do anything more than show up and be a good person in that room, a good teacher in that room, I would suggest that that isn't my idea of community... Is [that] community or just the teacher-student relationship there? I think if they truly felt the kind of community that I am talking about, then it wouldn't be such a huge leap as it seems to be able to say, "okay, this is where I'm interacting here today, but indeed, I can see that this is a building, an institution that needs the support of community, that needs people to be involved. And when I'm called on, I don't just turn a blind eye and totally ignore it."

Terri explains that this criticism ultimately comes from a concern not only for the survival of the CEC, but for the survival of the West African dance and music practices housed there, as well as the other artistic practices supported within the space (which include capoeira, various forms of social and/or concert dance, theater classes, and more). She posits that the gentrification happening in the area means fewer people

moving into the neighborhood will have a personal stake in these particular practices, and the more likely these practices will not be supported, making the need for what she refers to as “building shared community” all the more dire. She has already seen that the changing landscape of Powelton Village has led to requests for different program offerings from new residents and local stakeholders (e.g. contradance). West African dance, warns Terri (who is planning her retirement in the near future), may be the first thing to go upon changeover of leadership at the CEC.

As previously mentioned, participants share this concern about the effects of gentrification. They are aware of the precariousness of the CEC’s position in Powelton Village. How to keep the CEC safe has been a frequent topic of pre and post-class chatter, and I have encountered such conversations in other artist circles around Philadelphia. Reflecting on these separate conversations, I understand Terri’s perception of disparate hubs of ‘community.’

Mama Arlene and Folassshade echo this sentiment and share their opinions that they have observed the existence of cliques within the Monday night class. Folassshade, who moved to Philadelphia in 2007, shares her perspective as an outsider to the city.

Folassshade: I’m not really a full part of Cachet’s community, in her class. I’m just getting to know people. It’s certainly an open space, but I definitely feel like it’s cliquish, because I think people in Philadelphia have been dancing in certain circles together - this is from an outsider’s perspective looking in. It seems that lots of people know each other and know each other’s lives and know each other’s kids, and I am still getting to know people.

Folassshade explains that during her earlier experiences in the Monday night class, she “connected quietly” to the class, coming to dance and then leaving without speaking

with anyone. After a concerted effort to smile and talk to people in the class, she feels she is starting to get to know people, but being in ‘community’ is not necessarily the goal.

Folassshade: I'm not trying to work my way in, and I definitely don't feel pushed out. I think it's probably a lot of my own time and my own personality, but I definitely am on the outside... definitely. And I don't think it's a negative thing.

When we first spoke about this during a conversation in the summer of 2015, Folassshade's perspective was surprising to me. She began taking the Monday night class before I did, and when I first met her I assumed that she knew everyone and was socially engaged with folks from class, outside of the studio. Reflecting on this assumption, I believe I mistook the joy and ease I saw in her dancing as connected to a sort of comfort or familiarity with the space and people around her. I recall that she would make direct eye contact with me and greet me with a warm hello. I remember telling her at some point in the following months that I enjoyed watching her dance, and that the smile she wore on her face while dancing was infectious.

Folassshade: I think you said to me one day, "Wow, you're always smiling. You smile a lot, and it's great to see that." I thought to myself, "I should probably talk to people." [laughs] "Like, be nice." I don't want to be mean, but I go in and out. And so, I remember that, and I thought, "Huh, what are these people like in this class? What's going on with them?" And so, slowly but surely I would just acknowledge if I liked other people and the style of dance that they were doing, like tap the ground next to them or smile and say hello, and eventually I just started to talk to people slowly.

Taking inspiration from Folasshade and others in the class, I try to offer friendly greetings to newcomers in the space, even if it is just in the form of a smile. I am not always successful, sometimes I am too wrapped up in my own thoughts or feelings. Sometimes my effort to connect goes unnoticed or unreciprocated. But the effort itself helps me to feel more connected to the class as a whole.

Folasshade's experience prompts me to view the way my participation in social circles within the Monday night class might be perceived by others. There are several classmates that I consider to be friends, some closer to me than others, and not all of them are close with each other. Some of us will go to dinner together, or spend time talking together before or after class. I have classmates who live just a few blocks away, and we sometimes carpool to class together. I can imagine that such social engagement, interacting differently with various people from class, creates the perception of cliques that may feel impenetrable to others.

Such social sub-groups within the class, according to Mama Arlene, are not necessarily all inclusive. Mama Arlene, an elder, perceives a sense of 'community' amongst those of her generation, and asserts that the younger generation operates in cliques that prevent the manifestation of a connected whole.

Mama Arlene: Amongst the older sisters, [community is] still there. The younger sisters... some of them do it because it's a fad, not all of them, but some of them... And some people need a place to be somebody. If you take that away from them, that's all they have, and I'm not saying it's a bad thing 'cause we all need some sort of expression. But, in the same respect, we're all in the same boat, we're all struggling together. At least I would want to think we're struggling together. But it's not like it used to be. I see factional-

ism, even in African dance, you've got this little faction, these people stay to themselves, instead of everybody coming together.

When elders are present in class, whether they are dancing or playing drums, I have observed that Cachet will usually find opportunities to acknowledge them and honor them during class, calling them out and drawing attention to them. While this is clearly meant as a gesture of respect, and I personally feel I learn from the elders every time I watch them, I wonder if this special attention might also make them feel a sort of alienation from the rest of the class? While I am not aware of whether being called out in this way causes any sort of discomfort, Mama Arlene did express that one source of her sense of alienation comes particularly from what she sees as a lack of investment by the class as a whole in social justice, somewhat mirroring Terri's perception of a diminishment or lack of social responsibility amongst participants. As someone who was significantly influenced by the civil rights, Black Power, and Black Arts movements, Mama Arlene's involvement in West African dance was intimately connected to the social justice.

Mama Arlene: The artistic expression of African dance has survived but the political agenda that kind of rolled along with it has died out.

The overt linkages between African American identity and African culture as a means of empowerment and resistance to marginalization and racial oppression have perhaps transmuted to more subtle messages for some, especially depending upon the experience of the participant. Some may attend the class with racial pride and empowerment as a driving motivation, others may be more interested in physical activity or creative

processes, and there exists, of course, many gradations between bolstered by the proliferation of West African dance classes across geographic, social, and cultural boundaries (Sandri, 2012). On any given night in the Monday night class, there are a number of participants who identify as white/Caucasian, or not of the African Diaspora, and so the issue of cultural/racial identity and social justice takes on a more complex dynamic that is rarely spoken of inside the class.

Sara, who identifies as Caucasian/white, shared that she cannot help but to take notice of her whiteness in the Monday night class. She asserts that it doesn't define her experience, but acknowledges the complexity of white participation in a traditionally African/African-American form. She believes that anything that holds space for African/African American/Black culture is a radical act of social justice in the United States, given the history of racial oppression and marginalization, and the historical disconnection of Black people from African cultures. For her and fellow dancing participant Alexis, also a white woman, they feel a profound connection with West African dance.

While it is this ineffable draw to the artistic practice that grounds their participation, they do so with the aim that their involvement serve as means of solidarity and support. In a group conversation, they both shared the sentiment that when people learn about and participate in each other's cultural practices, differences can be affirmed and celebrated, and social barriers created by ignorance and fear can be broken down. They also expressed a deep concern with remaining mindful about the ways in which they take up space in the class, and shared the understanding that their presence as white

women in the class centered on African Diaspora experiences and culture, and comprised primarily of people of color, is a complex issue and may be viewed in different ways by different participants.

