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JAZZ DANCE A DERIVATIVE GENEALOGY:
YOURS / MINE

by
Julie Mondrick

Presented to Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the racialized histories and gendered stereotypes of the jazz dance genre, from its inception on plantation dances through the stage performances of popular white jazz dance choreographers in America. It asks: What can a white jazz dance performer and choreographer do to acknowledge and disrupt white, male appropriations of a black vernacular form, a dynamic which has created and propagated gendered stereotypes of the form in its codification and commodification? This paper explores the ways in which I, a white performer and choreographer was exposed to jazz dance, seeking to honor the black origins of the form, while questioning heteronormative stereotypes surrounding the female body in the commodification and legitimization of the form as it moved from the jook onto the stage. This research builds on the work of Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Anthea Kraut, and Marshall and Jean Stearns, culminating in a choreographic and written work exploring ways to repurpose and subvert historical stereotypes, while tapping into the joy of movement at the basis of the genre.

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The ones whose names are not written into the history

To the ones whose names have legitimized the form

To Thomas Ralabate for instilling a love and fire inside my jazzy soul

To my fearless cohort, for enduring the insanity in the world through the final weeks of this process

To Mom, Dad, Shawn, and Sophie for having my back, encouragement, late night phone calls, kind words, and open ears

And to all others who have shown love and support throughout

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WHAT IS JAZZ?

Jazz dance is a term that cannot be clarified through one simple definition, one often left in the grey areas of form and genre. The mention of jazz dance in casual conversation often elicits a quick, flash of elbows bent at the waist, palms facing outwards, with fingers splayed apart, a torque of the spine creating a separation of upper and lower body. The sharp expression of the arms, the shoulders, and face directly confront the “audience” accompanied by an overtly exaggerated smile or sultry look. The bottom half speaks differently, a bend in one knee as the heel pops upwards towards the calf, the leg drawing in to the other at the inner thigh as if squeezing to avoid peeing, closing off any openings between the two legs. There is also a conventional costume associated with this “classic” pose: a feminine figure, clothed in a black high cut, skintight leotard, showing off the hip bones, with elongated legs that are exaggerated by the cut of the leotard and the heeled character shoes. This is the iconic stereotypical image that haunts the term “jazz dance,” while also highlighting the dominant narrative surrounding the form. What is erased from this image and narrative is the foundation, or what many jazz dance scholars refer to as the “roots,” of the form (Guarino, 2014).

Jazz dance is an ever-growing genre, one in motion with an established “historical, cultural, social, and kinetic continuity” that Patricia Cohen refers to as a continuum (Cohen, 2014, 3). It can also be viewed as a tree with roots in West African culture. In Kimberly Testa’s model, discussed by Wendy Oliver, the trunk includes cultural, kinetic, and social histories of African Americans, and the branches are the vernacular and theatrical growths of jazz dance

(Cohen, 3, see Figure 1). Cohen aligns the tree's verticality with the Eurocentric aesthetic influences on the form, the horizontal branches to Africanist connections to the earth, and the interwoven relational vines to their mixture in the complex and evolving genre that is jazz dance (3). The genre of jazz dance has developed over time. It includes popular dances and social dance crazes, but it also deeply rooted in the histories of violence and racism that register in African American culture. Jazz dance

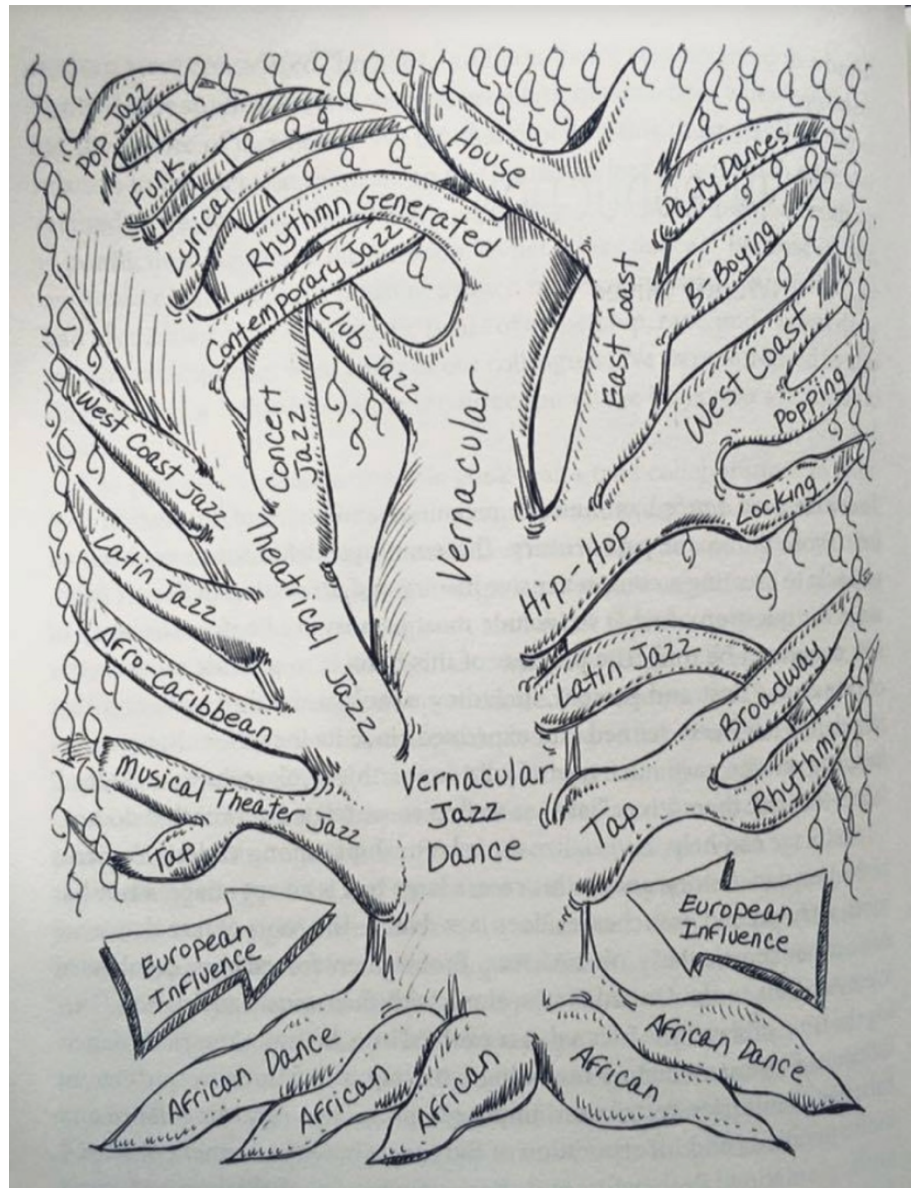


Figure 1: Jazz Dance Tree by Kimberly Testa from Oliver, 2014, xvi

uses the “past as prologue for the future” (Durden 2019). I define jazz dance as a genre that is heavily influenced by the cultures in which it lives, from African American vernacular and social dances, to Broadway and theatrical stages, to concert dance stages. Jazz dance is not a one size fits all term, as casual conversation and stereotypes may make it seem. Jazz dance is a genre of cross pollination, a form historically and culturally rooted in the United States.

This thesis discusses the history of American jazz dance, the stereotypes that shadow the form, and spaces of agency for black and female performers, alongside an analysis of my own

choreographic research intervention. Through this research I seek to honor the black origins of the jazz form, while questioning the heteronormative stereotypes surrounding the female body in the codification and legitimization as it moves to the stage.

BLACK DANCE, WHITE TERMS: STEREOTYPES IN MOTION

(Plantation Dances to Ragtime, 1800s – 1920s)

Jazz dance, in both its social dance and stage forms, historically began on the plantation. Marshall and Jean Stearns wrote one of the first jazz dance texts exploring the beginnings of the form (1994). The Stearnses examine the near extinction of the Buzzard Lope, the endurance of vernacular dance moves such as the Itch, the transformation of the original Giouba dance from African into the whitewashed Juba of the United States, and the survival of the Ring Shout. From each of these specific examples we can see the ways in which African-derived dances forcibly evolved for survival and were dispersed into American culture.

The Buzzard Lope is a circle dance, where one dancer enters into the center of the circle performing in a crouched position with flat feet (Georgia 2009). The gaze of the dancer is downcast towards the center of the circle, where a dead animal would be, jumping towards and away, circling around with intricate footwork that is weighted into the ground, before returning to the outside of the circle (Georgia, 2009). The Buzzard Lope experienced near extinction because a newer, similar dance, the Eagle Rock, took its place, as the dominant culture felt the Buzzard Lope was too closely “associated plantation life” (Stearns 1994, 26). This reflects the power dynamics of dance in a U.S. context: the white, dominant culture determines what is worthy within African American culture to become mainstream.

In comparison to the erosion of the Buzzard Lope in the United States, the Itch adapted itself to become more versatile. The Itch originated within the circle dances of Legba or Elegba, an African deity, and was adopted into American culture through a simplified scratching gesture (27). The Itch is an example of a “gesture [having] a universality that could lead to its

appearance-with or without syncopated rhythms-almost anywhere” (27). This distance from the original form, understood as “universality,” allowed the Itch to move from an African circle dance into the social dance setting of the United States.

