PASS THE FLOW:
THE SUBCULTURAL PRACTICE OF LIQUID DANCE

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by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how the subcultural practice of liquid dance emerged from US rave culture and continues to sustain itself and evolve in today's era of social media and EDM festival culture. I draw upon the concept of flow as a lens to trace the historical, aesthetic, digital, social and subcultural trajectory of liquid dance. I analyze how this subculture continues to evolve through individual practice, as well as how dance is shared through online and live dance exchange. My dissertation consists of seven chapters that provide both academic and practitioner perspectives of liquid dance.

My research methods combine a multidisciplinary approach to implementing semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and digital archival research. My fieldwork consists of interviewing fourteen liquid practitioners, as well as conducting ethnographic research at an EDM festival where liquid dancers annually attend and participate. The purpose of this project is twofold. One, to contribute new knowledge to the field of dance studies on the specific dance genre of liquid, which up until now has not been documented in this field. Two, to provide a space for practitioners to openly share their perspectives in a collaborative effort to produce new knowledge.

From the beginning, it has been my intention to produce a dissertation that provides the foundation for a continuing series of academic discussions from which to draw upon for further, future research and critical engagement with liquid dance. This document may also be used as a template for scholars across disciplines to deploy as a lens to analyze and critique other subcultural dance practices within the continuum of rave, club and dance music festivals.

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INTRODUCTION

> Hundreds of bodies dance like water at an abandoned warehouse rave party at 2am, deep in the industrial parks of Kansas City, Missouri in 2001. Suddenly, I am locked into the flow of a raver's fingers dancing in continuous linear patterns tracing the outline of his torso. Every arm, hand and finger gesture matches the precise timing of the booming rhythms of electronic dance music. The bass abruptly ceases, leaving only the synthesized melodic components, inspiring the raver's fingers to mimic the sonic textures of the music, while simultaneously, his patterns shift into spherical shapes resembling an invisible ball. My eyes remain fixed on a series of illusions generated from this obscure form of movement. He sees the bewildered, yet astonished expression on my face. "It's called liquid," he exclaims.

My personal journey into liquid dance began at the rave described above. Raves were underground electronic dance music (EDM) parties that primarily took place at night between the hours of 10pm and 8am and were typically held in unlicensed/illegal venues such as warehouses, abandoned buildings, and outdoor settings like open fields, forests, deserts and beaches (Anderson 2009; Olaveson 2004; Redhead 1993). Between 2001 and 2006, I attended over 100 Midwest raves in the states of Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Illinois. During those pivotal experiences between ages 19 and 24, I observed that liquid was an abundant dance practice at all the raves I attended.[1] During this time I learned the foundations of liquid, which I understand as the technical, conceptual and social dimensions of this dance form. My experiences dancing in the rave scene shaped my appreciation for EDM and my identity as a liquid dancer, and thus my material relation to the practice. As an insider of US rave culture and an avid practitioner of liquid dance, I began this dissertation research project with what historian Herman

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[1] There may have been an exception or two, but to my knowledge every single rave I attended between 2001 and 2006 had at least two or more liquid practitioners other than myself. Many raves, especially those I attended between 2001 and 2003 had hundreds of ravers engaged with liquid on one level or another.

Paul (2015, 50) calls an intuition, which he defines as "a first thought or a first conjecture of what is at stake." My intuition was that liquid dancing represented a fundamental dance form and social practice rooted in US raves.

The Flow of Liquid

The genesis of liquid dance emerged in mid-1990s US raves when three ravers, Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea, Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman and "Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE), developed their individual approaches and styles of liquid. They each began with what Hickman (interview 2016) calls the rudimentary form of liquid, colloquially referred to as the technique of hand-flow: "to move or run smoothly with unbroken continuity as in the manner characteristic of a fluid" (LPC Tutorial 2001). According to Hickman, hand-flow constitutes the process of a dancer's "dominant hand pulling or pushing the other along an imaginary path" or series of paths across the body (Hickman interview 2016). Furthermore, liquid utilizes the hands and fingers to "create the illusion of imaginary objects and paths in space," which is centered on or relative to the space or relationship between the hands (Hickman interview 2016). Notably, both Hickman and the other practitioners I interviewed refer to liquid as a flow-based dance.

Practitioners explore this dance form through a variety of training methods and improvised practices to develop their personal style, and purposely share their individual experiences through dance exchange. These dance exchanges between practitioners take place during a process colloquially referred to as **pass the flow** (see Glossary for all bolded terms), a social dance game that takes place between two or more dancers.

Therefore, I draw from psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) conception of flow theory as my primary theoretical framework to explore and analyze liquid. Flow functions as an overarching concept for this research because it simultaneously describes the movement qualities of the dance form and signals the transmission of liquid's movement technique, subcultural values and social affiliations across different historical moments. Such moments include liquid dancing's migration beyond the US rave scene, as dedicated practitioners shared this dance among one another at clubs and private residences. One particular group of liquid dancers, known as The Liquid Pop Collective (LPC), began working together on brainstorming and fashioning ways to transmit their improvised vernacular dance sequences into what the LPC refer to as teachable "concepts." These concepts serve as the earliest formalized physical and exploratory components of the foundations of liquid dance. In 2002, the LPC created the first liquid dance tutorial in history, which the crew then disseminated in the liquid community through analog video.

Throughout the last sixteen years since the tutorial's release, the Internet became an increasing source for liquid dancers to share their practice through social media blogs. Currently, liquid dancers are connected internationally through Facebook groups specifically catered to this subcultural practice. Thus, I deploy flow in the following ways: first, as a lens to trace the trajectory, progression, and documentation of the narrative accounts of practitioners responsible for codifying liquid into a formal technique; second to describe the digital transmission of the subcultural practice; and finally as a lens to examine the aesthetic dance ideas shared between face-to-face interactions at contemporary liquid events in EDM festival culture.

The Subcultural Practice of Liquid Dance

In 2009, I met Hickman at a nightclub in Honolulu, Hawai'i. We kept in regular contact and became friends since our first dance exchange. Over the last nine years, Hickman has been one of my mentors in liquid dance. In 2012, while earning my Master's Degree in Dance and Cultural Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, I interviewed Hickman. He described at length his thoughts, perceptions, memories and critical reflections on his experiences with liquid dancing in the US rave scene. He educated me on his creative process, philosophies and connections to other practitioners. My conversations with Hickman shaped my understanding of his role within the liquid dance community, and this inspired me to seek out more liquid dance practitioners from whom I could learn.

I subsequently met dozens of practitioners, who self-identified as **liquid heads**, each of whom attended raves in the 1990s and early 2000s. Through my interviews, I confirmed my theory that liquid represented two important, interconnected qualities. First, liquid was the main dance form expressed through ravers who embodied the sonic components of EDM. Second, liquid was a social practice that connected ravers through dance exchange. Thus, liquid was ostensibly, I argue, the primary dance practice connected to and rooted within US raves.

In the chapters that follow, I position liquid dance as a practice that emerged in the 1990s US rave scene. Between 2000 and 2010, raves became less abundant due to stricter venue licensing laws, commodification of electronic dance music, and dispersion of the culture via the Internet, particularly through social media (Anderson 2009;

Rushkoff 2013). The fragmentation of the US rave scene forced liquid dancers to seek out alternative spaces to continue their practice. Such spaces included nightclubs, private residences, and ultimately, social media. By the 2010s, liquid dance evolved beyond its roots in US raves and re-emerged within the contemporary US electronic dance music festival scene. I explore why liquid dance has remained on the fringes of mainstream culture by positioning it as a subcultural dance practice dedicated to preserving, sharing, and innovating the practice among its core group of dancers. I explore and analyze the collective and individual subcultural values that ensure liquid dancing's position as a practice that continues to evolve on its own terms.

Research Focus

I set out to examine how liquid dance emerged, migrated, and evolved from a vernacular dance rooted and created within 1990s US raves into a subcultural practice composed of codified dance techniques that have re-emerged through digital and live sites of interaction. In order to explore the emergence and transmission of liquid, I examine five key questions in the chapters that follow. First, what are the historical and subcultural roots of liquid dance? This illustrates the necessary background of the cultural predecessors to US raves, while simultaneously tracing the lineage of electronic dance music events that fostered liquid's emergence. Second, who were the practitioners responsible for creating the foundations of liquid dance and what was their role in the development of the subcultural practice? The purpose of asking these two questions is to illustrate how the foundations of liquid were shaped by these three individuals, as well as establishing their role in shaping the subcultural practice. Third, what constitutes the

physical components of liquid dance, and how and why did liquid dance become a formalized technique? This two-part question is essential to distinguish the dance form's foundations, and because liquid dance has remained largely unknown to the mainstream, as its roots stem from a US rave-based culture that no longer exists. Fourth, how and why did liquid dance migrate from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media? This question is essential to understanding how the dance form has been documented, disseminated and shared in early and contemporary digital media. And finally, how is liquid dance created, shared and perpetuated through live dance exchange? This final question addresses what liquid dance can do for individual practitioners. It is the question that serves as my guide during my culminating experiences at a three-day EDM festival dancing with six other liquid dancers.

Addressing each of these research questions leads me into my thesis argument that liquid is the embodiment of a continuous flow of shared ideas expressed through the hands of the dancer, consolidated through subcultural community, disseminated through video and digital technology, and perpetuated through face-to-face dance exchange.

Statement of Methodology

Given that liquid dance remains a niche, subcultural practice, it is not surprising that this research project represents the first PhD dissertation inquiry into liquid dance in the field of dance studies. Currently, Diego Maranan's (2012) unpublished Master of Arts thesis remains the only academic work that addresses specific questions around liquid dance. No other academic work directly references liquid dance, let alone acknowledge its place and contribution within the larger context of 1990s and early 2000s US raves.

The lack of attention to vernacular dance practice generally is a major gap I discovered within the fields of club culture and subcultural literature. According to popular dance scholar Sherril Dodds (2011), this marks a symptom of a broader concern within the academy that vernacular dance forms have been historically overlooked and marginalized.

Aside from the absence of academic literature on liquid dance, another research challenge is that most of the publically available video documentation of US raves do not directly reveal liquid as an abundant dance practice, let alone its earliest embodied forms. The majority of publically accessible documentation showcases at best a vague peripheral viewpoint of rave culture, highlighting silhouettes of rave patrons, close-ups of DJs, and blurry images of laser lights. The majority of dance related footage consists of the collective crowd throwing their hands in the air, skewing the nuances of individual dance exchanges that frequently occurred at such events.[2] Thus, a major task concerns determining what constitutes the dance form's physical components.

I therefore deploy a qualitative research methodology that privileges the words and cumulative experiences of liquid dance practitioners. The purpose of this is to examine the nuances of dance exchange and subcultural values embedded and perpetuated within such exchanges. I aim to delineate the movement characteristics of this dance practice, which in turn, reveals a series of nuanced individual approaches to

[2] It has been one of my hobbies since long before this research project began to attempt to find any and all dance footage available from 90s US raves. I have sifted through hundreds, if not thousands of YouTube and other public Internet access forums to find evidence of liquid dance. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, 4 and 6, one of the main reasons for the lack of documentation on dance, especially liquid, within this time period and scene is because cameras were not commonplace at US raves in the 1990s. Cameras were considered invasive at the time, according to my interviewees as well as scholars like Anderson (2009) and Redhead (1993) who have done extensive work on raves.

this dance form and methods of transmission and exchange through video, digital and face-to-face means. My primary research method is ethnography, which incorporates interviews with fourteen liquid practitioners, examination of digital communities of liquid practitioners, and participant observation at an EDM festival. This is further supported by archival research of online video documentation of liquid, and first-person reflexive methods, situated in my own practice as a liquid dancer. I will return to the detail of this in Chapter 2.

The critical literature that I use to examine the phenomenon of liquid is situated across club cultures scholarship, subcultures scholarship and dance studies. Unlike popular dance styles that attract mainstream attention (such as breaking, house, and other hip-hop forms), liquid has remained linked to the status of what club culture scholars often refer to as an "underground" dance form (Anderson 2009; Buckland 2002; Hall 2013). Therefore, I situate liquid as a subcultural dance practice that emerged within the 1990s underground US rave scene. According to post-subcultural theorist Ross Haenfler (2014), subcultures are challenging to define. Although members of any given subculture may share a common group identity, marked by the values perpetuated within the subcultural practice, such values remain as fluid as the members themselves. For liquid dancers, this is no exception, as individual practitioners choose to participate according to different degrees of investment. Although I describe liquid as a subcultural dance practice, to acknowledge the complexity of this definition, in Chapter 1, I trace the lineage of subcultural (Hebdige 1979) and post-subcultural theory (Muggleton 2000). I do this to understand the fluid nature of subcultures, their members and the nuances of values perpetuated within niche social groups. In the context of the subcultural practice of

liquid dance, it is important to understand how scholars from the disciplines of club culture literature (St John 2009) and popular dance studies (Dodds 2011) conceive of what constitutes a subculture. The reason is that subcultures are not fixed entities, and are in fact fluid with nuanced levels of participation. And the subculture of liquid dance is no exception.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first two chapters examine the critical literature and my methodological framework, while the remaining five address the emergence, migration and evolution of liquid dance. In addition, I provide a conclusion chapter that synthesizes and reflects upon my research findings. Chapter 1: Literature Review discusses the pertinent academic and popular resource material to contextualize liquid and its foundational roots. This chapter is composed of three sections. Section 1 provides a review of relevant fields of literature on rave, club, and EDM festival culture. I examine this expansive area of literature to establish the historical, social and cultural conditions under which liquid dance emerged within US raves. I draw from areas within this field to address aspects of EDM, venue space, mind-altering substances, identity and aesthetics in order to analyze practitioner experience with liquid dance. Section 2 outlines and analyzes subcultural and post-subcultural theory, as it is my assertion that liquid dance is a subcultural practice. In this section I trace the progression of research on music and dance subcultures and how scholars within this field have shifted trajectories from subcultural to post-subcultural frameworks. Section 3 engages with two specific areas of dance studies. The first is theories of dancing bodies in studio practice. I draw key terms

from dance studies scholars, specifically Susan Foster's (1997) approach to dance technique, Danielle Goldman's (2010) and Kent De Spain's (2014) theories of improvisation, and Carrie Noland's (2009) conception of kinesthetic agency. Second, I draw from the sub-discipline of popular dance studies (Dodds 2011). This is a useful lens through which to view subcultures as well, particularly liquid dance. Popular dance studies offers a perspective that centers on how dance is produced, circulated and consumed. It is also a tool to examine how dance emerges, is transmitted and engaged with by practitioners.

In Chapter 2: Methodology, I establish my primary research method as ethnography. Section 1 details my ethnographic, first-person perspectives, and autoethnographic facets of my research. Section 2 outlines and explains my fieldwork, with subsections devoted to explaining how I obtain data through the digital archive, interviews, and participant observation. Section 3 details my means of data collection throughout my research process. This chapter also addresses issues of limited access to historical information on liquid on two levels. The first involves levels of documentation, specifically, the limited video footage of liquid dancers at US raves. The second issue rests in obtaining access to practitioners. To supplement my online archival research I discuss the importance of privileging the words of practitioners whose testimonies construct liquid's history, migration and evolution. Lastly, I outline my methodology for conducting ethnographic research of an EDM festival where liquid dancers annually participate.

Chapter 3: The Roots of Liquid Dance examines the first research question: what are the historical and subcultural roots of liquid dance? In order to trace the roots of

liquid, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first three sections investigate the historical predecessors of US rave culture: Disco, House, and Acid House. Each of these music and dance cultures shaped the social, musical and dance foundations of US rave culture, which I argue contribute to the emergence of liquid dance. The final section of this chapter illustrates and analyzes the social, spatial, temporal, musical and cultural conditions of US raves where liquid came into being. This section is supplemented by the narrative accounts of some of the earliest liquid dance practitioners who utilized glow-sticks as a tool to explore and develop nascent versions of this dance form.

Chapter 4: Pioneers of Liquid examines the experiences of three key practitioners whose innovations and actions paved the foundation to liquid's full emergence. This chapter analyzes the personal narrative accounts of Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea, Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman and "Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE). Here I turn to the second research question, which asks who were the practitioners responsible for creating the foundations of liquid dance and what was their role in the development of the subcultural practice? To do so, I examine how each dancer's process of improvising and experimenting with liquid, and how their individual experiences and approaches to liquid contribute to the foundations of the dance form. I draw from dance studies scholars Goldman's (2010) work on improvisation, Foster's (1997) approach to dance technique, and Noland's (2009) conception of kinesthetic agency to examine each practitioner's contributions to the foundations of liquid.

Chapter 5: The Liquid Pop Collective (LPC) addresses the third research question that focuses on the two-part question of what constitutes the physical components of liquid dance, and how and why did liquid dance become a formalized technique? The

purpose of exploring this question is to examine how the LPC formed as a dance crew, eventually developing and formalizing movement vocabulary that marked the first codified foundations of liquid. I continue to draw from Foster's (1997) conception of obtaining an "ideal body" (the technical ideal as demonstrated by a real or imagined expert dancer) and a "perceived body" (the everyday, sensed body of the dancer). Foster's lens enables me to analyze the process of the individual members of the LPC developing their personal style of liquid dance. I also draw from subcultural theory (Bennett 1999; Haenfler 2014) to examine the subcultural values of sharing, documenting, creating and preserving personal style of liquid dance. Here I explore the personal styles of the LPC, which the crew documented in analog VHS format (LPC Tutorial 2002). This chapter reveals how the nuances of the LPC's individual styles of liquid have accumulated, codified, and continue to shape the expanding physical components of this dance form.

Chapter 6: Digital Flow looks at how and why liquid dance migrated from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media. The chapter examines the particular subcultural values perpetuated digitally, as well as how such values shape localized perceptions of liquid dance, and the continuously expanding community of liquid dancers. In this chapter I deploy a media and communications perspective, drawing from media and digital communications scholars Nancy Baym (2010), Kate Hennessy (2012) and Douglas Rushkoff (2013) to examine the spread of digital information and its effects on transmission. This chapter analyzes the online social network blogs of Reflective.net (2002), YouTube (2005), Floasis.net (2007), and Liquid Lab (2012). Each online forum functioned as message boards that provided the first online spaces for liquid practitioners

to post videos, voice their opinions and ask for critiques about their practice. I explore what each of these forums provides for practitioners, as well as the how each forum contributes to the sustainability and progression of liquid dance.

In Chapter 7: Pass The Flow, I explore my final research question: how is liquid dance created, shared and perpetuated through live dance exchange? The chapter focuses on the ethnographic research I conducted during the summer of 2017 at Sonic Bloom in southern Colorado. This final chapter investigates the vernacular practice of passing the flow, which I argue serves as a conduit for dance exchange. This chapter provides first-hand accounts of my interactions with six practitioners who attended Sonic Bloom. I return to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow theory to explore and analyze my participant observations of liquid dance exchanges that took place at this festival.

In the Conclusion to the dissertation I synthesize my research findings as evidence of my thesis statement. These ideas are historically situated along a continuum of vernacular dance practice associated with rave, club and festival culture. The face-to-face dance exchanges of pass the flow represent a channel through which aesthetically and physically charged ideas flow between dancing bodies. Finally, I reflect on my research process (strengths and weaknesses) in order to set the foundation for continuing work devoted to liquid dance. As an avid practitioner of seventeen years, this dissertation is my contribution to dance studies, and my personal tribute to those who pioneered, and continue to elevate this dance practice.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that focuses on the areas of club, rave, and festival culture, subcultural and post-subcultural theory, and dance studies. In the context of my investigation into liquid dance, I position these fields of study as an interconnected network of topics and theories. One of the challenges for choosing, categorizing and connecting these three areas of study is that several topics and scholars fall into all three categories. Thus, I discuss some of the scholarly work in more than one section, while others are chosen for their specific contributions within a particular niche area pertinent to my study. In section one, I conduct a review of club, rave, and festival literature to trace the emergence of liquid dance in 1990s US raves. This allows me to illustrate the complex musical, cultural, social, temporal and spatial conditions under which liquid dance first evolved. In section two, I examine the academic lineage of subcultural and post-subcultural theory to examine the collective and individual values perpetuated among liquid practitioners. Subcultural and post-subcultural theory allows me to track the migration of liquid dance practitioners from the early face-to-face encounters at US raves, their online interactions through digital platforms, to their current live exchanges within EDM festival culture. In section three, I review specific work within the field of dance studies in two key areas: examination of the dancing body in studio practice and the social networks that develop through popular dance. Together, both strands of dance studies function as lenses through which I analyze the accumulating experiences of liquid practitioners that have shaped, and continue to shape the evolution of the dance form.

Club, Rave, and Festival Literature

For the past two decades, a robust scholarship has developed in response to club, rave, and festival culture. Topics include the sonic components, musical structure, performance and presentation of electronic dance music (Butler 2012; Solberg 2014); sensorial experience within venue spaces (Landau 2004; Malbon 1999); the collective and individual vibe(s) generated and shared in rave and club spaces (Anderson 2009; Olaveson 2004; St John 2004); connectedness experienced between the collective participants of raves and clubs (Olaveson 2004); dimensions of identity in terms of gender, age, class and sexuality (Gregory 2009; Hall 2018; Pini 1997 and 2001; Thornton 1995); the individual and social effects of mind-altering substances (Redhead 1993; St John 2004; Tramachhi 2004); and the ritual and spiritual connections to rave, EDM and drugs (Gautier 2004; Gerard 2004; St John 2009). The purpose of this section is to examine and critique how club, rave and festival events have been conceived in academic literature, and to provide the reader with a foundation for understanding of how specific elements within club, rave and festival spaces directly impacted the emergence of liquid dance.

Structure of EDM

I begin my analysis of the literature devoted to the structure of EDM, which encompasses the sonic components of this musical genre. In this section I draw distinctions between different categories and musical qualities of EDM to illustrate both the similarities between different styles and the subtle differences that separate them. Communications studies professor Kembrew McLeod (2001, 290) frames EDM as an

umbrella term to describe a "heterogeneous group of music made with computers and electronic instruments—often for the purpose of dancing." EDM, like rock and hip-hop, is a musical genre. Popular music scholar Franco Fabbri (1981, 52) defines musical genre as "a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules." These rules, however, are not absolute. This is especially pertinent to the continuum of EDM, which is why this genre is separated and categorized into multiple subgenres (such as **house, techno, trance, breaks, jungle, and drum 'n' bass**). To both the untrained and trained ear, it is challenging to draw clear distinctions between these different, but at times overlapping, forms of synthesized music. Yet, for liquid dancers, the particularities embedded within the sonic components of different categories of EDM shape individual taste. Articulation of EDM music preference represents one of the core subcultural values within the practice. For this reason, I review the literature that analyzes the musical qualities of EDM.

Musicologist Mark Butler is one of the leading scholars in this field of study. He has published several books and articles centered on the musical structures of EDM. Butler (2012) states that a fundamental characteristic of EDM resides in the repetition of repeating rhythmic patterns, referred to by dancers and DJs as a loop. Each of these loops (depending on the subgenre of EDM) contain distinct rhythms, "any phenomena involving musically organized time," and meter, "a specific subcategory of rhythm having to do with the measurement of time" (Butler 2012, 23). Butler draws the distinction between what fans understand as "**four-on-the-floor**," which is 4 beats per measure (the distance between two notated musical bars), and which is composed of 4-quarter-notes in each measure (Butler 2012). Furthermore, the phrase "four-on-the-floor"

is a representation of the characteristic rhythm and pre-programmed drum patterns of house, techno and trance music. In contrast, **break-beat** rhythms of EDM such as jungle, drum 'n' bass and breaks, are syncopated (irregular and broken apart), emphasizing the "weaker" beats while deemphasizing the "stronger" beats (Butler 2012, 23).

In addition to beat structure, the speed, or tempo of EDM also represents a crucial component of how music is constructed by producers, presented by DJs, and received by dancers. Popular music scholar Philip Tagg's (1994) essay "From Refrain to Rave" was one of the first to explore BPM (beats per minute) in electronic dance music, as well as **sampling** vocal elements, bass, melody, and other sonic attributes. For example, house and trance both have a four-on-the-floor rhythm and structure, but house averages between 110-125 BPM and trance averages between 120-145 BPM, denoting clear differences in tempo, and therefore how they sound, feel, and are danced to at any given event.

DJs (in any genre) compose what is colloquially referred to as a **set**, which encompasses a pre-programed order of **tracks** that are played on two turntables that play music from vinyl records, or two **CDJs** for music digitally programed onto CDs. Although this literature review does not provide an expansive historical account of hip-hop, it references key hip-hop DJ techniques in order to show the parallels and similarities within club, rave and festival spaces. For instance, one common DJ technique known as **cuts** involves the removal and eventual return of the bass drum (Butler 2012). Dancers often use the term **breakdown** to describe the absence of the bass drum. When the DJ **drops** (or reintroduces) the bass, the crowd dances with greater intensity. DJs in

effect tease the crowd by removing the beat and bringing it back (via the twist of a knob on the **mixer**) in carefully controlled intervals, which adds both variety and anticipation.

For instance, musicologist Ragnhild Solberg (2014) conducted case studies of two **electro-house** tracks: "Body" by Cinnamon Chasers (2013) and "Icarus" by Madeon (2012). Solberg argues that both tracks contain distinct builds and drops strategically programmed to elicit the strongest possible emotional and movement responses from the crowd. She describes builds as the gradual introduction of synths, melodies, and drum-patterns, followed lastly by the addition of the bass. The removal and reintroduction of bass and bass drum creates tension within the dancing crowd in the form of anticipation.

Solberg supplements her structural analysis with the emotional responses of EDM fans, which she quotes directly from online the comments posted on SoundCloud.[3] Although Solberg privileges the words of listeners, she balances their lay responses with data from amplitude graphs and spectrographs to visually illustrate the build-ups, breakdowns, and bass drops of the above tracks (Solberg 2014). What this dual approach does is combine qualitative with quantitative research methods. Although this dissertation does not employ a quantitative approach, I draw from portions of Solberg's findings. Her work provides a deeper understanding of the connections to specific sounds, as well as the circumstances under which the music was created, performed and consumed.

From Solberg's structural breakdown of EDM, she theorizes the following emotional and physical responses that dancers experience at different points during an individual track. Solberg (2014, 63) divides the physiological and psychological responses into five categories: imagination, tension, prediction, reaction and appraisal.

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[3] SoundCloud is a social media platform for storing and sharing music files that is available in both free and paid formats.

From my experience as a liquid dancer, it is possible to see how these categories map onto liquid dance practice. As an EDM track progresses, the listener or dancer *imagines* how the track will change in terms of what is added, subtracted, amplified or deemphasized. For liquid dancers, this causes *tension* in the body's muscles and limbs. With decades of experience, we (as dancers) are able to *predict* both dramatic and subtle changes within the music. For instance, when a dramatic shift occurs, such as the drop of the bass, dancers *react* to the bass by drawing from his or her movement vocabulary, which Solberg (2014, 63) understands as "embodied music cognition." Finally, a dancer consciously evaluates his or her experience of the EDM track through his or her *appraisal* of the moment. Although Solberg does not explicitly state what she means by "appraisal," I think she is talking about how dancers feel about the quality of the moment they experienced, although this can manifest itself in any number of ways, hence the need for further clarification.

The main purpose in setting up this complex musicological apparatus is to explore how distinct sonic components of EDM shaped, and continue to inform the physical qualities of liquid dance. In later chapters, I show that the foundations of this dance form are as diverse and distinct as the musical textures of EDM.

Collective and Individual Experience

Several scholars have conducted research on patrons' narratives of their collective and individual experiences within club, rave, and festival spaces. Club culture scholar Ben Malbon's (1999) book *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality* is one of the earliest attempts to capture the experience of clubbing as a whole. Malbon frames the collective

experiences of clubbers as an *oceanic experience*: “sensations of extraordinary and transitory euphoria, joy and empathy that can be experienced as a result of the intensive sensory stimulation of the dance floor” (Malbon 1999, 105). This sensorial stimulation is influenced by a multitude of visual (lighting within the venue), auditory (music and its sonic components), social (connections to and interactions with clubbers), and kinesthetic (embodied responses through dance) variables within the continuum of club spaces.

To trace and explore these variables, Malbon privileges the words of his interviewees who participated in various club and rave events. Yet, they do not articulate detailed accounts of what they physically experienced in their bodies as they danced, let alone what the dancing looked like. Malbon’s lack of attention to kinesthetic analysis of individual dancing bodies marks a symptom of a larger issue within club, rave, and festival literature. Specifically, this literature tends to privilege ideas that conceive clubbers, and relate their experiences, through the lens of a collective dancing crowd. This fails to differentiate individual clubbers with specific identity positions, and overlooks the individualized dance practices they embody within club spaces. The result is a vague generalization of participants who “lose themselves” through dance.

For example, Malbon argues that the combined sensorial experiences of individual participants create strong desires to share with others through dance, connecting both individual and group identity formations. These experiences include “feelings of *loss* (of self, of time, of place, of limitations) and feelings of *gain* (of unity, of oneness, of an ideal place, of release)” (Malbon 1999, 105). Every club participant plays individual and group roles that create the collective club experience, which simultaneously shapes individual experiences. This is one of the primary tensions within

club culture literature: while later scholars have begun to privilege individual experience, the earlier scholars focused on individuals "losing themselves" to the group collective experience.

The notion of "loss" not only applies through experiences of collective dancing, but several scholars have focused on the mind-altering substances that are consumed within club, rave, and festival spaces. The most popular, is a substance known as MDMA (3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine), synthesized in Germany in 1910 by chemist Anton Kollish (Reynolds 1998; Takahashi 2004). By the 1970s, the substance was utilized as an alternative medicine for psychotherapeutic purposes. Popular colloquialisms associated with MDMA include "E," "X," "ecstasy," "the hug drug," "Molly," and the colloquial action verbs symbolizing the effects of the substance, such as "rolling" or "dropping" (Collin 1997; Reynolds 1998 and 1999; St. John 2004). Club, rave, and festival scholars have classified MDMA as a hallucinogen with the properties of mind-altering substances designed to flood the brain with a burst of serotonin and thus drain the supply of this chemical mood enhancer (Malbon 1999; Anderson 2009). However, the term hallucinogen has a pejorative connotation to it.[4] Club culture scholar Jonathon Ott (1996) therefore provides an alternative suggestion. Ott prefers categorizing MDMA as an entheogen, or entheogenic substance.[5] Furthermore, Ott (1996) asserts that classifying club drugs as entheogens places such substances in their individual cultural contexts of use.

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[4] The term hallucinogen has a pejorative connotation because of the stigma associated with its potential negative psychological effects.

[5] Entheogen and entheogenic substances are terms implemented by scholars to describe MDMA. They serve as non-pejorative terms designed to change the perceptions of the drug's effects on individuals. See St. John (2004).

Scholars have conducted interviews with ravers who openly discussed their experiences with MDMA. Ravers have attempted to articulate their ecstasy drug experiences with phrases like "feeling free," "connected," "euphoric," and "alive" (Malbon 1999; Olaveson 2004; Reynolds 1998; St John 2004). As rave culture scholar Simon Reynolds (1998) suggests, MDMA produces a communal or collective utopia, where ravers feel a sense of connectedness and unity. Such utopic views of MDMA and rave have since been critiqued by rave and club culture scholars for neglecting the negative effects of the drug, such as overdosing and deaths (Redhead 1993). One of the main issues with addressing experiences with MDMA, or any illegal substance in an academic context, is the possibility of facing scrutiny from law enforcement. Another challenge is that charting the individual experiences with MDMA remains notoriously difficult to describe.

That being said, the available club, rave, and festival literature on MDMA provide an important perspective on the social, psychological and physiological effects of this mind-altering substance. I argue that MDMA is one of the key substances that contributed to liquid dancing's emergence within 1990s US raves. According to my interview with Hickman (2016), its psychological effects consist of "an overwhelming sense of empathy and connection with ravers." In turn, this creates a social space that welcomes and encourages sharing through dance. Moreover, the physiological effects of MDMA soften the muscles of the body. According to Hickman (interview 2016), MDMA "makes you feel like jelly." This kinesthetic feeling, embodied through liquid, is an important aesthetic quality of the dance form that I explore in depth in Chapter 4.

The combination of electronic dance music and MDMA produce what ravers colloquially refer to as a collective vibe, or vibes shared among individuals. The concept of vibe(s) has been theorized across the spectrum of EDM events. I distinguish between the singular noun *vibe* to denote what has generally been accepted in the literature as the "collective" energy, atmosphere and experiences of patrons within club, rave, and festival spaces (Anderson 2009; Malbon 1999; Olaveson 2004; St John 2004). The plural version, *vibes*, represents the individual energy projected in club, rave, and festival spaces, as well as individual experiences and how they are perceived. In the context of club, rave, and festival spaces, vibe(s) remains site-specific to each event (Anderson 2009). The literature addresses the following variables that directly impact how site-specific vibes emerge: venue space, the selection of EDM music, the presence and option of ingesting mind-altering substances, and the participants (St John 2004). While it is not my intention to explore the concept of vibe across the spectrum of EDM club practices, I consider it here as an important component to the historical development of liquid dance in US raves.

In club, rave, and festival literature, vibe has been theorized as that which constitutes both the "connectedness" of all participants, as well as the collective and individual energy to create the atmosphere or ambiance of raves (Olaveson 2004; St. John 2004). Cultural anthropologist Graham St John (2009) contends that the immediacy of the present moments in clubs, raves, and festivals, combined with the sense of collective ethos powered by electronic dance music generates a particular vibe. Vibe has also been conceived as a way of generating an alternative utopian community (Malbon 1999). Utopian, in this case, represents the ideal conditions within raves where everyone is on

the same collective vibrations in terms of positive emotional energy. However, this conception of vibe has been critiqued by scholars, such as Julie Gregory (2009), who argues that individual motivations play a vital role in generating perspectives and perceptions that in many ways contradict the narrative of a collective utopia.

Religious anthropologist Tim Olaveson (2004, 90) has stated the vibe of a rave represents "a kind of energy or pulse that cannot be expressed or understood in words, but as that which can only be physically [and emotionally] experienced." I would contend, however, that this perspective assumes that the experience of vibe is somehow beyond the discursive. In later chapters, my interviewees articulate and reflect upon the importance of the multiple dimensions and interpretations of vibe. Olaveson attributes the collective unity of vibe to group feelings of connectedness, through which individuals become immersed. In this framework, the individuals "lose" themselves to the collective energy, or vibe, of the rave. As I will show in Chapter 3, I agree with Olaveson's description of the overarching characteristics of the vibe as empathy, acceptance, love and compassion. However, I find the idea of loss and losing one's self to the collective to be a limiting perspective. In both my own experiences at raves among liquid dancers, and as I will demonstrate through interview material and field data in later chapters, connectedness involves finding one's self through dance and conversation.

Dancing Bodies in Club, Rave, and Festival Spaces

Anthropologist Graham St John's (2006, 247) primary critique of club, rave, and festival literature is that many scholars "neglect the central role of music and dance, constructing idealized versions of raves and clubs rather than actual instances of situated,

performed events." St John (2006, 257) notes that he "has yet to see a full-bodied penetration of a dance scene informing scholarship." For example, Malbon (1999, 100) states that participants resonate with the rhythms and bass of EDM, which directs individual bodies in terms of "what to do where and in what way through the bodily practices of dancing itself." Although Malbon's research provides insightful theories on clubbing's cultural, social and spatial dimensions, his attention to the dancing bodies of clubbers lacks serious analysis of physicality, techniques and improvisation.

A similar problem with lack of attention to the physical components of dance is found within club culture ethnographer Phil Jackson's (2004) research on international clubbing practices (both queer and heterosexual) within the United States, Europe and Asia. Jackson does provide a possible template for theorizing the social dynamics and spacings of clubbers' bodies in the space of nightclubs throughout the progression of what he frames as a "typical" evening of clubbing (at least from his experience) by listing and describing five stages of the dance floor's development. However, he collapses his findings into a universalizing formula through broad generalizations. Jackson's (2004, 18) writing remains vague through descriptions of clubbers "beginning to move into *the dance* [my emphasis] by experiencing the music as an irrepressible embodied force." This prompts me to question what exactly is "the dance" to which he refers, and what does he mean by an "irrepressible embodied force"? Although Malbon and Jackson are not dance scholars, given that their work centers on electronic *dance* music culture, they virtually ignore dance altogether. It is in response to this glaring omission that I intend to make an intervention through a focused study on the club cultural and subcultural practice of liquid dance.

Subcultural and Post-Subcultural Theory

As established in the Introduction of this dissertation, I conceive of liquid dance as a subcultural practice. In this section, I review the lineage of scholars who have contributed significantly to this field, and draw from key theoretical frameworks pertinent to my study. Subcultural theory stems from the 1970s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (Cohen 1972; Hebdige 1979). Defining the parameters of a subculture has been a subject of continuous debate since the earliest attempts by sociologists and anthropologists. For instance, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) research within the intersecting fields of popular culture, history, economics and politics led to his theory of habitus, the process through which culture perpetuates itself through constant repetition of dominant ideologies, rules, and norms. From this, Bourdieu drew connections and distinctions between what he frames as cultural capital, or the embodied accumulative knowledge acquired through time spent in one's educational background, social network and economic status (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu's conceptions of habitus and cultural capital were subsequently utilized by subculture theorists, such as Dick Hebdige (1979), as a lens to analyze the social behaviors and practices that generated specialized embodied knowledge and meanings within subcultures.

Hebdige (1979) conducted case studies of British white male youth music scenes. Scenes, in this context, represent spaces where participants created what Hebdige (1979) conceived of as "spectacular styles" associated with objects, fashion, body art and alterations (hairstyles, tattoos, and piercings, for example) that served as identity markers

within each subculture. Hebdige (1979) closely examined the "meanings of style" propagated within the music and fashion choices of dedicated members of a wide-range of British subcultures, such as the rock music scenes of punk and heavy metal. From his findings, Hebdige developed his conception of "bricolage," the subcultural practice of mixing, combining, and re-appropriating cultural objects (especially music and fashion associated with youth) (Hebdige 1979). Bricolage represents the process through which British youth transformed the meanings of seemingly mundane, ordinary objects, such as punk rockers using safety pins as lip or ear-piercings (Hebdige 1979). Hebdige concluded that such examples of British youth transforming meanings of objects represented a rebellious act against their parents, as well as the dominant working class culture.

Hebdige, however, did not spend time among participants within the subcultures he examined. Instead, Hebdige drew from the peripheral, popular images of British subcultures, often generated by the British popular media to emphasize his conception of spectacular styles. This created broad generalizations that misrepresented individual members of subcultures. Post-subcultural theorist David Muggleton (2000) critiqued Hebdige's (1975) inattention to the experiential sphere of the British punk rock scene. Furthermore, Hebdige's research was limited and biased in the sense that he did not interview individual participants within subcultures, and neglected to represent females or people of color. In spite of this later critique of Hebdige's research, his focus on the subcultural practices of white male youth was widely embraced as a standard approach by other scholars within the CCCS (Haenfler 2014).

In the 1970s and much of the 1980s, most subculture theorists relied on such distal perspectives and did not engage in ethnographic methods involving participant

observation, which was ultimately embraced by post-subcultural theorists (Muggleton 2000). Thus, respected scholars within the CCCS were responsible for producing research that initially framed subcultures as those that consisted of white, male British youth. Such youth were perceived as devoted to practices that included music scenes like punk rock and metal, physical activities like skateboarding, and groups of devoted video game players (Haenfler 2014). Following Hebdige, the CCCS focused more on the sensationalism surrounding subcultures created by the British media. As a result, subcultures became associated with the "deviant behavior" of white, working class males' responses or "resistance" to authority in Great Britain (Bennett 1999, 600). Such authority included law enforcement, parental influence, teachers, and politicians. British youth's deviant behavior, which I discuss below, fueled the general public's "moral panic." According to Haenfler (2014, 102), moral panic "ensues when a significant number of people believe a group or practice threatens the social order of fundamental social ideals." Furthermore, research on British youth culture reveals that public moral panic was exacerbated by the mass media's focus, portrayal and sensationalism of specific subcultural values. CCCS scholars, such as Stanley Cohen (1972), conducted some of the earliest research on public responses that generated such moral panic. He examined the cyclical relation between the media's "overreaction" to youth behavior (ranging from fashion, sexual practices, and illegal drug use) to public's perception of images perpetuated through the media's sensationalism of British youth.

The early CCCS model of subcultural theory was critiqued and challenged by post-subculturalists such as Bennett (1999) and Muggleton (2000) for several reasons. It created broad generalizations that collapsed together the "collective," cumulative

practices of subcultural groups, and which subsequently marginalized the "individual" participants' experiences within subcultures (Blackman 2005). Furthermore, the post-subcultural theorists questioned the CCCS scholars' assertion that youth culture produced "spectacular styles" as a way to uniformly resist authority and "structural changes taking place around them" (Bennett 1999, 602). For instance, law and popular culture scholar Steve Redhead (1993) was one of the earliest to examine British and US electronic dance music events, particularly illegal drug use at raves. He conceived of these youth activities as practices of hedonism, as opposed to acts of class resistance. This was based on his ethnographic research and interviews with participants (Redhead 1993). By the 1990s, certain shifts in understandings and approaches to subcultures began to take shape. Redhead (1993) was one of the early pioneers in this area as he saw the post-subcultural generation of "ravers" as those who remained unbounded by "spectacular style" that was previously viewed from CCCS scholars. Redhead's research revealed a more nuanced, fragmented subculture composed of diffuse groups of practitioners who blended multiple styles of music, fashion and taste, and also exercised individual agency in choices of how they chose to consume, socialize and participate within raves. Unlike the previous conception of subcultures as representing the actions of a unified, collective and purposefully organized class and political resistance, the post-subcultural approach served as a catalyst for engaging in deeper ethnographic analysis of individualized practices, ultimately privileging the voices of discrete participants.