While this particular issue was never raised in conversation by any of the research participants (it was only addressed after I offered questions to directly probe into the matter), references to Africa and African culture (regardless of their racial or ethnic identity) and especially the common use of the words, “we,” “us,” “ours,” by some (particularly by those of color), illuminates an ambiguous sense of cultural membership connected to conceptualizations of African Diaspora identity. The prevalent “all are welcome” narrative of the class amongst participants suggests a sense that there are indeed differences amongst us. Yet, the ‘we’ so easily offered in conversations about ‘community,’ sparks the question around inclusion/exclusion (in regards to race, ethnicity, gender, or any social identity construct) that often goes un-asked and unanswered, “Who are *we*?” I do not suggest that there is a definitive answer to this question, rather, I wonder about the ‘we’ the same way I wonder about ‘community’ as a concept that is complex, fluid, and dependent upon the context in which it is evoked.

This tension embedded in the notion of cultural membership is evident in stories that have been shared about the dichotomy between African American practitioners of West African dance and music and continental African practitioners in the United States (Sandri, 2012; Washington, 2013). The common narrative that I have encountered centers on a question of authenticity and ownership, in which African American practitioners feel that some continental African artists question their right to teach, compose, or

choreograph African-derived music and dance forms. And along these lines, some Americans don't trust other American teachers, and prefer to seek out classes taught by artists from the continent of Africa despite the long and well-established history of West African dance and music practices in the U.S.

Mama Arlene: It has gotten so deep. I've heard Africans say, "Just because you do African dance, you wear African clothes, doesn't make you African." So there's like, dissension in the cultural community which basically is going to affect your political ties, your political beliefs. Because if you thought "you're not African," or, "you're not African American," it just separates everybody... I don't think it will ever get back to the way it used to be. I think that at this point, we as a people... need to sit down and redefine our direction and redefine our goals. Look into and investigate the problems that we are confronted with as a people. And at that point maybe we can begin to reunite.

I clearly recall one Monday night class in which the full battery of musicians was present, along with a very full presence of dance participants. We were celebrating the birthday of one of the musicians, and on this particular night, a Guinean musician fairly well-known in Philadelphia also happened to be in attendance. Aside from the fact that I recognized that this person was not a regular musician in this class (or at least had not been in the years that I have been attending), I knew that his presence was going to create a discernible shift in my experience. Before class began, he warmed up by playing his *djembe* loudly. It was so loud that it actually hurt my ears. Fellow dancers and I shared glances and grimacing facial expressions with each other, collectively wondering why this was going on. During the class, I could hear his sound much more prominently over the other musicians, often in what sounded like opposition to the oth-

er lead *djembe* players who give the breaks (the rhythmic cue to start, stop, or change rhythms). I did not perceive the harmonious "oneness" that is more typical amongst the ensemble. This disconnect does sometimes occur with the regular musicians.

Brytiece: Sometimes the rhythms can get pretty puzzled to where it's not connecting. So, sometimes you just gotta stop and listen, I try to hear every part. And if I can help out... I mean everyone's good at what they do. So, we all come together, we all do this. I give ideas, Terrell gives ideas, Jabar gives ideas, Omar gives ideas, it's a community thing, it's together.

On this particular night, however, I observed the musicians struggling to come together. I also noticed that the musician from Guinea occasionally moved his position in the group, standing on one side of the group and then the other, gesturing as if attempting to conduct the group. I am admittedly not well informed about Guinean music practices, and I recognize that I may be missing important cultural implications in his style of play. What I do recognize, is that the *difference* I perceived was significant to my dancing experience, and seemingly to the experiences of other dancers that night, as well.

While dancing down the floor, a fellow dancer and I quickly exchanged a few words about how difficult it was to find the rhythm with our movement, and how badly it felt on our bodies. It looked as if other dancers were having a hard time, too, as very few people were in sync. The "marriage" was on the rocks. I noticed Cachet had a pained look on her face. Cachet eventually had to pause the class and explain that sometimes the music just doesn't "mesh." I spoke with several musicians who were in attendance that night to better understand their perspective of this occurrence.

Jabar: What happens sometimes is some of the people who come from Africa recently don't realize that these drums have been in America almost a century.²⁶ ... We know people who had played djembe and taught djembe, who had played and taught dundunba, who played ashiko and taught ashiko, who played bata and taught bata... I guess it's an entitlement, or not recognizing that we've developed a high level of playing, even though we're not directly from Guinea or Mali or Senegal. We have our own high level of play. Drums are a conversation, so if you are always the speaker you're not allowing other people to exchange energy with you because you're taking over the conversation. So, that's not a positive energy exchange, and that's what people feel. It doesn't mean that we don't think [the musician from Guinea] is a good drummer, but we're conscious enough to recognize and to feel that the energy exchange is not there, it's not available, and that's how we like to play, you know?

Rather than continue to try to push through the awkward rhythm and confusion, Cachet decided to address the tension, which to me felt palpable in the air. She concluded the class by sitting the dancers down on the floor in front of the musicians. She asked the musicians to play, and requested that each of them take a turn soloing while the rest of the ensemble provided accompaniment. It was in this moment that the musician from Guinea settled into what I perceived as a more supportive role with his djembe while he waited his turn to solo. Each musician improvised, including the Guinean musician, who offered a stunning and virtuosic display of speed, volume, and rhythmic complexity. The overall result was a beautiful and touching display of respect and togetherness, an aural coming together of reciprocal exchange that allowed for the musicians to achieve the harmony that they had been struggling for the entire class.

²⁶ African drums were outlawed during slavery through various state laws, ordinances, and regulations, such as the Negro Act of 1740 and the Georgia Slave Code of 1755. Drum suppression continued well after slavery (Dor, 2014).

I offer this anecdote to highlight conversations around difference that sometimes get framed as national, cultural, and/or energetic. I do not intend to generalize relationships between continental African and U.S.-based practitioners of West African dance and music. To further this point, I recall a more recent occasion when a master musician and scholar from the Ivory Coast, Dr. Djo Bi, visited our class.²⁷ On this night, all the musicians "meshed," the oneness was created. There was a rhythmic harmony that, for me, helped me ease into my movement. I felt energized, light, and unencumbered by any sort of tension. I recall after-class chatter about how much fun it was to have this drummer with us, and how great the music sounded and felt that night.

Considering instances of conflict and tension, I understand how perceiving a void, a misconception, a disconnect, can further shape 'community' as an imagined ideal. What is unavailable, and that which we have yet to achieve, informs what is desired in 'community.' If the desire is, for example, to be a part of a community in which each member takes on equal financial and social responsibility for the sustenance of the collective, then the notions of financial and social responsibility inform what 'community' means for that individual, though it may not be the reality. 'Community' can be understood as a potential that remains to be fulfilled.

I find that the aspects of lack and desire expressed by some participants still uphold the collection of 'community' meanings shared by the majority of participants with whom I spoke; they are not inconsistent with the others. On the contrary, they are

²⁷ As a young teenager, Dr. Djo Bi was a musical prodigy, and was given the title, "The Doctor," by professional musicians and dancers because "he could take any rhythm or sound and make it even better ("Dr. Djo Bi Productions").

in line with collective ‘community’ meanings organized around themes of shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice. The departure is that these particular participants describe the *experiencing* of these meanings in class as lacking, or non-existent, but the overall imagined ideals remain. For example, the lack of shared financial responsibility can fall within ‘shared practice;’ social clicks or cultural tension/disconnects around racial or national affiliation can fall within ‘cultural knowledge and membership,’ as well as ‘support and family;’ and perceiving a diminishing relationship between political activism and West African dance practice can fall within ‘social justice.’ This reflects the notions of utopia addressed earlier in this dissertation. Utopia is not the existence of the ideal, but the *work* towards its potential (Dolan, 2001).