Another African-based dance that transformed and distanced itself into a new form in order to survive in the United States was Giouba, an African derived “step-dance which somewhat resembled a jig with elaborate variations” (28). Giouba morphed into the Juba, “a completely choreographed, continuous group dance, combining the call-and-response pattern, dancing in a circle, the Shuffle, improvisation, and the rhythms of calling and clapping” (29). Similar to the way in which the Itch found its way into social dance settings in the United States, Juba found its way onto the minstrel stages, where the dominant, white culture, used it as a mockery of the original African American form. A form of Juba, patting Juba, stemmed from clapping to encourage another dancer, into a routine of clapping and slapping the body in rhythmic displays (29). This form found its way onto the minstrel stage via the Golden and Grayton duo, white men in blackface, performing patting Juba like a snare drum (29). The Juba moving onto the minstrel stage is another example of the historical dynamic whereby white cultural stipulations control the dissemination of African cultural forms, while simultaneously using them for white entertainment and capitalizing on them for white consumption.

The Ring Shout, derived from the African Circle Dance, is the most well-known surviving African dance form in the United States (29). The Ring Shout employed clapping and stomping (in place of drumming) and a shuffle step (that did not include leg crossing), as a result of religious persecution against dancing and drumming as two important aspects of African religious affairs (30). The incorporation of clapping and stomping in place of the drumming, an integral part of African dance culture, was a method of adaptation for the survival of enslaved

Africans' culture in the Americas, especially where drumming was outlawed, such as in the U.S. (Durden). The Ring Shout originated as a religious dance form and was transformed into a secular group dance, which in turn informed the Walk Around of minstrel shows and was also adapted onto the Broadway stage by Florenz Ziegfeld from the Negro revue, *The Darktown Follies* (Stearns, 31). From the Buzzard Lope to the Ring Shout, the Stearnses research brings to the forefront the initial development of jazz dance during periods of historical violence and the racism against African American dance forms, even as they moved into the dominant, white American culture. The Stearnses breakdown of various African diasporic cultural dances trace the gradations of survival, translation, and transmission that each vernacular form experienced within a larger political and cultural context of violence and racism.

Building on the Stearnses initial mention of blackface minstrelsy within the transformation of plantation dances such as patting Juba and Ring Shout, Bill Barlow investigates renowned blackface minstrel performers alongside an exploration of the performance paradox created for African Americans (2008). Minstrelsy is an important period in the history of jazz dance, as a form that fuses entertainment and racism within the constructs given by the dominant white culture. Minstrelsy is seen as the historical inception of an ongoing dynamic where white entertainers pursue African American cultural forms to create a whitewashed version for commodification. Barlow overviews the inception of blackface minstrelsy as a form of white entertainment mocking black people through exaggerated and grotesque stereotypes drawn from plantation life. Though the initial performers were white, black entertainers were included as the form's popularity declined. Blackface minstrelsy lived on the white entertainment stage from the 1840s until the Civil War era (Barlow 2008).

The tropes from minstrelsy have followed not only African American performers, but also casts shadows over jazz dance forms. Brenda Dixon Gottschild explains that the “European American appropriation of Africanist forms and principles were systematized, validated and institutionalized in the minstrel construct” (1996, 81). Blackface minstrelsy was legitimized through white bodies with darkened faces, sanctioning the stereotypes circulated by the form. Simultaneously, if these black forms were performed by African American performers, they were viewed by white audiences as too closely related to the plantation. This was a way for white performers “to have their cake and eat it too—to have the power to be both outsider and insider in relation to Africanist life and culture” (Gottschild 1996, 83). As Gottschild and other scholars have argued, the allure of the exotic Other creates a blurred vision based on the lack of understanding (1996, 82; Said 1978). This lack of understanding leads to appropriations and reductions that undermine the complexity of the Othered culture, while simultaneously plaguing these cultures with stereotypes that are popularized and legitimized in the dominant culture. The power of dominant, white cultural hierarchies allowed for the appropriation of alluring African American cultural forms, exemplified by the Juba and Ring Shout, in the production of whitewashed entertainment that had far reaching damage for those who had created the dances. Blackface minstrelsy not only created and disseminated dehumanizing stereotypes, but it also created a paradoxical framework for African Americans once they entered onto the minstrel stage.

Barlow briefly explores the paradoxes that African American performers faced when joining the white minstrel entertainment industry. As these performers entered into the minstrelsy workforce they were bombarded and hindered by the “permeating nostalgia for the Old South and slavery” that was the nexus of the minstrel stage (Barlow 2008, 90). This

nostalgia, based in the whitewashed mockery-based form, is an example of the white terms that black performers and forms needed to follow in order to survive in the dominant culture and create a place for themselves onstage and in the entertainment business more broadly (i.e. blackface in Hollywood).

These terms overshadowed the social ragtime dances of the 1910s as well. The popular trends of ragtime dance in the 1910s were animal dances, well established and linked to African roots (Graves 2009, 59). Although these trends are linked to African roots, there was a transformation between the animal dances performed on the plantation by African Americans and the dances that were popularized in urban settings (61). In these settings, where African American dances met with other European styles, ragtime dance developed and flourished (63). Graves argues that in this cultural mingling the dominant, white, hegemonic force takes the forefront while the African American culture becomes disavowed (63). These hierarchies were initiated in the 1800s with plantation dances, as in the example of the Eagle Rock versus the Buzzard Lope described by the Stearnses, aligning their work on the roots of jazz dance with Graves's argument regarding the resonating historical consequences of dances that outlive the original form.

Graves also brings the historical influence of Darwin's social theory of evolution into her argument, referencing how Africanist and African American movement styles were viewed through an evolutionary lens at certain time periods, resulting in the development of the primitive trope that permeated the development of these forms (65). Through a Darwinian lens, the associations of blacks and animals within the ragtime dances, and arguably also with plantation dances, served as "further evidence that blacks existed at an earlier stage of biological development" (65). This created consequential relationships between primitivity and African

American culture as “cruder, simpler, baser” than that of white America (65). The animal dances of ragtime caused African American performers to face the irony and complexity of the paradox of white culture both celebrating and disparaging primitivity (65). The dominant, white culture was “trying to work their way back into that jungle...in a word, doing their best to pass for colored” (Johnson quoted in Graves 2009, 69). The tropes of blackface minstrel, and related paradoxes, did not dissipate with these particular dance forms. Instead they continued to allure white audiences through the dissemination and popularization of other black dance forms.

Graves alludes to the ways that race played a role in the dissemination of social and popular dance forms, specifically ragtime dance. “In all of these venues, dancers of different racial backgrounds and classes borrowed, stole, and one-upped one another” (Graves 2009, 56). This borrowing on the social dance floor was imperative to the survival of the shimmy, a popular dance from around 1910, defined by the isolated shaking of a specific body part, usually the shoulders or hips.

The shimmy is another example of a social dance form that faced the racial paradoxes created by white American culture. It was attacked for “the impropriety and sensuality of its movements” while also being embraced as “both an exhibition and a social dance” (Bryant, 2002, 168). As Bryant states, the shimmy was not only a social dance form, but also an exhibition form, which highlighted the commodified African American female body. From 1917 to 1918 the shimmy moved from Chicago to New York, where it was transferred into “exclusive segregated New York cabarets” (171). These venues served predominantly wealthy and white audiences, from businessmen to younger members of society, offering “entertainment with racy adult themes” (171-172). These racy adult themes were associated with female sexuality through the undulating and shaking motions of the shimmy (174). The performances of the shimmy in

this context drew white audiences with desires to consume the exotic, commodified Other, relative to the dominant, contemporary society (175). The draw of the exotic, through black female sexuality, constructed a performance dynamic which drew white audiences to get close, without becoming fully immersed in the culture of the promiscuous Other, another example of Gottschild's outside-insider paradox.

When the shimmy moved from cabarets onto Broadway and vaudeville stages, reviewers condemned the form for its moral impropriety, while the form also continued to grow in the social dance halls, where the proximity of bodies moving in this racy way likewise made critics uncomfortable (Graves, 180-181). Critics caused enough backlash that the shimmy, alongside its jazz musical counterpart, became widely acknowledged as an incitement of sexual excitement along with calls for reform that would return women to a more decorous standard (180-181). The shimmy tied mainstream American culture closely to that of African American society, but the stereotypes of vulgarity, promiscuity, and primitivism remained, permeating white critical reviews of the form. The form brought female sexuality to the forefront, and more importantly African American female bodies, which were commodified and used as an example of what a decorous [white] woman, would not do. This sustained the hierarchical separation of race, gender, and sexuality according to distinct moral standards: decorous versus vulgar. In this example, racial, gender, and sexual policing occurs through the performance of the shimmy, a culturally black form. Graves tracks the shimmy as it moves from social dance floors onto white stages, drawing through a theory of "resonating consequences," a term theorizing how the original stereotypes associated with African American vernacular dances have historically shadowed these forms. These stereotypes continue to be tied to these forms, historically linking these racial stereotypes to African American forms. The "resonating consequences" associated

with the shimmy define African American women as vulgar, promiscuous, and primitive can be tracked historically, exemplified through reclamation by Josephine Baker, a popular African American female performer.

