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Audience Engagement in San Francisco's Contemporary Dance Scene: Forging
Connections Through Food

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Melissa Hudson Bell

June 2014

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Chairperson

Dr. Anthea Kraut

Dr. Lynette Hunter

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The Dissertation of Melissa Hudson Bell is approved by:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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children, both Sami and our new Baby Bell whose little dancing feet I can just this week feel fluttering around inside.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Audience Engagement in San Francisco's Contemporary Dance Scene: Forging
Connections Through Food

by

Melissa Hudson Bell

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies
University of California, Riverside, June 2014
Dr. Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Chairperson

This dissertation looks at critical interventions made by select San Francisco bay area choreographers and dance programmers interested in altering spectatorial norms for contemporary dance. Those selected have strategically employed food themes and materials in and as performance, simultaneously tapping into existing foodie ideology and redressing concerns about dwindling audiences for live dance performance in the twenty-first century. I argue that such efforts 1) bring to light subsumed race, class, and gender politics embedded in the trend towards “audience engagement,” espoused by arts funders and dance makers alike as a necessary intervention for the survival of contemporary dance; and 2) open up discursive and experiential realms of possibility by favoring material, associative exchange, (re)awakening synesthetic sensory-perceptive capacities, inviting spectators to refigure themselves as co-creators in performance, and providing opportunities to reckon with exoticizing desires to enrich one's own culture by consuming another's.

In theoretically grouping these choreographies together I illustrate a spectrum of responses that clarify how food-oriented performance gatherings can operate not only as strategies for altering audience relations, but as sites for alternative knowledge production and fruitful commensal exchange. Such research draws from and intervenes in the overlapping fields of food studies, American studies, and performance and dance studies. This analysis is uniquely positioned amongst other work addressing the interstices between food and performance in its emphasis explicitly on Western concert dance. It also contributes significantly to the archives of an often overlooked San Francisco bay area dance community.

Methodologically I take a dance studies approach, generating choreographic analyses enabled through interviews with choreographers and dance programmers, my own work as witness/participant in the selected events, and archival research into feminist theories of performativity, anthropologies of the senses, contemporary theories of embodiment and select dance and theatre scholarship from the 1800s to the present. Throughout I prioritize the embodied experience of spectatorship, highlighting how contemporary corporeality is shaped by shifting inclusions and exclusions of various peoples and practices, capitalist economic models, the pervasive reach of readily-available digitized media, and both dominant and alternative systems of knowledge production.

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Introduction

“If I don’t call you by 8:30pm come and find me” I say, only half-jokingly, to my boyfriend before giving him an address and hanging up the phone. I am mildly worried about my personal safety. I am with Alice, my very adventurous dancer friend, and we are wandering up and down a street in North Oakland, CA looking for the basement apartment to which we have been invited for dinner... by a stranger named Jeremy that Alice met at the bookstore on Telegraph Avenue that afternoon. Alice is one of those people who makes friends everywhere she goes, so the fact of the invitation is not surprising. The particulars, however, have got me raising my eyebrows with a bit of concern. The proposal is that we join a dinner party that is being cooked by Jeremy’s brother Joe, a former professional chef at the much acclaimed San Francisco restaurant Mecca. The dinner is a four-course gourmet meal, offered for the price of \$20, and hosted at their residence on the street we are currently wandering in the twilight of dusk on an May night in 2004. Being a lover of good food and adventure I am intrigued, being a young woman unfamiliar with the Oakland neighborhood, I am worried that I may foolishly be putting my life on the line for the promise of my first beef wellington.

We have been told the atmosphere is “casual” but casual does not prepare me for set up that I find once the apartment has been located. We are greeted at the gate by the Birkenstock sandal wearing Jeremy and his exuberant but obedient pet pitbull, Shinobi. The pair lead us along the side of the house, past the garbage bins, and into a greenly-

overgrown backyard strewn with fruit and magnolia trees, dilapidated furniture, and a small side table with a couple of candles. As Jeremy holds open the door for us, he informs us we are “just in time for the first course,” which we find is currently being served to a cramped room full of people. All eyes are on us as we enter, sidle along the right side of the room, and deposit ourselves amongst the others on floor cushions arranged around makeshift tables made from reclaimed doors on cinder blocks. We have just begun what would be an unforgettable night.

As the night went on we learned that we were part of an experiment called the Ghetto Gourmet, a roaming underground supper club which, a short two years later, found itself featured on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle. The article identified the Ghetto Gourmet as part of a cultural trend in the bay area and beyond that savors good “foodie” food while bucking the “establishment” - both the establishment of fancy, formal restaurants and the industrialized food system that sometimes spawns them - in favor of creating an environment for strangers to connect.¹ As the organization grew the dinners vastly varied, being held not only in basement apartments but in the homes of the wealthy on Nob Hill, in shuttered cafes in tiny coastal towns, on farmland in Sonoma County, in trendy work/live art studios in San Francisco’s mission district, and in industrial lofts in Oakland, to name just a few. Different chefs rotated in and out, and

¹ Janine DeFao, “Guerrilla Gourmet: guided by word-of-mouth, diners flock to unlicensed restaurants for excellent food in secret settings” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, January 22, 2006).

Townsend experimented with themed nights like a naked sushi party and a blindfolded dinner in the dark.

Dinner was always accompanied by some sort of performance - occasionally this was no more than Shinobi the dog performing his tricks, but more often than not it included performances by local artists - comedians, dancers, woodcutters, opera singers, blues players, beatboxers, and more. The lineup and the landscape meant that each dinner was a distinct experience. The promise the dinner events held, however, remained the same. The Ghetto Gourmet was designed so that those gathered could meet some new folks, eat some good food, and experience the work of some cool artists.

The Ghetto Gourmet was only operational about four years. In that span of time, however, they put on some 350 events, serving over 8,000 distinct diners in the greater bay area, New York, and Los Angeles.² Diners were often invited to dinner by word of mouth, as we were on that first evening. Townsend also posted events on Craigslist and eventually created a searchable website. He reached out to food bloggers, artists, activists, chefs and techies who sparked his interest. People showed up, and they kept showing up - illustrating a long standing bay area ethos of adventure, experimentation, and innovation - made possible in post postmodern era via the use of the internet.

I went on to become rather intimately involved with the Ghetto Gourmet's dealings. My boyfriend (now husband) and I developed a great friendship with Townsend

² Demographic details for these diners are not available. The numbers are rough estimates offered by Townsend in discussion with the author, Oct 30, 2013.

and we were subsequently recruited to perform, serve food, and otherwise help propagate the grassroots events. I collaborated with Townsend to present my first full-length professional dance concert in San Francisco in 2006. Through my associations with the Ghetto Gourmet I met a lot of folks, ate a lot of good food, and experienced the work of some cool artists, just as promised. I also came to identify myself as part of an emerging cultural subset, the expression of which was distinctly “bay area” though evidence of other similar events emerging around the globe in the past fifteen years point to a larger trend that extends well beyond the cool reaches of the coastal California fog.³

This bay area subculture is shaped by a number of factors that are simultaneously ideological, ecological, political, historical, material, imagined, and otherwise constituted in and of our bodies. Underlying these various factors is a rather fundamental, and yet fundamentally complicated, desire to “connect” to or “engage” with others. Such a desire to connect is revealed through research as both old and new, both intra and interpersonally generated. The nagging, amorphous, polyvalent nature of this desire renders it a compelling site for critical inquiry, accessible from various theoretical frames. Scholars like Elspeth Probyn (2000), Peter Scholliers (2001), and Deborah Lupton (1996) touch on how food sharing does and doesn’t address this desire to connect, noting how our relationships to food and to each other through food are shapers of and shaped by

³ For more information on underground supper clubs in the twenty-first century see Jenn Garbee, *Secret Suppers: Rogue Chefs and Underground Restaurants in Warehouses, Townhouses, Open Fields & Everywhere in Between*, (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2010).

urban industrialization and global digitization.⁴ Feminist food studies scholars like Avakian and Haber (2005) point to how valuing and cultivating connections with others becomes a resistant strategy working against hegemonic conceptions of an autonomous self propelled by patriarchy.⁵ These desires for connection may also be construed as responses born of the dominance of middle and upper class whiteness in America - namely the ways in which whiteness is shaped as by a legacy of Protestant asceticism and Cartesian duality touting the division of a rational “mind” as separate and in control of a desirous “body.”

In what follows, I examine how a bay area specific strand of this (white Western affluent urbanite) desire to connect is influencing the terrain of contemporary concert dance and vice versa. As an aspiring dance studies scholar, my analysis is driven by a conviction that dance practices, performances, and programming reveal and conceal vital information about a given sociocultural context, and that any given sociocultural context is, in turn, choreographed by these same choices. Through close analysis of select bay area performance examples that creatively incorporate food into spaces designated for

⁴ Elspeth Probyn, *Carnal Appetite: FoodSexIdentities*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2000); Peter Scholliers, editor, *Food, Drink, and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001); Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self*, (London: Sage Publications, 2000). Also, Scholar Paul Levinson remarks upon how interaction with virtual media influences this desire stating, “Virtual media do not undermine our interest in real-life communication but instead, stoke it. What we lack in all the online communication is the physical body -- that we can reach out and touch, or at least see in full dimension. This makes real contact between people all the more special.” Paul Levinson, “Engaging All Five Senses” *New York Times* The Opinion Pages: Room for Debate, August 18, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/08/18/did-youtube-kill-performance-art/performance-art-engages-all-five-senses?emc=eta1>

⁵ Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, introduction to *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

dance performances, I illuminate some of the ways that bay area dance makers and presenters are addressing and redressing this desire for “connection” while at the same time tackling a persistent problem plaguing concert dance - that of further expanding and engaging its audience base. The selected works raise the following questions: how are food themes and materials being variously choreographed into San Francisco bay area concert dance events in the twenty-first century? How does the historical framework and popular perception of Western concert dance both constrain and bolster such efforts? How might these choreographies highlight the intersubjectivity of those present, destabilizing fixed notions of embodied “presence” and illuminating the racist, classist, and sexist legacies that continue to shape concert dance aesthetics, economics, and spectatorial norms? Finally, how are these effects especially shaping and shaped by the technologically savvy, politically liberal, vibrantly multi-ethnic, do-it-yourself ecosphere that reigns in the bay area?

Close analysis of the particular choreographies I have chosen to analyze reveals how creative energy is being spent not just on making virtuosic, innovative, or dazzling dances, but on encouraging audience members to experience art differently, in a manner that is grounded in physical sensation and community engagement. Such efforts, I argue, position Western concert dance as a vital player in a twenty-first century cultural landscape (prevalent in San Francisco but also beyond) that values and queries “participation,” “investigation,” and “experimentation.”

Peering through the lens of food-oriented performance events brings to light subsumed race, class, and gender politics embedded in twenty-first century movements towards “audience engagement” within American contemporary dance in general, and the San Francisco bay area contemporary dance community specifically. When food’s performative potentiality is tapped it can invoke past relationships to foods and bodies and suggest alternatives, (re)awaken synesthetic sensory-perceptive capacities that have been hierarchically segmented, implicate and invite would be spectators to recognize themselves as co-creators in performance, and provide opportunities to reckon with exoticizing desires to consume other cultures and histories in order to enrich one’s (primarily, in the context of concert dance, white, educated, liberal) own.

The incorporation of food is but one of many strategic choreographic options being employed by dance makers and presenters who are engaged in a revivifying campaign with regards to concert dance. Part of what makes food’s incorporation in concert dance settings significant is that it is in fact a re-incorporation and re-imagination of practices that were historically excluded from the terrain of concert dance due to cultural biases (against, for example, the ritual enactments of food/dance mergings amongst Indigenous populations), class distinctions (the bourgeois body of “ideal” concert dance goers being cultivated as refined and decorous rather than ravenous), and

patriarchal prioritization of critical distance over shared intimacy.⁶ Food's reintroduction into concert dance spaces opens up what "Western concert dance" encompasses, and reveals interest in querying audience/performer dynamics in a twenty-first century context. What performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to as food's "dynamic and unstable character," or food studies scholar Arjun Appadurai refers to as food's "semiotic virtuosity" and "capacity to mobilize strong emotions" acts upon these concert dance-going bay area bodies in ways that concretize and expand upon the work that dance is always already doing.⁷ Aspects of this affective work analyzed in the performance examples that follow revolve around the various ways in which the selected food/dance interplays emphasize the intersubjectivity, or "connectedness" to others and the material environment that spectatorship enables but historically deemphasizes in the "high" arts. The reintroduction of food in concert dance spaces allows for opportunities for those present to be "present" differently.

METHODOLOGY

No longer limited to dances that take place in concert halls or are set to concert music, I recognize that the general descriptor of "Western concert dance" now refers to a

⁶ See Browner and Kasson respectively, for further exploration into Indigenous dances that involve food and the construction of bourgeois "mannered" bodies. Tara Browner *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*. (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1990).

⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Playing to the Senses: Food as Performance Medium" in *Performance Research: On Cooking* edited by Richard Gough 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 11; Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia," *American Ethnologist* (University of Pennsylvania 8, no. 3, 1981), 494.

wide swath of practices unified by the intention of presenting “dance as art.” Dance as an autonomous art form was initially historicized as an offshoot of Western “high” art theatrical presentation, a popular perception with which those working within the genre must still contend. Despite what Kirstein (1935) historicizes as (Western) theatrical dance’s distinctly “folksy” and even food-centric roots, concert dance in its nascent phase was more or less devoid of food materials and themes.⁸ Dance studies scholarship produced in the past several decades (cited throughout this dissertation) has revealed the ways in which this historicization has occluded the manner in which the genre, from its inception, has been constituted as vitally via the contributions of non-white artists and aesthetic principles as it has through those majorily white artists who have been canonized as the founders and leaders of the genre, namely Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, Martha Graham and others.⁹

⁸ Lincoln Kirstein, *Dance: A Short History of Classical Theatrical Dancing*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1935), 80-150. In Kirstein’s text he explores how dance was historically intertwined with food in medieval pageantry as well as in French and Italian noble courts in the fifteenth century and beyond. In fact, Kirstein claims that the first ballet was performed by dancers between the courses of a large wedding feast for the Milanese Duke in 1489 (133). Of these event Selma Jeanne Cohen notes “the serving of roast lamb was heralded by a portrayal of the legend of Jason and the Golden Fleece; the course of wild boar was introduced by Atlanta, while the fruits were accompanied by the appearance of Pomona,” all danced offerings. Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present, Second Edition* (Princeton Book Company: Princeton, NJ, 1992, first edition 1974), 6.

⁹ In fact, it has been shown that some of these canonized artists cannibalized non-white practices, presenting them in concert dance settings as “original” choreography inspired by “others” who’s work never gets credited or otherwise respectfully incorporated. For analysis of this process with regard to Africanist aesthetics and African-American contributions see Brenda Dixon-Gottschild *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger Press, 1996); Thomas DeFrantz *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race In Motion* (Minneapolis, MN and London: Minnesota University Press, 2004). For analysis of indigenous contemporary dance practices and the ways in which Graham and Shawn appropriated Indigenous dances and practices see Jacqueline Shea Murphy *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*, (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2007).

Throughout the twentieth century dance makers and presenters busied themselves with explorations into what “dance as art” could express, encompass, denounce, imagine, and enact. Participating in this process has necessitated continually questioning the parameters of the genre, a process that continues today. Each of the choreographies analyzed herein participates in this tradition - the artists have all trained in and chosen to present work that employs certain theatrical standards ascribed to “concert” dance while challenging others. These standards include but are not limited to the following: advertising an event that requires a ticket purchase and offers a gathering at a specific time and place, employing dramatic use of lights and sound, positioning audience members as witnesses to danced expressions, setting dancing bodies in motion as bearers of meaning. Some of the choreographers have staged their dances in theaters meant to accommodate concert dance, others have not. Some have incorporated song and spoken text, others have not. Most, with the exception of Halprin’s 1960s postmodern work, are “contemporary” dance offerings.¹⁰ All of them have chosen to explore how the incorporation of food into the realm of concert dance foregrounds and helps us rethink our subjective, habituated responses, represented in the instances that follow through remembered and present-time interactions with food themes and materials. In doing so,

¹⁰ I use the term “contemporary concert dance” to loosely refer to dance that is part of the modern and postmodern dance lineage - and therefore, generally speaking, made as “art,” somewhat exploratory or experimental in nature, and often a blend of various forms and techniques including those of major schools of modern dance (Horton, Limon, Graham technique, etc) as well as those of other dance genres (hip-hop, ballet, salsa, Afro-Cuban). While it does not necessarily take place in a “concert” setting (indeed, the breakaway from the concert hall was one of the major thrusts of the postmodern dance movement), those in attendance are generally under the standards of behavior that one would expect to find in a such a setting. For more information on the current debate around the label of “contemporary” dance, see the discussion on the “Dance Advantage” website at <http://danceadvantage.net/2011/07/19/contemporary-confusion/>

these artists make sensible the complexities of otherwise subsumed behaviors, borrowings, presumptions, and desires that each individual brings into the spaces in which they publicly gather.

I anchor my study in dance studies theorizations generated in the last twenty years by those like Susan Leigh Foster and Andre Lepecki who, through discussions of corporeality, site, choreography, presence and spectatorship, dance with the complicated cultural and political realities of a contemporary concert dance performance experience. I am equally reliant on those like Susan Manning, Thomas DeFrantz, and Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, among others, who attend especially to how Western conceptualizations of these phenomena are deeply enmeshed in African and African American aesthetics and influences, despite the ways in which concert dance has been historicized as “white” and “Western.”¹¹ Feminist theories of performativity, phenomenological, psychological and contemporary philosophical theories of embodiment, scholars grappling with embodied responses to the industrialized food system, as well as select histories of Western theatrical performance from the mid 1800’s to the present all round out the theoretical frame from which I operate as a witness/participant/researcher. Finally, I rely on information gleaned from interviews with choreographers and arts programmers, as well

¹¹ While the racial politics of African diasporic presence in concert dance is not the only available or relevant frame for analyzing the case studies I have selected, I emphasize this scholarly work because of the overt ways in which the case studies draw forth questions about how this African and African American aesthetics and practices are and aren’t supported, critiqued, and incorporated into the concert dance “ecosystem” of the San Francisco bay area. This comes up especially in the case study centralized in chapter three, that of African-American choreographer Amara Tabor-Smith’s *Our Daily Bread* dance performances (CounterPULSE, San Francisco, CA, April 2011 and November 2012).

as my own experience as a dancer, choreographer, and dance concert attendee in the San Francisco bay area from 2003 to the present.

These various theoretical and artistic players have informed my selection and subsequent analysis of certain San Francisco bay area performance examples, most occurring between 2008-2013, as case studies of choreographies that actively challenge a legacy of passive, critical spectatorship that the label of concert dance commonly conjures. Instead, these choreographies are constructed around ideals of more relational, participatory performance experiences. My use of the term “choreographies” here is perhaps most closely akin to Susan Leigh Foster’s (2011) discussion of the term, which opens it up to practices that extend well beyond a given stage, encompassing various efforts aimed at coordinating and/or framing moving and still bodies through time and space.¹² I employ words like “relational” and “participatory” throughout this dissertation with an acknowledgment of how they, too, register a broad range of tactics for moving and being in responsive relationship with others.