This fostered new conceptions of subcultural groups introduced by post-subcultural theorists. For example, Bennett (1999) developed his framework of neo-tribes by drawing from sociologist Michel Maffesoli's (1996) concept of tribus (tribes), which

is understood as a group of people who choose to move within and between groups at their leisure. Bennett viewed both the boundaries and members of tribes within dance music subcultures as fluid. As Haenfler (2014, 11) explains, Bennett's conception of neo-tribes consist of "diffuse collections of people who gather intermittently, primarily to have a good time, and share some sense of collective identity." Neo-tribes encompass similar characteristics of small social groups of liquid dancers who periodically form when they choose to gather at EDM festivals to dance and socialize. However, the term "tribe" is itself problematic. It has been critiqued by post-subcultural theorists, such as Haenfler (2014), for promoting the colonialist legacy towards "othering," which produces a passive marginalization of peoples of color.

Therefore, instead of describing groups of liquid dancers as neo-tribes, I deploy an alternative term: **crews**. I draw from cultural sociologist Mary Fogarty's (2012) conception of dance crews in order to frame, in part, why small groups of liquid dancers gather together. Fogarty conducted an ethnographic study of New York City breakdancers. For B-boys and B-girls, crews consist of "groups of individuals who formally decide to make their affiliation with each other known to the public" (Fogarty 2012, 57). Similarly, liquid dancers do this, but not to the same scale or the same purpose as breakers. In the context of breaking culture, crews are formed for competitions, colloquially called **battles**, through which a cash prize and reputation is at stake (Fogarty 2012). In the last ten years, liquid dance battles have been hosted periodically. However, I argue that the subcultural value of competition is not nearly as important as that of sharing dance for its own sake. In later chapters I explore how and why individual members of liquid crews remain fluid in terms of their levels of dedication to the practice,

as well as their levels of participation among fellow practitioners. This is why recent shifts in thinking within post-subcultural theory have reshaped the criteria and parameters for defining the qualities and roles of individual members within subcultures.

Sociologist Ross Haenfler (2014, 16) conceives of subcultures as "a relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived conventional society." Haenfler's definition clearly indicates that a subculture consists of social groups who share common values that shape their collective identity through niche social activities. Yet, individuals within such groups remain fluid in their identities, ideas, and levels of participation within their subcultural practices. Thus, members may come and go as they please, and participate at their leisure. Post-subcultural theorists emphasize "the centrality of consumption and leisure in alternative cultures" (Haenfler 2014, 12). Leisurely consumption represents a fundamental shift away from the previous subcultural lenses of bricolage, spectacular style, and unified social class resistance.

One of the earliest attempts to study subcultural participation within club culture spaces was conducted by cultural anthropologist and club culture scholar Sarah Thornton. In her 1995 book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Thornton examines British youth's niche knowledge generated and shared among clubbers. Thornton draws from CCCS literature, particularly from Bourdieu's (1977) conception of cultural capital. From this, Thornton (1995, 10) conceived of club cultures as "taste cultures" and developed her concept of subcultural capital, which she frames as "knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and education which confirms social

status." This knowledge is positioned and connected to the particular subculture it stems from. For example, club and rave participants' ability to name and distinguish between different types of EDM, further validated through knowing the names of the DJs who spun live sets or producers who created individual tracks. According to Thornton (1995), such specialized knowledge grants social status to those who possess and share it with others. Although Thornton's research is regarded as an important early work on youth in club culture, Malbon (1999, 17) asserts Thornton "largely neglects the *experience of clubbing* itself."[6] This was a major weakness of Thornton's work as she failed to evidence any of her interviews with individual members, and instead provided a generalized portrait of clubbing.

Subcultural and post-subcultural theory represents essential perspectives of what constitutes the leisure activities that draw particular groups of individuals together in a shared practice. It distinguishes subcultures from mainstream/popular culture and the specialized knowledge generated within niche groups of individuals. This literature also shows that subcultures are fluid in the sense that participation of members fluctuates depending on individual dedication and motivation. Finally, the literature shows that subcultural participants perpetuate specific values in order to identify within the practice, as well as distinguish themselves. Thus, this literature provides a map for me to analyze the nuances of individual dance and social values within the subculture of liquid dance.

[6] Thornton's (1995) work on British youth subcultures was one of the first to place patrons of EDM-centered events within the category of a subcultural practice.

Dance Studies

In this section I review two critical areas pertinent to my analysis of liquid dance. The first examines theories of the dancing body within studio practice. I examine three critical topics: dance technique, kinesthetic agency, and improvisation. The second area stems from the social networks that develop through popular dance. I draw from specific scholars who effectively combine the latest notions of popular dance with established research in club, rave and festival culture, subcultural and post-subcultural theory. Combined, these two areas of literature allow me to explore the development of the larger dance practice of liquid, as well as how individual practitioners create, embody and perpetuate the form.

Theories of the Dancing Body in Studio Practice

In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies*, Dodds (forthcoming) notes that studio practice from its inception within the academy "has been recognized as an integral component of knowledge construction." Theories of the dancing body centered in studio practice provide three areas critical to my investigation and analysis of liquid dance: dance technique, kinesthesia and improvisation. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1934) first suggested that all movement encompasses technique. He attributes his claim to his extensive analysis of basic human actions such as standing, sitting and walking, the body's quotidian movements. He further categorized movements that required certain levels of physical skill necessary to execute more complex activities such as climbing, swimming and dancing. Although he did not conduct extensive studies on specific dance

techniques, his argument that movement is a culturally specific and learned mode of behavior has proved useful for dance scholars.

Dance studies scholar Susan Foster is one of the early innovators of developing working definitions and theories of what constitutes a formalized dance technique. Foster (1997, 236) defines dance technique as a "systematic program of instruction." Dance technique encompasses individual sets of principles particular to each dance form designed to produce what Foster frames as two bodies. The first is the "ideal body," or a body that demonstrates faultless expertise in such a technique. The second is the "perceived body," which stems from the dancer's kinesthetic awareness and sensorial experiences "visual, aural, haptic, olfactory" resulting from studio training (Foster 1997, 237). The perceived body is the tangible one that can be refined and molded. Both the "perceived" and "ideal" dancing body have acquired technical proficiency in dance technique(s), and therefore produces the end result (or product) of a technically proficient trained dancer. Furthermore, Foster (1997, 239) defines technique training as "the process of repeatedly reconfiguring the body." This is accomplished through drills, or purposeful repetition of exercises designed to shape the body into its ideal and perceived form. Both bodies, according to Foster (1997, 237) are "constructed in tandem; each influences the development of the other." Dance training, in the context of liquid dance, occurs at both the individual and communal level.

Thus, I also deploy Hamera's (2011, 5) assertion that dance technique is both an aesthetic principle and a social experience that "facilitates interpersonal and social relations as it shapes bodies." Hamera suggests that dance technique extends beyond individual dancing bodies, as it is shaped and molded by multiple historical, cultural and

social roots from which that technique stems. Like Hamera, I privilege the words of liquid practitioners who have demonstrated high levels of expertise in liquid's physical characteristics, its broader aesthetics, the history of the practice, and their approaches to the dance practice.

I now turn to the concept of kinesthesia, which in later chapters I deploy to analyze the physical components of liquid dance and the sensations that dancers experience while engaged with the practice. Kinesthesia has been theorized in dance studies in multiple contexts across a diverse spectrum of practices. For instance, Foster's (2011) study of kinesthetic empathy addresses audience reception through their embodied responses to performances they witness on the concert stage. In later chapters, I deploy this lens to analyze how liquid dancers perform for onlookers, and how onlookers respond.

I also draw from dance studies scholar Carrie Noland. Noland (2009) conceives of kinesthetic agency by first attending to the notion of embodiment. Noland (2009, 9) defines embodiment as "the process whereby behaviors and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and "lived" at the level of the body." Here, Noland draws from Bourdieu's (1972) notion of habitus, which I describe in the previous section that explains how bodies accumulate movements that become "culturally inscribed." Noland (2009) elaborates by drawing from philosopher Michel Foucault (1975), who describes culturally inscribed movements as those informed by social ideas that circulate within the surrounding culture and environment from which they emerge. In other words, there are cultural and social spheres of influence that inform one's movement repertoire.

According to Noland, this directly impacts the "agency," or power of individuals to choose how he or she moves.

Noland provides an example of this in the introduction to her 2009 book *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*. She focuses on repeatable movement sequences that she understands as a series of socially and culturally inscribed "gestures, learned techniques of the body" (Noland 2009, 2).[7] For example, in her introduction Noland introduces such gestures by vividly describing the kinesthetic awareness of graffiti writers' ability to create murals, emphasizing their agency of choice within their learned movement vocabulary along a continuum of gestures (Noland 2009). Liquid dance is rooted in part by socially and culturally learned movement, but it is a form that emerged under site-specific conditions that accumulated within club, rave, and festival spaces. I deploy Noland's lens as a means to show how liquid practitioners express agency in their embodied practice through experimentation with and innovation of movement vocabulary. Given the emphasis on improvisation in liquid dance, I call upon literature in dance studies that addresses spontaneous movement creation.

Improvisation has a long-standing history of inquiry within the fields of dance, theatre and performance studies (Blom and Chaplin 1989; Foster 2002; Nagrin 1994; Zaporah 1995). As Foster (1997, 249) asserts, dancers "explore through improvisation the movement territory established by the stylistic and technical rules of the form." Foster (1997) situates improvisation as an exploration of any dance technique along a continuum of techniques.

[7] Cultural inscription is an idea derived and adapted from philosopher Michel Foucault's research on the social construction of the body. See *The Order of Things* (1966) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

In a collection of essays *Taken By Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, co-edited by dance scholars Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere, Gere (2003) frames a popular notion that dance improvisation "calls forth images of a state beyond language, where images are plumbed from the depths of human psyche, and where words do not suffice" (Gere 2003, xiii). What Gere proposes is that in order to articulate experiences of improvisation through language, it requires both embodied and intellectual understanding. In the remainder of this section, I discuss two dance scholars whose approaches to improvisation are paramount to my investigation of the improvisatory dimensions of liquid dance.

First, I examine dance scholar Kent De Spain's (2014) book *Landscape in the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation*. It traces the lineage of post-modern approaches to what De Spain (2014, 4) frames as movement improvisation, which he describes as "a loose collection of skills and practices, one that can't quite decide on a name." I find this reference and approach to improvised movement applicable to my analysis of how liquid dancers create, improvise, and conceptualize their movement vocabulary. Furthermore, De Spain (2014, 3) conducted extensive interviews of what he frames as "eight of the most respected practitioners/teachers of what is known as movement improvisation." De Spain argues that each of these eight dancers developed individual approaches to framing and structuring the process of improvisation. This will become particularly useful when I explore the process through which liquid dancers engage with their version of structured improvisation, the structure being the movement framework of liquid's foundations.

According to De Spain (2014), as living beings we experience everything in the moment it occurs. However, those experiences are stored in our embodied memories. The challenge, especially in improvisation, is to remember the process of how a dancer creates and chooses from his or her movement vocabulary in the present. De Spain describes this process as tracking. He states: "As I am improvising, I am noticing certain aspects of what is happening to me, keeping track of them in ways both conscious and unconscious, so that I can use them to inform my choice making" (De Spain 2014, 45). Tracking the variable of time, for example, allows a dancer to have a sense of when and how to end his or her dance. I argue this is applicable to how liquid dancers choose from their movement vocabulary based on their sense of timing and accumulated knowledge of dancing to EDM. This is one example of how I connect the structure of EDM to the aesthetics of liquid dance.

In an interview with dance improvisation instructor Ruth Zaporah, she tells De Spain: "I am tracking things like time, space, shape…and the 'music' of what's going on…and the rules of improvisation that I set up" (De Spain 2014, 46). Zaporah's quote succinctly describes the multiple variables of awareness necessary to successfully track qualities of movement, and how those qualities are manifested in the moment through choice. Such qualities emerge and are determined by a dancer's "improvisational values," or what a dancer thinks is essential in the moment (De Spain 2014, 48). In later chapters, I explore individual values embodied by liquid dancers through the concept of tracking.

Another useful idea I draw from De Spain's (2014, 7) work resides in his use of constructivism, which "acknowledges that what we know about something like improvisation is built up over time." I see constructivism as a way to analyze how the

ideas and processes of dance, particularly with liquid, change over time. De Spain (2014, 7) states that as our "ideas, practices and values change, so does our understanding of what something is and how it works."

The second dance studies scholar I draw upon who explores questions of improvisation is Danielle Goldman. Her 2010 book, *I Want to be Ready*, challenges the previous assumption that improvisation is an entirely spontaneous and extemporaneous movement practice. Proactively, Goldman suggests that improvisation may be conceived both as a dance technique and a practice of freedom. Goldman makes clear that the process of developing improvisation as a technique involves rehearsal and planning. She explains that one of the issues in defining improvisation is its overemphasis on spontaneity and intuition. She suggests these two terms "often imply a lack of preparation, thereby eliding the historical knowledge, the sense of tradition, and the enormous skill that the most eloquent improvisers are able to mobilize" (Goldman 2010, 5). Indeed, historical knowledge of the dance form being improvised, a strong understanding of the social and cultural underpinnings within the traditions of the practice, and embodied knowledge of the form's aesthetics are all necessary components for improvising dance.

Furthermore, training and performing dance through improvisation depends greatly on "the shifting social, historical and material conditions under which dancing occurs" (Goldman 2010, 6). Goldman refers to these continuously shifting circumstances as "tight places." Goldman developed her conception of "tight places" by drawing this phrase directly from African American studies scholar Houston Baker's (2001) book *Turning South Again*. Baker historically situates such "tight places" as the collective

struggle experienced by African Americans during incarceration, which dates back from slavery to the current US prison system (Baker 2001). However, these tight places are not limited to the physical spaces of slave ships or prison cells. Goldman (2010, 22) applies tight places to dance circles in nightclub settings like The Palladium in New York City, where "a variety of constraints, imposed by racism, sexism, and physical training shaped how people moved within the Palladium on any given night." The social, cultural and physical conditions of any given moment determine how individual dancing bodies move.

Thus, Goldman (2010, 8) also situates physical technique as constituting a tight place on its own. She does this in order to examine how physical technique "enables eloquent articulation in dance, but also shapes the body's contours and enforces ways of moving" (Goldman 2010, 8). What is interesting about Goldman's conception of improvisation is that it in some ways parallels certain subcultural underpinnings and implications for how liquid practitioners have adapted to changing social, economic and technological conditions. Such conditions have shaped, hindered, or at least limited how, where, and when dancers meet in person. This is a useful framework to view the temporal and spatial migration of liquid dancers from the spaces of raves, to private residences, to online communities, and finally to festival spaces for face-to-face dance exchanges. It is because of these different sites of production and participation that I now turn to scholarship on popular dance.

Social Contexts and Networks of Popular Dance

Popular dance studies scholar Sherril Dodds (2011) distinguishes between the terms "popular," "social," and "vernacular" dance in her book *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance*. Dodds draws from dance studies scholar Julie Malnig's (2001, 7) observation that all three of the aforementioned terms are used "interchangeably" in dance studies. Yet, Malnig, according to Dodds (2011, 45), fails to "provide any delineation of their distinct characteristics." To compensate for this, Dodds explores how each term has been theorized in dance studies. Furthermore, Dodds also traces the interdisciplinary lineage of how notions of "the popular" have been incorporated within popular music studies, cultural studies, and dance studies. For example, Dodds (2011, 46) points out that popular music encompasses "a diversity of styles, genres, traditions and functions." Consequently, the boundaries and parameters of what constitutes popular music remain blurred and uncertain. This also applies to notions of popular culture, as scholars have argued against the idea that popular culture represents a "singular" or "monolithic" quality. Instead, Dodds (2011, 46) asserts that popular culture encompasses a "multitude of objects and practices." Therefore, Dodds (2011, 47) offers an alternative conception of the popular, which she frames as "an approach" rather than "a fixed set of objects and practices." By tracing and analyzing the different approaches to notions of the popular through the fields of popular music, cultural studies, and popular dance, Dodds (2011, 47) reveals how "different approaches reveal specific value judgments in their construction of the popular." Dodds (2011, 47) argues that popular dance "cannot be understood as an absolute definition, but encompasses a way of

understanding a range of dances that take place under particular conditions." This is especially important when I examine the subcultural roots of liquid dance.

Liquid dance stems from specific social, music and dance subcultural predecessors (i.e. disco, house and acid house), each of which produced different levels of participation, consumption and commodification. The epicenter of liquid's emergence in 1990s US raves also encompasses a fluid base of popular music, dance and cultural practices, and fluidity of participation. Thus, I draw from Dodds' understanding that subcultures are also a fluid entity under which values are continuously constructed and circulated among its members. Furthermore, I draw from Dodds' (2011) methods as a template for analyzing dancing bodies within niche practices. Her case studies included ethnographic research of British dance practitioners who embodied technique and styles of pogoing, head-banging and skanking. While none of these dance forms are related to liquid dance or the rave scene, I find Dodds' work useful in examining how dancing bodies perpetuate specific aesthetic and subcultural values within a practice.

To date, there have been few studies of dancing bodies within club, rave, and festival spaces. By this, I mean research that methodically analyzes the movements and meaning of the dancing. For example, performance studies scholar Fiona Buckland (2002) conducted ethnographic research through participant observation and interviews of New York City gay dance clubbers. According to Buckland (2002, 84), dance movements were powered by "a standard of fierceness." Buckland asserts that this fierceness was marked by hand, arm, head and neck gestures with sharp standing poses (or freezes) executed with high levels of confidence and self-assuredness. She depicts participants who become "slaves to the rhythm" (Buckland 2002, 84). Buckland attempts

to explore how individual identities and perceptions contribute to the cohesive whole of the gay club experience. Buckland's main contribution seems to be geared towards analyzing how individuals achieve a sense of individuality through navigating personal choices within queer club spaces, particularly as it relates to standing out on the dance floor. Although she provides some insights into personal styles of dance, she does not explore in depth precisely what dance techniques are embodied within such club spaces.

Sociologist Julie Gregory (2009) conducted research on ten women's personal reflections on their experiences attending raves in Toronto, Canada between 1994 and 2000. Through a feminist perspective, Gregory privileges the voices of females to reveal the nuances of individual motivations for attending these events. Issues of gender, age, access to events, divisions within the Toronto scene and experiences as female ravers are some of the primary themes covered in Gregory's article. She argues that female participation in raves represents "a form of accommodative resistance" to gender roles normally dominated by their male counterparts (Gregory 2009, 65). For example, although the majority of female ravers interviewed depended on older females or males to transport them to each event, these young women attended raves in order to assert their independence. They were under legal drinking age, but could attend all-age rave parties and experiment with drugs. Gregory's primary contribution to this field of study is her specificity in examining niche rave-centered practices read through the subcultural lens of aging practitioners, and sociological perspectives of gender identity.

Recently, studies of identity politics within niche subcultures have generated even more nuanced understandings of participants' preferences to specific subgenres of EDM. Popular dance scholar Joanna Hall (2013, 2018) draws the reader in with thick

descriptions of her interactions with participants at a Drum 'n' Bass (DnB) music nightclub event, which took place in London in 2006. According to Hall, DnB is a sub-genre of electronic dance music that developed in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. Hall (2013, 104) argues that DnB participants construct specific "cultural identities closely connected to perceptions of the clubbers' dedication to, knowledge of and passion for the music." In other words, a DnB participant identifies as a "Drum 'n' Bass head" by comparing their devotion to the music and practice to other participants in neighboring EDM sub-genres such as house, techno and trance. One's preference for specific aesthetic sounds produces different DnB identities within the culture. Liquid heads are similar to Drum 'n' Bass heads in the sense that they identify through specified knowledge of dance, music and social practices within the subculture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have established that each of the areas of literature provide critical topics and theoretical frameworks through which I base my investigation of the subculture of liquid dance. Club, rave, and festival literature provide important contextual background for liquid dance's emergence. The structure of EDM, collective and individual experience, collective and individual vibes, and dancing bodies within club, rave, and festival spaces provide key historical and social threads through which I analyze the conditions under which liquid dance emerged. Although the club, rave, and festival literature provide a complex sociocultural history of popular youth practices within EDM cultures, the specific dance practices rooted within these subcultures have remained under-researched. Even though several scholars within this field deploy the

term dance, it is inchoate. Overall, scholars have failed to examine how the bodies of clubbers and ravers move to specific EDM subgenres. The subculture and post-subculture literature provides several, sometimes contradictory, frameworks for analyzing the modes of engagement, the levels of participation and the values produced by individuals within subcultural communities. This material is important when tracing the migration of liquid dance as a subcultural practice as it moves across different social spaces in relationship to a dedicated network of practitioners. The dance literature I turn to offers two main perspectives. The literature that concerns studio practice enables me to closely examine the physicality of liquid as a dance form, as well as individual dancing bodies. The lens of popular dance allows me to trace the continuing progression of subcultural values embedded within the practice. The following chapter outlines and explains my methods of gathering empirical data to explore and analyze such ideas.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

As I explore the emergence, migration and evolution of liquid dance primarily from the perspective of practitioner experience, I employ a qualitative research design. I study liquid practitioners "in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3). My primary research method is ethnography. This chapter establishes the specific ethnographic research methods I employed to collect and analyze data from the fieldwork I conducted on liquid dance. My fieldwork consists of analyzing a spectrum of video documentation housed and shared through the digital archive, semi-structured interviews with liquid dance practitioners, and participant-observation at an EDM festival that took place during the summer of 2017. I embrace the ethnographic tradition of triangulation as a way to confirm, cross-reference and assess the validity of "inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others" (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, 183). My rationale for pursuing this methodological approach is multi-layered. I situate myself as a practitioner and researcher. This shapes the course of my qualitative study through reflective analysis of my embodied experiences with liquid dance, and I supplement those experiences with my participant observations of practitioners.

This chapter is organized into three sections. Section 1: Ethnography and First-Person Perspectives, establishes the primary research methods of my qualitative study of liquid dance. It outlines the ethnographic approaches and the ethnography scholars from

whom I draw. This section also explores how I incorporate various facets of first-person writing and autoethnographic approaches to observing and analyzing dance exchanges. Section 2: Fieldwork outlines my presence, participation and observation in the field, which consists of the online community of liquid dancers and live festivals. This section frames and discusses the online social networking sites from which I gather empirical evidence on how the subcultural practice of liquid dance continues to evolve. It explains the methods through which I conducted my interviews while addressing issues and ethics associated with ethnographic representation. Section 3: Data Collection discusses my methods of gathering and analyzing the data I selected from my study of liquid dance. It describes the methods through which I gathered, recorded and organized my field notes. I discuss how I extracted and analyzed data generated from each theme I explored throughout my research project. Collectively, these sections establish the research methods I employed to investigate the historical, cultural, and social meanings of liquid dance.

Ethnography and First-Person Perspectives

Ethnography

According to sociologists Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2007), ethnography is a form of qualitative social research focusing on people's actions and interactions, ranging from quotidian practices to rare ritual moments that occur within their localized, cultural settings. It is both a method and outcome of studying cultural phenomena, like dance, from the point of view of the subject of study, such as dance practitioners. Dance anthropologist Deidre Sklar (1991, 6) notes the term *ethnography*

"literally means 'portrait of a people.'" The people, in the case of my research, are dancers. In a seminal collection of essays titled *Dance in the Field*, dance scholar Theresa Buckland (1999, 1) frames *dance* ethnography as "the study of dance and human movement systems." Dance ethnography examines and privileges the embodied knowledge of practitioners. Furthermore, it examines what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, 89) understands as cultural knowledge, or "a people's ethos—the tone, character and quality of their life," as well as how they see and interpret the world in which they live.

The results or findings produced from this type of qualitative research "cannot be generalized to other events or to other years of the same event, because the results are specific to the cultural setting in which they were formed" (Mackellar 2013, 5). It is not my intention to "generalize" my findings, but to uncover multiple meanings within the subcultural practice of liquid, and these meanings are what I am interested in exploring. The primary challenge of interpreting the multiple meanings of liquid dance stems from embracing what anthropologist Ivan Brady (2004) refers to as "plural knowabilities." In other words, there exists within any specific contextual memory or experience of liquid dance multiple ways of understanding, relating and expressing knowledge gained from dance. The "frustration," according to Brady, rests in the act of choosing which "knowabilities" to focus one's attention on. For example, one of the main focuses of this research project resides in the spectrum of individual dancers' kinesthetic approaches to liquid dance. These approaches encompass different ways of knowing based on their embodied experiences. As a dance ethnographer, my challenge is to excavate through language the "plural knowabilities" that liquid practitioners embody through dance

practice and perpetuate socially within the subculture. My obligation is to push through the "frustration" or challenges of choosing which knowabilities to examine or omit.

In her essay (*Re) Constructing Meanings: The Dance Ethnographer as Keeper of the Truth* (1999), Buckland explores the ongoing relationship between the ethnographer and the ethnographic community. Her twenty-year study of the Britannia Coco-Nut Dancers of Bacup, Rossendale in Northwest England began in 1977. Buckland asserts: "There is almost inevitably no consensus of interpretation that the ethnographer can publish nor one truth to be established" (Buckland 1999, 197). In other words, there are multiple interpretations and meanings embedded within the words of respondents. Buckland interviewed her respondents at annual events through what she calls "discrete encounters with the community" (Buckland 1999, 198). At each event, Buckland's role as a participant observer enabled her to cross check what she heard from her interviewees' testimonies with what she saw. Meanings were drawn from and revealed by direct access to her subjects engaged in the social activities particular to the community of study.[8] It is such meanings that prompt Buckland to reflect on the ethnographer's moral and ethical obligation to "navigate" the ethnographic process and the "dilemmas of ethnographic representation" (Buckland 1999, 197).

[8] Buckland asked the Britannia Coco-Nutt dancers of Bacup why they blackened their faces. The individual and localized meanings generated from her interviewees responses created a dilemma of ethnographic representation. Buckland successfully navigates the racially charged context of the meanings among dancers through triangulating their responses. She traced the lineage of how different meanings of blackface have been constructed in previous Bacup traditions dating back to the nineteenth century. Buckland also examined how folklore studies have analyzed blackface in different communities. This approach allowed Buckland to contextualize her study of localized meanings within her research on Britannia Coco-Nut Dancers.

I understand ethnographic representation as the process and outcome of revealing multiple meanings within the words and actions of my research subjects, while simultaneously representing what they, as individuals, understand or know to be "true." Buckland asked the question, what is "truth" within a story? She states: "The 'truth' is a kaleidoscope of possibilities and, in the field, it depends who is lifting that kaleidoscope to his or her eye, [as well as] when and in which direction it is pointing" (Buckland 1999, 205). Here, Buckland conveys the notion that there is no singular or ultimate "truth," but instead a series of possible meanings, or, as Brady (2004) frames it, knowabilities. In my study of liquid dance, the concept of "truth," or what individuals may know or understand to be true, stems from a "kaleidoscope" of experiences within this dance practice. Clearly, ethnography privileges the words and experiences of participants in the field.

First-Person Perspectives

As a long-term practitioner with a high-level of training and expertise in liquid dance, I now turn to first-person methods to access dimensions of self-knowledge. First-person methods stem from writing that emerges from reflecting on personal experiences, such as dance. These experiences are layered with emotionally charged connections to such experiences. Ethnographers such as Buckland (1999) and Brady (2004) recognize one of the main critiques of first-person methods is that researchers sometimes reveal the "truths" or "knowabilities" we *want* to find, despite evidence to the contrary. Anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) applies a strategy to avoid such an unbalanced approach.

Behar's (1996) book focuses on her concept of the *vulnerable observer*, which she frames as the observer's emotional responses to any witnessed event. Her first chapter begins with the story of an avalanche in Colombia that buried an entire village in 1985. Behar draws upon the narrative account of Isabel Allende, a writer who watched the outcome of this tragic event unfold live on television. Allende subsequently wrote a story called "Of Clay We Are Created" (1991) based on her emotional response and memories of witnessing the tragic death of a 13-year-old girl.

Allende recalls watching a horrific, yet mesmerizing moment when camera crews, journalists and photographers "fixed their curious yet useless eyes" on a 13-year-old girl trapped in mud (Behar 1996, 1). She was slowly suffocating. During this moment, photographer Rolf Carle, whom Behar refers to as "the vulnerable observer par excellence," placed his camera down. Carle could not handle the emotional stress of watching the young girl's pain and suffering, so threw his arms around the young girl in despair as "her heart and lungs collapsed" (Behar 1996, 1). The dilemma was clear: stand and document this horrible event, or take action in the face of certain failure.

When ethnographers choose to make themselves vulnerable by revealing their emotional connections to the content of their research, the stakes are raised. Behar (1996, 14) states: "The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to." This begs the question: what if the writer's personal revelations do not inspire or illuminate the reader, or are instead perceived as inconsequential, boring, or deemed inappropriate for academia? Behar believes writing vulnerably entails an emotional response that creates tension between one's emotional experiences and objective research focus. Yet, Behar also recognizes there exists an

emotional tension within academic language, and is therefore critical to the research process.

Adding first-person writing to ethnography empowers the author with the agency of "making themselves one of the objects of research" (Bochner 2012, 158). I therefore draw on this methodological approach because adding first-person writing provides a personal and intimate perspective to my research on liquid dance, and allows me to draw from my experiences as an expert practitioner. Furthermore, as an insider I have an embodied, social and cultural awareness of liquid dance that informs how I mediate and relay my interview subjects' accounts. This practitioner/insider perspective adds a critical layer of research that has been largely absent in most academic accounts of rave, club and festival dance practice (Malbon 1999; Dodds 2011; Hall 2013). My task as a practitioner engaged in first-person writing and reflection is to insert myself into the practice of liquid dance in a way that reflects upon my experiences, as well as reveal interconnected concepts and meanings of those ideas shared between practitioners. The challenge for ethnographers such as myself, as Behar reminds us, is to decide how much of my emotional connection is appropriate to include. Like Behar, I believe that revealing emotional connections to the subject of study enhances academic research. Therefore, I extend Behar's metaphor of vulnerable observation into what I frame as vulnerable reflection. Methodologically, this involves analyzing the memories of experience through my journal entries, each written at different time periods and settings throughout the last seventeen years.[9]

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[9] My journal entries and poems covered experiences I had with liquid dance that date back as far as 2001. I used these as a reference point to reflect upon my experiences in order to engage with my research topic.

In my research, the concept of reflexivity directly impacts how I produce academic material based on my encounters with liquid practitioners. According to Hammersely and Atkinson (2007, 15) "The concept of reflexivity acknowledges that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them." My socio-historical locations within the liquid dance community, rave culture and the academic community at Temple University accumulate and combine to shape my perceptions as a scholar who remains intimately connected with the subject I am studying. Therefore, reflexivity is vital to the research process.

One challenge rests in my self-reflexive awareness of my position as an insider of the subculture and community. For instance, I have the privilege of access to practitioners, several of whom I know personally. It is paramount to acknowledge through autoethnographic reflection how my personal connections to liquid dance shapes my understandings of both the dance form and my perceptions of my interviewees' experiences. My insider status informs how I represent the words of other practitioners, as we share a common passion for liquid dance, despite our individual differences in experience, perceptions, and philosophies around this dance form. These memories and continuously evolving ideas around liquid shape my writing, and how I therefore present the dance as an evolving form and subcultural practice. This directly impacts what is commonly referred to as the crisis of representation.

> The crisis of representation motivated researchers to recognize the limits of the knowledge claims they make about the contexts, subjects, and findings of their research…[it] also motivated researchers to acknowledge how their own identities, lives, beliefs, feelings and relationships influenced their approach to research and their reporting of findings (Adams et al. 2015, 22).

The above quote indicates that I cannot claim to know or completely understand my interviewees' words in the same ways that they do. All I can do is acknowledge how my identity, lived experiences, beliefs and feelings influenced my relationships and therefore my approaches to studying liquid dance and its practitioners from an insider's perspective. For example, my experiences dancing to multiple subgenres of EDM at rave, club and festival events influence how I embody, perform and understand the physical qualities of liquid. That said, I am able to recognize the similarities and differences in my approach to liquid compared with other practitioners.

Furthermore, it is necessary to remain transparent in my identity as a straight, white male who comes from a middle class background. I cannot simply take my identity in any capacity for granted, as it shapes my perception of the dance, the culture and the people I am engaged with throughout this research project. For instance, it is essential to acknowledge my potential biases as an insider of liquid dance. Such biases include personal preference to aesthetics in both EDM and dance. My deep passion for this dance practice informs how I write. This may at times enhance certain aspects of analyzing dance exchanges, but could potentially hinder portions of my research agenda. Thus, the challenge for me was to find a balance in both academic language and ways to convey my passion without hindering my critical engagement. I value transparency in my approach to both research and practice. Therefore, I openly acknowledge my identity as a liquid dancer and my emotional connections to my writing.

To facilitate this transparency, I incorporate the practice of reflexivity by constantly triangulating my field notes, journal entries, interview transcripts, and video recordings (both from the digital archive and from my ethnographic fieldwork) in order

to continuously synthesize, refine, revise and shape my analysis of this evolving practice. Furthermore, while it is not possible for me to disembody myself from the practice, it is possible to gain critical observance of my practice. For this reason I deploy the method of autoethnography, which I discuss in the following section.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method that "uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs and practices" (Adams et al. 2015, 1). This qualitative method places value on the researcher's relationships with others as a participant/observer whose presence affects the subjects of research. As a scholar engaged in human subject research, I am ethically obligated to balance personal (embodied practice and status as a dance practitioner), relational (friendships and acquaintances with others) and institutional persona (my position as a dance scholar) during the process of my dissertation fieldwork. Therefore, I balance my approach to researching liquid dance with participant observation and what performance studies scholar Alice O'Grady (2013) frames as immersion.

O'Grady's autoethnographic method privileges immersion of the researcher within spaces of the culture being studied. This immersion involves placing the researcher in direct contact with research subjects within their natural environments that produce new ways to "unpack some of the epistemological issues relating to conducting fieldwork in spaces of play" (O'Grady 2013, 19) In other words, immersion allows the researcher to understand how practitioners know, feel and think about play in the context of the research. Methodologically, O'Grady explores the concept of play within the

spectrum of electronic dance music culture through autoethnographic reflexivity and situates herself directly within its framework in the following ways:

> As a performer-player-researcher, how images, sounds, spaces, people, ideas are encountered first hand forms a dynamic narrative that is later recorded either digitally or in written form during the festival itself. This autoethnographic approach incorporates drawings, notes, sketches, snippets of dialogue as well as more conventional prose-based accounts of what was experienced and is accompanied, where possible, by still and video footage (O'Grady 2013, 33).

For O'Grady, performance can be research.[10] Similar to O'Grady, I occupy the combined position of participant *and* researcher in the specific contexts of the EDM festivals I attended. My process involved finding balance between engaging with liquid dance practitioners through dance exchange and dialogue, and stepping back from those moments to take field notes describing what I observed and experienced.

In addition, O'Grady deploys her understanding of Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow theory to analyze how festival participants experience flow during acts of play. Her combined deployment of autoethnographic methods and theoretical framework of flow theory matches well with portions of my own work, and serves as a template for my methodology. O'Grady's fieldwork and approach to investigating play and performance at EDM festivals through participant observation is very similar to how I explore the flow of shared dance exchanges between liquid practitioners. Furthermore, like O'Grady, my relationship with my subject of study "pre-dates my life as a researcher quite considerably" (O'Grady 2013, 19). This consequently positions myself in a place where my research and dance practice are "inextricably linked" (O'Grady 2013, 19). O'Grady recognizes that research encompasses embodied, participatory activities. And, since I am

[10] O'Grady's work falls in line with dance studies, particularly the field practice-as-research and ideas of dance as a mode of theorizing.

an avid practitioner of liquid, my direct participation at festivals among the dancers I am studying builds a strong link between method, theory, and practice.

I have established how I combine ethnographic, first-person and autoethnographic methods of collecting and analyzing data generated from my observations and experiences in the field. My deployment of these methods, however, was not without its tensions. My challenge was to analyze multiple meanings that emerged in specific contexts of this subcultural practice. The following section discusses precisely how this was accomplished through my fieldwork process.

Fieldwork

Digital Archive

In this section, I discuss the first part of my fieldwork: analyzing the digital documentation of liquid dance online. Within the last ten years, digital ethnography has evolved as a method for analyzing digital media's power to represent, preserve and archive culture (Pink et al. 2016). Therefore, I employ digital ethnography as a means to examine the digital archive, a term I use to encompass online databases that harbor the majority of documented online video footage of liquid dance.

During my process of obtaining information on liquid dance, I have reviewed relevant literature within the intersecting disciplines of digital media and communications studies. Although I do not provide an exhaustive review of this field, I selected resources pertinent to my methodological approach to analyzing liquid dance through the digital archive. I draw from digital ethnographer Kate Hennessy's (2012, 349) conception of digital cultural heritage as a way to examine how liquid practitioners preserve, maintain

and share their “intangible” practice and subcultural “heritage” online. Hennessy’s work also functions as a lens to analyze what constitutes the authority figures, or gatekeepers whose purpose is to “safeguard” the “authenticity” of liquid dance from being exploited or misrepresented by the mainstream public. In other words, practitioners purposely choose what to make available to the general public and what to keep within the confines of the face-to-face interactions of the subculture.

The process of investigating these digital archives involved the following steps. First, I undertook keyword searches through the search engine Google, which linked to all YouTube clips referenced through a series of hash-tags. A hash-tag is a classification technique that provides quick textual references to online video clips. Relevant hash-tags included the following: Liquid, Liquid Dance, Liquid Pop Collective, Rave Dance, Old-School Rave Dance, Glow-Sticks, and Glow-Sticking. Second, I entered key searches for liquid dance crews: Liquid Pop Collective (LPC), Liquid Lights Crew (LLC), Dark Matter Squad, and Chronic Illness. Third, I searched for key individual practitioners by dancer aliases, including LpE, Fu Manchu, D-Strange, Verb, Distortion, and Falsify. This methodical word search enabled me to gather links to online video addresses through their URLs (uniform resource locator) to return to as often as needed (Berners-Lee, 1999). With each video clip, I downloaded the URL to gain immediate access at any point. I also created an appendix of all videos referenced from three primary online forums: digital blogs, YouTube and Facebook.

During my process of sifting through nearly one hundred YouTube and Facebook video clips I discovered two videos that were constantly referenced or suggested as videos to view in the search bar. The first video, colloquially referred to as “The Arcade

Clip," captures the solo performance of "Liquid Pop" Eric (LpE) liquid dancing in front of a video arcade game during a rave at Club Space in Philadelphia in 1999. The second video is titled "The All Access Liquid and Digits Tutorial," which I refer to as "The LPC Tutorial." The Arcade Clip's digitally stamped date embedded within the video clip that reads March 13, 1999. Although this clip is by no means the oldest or first footage of liquid, "The Arcade Clip" represents the first footage of liquid dancing published to the online database of Napster, and the entry point for liquid dancing's digital documentation.

"The Arcade Clip" was later posted to YouTube in 2007, and since that time has generated over 300,000 views with the hash-tag "Liquid Rave Dance." The video has also been copied and redistributed on YouTube under other hash-tags such as "Liquid Pop Eric," "Insane Rave Dance," "Liquid Dance," and "LpE Eric Full Video Clip." Each of these different hash-tag versions of the video have generated between a few hundred views to over 100,000 views. These high viewership numbers clearly indicate a firm subcultural following.

One challenge that arose from this method stems from clips that may have been hash-tagged (or titled) "liquid dance," but were not composed of liquid dance footage, and instead consisted of popping or other hip hop dance forms. I have therefore determined authentic liquid dance clips by examining the primary movement characteristics. Liquid clips consisted of hand and finger-based sequences during which one hand leads the other in a series of unbroken patterns. In contrast, mislabeled or non-

liquid dance clips exhibited characteristics of hip-hop movement techniques such as **waving**, **tutting** and **hitting**.[11]

My collective experiences as an expert practitioner have informed how I developed a methodical approach to searching and categorizing liquid dance clips by their structure (solo and group performances and tutorials), content (physical components of liquid displayed), space and time (the circumstances it took place), hits (number of views per video), and within which social media network it is housed (YouTube or Facebook). I began my analysis of solo liquid dance clips of twenty individual practitioners. Each performance was video archived either through YouTube or Facebook. Fifteen of these practitioners belonged to three established liquid dance crews: The Liquid Pop Collective, Liquid Lights Crew, and Chronic Illness.[12] With each solo clip I looked for themes in the following areas: foundation, technique, fluidity and levels.[13] After collecting audio-visual information on liquid practitioners from multiple online databases, I formed a list of individuals I considered to be most impactful to the continued development of this dance form. My criteria to establish this was based on three categories: available video documentation of each practitioner, online social media presence, and contributions to the subcultural practice.

For example, first-generation practitioner Gorea has hundreds of online videos that document his engagement with liquid. In addition to multiple improvised liquid

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[11] I discuss the kinesthetic and subcultural influences of the aforementioned hip hop dance techniques on liquid in Chapter 5.

[12] I return to discuss members of three liquid dance crews: LPC, Liquid Lights Crew and Chronic Illness in Chapter 6.

[13] These categorizations of foundation, technique, fluidity and levels of expertise in liquid are discussed further in Chapter 6.

dance performances, several of Gorea's YouTube and Facebook videos consist of Gorea providing verbal explanations of his approach to specific training methods, followed by physical demonstrations of specific liquid techniques (See Appendix A). I also determined the current leaders within the community by closely examining who contributes to and facilitates liquid dance social media platforms. I learned through the Facebook group *Liquid Lab* that second-generation practitioner Chris "Verb" Atkins manages the site. Verb is also the creator and host of an annual liquid dance event known as *Confluence*.[14] The digital archive of liquid dance continues to grow, not just from new members of online social groups, but from awareness of older dance footage recently uploaded to sites like YouTube and Facebook. Yet, the digital archive would not be complete without a dedicated group of practitioners who continue to develop the dance form through face-to-face interactions. I now turn to the core group of liquid dancers I chose to interview for this study.