The formal hierarchy that chronologically laid out racialized value systems and subsequent tropes started with the plantation dances in the South, followed by blackface minstrelsy, and morphed in ragtime dance and social dance forms such as the shimmy. This hierarchy aligned with the dominant cultural statutes of the time by stifling the growth and prosperity of the original forms, leading to the popularization of the whitewashed and white-approved forms. The continued distancing from African American culture precipitated the outsider-insider paradox of the allure of these forms, a paradox that continues historically in the development and legitimization of jazz dance. This simultaneous distance and proximity of white and black cultures in the U.S creates distinct aesthetic and philosophical values that are at play within the interwoven branches of the jazz dance form.

THEORIES OF AESTHETIC VALUE: AFRICANIST VERSUS EUROPEANIST

Patricia Cohen shares that “even when performed as entertainment for an audience, at its heart, jazz draws on the experiences and the vernacular dances of its people ... The vernacular forms are subsumed into the art form and used as yet another tool for self-expression” (Cohen 2014, 7). Vernacular dance forms, or culturally specific forms, develop within social settings, emerging from and reflecting the cultural values of those social life worlds. Black vernacular forms have historically been categorized as less valuable than the European forms that have historically dominated stage performance settings, forms considered “art.” This divide is created along the lines of Europeanist aesthetic versus Africanist aesthetic forms, exemplified in the previous section in the transformation of African dance forms on white entertainment stages to appeal to white aesthetic sensibilities and ideologies.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild breaks down the defining aspects of Europeanist dance aesthetics, highlighting the importance of the upright torso with the spine as the center: “the hierarchical ruler-from which all movement is generated” (1996, 8). Gottschild expresses that this structural principal, of erectness, is partial to the post-Renaissance, colonialist view in which the central, straightened spine is a metaphor for Europe positioning itself as the center point of the world, causing all else to be defined and controlled in relation to this central point” (1996, 8).

In discussing the development of ragtime dance, Nadine George Graves describes the importance of this Europeanist erect influence in America. Graves depicts this upright relation to the dance floor as one of the most important European influences in the U.S., as it perpetuated the “Christian notion of uprightness (in all senses of the word) and closeness to God,” alongside the move away from agrarian lifestyles for black workers (Graves 2009, 63). From this

Eurocentric viewpoint and aesthetic hierarchy, Gottschild expresses a contrasting Africanist aesthetic and principles.

The dancing body within the Africanist aesthetic illustrates “a democratic equality of body parts”, allowing many movement centers to emerge (1996, 8). Unlike the static, erect held spine of the Europeanist aesthetic, the Africanist aesthetic prioritizes polycentrism. Gottschild defines polycentrism as one part of the body playing against another, allowing these different parts to originate from more than one, spinal focal point (1996, 8). Polyrhythm becomes correspondent to polycentrism as multiple movement centers have the ability to move to different rhythms as well. Distinct from the upright, erect held carriage of the Europeanist dance aesthetic, the Africanist aesthetic favors a bent-legged position, connecting and contacting with the earth (1996, 8). These differences in aesthetic have been associated with racialized stereotypes, exemplified by the animal dances of ragtime. These stereotypes haunt dance forms, including jazz dance, that align closely with Africanist aesthetics.

Gotschild dedicates an entire chapter to enumerating five premises of the Africanist aesthetic, which include: embracing the conflict (often elicited through opposites), polycentrism and polyrhythm, high-affect juxtaposition (through a break omitting transition or connective link), ephebism (attack within the confines of speed, sharpness, and force), and the aesthetic of the cool, an all-encompassing term (Gotschild 1996, Gottschild 2001). Both Europeanist and Africanist aesthetics are key factors within the development, progression, codification, and commodification of jazz dance. Many of the key factors that Gottschild points out will be tracked through both the historical and personal lineages of jazz dance that this paper addresses. Through Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics, as a theoretical lens set forth by Gottschild, this research tracks these aesthetics as they influence the history of jazz dance.

As these aesthetics combined to create jazz dance, there has often been an unequal “cultural exchange” in a dynamic Gottschild calls: appropriation-approximation-assimilation. This theory states that as a trope is appropriated, it must also go through a process of transformation in order to “measure up to the reigning aesthetic in the host culture” (Gotschild, 2003, 20). Historically in jazz dance one can track the aesthetic hierarchies that transformed the social, vernacular forms as they moved onto the white concert dance stages. As explored in the previous section, this occurred through the transformation of plantation and African diasporic dances into forms made palatable for white consumption. Gottschild argues that unlike appropriation of imported elements, the Africanist presence comes from within American culture (1996, 23). As the Africanist presence was adopted into mainstream American culture, “the tradition is assimilated, yet its creators are systematically excluded” (1996, 27). This can be seen as Africanist forms found their way onto the minstrel stage. While audiences viewed these forms as mocking versions of plantation and Africanist dances, the African American originators were excluded from the stage and the development of these shows. Later black performers were allowed to perform on the white minstrel stages such as William Henry Lane, billed as Master Juba, whom received higher billing than white colleagues before the Civil War (Stearns 1994, 29). When more of these black performers took the minstrel stage, after the Civil War era, they found it was necessary to fit “himself into the mold cast for him as typical” (57). The famous Williams and Walker duo track the blackface minstrel paradox as white performers worked to look like a ridiculous character that the black performers then imitated to appear more absurd (57).

As the assimilated form is passed on without reference to the people from whom it was appropriated, the terms of the original form and the allocation of ownership becomes blurred,

exemplified by black performers molding themselves into the white minstrel form. By molding to the white minstrel stipulations, the original black cultural forms fall secondary to the ownership of the whitened form. Another example is the African Giouba transforming into the whitened Juba dance. Wendy Perron, a white dancer who describes her ignorance in thinking that “jazz [dance] was a white form ... even when I was studying with Matt Mattox I didn’t know it was a form that came from black culture” (Perron quoted in Gottschild 2003, 20). Perron’s allusion to jazz dance as a white form does not come from left field, but is rather a part of the widespread dynamic, theorized by Gottschild: as African American forms become appropriated, approximated and then assimilated into dominant white, American culture, whitewashing erases black claims to cultural ownership of black forms. This assimilation of African American cultural forms became a key factor in the codification and legitimization of jazz dance on the concert stage. The cultural exchange, as Gottschild argues, is not an even exchange because the forms were appropriated on the dominant terms. African cultural art forms, such as dance, when considered by Europeanist cultures “are raw materials that are improved upon and elevated when they are appropriated and finessed by European artists” (Gotschild 1996, 41). This appropriation-as-whitewashing occurred in jazz dance to “develop” and “legitimize” the forms, reifying the dominant culture’s ability to stipulate what is worthy to be on the Broadway or concert stage.

This transformation in form can also be seen in relation to the dissemination of vernacular jazz dance steps from class to the stage. Anthea Kraut explores copyright in dance, specifically the argument that if vernacular forms had been patented, they may have never been disseminated or developed in the ways they have. Kraut argues that these vernacular forms have become public domain, allowing white artists easier and greater access to excavate from, and

capitalize on, these forms for their own benefit (Kraut 2010, 175). As forms become public domain, referencing or naming the original is unnecessary. In part, this is because the forms are not owned by one individual, yet power and knowledge dynamics become defining factors in who has access to this public domain. “The testimony of black vernacular dances will suggest, social dances depend on a kind of imitation and give-and-take” (Kraut 2010, 178). This raises problems when these dances are appropriated, assimilated and approximated from “recreational arenas to the for-profit theatrical stage” (2010, 178). The transformation from recreation to for-profit theatrical stages is a double-edged sword for these vernacular forms and the cultures from which they were birthed. One side of the argument is that, as these forms are removed from their cultural and social milieus, how they are expressed and presented is transformed and diluted, shifting their meanings and social implications in detrimental ways. Meanwhile the opposing stance argues that bringing the form into context of a theatrical stage space allows for legitimization, and therefore endurance, of the form. When jazz dance becomes ‘legitimized,’ as it moves onto theatrical stages, it takes on the Europeanist aesthetic of dominant forms, such as ballet, so that it can be performed in coordination with the dominant, white culture stipulations. Although this legitimization may appear to level the playing field for vernacular, African American cultural forms as they move onto the theatrical stage, it also registers the reification of the racial hierarchies that are historically integrated into American dance culture. This legitimization according to dominant white stipulations began early within the jazz dance genre, starting with modifications in plantation dances and intensifying through the popularization and codification of the jazz dance forms. Through this uneven weight of aesthetic form based in racial hierarchies, the fraught histories of value are highlighted. However, there are arguments for black reclamation under the dominant, white stipulations and value system.

AGENCY AND AUTHORSHIP: BLACK RECLAMATION

Danielle Goldman's argument that freedom is imagined and defined differently for all complicates easy claims that jazz dance "is a freedom-loving, movement-loving tradition" (Kriegel 1994, xi; Goldman, 2010, 3). Goldman problematizes a conception of freedom-as-achievement, the idea that once able to overcome a specific oppression, everything would be well. She explains that this conception is problematic because it elides the fact "that there are always multiple and diverse strictures in the world" (3). This freedom-as-achievement notion is complicated by the "resonating consequences" of black dance on white terms explored in the first section. Improvised dance, a form often viewed as freedom in movement and an important aspect in the development of jazz dance, "involves literally giving shape to oneself by deciding how to move in relation to an unsteady landscape" (5). This decision about how to move has historically been set by the dominant, white cultural strictures, while African American culture must reconfigure in order to maneuver through these regulations (i.e. Gottschild's theory of appropriation, approximation, and assimilation). Within this maneuvering of various strictures, African American performers have had the ability to reclaim some of the stereotypes that have been customarily placed on them.