My exposure to certain dance practices has dramatically shaped what is included and occluded in this necessarily limited study. As a professional dancer I have trained extensively in various modern, postmodern, and contemporary dance contexts, including release technique, contact improvisation, and styles developed by Graham, Horton, and Limon inspired teachers. Alongside these I also studied more explicitly Africanist dance

¹² Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia In Performance*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2011), 2-6.

forms like hip-hop, jazz dance, and Afro-Haitian dance. My decision to pursue these avenues of practice, to dance for bay area dance companies performing in these styles, and eventually to start my own contemporary dance company with movement inspired by these experiences positioned me within a certain community of artists, exposing me to certain dance practices and not others.

These dance experiences led to certain aesthetic predilections which greatly influenced the works I have chosen to feature herein. In fact, my curiosity about dances that incorporated food grew from my own company's mission to develop performance pieces around food themes and materials. As a choreographer, I employed food in dance as an avenue of access to "experimental" dance. The dancers and I explored our own relationships to food, hoping that our own food play would provide a sort of stronghold to which audience members could readily enter into meaning making associations. We often shared food at these events, an intentional move made in the hopes of cultivating a warm, interactive atmosphere where people felt "fed" and got curious about what contemporary dance could generate.

As I have developed this study, I have become aware of the ways in which my presumptions of food as a novel inclusion in concert dance were shaped by my limited practice of dancing in and around a selection of dance forms that continued to insist on relatively white Western modern and postmodern practices of spectatorship. Through my examination of the ways in which food is and isn't operating in the case studies I have included I have become aware of different Indigenous, African, and South Asian dance

traditions that incorporate food, not solely in “folk” or “ritual” settings like cultural celebrations or religious ceremonies, but on and around concert dance stages. For example, in an informal interview (2010) with one of my former PhD classmates, Prema Thiagarajan, I learned that when her Malaysia based dance company Premalayaa Performing Arts performs in Malaysia they provide spectators with food, often prepared and served by her friends and relatives. She noted that this practice was the norm within her arts community, and that recent controversy had centered around the choices some of her peers had made to charge people money for the food they ate (a practice she said she did not care for). As Manning, Shea Murphy, DeFrantz and others have pointed out, the formation of “Western” dance practices have been popularly historicized in such a way as to erase or occlude the contributions of ethnic minorities. Part of what this dissertation tracks is my own rising awareness of how this historical exclusion of “ethnic traditions” and valorization of “white achievements” has similarly shaped food’s relative exclusion and seeming ill-fit within the space of concert dance.

The remainder of this introduction further details my theoretical framework and provides a short sketch of each of four chapters. I consider the influence of bay area “foodism” upon the performance contexts I examine, particularly drawing upon the work of anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis. I identify these various performance examples as sites for what Seremetakis calls “commensal exchange,” and the desire to connect as a

desire for “commensality.”¹³ These opportunities for commensal experiences are couched within specific performance contexts that constitute what I am calling offerings of “cultural nourishment.”

FOOD + IE/ISM

In 1971 Alice Waters opened her restaurant Chez Panisse on Shattuck Avenue in North Berkeley. The restaurant was inspired by her travels in Paris, France, where fresh, local food was cooked in a way that made the ingredients shine rather than masking or muddling their distinct flavors. Additionally, Waters wanted to cultivate a place where her friends and acquaintances would feel welcome to eat leisurely, enjoying one another’s company. She envisioned a restaurant that mirrored her French experiences of “market cooking.” This was cooking that a French housewife in a village might engage in, a sort of improvisatory style of cooking based on what was available and appealing at the day’s market.¹⁴ The text *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution* tells the story of the restaurant’s development from the point of view of a biographer, Thomas McNamee. In McNamee’s account, Waters is painted as a complicated but irresistible visionary, a tour

¹³ C. Nadia Seremetakis, “The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 9, no 2 (Fall 1993): 14. Article first published online : 8 JAN 2008, DOI: 10.1525/var.1993.9.2.2; C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, edited by C. Nadia Seremetakis (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), vii-44. Seremetakis defines commensality not just by the literal meaning of eating and drinking together, but as a “reflexive cultural institution” where social knowledges articulated via material culture and circulated and recirculated via collective memory are formed.

¹⁴ Thomas McNamee, *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), p586-587 of 6363 kindle edition.

de force boldly occupying the forefront of a movement that has come to be known as the “foodie” movement.

The origins of the term “foodie” are murky, but Peter Scholliers (2001) notes how the term was used to describe a certain set of urbanites in the 1980s and 1990s, namely “well-to-do epicureans whose main activity involves eating at fashionable restaurants.”¹⁵ As the movement has developed the term has come to denote something different, at least in the bay area, where foodie mentality is largely shaped by a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos and “farm-to-plate ideology.”¹⁶ This ideology proposes that people resist and respond to the industrialized food system by becoming active participants in “alternative agrifood networks.”¹⁷ The bay area has proven an especially potent place for such proposals, surrounded as it is by agricultural, maricultural, and vinicultural abundance and diversity. Foodism aligns with the left-leaning political stance, cosmopolitanism, and relative affluence bestowed upon residents of the bay area in popular imagination. As a result, many foodie-inspired organizations have flourished here, beginning in the 1970s with Waters and others like her, and blossoming in the twenty-first century.

¹⁵ Peter Scholliers, “Meals, Food Narratives and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present,” in *Food, Drink, and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*, ed Peter Scholliers (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2001), 7.

¹⁶ The use of the term “farm-to-plate ideology” here refers to the ways in which chefs, restauranteurs, scholars and others have encouraged consumers to become active, knowledgeable participants in alternative agrifood networks. These networks reconnect consumers and producers, so that producers may be educated about the foods they buy and ingest - where the food comes from, how it is grown and distributed, the potential benefits and ramifications of their food purchasing choices. For more on this ideology, see Lynn Walter “Slow Food and Home Cooking: Toward a Relational Aesthetic of Food and Relational Ethic of Home,” *ProVisions*, no.1, 2009: 11-13.

¹⁷ Walter, “Slow Food,” 13.

For example, in addition to the now famous Chez Panisse restaurant, Waters and others started The Edible Schoolyard Project and its affiliate programs in 1999.¹⁸ These programs provide a template for urban gardening as a teaching tool and school lunch resource for children throughout the nation. In addition to the Ghetto Gourmet there have been other locally based supper clubs like The Canvas Underground (a Ghetto Gourmet offshoot) and Out Standing In The Field (operational from 1999 to the present according to its website).¹⁹ Oakland's annual Eat Real Festival attracts thousands eager to dabble in foodie activities offered (everything from whole hog butchering classes to yeast cultivation for bread baking to urban gardening is on the docket alongside requests for signatures on petitions for legislation demanding more humane farming techniques and long lines of chic food trucks peddling portable fare).²⁰ Forage SF, a "locavore"²¹ organization, gathers foodies interested in bucking the industrialized food system (though at \$85-\$125 for a many-coursed meal there seems to be no interest in bucking elite social dining practices). Forage SF invites strangers to gather to discuss local ecosystems while dining on food foraged in the area's hills, woods, fields, and even residential backyards.

¹⁸ For more information see the "Edible Schoolyard" website, accessed Feb 5, 2014, <http://edibleschoolyard.org>

¹⁹ More information on these is available at their respective websites: "Outstanding in the Field," accessed Feb 14, 2014, <http://outstandinginthefield.com/about>; "Canvas Underground," <http://canvasunderground.wordpress.com>.

²⁰ For more information see the "Eat Real" website, accessed Feb 5, 2014, <http://eatrealfest.com>.

²¹ The organization uses the term "locavore" to refer to those who primarily eat food that comes from within a 25 mile radius of one's location. Locavores are fueled by a concern about the industrialized food system and the manner in which it taxes the planet and disconnects people from the sources of their food.

Larger organizations like Slow Food Bay Area (a subset of Slow Food International) host a variety of events each month for members, many of whom gather again and again throughout the year. While some of these gatherings seem to focus primarily on the filling of members' bellies with expensive six course meals, others whet members' appetites for responsible civil action by creatively promoting select food justice issues (in the form of film screenings, participatory lecture/demonstrations, and sit-ins supporting healthier school lunches, for example).

Some of these organizations lean in specifically artistic ways. Chez Panisse's former staff members, Stacie Pierce, Jerome Waag, and Sam White began San Francisco's *OPENrestaurant* in 2008. This collective of food professionals produce food-oriented events outside of restaurant settings, a move they claim "turns the restaurant, its codes and architecture, into a medium for artistic expression which is made available to cooks, farmers, artists and activists as a way to explore issues around food and society."²² In 2009 they were commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, subsequently creating an event called *OPENfuture*, in which the carcass of an locally sourced cow, brought to the museum by bicycle, was performatively butchered into "edible sculptures" for spectators' enjoyment by a team of female butchers.²³ One of their

²² For more information see the "Open Restaurant" website, accessed September 5, 2011, <http://openrestaurant.org/>. A group with similar aims produces an annual Umami Festival in New York City. Umami's mission is to "open avenues of connection" between artists and food professionals with their biennial food and art festival designed "as a meeting ground to people who use food as a medium and who present their audience with a multi-sensory experience in the dining room, or gallery space." Information available at "Umami Festival," accessed Sept 5, 2011, <http://umamifestival.com/>.

²³ For more information see the San Francisco "MoMA" website, <http://www.sfmoma.org/events/1461>

first events in 2008, *OPENsoil*, featured diners enjoying a three course meal with overt connections to the farms, specifically the soil, where the food came from, all in the presence of non-dining spectators seated in bleachers.

Just as these bay area food professionals have ventured into the “art” world, so have select dance artists in the bay area and beyond begun to incorporate food materials and food-related subjects into their art. Since the inception of this project I have received notifications for dance performances at farmers markets and restaurants, gatherings that involve a lunch created around a performance score, Facebook invites for dances “made to order” off of a menu, and invitations to screenings of a dance video staged in a kitchen, to name just a few.²⁴ I propose that these various activities and organizations both construct and assuage the aforementioned desire for connection of a certain sort, a desire that, in concert with the work of Seremetakis, I identify as “commensal desire.”

COMMENSAL EXCHANGE, COMMENSAL DESIRE

Commensality is a term that surfaces primarily in anthropological and sociological scholarship in the twentieth century, generally defined as the sharing of food and drink. Many of the foundational food studies scholars like Mary Douglas, Claude

²⁴ Dance Performances: Gretchen Garnett and Dancers, *Sunrise Awakening*, Heart of the City Famers’ Market, San Francisco, (June 12, 2011), RAWdance *A Public Affair* at Orson Restaurant in San Francisco (October 2011) and Amara Tabor-Smith’s Our Daily Bread Project events detailed in chapter three; “Body-Nature: In the Spirit of Lawrence Halprin” a workshop at Anna Halprin’s Tamalpa Institute on May 30, 2011; Kingsley Irons’ ongoing dance film project entitled *Dances Made to Order* (<https://dancesmadetoorder.com/>) as well as the Los Angeles dance showcase, *Anatomy Riot #34: Dances Made To Order* (Oct 12, 2009); and finally a screening of *Domestic Animals* by EmSpace Dance discussed further in chapter two, respectively.

Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Sidney Mintz analyze the organizational structures and political pathways that shape and are shaped by commensal practices formulated in line with a given group's religious affiliations, ecological location, and/or ideological purview.²⁵ More recently, anthropologists like David Sutton and Seremetakis have analyzed commensal practices as junctures where social knowledges are created, recreated and disseminated through the interactive exchange of thoughts, feelings, memories, associations, and actions that coalesce in and through contact with material culture. Analysis of such practices foregrounds bodies in action as meaning makers, and sensory-perceptive pathways as vital generators and perpetuators of what Sutton calls "historical consciousness."²⁶

Seremetakis defines commensality thus,

Commensality can be defined as the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling. Historical consciousness and other forms of social knowledge are created and then replicated in time and space through commensal ethics and exchange. Here each sense witnesses and records the commensal history of the others. In this type of exchange, history, knowledge, feeling and the senses become embedded in material culture and its components: specific artifacts, places and performances.²⁷

²⁵ These authors are all contributors (among others) listed in the section called "Foundations" of the *Food and Culture Reader (Second Edition)*, ed by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York and London: Routledge, 1998).

²⁶ David Sutton, *Remembrances of Repasts: An Anthology of Food and Memory* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001). Both Sutton and Scholliers (2001) lay out a brief chronological history of the development of food studies that is useful to considering relevant trends and contributions.

²⁷ Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses," 14.

In this statement, Seremetakis asserts the work of the material interactions that take place in environments, like those examined in this dissertation, where the sensory stimulating and memory evoking nature of food sharing serve as inroads to different sorts of social knowledges.²⁸ Seremetakis asserts that gathering people around food opens space for exchange, reflection, and attention to bodily actions and interactions. These interactions are not merely functional, nor are they solely about hospitality and/or “tradition.”

Food’s materiality acts upon bodies in at least two identifiable ways. It’s physical presence - the smells, sounds, sights, and tastes of food - stimulate biological responses such as salivating or stomach turning. Part of the food materials, once ingested, actually become part of the constitution of the human body, participating in cycles of creation, growth, decimation and elimination that are ongoing throughout human physiology. Beyond food’s role as a source of sustenance it often operates a source of pleasure, and sometimes as a source of sickness. These experiences in turn create strong mnemonic associations, powerful memories that are built upon throughout a person’s lifetime, changing as further food experiences coalesce, contradict, and/or compound the memory of past food-oriented experiences.

I propose that these exchanges - between foodstuffs and bodies as well as between bodies gathered around foodstuffs - manifest uniquely when they align with the already-

²⁸ I use the term “food sharing” here broadly, not limiting it to acts of preparing and eating food together, but also to the sharing of food that happens more presentationally or ideologically via stories told about food, the use of food in performance as a device for considering ideas that extend beyond the actual food material.

in-motion material work of Western contemporary dance performance. This is work that queries the ontological and epistemological through gesture, action, stillness, sound, witness, and the overt organization of bodies in time and space. Dance performances offer up choreographies that resonate variously with each participant's distinct cultural context, physical presence, and active attentiveness. They are spaces that honor multiple interpretations and reactions, spaces that utilize theatrical devices (lights, sounds, stages) or found environments (whether grand, glum, or gritty) to attune the sensory-perceptive capacities of our bodies in particular ways.

Unlike with food, dance's material effects have been commonly called into question. Dance is often cited as an "ephemeral" art form because its articulation occurs in bodies rather than primarily in a textual or pictographic "artifact" which can be easily bought, sold, analyzed, and/or memorialized. Therefore, the materiality of dance performance relies heavily upon evocations, symbolic meanings, and mnemonic associations that arise through danced action and interaction. The performance of these actions and interactions are informed by rigorous training - which, in some instances, train bodies to articulate danced material in ways that produce visceral a/effects in witnessing bodies. Certain dance techniques, like those proposed by Anna Halprin whose methods are explored in chapter two, foster mindful ways of being-in-engagement with one another and the world that shape not only how dancers approach their work, but how such work is perceived and received by audiences. These methods foreground audience members' materiality - by which I mean their bodily being-in-the-world and their

embodied and in motion ways of experiencing the world - making evident how their respective and interrelated materiality implicates them as participants in a danced event.

These dance methodologies prioritize attentiveness to what select feminist scholars have referred to as “situated knowledges” as strategies for developing new insight not only in performance settings, but in daily life. Donna Haraway proposes the creation of situated knowledge as a form of feminist “objectivity,” a way of gazing into/ upon the world that resists both hegemonic, authoritative claims and relativism. This is accomplished through attendance to “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” that “privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing.”²⁹ These knowledges are process-oriented, they emerge through engaged practice. These are the sorts of knowledges Seremetakis proposes are enabled through commensality, and it is these sorts of knowledges that I propose here occur in select food-oriented performance situations. When food is choreographed into the arts it has the potential to become what Lynette Hunter terms an already in motion “situated textuality,” the means through which these alternative, situated knowledges materialize.³⁰

While the space between dance and food may initially seem vast, parallels exist between the way that dance and food operate culturally. Both food studies and dance

²⁹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 575-599. Accessed at <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0046-3663%28198823%2914%3A3%3C575%3ASKTSQI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>.” (584-585).

³⁰ Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing, and the Arts*, (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1999), 86-161.

studies are interested in the social formation of bodily ideology and in the cultural significance of action/motion/embodiment (often as a counter to the valorization of speech/text/idea). Both bodies dancing and food presented or ingested generally represent something “greater than the sum of their parts.” Our interaction with both is effected by our own histories and biases, as well as the circumstances around their presentation. Long after the dance or dish has disappeared it resonates in bodies, albeit in different ways in different contexts. Both food and dance have the potential to destabilize presumably fixed categories that delineate what lies within or apart from ourselves.

Two texts, compiled in the late nineties, reveal some of the overlapping methodologies and concerns of food and performance. The first is a special edition of the *Performance Research* journal entitled *On Cooking*, which represents a collection of creative and scholarly submissions from those working in food and performance. Its presence, as well as the presence of *The Senses in Performance*, which is edited by dance studies scholars Sally Banes and Andre Lepecki, make evident a critical mass of performance scholars and artists interested in exploring the connections between the two seemingly unrelated fields as the turn of the century approached.³¹ I could not help but notice that even in texts such as these there are relatively few references to *dance*

³¹ Richard Gough, ed, *Performance Research: On Cooking* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999); Sally Banes and Andre Lepecki, eds, *The Senses In Performance*, (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2007).

performance, while examples from performance art and theater abound.³² More recently Alexandra Alisauskas and Paula Pinto edited a special edition the electronic journal *Invisible Culture* called *Aesthetes and Eaters - Food and the Arts* which follows suit - offering analysis of several food-oriented performance events, none of which are primarily dance offerings.³³ This is an omission that I hope this dissertation begins to remedy.

Theater studies scholar Barabara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett chronicles a number of different food oriented performances in articles included in aforementioned texts. These two historiographies - one focused mainly on contemporary performance art that utilizes food as a performance medium (1999) and the other a chronological tracing of food as performance and food in performance (2007) lay foundational work for the dialectic and performative tensions that food's intermingling with bodies in performance engenders.