Interviews

The first step towards organizing interviews was obtaining approval from the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB provides for researchers the guidelines and ethical principles set by the National Commission for the Protection of

[14] Chris "Verb" Atkins hosts *Confluence*, an annual liquid dance meet-up that combines dance workshops held by well-respected practitioners (like Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea), and an informal cypher competition. It is not set up in the same fashion as a hip-hop battle, where one person is pitted against another. Instead, the competitive aspect is minimalized in the sense that the participants and judges dance with one another in an open cypher throughout the event. I attended *Confluence* 2018 and experienced this for myself.

Human Subject's Belmont Report.[15] After obtaining IRB approval in the fall of 2016, I began contacting practitioners primarily through Facebook, and sometimes directly through email and/or phone, as I knew them personally.

One of the limitations of this method of recruiting interviewees was that not all liquid dancers are actively present on social media. Some choose to remain anonymous in their practice. However, to compensate for this challenge, I was able to track down several dancers through talking with some of my first interviewees, an ethnographic technique referred to as snowball sampling. By talking to one person, I was able to gain access to his or her social network, which led me to contacting other liquid dancers.

My interviewees consisted of those who self-identified as liquid dancers. This identity, however, remains fluid (Gregory 2009). Each participant's individual dedication, time, motivations and stakes within the subcultural dance form can be variable. Some engage with the dance practice on a daily basis, while others prefer to dance under specific circumstances such as festivals, nightclubs, or other liquid meet-ups (Verb interview 2017). It was my intention to provide as broad a range of perspectives on this dance as possible. Therefore, I chose my interviewees based on what I have determined as their contributions and dedication to liquid, both as personal practice and as a subcultural practice.

I divided my interviewees into three broad categories based on the decade they were introduced to liquid dance: first-generation (1990s), second generation (2000s), and third-generation (2010s). First-generation practitioners are sometimes referred to colloquially as the **OGs (Original Gangstas)** of liquid, as this group paved the

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[15] "The Belmont Report." Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (United States) For URL see Appendix A.

foundations for this dance form. I fall under the category of second-generation, since my entry point into this dance form began in 2001. I chose this classification of three generations for two main reasons. First, the notion of grouping dancers together by "generations" is a widely accepted practice within the liquid community and other neighboring hip-hop dance forms, such as popping and breaking (Schloss 2009). Second, dividing liquid practitioners into distinct generations helps distinguish between the various levels of experience, expertise and dedication to the practice.

In total, I interviewed fourteen practitioners. I selected this number because I wanted to include a varied range in terms of the demographics of practitioners available and willing to participate in the study. Ages ranged from 24-42, and there were twelve males and two females, each with varying ethnic, economic and cultural backgrounds. The majority of the interviewees were white males (eleven in total), along with one African American male, and two white females. I quote one additional liquid dance practitioner "Itch," an Asian-American male, from a video he posted (in Chapter 6). However, "Itch" was unavailable for a formal interview. The main reason for the racial and gender imbalance in my selection of interviewees is that liquid dance remains a predominantly white-male practice, which I briefly discuss in Chapter 6.

At the start of each interview, I began by thanking each interviewee for speaking with me, and then proceeded with a three-to-five minute casual conversation centered around the practice of liquid dance to help set the tone for the interview. The purpose of this ethnographic strategy was to address the notion that a researcher should learn all they can about the interviewee in order to determine how he or she experiences his or her dance (Sklar, 1991). For some dancers it was not possible to meet through Skype or

FaceTime, in which case I chose to meet them in person at one of the two festivals I attended.

I made it clear that they may choose at any point to not answer specific questions I pose during the interview, and that they had the right to withdraw from participating in my research at any point they wished, even after the interview was completed. I also informed them that I would be recording the conversation on my iPhone for my reference, but that the audio recording would not be made public at any point. I informed them that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript for their records, and that they would receive a copy of my final dissertation document if they desired. Finally, I also explained to each interviewee that if sensitive subjects emerged through the course of the conversation (such as drug experiences and personal social encounters) that we would not discuss them if they did not feel comfortable doing so.

My interviews generally lasted about one hour. I chose this length of time for the following reasons. First, an hour was enough time to establish rapport with the individual. Second, an hour was enough time to have a deep conversation about specific memories, experiences and perceptions of liquid. Third, an hour proved to be a solid block of time that could be mutually spared. My aim for this hour-long interview was to address between five and ten questions. I formulated my interview questions to facilitate the beginnings of conversation by tailoring each interview script to individual practitioners. Each set of questions was generated based loosely on the individual's years of practice with liquid, and more specifically on their contributions to the dance form and the collective liquid dance community. The format of each interview was semi-structured, and most questions were open-ended. The nature of the questions ranged from basic

information about when and where they were first introduced to liquid, what their approaches to liquid entail, why they engage with the practice, and what their experiences reveal about liquid dance (see Appendices B, C and D for recruitment script, consent forms and full list of interview questions).

My goal was to pace the interview in a way that my interviewee and I could comfortably complete a cohesive conversation within one hour, but leave plenty of room for follow-up questions at a later date if necessary. With each interview, my tone ranged from calm and collected to enthusiastic and excited, revealing my personal connection to liquid dance. This supported my intention to research a dance form that I am deeply invested in, which Behar (1996) may refer to as taking on the role of the vulnerable researcher.

Each interview was recorded and stored onto my iPhone voice recorder application in order to have a complete record of all dialogue. I transferred each recording to my Macbook Pro laptop and an external hard-drive. I took notes at key moments during the interview where a subject or historical event came up that caught my interest. I informed each interviewee prior to our conversations that I would be taking notes periodically. All interviewees revealed their specific historical, cultural and social conditions under which they first encountered liquid, as well as how those conditions shaped individual accounts, opinions and philosophies of liquid. In addition, practitioners offered specific insights as to how liquid as a subculture has continued to perpetuate itself, evolve, and who the prominent practitioners were from each generation. In other words, they revealed “plural knowabilities,” shared what they understood to be true, and

the multiple truths within their vast experiences with liquid (Clifford 1986, Brady 2004, Bochner 2012).

The process of transcribing my interviews from the voice recordings on my iPhone enabled me to do two things. First, I listened to the entire interview multiple times while typing the transcriptions verbatim into a word document. Second, I read through these transcriptions for accuracy, affording me the time to reflect and process what was said from a critical distance necessary to analyze and parse out some themes within the dialogue, as well as clarify any gaps in information that I may have missed during the interview itself.

One of the biggest challenges with all three interview groups was finding a way to discuss openly and frankly some of the more sensitive subjects related to experiences that influenced an individual's immediate experiences of and long-term connections to liquid. According to the Belmont Report (1979) I must assess any risk, defined as "a possibility that harm may occur." For example, questions pertaining to drug use fall under this category of possible harm. As I discuss in Chapter 3, mind-altering substances played a vital role (and sometimes continue to do so) in the development of this dance form. As a scholar engaged in ethnographic research, I had a moral and ethical obligation to remain cognizant of any and all subject matter that may be deemed potentially harmful or inflammatory. For example, in Chapter 4 I examine Hickman's narrative account where he openly shares some of his experiences with particular drugs while liquid dancing. This brings up a whole series of emotional and psychological connections that may hinder or amplify his narrative account. Although it is not my goal or intention to engage in a psychological analysis of Hickman's altered states, it is my ethical obligation to represent

his voice, experiences, perceptions and interpretations in a way that does not distort, mask or exaggerate his words (Adams et al. 2015).

Another concern is that no matter how in-depth Hickman may have revealed his feelings and memories of his experiences through language, and no matter how much he may (or may not) trust me, his responses to my questions and my interpretations of his responses constitutes what Clifford (1986, 7) refers to as the ethnographic challenge of writing about "partial truths." However, this is not to say that what was said, or unsaid makes or breaks the research endeavor. On the contrary, acknowledging the limitations of not knowing or relating to individual meanings and perspectives related to any subject, encounter or experience can be "liberating," and lead to "more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture" (Clifford 1986, 25).

Each of my interviews provides critical points of view on various aspects of the histories and current social practices of liquid. The primary focus of each interview was to find common themes (particularly subcultural values), as well as a sense of individual perspectives on the dance form. Individual practice is marked by personal style, a topic central to my participant observations of live dance exchange.

Participant Observation

In social science disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, participant observation is an ethnographic method of situating the researcher directly within the space and community of the culture being studied (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007). Dance ethnographers like Buckland (1999) value participant observation because it immerses the researcher into the physical practice of dance to generate a more nuanced, embodied understanding of the form. This method avoids disrupting the flow of the event

or the subjects being observed as researchers observe people while they are engaged in their various activities, such as dancing (Mackellar 2013). This allows researchers to observe new behaviors as they occur. This is especially useful for observing behaviors at music festivals, such as Burning Man and other multi-day electronic dance music-centered events (O'Grady 2013). Furthermore, Buckland (1999) believes it is important for dance ethnographers to participate in the dance practice they are studying because it grants researchers hands-on experience "doing" the dance, as opposed to simply watching the dance as a spectator. Participant observation reveals nuanced, "deeper understanding of participants' subculture," which may be obtained through analysis of both actions and dialogue between participants (Mackellar 2013, 5). In my research, I am concerned with such deeper understandings of why liquid is important, and what liquid dance potentially provides for the individual practitioner and the subculture as a whole.

In ethnography, researchers traditionally participate in multiple events directly related to their subject of inquiry. My previous experiences of attending over 100 raves between 2001 and 2006, followed by hundreds of nightclub events between 2006 and 2018, informs my position as an expert liquid dance practitioner. Therefore, I have engaged in what has Clifford (1986, 9) refers to as "indigenous ethnography," as an insider studying my own culture. I draw from my previous experiences with liquid dance at raves. But since raves no longer exist in the format that once catered liquid dance, my challenge was to find new sites where I could observe liquid in abundance. So I began researching where liquid dancers frequently meet for face-to-face dance exchanges: EDM festivals.

EDM festivals are multi-day camping events offering live electronic dance music acts throughout the event on multiple stages, providing a wide-range of EDM music subgenres (Anderson 2009; O'Grady 2013). These festivals are typically held on private property in rural or coastal locations rather than in urban or suburban sites. EDM festivals often offer workshops in practices ranging from yoga and tarot readings to fire spinning and breakdancing. I chose to investigate which festivals would appeal to as many liquid dance practitioners as possible, so that I could make an informed decision about which ones to conduct my fieldwork.

I began by asking my interviewees which festivals they recommended, and if they planned on attending any during the summer of 2017. Four festivals were suggested: Sonic Bloom (Colorado), Big Dub (Pennsylvania), What the Festival (California), and Lightening in a Bottle (California). Ironically, prior to the summer of 2017, I had never attended a festival like this before. To educate myself, I read through festival websites, blog posts of attendees, DJ line-ups, and workshops in order to see the kinds of amenities they provided and what they did not. Then, I cross-referenced each festival by asking liquid dancers about their experiences of these events from previous years attending them.

Prior to deciding which festivals to attend, I created a proposal for teaching a breakdance workshop.[16] I applied to teach at the four aforementioned festivals with the intention of obtaining free-entry, as well as appropriate accommodations, such as a

[16] I have over eighteen years of breakdance experience, and ten years of teaching the fundamentals of this dance form. I chose to teach breakdancing instead of liquid for two main reasons. First, I had well-documented video footage of breakdance workshops I taught in both Hawaii and Philadelphia. Second, although I have taught individual one-on-one lessons, I had never taught a liquid dance workshop to more than one person at a time.

complimentary tent, meal vouchers, and full access to areas of the festival reserved for instructors and performers, and separate from the main campsite. Within three weeks of applying, I received approval from two festivals, and I was invited to teach breakdance workshops at both Sonic Bloom (Colorado) and Big Dub (Pennsylvania). Upon receiving this news, I immediately reached out to liquid dancer Chris "Verb" Atkins. He informed me that both Sonic Bloom and Big Dub have served as annual liquid dance meet-ups for the last four years. He encouraged me to attend either or both, as each would have different liquid dancers attending at different locations. After discussing plans to attend these festivals with ten other liquid dancers who confirmed their plans to travel to each festival, I decided to attend both. Thankfully, I was able to attend Sonic Bloom for the full three-day/three-night event. However, I only attended one day of Big Dub, due to extreme weather conditions.

Sonic Bloom took place from June 15– June 18, 2017 in southern Colorado. I navigated between different social and dance interactions while cohesively incorporating my personal practice as a part of my research process. I spent a significant amount of time with each dancer in order to obtain a deeper connection and understanding of each individual's process and approach. As will become evident in Chapter 7, attending this festival provided a substantial amount of data, far exceeding my pre-PhD experiences documented in journal entries from previous raves and other EDM nightclub events I attended.

My observations of each festival focused primarily on the physical surroundings, festival vendors, attendees, music, sound stages, and dancers. At Sonic Bloom, which was a three-day festival, my observations changed over the course of the festival. I

observed the solo performances of liquid dancers, as well as the moments when they chose to exchange dance, or what I frame as passing the flow of kinesthetic ideas from one dancing body to another. I also observed the social behaviors and verbal exchanges between liquid dancers that supplemented their festival experiences.

A major advantage to attending Sonic Bloom was having the opportunity to conduct unstructured interviews with liquid practitioners in areas of the festival that were far from any music or other distractions. There were tents located outside and around the perimeter of the festivals where most attendees were camped. This was a good spot to have several sit-down conversations. On the final full day of Sonic Bloom, I gathered four my interviewees together to conduct a semi-structured group interview. My strategy for doing this was to allow the liquid dancers as a group to have a conversation, and let the topics organically flow from one to the next. It also allowed for me to assess where individual differences of opinion occurred within various aspects of liquid dance. This includes interpretations of approach, physical components, historical roots, personal anecdotes, as well as individual and shared experiences with this dance form. My choice to conduct a group interview proved to be advantageous, because all four dancers were good friends, and enjoyed the opportunity to have a discussion at this level. The entire interview was both video and audio recorded, providing two mediums of data collection.

Data Collection

The first portion of my field notes consisted of material gathered from the semi-structured interviews I conducted through Skype, FaceTime and the two festivals I attended. The second layer was from hand-written and typed notes generated by my

direct observations of liquid dancers from online video archives and from my participant observations of liquid dancers at Sonic Bloom. The third layer of field notes stems from my analysis of the video and still photo footage I collected at both festivals. This footage also included video of myself engaged with other practitioners through sharing liquid dance exchanges.

In total, I generated thirty pages of hand-written observations at Sonic Bloom (roughly ten pages per day), and ten pages from Big Dub (from my one day of attendance). I organized my notes by accounting for the date, time frame and specific areas of the festival where each entry occurred. I also had my laptop with me, enabling me to sit and type out observations as they occurred, but often took notes minutes or hours after my initial observations occurred. My observations consisted of "thick" ethnographic descriptions that Geertz (1973, 18) says "takes us into the heart of that of which it is an interpretation." Importantly, my descriptions were not only of the surrounding space and social conditions of each festival. As a dance ethnographer, my obligation was to privilege embodied experience. As Sklar (1991, 6) succinctly states, "it is not enough to 'explain' a movement." The data I collected reveals a rich practice deeply connected and rooted within subcultural values particular to liquid dance.

I analyzed data generated from my field notes, which consisted of hand-written and typed textual documents, as well as video and still photos of Sonic Bloom. First, I listened to each interview and transcribed the audio into word documents. Second, I began the process of coding, a qualitative research method rooted in ethnography (Van Manen 2014). I deploy coding in order to search for thematic elements in the language of my interviews. I extracted empirical data from individual narrative accounts of

experience and memory, through which to draw qualitative assessments, analysis and conclusions (Bond 2008). Using color-coded text, I classified and highlighted specific emerging themes generated from my interviewees' responses to my questions.

The systematic way in which I coded my field notes and interview data involved highlighting language and sentences in red that indicated a moment where the interviewee showed a disagreement, alternative perspective, or strong opinion that is contrary to the subject of the question. Anything highlighted in blue was an explanation of strong beliefs, opinions or perceptions that indicated liquid was distinct from other dance forms in one way or another. Green highlighted text that signified a strong assertion that liquid 'is' categorically one thing or another. Orange highlighted text that designated a historically situated assertion that I was obligated to confirm, clarify, or check through available literature or video source materials. And finally, anything highlighted in purple indicated a statement in the conversation that revealed something nuanced about the interviewee's approach to his or her personal practice of liquid.

The third step involved interpreting the meanings of my findings, much of which is tied directly to practitioners' memories and experiences. Because memories shift in meaning over time, depending on the context, circumstances, and with whom those memories are shared, it was important for me to observe dance as it occurred, and conduct unstructured interviews almost immediately after the dance moment (Bochner 2012, Van Manen 2014). In other words, I focused on the immediacy of experience in order to observe the exchange and sharing of ideas as they occurred.

Conclusion

This chapter has established my primary research method as ethnography. It has shown the complexities of ethnographic methods necessary to investigate how the subculture of liquid evolved from a vernacular practice into a codified technique, as well as how the dance form continues to evolve through social media and live dance exchange. I methodically researched the key contributors to the development of the dance form, as well as determine which practitioners currently represent leadership roles within the online community.

During my fieldwork at Sonic Bloom, my goal was to capture those exchanges on video and transmit my observations on paper. This also allowed for me to reflect back on those moments. Dance memories reveal a multitude of perspectives and meanings, and therefore how practitioners understand and feel about such memories. My challenge as a scholar was to incorporate, through the process of triangulation, academic resources around each of my interviewee's observations, claims, assertions and/or beliefs on liquid dance. Coding my field notes provided a means to uncover the nuances of individual the practice that contribute to the collective subcultural values. In the following chapter, I trace the music and dance cultural predecessors that ultimately spawned the conditions for liquid's emergence within US raves.

CHAPTER 3: THE ROOTS OF LIQUID DANCE

Introduction

> There are three theories of how liquid came into being, at least among the heads I've learned from over the years. The first is the stacking motion that occurred at the early London acid house parties and NYC raves. Raves were super crowded and dancers were forced to dance in a contained space, so they'd repeat these basic stacking motion patterns where one hand would be over top of the other, and it eventually became more of a figure-eight style. The second theory is liquid came from waving and tutting, which I argue is heavily influenced by the Liquid Pop Collective's use of both since those styles are in a lot of their liquid videos and their tutorial. And the third, probably most popular theory is that liquid came from glow-sticks. At the core of liquid since its inception there have always been these questions of where did this dance come from? Where does liquid reside within dance culture, and where do we as liquid dancers fit into the dance world? (Falsify Interview 2017).

During my interview with second-generation liquid practitioner Will "Falsify" Greggathus, he maintains that liquid dancers "should know the history" of where this dance emerged. This suggests that there are unanswered questions regarding liquid's historical place in the spectrum of social dance practice. In this chapter, I return to the first of my research questions that asks, what are the historical and subcultural roots of liquid dance? Therefore, I set out to construct a history of the musical, cultural and social dance roots of liquid. I propose in the Introduction to the dissertation that liquid emerged from within US rave culture. The purpose of this chapter is therefore two-fold. First, I establish that US raves stem from the cultural predecessors of underground US disco, US house, and UK acid house. Second, I illustrate the specific music and social conditions within US raves that led to liquid dancing's emergence. I draw extensively from club, rave, and festival literature to trace the lineage of DJ music performance and social dance practices within each of these areas.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 1: *The Music and Dance Cultural Predecessors of US Raves* consists of subsections that historicize three preceding dance music cultures that influenced the development of US raves. The purpose of this is to trace the lineage of electronic dance music and DJ-centered events. *Disco* was the first dance music culture within the United States that utilized DJs as its primary source of music performance (Butler 2012; Fikentcher 2000). This is significant because it allowed the continuous, uninterrupted play of music for hours at a time to which participants could dance. This set the trend for future DJ-centered events, particularly with EDM. Disco splintered off into another subcultural music and dance scene that became known as *House* (Sommer 2001). In this subsection I outline and discuss how specific elements of disco culture were adopted and ultimately expanded into house music, a subgenre of EDM. I also examine the shift from the hedonistic aspects of disco to the dance-centered focus of house. I then transition into a discussion of *UK Acid House*, a British subgenre of dance music that fostered some of the earliest outdoor and indoor illegal dance parties catered to EDM. In this section I explore the impact of MDMA on the Acid House scene, specifically how it fostered a social dance vibe.

Section 2: *US Raves* explores the historical, cultural and social conditions of raves, which first emerged in New York City in 1988. It provides the necessary background for the reader to grasp the complex social and sensorial dimensions to this underground dance music culture. In the subsection titled *Storm Raves*, I analyze the nature of these NYC-based events that gave rise to a particular social vibe, primarily influenced by the presence of MDMA, that perpetuated an atmosphere conducive to sharing dance (Anderson 2009; Fikentcher 2000; Malbon 1999; Olaveson 2004). I

illustrate that the vibe generated within US raves represents an essential component to the emergence of liquid dance. Finally, I explore the raver prop of *glow-sticks*. I examine the visual effects of this playful dance tool and its subsequent influence on the development of liquid dance. I argue that glow-sticks represent the final catalyst for liquid dancing's emergence in US raves.

The Cultural Predecessors of US Raves

Disco

The late 1960s in the United States marked an era of dramatic social change. It was the height the Vietnam War, a time for African Americans' fight for civil rights and for feminist mobilization of the women's liberation movement.[17] Simultaneously, the psychedelic rock era of the late 1960s and its accompanying sexual revolution caused a significant political and moral shift in the public's views of sexuality and sexual acts (Brewster and Broughton 1999). This was particularly evident towards non-monogamous relationships, casual sex with multiple partners, and permissive attitudes to homosexuality. Evidence for this change in values stems from the legalization of abortion, the invention of The Pill as a primary source of birth control, and antibiotics for sexually transmitted diseases (Brewster and Broughton 1999). According to Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, coauthors of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (2000, 126), "gay Americans felt able to turn up the volume on their existence." For black gay men, disco represented the soundtrack and the space to express themselves through dance.

[17] The late 1960s and early 1970s fostered an era of equal rights movements. This includes the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Lib, gay rights, and legalization of abortion. See James Cook's (2008) *The Cultural Turn in US History*.

Disco began as an underground nightclub subculture in New York City, and was primarily "an African American creation refined and popularized by DJs at underground clubs for black gay men [beginning] in the late 1960s" (Hogan and Hudson 1998, 171). There was also a significant Hispanic, gay male presence within the disco nightclub communities of New York City (Brewster 1999). Club culture scholar Kai Fikentscher (2000) presents disco as an "underground dance music" (UDM) culture. Disco's roots were "underground" in the sense that it was not a music genre or culture associated with the mainstream, at least in its formative years. By the early 1980s, aspects of disco music and culture were commodified, and became part of the mainstream American life.

The concept of UDM is not unique to disco; its roots date back to the earliest forms of jazz music played in speakeasies during the prohibition era of the early 1920s. It is beyond the scope of this research to trace a comprehensive lineage of the vast underground music and dance practices of the twentieth-century. Therefore, I begin with disco because of its distinction from previous UDM scenes. Disco's primary innovation was in the curation of recorded music performance, as it replaced live musicians and bands with DJs. As an alternative to live performances by bands and orchestras, disco utilized recorded music pressed onto vinyl records that DJs "spun" on two turntables (Brewster and Broughton 1999). Like hip-hop, which developed in parallel with disco, the music remains challenging to categorize because it is composed of a wide range of sounds sampled from gospel, jazz, rock and roll, funk, and rhythm and blues (Fikentscher 2000). Disco records were played so that one track would seamlessly flow into the next, with no abrupt pauses, creating a continuous nonstop musical **mix** for dancers.

Fikentscher's conception of UDM reveals what he conceives as a "performance environment in which technologically mediated music is made immediate at the hands of a DJ, and in which this music is responded to via dance by bodies on the dance floor" (Fikentscher 2000, 22). This notion of immediacy and instant access shapes both the music and the embodied response to it. Disco's "environment" took place within venue spaces called discotheques (Matos 2015). For example, within the physical spaces of discotheques, such as the infamous Studio 54, dancers' senses were heightened by amplified sound.[18] The sonic components of volume, bass, treble, and tempo/BPM were controlled and manipulated by the DJ using **mixers**. This new technology enabled the DJ to efficiently distort, prolong or shorten portions of disco tracks to create a blend of auditory sensations for the listener. Within the space of any given discotheque, the music became both an auditory and physical experience, as dancers could literally feel the sounds of disco music in the body.

One of the technological advancements that made this blurring of the senses possible was the invention of subwoofers in the late 1960s (Lawrence 2003). Subwoofers amplified sound in ways never experienced in an indoor setting, measuring sound levels at an unprecedented 135 decibels, 10 decibels short of rupturing the eardrum, potentially

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[18] Studio 54 opened April 26, 1977 and closed in 1980. Studio 54 was architecturally reminiscent of an old theatre. Patrons included famous movie stars and other celebrities like Cher, Carry Grant, and Donald Trump, but also included performers such as drag queens, singers, musicians, blue collar and white collar workers, and of course, DJs (Haden-Guest 1997). According to disco historian Anthony Haden-Guest (1997), Studio 54 was established as an exclusive nightclub catered to the "fabulous" and "beautiful." Co-owners Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager insisted that patrons meet the criteria of being physically attractive, regardless of their sexual orientation, race, or economic status. Rubell personally oversaw the admission and denial of patrons at the front entrance of the venue located at 254 W. 54th Street in Manhattan. Rubell turned away far more people than he let in. See Hayden-Guest (1997).

resulting in permanent hearing damage (Lawrence 2003). Disco venues incorporated subwoofers into their sound systems that created "wall-to-wall sound," marking yet another characteristic of the disco experience (Fikentscher 2000, 26). The effect of this was an embodied experience that dancers felt, as they were literally enveloped by the sounds of disco music, as the sonic elements of bass resonated throughout the venue. In other words, the boundaries between music, the body and dance became porous.

A notable component of the disco experience was displayed through the cyclical relationship between the flow of energy from the dancers and the music spun by the DJ, which Fikentscher frames as disco "performance." Throughout the space of a typical night at a discotheque, patrons and dancers moved on and off the dance floor, while interacting with one another in various social engagements, ranging from casual conversation, to solo dancing, to informal dance competition.

While I do not provide an extensive analysis of dance styles or dancing bodies within disco, I feel it necessary to provide at least a brief description of some of the more popular practices. Thus, I divide disco dance practices into three broad categories: freestyle, partner and line dances. Freestyle dancing represents any "autonomous, individual creation" through physical movement by dancers (Fikentscher 2000, 76). Freestyle also involves differing levels of virtuosity and technical skills deployed at the discretion of the individual. For example, a dancer may choose to incorporate elements of dance styles within his or her repertoire, which could include disco or other dance forms. Line dances consist of large groups of dancers spontaneously forming organized lines of people to perform dance steps such as The Bus Stop (Powers 2003). Dancers complete quarter turns with each complete sequence, so that once the dancers repeat the movement

patterns four times, they “return to their original position” (Fikentscher 2000, 127). By 1974, the Latin social partner dance known as The Hustle emerged as an iconic disco dance form that brought male and female, gay and straight crowds together (Fikentscher 2000). Bonding through couple dancing shaped an atmosphere of acceptance and comradery, producing a disco dancing vibe that, at least from surface appearance, transcended ethnic, social, class and sexual differences on the dance floor.

Disco dance styles were determined and accentuated by fashion choices. The aesthetic of disco fashion mimicked both the formal and glamorous, and the casual and hippie trends. On the formal end of the fashion spectrum, one iconic women’s look was the wrap dress, which was knee length with cinched waist. It forms a v-shaped neckline while accentuating a woman’s curves. Other popular glamour fashion choices included ball and evening gowns, and stiletto shoes. Accessories included scarves, gold jewelry, skinny and wide belts. Women shined in their satin and gold colors, which glistened under the strobes and laser lights of discotheques. On the casual side, women wore sundresses, sweaters, tracksuits, tube tops, short-shorts, spandex and sneakers. For men, formal wear included three-piece suits typically in bright, shiny colors with wide-legged or flared trousers. Casual wear ranged from plain t-shirts to tight jeans and shorts.[19] Combined, men’s and women’s disco fashion choices created a visual cascade of moving bodies both on and off the dance floor, adding to an already complex sensorial experience particular to disco.

A final aspect of this sensorial experience stems from recreational drug use. Marijuana, LSD, cocaine, speed and methaqualone (“ludes”) were among the more

[19] See Appendix for FashionEra.com for more on the fashion trends of disco.

popular substances commonly ingested at discos throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Reynolds 1998). These so-called "club drugs" created what club, rave, and festival scholars refer to as synesthesia, which is a blurring of the senses, such as seeing music sounds and hearing colors of light (St John 2004).

The combination of the sensorial experiences of the aforementioned ambience of the disco venue, the flashy fashion, the drugs, the persistent cyclical relationship of the DJ spinning records and the participants dancing in response created a dance and social vibe particular to disco. According to Fikentscher (2000, 81), vibe in disco club scenes functioned as a "form of energy that collapses the boundaries of individual and collective musical experience, an energy made possible when the music transcends the acoustic realm and becomes physical." In this case, vibe represents the fluid, collective energy, or interrelationships between dancers and the music. The disco vibe depended on the continuously shifting variables such as "the size of the venue, the lighting, the patrons, the time of night, the dress code—in addition to the volume, tempo, and style of music" (Fikentscher 2000, 80).

In this section, I have established the essential qualities of the disco experience. The presence of the DJ as a musical performer represents disco's distinction from previous underground dance music cultures. From the late 1960s onward, DJs have gained access to continuously advancing technology that enables them to create dance music sets with greater efficiency. This includes everything from the turntables and mixers to sound and lighting systems installed within the venue spaces of discotheques. DJs constantly innovate through their craft by developing personal techniques of mixing and manipulating sound. This set the scene for other electronic music genres and

performance environments to be explored by DJs and dancers beyond the 1970s discotheque.

House

House music is a subgenre of EDM that combines the synthesized components of drum-machines and samples of acoustic instruments (Reynolds 1998). Like disco, house music was pressed onto vinyl records (Brewster and Broughton 1999). This was significant because it granted DJs the power to create a continuous mix of house music without interruption. In my experience, house music is structurally characterized by cyclical repetition of bass and drumbeats, with a strong emphasis on bass, rather than the melodic components. House music incorporates synthesized 4/4 rhythm that "hovers around 125-130 BPM, versus the slower 100 BPM of hip-hop or the faster 150-180 BPM of techno [or trance] (Sommer 74, 2001). Like disco, the repetitive musical structure allowed DJs to seamlessly cut and mix house records from one to the other. Thus, the performance of house music within the spaces of house music clubs produced a musical, social and dance environment similar to disco. Furthermore, the music at house events perpetuated a specific house vibe, as the dancers would respond to the sonic components of house music, and the DJ would respond to the energy embodied and expressed by dancers. Thus, the lineage of the DJ/dancer relationship was transmitted from disco to house.

It is widely accepted in club, rave, and festival literature and house music culture that house music can be traced back to one man: Frankie Knuckles (Anderson 2009; Lawrence 2005; Matos 2015). Colloquially referred to as "the godfather of house music,"

Knuckles was a gay African American DJ who pioneered a signature sound at a Chicago venue called The Warehouse (Lawrence 2005). The popular term "house music" stems from the 12-inch vinyl records spun by Knuckles at The Warehouse, which took place during the first-half of the 1980s (Brewster and Broughton 1999).

In many ways, house music culture is an extension of disco culture (Lawrence 2005). Like disco, house established its local, subcultural base within gay, African-American male communities within inner cities like New York and Chicago (Buckland 2002). By the late 1980s, house music and its associated dance forms, which I will come to shortly, became more popular across a diverse spectrum of patrons. Like disco, house expanded its demographics to include both gay and straight African American, Caucasian, Latino and Asian males and females (Anderson 2009; Matos 2015). In spite of the AIDS crisis between 1982 and 1985, in the latter half of the 1980s "a culture of sexual abandon prevailed for gay and straight clubbers alike" (Brewster and Broughton 302, 1999). This resulted in a subcultural house community that promoted a collective dance experience among diverse groups of individuals (Sommer 2001). However, according to Sommer, one of the major distinctions between disco and house culture is that the hedonistic aspect of drugs was far less essential for dedicated house dance practitioners. Although club drugs like marijuana, cocaine and LSD were present, music and dance remained the central focus of house events (Brewster and Broughton 1999).

Like all vernacular, underground dance forms, house dance developed over time, and eventually became codified into a complex movement technique. The foundation of the form, according to house dance pioneer Ejoe Wilson (Traxmag.com 2017), stems from a combination of upper body gestures and intricate footwork patterns. For example,

“Jacking,” otherwise referred to as “The Jack,” represents a fundamental aspect of this dance form’s physical and aesthetic foundations (Sommer 2001; Schloss 2009). Jacking consists of spine undulation, with a wave beginning at the base of the spine, travelling up the torso and out through the neck and head. The action of bending one’s knees is required for “deeper jacks,” resulting in more pronounced body waves (Wilson interview Traxmag.com 2017). In my experience, jacking incorporates body waves that mimic the sonic textures of house music, particularly the rhythms of the bass, while accentuating the more subtle musical elements like snares.

The footwork of house dance draws from multiple social dance traditions and aesthetics. For instance, the gallop, colloquially referred to as “digs,” named after the female house practitioner Jojo Diggs, involves kicking the feet forward, low to the ground, with the heel landing and the toe pointing upward. Each step hits or lands on each 4/4 house beat. With every gallop, the leading foot lands toe to heal, until the supporting foot is flat. Swift, fast footwork, combined with the groove of the upper body provide the foundational aesthetics of house dance.

By the mid-1980s, “housing” or “house dancing” became the primary dance style and aesthetic of the house music community (Sommer 2001). According to Brewster and Broughton (1999) house dancers wore comfortable clothing such as baggy jeans and sports sweatshirts, as well as cardigans, woolen jodhpurs and sneakers. Sommer (2001) describes how dedicated house dance practitioners are colloquially categorized as house-heads. She states, “The goal of the diehard house-head is to be part of the group yet maintain a sense of individuality—to seek the good vibe and hit the zone through the physical rapture of hard dancing” (Sommer 2001, 73). In other words, house-heads are

devoted dance practitioners who "vibe" with the music and each other. Like disco, the house "vibe" Sommer describes is constructed and connected by dancers' cyclical relationship with the house music spun by the DJ. She states:

> The vibe is an active, exhilarating feeling of "now-ness" that everything is coming together—that a good party is in the making. The vibe is constructive; it is a distinctive rhythm, the groove that carries the party psychically and physically (Sommer 2001, 73).

Sommer emphasizes the notion of "now-ness" as a house dancer's connection to the present moment shared through dance, as well as to the larger group within the space. Although Sommer's description lends itself to many social dance forms, the vibe generated in this context remains specific to house music and the physicality of dance produced in response to house music. Yet before long, this EDM music subculture also began to further splinter and migrate.

UK Acid House

Acid house first emerged in Chicago in 1987. It was discovered by "accident" by a group of three DJs (Nathaniel Pierre Jones, Earl "Spanky" Smith, and Herbert Jackson) known as Phuture (Rietveld 2004). This trio invested in two key pieces of technology to advance this subgenre of EDM: the Rolland TR-808 Drum Machine and the Rolland TB-303 Bass Synthesizer.[20] This new technology helped drive the music into "unprecedented dimensions" (Russell 1993, 98). Acid house "dehumanized the previously soulful Chicago house by orienting itself around new digital instrumentation...facing up to the very latest equipment and basing itself solely on those terms" (Russell 193, 124).

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[20] Two technological advances in music production provided house music producers and DJs with new electronic instruments through which to create synthesized sounds: the Roland TR808 Drum Machine and the TB303 Base Line Synthesizer (Reynolds 1998).

As a subgenre, acid house was epitomized through the subsequent production of "Acid Trax" (1987). This American acid house record was imported to the United Kingdom, marking the beginning of the acid house scene in the UK (Russell 1993). The sonic elements of acid house are composed of "incessant psychedelic or 'acid' squelchy bass sequences placed on top of a relentless 4/4 bass heavy beat" (Rietveld 2004, 51). The adjective "incessant" accurately conveys the continuous series of repeating rhythms, without pauses or breaks, that characterize acid house music. Like US disco and house, UK acid house initially attracted a black, gay male British youth audience that ultimately expanded into the straight, white male and female British youth in cities like Manchester and London (Collin 1997; Reynolds 1999).

When acid house reached the UK in 1988, British youth embraced a combination of hippie style and hip-hop fashion. Like US house, attire was worn for comfort and convenience to dance. This included pastel-colored shorts, T-shirts and bandanas, baggy trousers, and hooded sweatshirts. The most iconic image of acid house fashion was "the newly adopted [yellow] Smiley logo, conferring (at this time) secret subcultural membership" (Melechi 1993, 33). The Smiley logo represents a symbol of acid house subculture, marked by the so-called deviant behavior and hedonistic experience of "the joyous high" brought on by MDMA (Russell 1993, 127). The combination of the abundance of MDMA and other hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, alternative (illegal and unlicensed) spaces for all-night ecstatic dancing, the increased scale of louder sound systems, complex lighting, popular DJs like Paul Oakenfold, and new fashion attracted the attention of the British police and national media, and ultimately international media attention.

The late 1980s in the UK was marked by the rule of conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In Britain, licensing laws restricted nightclubs from remaining open past 2am (Rietveld 1993). British politician and law authority figure Graham Bright proposed a bill enacted into British law that enforced an increase in penalties for "unregulated private entertainment," the category under which acid house parties fell (Russell 1993, 76). The formula for throwing underground acid house parties can be traced back to one man. Tony Colston-Hayter was an entrepreneur who valued the thrill of outsmarting authorities (Redhead 1993). As a way to deter British police from shutting his events down, Colston-Hayter created a method designed to promote his illegal events. He fashioned an info-line system that consisted of passing out flyers with a telephone number (Olaveson 2004, 61), which would only be active and available the night of the party. Callers were told to drive to a location, and meet another person who served as a checkpoint. Depending on the location of the party, sometimes multiple checkpoints were used in order to maintain secrecy. This enabled acid house parties to run all night long without being detected and shut down by the police. According to club cultures scholar Matthew Collin (1997, 88), Colston-Hayter "wanted to create a hedonist Wonderland; he had even hired a children's bouncy castle for clubbers to cavort upon like weightless astronauts…like being freed into a fantasy playground sparked with the fairy dust of MDMA." One of the main motivators for Colston-Hayter was to provide a space for partying and openly ingesting MDMA.

Redhead (1993, 13) observes: "The mass media had a veritable field day with some of the key features of what it perceived to be a new youth style or subculture, to rival punk in the 1970s or hippy in the 1960s." Although these parties were initially small

and held in legal, licensed venues, acid house nights became so popular that promoters were forced to throw these events beyond the city limits, usually in obscure locations to deter law enforcement from intervening (Anderson 2009). The alternative spaces for these events were primarily held in illegal and unlicensed venues such as abandoned warehouses, airport hangers and fields (Redhead 1993). Eventually, these all-night events evolved into the phenomenon of the large-scale acid house parties, colloquially referred to as **massives**, that catered to between one and twenty-five-thousand people. During the summer of 1988, massives brought acid house music to a wider, mainstream audience (Anderson 2009). Although MDMA had been declared a Class A substance "with the same potential penalties as heroin and cocaine in Britain," it nonetheless had become the popular drug of choice in the acid house scene (Redhead 9, 1993). British media depicted the UK acid house phenomenon in the summer of 1988 as "The Second Summer of Love," in reference to the youth culture values (peace, love and unity) perpetuated at the Woodstock hippy festival of 1969 (Redhead 1993; Rietveld 1993; Russell 1993).

The UK acid house phenomenon provided the first series of EDM-centered underground dance parties connected largely by the mind-altering substance of MDMA. These all-night events brought thousands of people together to form a significantly distinct dance vibe. Eventually, the dance and social vibe of the UK acid house scene was adopted in the United States, which served as a platform for the next music and dance revolution: US raves.

US Raves

The late 1980s and early 1990s within the United States was under the presidency of George H.W. Bush. Conservative politics transferred from the Reagan era continued to benefit large tax cuts for the wealthy, while maintaining a sizeable poverty gap between the rich and poor. The Gulf War (1990-1991) brought international civil unrest. Popular youth culture responded through music ranging from gangsta rap to grunge rock. In response to the political, economic and social struggles of this time period, raves emerged as a localized US underground EDM-based dance culture (Anderson 2009; Redhead 1993; St John 2004).

Like the British acid house parties, raves took place primarily in unlicensed spaces such as abandoned warehouses and shipping yards. Ravers wore bright colors similar to the British acid house scene, but the main differences in fashion stem directly from hip-hop style influences (Anderson 2009; Rose 1994). For example, US ravers wore t-shirts, baggy hoodies and cargo pants, often with Adidas, Puma or Nike sneakers, and a single-colored beanie, baseball cap, or visor (Gregory 2009). Raves followed the lineage of US house and UK acid house, as raver attire was worn for comfort to dance in hot indoor and outdoor environments.

US Raves consisted of a wide variety of EDM subgenres performed by DJs on multiple stages, or **rooms** (Anderson 2009). EDM subgenres included the aforementioned 4/4 beats of house, techno and trance, as well as the syncopated beats of breaks and drum 'n' bass. Each room within the space of the venue caters to a specific musical style, yet ravers had the freedom to navigate between rooms at their leisure (Gregory 2009). The "main" stage (or the largest stage) provided a space for the "headline DJ," a colloquial

term to describe a DJ who is recognized within the rave scene for producing specific EDM sets.