This has been demonstrated from the beginning of slavery, for example with the development of the Cakewalk. The Cakewalk is a dance of many influences including African competitive, Seminole, and European dancing (Graves 2009, 56). Although developing through the incorporation of many varying influences, the major backbone of the dance "was a mockery of these European styles," an early glimpse into African Americans claiming agency (Goldman, 57). The mockery function of the Cakewalk came from the imitation of European partner dances

by African American slaves, while exaggerating and shifting the aesthetics from European to Africanist. Simultaneously white masters approximated this imitation as flattery. This mockery of the Cakewalk allowed African American slaves to safely subvert the expectations of their masters, while also performing under the white terms. These terms included the creation of a competition, resulting in the winning slave being rewarded a cake. In mocking their masters, African American performers created a form that white culture would later assimilate to simulate without knowledge of the underlying meanings in the dance's formation. The Cakewalk provides an example of African Americans claiming agency for their personhood through the introduction of a double subtext through dance.

Another example of danced agency is given by Danielle Robinson, who offers that African American jazz teachers “developed new ways of working within the subordinating system of appropriation between black and white performers of the [twentieth century] period” (20). This subordinating system of appropriation refers to the fraught histories of racist stereotypes and hierarchies of dance forms explored in the previous sections. African American jazz teachers determined how to move within the system of appropriation by coaching and teaching white performers, those for whom professional jazz dance performance opportunities were more readily available (Robinson 2006, 25). Black dances, such as the shimmy, “were the stars of the Jazz Age,” when performed by white women celebrities. Robinson argues that this dynamic enabled the careers of black dance teachers (25).

Although black teachers' careers combated some of the white appropriation of black forms, these teachers still had to follow regulations of the white dance world. One regulation of the “1920s [for] black dance teachers was a tactical invisibility to white audiences,” calling into question whose labor is legible in the popularization of the form. Despite following the

regulation of invisibility, these black teachers “facilitated the establishment of black dance teaching as a profession in its own right,” while also demonstrating “that such skills were not natural, but rather [that] they were learned” (Robinson 32, 38). These skills that black dancers were teaching for compensation to white dancers countered assumptions that professional African American dancers were simply flaunting natural talent rather than skill resulting from practice and training (38). This countering of assumptions, however, was only seen from the white performer’s viewpoint. Once she moved onto the stage, all remnants of the black instructor were removed. This resulted in the audience viewing only the white performers’ labor, undermining the labor of the black body that produced and instructed the performer. Robinson’s argument exemplifies the ambivalent ways in which African American performers asserted agency through their labor in education to combat appropriation, while continuing to be erased by stipulations of the dominant white culture.

Anthea Kraut explores another route that African American performers followed to claim agency: an individual’s agency to coin and claim steps. Stealing and imitation was an important aspect in the dissemination and popularization of jazz dance. Kraut builds her exploration of copyright law in relationship to dance by explaining that the invention of signature steps, using Josephine Baker as an example, functioned as “a corporeal autograph—a bodily writing of her name in and through performance” (Kraut, 2010, 186). Though the production of an unofficially named step, dancers developed a way to declare proprietorship, a greater claim on the move itself (2010, 186). Kraut explores the ability to track and tie a movement to a specific performer as a parallel to the “right of publicity.” This parallel proposes that choreographic reenactment was considered a “trademark,” calling upon an understanding of embodied personhood as private property (2010, 186). This embodied private property descended from the “unauthorized

commercial use of a celebrity's likeness," meaning that a signature step, similar to a celebrity voice or visage, becomes an extension of the individual's image (2010, 186). Examples of signature steps include the Texas Tommy, Earl "Snake Hips" Tucker, Suzie Q, and Shorty George. Despite the fact that these steps are associated with specific names, their histories are often varied and disputed, as I examine further in the following section. Through this unofficial naming, creating signature steps offers another example of African American performers staking claim to their embodied knowledge. In spite of appropriation, the attachment of a performer's identity to a specific step allowed them and others to acknowledge the personhood behind the labor of dance production.

Josephine Baker is an example of a specific African American jazz dance performer that claimed agency, through the reclamation of stereotypes, the inimitability of specific steps, and despite the commodification of the black female dancing body. "Baker developed ways of distancing herself from the stereotypes even as she reproduced them" (Kraut 2003, 438). Like other African American performers, Baker was required to follow the stipulations and strictures set forth by white male choreographers, such as George Balanchine. But when put onstage to perform, Baker "inevitably seemed to forget the steps that she had been taught and wound up performing her own idiosyncratic moves in their place" (2003, 437). In spite of neither directing, choreographing, nor producing the shows in which she performed, her signature moves are what led to her stardom. These improvisational moments that Baker incorporated into her performance "not only differentiated herself from the official choreographer, she also monopolized the attention of theatergoers," thus asserting her the agency in the situation (Kraut, 2008, 2).

Through this reclamation of authorship Baker also utilized “kinetic articulateness, zaniness and exuberance” to create a signature that was impossible to imitate (Kraut, 2010, 187). As an African American woman and through the performance of her own steps, Baker found a way to be accepted and well compensated by white audiences, while demanding that her personhood remain intact. In addition to authoring her own steps on the stage, Baker also found ways to subvert the stereotypes of the black exotic and primitive woman that she was required to play (Kraut 2003, 438). While her performance image included her “now-infamous banana skirt” and dancing topless, her complex moves subverted the images of primitivity displayed to white audiences (438). Through her redefinition of authorship, creating an embodied signature of copyright and subverting stereotypical images in motion, Josephine Baker is an example of an African American performer reclaiming stereotypes and claiming agency in the face of white dominant cultural terms for performance.

WHOSE DANCE IS IT ANYWAY?: WHITE CLAIMS OF AUTHORSHIP

(White Concert Stages, 1930s – 1980s)

Placing Brenda Dixon Gottschild's theory of Africanist aesthetics in American dance forms in conversation with Nadine George Graves' observations about the popularization of ragtime dance, conveys a tension between Africanist versus Europeanist aesthetics in the development of jazz dance. This tension can be tracked through my jazz dance education at the University at Buffalo. My education also raises questions about the differences of authorship in relation to labor in the previous section on agency and authorship. In this section, I break down my jazz dance history and lineage, expanding on the dynamic of white male authorship as these black inspired forms moved onto the concert stage.

Jazz dance history was embedded within the technical practice in the dance program at the University at Buffalo. The history and key figures of the form towed the line of a dominant narrative centered on individual, white male choreographers, while alluding to the African American roots of the form. This material was presented and taught by white professors, both male and female. Professor Thomas Ralabate, creator of the jazz dance curriculum at the university, implemented a jazz dance track, which allows students to explore and hone the technical characteristics of African American vernacular movements, such as jazz walks, alongside the artistic signatures of Jack Cole, Bob Fosse, Gus Giordano, Eugene Louis "Luigi" Facciuto, and Matt Mattox, while professors are simultaneously asked to sprinkle their own artistic signatures into the program.

The first section of this thesis explores black dance on white terms, citing the fraught histories of African American cultural and social dance forms. Similarly, the history of jazz

dance styles named after the aforementioned individual choreographers can also be contested. In the following section I build on the Africanist aesthetic theory of Brenda Dixon Gottschild to track the contrasting Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics in my jazz dance lineage and education. Throughout this section I highlight the contrasting aesthetic features in the work of each white, male choreographer based on Gottschild's extensive research.

White, Male Choreographers

Jack Cole, a white gay man, is the man behind the persona of Marilyn Monroe. The importance of Cole's sexuality, not public knowledge of his time, is elided from many biographies, but is hypothesized to be a factor of the tension that followed his artist work (Boross quoted in Darkenwald 2014, 83). This tension is important to note because for Cole this meant conforming to heteronormative culture, similar to the development of jazz dance being accommodated to normative white cultural regulations. Cole, known as the father of theatrical jazz dance, contributed to the world of jazz through the entertainment circuit, such as nightclubs, Broadway, film, and television (Darkenwald, 82). Cole trained with many canonical modern choreographers, including being introduced to the styles of East Indian dance through Ruth St. Denis, which led to him seeking additional training in the authentic Bharata Natyam form with Indian dancer, Uday Shankar and American ethnic dancer, Le Meri (83).

The following description is an example of an Indian inspired mudra, arm isolation of the Cole style taught at the University at Buffalo. The arms are bent and the hands are in front of the dancer's chest, the thumb and middle finger touch, while the other fingers are separated into a petrified position. The fingers begin in the upright position and then quickly shift, with the rotation of the wrist to flip into the same position upside down. The style that Cole eventually

formed includes complex rhythmic patterns to jazz or world music, specific isolations inspired by Bharata Natyam, “a cool, cold stare, intensity in the eyes with a ‘fire in the center’, a dropped center of gravity and horizontal orientation to the floor, warrior-like strength, use of extreme spatial levels, dynamic range (attack,) catlike, slinky sensual movement, an erect torso and regal spine, and supple arm movements initiating from the back and shoulder” (87). Cole drew the Africanist aesthetics of complex rhythmic patterns, the aesthetic of the cool, a dropped center of gravity and horizontal orientation, dynamic range (i.e. ephebism,) and mixed in the Europeanist aesthetic of an erect and regal spine to market his choreographic footprint.