³² Food in feminist performance art, in contrast, has been extensively theorized. Feminist performance artists like Karen Finley and Carolee Schneeman responded to sexism and hegemony by subverting expected relationships between food and female bodies. In Finley's "We Keep Our Victims Ready" (1990) she slathers her body in sticky substances like yams, chocolate and honey while speaking out against patriarchal hegemony; in Schneeman's "Meat Joy" (1964) she cavorts with others, nearly naked, amongst massive quantities of bloody, raw meat. Finley, Karen. "We Keep Our Victims Ready" (1990) and "Shut Up and Love Me" (2001). Carolee Schneeman, "Meat Joy" (1964). Performances. British performance artist Bobby Baker has a celebrated career in food-related art including life-size cakes of her family members and performances in her kitchen in which she hurls pears and peels carrots. Spanish performance artist Alicia Rios "has been employing food to reinterpret our surroundings," most famously by creating edible cities for international food-art festivals. The group FLUXUS, founded in the 1960s, created performance scores emphasizing the art of the everyday with pieces like "Make a Salad" which Alison Knowles has re-staged at the Tate Modern and on New York's High Line for Earth Day in 2012. Information about Bobby Baker is derived from her website <http://www.bobbybakersdailylife.com/> as well as the text compiled by Baker and Michelle Barrett entitled *Bobby Baker: redeeming features of daily life*, (2007). Information on Alicia Rios can be found at her website <http://www.alicia-rios.com/>; and info on FLUXUS' "Make a Salad" was found at <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/thelongweekend2008/14708.htm> and <http://www.thehighline.org/high-line-art-performance-alison-knowles-make-a-salad>

³³ Alexandra Alisauskas and Paula Pinto, editors, *Invisible Culture: Aesthetes and Eaters - Food and the Arts* 14 (2010). Accessed April 2, 2014 online at http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_14/contents.html

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work suggests that food and theatre have always in some way been conjoined, and she leads readers through this marriage of food and theater in different settings from the fifteenth century European "opera gastronomica" banquets to Jewish religious rites, from the court at Versailles to *repas en ambigu* ("an elaborate formal composition of dishes laid out in a room... fashionable in the late seventeenth century") as a one-act play.³⁴ Additionally, she considers certain restaurants which "heighten the already staged nature of public eating places," showcasing artisanal techniques, display kitchens, exhibition cooking and connoisseurship. She cites the Blue Man Group's slinging of food objects, likened to a sort of regression, that entertains and evokes audiences into action via the unpredictable use of predictable (daily use) objects. She notes groups like Bread and Puppet and Great Small Works who hand out food in performances, hoping to generate a sense of conviviality amongst audience members, all as examples of different ways of conceiving performance and food as intertwined. In the latter essay, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett historicizes the nineteenth century process of separating different elements of performance (music, dance, theater) into distinct genres, each with their own "distinct protocols for structuring attention and perception." In this she notes how, especially with the advent of Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook* (1932), food too becomes situated in some people's imaginary as its own "sense-specific art." However, in all of this, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's only nod to dance specifically is that of

³⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Playing to the Senses," 3-12. Here Kirshenblatt-Gimblett indicates the parallels between contemporary food and art-making practices by outlining what, in her definition, it means "to perform" (the tri-fold "to do," "to behave," and "to show").

the tradition of Follies girls in the early twentieth century as representations of food objects such as potatoes, chocolates, cocktails, etc., which illustrates what she sees as a conflation of food and sex and its related figuration of women as consumables (especially true of dancing women, who's bodies are on display presumably, in a patriarchal Western paradigm, for others' enjoyment or "enlightenment").³⁵

There is evidence of occasional dabbling into food scenes and food themes in early concert dance, such as the staged feasts in select ballets like *Romeo and Juliet*, and certainly in *The Nutcracker*. Ruth St. Denis' "Oriental" dancing gestured towards the food offerings from Hindu rituals, as in her 1906 *Radha* solo, labeled a "dance for the five senses." *Radha* and other St. Denis solos were performed early on in salon settings, matinees where those gathered would share tea in addition to watching the performance.³⁶ However, these dances featured foodstuffs rather conventionally - either as necessary to a narrative, or as part of the "scenery" in which the dance takes place - at least compared to later experimentations undertaken by postmodern choreographers and performance artists alike.

I began to wonder if perhaps Western notions of dancers' bodies (as derived from stereotypes of the ethereal ballerina as well as the anorexic, cigarette-smoking modern dancer) were simply preventing dances that incorporated food from being made. In response, I undertook an informal investigation, scouring New York Times reviews,

³⁵ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Playing to the Senses," 82.

³⁶ Linda J. Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 51-52.

blogs, and dance texts for evidence of food-dance mergings within modern and contemporary practices. I solicited memories and anecdotes from friends and colleagues, inquiring about their experiences with food-oriented dance works from the late 1960s to the present. In gathering this information, I have found that food materials and themes are being used in abundance, and in vastly varied ways - not just to reflect on (masculine) desire or on the (perhaps overdone) topic of eating disorders and distorted female body image.

There are several dance companies who utilize foods as active props that further development of character relationships (Joe Goode Performance Group, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange). This is part of a long standing tradition within the theater of realism, though such props were scarcely seen in concert dance until their radical reintroduction (along with the reintroduction of text, sung and spoken) in the postmodern era. Often these props are included for their semiotic potential, with some employing them to make political statements about consumer culture (Mary Armentrout Dance Theatre *traffic (or thoughts while eating Ritz crackers)* (2008), FACT/SF *Consumption Series* (2010), Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company *Blind Date* (2005)).

Food has been incorporated to query embodied experiences of domesticity, women's work, and notions of home in diaspora. For example Jane Weiner's Texan HopeStone Dance Company used food to highlight women's work and the effects of food television in *Feather Wait* (2000), *Cooking Show* (2002), and *Lemonade Stand* (2010). As explored in chapter two of this dissertation, both EmSpace Dance's *Domestic Animals #2*

and Anna Halprin's *Apartment 6* query the performative potential of positioning dance directly in domestic settings (one in an actual home, the other on a stage dressed up as a home). Bebe Miller Company's *Landing/Place* (2005), Roger Sinha's *Burning Skin* (1992), and Shobhana Jeyasingh's *Just Add Water* (2009) all explore how food practices intermingle with the cultivation of diasporic cultural memory and identity formation.

Blondell Cummings' seminal work *Chicken Soup* (1981) invokes images of decaying food in relation to experiences of loss while Japanese artists Yubiwa Hotel actually made such decaying foods present in their work *Nowhere Girls episode 2 poison* (2002). Yubiwa Hotel's performances, along with those of Ireland's Fabulous Beast Dance Company, among others, tapped into the performative potential of food's material presence on stage to stimulate the senses of viewers and to highlight the grotesque nature of the body. Nederlands Dans Theatre explored the highly codified world of Baroque era mannerings of bodies, and the parodic ruptures such codes engendered through interactions with food in a comedic cross-dressing high-speed duet video that was embedded in their larger stage work entitled *BIRTH-DAY* (2001).

Some choreographers include food sharing as a means of incorporating specific cultural practices in contemporary performances. Alutiiq choreographer Tanya Lukin-Linklater shared berries as part of her site specific piece *Women and Water* (2006). Foster analyzed this inclusion as but one example of Lukin-Linklater's embodiment of indigenous aesthetics and practices. African-American choreographer Amara Tabor-Smith, whose *Our Daily Bread Project* is the subject of chapter three of this dissertation,

also offered berries to her guests. Additionally, she had apron-clad dancers distributing food amongst her crowds, and even encouraged audience members to feed one another. Her project, commissioned by the social activism-oriented performance space CounterPULSE, included Mardi Gras marches, quilt-making potlucks and more.

Further analysis of the trends in terms of content and quantity of performances that use food at any given point in this timeline is beyond the scope of this proposed project, but I believe understanding the prevalence of foodstuffs in the dance setting (that have gone more or less unnoticed) is a necessary part of framing how they may be looked upon as reflective of efforts and desires to (re)connect audiences to art.³⁷

COMMENSAL DESIRE IN A DIGITAL AGE

Some of the case studies in this dissertation, specifically those in chapter four, look not at food in a staged performance, but the role of food sharing in various performances of dance-going “community” in a digital age. Some of these performances trade on nostalgic imaginings, some urge participants to “try on” dance moves that connect physically with others in a way that would not be possible through more remote means. These performances foreground the materiality of audience members’ bodies, and, in the case of YBCA’s *Smart Night Out* program detailed in chapter four, aim to bridge the experiential gap in the ways that audience members take themselves into account as

³⁷ This list of food-oriented choreographic efforts is not comprehensive, nor are these postmodern and contemporary contexts the only times in which food and dance have been aligned. Research was conducted via websites, email inquiries, and in conversation between August 2010 and May 2011.

sensing, receptive, interactive differently in “performance” contexts versus pre or post performance modes.

In what follows I open up conversations around how concert dance, and especially concert dance that performatively includes food sharing, insists on the vitality of the physical, on exchange enabled not solely through high-speed digital network connections but via the senses. However, the exchanges enabled in these spaces are only potentialities. They require interventions - what I characterize throughout this dissertation as “choreographies” - that explain, manipulate, invert, subvert and/or collectively manifest the parameters at play in a given context.³⁸ These interventions are choreographic in that they involve people moving and being still, gathering and dispersing, performing quotidian behaviors and/or virtuosic dance movements. They are also choreographic in that they produce a/effects - they are designed to shape perceptions, elicit memories, and broaden embodied experience.

For example, chapter one expands the more traditional use of the term choreography emphasizing how, through six different performance examples, different sorts of audiences are made to move, behave, and identify together as spectators in accordance with social norms. Chapter two looks at two staged choreographed works by each of two choreographers, figuring the choreography - which refers to movements and organization of dancers and audience members alike - as a vehicle for affective

³⁸ The term “choreography” has been used by dance studies scholars in many different ways, my use of the term, as stated in chapter four, perhaps most closely aligns with Foster’s 2011 definition.

experience. Chapter three's analysis blends the tactics employed in the first two chapters - looking both at the actions of selected dance performances as well as the grassroots methods employed to motivate participation in a local food/performance oriented social movement. Finally, chapter four considers the choreography of an arts program at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts as a single example of a broader choreographic trend of Attention given to these choreographic specificities, and willingness to actively participate in their constitution, activates realms of signification that may otherwise remain latent.

And such realms of signification do often remain latent. This is evidenced by the crisis of dwindling and/or disinterested audiences that has entered popular discourses around not just concert dance, but the Western "high" arts (opera, ballet, symphony, etc) in the twenty-first century.³⁹ I must confess to my own frustration as a Western contemporary dancer and choreographer attending various performances where I feel a sense of distance and disconnect from the proceedings despite my convictions in the potentialities for meaningful social exchange that dancing choreographies hold. Evidently, there were enough people within the dance community sensing such distance and disconnect to prompt a nationwide trend towards what has been labeled "audience engagement" (see chapter four for further exploration of how Dance/USA and others

³⁹ This crisis is discussed more thoroughly in chapter four of this dissertation, but discourse around the relevancy of the high arts in contemporary Western societies queries how to build and retain in a twenty-first century context. This is a context marked by new audiences as past generations of audiences age out, these audiences express different consumer concerns and have increased options with home entertainment and internet video availability. This media is customizable, instant, and readily accessible in ways that live performance most often is not.

have urged art makers to address and redress this crisis of dwindling audiences by rethinking how contemporary dance makers and presenters interface with their audiences).

In considering what precipitated this crisis with regards to audience “participation” or “engagement” in contemporary dance proceedings, I turn again to the work of Seremetakis on commensal exchange. Writing in 1993, Seremetakis theorized the processes that thwart commensal exchange as products of the agenda of modernity, namely modernity’s sublimation of the sensory-perceptive potentiality of bodies. Our senses and perceptions, she claims, have been simplified, commodified, and literalized so as to make them easily “digestible.” This occurs through innumerable acts that propel the myth of linear production and consumption and discount the power of associative practices - such as the gesture of an upturned and extended palm of a hand, or the good feeling evoked by the smells of a favorite childhood meal.⁴⁰

Part of the post-post modern conditions with which those participating in commensal and performance practices must engage in the twenty-first century is the

⁴⁰ Seremetakis, “The Memory of the Senses.” This is not to say that we are not otherwise availed with opportunities to revel in such mnemonic associations, memories, and novel sensations. Indeed, within the genre of contemporary dance such associative memories are often allowed to take center stage, and opportunities abound perhaps now more than ever for performance experiences that overtly evoke and manipulate the senses. For example, *I Will Embrace You*, an improvisational seven minute solo performance for a single audience member that involves physical contact, was performed at the 2011 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Such an event undeniably foregrounds the physicality of the audience member but, not unlike a lap dance at a strip club, the embodied experience is not one shared amongst the larger community (in fact, participants are specifically asked not to share about their experience with others). Another fringe festival performance, *Dance Marathon*, cast all audience members as contestants in a 1940s style social dance competition. This created a lively community of audience members physically interacting through dance, but did it through the creation of an alternate (nostalgic) world, rather than an enlivening of this one. Performances: Ian Smith, *I Will Embrace You*, (16-20 August, 2011, Dance Base, Edinburgh, Scotland), dance performance; bluemouth inc., *Dance Marathon* (14-26 August, 2011, Departure Point Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, Scotland), dance performance.

production and dissemination of mass-produced culture. This means mass-media, mass-food, mass-existence that flattens the specificities of particular engagements (with foods, with dances, with others) in favor of blanket problematic “norms” that uphold hegemonic epistemologies. In consumerist societies like the United States these norms are often cultivated by commercial organizations who commodify and market products that perpetuate and confound insatiable consumer desires for “more” or “better” as a means of personal fulfillment and/or community belonging. Especially for women, these norms dictate stringent and highly codified “acceptable” body types, as well as ways of eating and socializing with which any attempts at commensality must contend.

Dance is not exempt from these processes. Popular television programs like “So You Think You Can Dance” and “Dancing With the Stars” package and process dance performance for commercial purposes - tightly editing high-energy, virtuosic, presentational dance as competition offerings subject to critical (and often cursory) assessment by “experts.” These dances are easily interfaced with online, where audience/participants can access them at will. The presence of these forms, while they undeniably expose a larger audience to a wider swath of “dance styles” (including hip-hop, Bollywood, lyrical jazz, tap, contemporary, and more) also urge those participating in the (non-televised) concert dance versions of these genres to rethink how, why, and for whom they operate.

Analyzing the factors that have contributed to the desire for connection means considering the effects of digitized new media platforms on our embodied experiences.

How do the personalized, readily accessible networks of exchange now available alter our senses of ourselves in the world? Interaction with material culture is further mediated by the technological advances governing new media which proffer virtual platforms for discursive exchange and “connection” with others. The pervasiveness of these digitized communities, only imagined at the time of Seremetakis’s 1993 writings, necessitate contending with what Foster refers to as “cyborgian” corporeality.⁴¹ This change in how we conceptualize our embodied “self” as co-extensive with digital devices in turn changes how we imagine ourselves operating in the world. The devices and networks through which we process our embodied experiences do not only happen in person to person situations. Connections with others extremely far away from us are readily available through cellular phones and computers. First-person accounts of global events unfolding (Occupy Wall Street protests, the Arab Spring uprising, etc) are made possible through exchanges like those on Facebook and Twitter. These cyborgian realities beg updated consideration of how the aforementioned desires to connect with one another arise, as well as what means are available for creatively responding to them.

It may seem at this juncture that my adherence to Seremetakis’ insistence on the value of social knowledges exchanged through live, real-time, in person, human-to-human contact with others tiptoes dangerously near a reinscription of a fantastical binary that separates the “material” and “sensual” from the “virtual” and “technological.” In the performance examples analyzed in the chapters that follow I attempt, when possible, to

⁴¹ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 167-168 of 282, kindle edition.

acknowledge the ways in which various media are incorporated into the choreographies I see unfolding. Things like publicity emails, blogs, websites, and dance videos are employed in the case studies as devices designed to connect people to one another and to the works. Participating in these networks is indeed vital to each event's success.

I propose that these twenty-first century performance examples are responses precisely constituted by the pervasiveness of new media and the ways it destabilizes otherwise fixed and limited notions of corporeality and interpersonal connection. In the twenty year span of time since Seremetakis' writing about the effects of modernity, the commodifying efforts she speaks of have certainly continued, though awareness and wariness of them - as well as creative responses to them - have just as certainly grown. Technological advances are making possible experiences that were previously only dreamed of and have, arguably, propelled interest in exploring human capacity and creativity. For example, Aakaash Israni, a musician interviewed for the August 29, 2013 edition of the NPR podcast called Radiolab referred to the resurgence of what he calls "analogue" practices fueled by people's interactions with technology.⁴² He cites big wave surfers who began to use jet skis to pull themselves into waves previously thought to be inaccessible. These surfers, once they were able to access the waves with the use of technology, realized that they were actually able to use their arms to pull themselves to the same waves. They found they could surf in ways they could not have imagined

⁴² Aakash Israni, interview by Jad Abumrad and Robert Crulwich, "Dawn of Midi," *Radiolab* podcast, National Public Radio, August 29, 2013.

without the aid of technology. Israni says “its like the computers showed us a world of possibility and now we are, sort of, almost realizing that world was inherent to us and not the machine.”⁴³

I see the drive behind the events that I detail throughout the dissertation, events that insist upon the value of gathering people together around food and art in unique ways, as similarly realized. The internet made people accessible to one another in ways previously unimagined, which in turn cast new light on the ways in which we were already gathering (and not gathering). The pervasiveness of the virtual connections made possible in the past twenty or so years have brought into question our relationships with the material. Select individuals, having connected and reconnected with others via the internet, have now manifested a resurgence of interest in exploring interpersonal connections anchored in physical, material human interactions, however fleeting and irreproducible they may be. This is especially apparent in the San Francisco bay area, a space where foodie ideology has already popularized material, political, global considerations around how, what, and with whom we eat.

The hosts of the NPR podcast remarked upon the music that Israni himself creates as a member of the trio of musicians who call themselves Dawn of Midi (which is a unique sort of free jazz - acoustic but methodically, rhythmically layered in a way that is simultaneously reminiscent of both the African tribal and electronic trance music that the

⁴³ “Dawn of Midi” Radiolab podcast, National Public Radio, August 29, 2013. Also cited by Israni is a French beatboxer who, having extensive exposure to electronic sounds, was able to expand upon what was commonly believed to be the limits of human vocal capacity with regards to beatbox.

group draws upon as inspiration). The hosts note how listening to and appreciating the music that Dawn of Midi produces necessitates altering their expectations with regards to music's content and structure. The same principles apply when considering the dances analyzed herein. These dance events query boundaries on multiple registers - the boundaries of "concert" dance as a genre, of the spectator/performer divide, of bodily boundaries that separate us one from another. However, in order for this querying to be legible, visible, or otherwise felt by participants, they (we) must be willing to reorganize our horizon of expectation around the work that concert dance can and does perform.

OFFERINGS OF CULTURAL NOURISHMENT

How to describe, categorize or otherwise discuss the work that I see these dances performing remains a difficulty. As previously mentioned, the particular food-oriented efforts I analyze in the following chapters are responding to the latest call (from those within the "dance community") to rethink what concert dance is doing within the communities in which it is created, while simultaneously addressing a certain twenty-first century desire for commensal exchange. These efforts, grounded and grounding in contested corporealities, constitute a certain kind of public offering - one that offers opportunities not just for the self-edification espoused by late nineteenth century "high" art theatrical practices, or the self-identification enabled by the emotive, expressive capacities of the early modernists, or the democratizing efforts of the postmodernists. When read alongside other popular foodie efforts in the chapters that follow, I propose

that these particular food-oriented efforts come into focus as offerings of a kind of cultural “nourishment.”

I mobilize the term nourishment because of the multiplicities already inherent. The foods, encounters, and exchanges that any individual marks as “nourishing” are not just sources of sustenance meant to assuage physical hunger, but are thought to suffuse bodies in ways experienced as enriching and enlivening. Nourishing properties are not fixed - they are highly personalized, yet often experienced via relational modalities. In other words, it is in contact with the material world - the people, processes, and/or products that differentially stir each of us - that we cultivate an interior sense of being nourished.