At first, US raves catered predominantly to a young, straight, white male crowd. However, the events slowly drew in a significant following of young, white females, gay white and black males, as well as gay and straight Asian male and females (Anderson 2009). Scholars across multiple disciplines have referred to *raves* as cultures, subcultures, scenes, tribes, neo-tribes, and/or lifestyles (Anderson 2009; Bennett 2004; Redhead 1993; St John 2004). For the purposes of my research, I refer to the larger social and cultural practices within raves as a subculture. However, I deploy sociologist and ethnographer Tammy Anderson's (2009) strategy of referring to geographically specific rave sites as *scene(s)*. The rave scene(s) refers to "the people, activities, culture and cultural products (i.e. music and parties), institutions, communication outlets and physical spaces" (Anderson 14, 2009). My rationale for adopting Anderson's approach is to acknowledge that raves have multiple, specialized scenes across the United States. The rave scene that I am concerned with in this chapter is geographically centered in New York City. I begin this section with a brief history of the first US raves in order to illustrate the specific social, cultural and musical conditions that ultimately fostered the emergence of liquid dance.

Storm Raves

Brooklyn resident DJ Frankie Bones is credited with bringing the rave scene to the United States during the summer of 1988 (Fritz 1999; Matos 2015). Although Bones began his DJ career spinning hip-hop records, he eventually gravitated towards the

electronic music spectrum, spinning a variety of house and techno tracks at underground nightclub events in the late 1980s. According to all of my liquid dance interviewees, and further supported in club culture scholarship (Anderson 2009; Matos 2015), the widely accepted narrative that has circulated among US rave subculture is that Bones travelled to London to play at a rave, ingested MDMA and had a profound experience playing for thousands of people. Bones returned to the United States with the intention of sharing the vibes and sounds of the London acid house scene (Anderson 2009; Fritz 1999). With the aid of a microphone, he began his DJ sets with the following speech: "'Hello party people! I just came back from England! And I just experienced this thing: The rave!'" (Matos 2015, 50). In the following summer of 1989, rave took the US by "storm," hence the first US raves were colloquially known as *Storm Raves*, which Bones organized, promoted and spun records at from 1989 until 1993 (Fritz 1999).

The Storm Raves that Bones hosted bridged the once separate worlds of house and acid house, creating a new collective: ravers. In 1992, during one of Bones' DJ sets, a fight broke out in the middle of the dance floor. According to Sylvan (2005), the popular story that circulated among ravers who attended the event was that Bones stopped the music, grabbed a microphone and demanded that patrons stop fighting and show peace, love, unity and respect. Through these words, Bones inadvertently became the curator of the rave-based concept of PLUR: Peace, Love, Unity and Respect (Anderson 2009; Fritz 1999; Sylvan 2005).

From my own experience at raves, I came to understand the concept of PLUR in the following ways. For instance, Anderson (2009, 197) describes cuddle puddles as "a group of ravers who sit on the ground or the floor to talk with each other and listen to

music." This was a common social practice at raves that specifically catered to those under the influence of MDMA. There are two reasons for this. The first involves openly communicating with ravers who likely never met prior. The second is the opportunity for physical contact, often through massage of the shoulders, neck and back. Yet, these extemporaneous massage sessions were, according to Anderson (2009, 30) "asexual" in nature. In other words, despite the hedonistic feelings generated from MDMA and the enhancement of touch, such social activities promote connection with friends and strangers. Cuddle puddles combine verbal communication with physical contact. Thus, cuddle puddles represent one of the social activities that perpetuate the rave mantra of PLUR.

Although, PLUR is only one part of the vibe generated at raves, the term was widely circulated and became attached to rave culture. In addition to my understanding of its meanings and significance, my interviewees also commented on its presence as part of a collective philosophy within the rave community. For this reason, I include samples from interviews with liquid practitioners who participated in raves as a way to explore the subtle connections of the philosophy of PLUR to the concept of vibe, and their connection to the development of liquid, which I will further explore in Chapter 4.

Second-generation liquid practitioner Shane "Blue" Talbot reflects on his experiences with PLUR at raves in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He says:

> I think the concept of Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect was definitely present and important, although I wouldn't call it completely ubiquitous. I think more importantly, the music itself unlocks a more fundamental connection to the world and people around you. If music indeed reflects the pulse of life, then when everyone synchronizes to the same rhythm, it becomes very easy to make that emotional connection (Talbot interview 2016).

Talbot's words highlight the stronger importance of the music as that which builds the vibe, and, he explains, can bring strangers together through dance. However, Talbot acknowledges that PLUR was at least a notable component of US raves, which influenced the overall vibe.

Since many participants were under the influence of mind-altering substances that generally projected states of euphoria, the vibe consisted of what Hickman understands as "an un-vocalized natural extension of being and experiencing a creative environment" (Hickman 2016 Interview). I interpret this "creative environment" Hickman refers as an energy and space for ravers and liquid dancers alike to learn, share and create their own experience through dance. Hickman seems to be alluding to a connection felt between dancers responding to collective *and* individual energies of ravers within the venue space, as well as the sensations generated through music, and sometimes, mind-altering substances like MDMA. What was unique about this connection of vibe in the context of 1990s rave subcultures was embodied through dance to EDM that produced a dance form indigenous to raves. And one raver prop brought this exchange of ideas into a visual display through a small play accessory: the glow-stick.

Glow-Sticks

Glow-sticks are plastic tubes that contain phenyl oxalate, fluorescent dye and hydrogen peroxide solution. When the plastic casing of the tube is bent, the result is a self-sustaining luminescent light source, creating glowing effect that stays lit for up to eight hours. Glow-sticks were invented in the 1960s by chemist Edwin Chandross, and in

the 1970s, the US Navy developed its own version of glow-sticks for military purposes.[21] By the early 1990s, glow-sticks found their way into the US rave scene. Although popular histories of rave have not traced how glow-sticks first appeared at rave events, the adoption and repurposing of fashions and artifacts to signify the visual identity of a subculture is commonplace. As Hebidge (1979) notes, this strategy of bricolage is employed by youth subcultures to produce a spectacular style. In common with the smiley acid faces and the bright tie-dye t-shirts, the luminous glow-sticks also contributed to the heady and psychedelic visual atmosphere of rave events. They became a popular rave prop used to create "tracers" or light patterns in space for ravers, some of whom were under the influence of psychedelic drugs (Hickman interview 2016). This was a visually stimulating phenomenon (whether sober or inebriated) that became an essential aesthetic to rave subculture. Most notably, glow-sticks were the visual catalyst for liquid dancing's emergence. As Hickman explains: "The earliest form of liquid started with ravers holding glow sticks and creating crazy light patterns they traced around themselves" (Hickman interview 2016).

The visual effects of glow-sticks drew focus from onlookers, many of whom were under the influence of MDMA or LSD, which sparked a desire to receive what was commonly referred to as light shows. Hickman further elaborates, "You didn't have to be a liquid dancer to use glow-sticks, but liquid and glow-sticks went hand in hand, literally" (Hickman interview 2016). These light shows were personalized, improvised dance sequences where the dancer performed for an individual or a small group of onlookers, who simply stood or sat still while visually following the tracing patterns of light

[21] See glowtopia.com and dpglowstick.weebly.com (accessed September 20, 2018).

generated by the glow-sticks. The onlookers became mesmerized by the intricate patterns that seamlessly morphed, bent and twisted right in front of their eyes. Light shows lasted anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes, depending on the flow of the dancer and the vibe created between the onlooker and the dancer. Light shows formed a type of social exchange that linked object manipulation, drugs, EDM and dance together to create a visual and kinetic performance unique to US rave culture. This is a significant moment for the development of liquid dance as the trace patterns of the hands in liquid derived directly from the light tracer patterns generated from glow-sticks.

The emergence of glow-sticks in US raves sparked two things. First, glow-sticks provided social dance engagement between ravers in the form of personalized light shows. This enhanced the sensorial experiences for both the performer and observer, and demanded a direct social interaction that was not so prevalent in the solo dancing at raves. Second, the manipulation of glow-sticks to produce light patterns was the catalyst for liquid dance trace patterns, which I will come to in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the historical and subcultural roots of liquid dance. To do so, I examine disco, house, UK acid house and US raves, and show how each created environments with specific music, fashion, and dance practices, which produced distinct dance music vibes. Notably, all of these scenes utilized DJs as the primary source of music performance. Disco, while rooted in gay black culture, expanded its demographics to attract a broad body of mainstream consumers. Within the hedonistic spaces of the discotheque, patrons indulged in an atmosphere of glamour, hedonism and freedom to

dance. Disco undoubtedly established the importance of venue environment, the prominence and power of the DJ, and the site-specific vibe generated by the music and dancers.

The US House scene continued some of the music performance traditions of disco, especially in terms of the uninterrupted mixes performed by DJs. The distinct evolution of house music, however, stems from both the technological advancements in music production, and the dance form that emerged from the music. The US house music scene created a space for dancing to electronic music for its own sake. Although mind-altering substances were available, dance was the central subcultural interest perpetuated within this scene. It produced dedicated practitioners who ultimately developed a codified dance practice. Furthermore, the house music scene encompassed and perpetuated a social vibe centered on the music and the dance exchanges between practitioners.

Although the UK acid house scene only lasted for two to three years, its significance as a predecessor of US raves cannot be understated. The UK acid house era presented the earliest all-night illegal dance parties catered to electronic dance music. Second, the introduction of MDMA into the UK acid house scene represents a key contribution to fostering a particular dance vibe between partygoers. Distinct from the experience of US house, where the competitive aspects of dancing reigned in the cypher, UK acid house dance manifested through the internalized experiences of MDMA. This set into motion the historical conditions for US rave culture to emerge in the late 1980s.

The first US raves adopted the previous traditions of disco, house and acid house through the creation of an alternative space centered on the subcultural value of dance exchanges. As a result, liquid dance emerged in its rudimentary form within the spectrum

of EDM-centered US raves between 1989 and 1993 at the New York City Storm Raves. These raves laid the foundations of the social and material conditions necessary to facilitate liquid's emergence in the years that follow. I argue that the conditions that brought about the emergence of liquid dancing are as follows: multiple EDM subgenres spun by DJs at unlicensed venues, the presence of illegal hallucinogenic substances (especially MDMA), the raver mantra of PLUR, and the raver prop of glow-sticks. Clearly, each of these aforementioned elements created a distinct social dance vibe. The following chapter therefore continues with the specific history of liquid through exploring three individual dancers who contributed to the emergence of this form.

CHAPTER 4: PIONEERS OF LIQUID

Introduction

Although I detail in the previous chapter how the scene was set for liquid dance to emerge, in Chapter 4 I ask who were the practitioners responsible for creating the foundations of liquid dance and what was their role in the development of the subcultural practice? I therefore explore the personal narrative accounts of three key first-generation liquid dance practitioners: Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea, Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman and "Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE). In this chapter I argue that the genesis of liquid dancing's foundations stem from these practitioners' experiences and embodied actions within the east coast US rave scenes of New York City and Philadelphia between 1994 and 2000. I deploy the term foundation by drawing from popular dance scholar Joseph Schloss's (2009) research on the New York City breakdance (B-boy/B-girl) scene. Schloss's conception of foundation is a useful critical lens because it encompasses the physical components of dance movements, as well as "the history of the movements, strategies for how to improvise, philosophy about the dance in general, musical associations, and a variety of other [related] subjects" (Schloss 2009, 12). Like breakdancing, I argue the foundations of liquid dance stem from long-standing traditions of historically and culturally situated social dance practices rooted in improvisation.

I incorporate three critical lenses from dance studies that provide distinct, yet interconnected frameworks through which I analyze the foundations of liquid dance. First, I draw from Goldman's (2010) conception of improvisation as both a dance technique and practice of freedom. Second, I apply Noland's (2009) conception of

kinesthesia and kinesthetic agency to analyze the physicality of liquid dance. Third, I deploy De Spain's (2014) conception of tracking as a way to analyze how liquid dancers consciously and unconsciously determine their improvised movement sequences. Using concepts that are rooted in dance practice, specifically, improvisation, kinesthetic agency and tracking, I show how these dancers developed the foundations of liquid.

The chapter is organized into four main sections. The first three introduce each dancer, whom I position as pioneers of liquid dance. They include narrative accounts of each dancer's earliest experiences with the form, which are cross-referenced and supplemented with references to concepts drawn from club, rave, and festival literature, subcultural theory and dance studies. I also draw from my interviews with other first and second-generation practitioners who consider Gorea, Hickman and LpE to be essential and respected contributors to the foundations of liquid dance and its subcultural community. Section four returns to an important contribution of all three pioneers: a game colloquially referred to as "locking the lookers." This game expanded liquid dance from an internalized, solo practice into the realm of performance and exchange between participants. I assert that the embodied contributions of these pioneers of liquid present significant influence on the foundations of the dance form.

Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea

> Tiny Love streaks the air with green light, drawing the gaze of ravers deep into his unending flow of tracer patterns. His continuous circular tessellations expand, contract, and morph with the melodies and synthesized drum patterns of trance music. The outlines of his silhouette become illuminated one limb at a time as he progressively traces every curve of his body with two glow-sticks.

The above description captures Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea, aged 24, performing an improvised glow-stick dance set at a New York City rave party called NASA in 1996 (See Appendix A). Gorea, now 45, is a Caucasian-Romanian immigrant who began his dance journey at the age of 12 in 1985. He developed his dance training in Romania, primarily in the hip-hop styles of popping, with particular emphasis on the techniques of **boogaloo**, waving, tutting, **ticking**, **cobra**, and **dime stops**. Before immigrating to the US, Gorea identified and classified himself as a popper. Then, in 1990, he moved to Queens, New York with his mother to escape the communist regime. Over the next four years, Gorea immersed himself in New York City hip-hop culture by attending breakdance and popping battles, jams and other hip-hop-related events.

When Gorea turned 21 in 1994, he discovered the NYC electronic dance music nightclub scene. He frequently attended events at venues such as Limelight, Palladium and The Tunnel.[22] At these nightclubs, DJs played variations of house, techno, trance, breaks and drum 'n' bass (Anderson 2009; Matos 2015). Gorea observed what he refers to colloquially as club kids dancing at the Palladium as if they were made of water. According to Gorea, club kids danced for hours at a time, typically pacing themselves by pausing to rest between the breakdowns and builds of each EDM track.

Between 1994 and 1996, Gorea met dozens of dancers who, according to him, were proficient with glow sticking, as well as what he considered to be a solid foundation in liquid. For instance, liquid dancers within the aforementioned club spaces displayed their virtuosic abilities with glow-sticks within their kinesphere by creating improvised light pattern sequences that mimicked the rhythms of the EDM tracks spun by the DJ.

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[22] See Appendix A for websites on Limelight, Palladium and The Tunnel.

These patterns often resembled an elaborate connection of geometric shapes, such as squares, rectangles, triangles, circles and ovals.

Gorea adds insight to how a dancer's hands manipulated the glow-sticks in two ways. The first technique involved clutching each glow-stick by wrapping the four fingers and thumb around them with only about an inch of the stick completely visible. The second technique was to place each glow-stick by threading them underneath the knuckles of the pointer and fifth digit (little finger), with the middle and index fingers bent, and the thumb remaining on the outside.

The different positions of the fingers clasping each glow-stick created distinct light tracer patterns when dancing. For example, clutching glow-sticks created light tracers that were smaller and sharper, resembling thin circular and linear patterns within one's reach space. The method of threading glow-sticks cast a series of light tracer patterns visibly distinct from clutching by separating the glow-sticks' illumination into three light segments. When dancers like Gorea utilized this method, the result was an illusion of multiple light patterns generated from one source.

Gorea did not know the name for the abstract movements generated from glow-sticks until he went to his first rave, called Sputnik (Satellite Records), in New Jersey in 1996. At this event, he observed that ravers were displaying similar patterns with glow-sticks that he first saw in New York City nightclubs. In addition, he also noticed that dancers were incorporating similar trace patterns *without* glow-sticks, thus creating a new dance aesthetic.

Gorea was arguably the first raver to expand and formalize the concepts of liquid into a kinesthetically repeatable technique. He could "see the rails and the figure eight

patterns," visually represented by glow-sticks that painted a vivid image of a dance form based on such illusionary patterns. His most prevalent contribution to liquid was incorporating the figure eight pattern popular among ravers using glow-sticks. Gorea started exploring different physical positions of the fingers, wrists, and arms to create multiple variations of light tracer patterns easily visible when he performed on a club stage or in sectioned off performance spaces on the dance floor.[23] He recalls, "If I did liquid without the sticks, with just my bare hands it was better if you [the viewer] were up close so you could see the different patterns" (Gorea Interview 2017). To visualize Gorea's execution of the figure-eight pattern, I provide the following description of him liquid dancing at a private residence in New York City:

> He lowers the brim of his plain white hat over his eyebrows, drawing intense focus to his hands. With his wrists touching, and his fingers bent, Tiny Love swiftly executes a continuous series of figure-eight patterns in front of his torso. His chest contortions are accentuated by his plain white t-shirt as his chest muscles contract and expand on beat. He gradually expands each figure-eight sequence by widening the distance between his hands with each consecutive revolution. Simultaneously, he effortlessly contracts and releases his chest in a counter-clockwise rotation as he smoothly sways his hips from side to side in baggy blue jeans, while gliding in Adidas sneakers back and forth with heal-to-toe movements grooving to the beats of underground techno. (Gorea YouTube Video).[24]

The digitally marked date on the video reads 12:49am 8/30/1996, and this clip marks the earliest evidence of liquid dance captured on film. Five of Gorea's raver friends watch him as he improvises to an obscure techno mix. They were the core members of the first dance crew to perform liquid with glow-sticks. Liquid Lights Crew (LLC) was formed in

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[23] Most of the spaces where Gorea and his dance crew performed were in the middle of dance floors and various clubs and raves. However, occasionally party promoters would position the LLC on small, elevated stages not far from the DJ booth. See Appendix A for video.

[24] See Appendix A.

1996, and the crew performed at weekly and monthly NYC raves, clubs and street shows between 1996 and 2001. The LLC had at least twelve members, each of whom embodied personalized styles of liquid.[25] Remembering the impact of the crew while dancing at events, Gorea explains, “We used to bug people out who were tripping on LSD and MDMA by giving them light shows at all the parties we went to” (Gorea Interview 2017). These light shows were improvised performances designed to “bug people out,” a colloquial expression used to describe the act of purposefully mesmerizing ravers. Gorea recalls:

> We were the first crew to have people stand or sit still and give personal light shows to. We did these light shows right in front of your face. And because we understood the rhythms of the music, we’d illustrate the music for you using our glow-sticks. And the lights would make these tracer patterns, and the faster you danced with the lights the longer the tracer patterns would last and stay in air (Gorea interview 2018).

There are two main points of interest in Gorea’s quote. First, the tracer patterns that Gorea describes ultimately formed some of the foundational aesthetic principles of liquid dance. Specifically, creating a series of continuous patterns and shapes within the body’s reach space is central to the flow-like quality of liquid. Some patterns traced the outlines of the body, such as the legs, pelvis, hips, torso, neck and head. Within these moments, the LLC were experimenting with the rudimentary forms of liquid through improvisation. For example, the LLC performed light shows regularly at a rave-centered nightclub called Palladium in New York City between 1996 and 1997, right before the club was

[25] Liquid Lights Crew members: Razvan “Tiny Love” Gorea, Jason “Dr. Funk,” “Yoshi,” “Macke,” “Danny,” “Sorin,” “Leo,” “Elmo,” “Radu,” “Billy,” “OPP,” “Mort,” and “Robo.”

shut down and demolished.[26] Interestingly, Goldman (2010) discusses Mambo dance circles that took place at the Palladium in the 1940s and 1950s. Goldman emphasizes:

> Mambo offered that real area of improvisation where a movement from any form of dance could be expressed. This area of improvisation is significant, as it places a different set of demands on the dancer than choreography. Although dancers undoubtedly make interpretive choices when performing choreography, there is no "next move" ready and waiting in improvised social dance" (Goldman 2010, 38).

My point in drawing from Goldman here is to show that there has been a long-standing tradition of improvisational practices in the club space of Palladium. In addition, Goldman's quote draws on several key points that draw distinctions between choreographed and improvised dance. She positions Mambo as an example of a social dance performed within the club space of the Palladium in order to exemplify her notion that dancers practice the "freedom" to express themselves in such spaces without relying on a "next move" (as in choreography) to determine how the dance progresses. In this particular club space, improvisation is encouraged as dancers draw from individual movement aesthetics.

In writing about improvisation, Goldman (2010) asserts that it does not occur within a vacuum, but is based on traditions, rehearsals, and social restrictions that shape what bodies can and cannot do. Yet, within the "tight places" (Goldman 2010) of nightclubs like Palladium, dancers engage in a "practice of freedom" through which they make creative decisions in the moment. This was also the case for liquid dancers who improvised in club Palladium in the 1990s. Although the LLC primarily drew from previous dance experiences that adhered to the movement codes and conventions of rave events, they also created improvised liquid dance solos and group performances based on

[26] Palladium: Opened in 1985 and closed in 1997.

the music, venue and surrounding ravers of each specific rave event. For the LLC, this approach to drawing from other movement aesthetics and previous dance experiences allowed them to create and develop personal style. Like Goldman's (2010) notion of improvising through trial and error, the LLC similarly experimented with glow-sticks.

The second point of interest from Gorea's narrative account is his assertion that he and his crew were the originators of light show performances at raves. During my research, I confirmed Gorea's claim through dozens of archived video documentation housed on multiple social media platforms.[27] In one clip, the LLC sectioned off an area of the dance floor using traffic cones with glow-sticks sticking out of the top ends as a makeshift barrier between themselves and onlookers. They utilized approximately ten to fifteen square feet within the center of the dance floor.

Gorea and the LLC embodied some of the earliest examples of liquid that extended beyond its rudimentary form, but before most of the physical components were given a conceptual framework and categorized into distinct movement vocabulary by those committed to developing and preserving the dance. According to Noland (2009, 90), a dancer's body "does not contain limitless new ways of moving; rather, the motor body contains new ways of moving that *have not yet been parsed and organized by a single culture* [her emphasis]." Noland considers the body as a tool to unlock unexplored avenues of movement, and it is possible to identify the conditions that enabled Gorea to do so. Gorea already possessed an embodied knowledge of popping, which demands a

[27] Tracing the lineage of Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea's rave experiences, glow-stick performances and liquid dance influence was initially a challenge. He continuously posts weekly (and sometimes daily) new video clips of his improvised dance performances on YouTube and Facebook. However, Gorea granted me access to some of his personal archived footage, also available on YouTube.

skilled use of improvisation within isolated body parts. This set up a template to further cultivate an exploratory approach to the rudimentary form of liquid dance. Yet, his dance experiences were influenced by what Goldman (2010, 8) describes as the "socio-historical and material conditions that affect how people move." In the case of Gorea and the LLC, such conditions emerged within the spaces of 1990s New York City raves and clubs.

Furthermore, Gorea's progressive dance innovations were informed by his previous experiences with popping technique. According to De Spain (2014), dancers develop improvisational values and techniques over time. The values that shaped Gorea's practice were a proclivity to creating precise 90-degree angles within tutting, while transitioning between different shapes to the rhythms of EDM. De Spain (2014, 45) describes the improvisational process of tracking as "noticing certain aspects of what is happening" in the body in order to "inform choice-making" during improvised dance sequences. Gorea developed these embodied values by "tracking" his dance experiences as a way to remember how he "worked with the rhythms" in previous improvised tutting sets (De Spain 2014, 48). Gorea tracked his progress of improvising within different aesthetics of popping, especially waving, tutting, and isolations, in addition to how he executed weight shifts from foot to foot, level changes (i.e. from standing to kneeling). Gorea also tracked aspects of his movements through how he approached his responses to particular styles of EDM, especially techno, house, breaks, and drum 'n' bass. By experimenting within this diverse range of the tempos and distinct sonic components of each subgenre of EDM, Gorea expanded both his musicality and his dance vocabulary. And ultimately, this informed his approach to exploring liquid dance.

Once Gorea started experimenting with liquid, he then began to develop specific movement concepts. One important innovation was Gorea's application of liquid dance fundamentals to an established concept of popping. This popping concept is called "fixed point," and according to Gorea (interview 2017) is the idea of one imaginary point (or series of points) resting along an imaginary "grid." This grid encompasses one's reach space. Such grids represent the framework of another dance form, tutting, which consists of creating geometric shapes with the fingers, wrists, forearms and elbows using precise 90-degree angles (Maranan 2012). Visually, tutting looks like a continuously evolving series of squares, rectangles and L-shapes.

Although Gorea did not invent fixed point, he was the first dancer to apply liquid components to this concept. Given Gorea's expertise also in popping and tutting, he explains: "Poppers were already doing fixed point when they were tutting" (Gorea interview 2017). Here, Gorea cites the technique of tutting as a predecessor to liquid, and indicates an important subcultural value. As Schloss (2009) and Fogarty (2012) explain in relation to the neighboring hip-hop styles of breaking and popping, participants of subcultures demonstrate knowledge of their practice by articulating awareness of its history and naming pioneer practitioners. Colloquially understood as "knowing your history" and "respecting your elders," such knowledge reveals significant subcultural capital. I argue that Gorea's careful attention to dance lineage and history represents the subcultural value of passing the flow of dance knowledge from one generation of dancers to another. In this case, Gorea extends his knowledge of fixed point from popping into liquid. This signifies that Gorea also has both an embodied understanding of fixed point, and an appreciation for its historical place within vernacular dance practice.

Gorea's complex approach to incorporating and fusing elements of popping techniques with liquid gave him a singular distinction as one of the "OGs" of this form. First-generation liquid practitioner Sean "D-Strange" Mahnken confirms this:

> Tiny Love is one of the oldest ravers and liquid heads in the game. He was doing liquid even before we were. I mean his influence in the scene can't be overstated man. Tiny has been one of those dancers who always shared his knowledge from day one, and he is definitely one of the guys I still look up to after all these years (D-Strange interview 2017).

Clearly, Gorea's impact as a pioneer helped to lay key movement foundations and this contribution needs to be recognized within the development of liquid dance. First, he established a base for liquid's emergence from the aesthetics and technique of glow-sticking. Second, his performances with the LLC represent the first of their kind within US raves. And finally, Gorea's purposeful application of the popping concept of fixed point created a scaffolding to explore linear patterns with liquid technique.

Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman

> He embodies the bass, the melody, the tempo and the rhythm of an **electro-breaks** track blasting from state-of-the-art speakers. He performs intricate rail[28] patterns, executed with effortless flow. One set of fingers follows the other, as if pulled by magnets in a straight line across the chest along the horizontal plane. His leading left elbow smoothly drops to waist level, pulling his forearm, wrist, hand and fingers into the vertical plane. His right fingers continue to follow the left along the same pattern, dipping and curving like the crest of an ocean wave. Suddenly, both arms shift into the sagittal plane, flipping positions so that his right arm now leads the left. If time stopped, his arms look like two inverted geometric shapes resembling two opposite capital Ls. The image lasts for only a moment as his eyes continue following the patterns of his hands, drawing himself deeper into proprioceptive bliss.

[28] Rails: Acronym for To Range In a Line, and a concept of liquid developed by the Liquid Pop Collective to describe one set of fingers following the other along a pre-determined path around the body.

The above description illustrates Hickman improvising to an EDM track at a Philadelphia rave event in 2001.[29] Hickman is a 38-year-old Caucasian-American male born in Trenton, New Jersey. He has been a liquid practitioner since his first exposure to the dance form at a New York City rave in the summer of 1994. Hickman was fourteen years old when he attended his first rave in New York City. That night, he ingested two mind-altering substances simultaneously: LSD (Acid) and MDMA (Ecstasy).[30] This activity, colloquially referred to by ravers as candy-flipping was a common social practice in US rave culture throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Collin 1997; Tramacchi 2004). While it is not my intention to engage in a psychological analysis of Hickman's drug experiences, I hope to illustrate through his narrative account how his drug experiences shaped his earliest perceptions of liquid. It will become clear throughout his reflections that LSD and MDMA helped him to achieve what club culture scholars have called an "altered state" (Collin 1997; Malbon 1999; Reynolds 1998; St. John 2004). Furthermore, I suggest that Hickman's narrative demonstrates how ingesting both LSD and MDMA, allowed him to access what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) frames as the optimal experience of flow-state.

Csikszentmihalyi describes two characteristics of flow state. The first is awareness of one's actions, but not of the awareness itself. In other words, an individual experiencing flow in a physical activity like dance does *not* interrupt themselves with

[29] See Appendix A.

[30] As first discussed in Chapter 2, the stigma associated with psychedelics and hallucinogens creates a major limitation on the subject of mind-altering substances and its relation to liquid's development. Hickman was the only dancer I interviewed who openly discuss his drug experiences and how they impacted his development and relation to liquid dance. Therefore, I am grateful to Hickman for his willingness to share his memories and for his candor.

questions that often circulate from an outside perspective, such as asking: am I doing well; what am I doing here; should I be doing this; and how does this look to others? These questions are referred to as experiencing a “loss of ego,” “loss of self consciousness,” “self-forgetfulness” and/or “transcendence of individuality” (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 42). This applies directly to experimenting with liquid dance, but does not necessarily mean that one must be in an “altered” state to be in “flow” state. As this section will illustrate, LSD and MDMA are tools to obtain flow-state more quickly.

The second characteristic Csikszentmihalyi describes is that “flow seems to occur only when tasks are within one’s ability to perform. That is why one experiences flow most often in activities with clearly established rules for action, such as rituals, games, or participatory art forms like dance” (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 39). For liquid dancers, physical skills are cumulative and developmental in the sense that movement knowledge builds over time. Yet for early pioneers like Hickman, liquid was in its infancy, and thus, limited to hand-based movements that did not expand far beyond the technique of hand-flow. One of the inherent advantages to ingesting LSD resides in its “strong vision-inducing properties” that alter the neural transmitters in the brain, resulting in altered perceptions of reality (Tramacchi 138, 2004). For Hickman, LSD expanded his visual and kinesthetic understanding of liquid dance, and simultaneously allowed him to achieve focus. Thus, he maintained prolonged flow states at raves.

Hickman recalls: “When the acid kicked in, everything around me went two-dimensional” (Hickman Interview, 2016). This revealed to Hickman a visual understanding of the geometric connection of liquid to running along imaginary grids.

Like Gorea, Hickman realized that in liquid dance, the hands could be traced in similar linear patterns created through tutting. Hickman asserts that through "hours and hours of dancing at raves" he gradually began to see that tutting was limited to a fixed distance between transitions from one shape (or tut) to the next (Hickman interview 2016).

If LSD can be a conduit for a dancer to conceptualize and visualize the manifestation of a form, then MDMA opens the door to kinesthetically reveal that form through the body. MDMA causes the release of serotonin, resulting in a cascade of sensations by altering individual perceptions so that sounds of EDM "seemed to caress the listener's skin" (Reynolds 1999, 84). Hickman confirms Reynold's description of MDMA's physical effects in his narrative account. He recalls: "When I started rolling on E my muscles and joints softened to the point where I felt like jelly."[31] In this moment, Hickman's joints, shoulders, forearms, wrists and fingers allowed him to dance "like jelly," and to simultaneously "feel the music, the people and the vibe in ways that to this day were unparalleled" (Hickman 2016 interview). From a kinesthetic perspective, his limbs transitioned from less angular shapes into a smooth, water-like flow, and thus a water-like appearance. This aesthetic moment exhibits the physicality of liquid dance and its essential characteristic of continuous flow. Hickman developed an enhanced form of kinesthetic awareness, which Noland (2009, 9) theorizes as a "sixth sense," or a series of sensorial experiences that ultimately shaped Hickman's "agency," or personal choices of movement available in the conscious mind. The kinesthetic sensations experienced under the simultaneous influence of LSD and MDMA, which Hickman and others experimented with, ultimately developed into repeatable dance techniques.

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[31] Rolling is a colloquial term for being under the influence of MDMA or Ecstasy (Hickman Phone Interview 2016).

As Hickman affirms, “LSD and MDMA alone were nothing without electronic dance music” (Hickman interview 2016). In other words, these substances amplified and expanded his perceptions and kinesthetic awareness, but it was the multiple subgenres of EDM that inspired him to dance. For example, Hickman describes quad-based rhythms of techno, house and trance that began to flow in and out of his entire body from all directions. Rave and club culture scholars have described similar sensorial experiences of EDM as “thunderous bass” that “rattles the lungs” and matches the rhythm of the heartbeat (Gerard 2004; McCall 2001). For Hickman, the combination of electronic music, the availability of drugs (especially LSD/acid and MDMA/ecstasy), the space of the underground venue, and the vibe of the participants perpetuated a “creative energy and atmosphere” for ravers to develop the aesthetic of liquid (Hickman interview 2016). The social and sensorial experiences generated comradery, empathy and connection between participants, which fostered an atmosphere of creativity and sharing ideas through dance exchanges. These ideas, or “concepts,” as Hickman refers to them, were derived from experimenting with various self-determined parameters and limitations of movement. I argue that such parameters and limitations constitute a form of structured improvisation.

The challenge, however, with Hickman’s approach was “tracking” his improvised liquid while under the influence of drugs (De Spain 2014). Throughout most of the 1990s, Hickman did not have access to video cameras that documented his flow. In fact, video cameras in raves were considered by most ravers to be invasive (Anderson 2009). One of Hickman’s greatest contributions to liquid dancing’s development was his visualization of the form’s potential to flow along and between the perimeters of

imaginary grids connected through fixed points. His visualizations, primarily influenced by his regular consumption of LSD and MDMA, created a series of approaches to liquid. Through the process of trial and error, Hickman was ultimately able to articulate and demonstration through repetition what he frames as rails (the acronym *to range in a line*, which I discuss in Chapter 5). Rails represent one of many ideas to emerge from Hickman. Although, it would not be until he ultimately met other liquid practitioners that matched his level of dedication and conceptual appreciation for the form that he would begin to formalize his process.

"Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE)

> His hands weave and spiral in a continuous series of concentric circular patterns, gradually increasing in diameter with each revolution. At the peak of his reach space, he shifts the pattern, extending the distance between his hands. His leading right forearm rises from chest level in an upward path, caressing the top of his head, while his right wrist bends at a 90-degree angle, forming an L-shape that cups the left side of his face. His right arm follows, threading between his left arm and upper torso, creating the illusion of two intersecting circles. Meanwhile, his feet shuffle in a heal-to-toe back and forth pattern. His knees bend and extend with each drumbeat. And with every subtle sonic shift, LpE rides the rhythms and progressions of a techno rave track at Club Space.

"Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE), 42, is a Caucasian-American male born in Patterson, New Jersey. My above description depicts a video segment of then 23-year old LpE dancing a Philadelphia rave venue known to patrons as Club Space, a popular Philadelphia rave venue between the mid-90s and early 2000s (Anderson 2009). This liquid dance clip was

originally uploaded by LpE to the video file sharing website Napster, and this video, which went viral, has since become popularly known as the Arcade Clip.[32]

The video's digitally stamped date reads March 13, 1999. Prior to the introduction of YouTube in 2005, the earliest publically available evidence of liquid's existence was this video clip of LpE. A freestanding video arcade game rests under the dim light fixtures of the rave. Meanwhile, the bass, tones and melodies of techno spun by an underground rave DJ fill the venue. In the moments of his improvised dance, LpE was not performing for the camera. "I had no idea I was being filmed at the time. My friend just showed it to me like days after she took that video" (LpE interview 2017). The significance of his lack of awareness is that LpE was completely immersed within the flow of his movements. Notably, when he witnessed himself dancing on camera for the first time, he was in "disbelief" as to what he looked like. Second-generation practitioner Will "Falsify" Greggarus watched LpE's clip in 2000 and states: "In LpE's video I saw him flowing and I was like, 'holy shit, this guy's rubber water'" (Falsify interview 2017). Clearly, his movement technique made a strong impression. Many second and third-generation liquid dancers like Falsify were exposed to this documented footage online prior to any other.[33]

The Arcade Clip represents the culmination of five years (1995-1999) of LpE's dedication to developing the technical skills, movement concepts and improvisatory practices of liquid. He recalls: "This is what liquid looked like for me in its purest form."

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[32] This clip (for URL see Appendix A), hash-tag labeled as "rave dance," has over 300,000 hits, with nearly a dozen other links ranging from 3,000 to 100,000 hits on YouTube with other hash-tag labels such as "arcade clip" "Eric Liquid Pop" and "Liquid dance."

[33] The significance of LpE's Arcade video is further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The patterns generated were not limited to straight lines, but included circles, ovals, and figure eights. LpE describes his approach to experimenting with the fundamental components of liquid dance as follows: “I tried to imagine myself at the bottom of a pool, literally pushing and pulling my way through water. So, when I was dancing, I was not liquid itself, I was moving through liquid” (LpE interview 2017). From his remarks, it is clear that LpE’s approach to liquid involves imaginary objects in his reach space. This created an illusion-based dance style that LpE colloquially refers to as “orbital style,” an approach to liquid that stresses its interest in symmetry and circular patterns (LpE interview 2017). Such circular patterns trace along the outlines of the body, which LpE would later develop into a dimension of liquid dance known as contours.[34] What is interesting about the Arcade Clip is that it directly influenced the Midwest rave scene through which I came to liquid. Between 2001 and 2003, I encountered numerous practitioners who emulated LpE’s orbital approach to liquid. Yet, it was not until I finally saw his Arcade Clip in 2003 that I discovered the roots of this style.

In his early twenties on the weekends, he attended rave and other EDM-based club events primarily in New York City and Philadelphia, where he devoted most of his time and energy to perfecting his craft. In July 1995, LpE was 19, and with a small group of friends ventured into the nightclub district of Philadelphia. They found Outback Jack’s, a popular underground rave venue (Anderson 2009). LpE recalls: “We could already hear and feel the bass vibrations in that club all the way in our car across the street as we pulled up” (LpE 2017 Interview). When he walked inside, his senses were overwhelmed with laser lights, surround sound, and a diverse group of club patrons

[34] Contours are a liquid dance concept conceived by the LPC discussed at length in Chapter 5.

ranging from gay, straight, male, female, black, Latino and white, collectively creating a rave vibe particular to Outback Jack's.

Recalling this event, LpE suggests rave participants (whether dancers, DJs, producers, or fans) develop embodied connections to specific sonic components embedded within specific subgenres of EDM. LpE explains:

> Everybody hears music differently. Each person is going to internalize it. Listening to music is an emotional thing and I think dancing is a manifestation of what you're feeling inside. So, the music for me what I was listening to at the time was a lot of steady 4/4 house and techno. But there were also a lot of breaks and drum 'n' bass. When you're listening to this music for hours at a time, it doesn't come down to the individual beats. It develops an actual flow. If you listen to it enough it almost like puts you not so much in a trance-like state, but it has more to do with the whole environment. It's the music, it's the people, it's where you were at, like if it's a dark, seedy back ally rave in a warehouse or if its in a posh nightclub, that adds to it, that adds to everything. It wasn't so much about the music, although the music was definitely played a part. But I think it was more linked to the whole entire environment where liquid was being developed in" (LpE Interview 2017)

From LpE's quote, it is clear that distinct subgenres of EDM were present at raves. Each type of synthesized component produces a different sensation for individual dancers. This shapes personal preference towards particular EDM subgenres, and ultimately, towards personal styles of movement. According to LpE, a dedicated liquid practitioner seeks to embody the music in ways that highlight specific musical components through personal style of dance. LpE explains: "Back then, you could tell who liked dancing to techno, house or drum and bass just by the way they moved on the dance floor; they had their own style" (LpE Interview 2017). This is a testament to how individual style is valued within this subcultural group, and how that style is developed through personal connections to different subgenres of EDM.

Another dimension to individual style stems from liquid dancer's attire. LpE describes encountering ravers wearing Adidas or Puma tracksuits, consisting of windbreakers and sweat pants, similar to early New York City 1980s hip-hop fashion (Rose 1994). In 2010, LpE reflected on this fashion choice to a small audience of liquid dance practitioners at the *Liquid Dance Confluence* in Chicago, Illinois. He explains the reason for wearing his Adidas track jacket as follows:

> Back then we didn't have clean lines with our liquid. That's why we wore Adidas track suits because A, we weren't clean enough to hide our lines, where now I don't need the jacket anymore, but back then, our elbows were in all kinds of funky positions, but at a rave party, people could look at the lines [on the jacket] and it sort of brings everything together [visually]. And in a dark nightclub, the bright white lines [from the Adidas stripes on the sleeves] helped show them off.

LpE's reflections on liquid dancers' fashion choices reflect the larger rave culture values of wearing clothes that were comfortable and functional to dance in (Anderson 2009; Redhead 1993). In addition, the specificity of choosing to wear Adidas track jackets reflects a more nuanced intention of creating an illusion of "clean lines" for the aesthetic appeal of onlookers. Hickman and Gorea also confirm this fashion choice as common among liquid dancers in the 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, while individual style was valued, common interests, dress, and danced behavior identified liquid dancers within a larger subcultural grouping.

LpE's impact on liquid dance as a subculture began with his action of uploading the Arcade Clip to the public forum of Napster. From there, his orbital style reached far beyond the east-coast rave scene and served as a starting point for many liquid dancers. However, LpE would further solidify his place in the subculture when he formalized his approach, a subject discussed at length in Chapter 5.

“Locking the Lookers” and “Being Locked”

The three pioneers described above were instrumental in developing specific components of liquid dance. As previously stated, individual style can be an important element of subcultural community. Nevertheless, another dimension of rave that also contributed to the foundations of liquid, and its characteristic flow, came through the interactive exchanges between dancers and onlookers. A popular activity at raves was to gain the attention of others through dance, which Hickman describes as follows:

> Back then we had a term that was called ‘being locked.’ That is to say if you are watching someone [such as himself] and I’m moving with a steady enough pace and I’m doing complicated enough things where I can make you follow my flow long enough, you suddenly realize you’ve been looking at me for the past ten minutes, and it only felt like a minute went by. As liquid dancers, that was our goal: to dance in our own space and to lock the lookers, to get them to come over and be like ‘whoa, what the hell’s going on?’ (Hickman Interview 2016).