Furthermore, if individuals’ ideas for what constitutes the ideal ‘community’ are ignored or marginalized, that can further erode one’s experience of ‘community.’ I am reminded of Crehan’s (2011) assertion that romantic notions of ‘community’ are commonplace, yet ill-defined. Vacuous ‘community’ narratives in which tensions or conflicts go unexamined can be divisive, laden with false assumptions about the social realities that constitute the ‘communities’ at the center of said narratives. Alternatively, conversations around ‘community’ can serve to shift hegemonic assumptions making space for marginalized voices and challenging oppressive practices (Crehan, 2011).

I begin the final chapter with a brief account of an experience centered on collective work towards desired achievement that encapsulates, for me, the collection of ‘community’ meanings shared with me throughout this research. This experience, a

phenomenon I am referring to as the 'other song,' is a momentary non-verbal communication and manifestation of collective desire and effort through the contribution of our unique selves towards a larger 'whole.'

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINAL REFLECTIONS AND ‘THE OTHER SONG’

The ‘Other Song’

*heard it tonight, a whole other rhythm
on the surface, and then deeper
hear it... feel it in the dance
it doesn't happen often*

*the drums talking, singing
sweet, the rhythm's song
hard to explain
anybody else hear this?*

*get the drummers going,
play on the same accord
everything just meshes
healing and bonding*

*a conversation, a ride
collective sharing of energy
we're all connected, sounds become one,
that's the best world...*

*lock into it, a meditation
hear the drums sing, feel something different
when you're in it, it takes you...
play to go there, it's addictive*

*go there together, drummers and dancers
come alive, see the smiles, spirits lift
Do you hear it? Do you feel it?
not alone, we have arrived*

This poetic transcript was created with text sourced from five participants' reflections about a phenomenon that I refer to as the 'other song.' It is an embodied mani-

festation that marks a communal process of reaching towards potential. It is described here as an additional layer of rhythm or melody, that sometimes sounds like a voice is talking or singing as if out of nowhere, evoking feelings of elation, a spiritual high. It has been explained it to me as the harmony achieved only through the balance of the members of the class (dancers and musicians) contributing our work, our unique selves, while also being totally selfless. Like when musicians, for example, play not for the solo, not to be heard louder than the others, but to reflect what they see happening on the dance floor, and contribute their sound for the good of the whole. Omar, a musician in the Monday night class, explains:

Omar: It's like something else that you feel when you're in it that takes you on a ride... It becomes addictive... Now that's what I play for. I play to go there, not alone, I play to go there with everybody... First I used to play for the flashy sound, to be strong, to be heard... but now I'm playing to get that 'song' out of the rhythm... I think that's where healing takes place that is embedded in this craft, that other form of inspiration and bonding with drummers and dancers alike...you really become closer to those people that you went there with... After I hear that song, I go home and my spirit is that much more lifted... To me, the song is group meditation... When you hear that rhythm and you know that you've reached that place with this group of people, it becomes special, they become special.

Omar's statement about the 'other song,' reflects Welsh's (1985) concept of extra-sensory textures of music and dance that cannot be measured, but are clearly perceived. In the 'other song,' I understand shared practice and purpose, support, interpersonal bonds, and spirit as intertwining textures of experience. It is a melodic and felt convergence of intersubjective understandings of 'community.' This convergence doesn't happen every time; some may experience it, while in that same moment, others

may not. We don't always achieve our ideal, our own discord may get in the way. Our understandings of the ideal may shift, change, or evolve in relation to the people in the room. But after experiencing this convergence before in the Monday night class, after *feeling* its impact, its potential is known and working towards it can galvanize collective effort.

Summary

Upon taking the Monday night class at the CEC for the first time, I felt the presence of 'something larger,' an ineffable presence of a 'whole' that I could somehow access or contribute to through participation. I have experienced this before, especially during my tenure as co-director of the Y Dance Program in Tarrytown, New York from 2007-2012. The collective 'whole' of which I was a part — though its boundaries were also porous and fluid, much like the Monday night class — felt like a discernible entity, what I understood as my 'community.' But it does not happen in every dance setting in which I participate. The fact that others in the Monday night shared my perception, and connected it to the concept of 'community,' bolstered my curiosity and desire to delve in to understanding what 'community' meant to us, and how it relates to this context.

Amans (2008), Crehan (2011), Jaspers (1995), and Koppers (2007) explain 'community' as a term that is broad, vague, and inherently full of tension. When such a term — one that can serve as a spacious vessel for romantic ideas and/or assumptions about the people and social systems that operate within and around it — is employed without context, it can minimize or erase social difference in the effort to promote an

imagined ideal, as Lorde (1984) warns. As such, examining ‘community’ can illuminate political dynamics and power differentials integral to its construction within given contexts and make space for marginalized perspectives that typically become invisible in the effort to uphold hegemonic imaginations of what ‘community’ is and how it works (Crehan, 2011; Lorde, 1984; Melzer, 2002). The notion of imagination is central to Anderson’s (1983) theory of how ‘community’ operates, Zeleza’s (2010) discussions of how ideas of Africa are conjured in identity and community construction, and to Diouf (2013), Sandri (2012), and Washington’s (2013) examinations of this construction within African dance and music practice in the United States.

My research contributes to this discourse by examining how ‘community’ is experienced and understood within a specific dance context, the Monday night West African dance class at the Community Education Center in Philadelphia. Initiating this search through sense perception, I delved into embodied experience with participants, which led us to rich conversations about our conceptual interpretations and understandings.

Through conversation, observation, and participation, the research participants and I generated a dynamic collage of ‘community’ meaning centered on ideas of shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice. “We,” the research participants and I, come together through shared practice, dancing and interacting in and out of the studio; we can experience a sense of collective purpose and responsibility for our well being as a ‘whole.’ Through movement, music, verbal and non-verbal communication, we support each other and, as a chosen (or ‘fictive fam-

ily'), take on each other's burdens on and off the dance floor. We learn about, engage in, and co-create cultural practice, bolstered by the ways in which we participate in each other's lives through this class. And participants' experiences of this class as a space where we collectively learn, embody, preserve, and perpetuate African Diaspora cultural knowledge builds on the legacy of West African dance and music in the United States as a social justice practice.

Through this process I have found 'community' as a multivalent concept to be much like the *Bantaba* circle. It can be improvisational, it can shift and change, it can be a mode to process information, celebrate and affirm, work through tension and discomfort. Individuals can enter it, contributing a unique self-ness, while participating in collectivity. It can also feel isolating, exposing, and anxiety inducing. In the Monday night class, the *Bantaba* is a place where we strive to support and lift each other up, and for some of us, work through our fears in order to be able to dance in the center, alone or with others. I also see 'community' in action in the process of dancing down the floor, progressing through space with our line partners, simultaneously following those ahead of us and leading those behind us, working to perfect the movement - or just to *move*.

Sharing experiences with research participants has highlighted the ways in which we interact with and within the space of the Monday night class, how our cognitive awareness impacts our participation, how we connect to the music and dance (and to musician and dancer), and how extra-sensory elements (including energy, spirit, and vibe) serve as modes of perception and inform our experience. Our conversations have

generated a collection of 'community' meanings, which I have organized into four themes: shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice. These intersecting and interdependent areas of meaning are by no means a comprehensive representation of the expansive range experiences and scope of understanding in the Monday night class. I view them as access points to enter our co-generated 'community' conversation - gateways to further investigation.