The performances represent offers of nourishment - in each scenario the nourishing capacity is only a potentiality, not a guarantee. The effects and affects of choreographic efforts are contingent upon sociohistorical contexts that I unpack in different ways in each of the chapters, attending as much as I am able to the particularities of the San Francisco bay area in which the works are created. This unpacking addresses audience expectation that is moulded historically and flavored by personal and interpersonal experiences shaped by race, class, gender, sexuality, age, mobility. In the context of this study, this all transpires in an urban cityscape shaped by deceptive popular narratives of cultural diversity and left-leaning social activism. These histories, as well as whatever frame a choreographer or arts presenter provides around their choreographed offering, shape audience members’ capacities and willingness to

participate in whatever “nourishing” practices are being proposed. These various factors co-mingle in the special space of performance, both comprising and confounding whatever alternate avenues of sociability are sought via food’s incorporation.

Offerings of nourishment, whether in the form of a good meal, a moment of meditation, or an outstanding performance, offer points of contact - with others and with material culture - that exist in a liminal relationship to “everyday” activities. As such, they hold the potentiality of Turnerian “communitas,” or a sensation of mutuality that emerges in performative spaces “betwixt and between,” spaces that transcend the possibilities of the quotidian - especially the quotidian as experienced in post-industrial, capitalistic societies.⁴⁴ Alternatively, such offerings also hold the potential for racist appropriations of cultural practices “borrowed” from ethnically othered groups of people who are already operating from a more relational perspective. Positioning these performance examples as offerings of nourishment brings into question who nourishes and who “needs” nourishing in a given dynamic. Such questions concretize our bodies’ already-in-motion entanglements with semiotic enactments of material culture and

⁴⁴ See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982); *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York: PAJ Publications, 1988); and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969). See also Bobby Chris Alexander’s text, *Victor Turner Revisited*, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), 37. For Turner performance enables “performative reflexivity” where people can “turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves’” (1988, 24). These liminal spaces (Turner cites religious tribal rituals as well as postmodern performance practices) enable a greater sense of relationality, where the permeable boundaries of the “self” and sometimes even of the interrelatedness of all things become more readily apparent. As with the sense of “communitas,” nourishing experiences are acknowledged as a “phase, a moment, not a permanent condition” (1969, 139) and yet they generate “a different kind of actuality” (Alexander, 37). Turner wrote extensively on the Western performance experience in relation to ritual, distinguishing between “liminal” and “liminoid” experiences, and their potentiality to generate communitas.

globalized networks of exchange that are replete with unequal power differentials and associated positions of privilege and lack.

My suggestion of the practices I analyze throughout the dissertation as offers of “cultural nourishment” is inspired by a remark made by dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild at a plenary session of the 2013 joint conference of the Congress on Research in Dance and the Society of Dance History Scholars in Riverside, CA. In regards to the necessity of bridging dance theory and practice Dixon Gottschild noted that “theory divorced from practice is like food without nourishment.” She continued, calling it “white bread” and then asserting, “and the pun is intended.”⁴⁵

Dixon Gottschild’s scholarship is referred to throughout this dissertation. Much of her past and current work centers around countering the systemic invisibilization of Africanist aesthetics and perspectives from the Western dance canon and the figuration of dancing bodies in the West. In her statement, Dixon Gottschild alludes to the ways in which whiteness - and the hegemonic structures and practices that whiteness perpetuates - are responsible for the separation of theory from practice in dance discourses and institutions. The intended pun of Dixon-Gottschild’s “white bread” relies on a presumption of a shared understanding by those present in the room of white bread and whiteness as problematic. While in certain circumstances white bread’s nutritive value is a vital source of fuel for hungry bodies, in the privileged, well-fed spheres of the scholars

⁴⁵ Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, “Plenary Session One,”(presentation, joint conference of the Congress on Research in Dance and the Society of Dance History Scholars, Mission Inn, Riverside, CA, November 15, 2013.

gathered for the plenary “white bread” can be understood as a substance that has been mass-produced, stripped of the the nutritional value inherent in whole grains, and often “enriched” by mechanical means in a way that is unpalatable to those who have heartier, artisanal choices. “White bread” cultural practices are not, in this context, desirable or nourishing.

Creating a parallel framework, I’d like to suggest that this whiteness, or the “playing white” that concert dance sometimes demands is also partially responsible for the structures and practices that influence the ways in which potential audience members feel they can or cannot access, “read,” enjoy, and otherwise participate in Western concert dance. The positioning of “artistic” concert dance as “high” art around the turn of the twentieth century enabled it to develop in a certain way, garnering governmental and privatized financial support that enabled American artists to create works and tour internationally. Occupying a space among the pantheon of “high” art offerings meant subscribing to codes of conduct, “acceptable” dance content, and a certain level of exclusivity designed by the mostly white, elite American men who controlled the theatrical spaces at the close of the nineteenth century.

In the cosmopolitan, progressive, urban environment of the San Francisco bay area, offerings that continue to uphold these customs are experienced by some as the disdainful “white bread” of art. Counter to this perception concert dance, as it is presented via bay area venues like Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and CounterPULSE, is revealed as a vibrantly mixed bag - showcasing international artists, diasporic

perspectives, LGBTQ and differently abled positive art, to name just a few.⁴⁶ In these contexts, concert dance is experienced as much more than a white, elite art form, and yet, the histories that birthed concert dance (some of which are explored in chapter one of this dissertation) continue to influence the aesthetic perspectives and expectations of audience members. Concert dance without attentiveness to this history, to the inescapability of the structures that white privilege has put in place, is the “white bread” of dance in the contemporary context - it is the “food” without the “nourishment.”

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Dance performances are spaces of witnessing and being bodies in motion - in this case bodies gathered together around food and dance offerings. As scholars like Lepecki have pointed out, in these spaces individual and collective desires - and the hopes, anxieties, memories and more that accompany such desire - are articulated. The dances I have chosen to analyze do not represent a consorted, overt effort towards community growth or change, nor am I claiming that they represent some sort of nourishment subgenre within contemporary dance. Instead, the case studies are deliberately positioned

⁴⁶ Specifically curated examples of this embrace of different types of people and practices in recent years includes the following: at YBCA - Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula’s *more, more, more..... future* in October of 2011, *Fears of Your Life* Kim Epifano’s Epiphany Productions 2007 dance work created in collaboration with AXIS Dance Company (an Oakland based dance company comprised of differently abled dancers) and Creativity Explored (an organization supporting artists with developmental disabilities); at CounterPULSE - Performing Diaspora (a festival, residency program, and symposium featuring performance artists exploring experiences of diaspora), ongoing support relationship with drag queen performance artist Monique Jenkinson/Fauxnique, to name just a few.

alongside one another in the pages that follow in order to illustrate the many paths to “cultural nourishment” that are being offered in but one community of performers.

Chapter one examines the creation of Western European derived spectatorial norms for concert dance, specifically with regards to the inclusion and exclusion of food from various performance settings. Zooming in on developments that occurred from 1830-1900 and that traveled from New York City to the west coast boomtown of San Francisco, the research reveals the ways in which elite distinctions of “appropriate” public behaviors and practices contributed to a legacy of passive, critical participation (devoid of food’s messy materiality) in “high” art concert dance. Methodologically, I have chosen to break the chapter down into a series of fictional imaginings based primarily upon secondary sources of the events that transpired. I am interested in how such a frame reprioritizes the materiality of moving subjects that often gets written out of historical accounts. These histories are focused primarily on concert dance’s elite, Western, theatrical roots not because I feel these roots are more important than other, less documented contributions but rather because such a history helps to make visible the ways in which these elite practices and ideals continue to permeate and confound efforts to make dance relevant and accessible to a wider population today.

Chapter two builds upon the histories sketched in chapter one, suggesting that select postmodern and contemporary responses to these spectatorial histories have amplified food’s performative potential within the realm of concert dance. Food’s performative potential is explored here from a feminist perspective, specifically with

regards to a reclamation of a synesthetic understanding of sensory-perceptive capacities that has been historically subsumed in favor of patriarchal hierarchization and control. Two postmodern and two contemporary case studies are mined for the ways in which the two female choreographers who created them have reintegrated dance with daily life, staging subtle protests and domestic dramas in a manner that destabilizes the separation of public/private and participatory/passive lives and selves. I propose in instances such as these food becomes what Hunter identifies as a situated textuality, through which avenues of knowledge production and exchange that run alongside hegemonic networks of informational exchange are effected.

Chapter three explores the 2011 and 2012 performances of Oakland-based Deep Waters Dance Theater's (DWDT) *Our Daily Bread* and the associated food parties, workshops, parades, symposiums, and outreach offshoots that have come to comprise the Our Daily Bread Project. This project, developed by DWDT choreographer Amara Tabor-Smith in collaboration with CounterPULSE, an experimental arts presenting organization, have successfully cultivated a community of "engaged" audience members interested in probing their relationships to food practices and politics. The efficacy of the project has relied heavily upon Tabor-Smith's grassroots methodologies and African diasporic aesthetics, represented both on and off stage. DWDT's critically acclaimed embodied responses to the politics of the industrialized food system offers a compelling example through which to consider both the contemporary parameters of what constitutes "concert dance" and the contemporary politics of intercultural exchange that concert

dance attendance can formulate. Tabor-Smith's insistence upon feeding her audiences home cooked food in performance requests a certain sort of active participation from all present. Her coupling of the political and the personal, of present tastes and past memories, of African and African-American inspired food gatherings and "high" art Western choreographic tropes provides various points of access to dance performances not offered through more commodified avenues of dance production.

Chapter four examines the twenty-first century trend towards "audience engagement" practices through the lens of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' *Smart Night Out* program. This is a program where, for an additional fee, patrons not only see a dance performance but are led through six accessory modules including a movement workshop, a themed dinner, and other opportunities for interpersonal interaction and critical dialogue around contemporary art. The development of the program is framed here as a "slow dance" of audience engagement aimed at addressing the perceived crisis of dwindling audiences for contemporary dance. This "slow dance" is conceptualized in conjunction with the foodie ideology of the Slow Food Movement, which advocates for alternative agrifood pathways that reconnect consumers with "good, clean, and fair" foods and the benefits of gathering with others around such food. The *Smart Night Out* provides an institutionalized response to the desire for commensal exchange that relies on participation enabled through a membership model. A contrasting example of RAWdance's *CONCEPT Series* provides an alternative, dance company funded and organized model. Participation in both successful programs trades upon what I am calling

“artisanal imaginary,” a bay area-bred fantasy that valorizes artisanal - or handcrafted, small-batch, do-it-yourself - experiences and methods of relating to the world.

In the conclusion of this dissertation I summarize my findings and offer up further avenues of potential exploration around the intertwining of dance and food, and around evolving understandings of factors that contribute to a given audience members’ desire, willingness, and/or ability to “engage” in contemporary Western dance performance.

Chapter One

Shifting Spectatorial Standards and the Emergence of West Coast Concert Dance

Conjure up an image of Western concert dance in your mind's eye, imagining yourself as a member of the audience. How would you describe the environment? Where are you located in relation to others? How are you situated as compared to the action of the performance? Now... what are you eating? Probably nothing. My guess is that you are not imagining elaborate banquet displays, simmering gumbo, custards, oysters, peanuts or popcorn. In fact, in your fictional or remembered image there may have even been posted placards or cantankerous ushers reminding you that food and drink are forbidden within the pristine space of the performance site. This was not, however, always the case. Throughout Western dance history there has been elaborate and meaningful interplay between dance and food. This chapter takes as its subject slices of that history, querying why it is that our contemporary imaginings of concert dance are more or less devoid of food, and how, in light of these histories and imaginings, the inclusion of food in contemporary American concert dance events can be conceptualized as audience engagement efforts that have roots in past practices.

The image of American concert, or theatrical, dance many of you likely conjured - one where a polite, critical, relatively quiet audience sits attentively directing focus to dances performed on stage - developed more or less in the mid to late nineteenth century.

Such a development depended upon practices that pre-dated this era, (in fact this chapter highlights influences dating back to decades and even centuries before). And, this proscenium-style image many conjured is not a fixable entity (in fact this chapter highlights some of the interventions in spectatorship that have disrupted this “norm” in the century or so since). However, certain ideas about bodily comportment and “proper” public interaction dating from this historical time - ideas effecting both theater culture and food culture - continue to shape spectatorial standards for concert dance today.¹

What are now commonly thought of as the “distancing” aspects of concert dance spectatorship (proscenium stage, fixed seating, formal presentation, directed attention) were historically constructed elements - at times with goals not dissimilar to today’s “audience engagement” efforts aimed at giving an audience a sense of a socially shared, personally meaningful art experience.² These structures are now somewhat naturalized as what constitutes a concert dance “environment” as such, but each was developed in

¹ The various spectatorial mores of any given time and space, of any given performance site, of any self-proclaimed class of people, are products of the ideas, memories, imaginings, interactions with material culture that govern - and that subvert or resist such governance. These many factors form what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*, or a given way of being in the world that shapes individual and social norms and deviations. In his texts, Bourdieu theorizes how this habitus is shaped by differentiated aesthetic tastes, especially along class lines. See *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

² See Downing Thomas, “Architectural Visions of Lyric Theater and Spectatorship in Late-Eighteenth-Century France,” *Representations* 52 (Autumn, 1995): 52-75. Scholars like Thomas have theorized the ways in which the rising popularity of the proscenium in the late eighteenth century reflected growing ideological interest (on the part of the elite) in creating a more participatory performance experience than was possible in the “absolutist” theatre of the “ancien regime.” Directing attention in a specific way to a carefully crafted choreography or narrative was intended to create an affective experience of an “extended moment of collective pathos” quite different than what was possible in the courtly setups that afforded full uninterrupted visibility to only the most important guests (63). Said another way, the same directed, disciplined, attentive focus given to the performance that many contemporary concertgoers bemoan as dividing those in attendance from the action was, at the time of the proscenium’s development, seen as a way of unifying and creating community amongst an audience.

conjunction with civic, social, and bodily ideology, constructs that change with the passing of time, and that vary depending on whom the art presented is thought to be serving.

In this chapter, I examine shifting spectatorial norms between 1830-1890 in New York and San Francisco. This is a time, as historian John F. Kasson, dance scholar Robert C. Allen and others note, of dramatic shifts in theatrical history.³ These mid to late nineteenth century changes affected who participated in certain sorts of performance culture and how their participation was shaped in concert with or contrast to prevailing notions of “acceptable” public behavior for different groups of people. Theatrical changes were intertwined with changing standards for bodily comportment, table etiquette, and interpersonal exchange. These standards were physically mobilized as the players in any given performance context came to terms with the realities of urban industrialization and its itinerant class antagonism, gender biases, and racialized conflicts. Prying into the interstices of these various sociocultural machinations reveal some of the rationales, anxieties, and complexities of cultural assignments of “high” and “low” arts and entertainments. These are assignments that ultimately contribute to the development and popularization of concert dance as an autonomous art form in the early twentieth century.

My inquiry consists of imagined recreations of select performance scenarios - in working class opera houses and small apartment living rooms, in high class restaurants

³ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*; Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and the American Culture*, (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 1991).

and public squares. Each broadly sketches a given scene by piecing together historical and anecdotal information gleaned from images and scholarly texts - all undertaken in order to conjure up the embodied experience of a spectator.⁴ Throughout, I consider how food's relative inclusion and exclusion from each performance setting encouraged different sorts of sociality - how the manner in which food was shared (or not) provides insight into how those in attendance were expected to behave. I theorize the performative uses of food onstage and/or amongst crowds, the 'performance' of ingesting and sharing food in public, etc. This approach is based on a conviction shared with scholars from a number of disciplines (history, anthropology, cultural studies, women's studies, and more) that examining food practices provides integral insight into the values, identities, memories - and their material markers - that shape the crisscrossing networks of our social experiences.

I undertake these historical imaginings in order to illustrate how certain bodily, social, and civic ideologies as well as theatrical structures and conventions of the mid to late nineteenth century (especially those dictating high-art appropriate decorum) continue to influence the "climate" of concert dance today. I am specifically interested in the formation of the San Francisco bay area's concert dance climate, and so have selected performance examples from this region, as well as from New York, a locale commonly

⁴ This is a narrative device used by other dance scholars in recent years. See Cara Tranders, "Cara Tranders' Reveries: The Autobiography of Cara Tranders, Ballet Girl at the Empire Palace of Varieties, 1892-99, in *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*, ed Alexandra Carter, (New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press, 2004), 69-79 and Priya Srinivasan, "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Modern Dance," *Discourses in Dance* 4, no.1 (2007): 7-47. I have limited my sources for these imaginings to secondary sources so as to get a better sense of what aspects of the chosen scenes continue to emerge as of interest across passing time.

understood as the epicenter of American performing arts at this time. Many of the theater owners and managers, as well as the performers who traveled to the boomtown of San Francisco mid century came from New York. They carried with them certain traditions that were subsequently altered for west coast living. Aesthetic tastes cultivated in New York radiated outwards to burgeoning urban centers like San Francisco. San Francisco aesthetes shaped (and continue to shape) themselves in relation to this ideology, whether in concert with or contrast to it.

My interest in San Francisco stems not just from this digging into historical archives, but from the repository of my own lived experience as a dancer and choreographer participating in the contemporary dance community there from 2003-2013. During this time, I came to know the San Francisco dance community as extraordinary networks of people interested in cultivating artistic experiences that reflect the fantasies and realities of those who have chosen to co-mingle in the cities that comprise the bay area (namely San Francisco, but also Berkeley, Oakland, Emeryville, Marin, San Mateo). Generally speaking, they embrace experimentation, adore autobiographical probing, and encourage art that embraces the place's history. I began to wonder in general how the community came to be, as well as how its development had been historicized.

My aim with the glimpses into spectatorial standards and practices that follow is to highlight the generation of certain norms in New York, and analyze their subsequent bay area specific adaptations. Historians, theater scholars, and even a few dance scholars

have analyzed these cultural changes before, and it is these analyses upon which I build my imaginings. My work departs from these others in my attempt to foreground and theorize the performative work of food within the selected theatrical and culinary realms. I position the interplay with food in various performance settings as integral to the choreography of the event, noting how this interplay is ultimately part of what shapes the development of a modern dance as an autonomous art form generally, and a San Francisco bay area art form specifically.

These imaginings are not meant to be comprehensive. There were many performance scenarios happening alongside those selected that do not get fleshed out here (but have been fleshed out in other texts, to which I attempt to direct you). Instead, these imaginings are meant to be evocative - by which I mean that they evoke the sensory enlivening experiences of spectatorship. They help to destabilize an assumed divide between 'spectator' and 'performer' by broadening the scope of what in a given context is performed, and what is worthy of being "spectated." Together, these fictive re-creations offer a sort of 'tasting flight,' meant to provide you with a sense of how American spectatorial standards change across time and space. This approach illustrates how some practices (like eating in public) morph as they are taken up in different contexts, and some practices (like quiet, attentive viewing) endure despite their seemingly incongruous existence alongside new emphases on participatory models for creating and receiving performance art.

AUDIENCE SOVEREIGNTY: NEW YORK CITY'S BOWERY THEATRE, EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

There are peanut shells falling from above. A man near the lip of the stage just got pelted with an apple core. Everyone around him laughs jovially, aware of the hazards of abiding in the pit where one's face might be met with not only the remains of fruit but the run off of dripping hot candle wax from the candelabras, or a spattering of saliva shot from a disapproving concertgoer in the boxes or gallery above. When he requires respite from the dancing and singing happening onstage, or from the rain of detritus discarded from those of higher social standing seated above, the man pelted by the apple core ventures to the lobby where he orders up a drink, grabs a small pie, slaps his friend on the back, and remains chatting for the next half an hour. Still, the show goes on.