Hickman’s comment about time seeming to flow slower than normal is exactly what I experienced. Being locked was a way to connect with a complete stranger at a rave. Furthermore, Gorea, Hickman and LpE not only danced for their own pleasure, but also to purposely “lock the onlookers” in order to “vibe” with other ravers through their performative actions (Gorea interview 2017). According to club scholar Francois Gautier (2004, 75), “raves promote participation” in contrast to other leisure activities characterized through “passive” reception or consumption. Liquid dancers require an audience of what De Spain (2014, 67) refers to as “energetic participants,” or those who are actively engaged within an improvised performance. However, it is up to a liquid dancer to “lock the lookers” into his or her flow in order to encourage active participation through “being locked.”

To return to Csikszentmihalyi (1975), he points out that one of the ways to bring energy and attention into focus is through limiting the stimulus field. This is a challenge in any given activity. Csikszentmihalyi illustrates examples of mountain climbers limiting their stimulus field by concentrating on the next step or foothold as they ascend. This enables climbers to immerse themselves completely in the task at hand. For liquid dancers, this involves another kind of immersion: the flow of the moment. All other intruding concerns or thoughts are blocked. Although "locking the lookers" can be an immersive experience, it also functions as a social exchange. According to De Spain (2014, 67), such exchange through improvised dance performance "subtly or radically alters the emotions and physicality of the performers" in an ongoing, cyclical relationship between the responses of the audience's reaction to the performers. Liquid dancers are aware of the onlooker's presence, and therefore consciously choose to draw them into his or her flow. Thus, I argue that the combined action of "locking the lookers" by liquid dancers, and the response of on-looking ravers "being locked" is an extension of personal flow into what I frame as performance flow: this marks an important shift from the individual to the interpersonal. However, unless the observer is another liquid dancer, he or she does not possess the physical skills necessary to respond in a way that would facilitate a liquid dance exchange. Yet, within raves and EDM festival environments, many participants become mesmerized by the performance of liquid itself, and therefore, there is a shared moment of energy comes into play associated with the vibe created between two people.

In the Introduction to the dissertation I described my first encounter with liquid dance at a Kansas City rave in 2001. I became "locked" into the flow of the dancer, and

at that time, had no concept of how to respond. For me, seeing liquid dance right in front of me for the first time was like watching a magic act. I witnessed someone morphing in and out of shapes as if he was made of water. In that moment, I did not understand the mechanics of liquid. Its physicality eluded me, and it would take years of attending multiple raves and countless hours of observation, dance exchanges, experimentation, practice and conversations with liquid dancers to finally grasp the foundations of this dance form. Eventually, I developed my own personal style of liquid, and found multiple opportunities to lock fellow ravers and liquid dancers into my flow. I began to realize that this practice of locking the lookers was a central way to connect with others, share a moment, and exchange and expand the vibe.

I therefore suggest that locking the lookers is a practice that extends the flow of a shared vibe with the "looker" who becomes "locked" into the flow of the dance. Second-generation liquid dancer Tommy von "Flowington" states that locking the lookers involves the following: "The ability to control the other person through a kind of show mentality" (Flowington interview 2017). This "control" that Flowington refers to involves guiding the focus of the onlooker's eyes, so that they follow the progressive flow patterns of liquid created by the dancer. This action shapes the onlooker's emotional, psychological, and physical responses to the dance, colloquially referred to as "tripping out" or "bugging out." These colloquialisms accurately describe the effects of being locked, particularly in reference to those onlookers under the influence of hallucinogenic or other mind-altering substances (Anderson 2009, Redhead 1993). I argue that once ravers become "locked," the flow of energy between liquid dancer and onlooker extends into a shared vibe.

Conclusion

This chapter established that three dance practitioners contributed to the foundations of liquid. Gorea's application of glow-stick patterns, particularly those associated with the figure eight, fostered the beginning of his exploration of liquid without the use of lights. He bridged the gap between tutting and liquid through finding connections within the technique of fixed point. He also found ways to track his progressions and cohesively connect techniques of waving, tutting and isolating with liquid, while maintaining the aesthetics of unbroken continuity associated with liquid.

Hickman's testimony on his experiences with LSD and MDMA serve as a major focal point for analyzing the effects of these mind-altering substances. They served as a tool for liquid dancers to achieve flow-state at a faster rate, as well as visualize and experiment with liquid in ways never achieved prior. Hickman's LSD experiences helped him visualize numerous linear patterns, along with the precision of 90-degree transitions utilized in tutting to create rail patterns. And his simultaneous experiences with MDMA enabled his muscles to relax and loosen in ways that he allowed him to experiment with flow for hours at a time. His approach to combining liquid with LSD and MDMA resulted in numerous conceptual ideas, which he experimented with trial and error in order to ultimately share with others.

LpE's contributions to disseminating liquid dance beyond US raves and onto the digital platforms of social media began with the Arcade Clip in 1999. In particular, his orbital approach to liquid inspired generations of dancers. Although Gorea's video clips

are clearly the earliest documented evidence of liquid's emergence in US raves, the Arcade Clip represents the first mass public exposure to the form.

All three pioneers of liquid revolutionized the dance form by expanding it beyond the solo performance to the interpersonal exchange of "locking the lookers." This practice sets the foundation to another liquid dance game called "Pass The Flow," which I explore in Chapter 7. Notably, each of these dancers incorporated various aspects of popping or tutting as a kinesthetic and visual model from which to create, explore and expand upon their approaches and concepts of liquid dance. In the following chapter, I examine how such approaches and concepts were ultimately formalized into repeatable dance techniques.

CHAPTER 5: THE LIQUID POP COLLECTIVE

Introduction

In 2002, the Liquid Pop Collective (LPC) released the *All Access Liquid and Digitz Tutorial*. This marks a significant moment in liquid dance. Prior to this tutorial, liquid dance remained a vernacular practice learnt informally at social dance events like raves, clubs and festivals. For the first time, liquid was transmitted into a formalized technique taught by expert practitioners. In this chapter I address my two-part research question: what constitutes the physical components of liquid dance, and how and why did liquid dance become a codified technique? This chapter establishes the core group of liquid dance practitioners who formalized the physical components of liquid into a codified technique.

To facilitate my analysis, I frame dance technique as follows. Sociologist Marcel Mauss (1935, 77) classified quotidian and specified movement techniques of the body "according to efficiency, i.e. according to the results of training." In dance studies, Foster (1997, 236) has conceived of dance technique as a "systematic program of instruction." Thus, from Foster's perspective, dance technique encompasses individual sets of principles particular to each dance form that aspire to what she frames as an "ideal body," or a body that demonstrates faultless expertise in such a technique. Foster defines technique training as "the process of repeatedly reconfiguring the body" through drills, which I apply to the purposeful repetition of liquid's fundamental movement components towards the goal of obtaining the "ideal body," or mastery of the dance form (Foster

1997, 237). Training, in the context of liquid dance, occurs at both the individual and communal level.

I also deploy Hamera's (2011, 5) assertion that dance technique is both an aesthetic principle and a social experience that "facilitates interpersonal and social relations as it shapes bodies." Hamera suggests that dance technique extends beyond individual dancing bodies, as it is shaped and molded by multiple historical, cultural and social roots from which that technique stems. Therefore, in this chapter, I privilege the words of liquid practitioners who have demonstrated high levels of expertise in liquid's physical characteristics, its broader aesthetics, the history of the practice, and their approaches to the dance. I argue that the members of the LPC produced a liquid dance tutorial that fulfills three functions: documentation of the practice, codification of the dance technique, and a guide intended to aid the evolution of the form.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, *Formation of the Liquid Pop Collective (LPC)* explores the narratives of the core group of practitioners who sought to codify the movement characteristics of liquid dance as a coherent dance technique. The remaining three sections of this chapter explore how the LPC liquid tutorial demonstrates and distinguishes between key components of liquid dance. *Tutorial Content Part I: Liquid Technique* describes and analyzes the LPC's understanding of liquid dance components, which they frame as *concepts*. I suggest the LPC's strategy of breaking down liquid into a series of concepts produces the scaffolding that enables structured improvisation within the form. This section is supported by interview data from LPC members who developed and codified the dance, and interviews with other liquid practitioners who share key insights on the tutorial's impact on the dance. *Tutorial*

Content Part II: Digitz examines digits, a technique that focuses solely on the fingers. The LPC asserts that while digits are dance techniques in its own right, digits are closely connected and utilized within the movement vocabulary of liquid. *Tutorial Content Part III: Solos* is the final section of the LPC tutorial where all six members demonstrate their individual approaches to liquid. This section showcases how each member explores liquid technique through improvisation, which I establish is an essential component to developing personal style. As Fogarty (2012) and Schloss (2009) assert in their analysis of breaking culture, personal style is a privileged value in this vernacular dance practices. In conclusion, I argue that the contents of the tutorial place liquid and digits into a teachable framework that breaks down each concept into a repeatable technique, which simultaneously encourages improvisation of such technique to develop personal style.

Formation of the LPC

Within the context of street dance and EDM cultures, dance crews encompass small groups of people within the larger subcultural dance practice who gather intermittently to enjoy group activities (often revolving around music and dance). Through such participatory practices, they build three forms of identity: collective, crew and individual. Practitioners collectively self-identify as liquid dancers, or liquid heads, as they remain linked to the larger collective subcultural dance practice. Yet, dance crews are an important element to street dance scenes (Fogarty 2012; Schloss 2009). The same is true of liquid dance. Thus, it is not surprising that individual practitioners eventually shifted from a broad and transient collective of dancers into smaller, dedicated crews of practitioners. As members of a dance crew, practitioners identify a strong sense of

belonging to their specific crew. Finally, as individual dancers, practitioners often identify with dance aliases, such as the names adopted by LPC members.

By chance, in the summer of 2000, "Liquid Pop" Eric (LpE), Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman, Sean "D-Strange" Mahnken, Jared "Code Red" Hupp, Ben "Grimm," and Phil "Frequency" Thorn all finally met at the Detroit Electronic Dance Music Festival (DEMF). During the festival, they exchanged contact information and discovered they all lived within a few hours of one another in the tri-state area of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. They immediately began to meet up at rave and EDM-centered club events. During these events, they got to know one another through multiple dance exchanges and conversations. After most rave events, depending on the city in which they met, the LPC would gather at one another's private residences to practice and share their experiences. In the weeks and months that followed, they developed semi-choreographed performances, leaving room for individual members to improvise to DJ sets. They routinely performed at several NYC and Philadelphia rave events under their dance crew name: The Liquid Pop Collective (LPC).

The LPC's dance performances ranged from impromptu exchanges within the crowd, to performing on elevated stages next to the DJ booth. Each performance combined segments of choreography and solo improvisations. The choreography consisted of two dancers mirroring each other with precise tutting sequences. Another common aesthetic choice involved linking hands together to form extended arm wave sequences. The LPC utilized the strategy of transitioning between choreographic elements of their performance into solos by switching aesthetics from waving to **botting**, the colloquial term for the popping technique of **the robot**. One dancer freezes with his

limbs locked into a position that the other dancer can easily manipulate. During each dancer's solo, they would blend liquid technique with popping technique.

The LPC routinely performed at Club Space, Philadelphia from 2000-2002. During these early performances, the LPC received negative attention and feedback from certain members of the East Coast popping community (LpE Interview 2017). As LpE explains, when NYC poppers first encountered the LPC performing liquid at raves, poppers mistook liquid for "a watered down version of **waving**," a major component of popping technique (LpE interview 2017). This was partially because, at least on a surface level, liquid dance looks similar to certain aspects of waving. In my own experience with both practices, I have come to understand waving as the technique of loosening the muscles between joints, and sequencing movement across the body from one limb to the other, which produces a series of waves that undulate through the body. In waving, the connection of the movements from its beginning impulse to the end of the wave sequence is contained between the body's joints. In liquid, however, the relationship of the movement rests between the hands. As a dance technique, the hands are free to trace across, around and outside the body, limited only by the dancer's kinesphere.

As a result of this misunderstanding, LpE recalls that the motivating factor for forming and naming his crew The Liquid *Pop* Collective was to gain acceptance within the popping community. He explains:

> We had poppers keep telling us that we ain't shit. They were just lumping what we do as 'waving.' And we were like, 'no it's not.' We used to get hated on so bad. Poppers used to send hate messages onto our message board on Reflective.net. And we were like, ok, show us, show us where what we are doing comes from, because if [liquid] comes from you guys [popping] there should be somebody out there who does what we do better than us. But there wasn't. So, in our minds, in our logic, if you get rid of everything else, what's left is the truth. The truth was, liquid was an

> intrinsic thing, developed in the rave scene, with the music, the culture, and everyone that was there (LpE Interview 2017).

Clearly, the tone in LpE's language suggests a high degree of passion and tenacity in his intent to differentiate liquid from the technique of popping. His quote indicates a strong desire to be accepted within the broad and intersecting dance communities of US rave and hip-hop. However, LpE's account does not encompass each of the LPC members' individual motivations. As Buckland (1999, 205) reminds us, accounts that explain the histories or cultures of dance inevitably encompass a "kaleidoscope of truths." Consequently, there is more to the story.

Another narrative that explains the LPC's motivations to place the term "Pop" in their crew name stems from the day they met popping legend, Steffan "Mr. Wiggles" Clemente from the notorious New York City's Rock Steady Crew. This event took place at a Philadelphia rave party, at a venue called Club Space, in 2001. Clemente happened to notice the arm, hand, and finger-centered styles of liquid embodied by the LPC, and became curious about the aesthetics and mechanics of the dance.

There are two YouTube videos that document portions of this encounter (See Appendix A). In the first video, Code Red, D-Strange, Fu Man Chu, Ben Grimm, and LpE each take turns dancing in a cypher. Clemente stands watching each dancer, nodding his head, indicating his approval and respect for each dancer's approach and skills. At one point, Clemente enters the cypher and showcases his signature boogaloo popping style.[35] Below I describe his round in the cypher:

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[35] According to popping pioneer Mr. Wiggles, Boogaloo Popping Style was one of the original styles of popping to emerge out of the west coast, primarily in San Francisco and California. In my experience, Boogaloo involves segmented body roles isolated between the legs, hips, torso, neck and head.

> A circle of captivated ravers observes Clemente progressively lock the lookers into his popping flow. Each muscle contraction mimics the sonic rhythms of an electro-breaks track. The speed of his hits matches the tempo of the beat, and his signature gliding footwork compliments the synthesized melodies embedded within the track. As the track builds with a piano melody, Clemente creates tension between his chest and hips, contracting and expanding with each hit. When the bass of the track drops, he improvises a progression of tutting sequences that match every beat.[36]

In the above description, Clemente demonstrates what Solberg (2014, 64) frames as "embodied music cognition." His nearly three decades of popping to multiple subgenres of hip-hop and electronic music inform his sensory-motor skills, as well as his ability to predict and interpret the electro-breaks track through his acquired popping techniques. As Clemente concludes his popping showcase, the surrounding ravers and LPC members applaud his dynamic approach to "bugging out" to the music (LpE interview 2017).

After Clemente leaves the circle, LpE walks over to Clemente and "locks" him into his liquid flow, gaining full attention from one of the world's most respected poppers.

> During the breakdown of an electro-breaks track, a sample of dialogue from the movie *The Matrix* fills the room: "This is your last chance…" Clemente is locked into LpE's flow. The syncopated rhythms begin to build, as LpE weaves and threads his left set of fingers between the spaces of his right set. Right before the bass drops, LpE raises his right hand to his mouth, so that tips of his fingers cover his lips, and his palm facing his neck. As the bass drops, LpE sticks his tongue out the left corner of his mouth. He moves his tongue from left to right, lowering each finger one at a time in succession, creating the illusion of licking his fingers in half. Finally, he runs his tongue the opposite direction, from right to left, returning each finger to their original upward pointing position, as if his tongue has the power to magically make them reappear.

In this moment, LpE shares with Clemente some of the foundational components of liquid and digits. Upon witnessing LpE's liquid for the first time, Clemente invites the

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[36] See Appendix A.

entire LPC crew to talk and share dance exchanges in the adjacent VIP area behind the DJ booth at Club Space.

Although now available on YouTube, the second video was originally sent to me directly by LpE for the purpose of this research.[37] The video begins with a slide of text that states:

Liquid Pop Collective @ Club Space
Philadelphia with MR Wiggles
Schooling us on Funk Styles
in the VIP.

LPC Members
LPEric / Code Red / FuManChu /
Ben Grimm (AKA DJ Brillz) / Dr
Strange / Super Girl

In the video, Clemente observes that while members of the LPC had a strong conceptual understanding of some fundamental popping techniques, particularly tutting, they lacked the technical proficiency in waves, **hits** and **isolations**. In this clip, Clemente shares his knowledge both kinesthetically and through verbal conversation. Although the blaring techno music obscures his voice, the video shows Clemente talking with the LPC behind the DJ booth in the VIP section of the same Philadelphia rave party as the first video. Clemente demonstrates his ability to combine tuts and waves, while accentuating those techniques with a third element called hits, the purposeful flexing and releasing of the muscles. LpE responds to Clemente by fusing his understanding of liquid with elements of Clemente's technique advice. Clemente indicates approval of LpE's personal style with three consecutive gestures: a head nod, thumbs up, and index finger pointing at LpE. Then, Clemente walks over to LpE and exclaims into his ear that he can enhance his flow

[37] See Appendix A.

even further by isolating each technique so that the viewer can visually see what is happening. LpE smiles and thanks Clemente with a gesture of his palms together, as if in prayer, and Clemente smiles back with a gesture of three fist-bumps.

The video then cuts back to Clemente demonstrating his signature style of hits and boogaloo leg rolls. Clemente, in effect, provided the LPC with an opportunity to expand their range of movement vocabulary. LpE attempts to mimic Clemente's command of isolating his body into segments. In response, Clemente shakes his head to inform LpE that he did not reproduce the same visual aesthetic, and then Clemente proceeds to demonstrate his isolation technique a second time. As the DJ at Club Space transitions from one techno track to the next, Clemente executes a series of **San-Fran shuffles**. LpE responds to Clemente's dance by showcasing his signature hip rolls and isolations, while combining his liquid flow to enhance the dynamics and range of his improvised dance set.

The video cuts to a wide angle shot of the LPC members huddled around Clemente, who demonstrates **chest pops**. They each take turns attempting to isolate their chest muscles, and some are more successful than others. At one point, Clemente stops them all and indicates that the musicality of the current beat is important. He counts on his fingers "one, two, three" and then performs chest hits that match the next three drumbeats of the techno track. This is a moment where poppers and liquid heads intersect, as each subcultural dance practice shares understandings and values of musicality.

LpE thanks Clemente again multiple times towards the end of the video. In the final shot of the video, a text slide reads: "Thank you Wiggles for taking time out to

dance with some crazy ass raver kids doing weird shit with their fingers…much respect and gratitude." This video, like the cypher footage described earlier, represents another rare moment captured on video of dance practitioners sharing and exchanging the components of individual, but closely related, dance techniques at a Philadelphia rave party. Clemente encouraged the LPC to learn the foundations of popping, specifically the techniques of waves, hits and isolations. I stress that the point of learning these styles, other than for its own sake, was to find different ways to enhance and develop the technique of liquid through incorporating these popping elements. This important exchange between the LPC and Clemente both explains why the reference to popping is embedded in the crew name, but also demonstrates how innovations to vernacular dance are brought about through practices of sharing, teaching and experimenting.

Second-generation liquid dancer Tommy von Flowington shares his insights on this phenomenon of making connections between neighboring dance forms.

> A way to look at street dance styles like popping, and all of its different ways of moving with like tutting, waving and isolating, they are all pretty much different approaches to the same problem: moving in a controlled way through space. This gives different types of illusion based off of whatever different type of technique you want. And learning each style teaches you a different part of the entire problem. But liquid bridges each of those separate street styles together (Tommy von Flowington Interview 2017)

Flowington's quote reveals two values that have become important to liquid as a subcultural practice. The first is the development of a personal style within the foundations of liquid as form. I surmise that personal style is an essential, embedded subcultural value among liquid practitioners that shapes the progression of the dance form. The second value is mastering techniques in popping. The LPC members developed their individual styles (showcased in the

LPC Tutorial) that combine their approaches to liquid, as well as their approaches to fusing elements of popping. I emphasize that for the LPC, preserving the foundational techniques of liquid and mastering personal style are interconnected.

This was a major motivating factor for the LPC to legitimize liquid as a dance form with movement components distinct from other dance styles within the realm of popping. In the summer of 2001, after their encounter with Clemente, the LPC crew decided it was time to create a documented liquid dance tutorial. From the outset, the LPC seemed open to incorporating elements of popping technique as a model to formalize their working concepts of liquid. According to LpE, this was a direct result of their encounter with, and subsequent approval from, Clemente.

Furthermore, this provided what Fogarty (2012, 53) describes in reference to breaking culture as passing down knowledge through face-to-face interactions, expressed as "each one, teach one." The LPC methodically created a peer mentoring approach to ensure liquid was developed collaboratively. As active, devoted practitioners, the LPC embraced their responsibility to pass the flow of their embodied knowledge. As a result, the LPC obtained, to use another colloquialism, "street cred," from their neighboring elders and peers within the popping community. This was evidenced and solidified by a video posted by Clemente on YouTube in 2005, giving a "shout out to the LPC" for their contributions to liquid and digits, a related technique discussed later in the chapter.[38]

[38] See Appendix A.

The LPC crew began “weekly meet-up sessions” at their private residences (LpE interview 2017). According to LpE, their goal was to brainstorm different names for specific liquid dance movement components that each of them had individually developed and experienced. During these meet-ups, they discussed their personal memories, experiences and understandings of liquid. Through recalling and reflecting on their lived experience of liquid dance, the LPC compiled a list of agreed-upon terminology, which they initially documented in writing. Over the course of about one year, the LPC developed a language to describe what they understood as liquid’s foundational movement sequences. The LPC categorized these movement sequences as a series of liquid dance *concepts*, which according to LpE was the collective effort to create a framework that dancers could draw from to explore liquid (LpE interview 2017).

According to LpE, the goal was to make liquid accessible to audiences both inside and outside the US rave scene. As LpE asserts, “We wanted people to take the concepts we came up with and bring those same concepts back to us with a different take on them, so we could be bugged out, and be like ‘oh shit, how the hell did you do that?’” (LpE interview 2017). I infer three things from LpE’s quote. First, I suggest that while the LPC was interested in formalizing and codifying liquid dance as a technique, they did not intend to absolutely fix it, but instead to leave room for innovation. Second, the LPC’s understanding of innovation was to not only advance the foundational concepts they codified, but included affording other dancers the possibility of fusing concepts to create personal style. Third, the LPC crew’s motivation for producing the tutorial stems from a desire to preserve the foundations of liquid as a dance form, while simultaneously

spreading new knowledge of this form with the hope that others would expand its movement foundations.

The LPC Tutorial

The Liquid Pop Collective: All Access Liquid and Digitz Tutorial was filmed between September and December of 2001 at a studio set in Philadelphia. Although all six members of the LPC contributed to the development of the tutorial, it was LpE who obtained a $10,000 personal loan to fund the production of the tutorial (LpE interview 2017). The LPC distributed and sold 2,000 VHS copies through US mail, as well as word-of-mouth, to promote the video throughout the US rave scene between 2002 and 2005.[39] The LPC tutorial granted dancers (and spectators) access to liquid dance beyond US rave and club scenes through the medium of video. It provided a pedagogical framework, which I will come to below, that broke down specific movement concepts with step-by-step audio explanations, supplemented with video demonstrations of each concept. This framework was a collective effort to develop what Hamera (2011, 6) refers to as a dance rubric, designed to create "common vocabularies, grammars, pedagogical and interpretative practices" for liquid dancers to share with each other and their audiences. The following section analyzes the contents of the tutorial, which outlines and describes the vocabulary developed by the LPC to distinguish liquid dance as a codified technique.

[39] VHS is an acronym for Video Home System.

Part 1: Liquid Concepts

The opening frame of the video provides a quote from ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov: "I do not try to dance better than anyone else. I only try to dance better than myself" (LPC Tutorial 2002). The LPC clearly value dancers and dances beyond liquid. More importantly, this quote reveals that interpersonal competition between dancers is not the primary motivating factor. Instead, it reveals the value of self-improvement through competing with one's self.

The tutorial introduces the names of the six LPC members and the title of the tutorial. The video then cuts directly into footage of each LPC member showcasing his personal style at the Detroit Electronic Music Festival (DEMF) in 2000, the time and place they all finally met face-to-face.[40] It illustrates how each dancer combines waving, tutting and liquid. There are also video segments of a choreographed performance from a rave party at Club Space in Philadelphia, PA in late 2000. At the conclusion of the LPC's performance, a slide of text states the following: "The Liquid Pop Collective does not claim to have invented the dance form known as liquid. They are mere practitioners of the dance. Nothing more. Nothing less" (LPC Tutorial 2001). Although the LPC acknowledges they did not create the foundations of liquid, they were certainly beyond "mere practitioners," as they were the first to develop liquid into a formalized movement technique. One possible reason for the LPC's initial display of humility is to indicate that they did not have an interest in claiming ownership of the form. Although they certainly

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[40] Detroit Electronic Music Festival is an annual EDM festival held in Detroit specializing in the subgenre of techno and its various sub-subgenres. It is one of the largest EDM-centered festivals in the US, attracting tens of thousands of attendees every year.

had a vested interest in preserving their approach to liquid and their place within the subculture, the LPC's goal was to educate and share their knowledge with others.

The tutorial begins with technique advice on the aesthetic of musicality, a common subcultural value in dance genres like breaking and popping (Fogarty 2012; Schloss 2006). This is the first documented statement explaining that musicality is also an essential component of liquid. An electronic voiceover and digitally printed text reads:

> The most important thing when dancing with liquid is dancing to the beat. This may be the single most overlooked aspect of the dance. As such, later in the video we will be discussing ways to make your liquid look rhythmic (LPC Tutorial 2002).

The tutorial elaborates on this idea through the physical demonstrations of what the LPC refers to as speed control.

> Speed control is also very important in enhancing the illusion further, and especially useful when dancing to a flat, 4/4 beat, like the beats most commonly found in techno, trance or house music. By keeping your speed constant, you in essence move exactly the same distance between bass hits. When done correctly, this causes a rhythmic effect, and greatly enhances the illusion. You must of course be wary of changes in the music both in tempo and in tone to maintain the illusion (LPC Tutorial 2002).

In both of the above descriptions, there is a video of LpE demonstrating his ability to match his speed to the trance track embedded within the video. For instance, in this 4/4 trance track a melodic sequence repeats within each measure. To accentuate the tones within the melody, LpE purposely extends the distance between his fingers on the first count of a measure. He does this because, on this first count, the melody sequence begins with a sharp, amplified tone, followed by softer tones on counts two, three and four, during which time LpE gradually brings his fingers closer together. As the next measure begins, LpE repeats this hand-distance pattern, all the while maintaining a constant speed to match the track's tempo.

Next, the tutorial progresses into specific technique advice designed to increase a dancer's proficiency within his or her individual repertoire, which simultaneously details the movement aesthetics of the dance form for the benefit of the spectator.

> One of the most common mistakes beginning liquid dancers might make is in their elbow placement. Many liquid dancers have their elbows tucked firmly in their sides. This not only limits their ability to move about, but also gives off a very sloppy, and meek illusion. This can be avoided by simply relaxing your shoulders and raising your elbows away from your sides (LPC Tutorial 2002).

In this clip, Hickman visually demonstrates this "common mistake" by tucking his elbows into his torso, and engages with the liquid techniques of hand-distancing and rails (detailed below) to illustrate the potential "sloppiness" of incorrect or limiting elbow placement. His demonstration clearly reveals the spatial and kinesthetic limitations of keeping the elbows locked into one position. In this instance, Hickman is demonstrating what Foster (1997) may consider to be the "flawed" body, or the antithesis of the "ideal body." After this, Hickman then relaxes his shoulders and raises his elbows to increase his range of motion, illustrating the potential to explore wider range and more complex patterns within his reach space. Here, he exemplifies Foster's (1997) conception of the "ideal body," the physically and aesthetically correct way of embodying a technique.

In the following frame, Hickman demonstrates the exploratory technique of hand distancing. The electronic voiceover states:

> Hand distancing can also play a major role in your individual style. Theoretically, your arm span is the absolute furthest you can go. However, one must remember that the further apart you spread your hands, the more difficult it is to maintain the illusion. Try experimenting with different distances at different times until you find what works best for you (LPC Tutorial 2002).

Although the intention of this video segment is to provide "technique advice," such advice advocates for the viewer to pause, question and reevaluate his or her ability to shape liquid. I discern that the "technique advice" of training the muscle and spatial coordination required to "maintain the illusion" of flow involves purposeful awareness of hand distancing, while simultaneously "experimenting" with this technique through improvisation. In other words, the "technique advice" of the LPC tutorial indicates that this dance form requires both technical skills and improvisation. As Foster (1997, 249) explains, dancers "explore through improvisation the movement territory established by the stylistic and technical rules of the form." The technical rules within liquid dance are discussed, distinguished and demonstrated in the next section of the LPC tutorial: *Concepts*. The first concept addressed concerns the central aesthetic quality of liquid dance. The electronic voiceover reads:

> *Flow*: To move or run smoothly with unbroken continuity, as in the manner characteristic of a fluid. The first and most important concept within liquid dancing is in mastering your own personal flow. Correct flow is accomplished in one of two ways. With either your dominant hand leading [pulling] the other along a pre-determined path or with your dominant hand pushing along a predetermined path. For those of you who are ambidextrous, this does not apply. However, ambidextrous or not, it is important to properly control your flow when it is moving in either direction (LPC Tutorial 2002).

This description of flow represents one of the most essential components of the tutorial for the following reasons. First, it clearly indicates that flow is the foundational aesthetic of liquid. Second, it explains the physicality associated with this concept. Third, it indicates that "mastering your own personal flow" is as important as the technique itself thus suggesting that flow is also a quality directly linked to personal style. Finally, flow, as established in Chapters 1 and 4, represents both a fundamental physical characteristic

of liquid dance, the simultaneous "state" through which liquid dancers obtain in order to explore the dance form through improvisation, and the transmission of ideas between dancing bodies.

The second concept introduced is known as *rails* (an acronym for Range In A Line). Rails utilize the relationship between the hands, where one hand leads or follows the other in a series of straight lines. For example, these lines may run across the chest, then up the torso, across the face, and back down the torso in one continuous flow, creating imaginary "box shapes" around the body (LPC 2001 liquid tutorial). In one of my early interviews with Hickman, he adds that when using rails a dancer "should be able to go both directions along the path, but feel as if the path he/she is drawing is actually present and real" (Hickman 2014 interview).

Rails run along an imaginary grid, and each line has a beginning and end point, fixed along a "predetermined path" (LPC tutorial 2001). The concept of rails may be applied to looping specific patterns in space across and around the body's reach space. The tutorial also provides advice through the following voiceover on maintaining musicality when dancing in rail patterns: "It also helps to connect these rails in a repeating or looping pattern in order to create a rhythmic effect" to keep in time with the music (LPC Tutorial 2001). For example, in my experience with rails, I like to synchronize my transitions between each rail (or fixed points in space) with the high hats, snares or bass hits within a trance track. This accentuates those particular instruments in the music, thus demonstrating musicality, while simultaneously conveying precision with my rails, as well as musicality.

The next video segment describes *contours*. The electronic voiceover states:

> To make the shape or outline of a figure, body or mass. To contour is to make your liquid run the shape of an object. The objects themselves can range from imaginary geometric shapes to actual physical objects, and onto the most commonly used object: the human body" (LPC tutorial 2002).

Visually, the development of contours primarily added the dimension of tracing the outlines of the body with the hands. An example of a common contour pattern I use in my own practice begins with my dominant right hand leading my left down the surface of the right side of my right thigh, around the bottom of my right knee, continuing back up the left side of my right thigh, arching across the outline of my lower pelvis, down the right side of my left thigh, around the bottom of my left knee, and up the left side of my left thigh. Thus, unlike rails, contours are not limited to straight lines, but follow the outline shape of the body. Yet, contours are limited to the body itself.

The next concept in this section of the tutorial incorporates the use of mime technique, visually manifested through imaginary object manipulation. Some common imaginary objects and shapes include boxes, boulders, or circular objects like balls or orbs. Mime technique is also utilized in popping, but, for liquid, the aesthetics are slightly different. Therefore, the LPC came up with the concept of *builds*. The voiceover states:

> Builds: To develop or give form to according to a plan or process. It involves using liquid to move imaginary objects about in space. The shape of the object you are manipulating is only limited by your imagination. When using builds, it is important to consider exactly how that object would behave. Imagine how it would look if you actually held it in your hand (LPC Tutorial 2002).

Primarily developed by Hickman, builds utilize the same principles of miming: manipulating imaginary objects in space. The main difference between miming and builds rests within the aesthetics of arm and hand placement techniques. According to Hickman, miming incorporates the technique of **marionette**, which aesthetically

represents a ragdoll on strings. The illusion comes from a dancer's ability to create imaginary objects in space as if being controlled by invisible strings attached to the limbs. In builds, there is a similarity in terms of where and how the arms and hands are placed in space to resemble manipulating imaginary objects. The difference is that instead of the illusion of marionette technique, builds incorporate linear travel patterns to place the arms and hands in the space around imaginary objects. Aesthetically, builds are an extension of rails in the sense that one hand leads the other travels along an imaginary path to a fixed point in space. To create the illusion of an imaginary object, the elbows, forearms and wrists pause at any given fixed point, while the fingers manipulate the shape or position an imaginary object.

One of the limitations of rails, contours and builds was that they ran on the principle that one set of fingers must follow the other set along a predetermined path while remaining in the same plane (the vertical, horizontal or sagittal). Thus, the LPC explored ways to manipulate and maintain the illusion of a flow in ways that did not involve straight lines or clearly linear pathways. As a result, they manifested the concept of *splits*. The voiceover states:

> Splits: Having been divided, or separated. A break or a split is used to give liquid more dimension. By slightly misaligning your hands along a vertical plane, you'll find that your liquid can become much more versatile. Now you can pass in places that were once impossible, but be careful to maintain the illusion of a flow, especially when one hand passes over top of the other (LPC Tutorial 2002).

Splits have been attributed by Hickman and LpE as one of the major breakthroughs of liquid, because this technique allows the limbs to pass overtop or underneath each other. This expands the flow of liquid from linear pathways into three-dimensional paths, which adds depth and volume to the dance form. In other words, liquid may run along a fixed

grid-centered series of paths, but splits make it possible to deviate from those paths. This creates non-linear shapes such as circles, ovals and figure eights. This is important because it expands liquid from linear, two-dimensional space and shapes into circular, three-dimensional space with depth and volume.

In the first part of the tutorial, the LPC presents, conceptualizes and distinguishes between the physical characteristics of liquid through specific concepts or vocabulary. The LPC showcases the complexities and dimensions of the technique both through verbal and visual means. In the second part of the tutorial, they move on to the technique of "digits."

Part II: Digits Concepts

Digits, colloquially spelled "digitz," represents a separate, but interconnected, technique from liquid. The digits sub-section of the tutorial begins with an extended textual introduction of the history of digits. The genesis of digits, according to the LPC, stems from the experiences of liquid dancers Mario and Milo (not members of the LPC). Both of these dancers developed digits together at The Tunnel Nightclub in New York City between 1995 and 1996 through experimenting with "simple, raised finger waves" (LPC Tutorial 2002). In 1998, LPC member "Code Red" began "experimenting with the techniques Mario and Milo had begun to build" (LPC Tutorial 2002). Over the next two years (between 1998 and 2000), Code Red perfected his approach to digits with increasingly intricate patterns, and found ways to flex his fingers to manipulate such patterns. He also developed several techniques involving elements of illusion, such as *hides*, where one hand creates the illusion that the other hand (or portions of the hand)

seems to disappear and reappear. LPC members Code Red and Ben Grimm demonstrate ten concepts embedded within digits repertoire.

Digits are aesthetically, visually and kinesthetically linked to liquid by the relationship between the fingers. However, the tutorial purposely draws distinctions between liquid and digits by separating digits into its own subsection of the tutorial. In my experience, the level of flexibility and dexterity required for digits is challenging. When I first learned digits, the palms of my hands, my knuckles and my fingers in general became sore within minutes of attempting to practice specific concepts. However, through time, my fingers and hands became stretched into what Foster (1997) would describe as the "ideal" version of digits.

The LPC demonstration of digits is filmed against a black background, with only a spotlight over the hands and fingers. Each video segment zooms in on each LPC member's demonstration of digits techniques in order to illustrate the detail of each technique. The LPC understood that this particular section would need a close-up frame for viewers to see exactly how to perform and drill each technique. Notably, a few clips that zoom out to a mid-shot, framing the upper body of practitioners Code Red, Ben Grimm and LpE. Each dancer who demonstrates digits wears a hat with the brim lowered, so that the viewer cannot see their eyes. According to Mahnken, this was a typical fashion aesthetic in US raves that also served a practical function through drawing the focus away from the face to the fingers.

As with liquid, the LPC frames digits as a series of concepts, and each concept requires the ability to train the fingers in ways that conform to particular aesthetics from which dancers may draw from in order to flow and explore this form of structured

improvisation. Thus, like liquid, I argue that the LPC formalized digits as a dance technique, and each concept represents a specific structural framework to improvise from. In the following paragraphs, I detail the aesthetic and technical intricacies that differentiate each digits technique. I do so for two reasons. First, this elaborate working through movement ideas in relation to the confined area of the fingers shows the creative and technical labor expended by the dancers in developing and mastering this movement technique. Second, the multitude of geometric and fluid illusions created when performing digits invites onlookers to become mesmerized by the hands in motion.

The first concept that appears in this section is referred to as *finger waves*: "the creation of a fluid flow from one end of the hand to the other through use of the fingers" (LPC Tutorial 2002). The fingers begin or end in either a curled or straightened position. Each individual finger curls or uncurls one after the other, creating the illusion of a wave. The hands may physically connect by either the two thumbs or the fifth digit. Variations on which finger begins the wave depends on the desired aesthetic, or shape of the wave. It is also possible to separate the hands so that one set of fingers waves one direction, and the opposite set waves in the other direction.

A variation of this concept is a second technique referred to as *rolls*: "a perfectly repeated rounded wave where the last part of the roll triggers the first origin of the roll" (LPC Tutorial 2002). Rolls are a specific type of finger wave that has the appearance of a repeated series of waves that are symmetrical, although this is a challenging illusion to maintain (LpE interview 2017).

A third concept of *contours*, which was first described in the liquid tutorial section, also applies to digits. In this case, "much like in liquid, contours include

following the outline of an object, be it imaginary or real" (LPC Tutorial 2002). Contours, applied as a digits' technique, involves one hand positioned with the fingers wide open, so that the other hand may trace the outlines between the fingers. In my experience, this technique requires a tremendous amount of dexterity due to the challenge of keeping the fingers wide enough apart to create a space for the opposite hand to trace the outlines between fingers.

The fourth concept is called *synchs*: "to create a pattern in which some form of synchronicity is achieved between each hand's fingers. This can be achieved along any axis or angle while remaining stationary or in motion" (LPC Tutorial 2002). This concept is far less codified then the previous techniques; with synchs, the hands can make any shape or movement the dancer is physically capable of. For instance, I like to place both of my hands in front of my face, with one palm facing me and the other facing opposite. I begin my lowering my little finger on each hand, and the others follow in succession. Then, I start with my thumbs to return my fingers to their original position. Another variation of this technique involves making a fist with both hands, then raising the fingers at the knuckles only, and returning the fingers to their clenched position. It is also common to sync every other finger rise or contraction to create multiple variations for the viewer. This gives the illusion that the movements of each finger are dependent upon one another.

The fifth technique is known as *contortions*: "this technique involves bending a wave so that it appears to be pinched at its central axis and then restructuring it back into another wave" (LPC Tutorial 2002). Contortions are challenging to describe because this technique abstracts fingers via bending and twisting the hands at the wrists, while

incorporating figure-eight patterns that thread one hand over the top and back underneath the other. The overall visual effect of digit contortions is the illusion of one set of fingers passing through the other set, as if they are transparent.

A variation of contours forms a sixth technique called *braids*: "Interlocking fingers in a one after another fashion. Braids can be twisted and contorted as well" (LPC Tutorial 2002). With braids, one set of fingers fills the space between the other set. This particular technique has two distinct variations. The first allows the fingers to momentarily rest in one position, so that the viewer can see distinct shapes created from each braid. The second involves contorting the braids, or flowing from one successive braid to the next. The result of this is the illusion that both sets of fingers continuously morph into different braid patterns without pausing.

The seventh technique referred to produces a clearly defined aesthetic known as *mirrors*: "The act of creating perfect symmetry between two hands. Mirrors can flow in any direction, and use any form or style, just so long as each hand matches as if they were a mirror image of each other" (LPC Tutorial 2002). This particular technique is interesting because the hands and fingers are free to mimic any shape the hand makes. Mirrors are similar to syncs, however, the mirrors technique requires that the hands and fingers directly face each other. Thus, it helps to keep both sets of the fingers in close proximity to one another. One of my personal strategies for this is to have at least one opposite fingertip contact the other in a progressive series of finger rolls. So, if I start my finger roll with my right and left pointers, those are the fingertips that are touching at the start of the roll. Then, I can gradually add the remaining fingertips one at a time to complete the roll, so that each fingertip is now in contact, creating a mirror image.

The eighth concept is called *axis shifts*: “Taking any digit technique and then shifting the hands oppositely along the vertical, horizontal [or sagittal] axis” (LPC Tutorial 2002). In other words, if both hands are flowing with digits in the vertical plane, one’s right hand may shift its physical spacing into the horizontal plane, while the left hand remains in the vertical plane. The point of axis shifts is to create variety of spacings between the hands, and therefore a variety of spatial patterns.