Shared Practice

'Shared practice' references West African dance practice as the common chosen activity that brings participants together in the designated time and location of the Monday night class. As such, I understand the Monday night class as what Jordan-Smith and Horton (2001) call a 'community of practice.' The theme 'shared practice' also denotes the feeling of inter-connection within a 'whole,' or individual participation in a collective entity, though the entity may be vaguely defined. I connect this to Berleant's (1994) theory of 'aesthetic community,' in which he emphasizes reciprocal relationships and interconnectedness within a whole. Additionally, 'shared practice' refers to a collective embodiment made possible through intersubjective relationships that include the dance, the music, the space, and social networks on and off the dance floor (Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001; Hamera, 2004; Hamera, 2011; Hast, 1993). I connect this to Bond's (1991, 1994, 2008) 'aesthetic community' in which individual perception and embodied awareness work to create a cohesive collective. The Monday night class makes space for embodied participation such that a collective cultural/aes-

thetic is borne of individual sensory/aesthetic modes of experience (Bond, 1991, 1994, 2008).

This collective embodiment through engagement in the class creates opportunities for experiencing shared somatic states in which we learn about ourselves, each other, and the world (Norris, 2001). Understanding 'community' as shared practice stems from sense perception and bodily knowing, our individual embodiment informs and is informed by the collective.

Examples of this embodiment include the daily mechanisms of class, such as entering the studio and putting on a *lapa*, making eye contact with a line partner and making sure to stay together as you dance down the floor, offering *dobale* and gesturing to the musicians at the end of class (Dalili, 1999; Hamera, 2011). It is within such details of participation that transformation occurs (Bond, 1991, 1994, 2008; Dalili, 1999; Sklar, 2001). The transformation from an individual enjoying a West African dance class into perceiving oneself as part of a collective, that is, from solitary participant to 'community' member, begins through embodied participation of class ritual and protocol (Dalili, 1999; Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001; Norris, 2001). Beyond the minute details, social formations within class facilitate relationships on and off the floor, deepening our collective engagement (Hamera, 2011; Hast, 1993; Jordan-Smith and Horton, 2001). Furthermore, we experience shared embodiment through empathic exchanges, such as those that occur when we celebrate or mourn together, when we enact the mechanisms of daily participation with the purpose of supporting each other.

Support and Family

‘Support and family’ refers to participants’ awareness of the opportunities to contribute to the well-being of the class and the moments in which we may feel like the beneficiaries of such contributions, both of which can engender familial-like bonds. The manifestations of support and family in the Monday night class take place through the rituals of the class and the social interactions within and beyond it. The extended social family (Collins, 2000) or fictive family (Daniel, 2005) offers a support structure within class, which engenders co-accountability through which participants can feel beholden to each other. The manifestations of this relationship include the ways in which we encourage each other through gestures, claps, and cheers; creating a safe and welcoming space to engage in cultural practice that is, for some of us, relatively new and uncomfortable; celebrating and affirming each other’s milestones and achievements (as in the *Bantaba* circle); watching out for the children as they meander through the dance floor; and coming to each others’ aid on and off the floor when needed (through financial, volunteer, and/or moral support). When we feel responsible for each other, we feel like we are not isolated, much like being part of a family.

West African dance gives us particular cultural mechanisms to support and be supported, and to participate in ‘family.’ The *Bantaba* circle, for example, is a spatial formation geared towards support (Davis-Craig, 2009; Welsh, personal communication, 2016). Standing body to body around the circle’s edge we can see and interact with each other, providing encouragement and affirmation as folks enter alone or in groups,

making the collective (and our role within it) visible. In the circle, we can deepen our engagement with each other and understand ourselves as a 'whole' (Stuckey, 2002).

I previously discussed the notion of the 'whole' as related to interconnection and reciprocal relationships within a group. Here, I build on the idea of the 'whole' in regards to the relationship between individuality and collectivity, or the role of individuals towards creating and supporting 'community.' This, according to Chernoff (1981), Malone (1996), Thompson (1966), is an important element of African dance and music aesthetics - everyone plays a part. Reciprocal relationships created through West African music and dance practice are reflected in 'fictive family' titles such as *Mama* and *Baba*, sister and brother (Daniel, 2005). Participants' invocation of the family as a metaphor for the collective reflects the feeling (or desire to feel) part of a larger 'whole.'

Cultural Knowledge and Membership

Together, we engage in dance and music associated with geographic locations, ethnic groups, and cultures within the West African region, and as such, West African dance as a cultural and artistic practice provides the material for participation in the Monday night class. Sandri (2012) and Washington's (2013) studies demonstrate the role that representations of 'West African' dance and perceptions of Africa play in individual and collective identity construction. We learn about sociocultural and historical contexts, including the ways in which dances and rhythms have been preserved, transformed, and/or created by the African and African American pioneers who promulgated this practice in the United States. Benita Binta Brown-Danquah's (1994) survey of

African Diaspora movement practices in Philadelphia provided for me a vital entry point to understanding the rich and complex genealogy of practice that these pioneers generated in this city.

The Monday night class is situated within this realm of practice, and intersects with many other West African dance and music practitioners, performing groups, and classes. Rooted in the larger schema of West African dance and music dance practice, cultural embodiment in the Monday night class traverses complex diasporic space where ethnic and racial meanings and implications may be felt, assumed, yet not clearly delineated or articulated (Sandri, 2012; Washington, 2013).

As in Seye's (2014) study of Sabar dance practice in Senegal, particular to the Monday night class are established class protocol that reflects the modes of participation within this class. The ways in which we acknowledge and celebrate each other's uniqueness and contributions to the class, for example, is an accepted cultural practice in this space. Like when we clap the rhythm for the children as they dance down the floor, their movements usually modified to suit their physicality and/or attention span. We are enlivened by their boundless energy and enthusiasm, and the very young, who seem to lack any semblance of self-consciousness, remind us of what it is to be free from inhibition. Such mechanisms become ritual and cultural norms, informing the ways in which we co-create a social space to express ourselves as individuals and a collective (Bond, 1991, 1994, 2008; Seye, 2014; Hamera, 2011; Washington, 2013).

Social Justice

Common amongst the practitioners and performing groups featured in Brown-Danquah's (1994) survey, is the mission to draw from African culture as a means of resisting oppression in the United States. Embracing artistic and cultural practices of Africa allowed practitioners to examine and raise awareness of racial prejudice and marginalization, counter negative stereotypes about African Diaspora people, and bolster a collective sense of pride around a cultural/racial identity (Brown-Danquah, 1994; Dalili, 1999; DeFrantz, 2002; Diouf, 2013; Philadelphia Folklore Project, 2014; Juang and Morrissette, 2008; Sandri, 2012; Washington, 2013). When we practice West African dance and music, we are upholding and preserving a way of life that may shift and evolve with time, but is ever-rooted in rich cultural traditions that have sustained African Diaspora peoples. As Karolyi (1998) notes, the predicament for diasporic, colonized, or oppressed peoples "is how to salvage, preserve and, if possible, maintain their great musical cultures, which are in danger of being lost in the same way as the folk music traditions have been largely lost in the West (Karolyi, 1998, p. 7)."

Likewise, when we engage in the practices that inform and shape the Monday night class, we are forging a path in an ever-changing urban landscape that has at its roots the rich cultural traditions established by pioneers of West African dance and music in Philadelphia, which have, and continue to be, marginalized. And when we affirm these practices, we are also affirming ourselves, individually and collectively, as practitioners within this genre, regardless of how we self-identify. We galvanize through cul-

tural/artist practice, enacting our human right to (as Mama Arlene says) survive and thrive.