Bob Fosse is well-known for his reign on the Broadway theatrical stage circuit, and his style can be “indisputably identified at a glance” (Mrozowski 2014, 97). The Fosse movement style developed from the limits of his physical facility, adjusting movements to reflect his own strengths and limitations instead of the dancer’s (98). Common gestures of his choreographic style include the jazz hands flash described in the introduction, “a bent knee, splayed fingers, percussive isolations, and sharp, jazzy movements...particularly hats and canes-camouflaged his technical limitations” (98). His style is known from the theatrical circuit, as well as concert stages, as he pushed forward the ways in which dance and theater fused together. These iconic images draw “resonating consequences” on the definition of jazz dance, while Fosse drew on the Africanist aesthetics of percussive isolations and ephebism through sharp movements, commodifying these elements in his codified technique. Fosse created a strong, white, image used to define jazz dance as an entertainment form that overshadows the rest of the jazz dance genre, as exemplified by the persistence of the stereotypical image drawn from his work described in the introduction.

Gus Giordano chose to define himself as an innovator, promoter, and motivator, rather than a teacher (Obey quoted in McStraw 2014, 107). This is important as Giordano felt the dancer was more important than the technique, bringing personhood into the conversation with choreography and technique. He is known for his theatrical jazz dance technique (107). Similar to Cole, Giordano studied with canonical modern dance pioneers such as Katherine Dunham, Hanya Holm, and Alwin Nikolais, all of whom influenced the development of his own form (McStraw, 2014, 105). One key element from his technique that is important to note is “that all movement emanates from the strength and control of the musculature in and around the pelvis (the “center”)(105),” an example of the singular movement center of Europeanist aesthetic form. Other key characteristics of the Giordano technique include a deep pli  , complex and precise rhythms, strong and consistent core, and frequent use of the limbs trained to move in isolation, rotating both in and out (106).

As part of the Giordano technique at the University at Buffalo, the following combination is performed on both right and left sides, creating the flow of a walk progression. The legs are separated and parallel with the body facing the front leg, as the front arm brushes towards the floor, the belly scoops into a contraction and both legs bend. As the arm sweeps upwards, it continues over the head creating an upward “u” curve, while the back arms meet it in an upside-down curve, creating a total “s” shape of the arms. This creates a walk progression because as the arms move to the “s” shape, the back leg steps forward, highlighting the arms rotation and movement into and out of a deep pli  . Giordano was open and supportive to students studying with different choreographers that they believed would make them better, requesting that they then bring back what they learned (107). Giordano “discovered that the physicality produced from within transforms the external, that the soul of the dancer must transcend technique (106),”

allowing dancers and non-dancers alike to experience the joy of dance through his technical aesthetic (106). Giordano jazz dance technique utilizes a deep pli  , complex and precise rhythms, and isolations from Africanist aesthetics to develop his singular, still available today, jazz dance technique.

Eugene Louis Facciuto, known as Luigi in the jazz world, created a classical jazz style, conceptualizing “jazz dance as diverging vernacular and theatrical threads that have shared roots in an Africanist aesthetic (Cohen, 2014, 113).” Characteristics of the Luigi style emphasize a vertical and elongated torso floating over the pli   in the lower extremity, an expanded chest and arm positions specific and relational to classical ballet positions (115). The ballet base of the style is articulated through presentational classroom exercises with weight shifts on turned out elongated legs, leading to the associated name of lyrical jazz dance (115).

The A and B families of Luigi’s *Lurhythmic* classes is taught at the University at Buffalo, The A families are more angular in shape and flow, while the B family are angular, but still lyrical in flow (Ralabate, 2019). These are taught to students as center floor combinations with the legs in first and second ballet, turned out positions for the A family progression and in a “classic” jazz beveled position, transfer of weight, creating a walking in place feeling for the B family. Luigi defined his technique through three specific principals: a pressing down between the waist and iliac crests creating a lifted torso, “feeling from the inside,” and the joy of movement and internal motivations inspiring one to dance (117). Through the development of his technique he also created a definitive book, legacy of a codified and disseminatable technique that influenced many dancers (118). Luigi’s technique follows Africanist and Europeanist opposing aesthetics, such as a pli   in the lower, a pressing down in the pelvis to create an oppositional pull and lift in the torso, classical ballet arm port de bras, and turned out legs.

The movement style of Matt Mattox was performed mostly within commercial theater, impacting Hollywood dance films and Broadway musicals (Boross, 2014, 119). Mattox studied for seven years with Jack Cole but defines his approach as “free style” differing from both vernacular and commercial jazz (119). The definition of “free style” for Mattox is that for a dancer to express a thought in the form of dance, they must make a decision, drawing from their “range of dance techniques to formulate the proper method of conveying that expression (122).” Mattox began teaching the Cole style in New York City, then moved on to open his own school and begin inventing his own series of exercises. These exercises trained the dancer with the qualities and precision of ballet with isolation movements that were characteristic of the jazz dance forms of the times (120-122).

The following description is one of the port de bras learned at the University at Buffalo, illustrates the integration of ballet and jazz within the Mattox technique. The arms extend from the waist, vertically above the head as the wrists move from internal to external rotation so that the palms end facing away from each other. The head follows the arms, as the legs step together into a beveled position, described in the introduction as a “classic” jazz dance staple. The shoulders twist, in isolation, as one leg steps forward into a turned-out lunge, as the palms tear down through the space, pulling the arms in front and behind the torso carving into the sagittal plane. The head turns to a ballet *épaulement*, where the corresponding ear pulls towards the front arm while the opposing cheek reaches as if receiving a kiss. A Mattox class progresses through a ballet-based structure beginning at center floor instead of at the barre (123). The exercises are performed in “parallel hip alignment, a plié level, and peppered with body isolations of the head, shoulders, rib cage, and hips. Arm port de bras of a jazz-ballet mixture are integrated with leg exercises, challenging the dancer’s mastery of polycentric and polyrhythmic

complexity (123).” Mattox incorporates Africanist aesthetics of the plié level, body isolations, polycentric and polyrhythmic movements, while incorporating European theatrical leg positions (i.e. the bevel) and balletic precision to create a free jazz form that he defines as his own.

Through this brief historical lineage, one can track African American vernacular characteristics across these individual styles, including: the commonality of all including a plié or low, dropped center of gravity; the cool, cold stare of Cole; the isolations of Giordano technique; and mastery of polycentrism and polyrhythmic complexity in Mattox’s approach. In juxtaposition, the Europeanist aesthetics include a commonality across the techniques of a regal spine, or vertical, elongated torso (especially in the Fosse aesthetic); one center of movement, the pelvis in Giordano technique; classical ballet arm positions and turned out, elongated legs in Luigi; and the incorporation of ballet into the entire technique of Mattox. These characteristics are European-derived according to Gottschild’s aesthetic theory. The presence of these European characteristics has historically been used to legitimize Africanist dance forms, highlighting the whitewashed form through a singular, white, male choreographer lens. As these forms are continually taught through this whitewashed, singular choreographer lens, the “resonating consequences” underline the form, minimizing black ownership of black cultural forms.

The Africanist aesthetics are hidden within the authorship of these dominant white, male choreographers that are some of the “popular” names within the jazz dance world. As these authors have created codified techniques, they have also expanded the form into different avenues. These white, male choreographer’s jazz forms have been categorized into different styles: Cole defined as theatrical; Fosse as Broadway theatrical; Giordano as theatrical; Luigi as classical; and Matt Mattox as commercial. These authors found a way to expand the definition

of the jazz dance genre, while also stamping it with their seal of approval. It can be argued that these white jazz dance styles “legitimized” the black form on white terms, by paving the way onto “high art” concert stages, in contrast to the previous popular “lowbrow” venues of ragtime, vaudeville and entertainment. This legitimization allowed the white choreographers to commodify and capitalize on the work of African American performers and dances without giving credit, in part because they added ample Europeanist, white aesthetics to camouflage jazz dance’s relation to, or more precisely roots in, black America.

Vernacular Influences

HISTORICAL MOVEMENT AND MUSICAL STYLE GRIDS

1800s – 1920s Fold, Spirituals, Brass Band, Blues Ragtime, Dixie

Ballin’ the Jack	Cross Over	Grind
Black Bottom	Eagle Rock	Hornpipe
Boogie	Eating Cherries	Itch
Buck and Wing	Essence	Jazz and Flash Steps
Bullfrog Hop	Falling Off the Log	Jazzbo Glide
Buzz	Foxtrot	Jig
Buzzard Lope	Freeze	Jump Back Jack
Cagney	French Twist	Jumping Jim Crow
Cakewalk	Gaze the Fog	Killing Time
Castle Walk	Get It On	Knee Jazz
Charleston	Grapevine	Legomania
Clog	Rubberlegs	Tack Annie
Let It Roll	Sand	Tango
Lindy – Syncopated Box	Scare Crow	Texas Tommy
Mess Around		

Figure 2: Historical Movement Chart by Ralabate

Although the work of these choreographers constitutes a majority of the jazz dance curriculum at Buffalo, the program also includes aspects of African American vernacular jazz dance, alongside its fraught history. Tom Ralabate breaks down these vernacular jazz dance aspects in his “Historical Movement Chart,” of historical movements and musical styles for jazz dance at specific time periods throughout American history (Ralabate 2014, 69).