Thus is the scene, or at least a small slice of the scene, as I imagine it at New York City's Bowery Theater on a cool fall night around 1830.⁵ The performance, which likely lasted three or four hours and had already been seen, possibly even several times, by many of those in attendance, was structured in a way that would likely offend the sensibilities of many concert goers today who are accustomed to quite a different standard. Allen notes that for many patrons at this moment in American theatrical history, "going to the theater did not mean going to watch the performance onstage - certainly not with the continuous, rapt attention we assume to be the normative mode of present-day theatergoers. Dramas were enacted in every part of the house, and undoubtedly these were as easy to see and hear as the action onstage."⁶

⁵ This imagining is gleaned from the work of Kasson and Allen, both of whom provide such details in their texts theorizing the dramatic changes in the performing arts across the nineteenth century. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 216-225; Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 53-55.

⁶ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 54.

Such a statement points to an American social reality, perhaps experienced most acutely in urban areas, wherein a performance stage is not the only locale designated for “performance.” Instead, each person present in a theatrical setting is performing a part - shaped not by a script but by how that person chooses to engage with prevailing behavioral standards for their respective class, race, gender, age, etc. These standards shift across time and venue, generating ever-changing spectatorial norms, and creating different sorts of sociality - some more demonstrative, some more “refined,” some more participatory, some more passive.

Allen’s account of early nineteenth century theater going (as well as others - see Levine (1988) and Cliff (2007)) paints a picture vastly different from today’s American concert dance experience where quiet, critical, attentive spectatorship is generally expected.⁷ The Western European inspired east coast theaters of the early nineteenth century catered to a variety of classes, separating people into their respective social group by floor. The performance setting becomes a sort of microcosm for the intertwining realities of urban living. Members of different classes would be privy to the same performances, but from very different vantage points - the lower, working class in the “pit” at or below stage level, the middle and upper classes in elevated boxes. The well-to-do (mostly white men from wealthy families) who occupied the elevated boxes might not have the best views of the performance, but they were well-positioned to see and be seen

⁷ See Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Random House Press, 2007).

by others in attendance. The gallery, generally consisting of rows of benches along the back of the auditorium, were places where cheap seats could be purchased by laborers and servants. The backs of these galleries, or the “third tier,” were often occupied by prostitutes and their clients. Generally, “respectable” women were scarcely seen in the theaters in 1830s - though some eventually were admitted as long as they were accompanied by a chaperone. Theatre scholar Faye E. Dudden suggests that there may have been more women present than are accounted for in most historical texts, which often categorically overlook the presence of women.⁸ Both enslaved and free black Americans, servants, other immigrants, and Indigenous peoples were able only to occupy the upper galleries, and even then only in some theaters.⁹ These different vantage points created very different spectatorial experiences - and figured these performance sites as places for fantasizing and socializing, but also for playing out social roles itinerant to one’s classed, raced, and gendered position.

“Performing” their parts as spectators at the Bowery enabled patrons to rehearse behaviors that expressed relatively newly formed nationalistic ideology. White, working and upper class identities were constructed in part around notions of American theaters as “public houses,” places of “public” enactments in a time when freedom and self-expression was valued (but subsequently denied to women, obviously ethnic, immigrant,

⁸ Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theater: Actresses and Audiences, 1790-1870*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) 1-8.

⁹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 218-219. Specifies this arrangement as pre-1840. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 52 for specifics of Bowery Theater. As various ethnic populations increased in the city, different ethnic communities (Jewish, Irish) began to build their own theaters, producing their own performances in environments that did not limit their participatory potential based on their race (Allen, 53).

and native Americans). As ideas around who constituted the American public shifted throughout the century, so did the ways in which people participated as a spectatorial “public.” Kasson notes, “The theater, the concert hall, the opera house, and other institutions of the performing arts would become key arenas in the struggle both to reshape the character of public behaviour and more generally to determine who as cultural participants the “public” was.”¹⁰

As the number of theaters built in New York increased, the Bowery became associated with a vociferous form of American patriotism, a propensity reflected in their programming. They favored new melodramas over British classics, and at least initially, engendered a relatively more mixed crowd in terms of class. Those in attendance at the Bowery expressed a sense of ownership over the theater through rowdy engagement with the performances offered. The lights remained up during performances, the air thick with chatter. Audience members, especially those of the working class, would guffaw and stomp, yell directives to and request pieces from the performers on stage. If they wanted to hear a certain song or see a dance again they could call from the house until their demands were met by the performers.¹¹ These behaviors denoted a white, male American sense of entitlement and self-governance that would shift dramatically by the end of the nineteenth century, as the theatrical “public” became increasingly under the control of those who owned, operated, and funded the theaters.

¹⁰ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 230.

¹¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 220-221.

The group of people present at the Bowery in the late 1820s and very early 1830s cultivated a dynamically participatory, if relatively unruly, performance experience. This participatory spirit is recorded in various accounts, and even gets personified in the creation of a “type” of character known as a Bowery B’hoj (and, according to Dudden, a Bowery Gal).¹² This participatory spirit is expressed in part via relationships to food, and to others through food. Each of the accounts I have mentioned thus far casually refer to the presence of food, acknowledging but not prioritizing how interaction with food both shaped and was shaped by this dynamically participatory environment. It seems that in these theatrical settings food and performance combined to create a convivial experience where all sorts of pleasures could be sought and satiated - by those admitted to attend.

This is not to say that all of the audience agreed upon what performance offerings were of interest, or were “appropriate” for viewing. Theaters like the Bowery housed much of the theatrical dance of the time (such dance at this point generally having been blended in a manner similar to later vaudeville acts with musical vignettes, variety acts, and monologues, and often featured in conjunction with a play or opera).¹³ In fact, the scene imagined above could have been the scene of the reception of what Allen identifies

¹² Dudden, *Women in the American Theater*, 60-74.

¹³ There are exceptions to this, of course. Romantic ballets also began to appear during these years (1830s and 1840s, with performers from Europe). See Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance As A Theatre Art: Source Reading in Dance History from 1581 to the Present (2nd edition)*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 69; Susan Au, *Ballet and Modern Dance, Third Edition*, (London and New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2012), 55 (first edition 1988). Cohen cites the first ballet performance by an American as that of Mary Ann Lee, who studied in Paris, and performed the title role in *Giselle* in Boston in 1837. Au reports that the first “complete and authentic” version of *La Sylphide* performed in the US occurred in 1839 (by Paul and Amalia Taglioni, brother and sister-in-law to the famed ballerina Marie Taglioni). Fannie Elssler toured as a ballerina from 1840-42, reaching much acclaim.

as the first American ballet, performed at the Bowery in 1827. The dancers appeared during the interstices of a mixed genre program, a performance offering that was thought to include a little ‘something for everyone’.¹⁴ While today ballet takes top bill as the ultimate “high” art in terms of dance, at this time of its introduction to American audiences it was seen as somewhat of a scandal. Conservative audience members criticized the female performers for revealing too much of their bodies. The dancers’ bodies themselves were meant to bear meaning in a way that many found disconcerting - and inappropriately arousing. “Ballet appealed directly to the senses, and its effect was not mediated or channeled by words... Her [the ballet dancer’s] art was predicated on the display of the physical self, not its effacement.”¹⁵ This early ballet forced acknowledgement of women’s bodies in public during a time when such sensorial stimuli was squelched in favor of a prioritization of the mind and its alleged rationality and control, at least among the elite.

For the white, mostly male, working and upper class patrons present modern fears of dirtiness and contamination through food contact did not exist. Concerns about interrupting a neighbor’s viewing experience by eating would have seemed ridiculous. A variety of goods including custards, fruits, pies, and (reportedly in Philadelphia) even things like fried oysters were sold to patrons in the lobbies of the theaters.¹⁶ These

¹⁴ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 88.

¹⁵ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 89.

¹⁶ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 55.

foodstuffs were more than welcomed in the performance space, contributing to an air of sociability and joviality that was as important to the theatrical experience as anything offered onstage.

Food studies scholars have theorized the many different ways in which sharing food can contribute to a sense of ‘belonging’ as part of a particular group.¹⁷ Partaking in the food offerings at the theater, then, was one way of demonstratively identifying one’s self as a participant in the social body, denoting as it does a certain level of familiarity with others in the space, and perhaps with the space itself. Purchasing food items conveyed information to others that an individual had enough personal material wealth to spend on delectable consumables. It simultaneously contributed to shaping the theater as a commercialized space where, through a purchase, a patron could assert personal preference, offer to purchase a food gift for another, or indulge in goodies designed for pleasure rather than sustenance.

Food items must have also been brought in to the theaters, as theatergoers not only ate food, but often food items such as apples, nuts, and gingerbread got thrown up onstage in a show of appreciation or disapproval (hence the well known trope of throwing rotten tomatoes at a performer the audience wants removed from the stage). Such actions now conjure a kind of comedic rowdiness from demanding crowds who were unwilling to put up with amateurish performative overtures, but I propose that these fruit-hurling

¹⁷ See Peter Scholliers, “Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging”; David E. Sutton, *Remembrances of Repasts*, 3-16.

actions actually contributed to decisions made about the content and structure of performances. If the conditions permitted, a theater manager could determine the length of a run of a particular performance based around audience reception. Was the actor being showered with flowers and cakes or with rotten eggs and tomatoes? Levine reports that in 1856 one actor's performance in California was met with "cabbages, carrots, pumpkins, potatoes, a sack of flour and one of soot, a dead goose...." and more.¹⁸ This performer would have been eventually run off the stage, and his engagement with the theater was likely cut short.

Demonstrative behaviors at the theater, Allen notes, put into question what rights came along with the purchase of one's ticket.¹⁹ This is a question that will crop up again and again as the context of "dance as art" expands in various ways. At this time and in these theaters, working class behaviors belied a belief that a ticket purchase enabled engagement of a proprietary sort, wherein making demands on the content of the performance was thought permissible. Hurling apple cores and tomatoes indicated to theater owners and managers what the interests of the audience were, thus contributing in vital ways to the eventual establishment of different theatrical markets and to the coming trend of differentiating performance offerings according to increasingly specific audience demographics. Food hurling thus comes into focus as an early form of audience engagement, albeit one that contemporary players are not likely to reintroduce.

¹⁸ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 28.

¹⁹ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 55.

Kasson claims, “Such assertive behavior and patriotic feeling sometimes moved beyond these relatively good-natured demonstrations to what was regarded as the audience’s traditional prerogative of rioting on behalf of their sovereign rights as theatergoers.”²⁰ In other words, the same sense of public ownership and entitlement that led to performances being interrupted by the “pitching of eggs, potatoes, apples, lemons, etc.,”²¹ gradually gave way to performances being interrupted by the pitching of paving stones and the smashing of windows. These disruptions, and the associated conviction that American theatrical performance should be a venture of “the people” and for “the people” led to riots in the streets, deaths, and at the midpoint of the century, a significant shift towards audience control and “niche” marketing along class lines.

AUDIENCE DIFFERENTIATION: ASTOR PLACE RIOTS AND BEYOND

The stench is horrifying as it wafts up to our box seats. The air is thick the sulfuric smell of the rotten eggs broken and splattered on the stage’s floor and against the set pieces serving as the backdrop to the Shakespearean play. The actor continues to deliver his lines, a stolid and stoic force in the face of such clamorous disarray. He admirably resists calling back to the increasingly divided crowd, refusing even as he is struck with their eggs and slurs to recognize the vociferous presence of these working-class interlopers. Where did these people come from?

They seem to be increasing in number, or perhaps it is just the volume with which they are hurling their insults and degradations that is growing. What egregious behavior. What despicable comportment. The floor of the house is a tangled mass of the arching limbs of struggling bodies. Two chairs have been thrown to the Astor Place Opera House stage, exploding with a crash of splintering wood. This ruckus compels the actor to make his retreat, even as uniformed police officers

²⁰ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 221.

²¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 228.

begin to arrest the rioters. Perhaps order can be restored. Perhaps Macready can be persuaded to come finish his performance....

But, wait, there is now a strange new din. A rumble. A crash. Smoke. Are there more outside? Are they making their way in?

They were, indeed, making their way in. The thousands who had gathered outside the Astor Place Opera House on the evening of May 10, 1849 were advancing into the lobby, throwing paving stones through the windows and lighting things on fire. They were fueled by the same indignant rage that motivated those who disrupted Macready's performance, a clamorous contention that their voices be heard, that their bodily presence be felt.

These rioters were protesting shifting spectatorial norms. By 1849, New York's Astor Place Opera House had been instituting certain changes in order to disinvent the rowdy behavior of working class patrons.²² Opened two years prior in 1847, the owners and managers of the opera house were interested in catering to the perceived desires of the burgeoning bourgeoisie by enforcing a dress code, exercising control over audience behavior, raising ticket prices and reserving larger sections for the wealthy.²³ These were practices that enraged many of the general public who were being excluded. Such conflicts came to a head when a squabble between two dueling actors, one British and

²² This scene inspired by Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots*. xvii-xxi, 214-231. See also, "Shakespeare Becomes American" online broadcast of "Shakespeare in American Life" radio show, shakespeareinamericanlife.org; and "Theater; When 'Macbeth' Shook the World of Astor Place," *New York Times* (Jan 12, 1992), accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/12/theater/theater-when-macbeth-shook-the-world-of-astor-place.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm>

²³ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 226-228.

one American - each having become symbols of the national values and behaviors associated with their respective homelands - elevated into full blown public riots that involved some five thousand people. This event, known as the Astor Place Riot, heralded the death of twenty-two and signified to authorities that what was permissible in the theaters had to change.

The American actor, Edwin Forrest, was well-known for his emotional presence and rugged, expressive acting style. This was a style that appealed to American audience members who remained skeptical of British aristocracy in the wake of the Revolutionary war. He developed a great rivalry with a British actor, William Macready, whose restraint and decorum were favored by the aristocratic elite. Both men were Shakespearean actors, and on the evening of May 10, 1849 they were scheduled to perform the same title role in competing performances of Macbeth. Two nights before, Macready's Macbeth performance was interrupted by disruptive working class patrons who called out during key moments of the performance, pitching rotten eggs at Macready from the house in order to express their disdain for his performance and to encourage his departure.

Macready did cut his performance short that night, and was prepared to return to London when he received a letter from a number of New York's elite men urging him to continue his theatrical engagement undeterred. It was because of these men's insistence that he took to the stage on that fateful evening of the riot, and that he subsequently suffered the indignity of being showered by a maelstrom of rotten eggs and working class disdain. Macready's performance was curtailed, but outside the "real" performance was

just beginning to take place. Those gathered in protest refused to leave and when it became clear that the police could not contain them, the militia were called in to restore 'order.' They did not yet know that the popular order of things was shifting - a shift that was marked on the evening of the Astor Place Riot in bloodshed.

The riot points to how the working class audience members' assertions of their sovereignty in the public realm (of the theater, but also beyond) were coming into direct conflict with newly defined "bourgeois" notions of appropriate, respectable decorum for leisurely pursuits.²⁴ Subsequently, in the years that followed this night, power was stripped from the audiences of certain theaters and placed in the hands of theater owners and management. These individuals were eager to cultivate audiences whose behavior was "appropriate" (read self-disciplined, rational, autonomous, sophisticated) according to the new ideals for "respectable" society.²⁵

As a result of these shifts, the once "heterogeneous fare that characterized an evening at the theater" was "fragmented into distinct forms for separate, socially defined audiences."²⁶ The various audiences were thought to value different experiences, to

²⁴ I refer here to Kasson's definition of bourgeois ideals, namely "orderly, regulated, learned, prosperous, "civilized" behaviors." *Rudeness and Civility*, 215. Kasson is speaking about New York City, a place with a broad range of theatrical offerings that became increasingly diversified (and segmented) as Victorian era "mannering" of elite bodies in the public sphere served to distinguish "upper class" individuals and institutions from those considered beneath them.

²⁵ Allen, writing about burlesque dancing, indicates that this control over the environment, newly won in the latter half of the century, was greatly challenged by the content of burlesque performance that began to popularize.

²⁶ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 61. This is not to say that before this point in history there were not vastly different entertainments available to different classes of people. Rather, the rise of the middle class and urban industrialization necessitated further distinctions, and more diversified "fare."

require different things from their respective entertainments. This increasing differentiation facilitates a process of breaking the once integrated performing arts into distinct genres. As the various genres of art began to be viewed as autonomous forms demanding certain kinds of attention, performance sites (ie symphony halls for symphonies, theaters for the melodramas, concert saloons for variety shows) were shaped accordingly. Decisions about location, architecture, and decor, as well as whether to stage a Shakespearean tragedy or a minstrel show created differentiated environments seen as suitable for certain portions of the populous and not others.

Many performances continued to include dance as an interstitial element in a larger production (as in vaudeville-esque reviews and eventually Broadway musicals) but it would take several decades before dance was popularly accepted as an art unto itself. When this does happen, dance is segmented in a manner similar to other performing arts with certain types of dance (ballet or the movement of a Shakespearean chorus) deemed acceptable for “high” class or “respectable” establishments and other types of dance (like burlesque, which Allen claims rapidly popularizes around 1860) denounced as “vulgar” and unfit for newly mannered high class audiences awaiting an “artistic” offering.²⁷

Just as certain venues adopt different kinds of performance, so too do they make decisions about the “appropriateness” of food and drink within the performance space.

²⁷ See Allen for a detailed account of different dance-oriented performance offerings available during this rapidly changing time in American history. Allen notes the complicated interplay between “high” and “low” cultural offerings - emphasizing how popular perceptions of the acceptability of certain forms altered across time and space. See also Stallybrass and White for more on this high-low interplay. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, (London: Methuen Press, 1986), 3-26.

Food, at one time a welcome and even necessary part of a performance event, was more or less eliminated from performance sites for the “high” arts, remaining only venues producing “low” or “popular” arts like variety shows. Food’s messy materiality did not jive with the aura of respectability and decorum that upper-class theater owners and managers began to cultivate. For them, a “desirable” audience member became one who is seen but not heard, at least not heard in the ways previously tolerated. This marked a sea change in terms of the way in which audience members were allowed to participate in the proceedings of an evening of performance. Rather than sharing food and vociferously demonstrating an opinion (whether affirmative or negative) about the performance, the new “ideal” high-class audience member is constructed as a person who demonstrates restraint, allows the performers to go on uninterrupted, models for other patrons disciplined attentiveness, concerns himself²⁸ with the enlightening effects that witnessing the art enabled (rather than with asserting one’s rights which, presumably, were not in question due to one’s high social standing). These ideals were already in place at other high class gatherings, including private dinner parties, where those gathered would act according to strict standards and prove their belonging by dressing properly, eating properly, and engaging in polite conversation.

²⁸ This applies not just to men, but increasingly to women as well. See Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre*, 104-180, for further discussion and more specific examples of women’s participation. Middle and upper class women were initially only allowed unescorted at circuses and melodramas, as these theatrical environments were “cleaned up,” women were reportedly more welcome to attend and participate without their respectability being called into question. As different ethnic enclaves developed throughout the city many opened their own theaters so as to create a more welcoming environment to those who did not fit within hegemonic (white, moneyed) standards of “respectable.”