Challenges in 'Community'

Placing our collection of 'community' meanings into categorical themes serves as an organizational tool to support discussion of concepts that, in context, do not operate so discretely within our lived experience. It is virtually impossible to address one element without the others (shared practice, for example, is integral to notions of support and family). One benefit of this approach, however, is that it helps to discern the presence of issues or perspectives that do not fit so neatly into this arrangement, which is an important component of this research. The perception of one-sided relationships (the absence of reciprocity or accountability), cliques and social exclusion, ambiguous perspectives of cultural membership; and a lack of investment in social justice, have undermined, for some, the perception and/or experiencing of 'community.' This highlights the notion that what is often perpetuated as a 'warm and fuzzy' social agreement, 'community' is actually inherently made up of a complex web of tensions between individuals and collectives, involving inclusion and exclusion (Kuppers, 2007).

Terri Shockley's concern about social responsibility on the part of patrons of the Community Education Center (which houses the Monday night class) stems from what she perceives as a lack of collective effort to advocate for the future of the center through volunteer initiatives and/or financial support. She sees each group that uses the space (including the Monday night class) as one of many, disconnected from each other,

and therefore preventing what she views as the potential for building a larger, stronger community that will sustain them all. While it is possible that some may share her perception, and others may not, the discrepancy itself is integral to the discussion of 'community' meaning within this space; difference necessitates a closer examination.

Within the Monday night class, social bonds are formed and performed on and off the dance floor. Dancing down the floor, for example, involves a brief moment of negotiation as participants look for line partners. This sometimes creates a magnifying effect, making visible for just a moment some of the social bonds that exist in the class and ways in which people may feel excluded - which people gravitate towards each other to partner together and which people are avoided. In this brief instance, a process of inclusion and exclusion plays out. Most of the research participants mentioned the welcoming and friendly spirit inculcated within the class. While I do not suggest that social formations within the class negate this perception by any means, I believe that looking just below the surface may reveal different perspectives that often go unspoken. Looking at difference may help us better understand how social formations can uphold or erode experiences of 'community' within this space.

Implications for Further Study

Conversations with fellow research participants have made me aware of perspectives and illuminated experiences that I may never have encountered otherwise. This deepened awareness of my classmates has enriched my experience dancing in the Monday night class, and has affirmed and enlivened my passion for 'community' in-

quiry. Intensively investigating our experiences and finding connections to existing theories is a significantly rewarding process that addresses questions about dance/community relationships that drive my work as an artist, educator, and emerging scholar. This investigation has made clear to me how vast and complex these relationships can be. Continuously returning to embodied experience served as a way to further mine contexts and concepts that emerged in conversation during the research process, while reflecting on embodied experience during this final stage has pointed to questions not addressed in this study that can further contribute to dance studies discourse about dance/community relationships. I have discovered a multitude of rabbit holes that I would like to explore.

First, the presence of children appeared to play a significant role in many of the participants' experiences, and I wonder then about experiences and understandings from the children's perspectives. Second, the role of social media factors in to my experience in terms of generating and/or disseminating information about the Monday night class, as well as building and sustaining social bonds. How does this component impact the experience of other participants? Third, over the past few years I have encountered several people who shared with me that they tried the Monday night class once or twice (or were once regular participants) but have decided not to return. What, I wonder about the factors at play in their decision, and how these factors might inform the examination of how understandings and experiences of 'community' operate in this class.

Finally, I made clear at the start of this dissertation that the overall focus is on experience, rather than a definitive critical analysis of social issues within the class.

And this study has affirmed for me that prioritizing experience can illuminate questions pertinent to critical analysis studies that can contribute to areas of research such as critical race theory, queer theory, and feminist theory. For example, reflecting on Alexis and Sara's comments about the implications of their whiteness within the Monday night class, I wonder about a fuller spectrum of racial perceptions of belonging within West African dance in the United States and how they might operate within a specific dance context in this realm of practice. Reflecting on my own experience of enjoyment in exploring feminine and masculine characteristics when dancing gender-specific dances (a liberty afforded to the women in this class, while men must always dance 'masculine'), I wonder how gender identity and performance within assigned male and female dances — or gender roles in West African dance practice in general — impact the building (or perception) of 'community.'

The work of this dissertation is necessarily limited in scope, and so I have had to resist the urge to follow enticing pathways and stay the course to the best of my ability. My aim has been to foreground the experiences and understandings of 'community' of the research participants.

Emergent Theory

Foregrounding participant experiences and understandings, for me, meant privileging embodiment, and following the data gathered through conversation, participation, observation, and reflection. I did not enter this study with any particular theoretical framework. By placing this in conversation within 'community' theories from a

range of disciplines and perspectives, we contribute to a broad and complex discourse that touches on numerous aspects of this subject, from the issue of definition, to negotiating difference, from pathways of participation to dynamics of space. Through this process, I began to resonate more and more with the notion of the utopian performative as addressed by dance and theater scholars Dolan (2001), Gonzalez (2004) and Hamera (2004). The salient themes of ‘community’ meaning generated in this study: shared practice, support and family, cultural knowledge and membership, and social justice, as a whole, conjure up a utopian ideal, an imagined ‘community’ where we share values, interests and experiences; uplift each other and operate as family; learn together, belong, and survive together.

According to the concept of the utopian performative, however, this ideal need not exist as a product or an established and fixed entity. Rather, it is an imagined future that operates in opposition to reality, and exists as a process, a collective endeavor to reach towards the *potential* of the ideal. This process occurs at the body level, through sense perception, specific to cultural modes of production and emerges through shared experience (Dolan, 2001; Gonzalez, 2004; Hamera, 2004). I now understand that this is where I personally feel the many manifestations of ‘community’ in the Monday night class. It is in the work, the ongoing effort to achieve together week after week, through dance and music. It is in the work to support each other, to welcome each other, to carry each other’s load when we can, to contribute to the collective. I understand that the goal of our achievement may be a moving target, or just generally ill-defined, and is part and

parcel of the work, and as such, so is the negotiating of difference, discomfort, and tension.

The utopian performative as a concept is reflected in the discourse of ‘difference’ by feminist scholars such as Collins (2000), Lorde (1984), and Melzer (2002). Working towards an imagined ideal, or the potential ‘community,’ can create the conditions in which difference is diminished or erased in order to understand the work as successful. Social and political dynamics and power differentials require a deeper analysis to understand their implications on ‘community’ formation and understand (Collins, 2000, 2012; Lorde, 1984; Melzer, 2002).

The tension that I discern within the Monday night class around difference, particularly manifesting as interpersonal rifts or social disconnects (read cliques and/or sub-groups of 'community'), seemingly lies beneath the surface of conversations around 'community' experience and understanding. It is discernible, yet elusive. The fact that any emergence of such discussions led me further away from the core research group is significant, yet also presented a path of inquiry beyond the scope of my study.

There exist West African dance practitioners, and associated realms of practice, that intersect with the Monday night class who I believe might generate a discussion around 'community' that could present a narrative that counters or troubles the utopian notions of those within the core participants of this study. I am interested in how difference is negotiated in utopian spaces, and the implications of the socio-cultural/political structures embedded in the individual/collective relationship within ‘community.’ Perhaps by looking more closely at difference — a fruitful interrogation of what ‘differ-

ence' means or how it manifests within this space, and the ways in which it may be erased/avoided — language can be developed to generate more robust dialogue addressing difference. I imagine that this process, like the concept of 'community,' will be specific to and dependent upon particular contexts. As such, and in line with my optimistic predilection for the ideal, I believe that this process has the potential to bridge gaps that disconnect people in the collective endeavor towards 'community.'