This movement chart informs the jazz walk study for the dance program at the University. These jazz walks, embedded within the curriculum, include the signature moves previously defined by Anthea Kraut in relation to authorship and copyright. Some of the walks included in the curriculum from the chart are: Texas Tommy, Lindy, funk walks, Cuban walks, Shortie George, truckin', Suzie Q, killing time, freeze, gaze the fog, picking and eating cherries, Black Bottom, spank the baby, sugar and stash.

Nadine George Graves touches on a few of these vernacular walks in her article on ragtime dance. She discusses how these moves transformed into having “their own names, though they were most popular as a variation or breakaway in other dances” (Graves 2009, 58). The breakaway is specific to social partner dancing from which one partner breaks away from the “closed partnering position to an open position that allowed for acrobatics, antics, improvisations, and showing off” (58). Some examples of these breakaway and variation moves were integral to my jazz dance education and these moves could be used to both break away and come back to one’s partner. Truckin’ is a rhythmic shuffle, slight, quick hopping in which the index finger is pointing upwards and shaking simultaneously (58). The Black Bottom moved from solo dance to popular breakaway, consisting of a “slapping of the buttocks while hopping forward and backward (58).” The Suzie Q moves from pigeon-toed to a rotated foot with the heel digging into the ground, while the toes are lifted, the opposite foot steps behind the heel and this causes a twisting of the hips and upper torso. Although these walks have their own names, they were expanded and imitated on for performers to make their own, causing the blurring of copyright that Kraut expresses through the dynamic of signature steps discussed in the agency and authorship section. Without a singular historical lineage of these vernacular movements, these forms are often noted in their relationship to specific choreographies from which they

became popularized, creating a sound connection to the singular performer or choreographer instead of the varied social dance histories.

Other jazz walks can be traced to other historical time periods, such as plantation dances, discussed in the previous history section. Ralabate notes that these vintage walks are associated with early vernacular movement and music theater. Vintage jazz walks include gaze the fog, picking cherries, and eating cherries. Gaze the fog is embodied with bent knees and planted feet, taking two quick steps to plant them again in a wide stance. An arm raises with wrist flexed as if saying “stop” and pulls from in front of the face continuing to extend open to the side, all as if you were clearing the fog to gaze through it. Another example of this vernacular aesthetic is seen within the Buzzard Lope: bent legged, feet connected to the ground, bent waist and focus downward, as if you were a Buzzard investigating prey (Georgia, 2009). These walks associated and varied from their roots on the plantation and in social settings, without concrete connection to their creator. Graves discusses this sort of disputed and unclear authorship exemplified by the Texas Tommy, mentioned above, and tracks some of the various origin stories from the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco to its appearance in the Broadway musical *The Darktown Follies* and beyond (58). The authorship of vernacular dance forms is often murky, especially with the varying styles and forms of “one” step due to the challenge and imitative history that disseminated these moves from one stage to another. The various histories surrounding signature moves provides an ongoing narrative related to the dissemination and expansion of the jazz dance form, as each individual adds their own flair and persona into their own variation of a specific step. The difficulty of tracking a specific creator is exemplified in Graves historical research of the Texas Tommy, making these forms public domain to be built upon and used by many without repercussions. These multifaceted variations on form distorts claims of authorship

that allow the singular, white male choreographer to commodify different aspects and variations in the creation of their own codified formal techniques. This highlights the importance of singular choreographer as author for the narrative timeline of history, while simultaneously underpinning the development and dissemination that allowed these vernacular forms to move throughout American society.

The dominant narratives of jazz dance history are of the singular, white male choreographer, while the collective labor of black innovators in the form is often lost. Authorship is most often attributed to the choreographers that have been discussed above: Cole, Fosse, Giordano, Luigi, and Mattox. They are the key faces behind the stereotypical moves that pop up when discussing jazz dance in casual conversation, such as those described in the introduction.

Women's Choreographic Labor

In addition to race, there is also a gendered dimension to these male choreographers' power to commodify and codify the form. Their techniques were embodied by female counterparts, or "dancing divas" as Dustyn Matincich calls these choreographers' muses in her research of female Broadway dancers (Martincich, 2018). Focusing on three twentieth-century, virtuosic women, Martincich argues that these dancing divas were not only the muse of their choreographers, but also were collaborators, translators, and artists in their own right, who brought the choreography to life. Of particular interest within her argument is the dancing body of Gwen Verdon relational to the choreography of Jack Cole and Bob Fosse. Martincich contends that the Fosse technique can only be defined in regard to Verdon's execution.

Verdon becomes the ideal definition of the Fosse technique. Meanwhile, even as her image is glorified, her embodied labor is subverted within the codification of the form under his name. Fosse takes authorship while Verdon's body stands as the example for authentic form, similar to the African American forms, both viewed as subordinate to the dominant, white male, as they moved onto white entertainment stages. White men are given credit as intellectual innovators, while women and black people's contributions to the form are strictly associated with embodying the form. Due to the Cartesian divide between mind/body in Western thought, which operates on a gendered male/female dichotomous register, these innovators are rarely understood as creators in their own right. Martincich explains that the female counterparts "served as translators of a choreographer's iconic style; and all inserted their voices into the creative process and helped develop" their signature roles (80). Similar to signature steps, these signature roles live as an extension of the original performer and the performers that follow into these roles take note of how they were constructed for the specific diva. By accounting for the specific diva and her performance, Martincich asserts a claim of embodied authorship for the female counterpart. She explains that "the work of the choreographer often eclipses the virtuosity of the dancer's body," calling into question again whose labor matters (81). Although women face a less violent history than African Americans, the labor of the inferior counterpart for both is often written out of the mainstream history. The name Fosse becomes the highlight of a conversation, whereas Verdon becomes known and popularized only through Fosse's work. Martincich argues otherwise, proposing that Verdon created a persona trademarking sexual dynamism with physical comedy, while simultaneously playing into the male gaze and subverting expectation of what is considered sexy (83). What made Verdon the authentic Fosse dancer was that through this persona she created a signature style which effectually "made Fosse's movements her own" (84).

Similar to Kraut's concept of signature steps, Verdon brought life to the choreographic form Fosse envisioned, through the incorporation and distinction of her signature style. Both Fosse and Verdon's "collaborative work" shifted "pointed feet to flexed, with turned-in toes, jutted-out hips, slouched shoulder, head cocked to the side, and a slack-jawed expression," all definitive factors of the specific and quirky Fosse style (85). Verdon's embodiment translated "his choreographic vision for other dancers and putting movement into understandable physical and verbal language" for them as well (87). Fosse's vision and name authored the style while Verdon's execution established "a lasting 'technique'" that dancers of today continue to learn.

Although Verdon is the genius behind the man, Fosse is the choreographic name that rings throughout history. In this example of contested authorship, it is a woman whose labor is subordinated. Although she is white, she is still not the dominant male figure through whom history is narrated. Similar to Baker, Verdon was forced to work within tight spaces of dominant stipulations, erased in the history of authorship within the formalization and legitimization of jazz dance forms. Based on the historical erasure of creators from the dominant narrative of authorship discussed above, the following embodied research section offers insight into reclamation and agency of jazz dance choreography.

A DERIVATIVE GENEALOGY: EMBODIED RESEARCH

Through embodied research, I began to grapple with my history and lineage in relation to the greater whole of the jazz dance world and became the way that my written research began to seep into the studio with me. Luigi's *Vogue* (1992) choreography is taught to the highest level of jazz classes, at the University at Buffalo. The first eight measures of this choreography are presented as notated from the original and the rest has been created by Ralabate based on his earlier work and studies with Luigi (Ralabate, 2020). The original choreography was created as a combination of both the A and B families, specific arm positions, of *Lurhythmics* in a creative flow. When learning the original choreography of *Vogue* by Luigi, Ralabate explains he "was aware of the 1990 American documentary film, *Paris is Burning*," about the emergence of voguing as a dance form within the queer African American and Latinx ballroom scene. He "was also very active in the [New York City] gay club trance culture and integrated with African American, Latino, white, gay, straight, lesbian, queer and transgender communities" (Ralabate, 2020). He notes that he does not recall Luigi referencing this culture when presenting the combination, but he does recall that Madonna references were made. As a white woman, Madonna's use, references, representations, and popularization of vogue—an art form created by disenfranchised gender nonconforming people of color—echo the dynamic of white male choreographers' commodification of African American forms, both in her song and Luigi's choreography to the song.

The first sixteen counts of *Vogue* recreated in 2016 on the senior class of dancers at the University at Buffalo, as choreographed by Luigi and disseminated through Thomas Ralabate. starts with the strike of a beat and the entire company in unison. With the legs separated, the

weight is sitting into the left hip and the rib cage is pulling upwards following the high diagonal reach of the focus. The left hand is situated with the palm on the hip bone and the right is placed above the eyebrow, similar to a salute, only the palm is facing towards the audience. The music continues and the right hand alone corresponds to a beat in the music as it unsticks from the forehead, from which it continues seamlessly to descend until it reaches second position, open to the side. The left extends to match the right and both palms turn open to the face the audience. The dancers continue to move in a chorus line fashion: frontal, rolling their shoulders and crossing one foot in front of the other, ending the phrase with the strike of a pose. Facing the diagonal one foot is in front of the other, like a kickstand, the elbows pull backwards on their prospective sides and the wrists are flexed, as if the hands are sitting on a table. One knee bends as the bodily length disintegrates through a contraction, while the head looks to the stomach. The arms invert creating hooks in front of the upper body and the dancers appear as if they are shielding their faces from a punch to the gut. Almost immediately the contraction releases and the spine and knees unravel. The weight shifts forward and the arms open to the side with the wrists flexed upwards as if pushing the walls away.