Eliminating food was not the only behavioral standard that changed, of course. The shaping of “respectable” audience behavior took on various forms. For example, some theater owners mandated behavioral norms and dress codes via notes in programs and/or signs on the walls.²⁹ At other times, these behavioral standards were enforced by law.³⁰ Theaters provided prime places for expressing such self-discipline as part of a newly cultivated “passive” audience.

This reshaping of audience behavior not only affected the social environment of the opera houses and private parties, but working class entertainments as well. More active, participatory, intimate interactions between performers and audience members were relegated to what became viewed as “low brow” or “popular” art - practices that continued to flourish despite (and sometimes because of, in the case of parodies) elite rejections of them. Those uninterested in hegemonic prescriptions of appropriate behaviors had plentiful outlets for leisurely pursuits - ranging from social dancing at dance halls (deemed disreputable based on close sexual contact and drinking), to variety shows at concert saloons, melodeons, and eventually vaudeville and cabaret stages - many of which mocked the people and practices of the upper class establishments.³¹ Newly formed concert saloons became homes to the “vulgar” variety acts, drinking, and

²⁹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 242, happens in the 1880s.

³⁰ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 73, this happens by the 1850s.

³¹ Parody was especially popular in minstrel shows, many of which were, troublingly, performed by white men in blackface. For more on blackface minstrelsy and parody see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

ribald behavior excised from the bourgeois theaters by the 1850s and 1860s.³² These alleged precursors to the cabaret were places where intimate, participatory environments were deliberately cultivated and the lines between the fantasy world of the performance and the reality of attendance were blurred. In contrast to the upper class theaters, patrons were often served table-side by scantily clad waitresses who sometimes doubled as performers. It was not uncommon for the performers to directly address those watching, even crossing out into the space where audience members sat.³³

The audiences were often clustered around cafe tables, rather than the raked, forward-facing seats of the proscenium style stages of upper-class establishments. While patrons of the opera and ballet sat focused and attentive, demonstrating a capacity for “ingesting” high art offerings, patrons at concert saloons figured themselves part of the entertainment “offering” on tap. Food was not only continued to be permissible in these settings, it played a crucial role in cultivating what scholar Shane Vogel refers to as “public intimacies.”³⁴ While the intimacies Vogel focuses on occur both in a different

³² Allen notes that some “respectable” and “vulgar” theaters of this time may not have differed that much in terms of the programming that was offered. However, the scene cultivated around the show differed quite a bit. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 60-73.

³³ The origins of cabaret have been widely disputed. See Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) for more information. Vogel discusses how this action, of the performer inserting him/herself into an already socializing, eating and drinking crowd, creates a performance environment distinct from both the “upper” class presentational performances and the “lower” class social dancing environments where there was little distinction between performers and witnesses (62).

³⁴ Vogel uses this term to articulate the happenings of different performance settings - namely cabaret culture in Harlem during the Harlem renaissance, several decades later. The concert saloons I allude to here pre-dated the cabaret settings Vogel analyzed. Therefore, the nature of the intimacies afforded would have been different, though the details I provide about how audience interacted with food, with one another and with the performers represent similarities between concert saloons in the 1850s and 1860s and the cabarets of the 1890s to 1920s.

setting (black Harlem) and later on a historical timeline (1890s-1930s), I imagine certain assertions about performer/audience dynamics that he theorizes began to play out in these earlier theatrical settings - both in the concert saloons where such intimacies were cultivated, and in the high-brow spaces where such intimacies were explicitly extracted.

Those gathered in concert saloons or cabarets to engage in acts of food sharing created a certain sort of sociability - one that meant engaging in conversation, in seeing and being seen by each other, albeit differently in different cabaret settings. Audience members could have been playing host to important guests or romantic interests, perhaps they went to refuel tired bodies after long days of hard work, or they may have simply sought to escape the monotony of a daily grind. The presence of food and drink dethroned the performance offering as the primary point of interest in the evening, thereby opening up opportunities for unexpected mergings, exchanges, and divulgences. These encounters were less predictable and formalized (though they were not lacking in structure or design) than upper class, decorous theater-going. It is possible that such exchanges were actively discouraged in highbrow spaces precisely because of fears about the ways in which they challenged authoritative control and a mythos of autonomous individuation.

“The ways people feed their physical bodies express larger concerns about the needs and perils of the social body,” Kasson claims.³⁵ This comes into especially fine focus when considering the ways in which food was included and excluded from different

³⁵ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 195.

performance spaces at this latter half of the nineteenth century. Rapid urban industrialization meant that outside of the theaters people were increasingly likely to be interfacing with classes and ethnicities of people that differed from their own. This means a greater likelihood of encountering foreign foods, and therefore more explicit choices about including or excluding such foods from one's diet. It also generated a growing middle class, many of whom were armed with expendable income and interested in elevating their status through attendance at public events. These were public events where the ways in which one interacted with material culture (ie the way you ate your meal, or the way you removed your hat) signaled to others whether or not you belonged.

From the sixteenth century on etiquette books had been offering guidelines for bodily comportment. These texts began to proliferate in the late nineteenth century, reaching a wider audience newly facing the need and/or desire to “properly” chew food and sip soup from spoons in public. Some, especially of the rapidly developing middle class, studied these manuals so that they might “act the part” appropriate to their current or desired social standing.³⁶ “Proper” upper-class bodies were imagined as autonomous, disciplined, and controllable. Rational aesthetics, order, and structure rather than emotional expression and affective exchange were favored. Therefore middle and upper class patrons could not allow themselves to enjoy the intimacies enabled by unbridled indulgence of food and drink whilst also gorging one's self on a performance offering -

³⁶ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, chapter two. Here Kasson details the role of etiquette books in social identity formation in the late 19c. See also, Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

especially in mixed gendered company. Instead, a certain level of critical distance and restraint was valorized. If they were to allow themselves to indulge in food and drink, it would be in a separate space, like a bar or one of the increasingly popular fine-dining restaurants, designated specifically for such purposes.

In contrast, the bodies of these “lower” class participants are figured as grotesque - uncontrolled, lascivious, even dangerous. The raucous behaviors previously tolerated, and the modes of performance that encouraged such behaviors, were denounced as repugnant and yet remained a source of fascination - a fascination that would eventually lead to commercialized, hybridized cabaret performance forms in the twentieth century. The increasingly diversified (and specifically marketed) performance offerings further strengthen the rather artificial distinction between “art” designed to edify and enlighten and “entertainment” designed to titillate or provide relief. In this paradigm, “art” becomes the domain of the wealthy and well-to-do, those who are thought to possess the education (or as it is commonly, and mistakenly, asserted the “natural” proclivities) necessary to appreciate art.

This is, arguably, an especially important distinction when it comes to dance. As discussed earlier, dance is a genre of the performing arts that was not readily considered “legitimate.” Without a textual narrative to follow, dance laid bare the necessity of performers to bear meaning bodily - in a time when attitudes about appropriate bodily action and interaction were shifting. The prioritization of dancers’ bodies as artistic ‘instruments’ foregrounded the materiality of these bodies - their abilities to leap, bow,

spin and flutter, as well as their ability to elicit sympathetic or repugnant emotional responses from viewers.

Further complication arises because the dancing women were... women. The rules for reputable women in mid-nineteenth century America dictated modesty - modesty that seemed at odds with the displays of female bodies that burgeoning dance forms required. As previously mentioned ballet was initially seen by some as scandalous, an unfit performance experience for respectable society. Its designation as “morally and socially acceptable” was a gradual process. As Allen theorizes, the transgressive nature of ballet was softened with the advent of the Romantic style in the 1830s, which featured women in roles as supernatural beings (nymphs, fairies) in supernatural realms. These roles enabled dancers’ humanity, and their material bodies, to be backgrounded enough to be deemed acceptable. In addition, the frame around the movement - the costumes, the lighting, the pointe work, the fantastical plots - effectively nullified the otherwise offensively “low” excitation of the senses deemed inappropriate for respectable society. The expectation of critical distance from audience members - illustrated to others through one’s countenance and decorum - became an important counterpoint to ballet’s salacious potential.

The same dance presented in the environment of the concert saloon would undoubtedly have been received differently. The behavioral expectations of the upper class theatres allowed proponents to claim ballet as a “high” or “classical” art form meant to edify, inspire, and enlighten rather than titillate (though accounts of

balletomanes and lecherous elite ballet patrons courting dancers bring such a distinction into question). In the public's eye, at least, the potentially transgressive materiality of dancing women was softened by the elite's adoption of the form.³⁷

Ballet is not the only dance form that was ambiguously received during this time of a public push for greater distinction between "respectable" and "vulgar" entertainments. Dances like the cakewalk posed a challenge to solidified distinctions between "high" and "low" dance forms, revealing the mutually constitutive and fluid nature of the seemingly binary categories. The cakewalk's origins are unclear, though most accounts begin their cakewalk discourse with pre-civil war dances performed by the African-American slaves on plantations in the American south.³⁸ In this context, the cakewalk was a dance of parody, a response to the high-brow mannerisms displayed in the quadrille and cotillion dance gatherings hosted by white plantation owners. Whether or not it was interpreted as parody by the plantation owners cannot be said for certain, but the jovial atmosphere it created prevented it from being viewed as threatening or subversive. In fact, before too long, the dance begins to be performed by the same white elite who were initially the subject of its mockery. Thus begins the complicated network of interactions, or "genealogies of performance" to use Joseph Roach's term, that the cakewalk engenders. Renditions of the cake walk emerge in black-faced minstrel shows

³⁷ See Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 87-92.

³⁸ For more on the cakewalk, see Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 5-18. Jean and Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1968), 50-292.

mid-century, as well as later in the first all black Broadway musical, “Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk” in 1898.³⁹ For some the dance becomes a competition, with coveted prizes including cakes, cash, and later even job opportunities on vaudeville and Broadway show circuits. Dances that subvert a high/low divide like the cakewalk presented a challenge to those in power who tried, in a post Astor Place Riot theatrical environment, to tailor certain performance offerings to certain audience demographics.

Despite the concerted efforts to create distinct genres and realms for different types of performance in the late nineteenth century, there was (always has been, and continues to be) integral interplay between “high” and “low” cultural offerings. As Stallybrass and White attest, each of these categories is constituted with and in contrast to the other. In other words, “high” and “low” cultural assignments exist as much in terms of what they exclude as what they include.⁴⁰ Moreover, these assignments are flexible, with what is deemed “acceptable” behavior for various races, classes, and genders of people often eventually being revealed as false and fickle constructs, generally devised by those in power, who wish to stay in power, and who feel threatened by what they perceive as the transgressive, sensual (and therefore both “distasteful” and fascinating) behaviors of those they deem “other.”⁴¹

³⁹ Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 119-121; and Barbara S. Glass, *African American Dance: An Illustrated History*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2007), 156.

⁴⁰ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 1-26.

⁴¹ Various dance scholars have pointed out how these denigrated behaviors were commonly associated with ethnic groups that white elites designated as “other” - like African-Americans and Native Americans - but from whom they freely sourced material or drew inspiration. See Dixon-Gottschild, Shea Murphy, Manning, etc., referenced in the introduction to this dissertation.

Mid to late eighteenth century New Yorkers rehearsed their respective social standings beyond the walls of opera houses and concert saloons as well. These same years, between 1830-1880, saw a vast increase and diversification in public dining. Partaking in a meal at a certain kind of restaurant, like taking in a performance at a certain kind of venue, becomes a way of asserting and/or shifting one's social standing. This was especially true for women, who were newly allowed to participate in the public dining scene.

Initially, non-celebratory, quotidian eating in public was born of necessity - a working person's venture sought not necessarily for enjoyment but for sustenance so that the work may continue. The masses would come together to take in whatever fare was offered at mess halls or dining halls during designated meal times. Sharing meals in public, with strangers, though perhaps leisurely and surely restful, was not necessarily an act of leisure; rather, it evidenced the needs of working bodies for refueling.

The elite, on the other hand, dined mostly in private, hosting dinner parties amongst friends. Men gathered to dine in private clubs. These meals were prepared and served by servants, with highly stylized progressions of courses and carefully rehearsed standards for how such bodies took in food. These were spaces designed for social exchange, however contrived. The food provided not only nourishment but evidence, through its framing, of the status of the diners. The environment was carefully controlled, appetites satiated but not overindulged.

In the late 1840s this all begins to change as dining out becomes a newly faddish activity.⁴² Restaurants become extensions of other public entertainments where fantasy and reality blur.⁴³ Eating in the new fine dining establishments, if done with proper etiquette, sublimates bodily need enough to be designated a leisurely, upper class pastime. In fact, the proper performance of eating becomes a means of neither negating or succumbing to bodily needs, but of displaying control and decorum even in the face of opulent offerings.

PERFORMATIVE DINING: DELMONICO'S AND THE "UNSOCIAL SOCIABILITY" OF LATER LOBSTER PALACES

And here comes the soup! You can feel in the room an incredible flurry of self-satisfaction as the bowls of fish consommé grace our table. Tuxedo-clad waiters deposit the dishes delicately, ensuring not a single drop is spilled. I've never before noticed how they move in concert with one another, a lovely coupling of efficiency and grace. As the tendrils of steam reach each nose, every woman present sits a little taller in her tall-backed chair, knowing that today we are making history. We dine today, in public, unaccompanied by men. We, the sisters of Sorosis, will enjoy four full lunch courses (that we ourselves have chosen) and we will enjoy them not sitting in some quiet ladies parlor in someone's private home, but here in the most prominent restaurant in all of Manhattan, Delmonico's.

Our discussions bubble and simmer as did this soup, moments ago, on the stove. The flavors are rich and deep, drawn up from bone and sinew cultivated in the sea, and yet the broth remains light. Will we achieve a similar balance? There is so much to decide. What form shall our women's club take? Who will decide our

⁴² See Joanne Finkelstein, "'Dining Out: The Hyperreality of Appetite,'" in *Eating Culture*, ed Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, 201-215.

⁴³ Finkelstein suggests that part of the appeal of dining out is in the ways it "offers an actual means of realizing one's fantasies; it is as if the restaurant were a theater or a diorama in which individuals can appear as they desire without any of the risks that would be encountered were they to try to cross social barriers" (*Eating Culture*, 204-205).

topics? How will we form our agendas? I look around this beautiful private dining room, elevated up from the din of the street below, and revel in the knowledge that each month this space will be ours and ours alone. As we reach the bottom of our bowls, the waiters swoop smoothly in, like fish in the sea. They clear each lady's place. I clear my throat. I believe I have something to say...

Sorosis formed in April of 1868, a response to the perceived snubbing of women journalists from a prestigious press dinner held in honor of Charles Dickens. The women, who had been ignored on account of their gender, responded to the slight by forming what Lately Thomas reports as the first American club for professional women, Sorosis. The women planned to discuss the topics of the day, but had difficulty procuring a space in which to convene. Embarking on what must have felt like a monumental endeavor, they did not want to retreat to someone's private parlor. They wanted their presence to be known, their gathering to be witnessed. When they approached Lorenzo Delmonico to request the use of one of his private dining rooms he agreed. Perhaps he was a supporter of their efforts, perhaps he was solely interested in the publicity their gathering would invite.⁴⁴

The most opulent food offerings available in New York in the late nineteenth century could be found at Delmonico's. This restaurant, still open as a fine-dining institution serving the wall street tycoons, tourists and whomever else secures a table in its downtown location, opened originally as a wine and pastry shop in the 1830s. By

⁴⁴ This imagining is inspired by writing by Lately Thomas' recounting of the events leading up to the luncheon in Lately Thomas, *Delmonico's: A Century of Splendor*; (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1967), 138-145.

1848, under new management, it began to cultivate a name for its self as an “aristocratic” eating establishment of distinction.⁴⁵ Women were not permitted into Delmonico’s until the 1860s, and even then only escorted.⁴⁶

The current website stakes a claim for Delmonico’s as the first American restaurant (it was the first eating establishment to use the French word “restaurant” to describe itself).⁴⁷ Prior to Delmonico’s, the story goes, American dining generally took place at home or at the rather utilitarian eating houses, hotels, and inns. Here no meal choices were offered, rather the fare was based on what was available on the market, laid out at a set dining time. Following the French tradition, Delmonico’s patrons began to be offered elegant European dishes in an increasingly elegant atmosphere. Waitstaff were trained to be genteel and deferential, and meal times and choices expanded. Especially from the 1860s to 1890s, Delmonico’s “reigned as a symbol of elegant nightlife, bringing wealth and dining under greater social control in the urban scene.”⁴⁸ During this time, a famed French gourmet chef Charles Ranhofer created an elaborate menu featuring fare that appealed to the elite both in its European roots (especially traditions from fashionable France) and its originality (Ranhofer allegedly invented Eggs Benedict at the

⁴⁵ Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture 1890-1925*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1981), 9.

⁴⁶ According to Lately, even after the formation of Sorosis and their monthly luncheons, women were not permitted to dine unescorted during the dinner hour and in the formal dining room. They were also not permitted to dine with someone of the opposite sex in a private dining room unless the door remained open. These rules were allegedly in place to protect their reputation, but it also “maintained” the restaurant’s reputation of class and distinction. Lately, *Delmonico’s*, 138-145).

⁴⁷ Delmonico’s website: <http://www.delmonicorestaurantgroup.com/restaurant/index.html>

⁴⁸ Erenberg, *Steppin Out*, 11.

request of a wealthy, female lunchtime regular bored with the “normal” options, as well as Baked Alaska in celebration of the US’s annexation of the state of Alaska⁴⁹).

Given options such as Delmonico’s, New York’s elite began venturing away from their private parties and salons, opting instead to dine publicly.⁵⁰ In these public places, where disruptions by lower-class interlocutors (or “new money” bourgeoisie) were more possible, formality and gentility became potent markers of social status. Patrons meticulously practiced refined manners. For example, diners were encouraged to eat well, though not too quickly. They were to avoid touching or remarking on the food, slurping or chewing too loudly, and were not to clean their plates so as not to look greedy or overly hungry.⁵¹ As Erenberg and others attest, Delmonico’s became a perfect interactive “performance site” in which the upper class could, through the acts of eating, drinking, and socializing, create and assert their social identities.

Anyone whose behavior was deemed below Delmonico’s standards, who failed to perform the part of a well-to-do diner convincingly (or who failed to offer to pay their credit in a timely manner) was blacklisted. The blacklisting of a diner was quite a performance in itself. The would-be-patron and any guests were greeted and seated as usual. The waiter came to take their order and then they waited.... for food that would never come. If they inquired with the waiter about the delay, the waiter reportedly

⁴⁹ Delmonico’s website: <http://www.delmonicorestaurantgroup.com/restaurant/index.html>

⁵⁰ By the 1860s escorted women were allowed to dine. Their presence “ensured high standards of male decorum and an air of civilization and social formality,” Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 11.

⁵¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 207.

scurried off to the kitchen to see if they could detect what might have gone awry, but never informed the blacklisted diner of their new status. Eventually the diner would realize their business was no longer welcome and they would be forced to get up and leave the table, hungry and embarrassed.⁵²

By the end of the century such fine-dining establishments proliferated (in line with trends in France) and came to increasingly resemble a “stage” (often visited before or after a visit to a real stage) upon which patrons could perform their public personas.⁵³ At some of these new restaurants, like the one at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, the dining halls were dressed as “sets” might be - mimicking fancy Fifth Avenue homes or European palaces. Public corridors and ballrooms featured full-length decorative glass and mirrors and special lighting was designed to amplify viewing potential - so that diners might better see themselves, and so those not able to dine might look in longingly.