The ninth concept is called *remotes*: “using one hand to manipulate or control the other” (LPC Tutorial 2002). This technique employs similar illusions to mime, making it appear that one hand is physically controlling the other by gesturing with one hand (using twists, circles, tracers, or simply pointing) towards the other hand. It is as if the hands are connected mechanically. This technique draws from the popping technique of botting, creating the illusion of one body part controlling another. In this case, it is at the micro-level of digits instead of larger limb movements used in botting.

The tenth concept of digits introduced within the tutorial is called *hides*: “This technique entails any form that will make fingers and/or hands seem to disappear and reappear, or, any other move that seems to have a magic presence to it” (LPC Tutorial 2002). This final digits technique is interesting because one can incorporate elements of contortions, finger waves, or rolls to hide one set of fingers, and then reverse the flow to make the set progressively reappear. As with previous examples, the presence of illusion creates a “magic presence” designed to “lock the lookers” into the flow of digits.

In order for any viewer to remain locked into any technique within the flow of digits, the dancer ideally performs within the space of about one to three feet of the viewer’s eyes. The closer the dancer is to the viewer, the greater the response and

connection is with these micro-movements. With liquid, which generally involves much larger movements, more space is required; ideally, it is performed for the viewer between two and five feet away. In my experience with both liquid and digits, I enjoy locking lookers by continuously flowing between techniques and movement qualities. This requires me to remain aware of how each movement quality may look to the viewer, so that I can change the distance between my body and the viewer at any time, depending on what I choose to perform in any given moment.

To be clear, one does not need to master digits in order to perform liquid proficiently. Yet, although they are separate techniques, they are interconnected in many ways. The fact that the LPC devoted an entire section of the tutorial to digits clearly prioritizes this set of techniques in relation to liquid, and I argue they did so for several reasons. First, I surmise that they wanted to give credit to those members who pioneered digits and to historicize the circumstances under which the form first emerged. The evidence of this is in their detailed text at the beginning of the digits section, citing the key dancers, dates and spaces where digits developed. Second, the LPC wanted to draw distinctions and connections between the physical techniques of digits and liquid. Although they may be trained and performed as separate techniques, they are interconnected through many of the same concepts. Like the liquid section of the tutorial, the LPC purposely demonstrate and explain verbally the technique of digits to reveal how it is a complex and nuanced movement technique. The movements that might appear superficially similar actually contain important distinctions to the expert practitioner. Through the tutorial, the LPC demonstrate their expertise in motion.

Part III: LPC Freestyle Solos

At the conclusion of the digits section of the tutorial, the video moves into the final section where each LPC member performs improvised dance solos. Each solo ranges from two to seven minutes in length. The first soloist is Ben Grimm. Below is my description of his improvised dance:

> Ben Grimm begins with the popping technique of hits, extending his right arm in front of his torso, followed by the left. He sways his hips in to the old-school hip-hop beats of *The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel.* He isolates his body into three segments, a popping technique known as the **twista-flex**. First, he twists the middle portion of his body, including his hips, torso, shoulders and arms by sharply turning to his right at a 45-degree angle, followed by his upper body, in this case his head and neck, and finally, his lower body with the legs and feet. Then, Grimm isolates his shoulders, forearms, wrists, hands and fingers in quick, miniature movements, as if walking through a strobe light.

Interestingly, Ben Grimm chose primarily to focus on the technique of popping for his solo. There are two theories I have for his aesthetic choice. First, the sonic components within the hip-hop track, to which Ben Grimm improvises, lends itself well to popping, as the genre stems from such beats. This may have served as Ben Grimm's internalized motivation to move a certain way that visually represents the music through his body. Second, there was also an external motivating factor for Ben Grimm at work, which De Spain (2014) calls agendas. In improvisation, agendas "act like filters for the experience, leading the improviser toward or away from certain actions or choices" (De Spain 2014, 35). The agenda, I argue, was to purposely showcase Ben Grimm's popping techniques. As established earlier in this chapter, the LPC wanted to gain acceptance within the popping community. Thus, I argue it was a strategic decision on Ben Grimm's part and the LPC. Furthermore, there were several previous video clips earlier in the LPC tutorial that already showcased Ben Grimm's expertise in both techniques of liquid and digits.

However, to gain acceptance within the popping community, I suggest that Ben Grimm's solo was chosen specifically to showcase his strengths with Boogaloo popping styles, which include hits, hip rolls, leg swings, knee drops and dime stops. In the beginning of the LPC tutorial, there is some footage of Ben Grimm fusing elements of liquid within his popping in a way that seamlessly connects one movement sequence to another.

The next solo performer is Frequency, whom I describe below:

> He begins a wave from the tips of his right fingers, passing it through the knuckles, wrist and forearm. When the wave reaches his right shoulder, he slows the wave down to accentuate both sides of his chest muscles, demonstrating strength in his ability to isolate his waves into small and large segments. Finally, he completes the wave by passing it through his left shoulder, forearm, wrist, knuckles and fingertips.

According to LpE, Hickman and D-Strange, Frequency's strongest attribute was his ability to isolate his body waves. Like Ben Grimm's solo, Frequency did not showcase much of his liquid abilities in this segment. But, Frequency also had video footage towards the beginning of the LPC tutorial where he fused his personal style of waving with the liquid technique of rails and splits.

The third soloist is D-Strange:

> D-Strange grooves to the old-school electro-breaks track of *Egyptian Lover "Kinky Nation."* He hits every beat with the precision of 90-degree angle tuts using his hands, wrists, fingers and forearms. Then, he switches to the digits level, creating boxes with his fingers that shift in shape, size and direction on every beat. Simultaneously, he isolates his pelvis and legs to travel from side to side with Boogaloo rolls.

In his solo, D-Strange showcases his strengths of combining popping techniques of ticking, tutting and dime stopping with his mastery of digits technique. He also utilizes his skills with tutting, both at arm and finger level. De Spain (2014, 35) affirms that "as you identify the individual reasons for someone's practice at any given time, you begin to

find unique sets of values and the effects those values have on their movements and choices." In this case, D-Strange's music choice is aesthetically linked to his personal style of tutting. This is both because of the sonic components of the electro-breaks track and the historical motivations behind the creation of this track. D-Strange states: "Egyptian Lover is one of those classic tracks that poppers loved rocking out to back in the day. And from what I was told, tutting comes from the Egyptian hieroglyphs. So when that track came out back in the early 80s, and popping was coming up, poppers would tut to that track" (D-Strange interview 2017).

The fourth soloist is Fu Man Chu (Hickman).

> On the first bass hit, Hickman pops his chest hard, and sticks his hands above his head at a 45-degree angle. He swiftly begins with a fast full-body wave that travels from his fingertips through his forearms and shoulders, down through the chest, stomach and hips, and all way through his upper legs, knees, to his feet. He then reverses the wave from his feet to his fingertips, where he creates a series of precise tutting patterns, followed by smooth liquid rail patterns that outline his torso. Finally, he executes a series of liquid split patterns while gliding from one heal to toe motion. His bright blue and white Adidas tracksuit accentuates every linear and circular path he creates through, around and outside his body.

In Hickman's solo, he fuses his liquid technique with body waves and tutting patterns. He also showcases splits. Hickman's ability to fuse his body waves with his liquid technique is also very apparent. In my view, Hickman's demonstration of his musicality is one of the strongest of all the LPC members. He applies what De Spain (2014) refers to as tracking, which in Hickman's case involves two major components. First, he tracks the timing of music in such a way that he anticipates every nuanced sonic component, which grants him the agency to choose how he improvises to each sound. Second, Hickman is also tracking his own progression of aesthetic choices. Since he has a vast repertoire of liquid and popping techniques from which to draw, his "agenda," as De Spain (2014)

would say, was to embody each sound in a way that cohesively connects from one sequence to the next. This is how Hickman's personal style manifests, as it is based on his music preference, technical skills, and aesthetic values of improvisation.

The fifth soloist is Code Red:

> The eerie, synthesized tones of a progressive breaks track guide the hands of Code Red. The camera zooms into a close-up shot of his left set of fingers rolling and weaving between the spaces of his right set. His flow resembles a kaleidoscopic abstraction of his fingers. The silhouette of his face is barely visible as he morphs between one shape and the next in concentric circular patterns.

Code Red's solo is four minutes and twenty seconds of showcasing his digits style. As indicated in the previous section, Code Red is one of the earliest practitioners and innovators of digits technique. His "efficiency" is the result of his personal dedication to training his fingers to flow from one digits concept to the next. Again, I argue that the LPC strategically positioned Code Red's solo specifically for his mastery of digits, despite the fact that other LPC members (especially D-Strange, Ben Grimm and LpE) are also proficient with digits. In section one of the LPC tutorial, Code Red demonstrated his mastery of rails. Furthermore, in the opening video clips of each LPC member, Code Red showcases his personal style of combining liquid techniques of rails, contours and splits with the popping techniques of waving and ticking. By now it is clear that each member of the LPC possesses a solid foundation of liquid and digits.

The final soloist is "Liquid Pop Eric" (LpE):

> The techno track builds, and the 4/4 beat drops. LpE rides the rolling melodies with the fluidity of a river flowing down a stream. His left hand pulls his right along figure eight patterns across his torso, around his neck, and above his head. He jacks his body, swaying from side to side, now hiding his left fingers by folding them one at a time, hiding them with right hand, and seamlessly making them reappear, so that his left hand

> now pulls his right along linear rail patterns. The smile on his face projects the joy of a child discovering magic for the first time.

LpE has the longest solo of seven minutes and thirty seconds. His dance set consists almost entirely of liquid technique. He flows from one concept to another in a way that captures the essence of the entire tutorial. LpE was chosen to close out the tutorial for the following reasons. First, his set demonstrates the physicality of liquid in "its purest form" (LpE interview 2017). In other words, his flow consisted primarily of liquid technique, as his "agenda," as De Spain (2014) may suggest, was to showcase the possibilities of liquid. LpE wanted to share not only what this dance looks like, but also what it can do. I argue that this final solo by LpE represents one of the most significant improvised liquid dance sets in history. It epitomizes mastery of technique, as well as the flow of exploration through improvisation.

I argue that three important points can be taken from the LPC tutorial. First, I assert that the LPC's understanding of liquid dance concepts represents a form of structured improvisation. For liquid dancers focused on "cultivating" the habitual practice of developing liquid as a technique, or series of multiple techniques, the "molding" of specific body parts begins with the articulation and flexibility of the fingers, and branches out to include the ability to isolate the muscles between the joints of the wrists, elbows and shoulders. Through the structured concepts formalized by the LPC, liquid dancers develop their personal style of liquid through exploration of each concept, which are ultimately mastered into repeatable techniques. Therefore, I assert that structured improvisation represents the fundamental component of the exploratory approach to liquid dance.

My second argument is that the tutorial was the first attempt to establish liquid as a legitimate dance practice. The LPC tutorial ensures the longevity of the form, which is especially important for ageing practitioners of a subculture to maintain both their role as pioneers, as well as the authority of their expertise. According to Fogarty (2012, 54), passing the flow of dance knowledge from one generation to the next creates "the infrastructure that supports the development of an established aesthetic for dance, and preserve dance styles through their actions and sustained involvement in aspects of the [in this case liquid dance] scene." I discuss such infrastructure and sustained involvement in Chapter 6.

My third argument is that the LPC wanted to gain acceptance within the popping community, while distinguishing liquid as its own subcultural dance practice developed in the US rave scene. These actions represent an important community practice of creating "communication infrastructure that makes identity, solidarity and memory sharable" (Hamera 2011, 1). Within the subcultural practice of liquid dance, sharing knowledge and ideas between members represents a core value.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the two-part question: what constitutes the physical components of liquid dance, and how and why did liquid dance become a codified technique? The answer to the first question resides within the dance form's aesthetics, repertoire, and individual approach. The LPC tutorial represents the first attempt to capture and codify such techniques and showcase individual styles that explore those techniques. This vocabulary provided a guide for dancers to understand the intricacies,

nuances, visual and kinesthetic understandings of this form of movement. And, this same vocabulary provided a starting point for conversations between practitioners who were eager to develop, master, and eventually, expand his or her repertoire. For the LPC, liquid dance is mastered and explored in the same manner through structured improvisation. I assert the structure is set by the rules and limitations of each liquid concept, and explored within the boundaries set by the dimensions of each concept. Thus, concepts represent the physicality of liquid's movement components as well as an approach to exploring those components through improvised movement sequences.

The answer to the second question stems from The LPC's encounter with Steffan "Mr. Wiggles" Clemente in 2001. The approval of Clemente represents the catalyst for the LPC's decision to create a framework for liquid in order to codify, preserve and innovate the form, as a means to make it distinctive from the neighboring form of popping. This chapter contextualizes and differentiates between the terms "technique" and "concepts." While the term dance "technique" can be read through Foster and Hamera, the term dance "concepts" was examined through the eyes of the LPC, who developed specific movement components to liquid, which they codified and labeled as concepts. The LPC's localized value of structured improvisation was documented and dispersed throughout the broader liquid dance community, resulting in the subcultural value of structured improvisation, and to this day remains colloquially expressed as concepts. The LPC's written and audio voice description of each concept within the tutorial formalizes the vernacular practice into a structured technique. They do this by categorizing the precise movement qualities in a way that encourages exploration of

different patterns and directions across the perimeter of the body, and within personal reach space around the body.

The tutorial also provided advice on how to embody such technique in a way conducive to developing individual style, which led to the split in emphasis between the technical and exploratory approaches to liquid dance. The tutorial marks one of the earliest documented examples of liquid dance, and illustrates that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive but are instead connected through the flow of ideas exchanged between dancing bodies, whether through face-to-face interactions or (as I discuss in Chapter 6) digital/online interactions. This chapter has established that liquid is both a dance technique to be mastered through rigorous body training and a practice of exploring the dance form's concepts through improvisation. The following chapter examines how the technique and subcultural dance practice migrated beyond the LPC tutorial to online social networks devoted specifically to preserving, sharing and critiquing this dance practice.

CHAPTER 6: DIGITAL FLOW

Introduction

This chapter explores the question of how and why did liquid dance migrate from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media? To examine this question, it is imperative to understand how the US rave scene gradually became fragmented, and ultimately, "died out." According to Anderson (2009), the two primary reasons for the rave scene's decline was the combination of the commodification of EDM by mainstream media, and the concerted efforts to stop raves altogether by US law enforcement. The RAVE (Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act of 1994 was the first attempt to slow the growth and production of US raves (St John 2004). But it was not until the George W. Bush administration's enforcement of The Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act of 2003 that raves began to decline sharply (Anderson 2009). Raves gradually became increasingly difficult to promote as patrons began posting recorded footage from cellphones with video capabilities of events otherwise unknown to law enforcement. Furthermore, raves gradually became commercialized, especially in terms of the music, which ultimately led to the umbrella commercial term of EDM (Anderson 2009). I personally observed the gradual, slow decay of a once thriving underground electronic dance music scene, transformed into a watered down, commercialized version of itself. Thus, liquid dancers were forced to adapt to a disappearing underground dance community. Yet, liquid dancing did not die with end of the US rave scene. Practitioners, such as myself, transitioned from the spaces of illegal venues to EDM-centered nightclubs, to private residences, and ultimately, the Internet.

By the early 2000s, liquid dance spread beyond its origins as a live dance practice situated within US rave culture and moved into the transnational space of the high-speed Internet. This chapter therefore explores how and why liquid dance migrated from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media. It illustrates that practitioners purposely archive video and text devoted to the practice in order to preserve, sustain and innovate the dance form. Such video and text represent the accumulation of knowledge shared through specific online social media, which I will detail shortly. This constitutes a digital cultural heritage, "the tangible and intangible, or the material and immaterial" elements of a culture or subculture transmitted into a digital archive (Hennessy 2012, 346). As digital ethnographer Kate Hennessy (2012) explains:

> The act of creation of the ethnographic archive to order and preserve documentation of the intangible is far from neutral...Digital heritage is shaped by systems of heritage value and subjective evaluation about what to preserve—in this schema, what to make public---and what to keep in private circulation or allow to be lost (Hennessy 2012, 35 and 37).

I deploy Hennessy's framework of digital cultural heritage to analyze the construction of online social networks devoted to archiving, sharing and maintaining the subcultural practice of liquid dance. My investigation seeks to understand the specific components of liquid dance that are selected and perpetuated within social media by practitioners, who serve as curators for such purposes. Like Hennessy, I understand the curatorial process through which digital culture is documented remains far from neutral. For instance, liquid practitioners decide what they deem to be important enough to share online. Through this sharing, subcultural values are transmitted and perpetuated digitally.

Thus, I analyze the transmission of the subcultural practice onto online forums, a process I conceive as digital flow to describe the sharing of dance through the electronic mediums of blogs and social networks. The conception of digital flow is not new, and has

been explored by several scholars (Hennessy 2012; Jenkins 2013; Pink et al. 2016; Rushkoff 2013; Underberg and Zorn 2013). In social media theorist Douglas Rushkoff's (2013) book *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*, he proclaims: "Our informational content comes to us both as ponds and streams—stored data and flows of data" (Ruskfoff 2013, 141). This is a helpful analogy when analyzing archival footage of liquid dance online because it demonstrates how the flow of data represents the continuous "streaming" or uploading of new information. This creates an expanding "pond" of stored digital information synthesized from recorded video footage of liquid dance and the textual threads of conversations about those videos. I deploy my understanding of digital flow as a metaphor to illustrate the relationship between online social media and the continuous flow of ideas generated by liquid practitioners that perpetuate, preserve, innovate and inform this dance practice.

To facilitate my discussion of digital flow and the specific digital forums catered to archiving, preserving and sharing liquid dance, I draw from several key practitioners (introduced throughout this chapter), each of whom administered or contributed to such platforms. To supplement practitioner narratives on this subject, I draw from the interdisciplinary fields of digital media and communications studies (Baym 2010; Hennessy 2012; Miller 2012; Rushkoff 2013) to examine the how each forum serves specific modes of engagement with liquid dance.

The chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section focuses on the subcultural practice colloquial referred to as *labbing*. I discuss the lineage of how practitioners began sharing, collecting and adding to the foundations of liquid. The second section looks at the online blog of *Reflective.net* to detail and explore this first

online forum created by the LPC. The third section turns to *YouTube* to examine how this social network serves as a conduit for preserving solo dance performances, as well as the pros and cons of using this public forum to share and document performances of liquid. The fourth section explores how the second-generation liquid dance blog, *Floasis.net*, provided space for critiques of the form. And the final section concerns the Facebook group, *Liquid Lab*, to discuss the current practice of sharing liquid dance videos through this self-identified community. Overall, this chapter examines how each of these aforementioned social media platforms provides the foundations of what I conceive as *digital pedagogy*: the learning process and continuing development of approaches to liquid dance technique. I show how the open interconnectedness of online social media caters to and reflects localized perceptions of dance at the individual level, as well as the production of collective subcultural meanings and understandings of the dance form.

Labbing

In the 1990s, as the Internet was in its infancy, there were no online liquid dance forums that catered to sharing, teaching or learning the foundations of this dance. First-generation liquid dancer Shane "Senchi" Johnson, a Caucasian-American male, explains how the digital flow of liquid dance only began in the early 2000s. During our interview, he recalls that dedicated practitioners initially began discussing their individual perspectives and sharing new aesthetic innovations with each other through face-to-face conversations. Johnson explains how groups of liquid heads would often gather at after parties, or private social gatherings that primarily took place following rave and EDM club night events. After parties were typically held at the private residences of liquid

dancers, usually between the hours of 2am and 6am (Anderson 2009). At these private events, dancers would "sit and talk about liquid" through sharing personal stories, memories and experiences with the dance form (Johnson interview 2017).

Johnson describes the process of sharing and creating new ideas on liquid dance as "labbing." I deploy labbing as a colloquial term throughout this chapter in order to explore the ways in which liquid dancers continue to sustain and innovate the practice. I suggest that labbing represents the purposeful actions of facilitating face-to-face and, ultimately, online interactions between practitioners. Such interactions include both dance exchanges and open dialogue. Furthermore, labbing enhances communication through the collective efforts of practitioners who engage in a combination of physical demonstration and discussion of ideas, which are in turn articulated as movement vocabulary that contributes to the evolution of liquid dance.

According to Buckland (1999) and Hamera (2011), the process of developing dance involves physical, social, and community meanings produced through practice. The subcultural practice of liquid dance is no exception. The meanings embedded within its repertoire and social interactions are multiple, creating questions and tensions within liquid dance communities throughout the United States.[41] Such tensions thematically emerge as differences of opinion regarding what constitutes an agreed-upon vocabulary to describe the repertoire of this dance form. In spite of the attempt by the LPC All Access Liquid and Digitz Tutorial (2002) to codify many foundational components of liquid and digits techniques, not everyone had access to this tutorial. Consequently, the debates continued.

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[41] Given the digital realm is transnational, there are small pockets of online liquid dance blogs in the countries of Japan and India.

Johnson states: “Instead of being like typical dancers who teach using phrases like ‘oh, it feels like this or it looks like this,’ we literally sat and had a conversation to figure it all out. We also practiced each concept together to show what we knew and how we did it. And this became a way of breaking it down using conceptual language” (Johnson interview 2017). Practitioners who engaged with labbing perpetuated the subcultural values particular to liquid dance of sharing, learning and creating new ideas within the dance form. I suggest the collective efforts of creating conceptual language represents an act of pedagogical and social desire to preserve, archive, share and create new knowledge of liquid dance.

As established in Chapter 5, the LPC’s tutorial was the first pedagogical tool available for liquid dancers to draw from. According to LpE, the tutorial helped to disseminate liquid dance to a larger audience through its distribution across the US outside the rave scene. As Maranan (2012) asserts, the tutorial set the standard for liquid’s foundations and became widely accepted as an essential focal point for learning the techniques of liquid. Yet, the tutorial had its limitations.

While Gorea (2017 interview) acknowledges that the LPC tutorial was the first attempt to provide a framework for learning and exploring liquid, as with any dance tutorial, it does not provide the foundations of every component of the practice. It was critiqued for omitting what Gorea considered to be essential foundational concepts. For instance, the tutorial does not showcase or explain the importance of the figure eight technique, which according to Gorea is arguably one of the first elements of liquid movement vocabulary drawn from glow-sticks. Gorea (2017 interview) also points out the tutorial does not discuss body posture, body angles or footwork.

Second-generation practitioner Matt Houdoken (interview 2017) discusses tunnels, another missing element from the LPC tutorial. Tunnels were a liquid technique that emerged between 1998 and 2000 in the Midwest cities of Chicago and Kansas City. Houdoken, a Caucasian-American male, does not know exactly where tunnels first emerged.

When I asked LpE about the above critiques, he acknowledged both Gorea and Houdoken's perspectives. He explains:

> We kind of put liquid in a box, and I kind of regret that. Really, because people saw something in that video and said 'oh this is what it is, this is what I have to do' and they stuck to the concepts so rigidly that they did not give themselves room to expand. My biggest regret though is that we didn't talk in our video about the mentality and philosophy behind the dance. (LpE Interview 2017).

Although the Liquid Pop Collective initially sought to formalize and share the technique of liquid through the mass medium of video, in hindsight LpE realizes how the crew inadvertently perpetuated an aesthetic of liquid bound to the contents of the tutorial. In effect, this essentially fixed liquid into a narrow and limited version of itself. Notably, the result of the tutorial's widespread circulation among practitioners created differences of opinion within the liquid community. The LPC began to realize this shortly after their release of the tutorial. Therefore, they attempted to remedy the confusion by creating an online social group that encouraged other liquid dancers to share their personal styles, ideas, experiences and critiques of the dance practice.

Reflective.net

In 2003, the LPC launched the first online blog specifically for liquid dance, Reflective.net. The word reflective clearly expresses the intention of this blog, which was

to enable practitioners to give consideration to their experiences with liquid. Although the blog is no longer active, it was the first attempt to create an open and ongoing dialogue among practitioners through digital means. The conversation threads ranged from discussions of the fundamental components of liquid, as well as emerging concepts from other first and second-generation liquid dancers (Flowington Interview 2017). As a digital social platform, Reflective.net provided a space for instant access to video and text. The site was primarily a message board, while "very few videos were uploaded during its existence" (LpE interview 2017). According to LpE, the video most discussed was the LPC tutorial and its components.

The purposeful creation of Reflective.net by the LPC represents what Hennessey (2012) refers to as an action of "safeguarding" intangible cultural knowledge through documentation. According to Hennessey, safeguarding was conceived by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at a convention held in Paris, France in 2003.

> [Safeguarding] measures aimed at ensuring the viability of intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of various aspects of such heritage (UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).

Along similar lines, liquid dancers administer safeguarding to ensure the preservation of the subcultural dance practice. This also represents an action of gatekeeping, by those practitioners invested in asserting control over the practice. This reveals the stakeholders in liquid who claim authority regarding access to, and knowledge of, the dance, and who possess control over the digital flow of information on liquid. For instance, Reflective.net was designed by the LPC to be a closed group for liquid dance practitioners, which

excluded the general public. One of the purposes of providing a closed group was to preserve what liquid dancers describe as “real” or “true” liquid (LpE interview 2017), a value that subcultural theorists have described as the authenticity of a practice.

Authenticity represents one of the core subcultural values within the larger liquid dance community. Vannini and Williams (2009) argue that the claimed “authenticity” of a subcultural practice is a social construction produced by the people who shape its meanings. These meanings are determined by the values and experiences of individuals invested in the subculture. As Haenfler (2014, 83) asserts: “Authenticity requires that we [as practitioners and/or scholars] actually be the sort of person we want others to perceive us as. Pursuing, performing and judging authenticity is central to most subcultural experience.” For liquid dancers, authenticity extends far beyond preserving the physical components of the practice through documentation. It includes the collective and individual understandings of the dance form’s historical, musical and social roots. To be an authentic liquid head, one has to acquire specialized knowledge regarding specific facets of the practice, or what Thornton (1995) refers to as “subcultural capital.” As Chapter 5 established, dedicated liquid dancers actively engage with such specialized knowledge of the practice to develop his or her personal style. This includes the physical skills, approaches and philosophies of the practice. Reflective.net represented the first digital space to articulate such spheres of knowledge and value for practitioners to share with one another.

The levels of participation, in terms of commitment and engagement of discussions on Reflective.net, constantly changed in topics, focus and intent. Like the physical practice itself, liquid dancers remain free to choose their level of investment in

terms of when and how they participate and what they share within the spaces of online dance communities. As Dodds (2011, 138) asserts, subcultural groups are not "a fixed and homogeneous collective." In other words, subcultures are somewhat fluid in the sense that members may come and go as they please. This fluidity stems from personal investment, as members of such groups have the choice to move between other social groups (Muggleton 2000). In other words, individual members of online liquid dance communities engage in varying levels of participation.

In 2005, the LPC crew disbanded "for personal reasons," and, shortly thereafter, Reflective.net was "taken down" from the Internet (LpE interview 2017). The shutdown of Reflective.net created an initial gap in digital communication between practitioners across the US. However, an alternative social media platform was about to emerge.

YouTube

YouTube, which was launched in 2005, is a free video file sharing website accessible to the general public, and functions in the liquid community as a conduit for promoting and sharing solo performances and tutorials. Prior to YouTube, video documentation of liquid dance was scarce. Today, liquid dance practitioners upload and curate YouTube clips on a daily basis. One of the greatest challenges for novice liquid dancers is to sift through thousands of videos that claim to showcase the dance form. This is especially problematic because YouTube incorporates hash-tags to classify video content, defined by digital ethnographer Paola-Maria Caleffi (2015) as text that incorporates the pound symbol (#) followed by words to describe the content of a video

or text.[42] Typically, when dancers conduct YouTube searches for "liquid dance," videos with these words embedded as hash-tags (#liquid or #LiquidDance) load onto the search engine screen, starting with the video that possesses the largest number of views or "hits." Searching by hash-tags alone presents a challenge, as some videos labeled "liquid dance" may not contain such content. Furthermore, YouTube videos are organized in order of highest to lowest numbers of views or "hits." So, if a popular video is hash-tagged #Liquid Dance, and it happens to be something else, this creates confusion and fragmentation of information.

In my 2016 interview with LPC member Edward "Fu Man Chu" Hickman, he references a YouTube clip of a dancer named David "Elsewhere" Bernal. Bernal has a dance clip titled "#Liquid Dance." The video has generated over 1.4 million views since its upload in 2006.[43] The issue with labeling this particular video as "liquid dance," as Hickman explains, is that the dancing displayed in the video is waving. As established in Chapter 5, waving is often conflated with liquid dance as the two bear aesthetic similarities, although they are in fact distinct forms. The misconceptions of what distinguishes the physical characteristics of waving from liquid stem from the use of the terms interchangeably. This has generated some confusion with commonly used hash-tags employed to categorize dance clips. As Hickman explains: "All you have to do is go online and type in the phrase 'rave dance' or 'liquid dance' and then a date, and you'll get

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[42] Caleffi observes: "hash-tags are specifically created by individual online users to comment on, praise or critique ideas (#domcracyisbetter) or people (#celochiedebeppe), to promote brands (Coca Cola, #AmericaIsBeautiful) or events (#Wimbledon)" (Caleffi 2015, 46).

[43] See Appendix A.

dozens of video posts with hash-tags of videos that claim to be liquid clips, but they aren't" (Hickman Interview 2016).

Hickman's concern over the validity of accurate labeling reveals two key subcultural values. The first is what Thornton (1995) describes as subcultural capital regarding what is authentically liquid. This specialized dance knowledge distinguishes, in part, what can and cannot be considered liquid dance. Therefore Hickman's determination of correct labeling demonstrates his knowledge of and experience in developing the conceptual foundations of liquid. The second subcultural value is the process of gatekeeping, which brings up the role of the digital curator, who serves as an authority of digital labels that deem videos worthy of being classified as liquid. Hickman clearly takes on this role of vetting the accuracy of clips and hash-tags to identify liquid dance.

In addition to gatekeeping and preservation of the practice, liquid dancers purposely share their practice with one another. There is no financial reward for such sharing, which means that liquid dancers are essentially amateurs attempting to ensure the preservation and continued evolution of the subculture. The etymology of the word "amateur" is Latin for the word "love." Simply put, amateurs do things because they love whatever it is they do. And when amateurs choose to share the love of what they do, they engage in what digital ethnographer Kiri Miller (2012) frames as online amateur-to-amateur pedagogy. Miller developed this conception by conducting three case studies of YouTube tutorials on conga, piano and yoga lessons. Within each tutorial, "amateurs," invest in "body-to-body transmission" for the purposes of obtaining "new corporeal skills, experiences and knowledge" (Miller 2012, 183). Her study reveals direct

correlation between amateur practitioners and pedagogy. Furthermore, Miller's work also illuminates the fact that amateurs pursue practice for its own sake. Miller (2012, 184) defines amateurs as those who "do things because they want to, for pleasure and at their leisure, not for material compensation or under duress." According to Miller, amateurs form online digital peer groups that foster amateur-to-amateur exchange of teaching and learning. For all practitioners in my study, liquid dancing rarely, if at all, serves as a line of income. Liquid heads are not motivated by financial reward. Instead, they pursue the dance "for the love of it" (Flowington interview 2017). I argue that liquid dancers are also engaged with amateur-to-amateur exchange of digital flow of information on the practice. This deep embodied investment can be seen as a model of amateur-to-amateur pedagogy that takes place.

At present, liquid dancers have not yet found a commercial interest in their practice, and they currently pursue this dance as a leisure activity. Yet, their knowledge is nevertheless highly valued on YouTube. For example, Gorea's subcultural capital ranks highly on YouTube as he has posted thousands of videos and is followed by hundreds of devoted viewers and subscribers (Gorea interview 2017). The majority of Gorea's YouTube footage was filmed in New York City, primarily during the daytime at locations such as Union Square and Central Park. Since Gorea has decades of experiences with both liquid *and* popping, Gorea began collating and categorizing his experiences by gathering his personal collection of dance footage from late 1990s NYC raves, club events and street performances. Like the LPC, Gorea was invested in sharing his approaches to dance. Thus, he created multiple tutorials on body angles, postures, level changes, torso exercises for improving the range of motion for cobra technique, twista-

flex technique for isolations, and finger stretches and drills to improve flexibility.[44] Gorea also utilized YouTube to preserve and document the legacy of Liquid Lights Crew (LLC) by conducting interviews with his crewmate, Jason, aka Dr. Funk. The interview was published on YouTube in March of 2009. During the interview, Dr. Funk confirmed stories of Tiny Love and Liquid Lights Crew, who attended rave and club nights in NYC during the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Some of the key points drawn from the interview include the following quote from Dr. Funk:

> My first club experience was over at The Limelight. And that's where I saw Tiny Love, and some of the Liquid Lights cats first, before I even knew what liquid was. I saw these kids doing all these crazy stuff with their hands. And I saw kids using glow-sticks and light-sticks, and it was the sickest thing I'd ever seen, and got into it for like twelve hours straight that first night" (Dr. Funk Interview online 2009).[45]

Gorea's purpose for uploading his video interview of Dr. Funk was to cement their place in liquid's historical roots, as well as sharing their narrative accounts of what they experienced. The video emphasizes that YouTube, as a social media network, connects what Miller (2012, 184) describes as "dispersed authority," which in this case are geographically dispersed members of liquid dancers. While Gorea and Dr. Funk both live in New York City, the YouTube video has the potential ability to reach other liquid practitioners across the country, or world.

In spite of its global reach, YouTube has notable limitations. In the above particular example, the video has approximately 400 hits, a relatively minimal number compared to the millions generated by videos that "go viral." Additionally, this video was challenging to find on YouTube, as it is hash-tagged with a long phrase: "Jason aka

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[44] For Gorea's YouTube tutorials see Appendix A.

[45] For Dr. Funk interview see Appendix A.

DrFunk interview on liquid dance and Rave culture NYC part 1." I argue the specificity of this YouTube label may serve as two counterproductive functions. First, it clearly describes the contents of the video, but which only appeal to a specific group of liquid dancers familiar with rave, liquid and Dr. Funk. Second, it remains archived among thousands of YouTube videos, many with similar or same words in different orders. As established at the beginning of this section, the videos with the most number of hits always appears at the top of the search list. Thus, tracking the Dr. Funk interview down was a challenge for myself as a subcultural insider, which suggests it is not likely to be found by those unfamiliar with the liquid dance scene.

Although YouTube provides a huge archive of video clips, its limitation is that the videos are decentralized, in that there is no singular or central curator. YouTube inadvertently creates a large "pool" of information that requires the general public to navigate through (Rushkoff 2013). One is left with the task of deciphering between the aesthetics of liquid, the various facets of the practice, and attempting to learn who the key practitioners are from a limited amount of context. This creates the challenge of sifting through the archives for specific practitioners and their respective solo performances, tutorials or other related liquid dance content. Another limitation is that YouTube is not a platform designed for users to engage in extended conversations. The only available text is limited to comments posted below the video, pending the approval of the individual curator who uploaded the video. This means that, in spite of the global reach of YouTube, its design ensures that there is still a tendency for videos posted by subcultural groups to remain largely within the domain of that particular subculture. To date, this has certainly been the case for the little-known form of liquid and its niche group of practitioners. Thus

to ensure its longevity, a new platform specifically catered to preserving the digital subcultural heritage of liquid was needed.

Floasis.net

As a result of YouTube's fragmentation and dispersion of liquid dance, two second-generation practitioners Kai "Sosceles," a Caucasian-American male, and "Itch" Chen, an Asian-American male, decided to develop another blog dedicated to the practice. They cofounded and launched Floasis.net in 2007. Sosceles explains their primary motivation for creating this online social group was to continue conversations between dancers in order spread more knowledge and foster the development of ideas that expanded beyond the original LPC foundations. Sosceles recalls:

> Itch and I started going on road trips across the country to the east coast to cities like Philly and small towns in New Jersey to interview liquid heads. What we hoped the driver for the forum would be was content. Only a very small handful of people released high quality video clips at the time, so we invested in a nice camera, and our intent was to film them dancing and interview them. We did this over the course of about two years. No one asked us for any money. It was kind of a holdover for the liquid dance community. Our intent was to get the content for more veteran dancers so that the newer dancers could kind of take the reins. I think we kind of failed in that a bit. We had the technical knowhow, but no one took over after we did (Sosceles interview 2017).

Sosceles' quote epitomizes the notion that dedicated liquid practitioners are amateurs intent on sharing and learning from one another for sake of obtaining new perspectives on the form. As evidence of this, Sosceles and Itch embarked on a series of road trips across the US with the goal of documenting, interviewing and learning from liquid practitioners. They collected dozens of hours of footage, which they collated and transmitted to Floasis.net. Neither Sosceles nor Itch were interested in generating any kind of profit.

Instead, Sosceles and Itch designed this site to be both a digital archive and a communication hub for liquid dancers. Like its predecessor Reflective.net, Floasis.net provided a space for practitioners to post questions and discussions in a message board, as well as a digital medium to post video documented clips of liquid. An added feature to Floasis.net was the ability to choose from different topic threads. Such topic threads were separated into textual icons, or digital text that represent characteristics of emotions, such as smiley faces (but not necessarily in reference to raves).

Within these conversation threads, participants discussed a wide-range of topics related to liquid such as body angles, footwork, musicality, and plans for liquid meet-ups. According to LpE, Reflective.net had many conversation threads connected to flow. Notably, Sosceles (interview 2017) explained that Floasis.net continued the discussion of flow in "greater depth." In my 2017 interview with second-generation practitioner Matt Houdoken, he recalls posting on Floasis.net a metaphor he commonly used to describe liquid as "a conversation between the hands." He was quick to point out, however, that liquid dance has been slow to develop because of the liquid community's overemphasis on hand-flow, both conceptually and at the technique level. I infer from Houdoken that the mechanics of achieving the physicality of flow in liquid extend beyond the perceived relationship between the hands, a discussion I return to in the next chapter.

One of the most important features of Floasis.net was that it provided a space for labbing liquid in an open forum. Practitioners were encouraged to share experiences and any new, emerging ideas on liquid. By 2008, Sosceles became interested in object manipulation activities such as juggling, **poi**, and **fire spinning**. He began labbing with fellow liquid heads Houdoken and Tommy von Flowington to develop the liquid

technique of *levers*. Levers stems from the aesthetics of **poi** and **staff spinning**, techniques utilized within the flow-arts practice of fire dancing. Sosceles learned the mechanics of poi and staff spinning separately. Then, similarly to Gorea's revelation with glow-sticks, Sosceles put the staffs down, and experimented with ways to rotate his forearms to mimic the aesthetics of two fire staffs spinning together. He incorporated these techniques into his repertoire, and expanded it into his foundations in liquid. Sosceles shared his ideas with Houdoken and Flowington, who each developed their personal style of levers. Levers incorporate the full length of the arm-span from the shoulder to the fingertips. From a visual perspective, the arms swing in a pendulum-like motion around an axis connected at the shoulders.

In addition to an open forum, Floasis.net provided a space for tutorials. For example, in a tutorial video posted by Itch, he explains that the technique of rails can be enhanced through footwork (Floasis.net 2007). He demonstrates three variations of his approach. The first involves gliding his feet across the floor in the same direction of his rail patterns travel, so that they appear to be floating parallel to the dance floor. In the second variation, he expands the range of rail patterns by bending his knees and folding the torso, which results in spatial level changes that "drastically shift" the dynamics of rail patterns. In the third variation, Itch executes ninety-degree turns that shift the axis and direction of rails to add another spatial dimension. The following is a direct quote from Itch who speaks directly into the camera:

> This is a video about my personal approach to achieving 'flow' in the dance of liquid. I am not attempting to define what flow is nor am I saying this is the 'right' way to flow, but simply laying out a perspective I have on flow that will hopefully spark some creativity and deeper thinking about the dance based on the idea of various 'relationships.' (Itch clip from Floasis.net 2007).

Itch's video represents one of the first attempts by a liquid dancer to speak directly in the video. Itch combines verbal explanation with physical demonstration of his approach to specific components of liquid dance. And Floasis.net was the first digital blog to house this kind of pedagogical flow of ideas. Through digital tutorial format, these videos represent a specific digital pedagogy designed for liquid practitioners to learn from.

In this tutorial, Itch also cites the LPC members Frequency and Fu Man Chu on their techniques and personal styles of rails. In vernacular terms, this represents an example of a second-generation practitioner "giving props to" or "paying homage" to first-generation practitioners for their contributions to liquid's foundations (Sosceles interview 2017). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this is an example of a practitioner projecting two subcultural values: knowledge of historical lineage of liquid and appreciation for the OGs or elders who represent the first generation of practitioners. In reference to breakdancing, Fogarty (2012, 57) suggests that its international community of b-boys and b-girls is composed of "extended families that are multigenerational." Fogarty's conception of extended family also applies to the liquid dance community wherein the younger generation, speak respectfully of and acknowledge the embodied contribution of their elders.

As a site dedicated purely to liquid, Floasis.net provided four things. First, it created space for alternative viewpoints on flow and other concepts first introduced by the LPC tutorial. Second, it served as a conduit to present new liquid dance concepts that ultimately developed into a second generation of codified techniques. Third, it was the first blog to provide a space for tutorials for both old and new liquid techniques. Fourth, it provided the digital links to YouTube clips for individual practitioner solo performances.

Floasis.net functioned as both a curated archive and a space to continue conversations about liquid dancing's physical components and individual approaches to the practice. In 2011, Floasis.net was shut down (Sosceles interview 2017) due to both lack of funding to maintain the website and the time needed to administer it. Over the next year, there would be no online resources besides YouTube specifically catered to liquid.

Liquid Lab

The yearlong gap finally came to an end with the addition of the Facebook group *Liquid Lab* (LL) in 2012. This site is currently one of the most popular online sources for liquid dancers with over 1,233 members. These numbers may be significant for the liquid community, but it pales in comparison to popular Facebook sites with millions of subscribers. "Popularity," in this respect, is clearly relative. And therefore, LL represents a niche subcultural group on Facebook. LL provides liquid dancers with digital spaces to post their personal training sessions and receive feedback either through text or video responses. Chris "Verb" Atkins, the current administrator and facilitator of LL, explained that this group was developed as a space to share one's technical skills and training methods through video posts and, in turn, "receive constructive feedback and critiques" from other members of this digital community (Atkins interview, 2017).