This choreography, and other adagios that were learned through my time at the University at Buffalo, have influenced my choreographic thesis work this year. As Luigi explains in the text “Jazz Dance Today,” “when I dance, I’m telling you about myself” (Facciuto, 1994, xvi). The choreographic process has been an internal embodiment of grappling with the stereotypes and fraught histories of jazz dance. I have questioned myself countless times, asking if I, a white woman, have the right to perform jazz dance as a contested African/American form. These internal conversations always concluded with a “yes, and yet,” in the process of calling into the studio all the choreographers and knowledge (both embodied and academic) that I have

been in contact and conversation with. Beginning with Luigi and Ralabate, the form of this work has grown from the fall semester as a solo, to a three-prong performance, entitled “Patent Pending: Copyright in Motion Yours/Mine,” to finish as an edited video version. I have encountered questions about stereotypes circulating in the form, which in turn have opened a plethora of other questions regarding; the feminized persona; simplified notions of jazz as flashy entertainment; conventional costuming or lack thereof; the tie of movement to sound score; and the use of a normalized proscenium stage space.

Noted jazz dance choreographer Luigi writes, “jazz must always be an honest expression of a musical soul. Look into your living soul and dance with it...simply, honestly, truly” (Facciuto, 1994, xvi). The impetus for the choreographic process this year began with Luigi’s *Luhrythmics* port de bras, both A and B families, and the choreography of *Vogue* as established by both Luigi and Ralabate. What was churning and ready to come out was the powerful, jazz performer that lived and thrived alongside music, but was simultaneously not a façade. This work has created an opening for me as performer and choreographer to allow the internal to become external. Beginning with movement from choreographic work that was necessary to master as an undergraduate at Buffalo, I allowed the movement to flow from an improvisational base.

Throughout the fall semester solo work, I made decisions to perform in the lobby, focusing on the idea of sharing a space with the audience, creating a spectator-performer connection and social space that was imperative to the initial Africanist dissemination and production of jazz dance. I also chose to perform with headphones in, removing an important relation to jazz dance for the viewer. Jazz dance, historically performed with jazz music, is tied to music, and musicality at its core. Therefore, the decision to remove this allowed me to

question if jazz dance is legible as such without the music to define it. Ultimately, the choice to remove the music only occurs for a portion of the performance. Near the end of the piece, the same track that had been in my headphones begins to bleed into the lobby space. As I exit, the music remains. I seek to invite the audience into a space of reminiscence and connection to what they had witnessed and even participated in.

Performance and COVID-19

As I begin to flesh out the choreographic process of “Patent Pending,” it is important to comment briefly as the following subsections journal two performance journeys. Each following section begins with the embodied research in live rehearsals as the spring semester began. The final paragraph of each discusses how the performance and choreography was then rediscovered, curated and altered to fit into a new virtual space and recorded medium. This thesis and performance were recalculated in lieu of the pandemic, COVID-19. This pandemic displaced performers from each other and school, necessitating a new performance medium to be developed to replace what would have been the live performance. As the next sections record this process, jazz dance as a wide ranging and ever-evolving form, has taken a new course of action as the work was transformed and translated from an original, live, work based on togetherness into a wide-spread, version focusing on the COVID-19 motto “alone, but together.”

Section 1: Flash Mob, “Patent Pending”

Throughout the spring semester I allowed myself more space to do what I had been dreaming about. Choreographer and professor Juliana May asked us to dream, asking us: if we could do whatever that dream was, no matter how outrageous, what would it be? For me this

began as a seed of creating a flash mob, a moment in time where dancers and spectators could become one, sharing and filling a social space with entertainment and enjoyment. Technical aspects of movement did not play a part of this. Instead, this section led with joy and fun. I worked to create a space sans judgement, which allowed room for each “performer,” planted among the audience members, to bring themselves into the process. This section is performed in the same lobby space of my fall semester solo, while audience is waiting to enter the performance stage space. They are unaware of the performers are planted throughout the space.

For this section, I hoped to include the entertainment and social experience that is integral to the history of jazz dance, while also creating a moment of shock for the audience. The music begins with “You Can’t Stop the Beat” from *Hairspray* (2007), morphing into “Pump Up the Jam” (1989), a “Do Re Mi Fa – Remix” (2013), and culminating again in “You Can’t Stop the Beat.” My goal in utilizing popular music from both pop culture and theatrical performance was to create an open space for audience to move and sing alongside the choreographed performers, allowing the performers space to laugh and smile without forcing it. The movement I choreographed was similar to the popular musical scores. I utilized “iconic” jazz dance movements, such as jazz squares, step ball changes, grapevines and three step turns with claps, while giving as much historical information and copyright available when presenting the choreography. This included who I learned it from, singular, white choreographers, while also working on historicizing the initial roots of the forms. I also included and manipulated popular and easy-to-spot dances such as the *Soulja Boy* (2007), the *Macarena* (1996), and the *Cotton Eye Joe* (1992). These provided more context for jazz within a context of black social dance. Some of the performers were aware of these dances and this context, while its inclusion also created conversations around the variety that is found within these unofficial codified choreographies.

These dances that I incorporated are not dissimilar to the inclusion of vernacular jazz walks in the Buffalo curriculum discussed in the previous section. Through the imitation and variation based on geography and time periods of performers, I found a variety in the form of each choreography. With reference back to the jazz dance history tree, one can find that these party dances are found within the intertwined branches of jazz dance history, yet many would overlook these dance crazes as part of the overarching genre. The flash mob culminates in a group pose, and, as the mob disperses, performers help move the audience into the performance stage space, where the remainder of the piece takes place.

This section was reworked into the virtual space rather seamlessly. Through the platform Zoom I was able to cultivate a sense of togetherness for the performers while taking into account the harsh reality that each individual had been displaced due to the pandemic, COVID-19. The choreography was adapted to become more frontal and camera facing. I was also able to manipulate the camera angle and scale to draw viewer focus to feet, upper body, and even specific performers to choreograph the camera work and create movement within a 2D space. The main goal of this section, even as it was adapted into the virtual space, was to create a purely enjoyable entertainment section with a strong tie to the musical score and audience, without requiring audience participation.

Section 2: A Chorus Line, “Copyright in Motion”

The second section of the piece was the last section that I created. It was choreographed in relation to the consistent theatrical references of Fosse’s jazz dance and the commodified form found in *A Chorus Line*, which continually came to the forefront in casual conversation and post-showing conferences. In these conversations around the piece, certain common ideas about jazz

were referenced, from high kicks to chorus line hard hits, mostly with a giggling undertone. In post-showing, or works in process, conferences, which happened every other week with faculty members, these ideas appeared through questions and expectations regarding costuming—such as French cut, or hip bone baring, leotards and heeled character shoes—but also regarding the choreography that had been presented. Questions in these sessions implied that it was necessary to include these stereotypes, such as: Why aren't you wearing a French cut leotard with character heels? Why aren't you doing jazz hands and flash movements? These reflections forced me to look at how to claim agency as choreographer and performer without reifying the commodified female body and muse persona. Additionally, the link between what would end up being the first and third sections was too drastic and jarring to create connection or commentary on jazz dance for viewers. From these conversations I decided to choreograph a section incorporating and underscoring the stereotypes that I was questioning through my research, while also foregrounding them in the choreographic process. This section includes five dancers, who are onstage as the audience enters into their seats from the flash mob.

A singular figure sits in a chair upstage center, in a bowler hat, black heeled character shoes, wine colored high cut leggings, and a sparkling top. The bowler hat, an iconic prop and costume of Fosse performers, and the black heeled character shoes bring the strong Broadway entertainer and performer persona into the space. Her arms reach from her waist, stretching to their full length, until they reach the hat. With articulated fingers, her hands finally meet the brim of the hat while her elbows remain vertically lifted. As her body begins to face the left, her left leg reaches long backwards and the right bends, resting on the top of the toe. Once in a sideways position, her left arm reaches up away from the hat while the right grabs the back of the chair. As she arches backwards with the drop of her arm, confetti showers from above,

referencing the iconic scene of the jazz film *Flashdance* (1983), while the theatrical opening score of *A Chorus Line* (2006) plays. At the same time as the confetti falls, the other four dancers emerge facing away from the audience as the curtain opens. The four women of the chorus wear steel grey high cut leggings, wine colored turtleneck sleeveless tops, and are barefoot. From this theatrical beginning moment, the section moves into a sharp, clear cut chorus line of women.