Future Research

The notion that 'pockets of community' exist within a broader community (expressed by Terri Shockley and Cachet Ivey), for me, paints an accurate picture of what many refer to as the Philadelphia African dance and music community. Reflective of the vast diversity of cultures on the continent of Africa, it is comprised of a multitude of distinctive yet intersecting practices, with practitioners who move within and through it, collaborate and exchange, preserve and create. The sociocultural and political history offered in this dissertation represents just a microcosm of this broad, dynamic, and multifaceted community, and as such, merits a much deeper and broader examination. Furthermore, as many of these practices are passed along through embodiment and aural/oral history, written documentation will contribute to the already rich interdisciplinary archive that encompass the wealth of cultural knowledge embedded in them.

Throughout this research process, I was directed to speak with many practitioners in Philadelphia and elsewhere, each who hold particular knowledge about the history and development of West African dance in Philadelphia. As much as I would have

liked to, I was unable to speak with most of them, primarily due to the scope and delimitations of this study. As such, I am particularly interested in a research endeavor uniting the fields of dance history and public history (employing participatory strategies to engage Philadelphia practitioners) to compile information about West African dance and music practice in Philadelphia, building on Benita Binta Brown-Danquah's (1994) survey. This will have significant implications across a range of fields and disciplines, and particularly, for the current and future practitioners of West African dance and music in Philadelphia.

Final Reflections

Back in the coffee shop once again, click-clacking on the keyboard as the tunes wafting through my earbuds drown out the chit-chat of other patrons, the realization of drawing this dissertation to a close is bittersweet. Over the past three years, I have sustained an intensive focus on the Monday night class, and on the experiences and understandings of ‘community’ that participants encounter, create, or contest within this space. Reflecting on this relationship in the Monday night class, for me, conjures images of dancing bodies adorned in colorful attire, traversing the space with grounded shuffling steps and torsos pitched forward, or explosive leaps with extended arms, and rhythmic undulating spines. I see glimmering eyes and bright smiles, and small children running and dodging adult dancing legs. I hear laughter, “Yip!”s and “Ay!”s. I hear the deeply layered percussion that permeates my skin and awakens my tired muscles. I feel

damp skin and sweaty hugs. I feel the wooden floor under my feet as I dance down the floor.

This research journey has affirmed the infinite and inexhaustible depth of the notion of ‘community,’ as well as its relationship to dance practice. For me, it feels at once reassuring and confounding. Utopian ideas of ‘community’ make me feel secure in a turbulent society. Yet, through this research, I have begun to see more clearly the contradictions and tensions embedded in ‘community’ that the ideal could easily mask. This tension feels important to me, especially as I think about the precariousness of the Monday night class in the midst of the rapidly changing urban landscape of Philadelphia. As I sit here typing, I wonder how wounds, rifts, contradictions, and misunderstandings, can be addressed in the effort to sustain this practice for future generations. After a strenuous and demanding research process, this question re-energizes me. I am inspired by the work of Philadelphia-based artists who cultivate and sustain African diaspora practices, and I am thankful for the space to continue exploring my inquiries in the Monday night class through embodied practice and generative conversations with fellow classmates, building on what I have learned through this dissertation study.

We, the participants of this research (and I include myself as the researcher and participant of the class), share a common practice, dancing and playing music together, participating in each other’s lives on and off the dance floor. We give and receive support as we engage in and beyond the class, and often connect to each other as extended family. We encounter, create, and embody cultural knowledge of the African diaspora,

historically rooted in West African dance and music practice, manifested through collective practice in the United States, specifically in this class in Philadelphia. We build this practice on the foundation of social justice movements in the United States and Africa, directly and indirectly enacting it as a mode of empowerment and resistance to oppression. Our sensory experiences are rich and complex, shaping and shaped by intersubjective encounters with the space, with the artistic and cultural content of the class, and with each other. Spatial dynamics, cognitive awareness, music and dance connections, and extra-sensory experience significantly impact our participation and the ways in which we interact.

Within these interactions exist opportunities for our sensory experiences and our understandings of ‘community’ to emerge, intersect, to conflict, or to shift. We may encounter difficulties in this collective space; discomfort and tensions can challenge, inform, and affirm our experience of ‘community.’ All of these elements operate within this class as interconnected, fluid, and shifting components of our participation in the class, and serve as entry points to our individual and collective understanding of what ‘community’ means to us. One of my personal understandings of ‘community’ that I professed at the start of this dissertation — that ‘community’ is the antithesis of individual isolation and collective detachment — has been affirmed throughout this research.

As we end each Monday night class with *dobale* to honor and give thanks, so do I conclude this dissertation with my expression of deeply felt gratitude. I am eternally thankful for the time spent on and off the dance floor with all who contributed to this

work, who so openly and willingly shared their wealth of knowledge and experience,
and who supported, challenged, and encouraged me along the way.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Alexandre, J. (2011). *Towards a theory of dance leadership* (Diss.). Antioch University.
- Amans, D. (2008). *An introduction to community dance practice*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. and extended ed.). London, England: Verso.
- Asante, M. & Mazama, A. (2005). NeGritude. In *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Asante, M. and Mazama, A. (2005). Afrocentricity. In *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Asante, M. (1991). Afrocentricity and the African-American student: A Challenge. *Black Collegian*. 121:4, p. 132.
- Aymer, S. (2016) "I can't breathe": A case study—Helping Black men cope with race-related trauma stemming from police killing and brutality. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26:3-4, 367-376.
- Berleant, A. (1994). Aesthetics and community. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 28, 257-272.
- Bond, K. (2008). The human nature of dance: Towards a theory of aesthetic community. S. Malloch (Ed.), In *Communicative musicality: Exploring the basis of human companionship* (pp. 401-422). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bond K. E. (1994). Personal style as a mediator of engagement in dance: Watching Terpsichore rise. *Dance Research Journal*, 26(1), 15–26.
- Bond, K., & Etwaroo, I. (2005). "If I really see you" Experiences of identity and difference in a higher-education setting. In M. C. Powell & V. Marcow-Speiser

(Eds.), *The arts, education, and social change: Little signs of hope* (pp. 87-99). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- Bond, K. E. and Gerdes, E. (2012). Student performance in a dance-based humanities course at “Diversity U.” In S. W. Stinson, Shu-Ying Liu and C. S. Nielsen (Eds.), *Dance, young people and change - Proceedings of the World Dance Alliance/Dance and the Child International Conference*. Available at: <http://www.worlddancealliance.net/Publications.html>
- Castaldi, F. (2006). *Choreographies of African identities: Négritude, dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*. Chicago, Ill: University of Illinois Press.
- “CEC Arts” Web. www.cecarts.org Retrieved May, 2014.
- Certeau, M. (1984). Walking in the city. *The Practice of everyday life*. Rendall, S. (translator) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 91-110.
- Chenowith, E. & King, G. (2014). When Dance has a voice. In www.thINKing-DANCE.net <http://thinkingdance.net/articles/2014/12/20/3/When-Dance-Has-a-Voice/>.
- Chernoff, J. (1981). *African rhythm and African sensibility: Aesthetics and social action in African musical idioms*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Collins, L., & Crawford, M. (2006). *New thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Collins, P. (2012). Social inequality, power, and politics: Intersectionality and American pragmatism in dialogue. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26(2), 442-457.
- Crehan, K. (2011). *Community art: An Anthropological perspective*. New York, NY: Berg.
- Crowley-Henry, M. (2009). Ethnography visions and versions. J. Hogan, P. Hogan, & P. Donnelly (Eds.) In *Approaches to qualitative research: Theory & its practical application - A guide for dissertation students* (pp. 38-63). Cork, Ireland: Oak Tree Press.