In order for LL to successfully facilitate digital pedagogy, this Facebook group perpetuates the subcultural value of sharing through digital communication. Baym (2010) argues that digital communication through online forums combines face-to-face interactions with written text. In particular, she examines the emphasis on social cues designed to enhance the nuances of how online communities express emotions and build

relationships. She describes how digital social cues encompass digital text in the forms of emoticons, caps lock, abbreviations and slang, each of which express emotional responses and build social connections. Baym (2010) deploys the term "community" to describe online social groups that exhibit five characteristics: a shared sense of space, shared practices, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal support. Clearly, Baym's connection of online social groups encompasses the overarching value of sharing, a value that liquid dancers facilitate through digital means. LL functions as a forum that facilitates sharing at all five aforementioned levels.

LL is currently the go-to social network for liquid dancers to engage in "amateur-to-amateur" exchanges. According to Miller (2012, 232), amateur-to-amateur participants consist of those who share embodied knowledge online in order to "build a scaffold for meaningful online discourse." Such discourse sets the tone to develop the pedagogical and the mentoring relationship between dancer and student. For liquid practitioners engaged in a form that encompasses multiple techniques, the teacher/student relationship often becomes blurred, as roles tend to shift often (Miller 2012). This is the case because one person may have expertise in one technique, while the other person may have expertise in another.

Within the format of LL, the interplay between teaching and mentoring that takes place among participants combines personal practice with online critique. When LL members choose to post a video clip of their practice, they often post comments that denote self-critique that encourage other members to respond with constructive feedback. The range of this feedback depends on the practitioner, as some seek general advice on

elements of the dance such as flow, body posture and musicality, while others desire formal critiques of their abilities to demonstrate precision in technique.

In one case, a liquid dancer posted the following: “I would like the opinion, criticism or advice on my presentation. It was all improvised” (Bruno Sales Nov. 5, 2017 LL). The response comments included: “I would recommend isolating your body as you’re going through your liquid. If you're going to move your body have it be proportioned/ in relationship to your liquid. I would also say just slow down some ya know. Dope though homie!” (Nick Sektor Nov. 5, 2017). While Sektor’s advice includes a general emphasis on spatial positions around the body and speed control of flow, he does not provide any specific drills or examples in this case, partially because Sales does not follow up by asking for further advice. He simply responds with the text: “Today I think I am able to isolate as recommended. Thank you for the constructive criticism” (Sales Nov. 5 2017 LL). Sales’ reply indicates that he intuitively understands Sektor’s advice, and the conversation thread comes to a close. Yet, the second comment posted immediately after attempts to be more specific:

> I'd like to see more tracing and isolated flow rails like Nick said. Try hand flowing around a fixed point in the space around you, and dancing around the [fixed] point [in space], if you know what I mean. It might add some extra dynamic illusion to your dance. Nice work dude, keep that shit up!” (Mohaned Rammahi Accessed Nov. 5, 2017 LL).

Rammahi’s specificity is an example of liquid dancers conveying their embodied expertise in a way that is encouraging experimentation within the technique of rails. This exchange of digital pedagogy represents what Miller (2012, 233) describes as amateur-to-amateur practitioners being actively engaged in a discourse of “competing standards, definitions, norms and authorities.” In other words, there are multiple approaches to

“adding dynamic illusion” to one’s flow, as Rammahi suggests above. Yet, it is up to the individual, in this case the practitioner Sales, which technique advice to follow. This example illustrates that liquid dancers desire to share embodied knowledge without the expectation of financial compensation. As Miller (2012, 233) emphasizes: “the fact that no money changes hands seems to enhance this phenomenon.” The lack of explicit interest in economic gain prioritizes other kinds of subcultural values regarding technical skill, pedagogic exchange, and social interaction.

I joined LL in the summer of 2016. Recently, I posted a clip of myself drilling the foundations of rails and contours while experimenting with different body angles. To explain this further, I wrote the phrase: “Feeling motivated. Working on old and new flow with rails, contours and body angles. Comments and feedback appreciated” (Posted April 1, 2018). Second-generation practitioner Shane Johnson replied to my video with the following comments:

> Nice leg contours, I dig the isolated rails after the tuts. Things to work on...while you’re using your Liquid nicely to accent the melody of the song (something I feel Liquid does really well) the beat and bass are not as well accented. I don’t know how others approach the layers of a track, but I often let my legs and torso accent the beat and bass, while I accent melodic parts with my Liquid more. This doesn’t mean I don’t switch it up or play with what accents what but as a starting point I go with the beat in my feet and the melody in my flow. Hope that helps. Also I can always show you some stuff at 4 Hours of Funk later this month. (Shane Johnson Accessed 9/28/18).

Johnson’s constructive feedback indicates what Miller (2012, 233) describes as amateur-to-amateur pedagogy that “generates a sense of mutual obligation, emotional investment, and social connection among participants.” This is evident the following ways. First, there is a “mutual obligation” between Johnson and myself. Johnson’s role as the teacher is to share and synthesize his musical and kinesthetic knowledge in a cohesive, clearly

articulated way that helps me understand how to isolate my upper and lower body to "accentuate" distinct sonic components (Johnson 2018). My role as the learner is to transmit his advice into my flow, so that the next time I post a video, I may share with Johnson my progression of musicality and liquid.

There is also, Miller (2012) puts it, "emotional investment" inherent in the response of Johnson. He began with an encouraging statement, letting me know that he enjoyed my leg contours, and that he "digs the isolated rails after the tuts" (Johnson 2018). Finally, the social connection is already established in the act of posting my clip, followed by the response of Johnson. Shortly after I posted this video clip, Johnson and I did in fact meet for the first time at the Baltimore, Maryland event 4 Hours of Funk, where we engaged in multiple dance exchanges and conversations. One of the major benefits to this Facebook group is that it encourages face-to-face meet-ups, a subject I discuss at length in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

This chapter began by asking how and why liquid dance migrated from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media. I have demonstrated how liquid dancers document, preserve and share the digital flow of ideas accumulated within the subcultural practice. Digital platforms serve three primary functions: a curatorial tool for the documentation and transmission of dance; communication hubs for geographically dispersed dancers; and platforms to share and critique ideas through posting video and text. I have established the lineage of websites that encompasses a digital flow of ideas shared between practitioners through interconnected online social media spaces. I have

also illustrated a growing desire among practitioners to collaborate, share and build online pedagogical forums and tutorials, as well as facilitating the continuing progression of the form.

I have also shown that liquid dance has resisted mainstream exposure as practitioners have, at least thus far, refrained from developing liquid as a sustainable monetized practice. Since its inception, liquid practitioners have fostered a community that prioritizes sharing the dance, rather than mining ways to exploit it for financial gain. Unlike some of the hip hop dance styles like breaking and popping, liquid has not been marketed through competition events that can attract corporate sponsorship and big prize money. Instead, liquid practitioners are more concerned with reciprocal exchange rather than virtuosic contest. And because it has not been commodified towards a market dance, liquid remains a niche subcultural practice that evolves on its own terms through amateur-to-amateur exchange. Such terms are determined and regulated by liquid practitioners, and many remain dedicated to keeping the dance form preserved online. This chapter has established that online blogs and Facebook groups catered to liquid dance represent a digital extension of the subcultural dance practice. The curators of each social network regulate what is shared and preserved, thus creating a digital subcultural heritage for the online liquid dance community.

The combination of the LPC tutorial and Reflective.net represented a tremendous first step in spreading the foundations of this subcultural dance practice; they both created an interest and demand for further conversation among liquid dancers across the US, many of whom began brainstorming and creating concepts of their own. YouTube helped to spread liquid onto a broader, public social medium. However, as a decentralized

website, it created confusion and fragmentation of information on the subcultural practice and the form itself. On the positive side, YouTube remains a useful archive for dedicated practitioners. Floasis.net represents an expanded version of the LPC blog. It was the first blog that fostered a digital space for liquid dancers to use recorded video clips of verbal communication about their experiences and approaches. Floasis.net also provided the first open space for tutorials alternative to the LPC's. It served as space to critique and analyze each other's dancing, as well as provided direct links to YouTube for quick and easy references to dance solos. The Facebook group Liquid Lab remains the current space for liquid dancers to share and critique each other's liquid technique through digital pedagogy. It brings amateur-to-amateur pedagogy to an instantly accessible domain. Liquid Lab also serves a communication hub for planning annual liquid dance meet-ups at festivals and other social gatherings.

Although attracting a small, but dedicated group of practitioners, these social networks ensured the digital flow of information regarding liquid's history and contemporary practice. Each platform provided ways to disseminate liquid across the Internet, allowing dance to be shared and exchanged among otherwise remote practitioners. Therefore, instead of liquid fading away with the end of raves, the embodied commitment of its practitioners enabled the dance to migrate. It began with analog video, and upgraded through the means of digital technology, allowing the digital cultural heritage of liquid to remain archived, and shared. Importantly, these sites also facilitate the interim between liquid dance meet-ups, where face-to-face dance exchanges occur.

CHAPTER 7: PASS THE FLOW

Introduction

In this chapter, I come to my final research question, which explores how liquid dance is created, shared and perpetuated through live dance exchange. To examine this question further, I consider how festivals like Sonic Bloom foster an atmosphere for what liquid dancers consider to be an ideal setting for face-to-face dance exchange. I deploy the methods of ethnography, autoethnography, first-person writing and participant observation to analyze the dance exchanges of seven liquid practitioners, myself included.

For this chapter, there are three aspects of flow pertinent to my analysis. The first is flow-state, which according to Csikszentmihalyi (1975) represents the optimal physical and mental ability to immerse the self in an activity such as dance. The second is the flow of the physical practice, where creative ideas emerge within the personal styles embodied by individual practitioners. The third relates to the transmission of such ideas through a process colloquially referred to as a game called pass the flow, a liquid dance exchange between two or more dancers. As part of this discussion, I consider how personal style influences the progression of each exchange. I argue that pass the flow functions as a conduit to create and share dance between practitioners. It represents the core connection between the dance form and the bodies engaged with the practice. Pass the flow expands the dance from solo participation to interpersonal exchange, based on the reciprocal responses between two or more dancers engaged with liquid. To address each of these facets of flow, this chapter is divided into four sections.

Sonic Bloom: An Ethnographic Description draws directly from my field notes to provide an ethnographic portrait of this three-day event. My narrative captures the "essence" of my experiences, which I understand as the ineffable qualities of such experiences that I endeavor to articulate in my written description (Glesne 1997). The purpose of providing this description is to illustrate for the reader the physical surroundings of the festival, as well as set the tone for my analysis of liquid dance exchanges that follow in the chapter.

Finding Flow examines the challenges of obtaining flow-state at the beginning of the festival. I return to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) theory of flow-state to analyze how individual dancers obtain such a state within a festival setting. I examine how achieving flow-state remains interconnected to the process of engaging with the physical flow of liquid and transmitting the aesthetic flow of ideas from one body to another. This process does not occur automatically, but takes place through a series of trial and error.

Sharing Flow privileges the words of each dancer to illuminate individual perspectives on achieving flow at festivals. This section reveals how the verbal communication between liquid dancers is an essential social component of the subculture. I return to club, rave and festival culture literature and subcultural theory to analyze the emerging values manifested during face-to-face dance meet-ups within the space of an EDM festival.

Finally, *Pass The Flow* examines the liquid dance exchanges that occurred on the final night of Sonic Bloom. It focuses primarily on how the transmission of ideas between practitioners connects individuals through liquid. To facilitate my analysis, I draw from my field notes, video footage, and interviews I obtained at Sonic Bloom.

Sonic Bloom: An Ethnographic Description

I arrived at the festival check-in tents with my photographer Kat Wang at approximately 2:30pm on Thursday June 15, 2017. The heat was a stifling 93 degrees. The Spanish Mountain range was in plain view to our northwest, and the Colorado windmill farms were in view towards the southeast. From the check-in tents, I spotted hundreds of vehicles two miles down the road. After we checked in with the Sonic Bloom staff, we were handed our credentials (VIP wrist bands, and a workshop badge for myself), as well as one meal voucher. We were told that our tent was a double, complete with air mattress, two sleeping bags and two pillows, already set up for us inside the festival grounds.

As the hired staff driver for the festival pulled up, we hopped into an SUV, and the driver drove us up to the front gate entrance where we were greeted by Stephinity, the workshop/performance recruiter and manager of Sonic Bloom. She requested we transfer our bags from the SUV to a small golf-cart unit, and we proceeded to follow Stephinity onto the festival grounds. The main entrance spelled out SONIC BLOOM in bright purple letters. As we passed through the gate, I felt a rush of excitement in anticipation of meeting six liquid dancers for the first time.

Blades of grass tickled my bare ankles as we passed by multiple food and clothing vendor tents. As we walked along the open field, to our right was the main sound stage, located at the southern end of the festival grounds. Stage crews performed sound checks, and adjustments to the scaffolding, lighting and sound equipment in preparation for dozens of musical acts ranging from solo performances, live bands and EDM DJs. After

crossing a vast grass field, we came upon forest foliage, and the entrance to our campsite, marked by two white hanging silks, and a Sonic Bloom VIP sign.

After unloading our luggage from the golf cart, we dragged our things through a small opening in a chain-linked fence, which led to a narrow dirt path with lots of rocks. We came upon a path to our left, marked by a small wooden bridge, which led to our campsite. Inside the tent was a fully inflated air mattress, two sleeping bags, and two pillows, exactly what we had requested. There were two-dozen single tents spaced out around the trees in this secluded area. We placed our suitcases behind our tent up against a tree, and proceeded to return to the VIP entrance, and casually strolled across the festival grounds to explore.

We walked north across large grass fields away from the main stage and noticed a line of two-dozen tents selling art, supplies, memorabilia, music, and other miscellaneous items. A second line of tents selling food and drinks ran perpendicular to the first line, separated by a dirt path, which led further north toward the Hummingbird Stage. This area of the grounds was decorated with art installations that included murals, paintings, sculptures and photographs. There were dozens of hammocks surrounding the main entrance to the Hummingbird stage, which had a black tent cover over the grass and rocks, in order to simulate the appearance of a dance floor. This would prove slightly deceiving as the rocks underneath clearly made the surface uneven, and treacherous at times. The stage itself was built specifically for DJs and artists to perform. The sound system was state of the art. The sound crew tested the speakers with the booming bass lines of an electro breaks track. The sound was intoxicating, to the point where I wanted to stop and dance immediately, even though no one was on the dance floor yet.

Miss Wang and I casually proceeded past the Yoga Dome, where multiple movement-based workshops would take place throughout the length of the festival. At the end of the dirt path, we ventured into a clearing of another large grass field, where the third stage was located. Although smaller than the Main Stage, the Meadow Stage was built specifically for larger musical acts that involved jugglers, hula hoopers, and fire spinners.

At the far north end of the festival grounds, we came upon a line of port-a-potties along edge of the chain-linked fence. Beyond the fence was a large area for attendees to park their vehicles and camp equipment. We then proceeded to walk back along the same path, retracing our steps to our campsite and took a much-needed nap. Two hours later, I woke up to sound of my iPhone dinging. The text message read: "We're here David! Meet us at the front entrance." The moment that I had been anticipating for months finally arrived. It was time to meet the liquid heads.

Finding Flow

One by one, I met Chris "Verb" Atkins, Rachel "LokiDoll" Reetz, Will "Falsify" Greggathus, Scotty "Distortion" Miggs, Tommy von "Flowington," and Jenna Rose. Each of these liquid heads shared a subcultural affiliation through this dance. And although I was excited to meet each of these dancers in person for the first time, I initially felt anxious. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 49) explains: "When a person believes that his action opportunities are too demanding for his capabilities, the resulting stress is experienced as anxiety." For me, my anxiety was fueled by thoughts of not being able to perform on a high-enough level to be accepted among the group, as well as the physical

and emotional demands of navigating my ethnographic research amongst the stimuli of a three-day festival. This reflects Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) notion of the skill level required as being above one's individual ability in a given moment. Therefore, social connection was needed. This offers a reminder of the limitations of Hebdige's (1979) vision of subcultures as a cohesive and unified group. Instead, we came together as separate individuals. Even dancers like Verb and Falsify, who have known each other for years and had danced together many times, had not seen one another since the last liquid meet-up that took place one year prior. It was little surprise that they too were somewhat anxious, but also, eager to find flow together. And best way to begin that process was through dance exchange.

LokiDoll suggested that we all proceed to the Hummingbird Stage to warm up. Verb agreed to join us, as Falsify and Distortion followed closely behind. As we reached the stage, the rhythms of deep house enveloped our bodies and the surrounding foliage. Miss Wang used my iPhone to document the first dance exchange between LokiDoll, myself, and Verb. The following descriptions of our initial dance interactions reveal the challenges of finding flow:

> As the bass dropped, LokiDoll began with her signature style of hand flow, folding her fingers gradually expanding her movements into a series of figure-eight patterns. LokiDoll progressed into rails, contours and splits that mimicked the sonic textures of the deep house track blasting from state-of-the-art speakers. Her eyes focused on the paths her hands created in the space in front of her torso. She seemed a bit shy towards the end, as she indicated with a gesture of a shoulder shrug, and uttering the phrase "I just ran out" (Day 1 Sonic Bloom 2017).

In this first exchange, LokiDoll improvised her liquid sequences aesthetically connected to both her strong embodied foundation of the form and her interpretation of the house music track. At first, LokiDoll was unhinged and focused solely on the act of dance.

However, at the end of her set LokiDoll's flow was disrupted by what Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009, 90) refer to as reflective self-consciousness, or the "awareness of oneself as a social actor." In this context, LokiDoll knew that Verb and I were watching her dance. At first, she was excited to dance, and found her flow through allowing the music to guide her liquid. Yet, her abrupt end to her solo signified that LokiDoll felt a social obligation to let both Verb and myself know that she "just ran out." In this moment, LokiDoll fell out of flow and into reflective self-consciousness. In other words, LokiDoll shifted her focus from flowing with liquid to over analyzing how her dancing looked to Verb and myself. This moment was significant, as I experienced this same phenomenon at the end of my dance response to LokiDoll. Although LokiDoll did not directly pass the flow to me, I quickly took the opportunity to dance.

> My muscles tensed up, as if I was preparing for a breakdance battle, despite the settings. I began with my polished rectangle and square tutting patterns, and then transitioned into familiar liquid rail patterns. As the DJ mixed one deep house track into the next, I shifted into some house dance jacks and digs. Midway through the track's bass loop, I abruptly stopped dancing (Day 1, Sonic Bloom).

During my dance set, I reverted back to my habitual, signature movement sequences that I have drilled often enough to repeat automatically in any given moment. For example, I began with a tutting pattern I created over ten years ago, and have taught countless times to beginner dancers. In some ways, this was antithetical to flow, as I was concerned with anxiety over how I may have been judged, in this case, by other liquid dancers. Thus, I was not in flow, which requires me to operate at what Csikszentmihalyi (2009, 90) refers to as "full capacity," which involves "a balance between perceived action capacities and perceived action opportunities." My balance was hindered by my focus on what I had no control over: the feelings of LokiDoll and Verb. In addition, my "action capacities" were

lowered because I was nervous and excited to be in the presence of high-level liquid dancers. This initially caused me to dance in a way that was limited to sequences that I knew I could execute every time, conforming to what I frame as my comfortable, repeatable movement patterns. These actions are antithetical to creativity, and thus antithetical to flow, both core values within liquid dance. Like LokiDoll, I too "just ran out" of ideas, and quickly passed the flow to Verb.

> I watch him absorb the energy I pass to him as he transforms it from sharp, fast movements into a slow, smooth and intricate flow, embodied through his fingers, hands wrists and forearms. Verb contracts his physical focus into a series of finger rolls, gradually expanding his dance into larger movements through hand flow. He blends liquid rail patterns with tutting, tracing distinct shapes across his chest, shoulders, ribs and abdomen. And then, he gently tosses an imaginary ball up into the sky, signifying the end of his solo (Day 1, Sonic Bloom).

Watching Verb dance for the first time in a face-to-face encounter was a mesmerizing experience. He locked LokiDoll and I into his flow. We could not keep our eyes off of him. During his solo, Verb established a connection between the three of us. This immediately brought back my memories and feelings from my earliest raves and exposure to liquid. At the end of his set, I shook his hand and stated: "Awesome man!" Yet, although his solo was aesthetically and physically connected to the foundations of liquid flow, Verb had not yet achieved flow-state. None of us had, not yet. Verb, like each of us, was warming up, physically and emotionally, in this moment. He was warming up his muscles so that he could physically relax, and execute the physicality of his improvised solo. And, he was warming up his mind, in the sense that he was absorbing his surroundings of the festival, and finding a way to join flow or stream of information generated by the stimuli of the festival. And finally, Verb was dancing to connect with LokiDoll and myself. We just met, and thus, our first dance exchange was

our first attempt at finding flow together. Flow, for liquid dancers, encompasses both the physicality of the dance form, and the state of mind that fosters complete immersion in the dance.

For liquid dancers, one of the subcultural values embedded within the practice is a desire to grow together through dance. Initially, however, I did not avail myself to the vulnerability of evaluation from dancers like Verb and LokiDoll. Contrary to maintaining the aesthetic flow of the dance and achieving flow state, my initial actions involved starting and stopping to process and evaluate my physicality. This was partially fueled by my desire to showcase my dance vocabulary for LokiDoll and Verb. In addition, my intention upon my first encounter with LokiDoll and Verb was to showcase my abilities in a way that in my mind felt complete, and hopefully, would impress upon them that I possessed a strong grasp of liquid's foundations. Simultaneously, I wanted to show them my range of dance skills. So I included elements of popping and house dance within my set.

Two categories of critical moments enabled me to learn from these encounters. The first was when a liquid dancer like Verb provided me with constructive criticism on my practice of liquid, which happened multiple times throughout the three-day festival. The second was when I caught myself reverting back to my old habits of dancing "too fast" with my liquid, an observation offered to me by Verb. Speed control is a value of liquid (LPC tutorial 2002). Varying the speed of my dancing, whether I am engaged with liquid, popping or breaking, is an essential quality for obtaining what scholars like Butler (2012) and Schloss (2006) describe as musicality.

Like many ethnographers engaged with participant observations at similar EDM festivals, I experienced numerous moments of anxiety and haste, which O'Grady asserts represent "the opposite feelings of immersion, pleasure and play" (O'Grady 2013, 31). This was clearly articulated through my body posture, facial expressions, and dance exchanges. For instance, although I was delighted to be in the presence of well-respected liquid dancers, my excitement hindered my goal of connecting through dance exchange. The emotion of excitement produced an anxious energy in the sense that I was overly eager to dance. This was caused by three conditions: my response to the house music, the presence of Verb and LokiDoll, and the added presence of dozens of spectators watching me.

As a result of my response to these conditions, my liquid was "too fast" and "rushed," according to Verb, who advised me to slow my movements down: "If you slow your flow down it will clean up your lines bro" (Verb interview 2017). Verb is referring to my execution of rail patterns and my ability to transition seamlessly from one rail to the next. This signifies a subcultural value particular and significant to liquid of mastering specific techniques as precisely as possible, which in this case is the linearity and connections of rails.

There were many moments during my fieldwork at Sonic Bloom when I chose to stop writing and actively participate in a dance exchange or have a conversation with a fellow liquid dancer. I found myself asking questions that Csikszentmihalyi would undoubtedly classify as disrupting my own flow, such as: "Does my dancing look good enough?" "What do these expert liquid heads think of me?" "What is my role in this moment?" "Am I a researcher, dancer, or both?" However, moments antithetical to flow

like those described above would gradually disappear. As the days and nights of Sonic Bloom progressed, we each found our own individual flow in the moments we danced together.

Sharing Flow

On day two, the process of finding flow in terms of obtaining flow-state and exploring the flow of liquid became easier. With each social interaction, whether it was a verbal conversation or a dance exchange, I began to resonate with each dancer on an exploratory level. I was no longer nervous or anxious to prove myself. Resolving these issues involved a process of bonding with the group. This bond began by warming up our individual muscle memories together through dance exchange. These exchanges happened repeatedly, and became increasingly intense as the days and nights progressed. With every dance exchange, I felt less self-conscious, as I knew I was becoming accepted as a fellow liquid head. Observing each dancer's personal flow, along with one-on-one conversations helped me stretch further into the flow of the moment, fostering deeper creative exploration within my own body of ideas. Finding flow does not come easily or naturally. It is a learned practice that requires great individual effort, as well as effective group dynamics. Thankfully, the Sonic Bloom liquid heads were all present for the same reasons: to dance, share, learn, and create.

By day two, it became clear to me that festivals like Sonic Bloom represent much more than a space for liquid dancers to meet up. According to Distortion, festivals provide the ideal conditions to "level up." Distortion explains that leveling up is a process of elevating one's ability to explore liquid from new angles and approaches. In addition,

this phenomenon includes finding new ways to connect the technique of liquid to neighboring dance techniques, such as popping. Distortion explains: “I enjoy finding ways to isolate my joints and link my liquid to my waves, tuts, hits, and other ways to isolate my lower, mid and upper body to make my liquid look more interesting, as well as enhance the illusion of my flow” (Distortion interview Day 2). Distortion’s quote demonstrates both his individual proclivities to specific dance aesthetics, as well as a broader subcultural value of creating new flow within the physicality of liquid, conceptually linked to bridging otherwise separate dance techniques. Below is my description of how Distortion “leveled up” on day 2:

> One set of fingers controls the flow of the other as his left arm descends from above his head, until the both wrists come into contact. Distortion progresses into figure eight-patterns while rolling his digits as if weaving a spider’s web. He connects each line to the focal point of his torso, expanding and contracting each liquid rail pattern as if stretching an imaginary piece of gum to its limit before it breaks (Sonic Bloom Day 2).

In the above description, Distortion plays with body angles, as well as the distances between his fingers. This creates a distinct aesthetic of a body that morphs, bends, twists and rotates in and out of concentric circles. Furthermore, Distortion’s verbalized insight on his creative process reveals a clear example of what Miller (2012) describes as amateur-to-amateur pedagogy. In this moment, Distortion shared with me, both through his body and through language, how he “levels up.” Distortion reiterates the point that body angles are important to maintain the illusion of one’s liquid drawing imaginary patterns, particularly linear patterns. He was especially concerned with finding different patterns in space to vary the illusion, and ultimately combine other styles like tutting and waving. Distortion then asked me to watch his demonstration carefully as it applies to his own approach and style of liquid. Thus, throughout day two, each of us

found moments to *share* our flow of ideas with one another in a way conducive to exploring liquid, and connecting with one another.

On the morning of day three, I sent out a text to LokiDoll and Verb that I wanted to conduct a group interview. By 2:30pm, the sun was a blazing 95 degrees. Verb and LokiDoll's tent was barely high and wide enough to fit six people. I began our discussion with each dancer by asking them why they choose to meet up with each other to experience festivals like Sonic Bloom. The following quotes are drawn directly from my recording of the interview.

> I feel like the dancing that happens at festivals like Sonic Bloom isn't something that happens anywhere else. I mean, every now and then at a nightclub maybe. But nothing compares to being locked into the flow of a festival for several days of intense, focused dancing. This is how we bond with our friends, build new friendships and solidify old ones. For all of us, these liquid meet-ups are like a family reunion (LokiDoll interview Sonic Bloom 2017).
>
> Yeah, it's definitely a family reunion. I do say that a lot about liquid meet-ups at these festivals. It really comes down to every time we end up going to a festival, whether it's here or at DEMF, nobody really holds back and we push ourselves really hard (Verb interview Sonic Bloom 2017).
>
> For sure, Verb and Loki make a good point. It's a really specific type of environment that like pushes you in a certain way, and that causes a lot of dancers to end up refining themselves because they are inspired to push further being around all these great dancers (Flowington interview Sonic Bloom 2017).
>
> At first it started off as like a pursuit to meet the, kind of the journeymen of the dance, and see what was going on with that. At this point its more just to hang out with friends, revisit a lot of the old stuff we used to do, and try to make new friends, and bridge gaps in relationships with other dance styles like gloving for example which is real popular right now. But yeah, festivals are fun" (Falsify Interview Sonic Bloom 2017).
>
> Sonic Bloom is fucking awesome because Verb, Loki, Flowington, Distortion and Falsify are all part of what I do, which is really refreshing, so I'm able to reach my flow better because they are my crew (Rose Interview Sonic Bloom 2017).

The first quote from LokiDoll reflects the subcultural values of face-to-face interactions with liquid dancers and the bonding relationships formed between close friends within EDM/Festival culture. Verb and Flowington agree with LokiDoll that close-knit relationships remain strongly connected to EDM festivals that serve as liquid meet-ups. Falsify and Rose's quotes reveal a subcultural value of forming social groups based on a common passion for music and/or dance (Bennett 1999). Based on each response, I surmise that the purposes and meanings of liquid dance gatherings are connected to sharing flow: to share is to connect, at the embodied, social and intellectual levels; and to flow is to exchange, physically through dance, and verbally through conversation.

Pass The Flow

By night three of Sonic Bloom, all of the elements necessary to find, achieve, maintain, and pass the flow were in place. We were finally all on the same level in terms of comfort, focus and intention to create and share dance. For me, I was no longer concerned with being perceived in a way that was not up to someone else's standards. I was simply ready to embrace the moment, dance, observe, learn, and expand my understanding of what this dance practice is all about.

Our final pass the flow session began with all of us sitting down at the Main Stage mural on the left side. Each dancer sat in a circle. The music was at a lull, and everyone could hear each other's words. I sat next to Distortion, who was happily explaining that festivals like this bring a comradery together on levels beyond the normal range of club-based events. He then began praising me for my endeavors to learn more about the dance form, and encouraged me to watch everyone tonight very carefully. Falsify came over

and sat next to me as well. He told me that this event has been fun and tonight was the night “to push as far we can go with the dancing,” which I interpret as our final chance to expand ourselves and connect with one another through liquid. By the end of tonight, our dance conversation would come to a close until our next encounter.

We ventured across the festival to the Hummingbird Stage in front of a small graffiti mural, where I filmed one particular pass-the-flow exchange between Falsify, Verb, Flowington and myself. The sounds of Claude von Stroke were intoxicating to say the least. He spun his signature 4/4 style of melodic, progressive techno, which caressed our eardrums like a waterfall of synthesized beats. Every four counts in the track added a subtle, new sound, creating distinct sensations for each of us. The dancing festivalgoers around us were flowing in their own ways, grooving to the steady 4/4 beat.The temperature dropped to a cool 55 degrees, yet, everyone was sweating as if it were in the 90s. The festival vibe in this moment inspired seven liquid heads to dance.

LokiDoll and I sat next to one another as we watched Flowington, Distortion, Falsify, Verb and Rose were already up and dancing. LokiDoll explained to me that festivals like this are extremely vital for the liquid community. At this point, I stood up and ventured over to Flowington, and became absorbed.

> Flowington begins with a single fixed point in space. His eyes grow wide as the bass drops, and his upper body responds with a hard hit, as if being electrocuted. The shock of the bass pulsates through his shoulders, causing his forearms, wrists and fingers to wave, mimicking the frequency of the melody. Once the wave reaches the tips of his fingers, he traces the outline of his head and neck in a series of concentric circles. These circles continue around his upper torso, across his pelvis, and around his knees, creating the illusion of continuous loops travelling around his body. At the edge of his last loop, Flowington passes the flow to Distortion by waving his fingers and gesturing towards Distortion’s chest.

> Distortion catches Flowington's energy by contorting his torso, cascading a series of waves that travel around his chest, through his pelvis, and out his legs. Then, Distortion reverses the body wave so that it travels up the legs, around the pelvis, across the chest, through the shoulders and forearms, and out through the fingers. Once the wave reaches his fingertips, he transitions into liquid rail patterns, creating an imaginary box in front of his torso, which he slowly walks around, keeping the patterns locked by tracing each line through four fixed points in space. At the end of his third walk-through, he passes the flow to Falsify.
>
> Falsify traces the outline of his pelvis, creating the illusion of one hand passing through his pelvis and catching it behind his back. He creates a pocket of space between his left forearm and head, threading his right arm through the gap with his elbow leading. Simultaneously, he hops and bounces from one foot to the other, riding the 4/4 beats of Claude von Stroke. In this moment, I felt connected to each liquid head, the festival, and to myself. I was locked into the flow of the moment.
> (Day 3 Sonic Bloom 2017).

As I carefully observed Flowington, Distortion and Falsify, I realized the key to obtaining flow in all of its aspects was not simply a matter of relaxing the body, but relaxing my emotional drive. At the beginning of the festival, I was "hyped" and "excited" to dance. On this final evening, I felt connected to each liquid head on both an embodied and social level. We were no longer strangers, nor mere acquaintances. We were now friends, connected through a common passion, devotion and drive to communicate through liquid dance. After observing Flowington and Falsify for a few exchanges, I strolled over to LokiDoll and Rose, who happened to be passing the flow between one another.

> Rose sways her hips to match the groove of the beat while simultaneously extending her arms to the edges of her kinesphere, creating split patterns representing concentric oval shapes. Her movements become smaller as she brings focus to her fingers, cascading a series of rolling digits patterns in front of her torso. She expands and contracts between digits and liquid, while fusing elements of tutting within each progression of her flow. Suddenly, Rose raises her hands to eye-level, locks eyes with LokiDoll, and passes the flow to her.

> LokiDoll gently reaches toward the space between herself and Rose to continue the progression of digital liquid. LokiDoll spins her wrists in figure-eight patterns that shift into contours that trace the outlines of her head, down her torso and around her waist, transitioning to hand-flow that expands with each revolution. Her shoulders initiate quarter turns, with every two counts within the house track's rhythm. LokiDoll embodies the beat of the drum, the flow of the melody, and the energy of the moment. And as the bass drops out, she passes the flow back to Rose.
> (Day 3 Sonic Bloom 2017).

At this point in the Sonic Bloom journey, my muscles were finally beginning to soften, and so was my mind. I was beginning to slow down, take my time, groove more to the moment. However, I was still a bit rushed at times, especially when I found myself falling back into my old habitual movement sequences. The difference was at this point, I was consciously aware of my movements. I had been "tracking" my progression of improvised movements, and tonight my "agenda" was to explore new body angles with liquid (De Spain 2014). But first, I needed to achieve flow-state. I closed my eyes for a moment, and allowed the beats of Claude von Stroke flow through my body. When I opened my eyes, I saw Verb right in front of me, and became locked into his flow.

> Verb's torso twisted so that his shoulders faced 90 degrees to his left, and he smoothly contoured his hands and fingers, beginning at the center of his chest, and ran them down the outline of his left leg until they reached the knee, upon which he reversed his liquid in a return pattern back up the leg to the center of his chest. He played with the rhythms of techno as if he was a musician. As I watched him, Verb began to resemble the sound frequencies of Claude von Stroke's bass synths.

Verb's dance set described above represents what I consider to be one of the highest examples of creativity and musicality I witnessed at Sonic Bloom. He was engaged in what can best be described as playing with the rhythms. Malbon (1999) describes acts of play within club spaces as an essential component to the collective and individual experience. He states:

> Within any group situation involving practices of play, such as clubbing, there will be variation in the extent that play is significant intrinsically and extrinsically, and this variation will exist between individuals and also within the experiences of a single person throughout timings and across the spacings of that situation (Malbon 1999, 140).

I cite Malbon's quote here to emphasize his notion of "variation in the extent of play," which I argue represents an emerging quality of liquid, as well as a subcultural value. First, the act of playing with the rhythms of EDM allows Verb to explore different avenues of movement within his repertoire, but also allows him to experiment with patterns and concepts that are not necessarily categorized as a formalized liquid technique. Verb colloquially refers to creating dance in this way as "free-styling," which indicates to me that he broke free from the conventions of liquid and its formalized structural foundations. Second, in this moment I realized that what I was observing in Verb was precisely the kind of play and experimentation that first-generation practitioners described to me when reflecting upon their experiences developing liquid's components. Thus, play encompasses another embodied subcultural value, which serves as a starting point for creating new flow.

In response to Verb's dance, I clasped the air, curling my fingers slowly and smoothly. I was not simply mimicking the slower tempo of the **dub-step** and **future-bass**. I was vibing with Verb, while exploring liquid through an expanded range of motions. I was no longer concerned with whether or not I looked good or looked right according to other dancers' standards. Instead, I was completely absorbed and immersed in the moment. As I ended my set, I passed the flow to Distortion. And one moment later, Verb walks over to me and says: "Dude, your liquid looks ten times better tonight. It's ultra clean now." Then, Verb gently pulled me aside, and gave me some advice on how to

enhance my flow through body angles, footwork and level changes. He said: "Try pivoting your foot so that your torso is turned and angled. When your liquid goes one way, your body leans or steps in the opposite direction. This expands your range." I attempted to do so, and Verb told me that I should simply keep practicing this as a series of drills. This moment where Verb pulls me aside to give me constructive feedback on my liquid technique is an important pedagogical moment. Like amateur-to-amateur teaching and mentorship that takes place within online communities (Miller 2012), the same subcultural values and actions of teaching and learning for its own sake occur at festivals. Verb expected nothing in return, except for me to listen, apply, learn, and expand my kinesthetic and spatial awareness.

At one point during our final group dance session, Flowington exclaims to Verb and myself: "My man Dave has been passing the flow since the beginning bro…just saying." Flowington encouraged me to continue exploring liquid in a way that was less about "hitting beats" and more of an approach conducive to creating new ways of flowing within its aesthetics. As a result, I was no longer repeating my habitual movement patterns. As De Spain (2014), might say, my improvisational "agenda" shifted from focusing on musicality to exploring the flow of liquid in ways I never had. This was evident in my fingertips, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, and even my torso and legs. I consciously chose to "track" my process of flow during my improvised movement sequences in this final exchange, so that I could repeat the same kind of approach at a later date (De Spain 2014). Here is what I tracked.

While I was in flow, I paid close attention to the tension I held in certain parts of my body, such as my neck, lower back, and hamstrings. This muscle tension was initially

difficult for me to release. This was partially due to my previous experiences and training within breaking (such as fast, sharp footwork, followed by spinning on my head and back). But, on this final evening, I felt comfortable enough to slow down, breathe, and relax my neck, lower back and hamstrings. This allowed me to transition from one movement aesthetic to another. It also enabled me to remember to pivot on my right foot, twist my torso, and utilize the space behind me to expand my rail and split patterns. So, I combined tracking the conscious release of muscle tension, as well as what kinds of movement aesthetics emerged as a result. And what emerged was a completely new flow of ideas I had never considered. It allowed me to connect with each liquid head in ways that inspired them to create and continue the flow ideas.

Our final exchange took place around 4am at the Hummingbird stage. It was a bittersweet moment. The festival was coming to an end, and I knew this moment represented the close to my journey. LokiDoll walks over to me and says: "I can safely confirm that everyone thinks you leveled up significantly this weekend David" (LokiDoll Day 3 Sonic Bloom). One by one I gave each dancer a big hug goodbye. Before we parted ways, I thanked Verb for everything. I gave him a high five, and he pulled me in and gave me a big hug. Smiling ear to ear, I strolled back to my tent across the festival grounds, with laser lights, glow-sticks, hoops and fire to light the way.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking how liquid dance is created, shared and perpetuated through dance exchange. It set out to explore the process of achieving three forms of flow. The first is flow-state, involving complete immersion and concentration within the

moments of dance. The second is achieving aesthetic flow within the structured improvisation of liquid's movement techniques. And the third is the flow of ideas produced and exchanged between liquid dancers. Sonic Bloom serves as an excellent case study to examine how dedicated practitioners harness their creative energies and synthesize new avenues of exploration. The vibe of the festival fosters an atmosphere of sharing dance. The continuous beats of electronic dance music function as a tool that shapes the progression of ideas found by dancers who explore the subtleties of EDM's sonic components through liquid. Dancers find, share and pass the flow of dance together, and synthesize new ideas to choose from. For liquid dancers, pass the flow is the ultimate social connection.

I conclude from this chapter that pass the flow functions as an extension of flow-state from the solo to the interpersonal. Pass the flow is much more than a simple game of watching another dancer and waiting for him or her to signal it is now your turn. It is an opportunity to communicate and connect with one another at an elevated embodied level. Liquid is no exception. It too is a language that is developmental, and learned through the body. One of the primary reasons why liquid dancers choose to share their dance through passing the flow is to learn another dancer's language, so that new ideas can emerge within each exchange.

I argue that the purpose of pass the flow is a continuing effort to learn from one another. It begins with recognizable symbols and patterns linked to the foundations of liquid, expanding beyond those structural limitations. The journey and effort it takes to find flow with one another throughout a three-day period is worth the initial struggles of

pushing through states of anxiety. And pass the flow is the ultimate game designed to alleviate anxiety, and promote connection between dancers.

This chapter establishes that liquid dance is the vessel through which new ideas emerge through the body, and are shared through the body. It is a dance form that bonds individuals to a shared experience. This act of sharing creates an extension of participation, which evolves into a dance conversation between two or more bodies. Therefore, I argue that the process of passing the flow represents an act of dance exchange designed to share a continuously evolving conversation of aesthetic ideas between dancers.

CONCLUSION

I entered this research project as an avid practitioner of liquid dance. My earliest experiences with liquid dance stem from raves I attended in the early 2000s. As they gradually disappeared, I continued to practice privately. I eventually found the online liquid community through Facebook, and reached out to multiple dancers by posting and sharing my solo dance sets. This ultimately led to my latest face-to-face interactions at clubs and festivals with dancers whom I had never met in person. Through this experience, I met a small, but highly dedicated group of practitioners, invested in the historical roots of the dance and its contemporary social practice. Unlike other vernacular forms, such as disco dance or breakdancing, liquid dance has never transitioned into mainstream culture. Thus, liquid remains a marginal subcultural dance form practiced primarily as a leisure pursuit by its small community who identify strongly as liquid heads. Not surprisingly, this little-known dance form has also remained largely neglected within academia. I therefore began this research project with the intention of examining a dance form that until now has remained absent from dance studies.