Choreographically, I utilized poses and movements of theater jazz, including jazz hands, the shimmy, hitch-kicks, and poses from the *Vogue* choreography of Luigi and Ralabate. I used the well-known musical scores from *A Chorus Line* (2006) *Chicago* (2002) to drive the choreography of this section, hitting the bumps in the instrumentalization and vocalizations of performers, as if choreographing the dance corps of a musical. As the score of the “Opening: I Hope I Get It” transforms into the song “One” also from *A Chorus Line* (2006), the bowler hat, originally worn by me as the soloist, is passed down the chorus line of women. This chorus line inspired section ends with a choreographed kick line. The dancers stand with arms linked behind one another and they turn to face the audience. As they step forward, their heads face the same direction as their upper bodies lean away. Their feet, initially pointing sharply on the left diagonal switch to the right diagonal, making their head and upper body shift in perfect unison as well. This choreography (a direct derivative of the well-known chorus girl finale) culminates with three quick steps, a pas de bourrée, and then they begin kicking at ninety degrees. The section ends with the dancers breaking from the strictures of the chorus line and beginning to expand the stage as the song “All that Jazz” from *Chicago* (2002) plays. As quickly as the dancers begin to expand the space, they return to the centrally located chair where they strike a pose with the music’s final bump.

This section took a toll as the work was adapted into the virtual platform. In order to distinguish this section from the flash mob, a Zoom meeting or filming of the performers in their own spaces, did not make sense. Choreographically, I decided to work the very beginning of the section with the singular female, iconic and stereotypical costumed persona as the introduction of the entire work. As the video begins, this feminine chorus girl persona is constructed, in order to invite the audience into the performer as individual outside of the choreography. This constructed persona carries the audience into the chorus line section. This decision came as I began and continued to think about reclaiming stereotypes, of the female muses like Verdon, the undermining of primitivity by Baker, and the Cartesian view of male as knowledge producer and choreographer. The choreography remained consistent from live to video performance, although it moved into a solo form. This solo form created a dissonance when placed within the sound score and construct of the entire piece. By moving into a recorded medium, I had the ability to utilize superimposition, overlaying one video with another. The addition of superimposition creates a new world for the choreography and performer, while making the solo now a duet. The chorus girl persona deconstructs as the video moves into the following solo section. The driving motivation behind this section was to give agency to the female performer and choreographer in her repurposing of the “resonating consequences” and stereotypes for her own redefinition, even as the choreography moved into the video format.

Section 3: Solo, “Yours / Mine”

The four chorus women slowly begin to clear the space, each carrying a different article of the iconic jazz paraphernalia—the black heeled character shoes, the bowler hat and the chair—all the while, they smile for the audience as they leave the soloist in a barren stage space.

This is a moment when the female performers are confronting the audience, looking and performing for them, while they are stripping the solo figure of these iconic jazz articles, leaving her to her own devices. The music is loud and jarring, the rock music of Nirvana, while the theatrical Broadway scores still resonate within the space, yet the performers are walking slow and sensual against the driving beat of the musical score.

The main goal of this section was to create a choreographic experience that was not overpowered by the musical score or audience expectation of choreographic conventions, while moving to give agency to the female performers as they work with these apparent and popular stereotypes to subvert audience expectation. Through the incorporation of the conventional material—the chorus girls removing the iconic paraphernalia, the slow and sensual audience mugging performance—the soloist is left, barefoot and alone on the stage calling this version of jazz dance into conversation with the recognizable and stereotypical form that came before.

This final section is an extension from my solo lobby performance of the fall semester, briefly touched on at the beginning of this section. I began choreographing from the movement curated during the fall semester, which utilized the *Lurhythmic* arm positions of Luigi as a movement base, adding variations in tempo and style. These variations created a rise and fall to the movement, generating an internal rhythm without a musical score attached. I then began to incorporate more of the *Vogue* choreography by Luigi and Ralabate, allowing the movement to flow from one step into another connecting and weaving the two choreographies, fall and spring, together. I allowed myself space to move and connect what felt necessary, reconfiguring the choreography of my jazz dance education, of the previously addressed white choreographers and vernacular jazz “walks,” playing with the original movement phrases from the fall iteration.

Throughout the initial showing and feedback process, I continued to show this section without music. This raised many questions and observations that were not brought up in the lobby, such as: the effect of the movement without sound, the development of a movement rhythm, and recognizable jazz dance connotations (i.e. jazz hands and flick kicks.) From these observations I decided that it was necessary to move into my solo with a sound score that was not as inviting as the flash mob and not the music of iconic musical theater dance.

In my education with Ralabate, the jazz adagios that we learned and classes we took were performed to various genres of music, not solely jazz music. I allowed this idea, of the ability to connect jazz dance to many types of music, to drive my choreographic process without committing to a sound score until my final showing. Ultimately, I settled on “Smells Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana (1991) as the musical score for my solo. The song begins as the chorus line clears the space and continues through a majority of the solo. The solo rises and falls, connecting and driving alongside the musical score.

Within the choreographic process, I allowed myself space to play with the rhythm and tempo of the choreography to be determined throughout the performance instead of setting it specifically beforehand. The allowance for improvisational play within the performance felt necessary in relation to the importance of rhythmic play and improvisation that is an important proponent in African and African American diasporic dance forms. I created anchors in the movement and music, allowing myself and viewers concrete movements to latch onto. One of these moments is a slow reaching moment, one arm pulls the upper body towards the floor, while the other accentuates the curves of the feminine body as it pulls towards the ceiling. The hands are relaxed until with the length between body and arms is at maximum, two strong jazz hands develop creating a picturesque moment in conversation with the iconic jazz hand image. With

this moment in time, the song fades and the movement unapologetically continues. The choreography builds in energetics, all in the wake of a reverberating silence. The energy and power of all that had taken place in the performance space and the lobby led to the climax of this moment for the singular female body, claiming agency by determining her own movements on her own terms within the proscenium stage space. The lights begin to fade on the dancer, who tirelessly continues amid the silence and darkness.

This section was necessary to carry into the virtual platform as it was the basis of my research and developed throughout the spring to really bring my definition of jazz dance into an embodied space. What became apparent early on in the transformation process, was the importance of clearing a space for the singular performer and how to develop a new transition from one section to another to create a similar juxtaposition and resonating dissonance between musical and movement scores. This section remained intact choreographically and performatively while moving in the greater timeline of the entire video. The importance of the choreography, juxtaposition, resonating dissonance and musical scores remained at the forefront of the transformation process, carrying through to the new media platform.

Moving from Live to Video

As the piece moved into the video medium, the greater timeline of the work changed. Instead of remaining in the format discussed above, it shifted drastically to create new tensions, builds, and transitions. In its final form, the chorus girl persona begins getting ready for a performance. Her hair is pulled back into a sleek French twist. She puts on her earrings, makeup and character heels, leading the viewer into the superimposed duet, chorus line section. As this section ends, the chorus girl person returns, superimposed over the transition of chorus line to the

solo section. This time, the chorus girl is deconstructing her persona. She removes her makeup, takes down and messes up her hair, and replaces character heels with converse sneakers, leading the viewer into the solo section. From the picturesque jazz hand reach described above, the viewer is moved through a microscopic lens into another world, where the zoom flash mob happens. The flash mob itself is cut shorter in order to continue the build of the musical score and trajectory of entire work. The flash mob finishes on a singular dancer, surrounded by a screen of other empty rooms, Flossing (a new Tik Tok dance craze,) and freestyling. As she leaves the camera, the microscopic lens effect closes as the final moments of the Hairspray sound score permeates the chorus line setting the viewer returns to. Upon arrival in this setting again, the viewer is left with only the chair and hat. As the sound score culminates, the hat is slowly blown off the chair and the chorus girl returns alone. She slowly closes the chair and exits into a blackout.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: CURATED NOT CHOREOGRAPHED

Throughout the entirety of the embodied research process I grappled with questions around choreography versus curation. I decided to utilize iconic choreographies that are notable and known to other dancers, movements that serve as connotations and spark references that are available in different ways for the audience and viewer to discover. With these choreographic choices in my research process, I made the decision to distance myself from the term choreographer. I made this decision in part due to the research of the historical problems that are shadow the term; the argument that the singular, white male is the laborer and sole creator that the research of this thesis has reviewed. I discovered that, in order to gain agency as a female performer, it was necessary to face the stereotypes head on by using them to subvert viewer expectation, following the examples illustrated historically by Baker and Verdon.

I also discovered that racial and historical stereotypes are deeply integrated into American culture. As one white woman, I cannot bear the weight of white guilt for all the appropriation and exploitation in the history of jazz dance, but I can add to the knowledge surrounding the form in an attempt to rectify the narratives that seek to smooth it over. This research is subjective, and its impact will be partially based on the viewer of the choreographic work. As research on jazz dance continues, in both embodied and textual forms, I recommend the incorporation of historical knowledge into the jazz choreographic process along with a discussion of choreographer versus curator of movement. This research has explored the contested term of choreographer, as a term historically enabling the dispossession of African American cultural forms and contributions of women. I suggest that turning to the idea of curation, as a selection and organization of choreographies of dance, can create a discussion

around ownership and choreography. I offer the idea for dance makers to reassess the use of the term choreographer as they continue to create work that has roots in forms that are historically written out of the dance history tree.

I have found, within this process, that the embodied informs the written research and the written research inevitably finds its way into the embodied process. The joy of the embodied process, alongside claiming a space for jazz dance in an experimental choreographic arena, reminds me that there is a potential for this form to teach more than the movement might initially suggest. I have experienced the stereotyping, firsthand, and I know that my choreographic and written research is only skimming the surface as it begins to explore ways to educate others on the profound knowledge offered in the jazz dance genre.

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