- Dalili, E.N. (1999). "More than a sisterhood:" Traditional West African dance in a contemporary urban setting (Diss.) University of Pennsylvania.
- "Dancer-Citizen" Web. <http://www.dancercitizen.org>.
- Daniel, Y. (2005). *Dancing wisdom: Embodied knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomble*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Brown-Danquah, B. (1994). African Diaspora movement arts in Philadelphia: A beginning resource list. *Philadelphia Folklore Project Working Papers*.
- Davis-Craig, A. (2009). Building community: African dancing and drumming in the little village of Tallahassee, Florida (Diss.) Florida State University.
- Davies, C. (1994). Migratory subjectivities: Black women's writing and the re-negotiation of identities. In *Black women, writing, and identity: Migrations of the subject* (pp. 1-27). London, England: Routledge.
- Davies, C. (1999). Beyond unicentricity: Transcultural Black presences. *Research in African Literatures*, 30:2, 96-109.
- DeFrantz, T. (2002). African American dance: A complex history. In *Dancing many drums: Excavations in African American dance*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 3.
- DeFrantz, T. (2010). Performing the breaks: Notes on African American aesthetic structures. *Theater*. 40:1, 31-37.
- DeFrantz, T. and Gonzalez, A. (Eds.) (2014) *Black performance theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Diouf, E. (2013). *Staging the African: Transcultural flows of dance and identity* (Doctoral dissertation). Evanston IL: Northwestern University.
- Dolan, J. (2001). Utopia, and the 'utopian performative.' *Theatre Journal*. 53:3, p. 455-479.
- Dor, G.W.K. (2014). *West African drumming and dance in North American universities*. Jackson MS, US: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.
- "Dr. Djo Bi Productions." Web. <https://sites.google.com/site/drdjobiproductions/>. Retrieved April 2016.

- Duncan, J. (n.d.) "Dancing the walls down: The Interview." Web. <http://www.geoclan.com/community/articles/cachetinterview.htm> Retrieved May 2014.
- Dyer, R. (1992). Entertainment and utopia. In *Only Entertainment*, p. 19-35.
- Ellis, C. S., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In *The Handbook of qualitative research*. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds). Los Angeles, Ca: Sage Publications
- Emerson, R., et al. (1995). Chapter 1: Field notes in ethnographic research. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Retrieved March 2015 from <http://www.pacificdiscovery.org/credit/SEAreadings/Robert%20et.al%20-%20Writing%20Ethnographic%20Fieldnotes.pdf>.
- Emery, L. (1988). *Black dance: From 1619 to today*. Highstown, NJ: Dance Horizons, Princeton Books Company
- Fine, M. (1998). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In *The Landscape of Qualitative Research. Theories and Issues*. N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 130-155.
- Finley, S. (2008). Community based research methods. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. L. Given (Ed.), Los Angeles CA: Sage Publications.
- Fitzgerald, M. (2008). Community Dance: DANCE Arizona Repertory Theatre as a vehicle for cultural emancipation. In *Dance, human rights, and social justice: Dignity in motion*. N. Jackson & T. Shapiro-Phim (Eds.). Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 256-269.
- "Flyground" Web. <http://flyground.weebly.com>. Retrieved April 2016
- "Fourth Wall Arts Salon" Web. www.texturaldesign.net/fourthwall. Retrieved May 2014.
- Fraleigh, S. (1996). *Dance and the lived body: A descriptive aesthetics*. Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Frichtel, M. (2012). *Freedom, transformation, and community: Student meanings of engagement in a dance-based general education course* (Doctoral Dissertation). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University.

- Garafola, L. (1994). *Of, by, and for the people: Dancing of the Left in the 1930s*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Giersdorf, J. (2013). *The body of the people: East German dance since 1945*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Genzuk, M. (2003). A Synthesis of ethnographic research. University of Southern California Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research.
- George-Graves, N. (2010). *Urban Bush Women: Twenty years of African American dance, theater, community engagement, and working it out*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Gonzalez, A. (2004). Urban Bush Women: Finding *shelter* in the utopian ensemble. *Modern Drama*. 47:2, 249.
- Guta, A. & Roche, B. (2014). Community-based research. *The Sage encyclopedia of action research*. D. Coghlan, M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), London, England: SAGE Publications.
- Hamera, J. (2004). Dancing other-wise: Ethics, metaphysics, and utopia in Hae Kyung Lee and Dancers. *Modern Drama*, 47:2, p. 290-308.
- Hamera, J. (2011). *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hast, D. (1993). Performance, transformation, and community: Contra dance in New England. *Dance Research Journal*, 25:1, 21-32.
- Heard, M. & Mussa, M. (2002) African dance in New York City. In *Dancing many drums: Excavations in African American dance*. T. DeFrantz (Ed.) University of Wisconsin Press, 143.
- Herr, K. & Anderson, G. (Eds.) (2005). *The Action research dissertation: A Guide for students and faculty*. SAGE <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.temple.edu/10.4135/9781452226644>.
- Philadelphia Folklore Project (2014). Honoring Ancestors: Notes from an exhibition. *Works in Progress*, 26:1-2, 4-7, 23-25.

- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A Pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Houston, S. (2005). Participation in Community Dance: A Road to empowerment and transformation? *New Theatre Quarterly*, 21:2, 166-177.
- Jasper, L. (1995). Tensions in the definition of Community Dance. In *Border tensions: Dance & discourse. Proceedings of the fifth Study of Dance Conference*. Guildford, England: University of Surrey, 181.
- Johnson, C. (2009). *Who came before me: The Search for my Tones and Lightfoot roots, and what I found*. Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press
- Johnson, J. (2014). Music, space and community: Participant experiences in West African dance. Unpublished document. Temple University.
- Johnson, J. (2014). Response to Lepecki. Unpublished document. Temple University.
- Jordan-Smith, P., & Horton, L. (2001). Communities of practice: Traditional music and dance. *Western Folklore*, 60:2/3, 103-109.
- Juang, R., & Morrisette, N. (Eds.) (2008). *Africa and the Americas: Culture, politics, and history*. ABC-CLIO.
- Kebede, A. (1982). *Roots of Black music: The Vocal, instrumental, and dance heritage of Africa and Black America*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Kenny, C. (2006). When the women heal: Aboriginal women speak about policies to improve the quality of life. *The American Behavioral Scientist*. 50:4, 550.
- King, J. (2014). Don't Stop 'til you get enough: Presence, spectacle, and good feeling in Michael Jackson's *This Is It*. DeFrantz, T. and Gonzalez, A. (Eds.) In *Black performance theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kolb, A. (2013). Current trends in contemporary choreography: A Political critique. *Dance Research Journal*. 45:3.
- "Kulu Mele". Web. www.kulumele.org
- Kuppers, P. (2007). *Community performance: An introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kvale, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