Liquid remains a relatively obscure dance practiced by a small subcultural community. But, it has nevertheless persisted to this day. Although it first evolved within the late twentieth century rave scene, raves died out relatively quickly. Yet, liquid did not disappear along with raves, but persisted through practitioners determined to sustain and develop the form, through online digital networks, and through new meet-ups that served as sites for face-to-face exchange. My dissertation therefore explores how liquid dance emerged, migrated, and evolved from its rudimentary form rooted and created within

1990s US raves into a subcultural practice composed of formalized dance techniques that have re-emerged through digital and live sites of interaction. To explore this, I focus on five research questions that concern the historical lineage, key practitioners, and social networks through which the dance developed and evolved: what are the historical and subcultural roots of liquid dance? Who were the practitioners responsible for creating the foundations of liquid dance and what was their role in the development of the subcultural practice? What constitutes the physical components of liquid dance, and how and why did liquid dance become a formalized technique? How and why did liquid dance migrate from US raves onto the digital platforms of social media? And finally, how is liquid dance created, shared and perpetuated through live dance exchange?

In order to connect each of these aforementioned questions, I utilized flow as the conceptual framing of this dissertation. First, I used the idea of flow to describe and examine the movement aesthetic of liquid as the hands move around the body in a continuous state of water-like flow. Second, flow is also used to describe the way in which expert practitioners exist in a "flow-state," which conveys their capacity to engage in sustained focus and immersion of creative improvisation without breaking their concentration (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Furthermore, I employ flow to encapsulate the spread of liquid through video tutorials, digital online communities, and through live interactions. This dissertation has established that the aesthetics and philosophies of liquid flow through digital spaces and live bodies.

Given that liquid remains a little-known dance, in Chapter 1: Literature Review I establish not only that liquid is overlooked in scholarship, but also that dance generally remains largely ignored in club, rave and festival settings. In spite of this, I turn to three

areas of scholarship that prove useful to my research: studies of club, rave and festival culture; subcultural and post-subcultural theory; and dance studies research. The literature devoted to rave, club, and festival culture provides necessary contextual material for the historical and social dimensions of EDM cultures. I specifically focused on the roles of the DJ, the musical structure of EDM, the collective and individual experience, and dance within such settings. Yet, scholars have failed to address how ravers and clubbers dance to specific subgenres of EDM. This represents a large gap in a subfield of study centered on electronic *dance* music culture, which my dissertation seeks to redress. Subcultural and post-subcultural theory allows me to situate liquid dance as a niche subcultural practice. I find that tracing the lineage of such research allows me to understand how subcultures remain fluid in terms of practitioners' individual investment, as well as how individuals identify themselves within the subcultural practice by perpetuating specific values catered to a niche dance practice. I also find that immersion, particularly embodied immersion, enables me as a participant observer to explore liquid dance at the level of the body.

As a practitioner with longstanding interest in the dance, along with that of other expert dancers, my own embodied knowledge offers an important contribution to my research data. For my concentration in dance studies, I focused on two critical areas. The first was theories in studio-based practice primarily centered on aspects of dance technique and improvisation. Foster (1997) helped me foreground the specific approaches to developing and training in liquid dance as a technique. Hamera (2006) enabled me to connect dance technique to the larger social practices from which liquid dance stems. Noland's (2009) conception of kinesthetic agency granted me the opportunity to explore

how liquid dancers choose to improvise by drawing on individual repertoire and the surrounding social circumstances. Goldman (2010) and De Spain (2014) were particularly useful in analyzing how liquid dancers progressively create, explore and share their embodied experiences with others. Combined, these topics allowed me to examine both the physical and social aspects of liquid.

In Chapter 2: Research Methods, I foreground various facets of ethnography as my essential qualitative research methods to my study of liquid dance. One of the challenges of this research project is what dance ethnographers refer to as choosing from "plural knowabilities" generated from multiple observations, encounters and facets of the field sites that I studied (Brady 2004; Buckland 1999). My strategy for overcoming this challenge was to adopt Behar's (1996) anthropological approach to ethnographic research. I became a "vulnerable observer," open to criticism and questions from each of the liquid dancers. I allowed myself to let go of ego, which according to Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 39) helped me become "relaxed, comfortable and energetic" in order to "center my attention" to completely immerse myself during each live dance exchange. Simultaneously, I embraced O'Grady's (2013) autoethnographic approach to fieldwork within EDM festival culture as a way to step back and observe, as well as engaging in verbal dialogue with practitioners between dance exchanges. While the first two chapters set up my methodological framing and approach, the remaining chapters set out to address my research questions.

Chapter 3: The Roots of Liquid Dance addressed the historical and subcultural origins of liquid dance as a vernacular practice. By examining the cultural predecessors of US raves, I traced the lineage of EDM music performance within disco, US house, and

UK acid house. Each of these dance music cultures provided space for a continuous stream of music to keep the flow of the dance floor moving for hours at a time. Furthermore, these underground dance music cultures set the foundations for the emergence of US raves, and the social conditions under which liquid dance emerged within the 1990s US east-coast rave scene. This chapter revealed the key ingredients for liquid dancing's development. I established correlations between venue space, EDM, the role of the DJ, the presence of (and option to ingest) LSD and/or MDMA, glow-sticks and ravers engaged with the rudimentary forms of liquid dance. This provided a creative social space, saturated with visual, aural and kinetic sensations that offered the ideal environment for experimentation with dance. In these tightly packed spaces, dancers began to play with the hand movements that formed the foundations of liquid. Such movements stem from the use of glow-stick tracer patterns as a model for liquid's rudimentary hand-flow patterns. Yet, practitioners ultimately expanded liquid far beyond hand-flow.

In Chapter 4: Pioneers of Liquid, I set out to privilege and give voice to the three key practitioners who I consider to be essential contributors to liquid's development. Gorea's innovations, personal style and impact on the form can be traced as far back as 1996. He set the foundations for many of liquid's concepts. Gorea combined the popping techniques of fixed point with the visual aid of glow-sticks. Furthermore, he developed a system of tracer patterns that combined linear and circular patterns, which he ultimately applied to liquid dance without the use of glow-sticks. Similar to Gorea, Hickman's contribution to the linear patterns based on fixed points in space within the structure of tutting allowed him to develop several foundational techniques in liquid, including rails,

builds and splits. Hickman's candid recollections of his experiences experimenting with liquid dance while under the simultaneous influence of LSD and MDMA provided a rare glimpse into the connections between flow-state and the physical flow of liquid. LpE's arcade clip was the first liquid dance solo to reach a mass audience through the Internet. His subsequent financial and creative investment in the LPC tutorial and Reflective.net solidified his place as one of the pioneers of orbital style. All three of these aforementioned pioneers were among the first practitioners to extend liquid beyond a solo practice into an interpersonal exchange, a game they colloquially called locking the lookers. This game served as the predecessor of pass the flow, which takes place between two or more liquid dancers.

In Chapter 5: The Liquid Pop Collective (LPC), I examine how liquid evolved from its rudimentary form into a formalized technique. In this chapter, I position the LPC as the first crew to transform liquid from an informal dance practice evident at US raves into a codified dance style with fully-articulated techniques. It historicizes the catalyst for the LPC's connection between liquid and popping as their encounter with Steffan "Mr. Wiggles" Clemente at a Philadelphia rave in 2001. Clemente encouraged the LPC to develop their fundamentals in popping techniques in order to physically and conceptually connect their foundations in liquid. The LPC subsequently produced the first liquid dance tutorial in history, cementing their place in the subcultural practice. On the one hand, the tutorial had its limitations as its overly prescriptive format potentially fixed liquid into being a relatively set dance without much option for evolution. On the other hand, it nonetheless provided the first map for dancers to explore this dance form through structured improvisation, with an emphasis on developing personal style.

In Chapter 6: Digital Flow, I show how the commitment of the LPC to sustaining liquid through the tutorial served its purpose, as committed practitioners have used online social networks to preserve and disseminate the form. In this chapter, I examine the migration of liquid dance through digital media in the face of the decline of the US rave scene. I analyze four social networks devoted to liquid dance. I conceive these sites to be the digital subcultural heritage of liquid dance and show how their curators are dedicated to documenting, preserving and sharing the practice. From this, I assert that as a subculture, liquid dancers are dedicated practitioners determined to share, teach and promote the dance and the subculture through amateur-to-amateur interactions online. They operate as a self-sufficient community whose interests in the dance are not motivated by economic gain. This shows that the subcultural values of learning and dancing for their own sake far exceed financial motivations. Instead, liquid heads take pride in sharing what they know.

In Chapter 7: Pass The Flow, I return to face-to-face danced interaction to illustrate how liquid is created, shared and perpetuated through live exchange. This chapter serves as the culminating ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted at an annual liquid dance meet-up. Here, I explore how liquid dancers bond socially, as a subcultural community, through passing the flow. This case study of an EDM festival reveals the necessary conditions for liquid dancers to obtain flow-state, and explore liquid through the progressive flow of structured improvisation. Furthermore, this final chapter confirms that passing the flow is much more than a simple game of sharing liquid dance. These dance exchanges create a strong individual and communal desire to evolve, preserve, and sustain the subcultural practice.

As a subculture, liquid dancers purposely create, reflect, and refine their practice through documentation, both digitally and orally. They perfect their craft through rigorous training, and experiment with the dance form's foundations through improvisation. As established in Chapter 4, improvisation remains a core value and principle practice perpetuated through, according to Dodds (2011, 84) "a schema of social and subcultural underpinnings that inform such values." Such values inform and inspire dancers to develop a personal style of liquid. The cumulative styles generated from individual practitioners constitute the dance form's continuously evolving movement components and aesthetics.

In looking at the historical, social and cultural significance of liquid, I have shown how this little-known vernacular dance practice emerged, migrated and evolved across different bodies and sites. The subculture encompasses a community of dedicated practitioners who collectively ensure that the dance continues to flow in quality of movement, and through online social networks and live danced interactions. These digital and live exchanges allow the dance to keep developing as liquid heads engage in a continuous loop of creative improvisation and constructive feedback. In dancing together, they find flow, achieve flow-state, share flow, and pass the flow. From this I conclude that liquid is the embodiment of a continuous flow of shared ideas expressed through the hands of the dancer, consolidated through subcultural community, disseminated through video and digital technology, and perpetuated through face-to-face dance exchange.

As with any research project, there are limitations that shaped the research outcomes. An obvious factor was time constraints. Although I attended two EDM festivals that liquid dancers frequent, I was only able to stay for the full length of Sonic

Bloom. I attended the first day of Big Dub in central Pennsylvania, and interviewed a few liquid dancers briefly and participated in some pass the flow dance exchanges. However, I was not prepared for the torrential rain, and was forced to leave at the end of the first day. Even if I had attended the duration of both, the data I generated from only two festivals sets limitations on my findings. For future research I would be interested to compare the practices and behaviors of liquid dancers at a broader range of EDM festivals.

Another limitation to this research stems from the implication of disclosing the identities of individuals who chose to ingest mind-altering substances. Only one of the dancers I interviewed was open to discussing this sensitive topic. His insights into the effects of such substances on both the body and the development of liquid remain invaluable, and it would be interesting to assess whether other dancers could vouch for similar experiences. I chose not to take any mind-altering substances during this research process, as I felt to do so would undermine my resolve and obscure my focus. Consequently, this area of the research remains under investigated.

My research represents a focal point for what I hope will be a series of future projects devoted to various facets of liquid dance through interdisciplinary approaches. For instance, there are opportunities to examine the demographics of the subcultural practice through the lenses of gender identity in rave, club, and festival culture (Buckland 2002, Gregory 2009). While my research reveals the subculture of liquid remains a predominantly white, male practice, this has begun to change within the last ten years thanks largely to the form's exposure within other dance communities and the Internet.

An increasing presence of Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern and African-American male and female practitioners are slowly but surely emerging (Flowington interview 2017).

As I have shown how musicality is an important subcultural value within liquid dance practice, another avenue of investigation involves a close examination of the specific EDM subgenres that impact the aesthetic movement qualities that liquid dancers choose to embody in response to the music. Hall (2013 and 2018) has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the UK drum 'n' bass scene, through which she analyzes dancing bodies and the subcultural values that shape participant's identities. Hall would serve as a strong dance scholar to draw from.

I have also signaled the role that pedagogy plays in the transmission of liquid, and this area is ripe for further development. One possible study would examine the pedagogical skills needed to develop effective methods of teaching the foundations of liquid. Such a topic might explore the individual learning styles of practitioners and process of learning the dance form through multiple mediums of exchange. Schloss's (2009) participant observation and immersion within the New York City breakdancing community may provide a place to start, as Schloss spent five years taking workshops and learning the foundations of breaking. I emphasize this because one of my goals here is to bring a practitioner perspective into dance studies.

I stress the importance of environment in the development of liquid, thus further research might address the spatial awareness of liquid dancers that links the physical surroundings of practitioners to their developments of their practice. Case studies for this project include private residences, nightclubs, and festivals. This study also potentially links the temporal qualities associated with liquid dance. It explores how the impact of

mind-altering substances distorts or enhances the temporal qualities of experience, as well as the physical qualities of how the dance is embodied.

I end this dissertation with some closing remarks reflecting upon the aims and impact of this research more broadly. In following the tradition and intentions of the LPC, my dissertation represents the first attempt by a liquid practitioner to formalize this vernacular dance practice within the academic context of dance studies. My goal since the beginning of this project was to create a document that serves as a tool for dance scholars to draw upon. My research represents a necessary first step in filling a major gap within dance studies, not just for liquid, but for vernacular dance practices within the umbrella of "street dance." Although there has been some excellent work devoted to street dance forms like breaking (De Frantz 2004 and 2010, Johnson 2011, Schloss 2009), there remains very little devoted to neighboring hip-hop dance practices like popping, krumping, and turfing, to name a few. These marginalized forms, like liquid, have a rich subcultural history. My dissertation addresses a gap in academic knowledge of these marginalized street dances. But more than that, it opens the door to analysis of those dances with a set of tools that I brought together: flow, online communication and dance-as-communication. As a practitioner, I am in a position to return to my community of liquid dancers and share my discourse, and pass the flow onto the next practitioner, so that the conversation may continue.

One of my hopes is that this work will inspire the liquid dance community to continue and progress their critical engagement with the form. This extends beyond the dance floor and labbing new concepts in private residences. I am seeking to facilitate a series of discussions from practitioners whose perspectives deserve a platform to

articulate their thoughts. This work, to echo LpE's (interview 2017) words, is not meant to place liquid dance or its practitioners "into a box." And in spite of liquid's journey from rave, to Facebook, to festivals, it remains a vernacular dance that continues to evolve on its own terms, through its practitioners. For instance, most recently, I attended an annual liquid dance meet-up event called *Confluence* on Saturday July 28, 2018, and was hosted by Chris "Verb" Atkins and Rachel "LokiDoll" Reetz. The day began at 3pm with workshops from Greg Irwin, Scotty "Distortion" Miggs, Sean "D-Strange" Mahnken, Matt "Darkmatthers" Houdoken, and Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea. This event was by far the most effective collaboration of dance workshops I have ever attended. Almost one hundred liquid dancers travelled from all over the United States to pass the flow with one another for this event. Clearly, liquid as both a dance practice and a subcultural community persists and evolves.

Liquid is a dance between dances. It bridges dance styles that may otherwise seem completely separated by distinct movement vocabulary. It begins with a conversation between the hands, progresses outside and around the body, and expands beyond the individual to the interpersonal. Liquid dance represents the embodiment of a continuous flow of shared ideas expressed through the hands of the dancer. It is the channel through which ideas flow between dancing bodies, and those ideas serve as a conduit for connecting individuals.

GLOSSARY

The purpose of this glossary is to provide contextualized definitions of common terms used within the subculture of liquid dance. These terms include colloquialisms used by dancers and DJs, as well as pertinent music terminology. All bolded material throughout this dissertation may be found alphabetized below.

Boogaloo: One of the original popping styles to emerge from the West Coast. It is a technique that involves isolating the hips, legs, torso and arms. The hips sway in a semi-circle (clockwise or counterclockwise), followed by the leading foot to step sideways. In my experience with this style, with each step (in any direction), the torso and arms tense up, creating isolated body hits (or the controlled flexing and releasing of the muscles).

BPM: The acronym that stands for beats per measure primarily used by DJs to describe the speed of a vinyl record. (See Butler 2012).

Breakdown(s): Breakdown: The time segment of an EDM track that gradually eliminates sonic components such as the tones, melodies and timbre, leaving only the bass rhythms before building, or re-adding those components back into the track. (See Butler 2012).

Break beat: A series of syncopated beats "built around, or derived from, the breaks of R&B and Hip Hop" (Fikentscher 2000, 135).

Bug Out/Buggin' Out: A colloquialism originally deployed in hip-hop culture to describe a dancers' impromptu response to a DJ's set during the 'break of a record' (Schloss 2009). In liquid dance, this term has been appropriated as a way to describe the effects of "locking the lookers" into one's flow (LpE interview 2017).

Build(s)/Build-up: The section of an EDM track "designed to create tension and a heightened emotional intensity" among listeners and dancers (Solberg 2014).

Burn: In my experience, a burn is a colloquialism used across the spectrum of hip-hop and club culture dance forms to describe the action of gesture(s) towards another dancer to indicate an insult, intimidation, or a playful way to antagonize one's dance opponent in a dance exchange. Burns are often used in breaking, popping and house dance (Schloss 2009).

Call and Response: This vernacular expression can be used in two broad contexts: the call of the DJ (the music) and the response of the dancer, or, the call of one dancer (one dancer performs a solo), and the response of the another dancer (the solo response of another dancer). This expression may be traced to countless African diaspora dance practices involving live drums and the response of dancers. See: (DeFrantz 2004, Osumare 2002, Rose, 1994, Schloss 2009).

Club Drugs: This colloquialism functions as an umbrella term to describe the popular drug choices among clubbers. These include both synthetic/designer drugs like MDMA, LSD, cocaine, and speed, and herbal drugs like marijuana and mushrooms.

Cobra: A popping technique that isolates the chest muscles in a rotating fashion that resembles the hood of a cobra snake. In my experience, the chest muscles may contract or expand, hit or wave, depending on the dancer's aesthetic choice.

Cocaine: Derived from the cocoa plant, it is a white powder that is typically snorted and creates a stimulus high similar to caffeine, but much stronger. Each bump, or hit typically lasts between five to ten minutes.

Cut(s): The DJ technique of transitioning or switching between one track and another on two turntables or CDJs. See: (Butler 2012).

Cypher: A circle or semi-circle of people, usually made up of other dancers and spectators. In the traditions of hip-hop dance forms like breaking, popping and house, one dancer typically enters the circle for one round. This dancer may "call" out one dancer, who then dances in "response" to the first. For more on the phenomenon of "call and response." See: (De Frantz 2004, and Rose 1994).

Dime Stops: A popping technique involving a swift freeze into a held position, usually for less than half a second, and then moving slightly to another position where the dancer freezes again, for another half-second or less. Dime stops describe the action of "stopping on a dime" or as quickly as possible.

Drop(s): The moment in an EDM track where the bass is reintroduced. See Solberg (2014).

Drum 'n' Bass: Drum 'n' bass: A subgenre of EDM developed from Hip Hop, primarily spun at 160-180 beats per minute (BPM). See Hall (2009).

Electro: A subgenre of electronic dance music combining syncopated beats and rhythms with synthesized melodies and other drum patterns (Butler 2012).

Finger Tutting: Vernacular term to describe the dance style of creating geometric shapes with the fingers. According to Gorea, this style was originally called "finger boxes," and Gorea was one of the early practitioners of this style (Gorea interview 2018).

Fire-Spinning: There are many different forms of this flow-art. Fire-spinning can involve the use of poi (strings or rope) or staff props, where the ends of each prop are lit with lighter fluid to ignite the flame. Dancers utilize different techniques in spinning the props so that the fire creates circular patterns in the air.

Four on the floor or 4/4: The colloquialism used to describe the steady beat structure of house, techno and trance music, as in 4 beats per measure. See Butler (2012).

Free-Style: This is a colloquialism used a lot in hip-hop dance culture to denote improvising a solo dance set. Free-style may draw from any number of hip-hop dance techniques, including (but not limited to) popping, breaking, and house. This term has also been utilized in the liquid dance scene to describe improvised liquid solos.

Harmony: The musical term used to describe combining music notes in a way that produces chords with an aesthetically pleasing effect. See Butler (2012).

Hash Tags: "A string of characters (possibly including numerical digits) that are preceded by the pound symbol #" (Caleffi 2015, 46).

Headliner: The colloquial expression often used within club/rave/festival culture to describe the EDM DJ who is hired specifically for an event to draw in as many patrons as possible (Anderson 2009).

Hip Hop: A meta-genre originally composed of four "elements": graffiti, emcee, DJ, and B-boy/B-girl/breaking/breakdancing (Rose 1994, Schloss 2009). Hip Hop remains challenging to classify because it is continuously evolving and sampling aspects of global dance culture, in the sense that most countries now embrace their localized versions of hip hop (Osumare 2002).

Hits/Hitting: The vernacular dance expression to describe a popping technique involving the isolation, flection and release of muscles including (but not limited to) the arms, chest, neck and legs. Hitting also includes the snapping motion of the joints, particularly the wrists, shoulders, elbows and fingers.

Isolations: The vernacular expression used to describe a popping technique that involves segmenting the bodies movements one limb at a time in a continuous progressing series of movement sequences. For example, poppers divide or isolate their movements between the upper body (head, neck and shoulders), middle body (torso, chest, stomach and hips), and the lower body (legs and feet).

Jacking: Otherwise known as "The Jack," it is the colloquial term for a foundational house dance technique. In my experience, jacking can be performed to every count or every two counts of the 4/4 rhythms of house beats. For a full definition and description of jacking, see: (Rietfeld, 2004 and Sommer 2002).

Jungle: This early 1990s form of electronic dance music originated in the UK, and ultimately evolved into drum 'n' bass in the US. Jungle utilizes syncopated beats, consisting of tempos between 165 and 195 BPM. See Hall (2013).

Junglist: The subcultural colloquialism to describe someone who identifies as a dedicated fan and/or practitioner of this subgenre of EDM. See Hall (2013).

Liquid Heads: The colloquial/vernacular expression used to describe a dedicated practitioner of liquid dance. During my experiences in the Midwest rave scene between 2001 and 2006, this term was not used. Most practitioners described themselves as "ravers" who "do liquid." Liquid heads seems to be a term that emerged on the East Coast rave scene, somewhere between the release of the LPC tutorial in 2002 and the establishment of Floasis.net in 2007.

LSD: A psychedelic substance that was first popularized by the hippie generation of the late 1960s. It induces visual and auditory hallucinations and, depending on the dosage, may last between ten and sixteen hours.

Main Room: At raves, this was the largest section of the venue that typically held headline DJs. See Anderson (2009).

Main Stage: At EDM festivals, the main stage hosts the headline EDM DJs. See (Anderson 2009).

Marionette: A popping technique involving the illusionary qualities of a ragdoll on strings. The dancer moves one limb at a time, while remaining loose in muscle tension, and pausing between each movement.

Massive(s): Large-scale acid house and rave events that cater to thousands of patrons. This term was first utilized in the UK (See Redhead 1993).

MDMA: Colloquially referred to as "E," "X," "Ecstasy," "Molly." MDMA creates a cascade effect when it releases the brain's supply of serotonin all at once. The result is an intense euphoric sensation that lasts between four and six hours. (See St John 2004).

Mix/Mixing: The selection of music, as well as the order the tracks are spun by DJ. Mixing represents the action of the DJ blending one music track with another (See Butler 2012).

OG: "Original Gangsta": The vernacular expression in hip-hop culture derived from some of the first rappers, DJs, emcees and B-boys/B-girls. The term represents appraisal of the earliest generations of hip-hop artists. See Jeff Chang's (2005) *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*.

Pass the flow: The colloquial term for liquid dance exchange between two or more practitioners. According to first-generation practitioner Razvan "Tiny Love" Gorea, the

expression itself has been part of the vernacular language among the subculture of liquid since his first encounter with the term in 1996.

Poi: In fire spinning, poi is the string or rope that connects any props that are lit to flame. In rave culture, poi was often used to spin glow-sticks (or lights on strings).

Rolling: A colloquialism in rave culture used to describe the state of being under the influence of MDMA. As I understand the term, rolling generally indicates a state of euphoria, signified by MDMA's effects on the mind and body.

Rooms: Sectioned off areas of rave events at warehouse venues that host various subgenres of electronic music (such as the house room, the drum 'n' bass room, etc.). (See Anderson 2009).

Sampling: The DJ technique of taking sounds from one source and placing it into a mix. For instance, samples include vocals, acoustic or synthesized drum patterns, guitar-riffs, or any recorded sound. See Butler (2012).

San Fran Shuffles: A footwork technique utilized in popping that emerged out of the San Francisco dance community. It involves quickly placing the lead toe, followed by the leading heal, placed in front of the body, with the weight on the supporting foot. In my experience, the shuffle, or switching of the feet, occurs on every count of an EDM track within the range of a 4/4 beat structure.

Session/Sessioning: This is a vernacular expression to describe the group activity and actions of dance exchange. I first encountered this term within breaking culture during breaking practice gatherings, referred to as sessions. In liquid dance, the same meaning applies to both practice as well as informal dance exchange. Specifically, liquid dancers engaged within a pass the flow exchange are sessioning or in a dance session with one another.

Set: There are two contextual definitions of a set: one for dance and one for music. In my experience, a set is a colloquialism used in both hip-hop and EDM-based dance forms like liquid to describe the duration of an improvised solo. This term is casually expressed in formal breakdance competitions, as well as informal dance exchanges. In music, a set is the track list order of a DJ he or she chooses to spin. See Butler (2012).

Speakeasies: Illegal nightclub bars during the 1920s that served alcohol and often had jazz entertainment. See articles on Jazz and The Age of Prohibition at http://indianapublicmedia.org/nightlights/big-speakeasy-jazz-prohibition/

Spinning: Colloquialism for DJs playing records on turntables or CDs on CDJs.

Synthesized: Any sound that is electronically produced on computers, drum machines or samplers.

Synthesizers: Electronic keyboards that create a wide-range of synthesized sounds.

Tempo: The speed at which a music track plays. In EDM, this is measured by beats per minute (BPM).

Techno: A subgenre of EDM composed of a 4/4 beat structure. It is similar to house and trance, but much less melodic and darker in tone. There is a minimalistic quality to techno in the sense that it does not build or break down like trance. (See Butler 2012).

Ticking: A popping technique involving quick muscle flexing and contractions.

Tracing: A popping technique that involves running the fingers along a body wave to accentuate and draw the viewer's attention to where the wave begins, travels and ends.

Track: An individual song or piece of music. Tracks are often pressed onto vinyl records for DJs to spin. See Butler (2012).

Trance: A subgenre of EDM rooted in the late 1980s dance parties of Ibiza, Spain. In my experience listening to trance over the last twenty years, I have come to understand trance as a continuous progression of melodic components, particularly synthesized piano tones, and a steady 4/4 beat (like house and techno), with the added emphasis of long builds and breakdowns. See St. John (2004).

Tutting: The vernacular dance style of popping that utilizes ninety-degree angles through shaping the fingers, wrists, forearms and elbows. It is generally accepted within the hip hop community that tutting stems from an ancient Egyptian dance style documented through Egyptian hieroglyphs that illustrate the precise L-shapes created by the wrists and fingers. In my view, tutting ultimately evolved into using the forearms to connect the left and right hands and fingers to form variations of squares and rectangles.

Waves/Waving: The vernacular expression that describes a popping technique involving isolating the muscles and limbs to create the illusion of a series of waves passing from one point on the body to another.

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APPENDIX A

YouTube Links

The Beginning of Trance and Goa Trance Scene (1992)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFm9jjvXjWc
Accessed May 5, 2018.

Couric, Katie. 1993. Today Show Report on the New “Fad” Rave Parties.
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Accessed April 7, 2017.

David “Elsewhere” Bernal (2001).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjMo0bN71BY.
Accessed May 3, 2017.

Dr. Funk Interview Part 1 (2009)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI9wXe5ddWY&t=25s&frags=pl%2Cwn
Accessed September 15, 2018.

Dr. Funk Interview Part 2 (2009)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfpVjzEy_rw&t=203s&frags=pl%2Cwn
Accessed September 15, 2018.

Eric “Liquid Pop” Arcade Clip (1999):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jphHSGeU_C0
Accessed September 2, 2018.

I’ll Have an “E” Please
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSKQR0k6tUY
Accessed June 5, 2017.

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APPENDIX B

PASS THE FLOW: THE SUBCULTURAL PRACTICE OF LIQUID DANCE

IRB Protocol

1) Abstract of Study

This dissertation explores how the subcultural practice of liquid dance emerged from US rave culture and continues to sustain itself and evolve in today's era of social media. The dissertation consists of two parts. Part I: Emergence of Liquid Dance sets up the foundation for my investigation of how, where, and who developed liquid. Part II: Evolution of Liquid Dance explores how this subculture continues to sustain itself and evolve through three spheres of influence: digital, pedagogical and collaboration. I draw upon the concept of flow as a lens to trace the historical, aesthetic, digital, pedagogical and subcultural trajectory of liquid dance. My research methods combine semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival research to situate my inquiry. My fieldwork consists of interviewing 20 liquid practitioners, as well as conducing ethnographic research at three dance music festivals where liquid practitioners attend and participate. The purpose of this project is to contribute new knowledge to the field of dance studies on the specific dance genre of liquid, which up until now has not been documented in this field at this level of research. My intended outcome for this project is to produce a dissertation that adds new knowledge to dance studies centered around liquid dancing's emergence from rave and club subcultures and how it continues to evolve in today's era of social media and music/dance festival cultures. This research may also be used as a template for other scholars to deploy as a lens to analyze and critique other dance forms within the spectrum of rave, club and music/dance festival subcultures.

2) Protocol Title

Pass The Flow: The Subcultural Practice of Liquid Dance

3) Principle Investigator

Dr. Sherril Dodds, Professor of Dance

4) Objectives

To understand the conditions under which the subculture of liquid dance emerged and how it continues to perpetuate itself and evolve.

5) Rationale and Significance

It is clear from existing scholarship that dance in the rave/club subculture spectrum is often theorized through (but not limited to) the lenses of the emotional (Pini 1997, Malbon 1999), cultural (Thornton 1995, Buckland 2002), social (Gregory 2009, Hall 2013), and temporal and spatial (Jackson 2004, Solberg 2014). Extensive literature also exists within intersecting subcultures of hip-hop (Schloss 2009) and house dance practice (Sommer 2001), as well as an ethno-musicological perspective on the sonic components of EDM (McLeod 2001, Butler 2012, Solberg 2014). However, none of the literature directly addresses liquid dance as a subcultural dance practice.
Furthermore, I have discovered a major research gap in dance studies devoted specifically to any in-depth kinesthetic analysis of dancing bodies within rave and club culture spaces (both in the United States and abroad). I began my research endeavors in 2013 while earning my MA in Dance and Cultural Studies at the University of Hawaiʻi at Manoa, where I conducted extensive interviews on the history and roots of liquid dance from one of the dance form's first practitioners, Edward "Fu Manchu" Hickman. Over the last four years, Hickman has been one of my primary guides and mentors as I endeavor to learn more about the history and trajectory of a dance form that has clearly migrated beyond the confines of its origins in US raves and spread into online communities and other dance/music subcultures and festivals across the world. Through this project I will examine the digital, pedagogical and collaborative dimensions of liquid.

My dissertation consists of two parts. Part I: Emergence of Liquid covers four chapters that set up the foundation for my investigation of how, where, and who developed liquid. Part II: Evolution of Liquid Dance explores three chapters on specific spheres of influence: digital, pedagogical and collaboration. Each chapter explores how the subculture of liquid dance both sustains itself and evolves. In order to supplement the limited visually documented empirical evidence of liquid dancing's emergence from early 1990s East-coast raves, I aim to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews of liquid dance practitioners. I classify my interviewees as practitioners belonging to one of three generations whose entry points into liquid began in the 1990s, 2000s, or 2010s. I have chosen my sources on the basis of their level of expertise, the number of years they have been practitioners, and documented evidence of their performances, workshops, and interviews. This method is necessary to both privilege the voices of insider practitioners and add significant new knowledge on an embodied dance practice currently absent from dance studies.

7) Prior Approvals

N/A

8) Study Design

a) Recruitment Methods

I am a member and active participant of three liquid dance social networks on Facebook: *EDM Dancers* (since 2014)*, Stop Drop and Liquid* (since 2015)*,* and *Liquid Lab* (since 2016). Through private messages, I will reach out to 20 interviewees who are each liquid practitioners and also members of one or more of these online communities (see Script of verbal information for identifying potential interviewee subjects). I will conduct semi-structured interviews that last between 30 minutes to an hour (see Interview Questions), either through Skype or FaceTime. I will be in a quiet location, such as my apartment or a coffee shop with little audio distractions. I will audio record each interview on my phone and will inform each of my interviewees of this (see Consent Form).

Potential interview subjects will be given a brief description of the scope and nature of my research. In addition, I will also identify myself as both a practitioner of liquid and a PhD student in dance at Temple University. When a potential agreement to an interview is reached I will provide a full written explanation of my research, along with the consent form for the project (see Consent Form). Each interviewee will be interviewed once, followed by a formal note of thanks in which I will indicate that they will be notified when the research findings are published. I will give each interviewee a copy of the interview transcript and a copy of any research outcomes on publication.

In addition, I will attend three music/dance festival events where liquid dancers will be present and participating in order to conduct ethnographic research through participant observation. If these events happen to be a place where potential interviewees decide to meet and speak with me about my research specifically, then I will provide the same advanced notice and forms prior to the interview being conducted.

I have previously conducted six interviews with IRB approval from the University of Hawaiʻi at Manoa for my thesis research on the commodification of rave culture, which I consider to be necessary background work for my current dissertation research. Each of my past interviewees turned out to be helpful and receptive to my research questions and ideas. Furthermore, as an insider of the liquid dance scene, and I have been an active participant in the aforementioned liquid communities. I do not anticipate any difficulties regarding recruitment.

b) Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The scope of inclusion concerns those who identify as liquid dance practitioners, many of whom belong to one or more of the three aforementioned Facebook groups. Although I do not know all personally, I am familiar with all of them.

c) Study Timelines

The study will take place between April 2017-November 2018 and participants will be involved in the project over this period. I anticipate interviewing 20 people from the Facebook groups (10 in the fall and 10 in the spring), along with another 10 who do

not belong to any of those groups (5 in the fall and 5 in the spring), totaling 30 people. I also anticipate that the majority of my interviews will be conducted well before April 2018, but the documentation, analysis, and writing will most likely be finished closer to the middle of May 2018.

d) Study Procedures and Data Analysis

All interviews will be recorded and transcribed and full transcriptions will be given to the participants. I will select quotes from each transcription to include in my dissertation. My writing is mainly ethnographic, however I will be threading specific dance theories in my analysis to interpret the meanings that circulate through liquid subcultures and the individual liquid practitioners I interview.

e) Withdrawal of Subjects

If any participant wishes to withdraw from the research, this is perfectly acceptable, but I have never experienced this dealing with liquid dance or any other street dance participants throughout my research projects. Participant interviews constitute only a portion of my research and the research focus is not deemed 'sensitive.'

f) Privacy and Confidentiality

The transcribed interviews will be held on my private MacBook Pro computer. Any information obtained during my interviews will not be shared, other than in the agreed form of research publications. For the purposes of publication, I will use fictional names unless participants choose to use their known 'dancer' names, or if the participant agrees to allow for their real names to be published.

I anticipate no problems with any potential interviewees and suspect they will feel comfortable with me as an insider of the scene. I personally know the majority of the interview subjects, and those whom I am less familiar have at least heard that I am conducting my research on liquid, and know me as a member of the online liquid communities through my participation. Furthermore, the semi-structured style of the interview (beginning with very general questions about their dance experience and background before moving toward specific questions about skills developed through attending raves, clubs and festivals) will be closer to a conversational style than a formalized interview.

9) Risks to Subjects

As suggested above, there are no perceived physical or emotional risks in participating in this research, as the primary research focus is not deemed sensitive in nature. If the subject volunteers to provide information of a highly personal nature regarding how liquid knowledge informs other areas of his or her life, the interviewer will respond sensitively to this information and will check whether the subject is happy to pursue

this discussion and whether they are willing (or not) for the material to be included in the research findings.

10) Potential Benefits to Subjects

There are several benefits to the subjects. The first is that they will be contributing their personal knowledge and experiences into the liquid community beyond the small communities of liquid practitioners, beyond the subculture itself and into written documentation in dance scholarship. They will be the first participants to be published in an academic setting, with their words potentially quoted by future scholars and academics. Each subject's perspective contributes new knowledge to both dance studies and the broader field of the humanities. It is evident within the online communities and festivals, which this research project focuses on, that liquid practitioners desire to share, communicate and collaborate with others in order to preserve their place in the subculture of liquid. This is an excellent opportunity for such an action.

11) Costs to Subjects

There is no economic burden on the participant; only the time taken to participate in the interview.

12) Informed Consent

The consent protocol will follow "INVESTIGATOR GUIDANCE: Informed Consent (HRP-802)," and the consent form is attached to the protocol.

13) Vulnerable Populations

N/A

APPENDIX C

Pass The Flow: The Subcultural Practice of Liquid Dance
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

My name is David Heller and I am a PhD candidate in the Dance Department at Temple University. I am writing my dissertation on the emergence and evolution of liquid dance. This research focuses primarily on liquid dance practitioners who consider this dance form to be a prominent part of their lives.

I am inviting you to be a part of my research because I am interested in learning more about your experiences, perspectives, opinions, and philosophies on liquid, and how this dance form continues to be sustained, perpetuated, and ultimately evolve itself.

What should I know about this research?

- I will explain this research to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, contact the chair of my dissertation committee Sherril Dodds at 215-204-4959 or at Sherril.dodds@temple.edu.

The interview will last between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on your availability. Questions will focus on your personal experiences with liquid, such as when and where you were first introduced to the practice, as well as your viewpoints on how liquid is learned, taught, and your views on what and how other dance forms and subcultures impact liquid. I will explain all of this again before our interview and will answer any questions you might have at any point before, during or after the interview.

Although I anticipate that my questions will be clear and straightforward, please remember you may ask for clarification at any time. I do not anticipate that any of the questions are of a sensitive nature, but you are free to decline to answer selected questions if you wish and you may stop the interview at any time. If you decide not to take part or to stop the interview, this will not be held against you.

The interview will be recorded and I will give you a copy of the interview transcription. I will use selected quotations for the purposes of academic publishing and therefore I need your permission to use your interview material for this reason. Unless you wish to use

your real name or your "dancer" name, I will use a fictionalized name for the purpose of publishing this work. This will ensure that you may retain anonymity if you wish.

The audio recording will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared by anyone outside my dissertation committee.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may speak to them at 215-707-3390 or email them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by myself or by my committee members.
- You cannot reach the committee members.
- You want to talk to someone besides my committee members.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it from the research team. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

Please check one of the following:

I would prefer you to give me a fictional name

I would prefer you to use my dancer name as follows:……………………….

I would prefer you to use my real name as follows:…………………………..

Signature Block for Adult Subject Capable of Consent

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

______________________________	______________
Signature of subject	Date

____

Printed name of subject

______________________________	______________
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date

____

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Thank you for assisting me with this research project. If you wish to follow up with me, I can be contacted as follows:

Email: hellerd@temple.edu

Phone: 808-284-3865

APPENDIX D
Sample Interview Questions

Interviewer:

Offers thanks for participating in the interview

Give brief reminder of the research topic

Ensure CONSENT form is signed

Explain that if any questions are unclear, then to ask for clarification and that, if the interviewee wishes to pause or decline to answer at any stage, then that is fine.

Questions:

1. When and where did you first see liquid dance?
2. How long have you been a practitioner?
3. What is it about liquid that drew you into this dance form?
4. Where and how often do you typically practice liquid the most?

I am interested in both the history and current practices of liquid. So I will first start with its history.

5. In your opinion, what is liquid? In other words, how do you define it or understand it?
6. What is your understanding of how liquid first emerged? PROMPT: One common belief circulating within liquid subculture is that liquid first emerged in US raves.
7. Have seen any video documented clips of liquid's history?
8. Do these have any influence on how you understand liquid's history? Which ones in particular?
9. Who are some of the major liquid dance practitioners you feel contributed to its emergence?

10. What other dance forms influenced or continues to influence liquid?

Excellent. So now I am going to ask you about the more recent trends of online social networks, particularly regarding *Stop Drop and Liquid*, *Liquid Lab*, and *EDM Dancers*. If you are not familiar with any of these please let me know.

11. What purpose do digital social networks devoted to liquid dance serve?
12. How do you think these online communities might be used as resources for learning liquid?
13. Do you think there are sometimes misconceptions about liquid that outsiders have?
14. Do you think there are sometimes misconceptions about liquid that insiders have?
15. What are some of the dominant topics of conversation related to liquid that you have encountered within the liquid dance community?
16. How do liquid dancers choose to participate at electronic dance music events? Do they learn or take workshops from other dance forms?
17. What are some of the advantages to taking workshops from first, second and third-generation liquid dancers?
18. Do you see any evidence of liquid practitioners collaborating with other dancers within the subcultures of liquid and/or the flow arts?
19. Do you see any evidence of liquid practitioners collaborating with other dancers or outside of the subculture?
20. As we have discussed, liquid has come a long way from its roots in underground rave and club subcultures. Do you have any final thoughts?

End interview with follow-up comments:

Thank you to the interviewee. Explain that I will send him/her a copy of the transcript. Ask interviewee if he/she has any further questions.