In these lush, lively, and lobster filled atmospheres (restaurants that catered to late night Broadway goers became known popularly as “Lobster Palaces” because of their rich offerings and encouragement of indulgence⁵⁴), the lines between reality and fantasy blurred late into the night. These were not, however, the intimate environments of the concert saloons and dance halls. Instead, these ventures capitalized on the spectacle of performance - extending the spectacle to the environs and even the food being served.

⁵² Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 124.

⁵³ Allen notes this time as “the most profound cultural reorientation in the history of American theater,” *Horrible Prettiness*, 29.

⁵⁴ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 38-52.

The food service matched the atmosphere, with several, decorative courses being paraded out by servers in a manner similar to courtly entertainments put on by European nobility in centuries before. Through meticulously mannered eating of such decadent displays, patrons revealed themselves as capable of devouring whatever they willed, while simultaneously exhibiting mastery or control over their own sensual gratification.⁵⁵

Oscar, the famed restaurant manager at the fine dining restaurant at the Waldorf, characterized the social behavior at these Lobster Palaces as one of “unsocial sociability.” Attendance lent a surface level sense of belonging, but participants were more interested in “seeing and being seen” as part of a certain social class than they were in satiating hunger. Mingling at the restaurants and theatres was certainly a socially significant activity, but did not necessarily engender the sort of “social bonding” sought by today’s audience engagement supporters.⁵⁶

As alluded to above, the post-Astor Place Riot “segmentation” of theatrical audiences along class lines meant further developed marketing strategies aimed at increasingly specific demographics. The development of fine dining in public at about this same time was similarly motivated. Both dining and performance become

⁵⁵ Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 55. Erenberg emphasizes how this type of service emphasized the “sensual indulgence of food” but in a controlled way (*Steppin’ Out*, 49).

⁵⁶ The desire for “social bonding” by today’s audience engagement supporters is documented in research conducted by WolfBrown in conjunction with the Engaging Dance Audiences initiative, discussed at greater length in chapter four of this dissertation. The “social bonding” sought by current audience engagement practices indicates a desire for a dance going experience that provides a real opportunity to not just see and be seen, but to get to know others whose common interests brought them to the event. While personal enlightenment and edification is still seen as part of the role the arts play, the interactive elements of audience engagement belie an ethos of “community” that is currently en vogue, especially in San Francisco.

increasingly conceptualized as marketable commodities, the participants groomed to look and act according to certain standards. In this turn towards the creation of marketable commodities, the link between theater going and restaurant going only strengthened.⁵⁷ In both settings, an aura of “unsocial sociality” prevailed as bodies were invited to ambiguously passive participation. Both were, and continue to be, highly mannered events (different manners required for different settings) that demand “a degree of reserve and aloofness that allows us to mix intimately with others without becoming immediately involved.”⁵⁸ In attending, participants share common offerings, but maintain a designated and protected personal space within the social atmosphere. As with audience going, dining out necessitates putting one’s body on the line - but within a highly codified structure that governs behavior and “sequesters us from the rigors of spontaneous, interrogated, and contested sociality”⁵⁹ that are made possible by the structures of other social settings, like those of the cabarets.

As Finkelstein indicates, in these more formal settings, each person knows what her/his role is and how to play said role before entering into the ‘performance’ arena. Participants are offered goods designed to satiate their desires, whether gustatory or terpsichorean, and in both situations the hope is that the goods will also invoke desire that leads to the participants’ return. In these formalized environments, the contestatory

⁵⁷ Finkelstein likens dining out to other entertainment industries, citing its production of fantasy, its creation and perpetuation of desire, and more. “Dining Out” in *Eating Culture*, 204-205.

⁵⁸ Finkelstein, “Dining Out” in *Eating Culture*, 206.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

potentiality of participation (that could emerge through self-reflexive questioning or self-edifying enlightenments) is subtly discouraged. Instead, homogenizing participatory practices are purported. In the performance of dining out, one rehearses model consumerism, playing into certain proscribed standards regardless of how radical the art or nouveau the cuisine.

Delmonico's is said to have "set the national standard" for the fine dining restaurants that eventually cropped up across the country. Similarly, New York theaters were thought to set the national standard for performance spaces created in rapidly developing urban areas outside of the American Northeast. David Scobey notes, "... it is clear that during the Gilded Age, Manhattan established itself throughout the country as a benchmark for respectable taste about what to wear, sit on, eat, and see."⁶⁰ In the second half of the nineteenth century adventurous theater owners, managers, and actors ventured West, modifying the structures and content of their theatrical offerings, as well as their marketing efforts, to suit the rapidly forming societies in which they found themselves. The segmentation of the arts according to genre and along class lines that had begun in the 1840s "spread outward from New York, the center of the commercializing theatre" influencing the ways in which these new managers figured their audiences.⁶¹ Dudden suggests that "New York's extreme version of segmentation by class soon had national significance, for as touring "combination" companies began to displace residential stock

⁶⁰ Scobey, 53. David Scobey, "Nymphs and Satyrs: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York," in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2002), University of Chicago Press, 43-66.

⁶¹ Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre*, 118.

companies in the 1860s, New York became the theatrical proving ground for the entire country.”⁶²

This migration west gives rise to the first European-influenced theatres and opera houses in San Francisco, a small California coastal town whose population exploded in 1848 with the discovery of gold in the nearby hills. During the gold rush era (roughly from 1849-1859) San Francisco historian Misha Berson accounts for some 1105 performances (907 plays, 48 operas, 84 extravaganzas, ballets, or pantomimes, 66 minstrel shows) staged in any of approximately 75 different theaters. Each of these theaters made overt attempts to cultivate boomtown audience members for the performances they staged.⁶³ Most major houses were grandiose and lush, created to model those in New York and Europe with proscenium style stages, a gallery on the floor and elevated boxes for the wealthy.⁶⁴

By the 1860s many of those who owned, operated, and/or attended theaters in San Francisco came from or were at least familiar with the theatrical traditions, standards, and practices born in New York.⁶⁵ Yet, having ventured West to try their hands in these new

⁶² Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre*, 119.

⁶³ Misha Berson, *The San Francisco Stage: From Gold Rush to Golden Spike, 1849-1869*, (San Francisco, CA: The San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum Journal, 1989), 24.

⁶⁴ An exception to this was the theater discussed in the next section, popularly known as the Royal Chinese Theatre, built by Chinese immigrants in order to house a resident company of Chinese performers creating works. This building reflected theatrical traditions of China, with two stage doors for entry and exit, a dressing circle, etc.

⁶⁵ Berson notes that three of the foundational figures of San Francisco theatrical history, however, were not from New York. These three, Stephen Massett, Joseph Rowe, and D.G. “Doc” Robinson, she claims, created a precedent of self-promotion and entrepreneurial hustling that embodied the spirit of the town in the tumultuous gold rush years of 1848-1851. Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 19-25.

urban spaces, they were at least somewhat interested in innovating the presentation of the performing arts. This was especially true once they encountered the specificities of the environment in which they found themselves - a space which Berson describes as follows: "The most action-packed melodrama, the most preposterous opera plot, the farthest-fetched tall tale - none of these could achieve the theatricality of life in San Francisco during the Gold Rush years."⁶⁶ How might we imagine this theatricality? What traditions endured the bumpy journey westward? What spectatorial trends were modified to better represent the people convened there? Or to encourage new performative frontiers?

TRAVELING WEST: TRADITIONS TRANSLATED FOR NEW TERRITORIES

If only they would pick up the pace a little. Our guests, nearly one hundred of them in total, are well fed and tipsy with drink. In such a state - dressed in their finery with bellies full and heads spinning - I'd like to get them inside. There is much about our new theater to point out to them before the show begins. Dinner went well - thirty-two courses and at least as many toasts celebrating the grand opening of our theater, Hung Chuen Yuen. From the corner of the restaurant I watched the meal unfold, structured so that with each course our pride in our theatrical contribution to this town, and our desire for their continued patronage might be apparent.

Ahead I spot the banners of crimson and gold that we have hung near the entrance. Regrettably, under them roils the accursed protesters from the rivaling Globe Theatre. The police are quieting them, so we process easily past, and I signal to my employees. Precisely together, they throw wide the doors to let our party enter. Inside the seats are already beginning to fill. Out of the corner of my eye I see yet another group of protesters, located down in the section of the dress circle we have reserved for women. Deftly, I reroute our group to the far side of

⁶⁶ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 15.

the theater to examine the brick architecture. I point out significant features of our theatre, done in a traditional Chinese style with two stage doors, and an alcove at the back for the musicians. I still my lips and feet as I wait for the translator to make my words and gestures accessible to our esteemed guests.

Now that the rioters have been subdued, I motion with a bow to the seats designated specially for our well-fed entourage. With head lowered I see their feet shuffle past in the dim light provided by the new gas lamps. I turn to leave them, heading with measured steps back behind the stage to alert my company that it is time. The show must begin, and quickly.

This imagined scene traces the events occurring January 27, 1868 when the owners of the Hung Chuen Yuen reportedly invited all of San Francisco's dignitaries to the grand opening of their new theatre, which became more popularly known as the Royal Chinese Theater, in San Francisco. The theater was to become historicized as the first permanent Chinese theater in the United States - funded by capital raised by the Chinese, and set to feature a resident Chinese company.⁶⁷ The building was unassuming, a rather simple, two-story brick structure, set back on the north side of Jackson Street, between Dupont and Kearny. The invited dignitaries were treated to an elaborate banquet at the city's finest Chinese restaurant, the nearby Hang Heong Low. The meal began at four-thirty in the afternoon, ran four hours long, and was chock full of toasts and speeches - themselves a sort of performance - made by the theater's board of Trustees who celebrated those in attendance and encouraged the English-speaking guests' continued patronage. Around nine o'clock the one hundred or so diners walked to the

⁶⁷ Information for this imagining gathered from Berson, "The San Francisco Stage," 87-91; and Lois Foster Rodecape, "Celestial Drama in the Golden Hills," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 21, no. 3, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, Sept 1942), 111.

theater to take in the evening's fare, a goal complicated by the presence of not one but two different groups protesting whom the theater had hired and whom they proposed to admit.

Author Lois Rodecape, writing in 1944, imagines the scene saying, "Knives and forks lay side by side with ivory chopsticks; champagne companioned Chinese liquors."⁶⁸ Rodecape seems enamored with the significance of this merging - of San Francisco's white elite enjoying the hospitality of the Chinese immigrants, presumably some of the most powerful and respected figures of the many thousands of Chinese immigrants that had entered the city in the previous decade or so. It is stories like these that contribute to the enduring fantasy of San Francisco as a place resplendent with multiculturalism. Even in these relatively early days as an urban center, the tales told of the city feature the adventurous spirit, inquisitive minds, and liberal hearts of its inhabitants. For example, Berson asserts that San Francisco in the mid nineteenth century was "an exceptionally democratic city, where classes and races mingled with relative ease" thus producing "theater-goers adventurous enough to sample *every* sort of novelty or sensation."⁶⁹ This seems like a gross generalization, especially considering the legacy of racial inequality between white settlers and the native Ohlone tribes upon which the town's missionary foundations are built. In addition there are exoticizing accounts of curious upper class folks popping their heads in to witness the debauchery of the opium dens of the Chinese

⁶⁸ Ibid. Rodecape draws most of her information from newspaper articles like those found in the *Alta California*, *Bulletin*, *Dramatic Chronicle*, and *Call* - select editions between 1868-1869.

⁶⁹ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 17 (emphasis is Berson's).

immigrants and drunken dance halls packed with immigrant Irish. This is not to mention the later internment camps forcibly containing Japanese immigrants and the continued exploitative treatment of Mexican and Mexican-American agricultural workers.⁷⁰

Choreographer Joanna Haigood brought to life some of the racial inequities of this time in a recent dance work by her company Zaccho Dance Theatre entitled *Sailing Away* (2010). *Sailing Away* was a site-specific piece that Haigood set at the Shoreline Plaque at Market and Battery and various nearby monuments, marking both the city's pre-landfill coastline and its eventual growth and development. The piece was inspired by research that Haigood and her dancers conducted into historical black figures who suffered persecution, succeeded in various ways, and eked out a memorable life in these tumultuous boomtown years. Her work brings to life some of the subsumed histories of the city, histories that are occluded by accounts like Berson's which imagine San Francisco in the 1850s and 1860s the way that many like to fantasize it is now - namely a liberal, welcoming, place equally accessible to all.⁷¹

That said, the diversity of the population of San Francisco in these years meant that those present were more accustomed, and on some level open, to mixing with people different than themselves. There were no powerful elite family lineages determining

⁷⁰ One might presume that the protests that took place that evening had to do with the fact of a Chinese-owned and operated theater and the "foreignness" of the cultural displays associated with its grand opening. However, the protesters outside are reported by Rodecape to have been actors from the Globe Theatre who were upset about actors from a rival theater having been hired to work there. The protesters inside were members of the Tong Wing Company of Washermen, fellow Chinese, who were protesting the designation of a certain portion of the house being reserved exclusively for women. Rodecape, "Celestial Drama," 112.

⁷¹ Information about *Sailing Away* accessed April 2, 2014 at <http://dancersgroup.org/2010/10/sailing-away-joanna-haigood-choreographs-san-francisco-history/>

social circles. Ethnic enclaves developed, but everyone lived within rather close proximity to one another, and the characters of different neighborhoods were still developing. At least initially, the mix of “Harvard graduates and farm boys, miners and entrepreneurs, sophisticates and ruffians” constituted the audiences at any given show. Many working class Western European immigrants brought with them a penchant for “high art” European opera. The large Chinese immigrant population meant that Chinese opera and puppetry was woven into performances at a variety of venues, though Berson reports that (presumably) white journalists and audience members often bristled against the foreign, dissonant tonalities, the costumes, and the length of shows.⁷² The San Francisco Minstrels achieved great acclaim, parodying the carnivalesque aspects of life in San Francisco - complete with self-referential digs at other local and touring productions.⁷³

The “adventurous” nature of potential bay area spectators was appealed to in marketing efforts and made evident in the broad range of performances made available.⁷⁴ This same breadth of offerings can still be seen, albeit changed with the time, throughout

⁷² Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 87-91.

⁷³ Sharon D. McCoy, “The Trouble Starts at Eight”: Mark Twain, the San Francisco Minstrels, and the Unsettling Legacy of Blackface Minstrelsy,” *American Literary Realism* 41, no. 3, (Spring 2009), 235. McCoy makes a claim (that I continue to question) that choices made by the San Francisco Minstrels positioned their work both as wildly successful, but also as less offensive than other minstrel shows.

⁷⁴ For detailed description of some of these early events see Lois Foster Rodecape, “Tom Maguire, Napoleon of the Stage” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Sept 1942): 239-275 . Published by the University of California Press in association with California Historical Society, accessed 10/17/13 online <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25161009>

the city today.⁷⁵ Patrons were willing to try out different forms of entertainment, turning the distinctions between “high” and “low” culture cultivated in New York topsy-turvy. Everything was new and, seemingly, worthy of exploring. The architecture, the housing, the wealth, the social connections, all were new; and there was a sense that it could all disappear just as quickly as it had appeared (and often it did - fires plagued the boomtown where construction happened quickly and safety codes had not yet been established).⁷⁶ With most present in San Francisco and the surrounding areas to seek some new fortune, or capitalize on others seeking theirs, the city cultivated an ethos of experimentation, innovation, and perhaps even inclusivity not possible in less diverse environs throughout the country.

Buildings for public entertainments similar to those found in New York and Europe proliferated - the theaters, opera houses, dance halls and auditoriums meant to house performances appeared quite the same as they might elsewhere, and the performance offerings that came through town included some of the same New York and European stars popular elsewhere (including notables in dance history like Fannie Elssler, Adah Issacs Menken, Lola Montez and more). But, at least initially, the population of people venturing out to these performances responded to them a bit differently. The

⁷⁵ San Francisco is host to a variety of dance-inclusive annual programming reflecting this diversity, including the International Dance Festival, the SF Hip-Hop Festival, the West Wave Festival, Contact Improvisation Festival, SCUBA, and more. In addition, it is home to the first professional residential ballet company, San Francisco Ballet; AXIS Dance, a nationally renowned dance company for differently abled bodies; and several nationally and internationally acclaimed aerial dance companies like Zaccho Dance Theatre and Project Bandaloop. (more info available at dancersgroup.org).

⁷⁶ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 24.

massive influx of people who flocked to the coastal town between 1850-1870 are commemorated as adventurers and dreamers looking to reinvent themselves, even to unburden themselves from social constraints associated with their status back home. Like elsewhere, audience members were most often men (very few women and children came in the early years) but these men had relatively “few responsibilities or family obligations,” relatively “lax social standards” (living conditions for most were appalling), and relatively “large appetite for diversion.”⁷⁷ Performance arts creators and presenters attempted to satiate these appetites with offerings ranging from “high tragedy, low comedy, grand opera, minstrelsy, burlesque.” In fact, all of these various styles were at some point produced by the same theatre owner, the notorious former cab-driver turned entrepreneur from New York, Tom Maguire.⁷⁸

Like upwardly mobile New Yorkers, San Francisco theater patrons emerge from newspaper articles, diaries, and historical society pages as people interested in establishing themselves socially, though relatively less concerned with distinguishing themselves from others along class lines. They were understandably less focused on asserting class differences or defending their alleged “turf” from unwanted bourgeois influences. This translates into more favorable reviews for dance performers like Lola Montez, whose tarantella-inspired “Spider Dance” Berson reports received much harsher critiques in New York than in San Francisco. In the east, Montez was criticized for

⁷⁷ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 15-19.

⁷⁸ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 27-29; Rodecape, *Tom Maguire*.

exposing her body, for her writhing and wriggling dance style, and for her emotional abandon as she depicted a woman overcome by venomous spiders. In San Francisco, Berson claims she was embraced as a character of intrigue and fascination.⁷⁹

These two accounts of the arts scenes of New York and San Francisco from the mid to late nineteenth century line up with dominant discourses around the ethos of each place. By this I mean that New York gets figured as the epicenter for American performing arts, creating the standards by which all other places are measured. In contrast, San Francisco becomes NYC's liberal cousin, less refined, more ramshackle. New York values polished, refined works of art, San Francisco rallies around experimenters, vagabonds, and liberals. I do not mean to polarize the two when in fact, the practices popularized in each were in play at both, then as now. In offering up this comparison I do, however, hope to emphasize two things. The first is how standards for spectatorship that were popularized at this time continue to shape concert-going behavior today. The second is to mark a major moment in San Francisco history that has contributed to the legacy of experimentation and inclusivity in which the performing arts community (and, as voraciously, the food community) pride themselves. This so-called "forty-niner spirit" continues to infuse the city these many years later. It has arguably influenced the development of architectural innovations like the theaters and gathering places of Julia Morgan, culinary innovations like those of Alice Waters and her low to

⁷⁹ Berson, *The San Francisco Stage*, 55.

high brow restaurant, Chez Panisse, as well as choreographic innovations from bay area dance legends like Isadora Duncan and Anna Halprin.