- Lefebvre, H. (1992). Social Space. In *The production of space* (pp. 68-128). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Lerman, L. (2011). *Hiking the horizontal: Field notes from a choreographer*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Lomas, C. (1998). Art and the community: Breaking the aesthetic of disempowerment. In *Dance, power, and difference. Critical and feminist perspectives on dance education*. S. Shapiro (Ed.) Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 149-170.
- Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider: Essays and speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley: Crossing Press
- Madhani, A. (2015) Timeline: Dozens of unarmed African Americans killed since Ferguson. In *usatoday.com*. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/08/09/timeline-dozens-unarmed-african-americans-killed-since-ferguson/31375795/>
- Maletic, V. (1982) On the aisthetic and aesthetic dimensions of the dance: A Methodology for researching dance style. (Doctoral Dissertation) Ohio State University.
- “Mapping Police Violence.” (n.d). Web. <http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed/> Retrieved April 2016.
- Madison, D. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Malnig, J. (2009). *Ballroom, boogie, shimmy sham, shake: A Social and popular dance reader*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois.
- Malone, J. (1996). *Steppin' on the blues: The Visible rhythms of African American dance*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Mara, T. (1966). *The Language of Ballet*. New York, NY: World Publishing Company.
- McGregor, P. (2013). Dance and civic engagement. *A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change*. Animating Democracy: a Program of Americans for the Arts.
- Melzer, P. (2002). "All that you touch you change": Utopian desire and the concept of change in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents. *Femspec*, 3:31. Retrieved November 14, 2014, from <http://search.proquest.-com/docview/200082635?accountid=14270>.

- Nance, K. (2014). Brothers of the “Bah Yah!”: The Pursuit of maleness in the Umfundalai tradition of African dance. (Diss.) Temple University.
- Nicholls, R. (1994). African dance: Transition and Continuity. In *African Dance: An artistic, historical and philosophical inquiry*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Norris, R. (2001). Embodiment and community. *Western Folklore*, 60:2-3, 111.
- Nketia, K. (1974). *The music of Africa*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Paris, C. (2014). Reading “Spirit” and the dancing body in the choreography of Ronald K. Brown and Reggie Wilson. DeFrantz, T. and Gonzalez, A. (Eds.) In *Black performance theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Peck, M. (1987). *The different drum: Community-making and peace*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- "PFP Honoring Ancestors" Web. <http://www.folkloreproject.org/about/news/HA2013.php>. Retrieved March 2015.
- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Sandri, S. (2012). *Performance, politics, and identity in African dance communities in the United States* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Oregon.
- Seye, E. (2014). Performative participation: Embodiment of identities and relationships in Sabar dance events. A. David & L. Dankworth (Eds.), In *Dance ethnography and global perspectives: Identity, embodiment, and culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shea, T. (2011). Anna Halprin’s 10 Myths: Mutual creation and non-totalizing collectivity. *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies Art & Anarchy*, 2, 9-29.
- Sklar, D. (2001). *Dancing with the virgin: Body and faith in the fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Smith, P. (2014). Outrage in Ferguson: The Shooting of an unarmed Black teen has stirred protest and debate. *New York Times*, September 15, 2014. 6-7
- Snipe, T. (1994). African dance: bridges to humanity. In *African Dance: An artistic, historical and philosophical inquiry*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

- Stanton, C. (2014). Crossing methodological borders: Decolonizing community-based participatory research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. SAGE Publication, 573-583.
- Stoller, P. (1997). *Sensuous scholarship*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Stuckey, P.S. (2002). Christian conversion and the challenge of dance. In *Dancing many drums: Excavations in African American dance*. University of Wisconsin Press, 39.
- Thompson, R. (1966: 1999). An Aesthetic of the cool: West African dance. In G. Tabery (Ed.), *Signifyin(g), sanctifyin' & slam dunking: A reader in African American expressive culture* (pp. 72-86). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Thomas, R., Whybrow, K., & Scharber, C. (2012). A Conceptual exploration of participation. Section I: Introduction and early perspectives. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44:7, 594-613.
- (2012). A Conceptual exploration of participation. Section II: Participation as engagement in experience-an aesthetic perspective. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(6), 746-759.
- Turner V. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Washington, G. (2013). *Performing Africa memory, tradition, and resistance in the Leimert Park drum circle* (Doctoral Dissertation). Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles.
- Welsh Asante, K. (1985). Commonalities in african dance: An aesthetic foundation. In *Moving history/dancing cultures: A Dance history reader*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan Press.
- (1994) (Ed). *African Dance: An artistic, historical and philosophical inquiry*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- (1994). Images of women in African dance: Sexuality and sensuality as dual unity. *Sage*. 8:2, 16-19.

Zezeza, P. (2010). African Diasporas: Toward a global history. *African Studies Review*. 53:1, 1-19.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/ TOPICS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant Biographical Information and Confidentiality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you describe your identity in terms of race, gender, class, age, profession, and/or other social factors? Where do you live? Where is your geographical community of origin? Do you, or have you, taken any dance classes other than Cachet Ivey's class? If so, when did you first begin to take dance classes? How long have you been taking Cachet Ivey's class? What prompted you to begin taking her class? What motivates you to continue to take the class? Do you wish to keep your identity confidential in this research study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do participants conceptualize 'community'? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does 'community' mean to you? Where did your understanding of 'community' come from? What happened? What person, place, or event influenced your understanding of 'community'?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a relationship between participant concepts of 'community' and individual and collective embodiment within the class? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you describe an early (or even first) class with Cachet Ivey that stands out in your memory? What makes it stand out? Can you describe some of the things you noticed in that moment? What did the room look like? What sounds do you recall? Who was there? Are there any particular sensations that stand out in your memory from that day? Can you describe a particular class (recent or in the past), or moment in class, that best represents why you continue to participate in this class? How did you feel? What are some of the sensations that stand out (images, sounds, physical sensations, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is this class socioculturally, politically, and/or historically situated within African Diasporic dance practices in Philadelphia? <p>NOTE: This topic and associated questions are for the elder 'West African' dance practitioners and those in leadership positions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your recollection/understanding of how this class came to be? What is your knowledge of the Community Education Center and its relationship to this 'West African' dance class? How would you describe the history of 'West African' dance in Philadelphia? Who are some practitioners, organizations, or venues that stand out to you as key to the development of 'West African' dance in Philadelphia?

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL



Research Integrity & Compliance
Student Faculty Center
3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304
Philadelphia PA 19140

Institutional Review Board
Phone: (215) 707-3390
Fax: (215) 707-9100
e-mail: irb@temple.edu

Certification of Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects

Date: 23-Mar-2015

Protocol Number: 22863
 PI: WELSH, KARIAMU
 Review Type: EXEMPT
 Approved On: 23-Mar-2015
 Approved From:
 Approved To:
 Committee: B BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
 School/College: BOYER COLLEGE OF MUSIC & DANCE (2200)
 Department: MUSIC:DANCE (22320)
 Sponsor: NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR
 Project Title: Participant Experiences of 'Community' in a 'West African' Dance Class in Philadelphia

 The IRB approved the protocol 22863.

If the study was approved under expedited or full board review, the approval period can be found above. Otherwise, the study was deemed exempt and does not have an IRB approval period.

If applicable to your study, you can access your IRB-approved, stamped consent document or consent script through eRA. **Open the Attachments tab and open the stamped documents by clicking the View icon next to each document.** The stamped documents are labeled as such.

Before an approval period ends, you must submit the Continuing Review form via the eRA module. Please note that though an item is submitted in eRA, it is not received in the IRB office until the principal investigator approves it. Consequently, please submit the Continuing Review form via the eRA module at least 60 days, and preferably 90 days, before the study's expiration date.

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit modification requests for all changes to any study; reportable new information using the Reportable New Information form; and renewal and closure forms. For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the Policies and Procedures, the Investigator Manual, and other requirements found on the Temple University IRB website: <http://www.temple.edu/research/regaffairs/irb/index.html>