THE MODEST BAY AREA BEGINNINGS OF MODERN DANCE

The dozen or so occupants of this small living room hold a collective breath as this twelve year old girl before us leans into one hip, her head tilted slightly left, eyes downcast, palms of straight arms opening outward. Her long hair tumbles around a pensive face, her slight body is covered in a loosely draping handmade dress. She holds almost entirely still, and yet there is a buoyancy of spirit, a joyful serenity that emerges from her, creating anticipation for her movement. As the music from the piano where her mother plays builds, she begins to lift her gaze and outstretched arms towards the sky, pausing slightly when arms and eyes have reached their highest height. Then, she is off..... into a series of delicate twirls, of prancing skips, of arms swaying, folding, and unfolding. She is the music, and somehow she is beyond the music. She is here with us, and somehow she transports us. She lifts us up out of this tiny, tidy Oakland apartment. Her scampering bare feet lap at this bare wooden floor, evoking the undulating waves of the nearby Pacific. She advances and retreats, with a largesse that doesn't seem possible in this crowded room. Now nearer to us with arms encircling her body, now leaping off to the corner, now running towards the piano, now looking back gracefully, slowly, over her shoulder. She has not far to go, performing as she does in this little living room and yet, mark my words, this girl will go far.

The woman who sat witnessing this young girl's dance would later in the evening (perhaps over an impossibly small slice of the cake the girl had somehow convinced the local baker to give her despite her inability to pay for it), remark on how the girl reminded her of a famous and wildly popular ballerina, Fanny Elssler. Elssler was a Viennese dancer well-known for her dynamic and captivating performance quality. She toured in the United States from 1840-42, over fifty years prior to this young girl's living room performance. She danced in a style that the young girl, after three lessons at a local

ballet school in San Francisco, vociferously denounced. And yet on this temperate bay area evening, during this small living room salon hosted by the girl's mother, this woman predicted how the young girl would, like Elssler, eventually make a name for herself as a professional dancer. Angela Isadora Duncan, would go on to tour the world, captivating the imagination of devoted fans with her dancing and her fascinating public persona. I like to imagine how, between bites of a small cake that her family couldn't really afford, and prompted by feedback given her by an "audience" member (really a family friend invited to their "salon"), Duncan began to dream of what her dancing might come to mean to the world.⁸⁰ From these humble living room salons Duncan would emerge as a tour de force, becoming for some the "mother" of modern dance.

Much is written about Isadora Duncan, whose work and life figure into every modern dance origin myth. Many writings position her - with her insistence on freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom from bourgeois restrictions governing female bodily comportment - as mother-goddess-pioneer of a movement that would radically explode dance's potential as an art form. Duncan's earliest performances were salon settings where friends and family gathered to share art and presumably food, even when they could scarcely afford it. Later, when Duncan had moved to New York she again performed in salon settings - this time for the wealthy elite who employed her. The

⁸⁰ The scene described above is an imagined recreation of an event Duncan recounts in her autobiography, *Isadora Duncan, My Life: Isadora Duncan* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1927), 13-21. The presence of the cake at this salon is a work of fiction - inspired by the "salon" setting where it is likely that Duncan's mother would have insisted on having some refreshment for her guests, as well as information Duncan's recounting of how she was the representative of her family who was sent forth to the butcher and baker in order to charm them into extending the family's credit when they could not pay.

basic structure of these performances were the same, though the cultural enactments enabled by those participating in the performance varied vastly according to the social standards of the distinct settings. These New York salon appearances provided Duncan with much needed sponsorship for her “new” form of dance. They simultaneously allowed the women who hosted and attended them a new sort of cultural agency. Dance historian Linda J. Tomko points out how the salons provided opportunities for New York’s elite women to expand their gendered roles into the realm of “cultural arbitrage” - where they acted as “cultural custodians” who, through their sponsorship, validated Duncan’s dancing and the image of the New Woman which it embodied.⁸¹

Duncan, (as well as Ruth St. Denis and Loie Fuller the other modern dance “pioneers” of her time), worked hard to cultivate receptive audiences. In addition to the salons, she danced on grand opera house stages, in the chorus of vaudeville-like revues and Shakespearean melodramas. Her ingenuity and dedication helped carve a place for dance amongst “reputable” company in and around “respectable” venues. Duncan’s demand for (and ability to elicit) rapt attention from those in attendance aligned concert dance with spectatorial standards already formed for high art endeavors.

I am interested here in highlighting two aspects of Duncan’s legacy - the bay-area specificity of her work, and the ways in which in her, we see the “birth” of modern dance as a form shaped in relation to everyday practices, experiences, and revelations that are

⁸¹ Linda J. Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 64.

inevitably gendered, classed, and racialized. Duncan's body in motion is analyzed in regards to the bay area as her birth place and early home. Most accounts (Au, Anderson, Jowitt, Reynolds and McCormick, Foulkes, etc) mention Duncan's humble beginnings where her mother, though poor, insisted on filling her children's life with art, music, poetry and philosophy. Her "liberated" dance style germinated in the special space of the San Francisco bay area where she cultivated "the sort of long and loose stride from the hips that seemed to echo the west's wide-open landscapes."⁸² Duncan herself claims a kinship with the Pacific, recalls romping on the sandy shores and being moved to move with the rhythms of the place. She asserts that her first dances, those that happened in utero, were influenced by local foods - the direct result of her mother's strange sea-oriented diet of oysters and champagne (which was, reportedly, all she could stomach due to an illness). These "foods of Aphrodite" Duncan acknowledges as her initial sources of fuel and inspiration.⁸³

Au, in turn, purports that "Nature was her inspiration and her guide.... She found ideas in natural phenomena such as the movement of wind and waves, and her dancing drew upon ordinary actions such as walking, running, skipping and jumping: the normal 'movement repertory' of human beings."⁸⁴ The nature alluded to here was the specific landscape of the San Francisco bay area, the human beings referred to are the immigrants,

⁸² Daly, *Done Into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 8.

⁸³ Duncan, *My Life*, 13-14.

⁸⁴ Susan Au, *Ballet and Modern Dance*, 3rd Edition, (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 2012), 89.

adventure seekers, entrepreneurs, and dreamers amongst whom Duncan lived in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, though exactly what parts of this population she came in contact with is hard to say. Her movement repertory is not generic “human” movement, but carefully selected to represent certain ideals becoming popular with certain parts of the population at the time. Recognizing this, Jowitt remarks, “If she [Duncan] did, in some sense, “just grow” into an artist, the climate of her native California may have been partly responsible. Aesthetic movements flowered robustly in the warm air and sunshine. People could stage poetry readings, put on plays and pageants out of doors. They could wear Greek outfits as a sign of liberal thinking or artistic proclivities....”⁸⁵ These early influences shaped Duncan, though eventually she bristled against what she perceived as the conservative nature of “the society” in which she lived.

Duncan was driven by hunger, both metaphorically hungry to share her dance with the world and sometimes literally hungry as she attempted to use her dancing prowess to help her family survive. In *My Life*, she recounts looking for dance work in Chicago with her mother while the two of them lived off a flat of semi-spoiled tomatoes they had been given.⁸⁶ The effects of this hunger were, of course, not apolitical. Duncan is memorialized as having “elevated dance from a popular entertainment to the hallowed

⁸⁵ Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 74.

⁸⁶ Duncan, *My Life*, 25-26.

halls of art and nature” but Daly astutely theorizes how Duncan’s “elevation” of dance was accomplished via strategies of exclusivity.⁸⁷ Daly states,

In order to reinvent the idea of the “dancer,” that is to say, to make dancing (but her specific kind of dancing) a matter of good “taste” within the existing cultural order, Duncan employed the dominant logic of difference along a number of axes and used it to cultivate “distinction.” Effectively she elevated dancing from low to high, from sexual to spiritual, from black to white, from profane to sacred, from woman to goddess, from entertainment to “Art.”⁸⁸

Duncan espoused existing white, elite ideology distinguishing proper “artistic” ventures from the allegedly more lowly entertainments, carefully constructing her dance endeavors in contrast not only to ballet as is often historicized, but to popular social dance and Jazz dance. She “drew on Hellenic ideals of government, art, architecture, and philosophy to liberate the body in reverence to the freedom of the individual spirit” while simultaneously propagating an anti-Jazz rhetoric that supported stereotypes of black dance and music as “uncivilized, sexual and profane.”⁸⁹ She, like many of the choreographers that constructed and reconstructed the parameters of modern dance throughout the twentieth century, was motivated by ideas about how dance could not just entertain, but edify and enrich people. She was not interested in the transgressive or liberating potential of other forms. Duncan believed that her dancing could inspire others to achieve greatness - that witnessing dance was in essence an interactive activity

⁸⁷ Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism From Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9.

⁸⁸ Daly, *Done Into Dancing*, 16-17.

⁸⁹ Foulkes, *Modern Bodies*, 9; Daly, *Done Into Dancing*, 7.

requiring openness and deliberate receptivity from audience members. However, her careful selection of sponsors, venues, music, and more belied convictions that such opportunities belonged to those wealthy, educated, and (presumably) white enough to engage in the heady, enlightened manner deemed appropriate for this new “modern” dance.

Discourse around Duncan tends not to focus on her interventions into spectatorship per se, though she did play a great role in revolutionizing how people took in dance. Her innovations came not so much through a restructuring of audience position or an insistence on their active participation, as through the ways in which she foregrounded her dance, prioritizing it over all other theatrical elements as the central point of focus. She consciously stripped away the trappings of spectacle that had built up around other forms of theatrical dance popular at the time - from ballet to vaudeville, burlesque to Broadway musical. She coupled her dances with concert music by Schubert, Chopin, and others - a move met with disdain by those who thought dance was “beneath” such great classical works, and with enthusiasm by composers so moved by her dancing that they created music in her honor. She often performed in front of a draped curtain on a bare stage, in a flowing, gauzy dress and bloomers that were, at the time, a radical departure from the corsets, tutus, and other costumes that shaped women’s movements in years prior.

Duncan’s solo dancing, complete with Hellenic images, elite female sponsorship, classical music, and a sense of spiritual righteousness effectively “purified” the space(s)

held for modern dance. She constructed these spaces in sharp contrast to other venues for dance and the dancing styles of those the elite considered Other - like the “dangerous” sacred dancing of native American ritual, or the “overly-sensual” stylings of social dances with Africanist roots. The assertion of Duncan’s, St. Denis’ and other early soloists dancing style as high art modernist expressions was just the beginning of (at least) half a century’s worth of alleged distinctions between “modern” dance and “ethnic” dance (or “black” dance or “native” dance or “folk” dance) that were to come.

Early concert dance thus came to closely resemble other high art theatrical offerings in terms of spectatorial standards. But, the “liberating” innovations Duncan worked for were not the only meaningful modernist expressions of dance emerging. Other dance forms encouraged various social transgressions and “public intimacies” that high art Western theatrical traditions had carefully eliminated.⁹⁰ As Vogel attests, cabaret spaces, especially the less commercialized African-American owned and operated versions of cabaret that emerged in Harlem throughout the Harlem Renaissance, opened up opportunities for commensal exchanges that “critique[d] normalizing narratives of racial and sexual identity.” This, Vogel indicates, was especially true for black people bristling at the trend towards “uplift” ideology, which encouraged black people to eschew

⁹⁰ Vogel defines “public intimacies,” stating that intimacy “does not refer to feelings of belonging or intersubjectivity based on teleology, commitment, permanence, longevity, functionalism, or family.” Instead these intimacies, cultivated collaboratively between spectators and performers, developed “relations and relational narratives that are not legible or recognized as valid by dominant discourses and social institutions.” Vogel makes an important distinction between the commercialized cabaret spaces where such intimacies are manufactured and the Harlem clubs that are his main site of inquiry. He claims that the “less remarkable” and less well-known Harlem clubs “expanded social possibilities.” These expanded social experiences were also sometimes afforded in more commercialized cabarets, but were effected differently. Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2009), 22-23.

African-derived ethics that emphasized relationality and interdependence in favor of hegemonic ideals like “... chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority and the accumulation of wealth.”⁹¹ Cabaret cultivated a very different audience experience enabled through the employment of various “spatial, social, historical, and performance practices” that allowed for socializing quite distinct from that encouraged in concert dance settings. Vogel states,

The elimination of the fourth wall and close proximity of the performers to the audience, the social interaction among the patrons before, after, and even during the show; the informality of the performance and the social codes governing the spectators (which, though informal, may still be highly choreographed; the spatial arrangements and architecture; the redirection of spectatorial sightlines; the late-night hours and consumption of food and alcohol - all work to create an effect of physical and psychic closeness and shared inwardness.⁹²

I include this lengthy quote in its entirety because each of the elements discussed earlier in this chapter as considerations in creating “high” art spaces (architecture, proximity, formality, etc) are also considered here, just aimed at a different end. Cabaret culture undoes the constructs put in place by those interested in “high” art, constructs that distance audience members from performers. It is also these constructs that postmodern choreographers manipulated in their choreographic and programmatic expansions of what concert dance could encompass during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Reynolds and McCormick (2003) claimed that at the turn of the twentieth century theatrical dance was “Rescued from the populism of vaudeville and the elitism of the

⁹¹ Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret*, 4.

⁹² Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret*, 23.

tsar's theater" and that it "entered the mainstream to become a diversion of the all-encompassing middle class."⁹³ This statement belies a popular conviction that modern dance was a "people's" dance form - a product rescued from the haughty high and lascivious low as a means of expression for the greater populous. It also subtly denigrates these other "high" and "low" forms as being somehow of less value - less in line with modern American Puritanic and democratic ideals.

DANCING AWAY FROM AND THEN BACK TOWARDS DAILY LIFE

Modern dance thus became associated with "real" art - valorized as neither the ethereal narratives of the ballets nor the mere entertainments of commercialized forms like Broadway. The name "modern dance" came to represent vastly different structures and dance content - dances featuring bodies expressing deep personal emotion (Martha Graham), bodies representing the emotional plight of "other" disenfranchised persons (Helen Tamiris), bodies as makers of line, shape, pattern (Merce Cunningham), bodies abstracting bodily line, shape, pattern (Alwin Nikolai), to name just a few. The 1930s was an especially potent time for establishing what could be encompassed by concert dance. This time is complete with a sort of coming-of-age awkwardness wherein different choreographers, critics, and even the government officials on a national level begin to shape what forms of dance get valorized as the new "modern" dance and which ones

⁹³ Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Point*, xii-xiii. Reynolds and McCormick speak here of modern dance in general, not indicating whether they are talking specifically about New York or elsewhere.

(often dances emerging from black or other ethnic traditions) do not “make the cut.”⁹⁴

Embedded in this process of modern dance’s self-definition was a drive to separate concert dance from daily life. Many of those engaged in the project were interested in “elevating” concert dance away from the social dancing, folk traditions, cotillions, ritual dancing, and commercialized expressions of dance. These forms (often, but not always, embodied by those of the lower classes or non-white ethnicities) are commonly framed as less valuable in terms of societal edification, and yet were commonly “borrowed” from as sources of “inspiration” for the dances that made it to the concert dance stages.⁹⁵

In this process of divorcing concert dance from daily life the ‘bodiliness’ of the dance, and of those watching the dance, gets deemphasized. Actions taken on by bodies going about their day, like the eating of food, are an ill fit in such a space. Sharing food, acts which foreground bodily undertakings of sustenance and pleasure did not fit with the critical, attentive forms of spectatorship that observing “dance as art” allegedly required. So, as concert dance audiences formed, food was rarely a part of the action. Perhaps there were fears that food’s presence might “upstage” the action of the choreography that was newly positioned as the reason for being in the theater. The aforementioned rise in restaurant culture meant that there was now a differentiated space for eating and socializing, so that such activities no longer needed to happen in the social space of the

⁹⁴ For more on this process of self-definition see Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of modernity, ‘race’ and nation in early modern dance*, (London and New York: Routledge University Press, 1998).

⁹⁵ See Shea Murphy (2007), Manning (2004), Dixon-Gottschild (1996), and DeFrantz (2004) for specific examples of such cultural appropriation.

theater. But, food also brought attention to the “lower” needs of the body that were seen as existing in conflict with the cultivation of “high” class audiences. Food’s extraction, then, can be seen an indicator of white elite efforts to distance the genre from the practices of various ethnic minorities who readily incorporated food and dance to varied ends in instances like cabaret, powwow, or various other cultural rituals.

The extraction of food - and the ways in which commensal exchanges can disorganize and reorganize groups of people in more relational modes - was one method of disciplining bodies to be and behave in line with the streamlined, efficient, ideals of urban, industrialized life. Allowing food to remain in the performance space would have interfered with an ideological agenda that constructed concert dance-going bodies as, in Bakhtinian terms, “modern” rather than “grotesque.” The “grotesque” body is porous and unruly - feasts, copulates, and defecates. It is continuous with the world around it, made of the same materials and destined to return to the earth. In contrast Bakhtin’s 1930s conception of a modern body closed off from the outside world, governed by the mind and its presumably rational ideals. It is a body that interfaces with the world via a critical gaze and eschews sensuous indulgences. These are the bodies cultivated by those (white elite theater owners, critics, and patrons) who dictated the parameters of concert dance at its inception.

This construction of critical, witnessing bodies began to be challenged in the postmodern era of the late twentieth century. Much of the work that was done in the first half of the century to extract concert dance away from “life” (and, with it, food) was

challenged through the critical interventions of select dancers, choreographers, presenters, and audiences. Members of this art community integrated the various social movements that popularized at this time like the civil rights movement, the anti-war and free love movements, and the feminist movement, among others. These artists were interested in reintegrating art with the visceral materiality of lived experience. This aesthetic shift meant once again expanding the parameters of dance performance, this time to include things like site specific performances (sometimes of political protest or action), pedestrian rather than virtuosic movement, choreography derived from movement scores rather than a singular, authoritative voice. Dancing bodies were featured in unprecedented ways, dance's participation in the creation of material culture once again expanded.⁹⁶

An often overlooked part of this reclamation of the quotidian and this refiguring of bodies' potential to evoke, enact, and provoke is the fact that food, too, was once again welcomed into the realm of body-centric performance practices like dance. Feminist performance artists were especially adept at incorporating food in performative ways, politicizing food's presence in relationship to their bodies in order to push back against hegemonic, patriarchal assignments of women's roles as domestics, nurturers and food providers. Karen Finley and Carolee Schneeman created powerful images with their food-oriented performances that challenged the popular conceptions of white women as

⁹⁶ For more on postmodern dance see: Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Postmodern Dance*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press, 1987); Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007) and Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press, 1997); amongst others.

dainty and docile objects designed to manipulate food in order to satiate the desires of (male) others. These women's interactions with food elicited the visceral in no merely metaphorical manner. Foodstuffs were manipulated boldly, Finley by smearing her exposed body in sticky substances - canned yams, honey, and chocolate to name a few - and Schneeman by rolling about nearly naked in massive quantities of bloody, raw meat.⁹⁷ Their work accomplished their political goals through viscerally affective means.

Choreographers like the bay area's Anna Halprin also incorporated food into embodied works and challenged hegemonic norms, albeit quite differently. Halprin has created an immense body of work that approaches representational politics from a different stance, namely an insistence on dissolving distinctions between a dance product and a processual life. In the following chapter I analyze two of Halprin's works, created in the 1960s, which exemplify how food's reintegration in the landscape of "concert" dance (and the subsequent destabilization of such genre-specific, categorical assignments to embodied forms of art) leant food-related themes and materials new performative potential.

CONCLUSION

I include this historical chapter to emphasize that Western dance history did not develop in a vacuum focused solely on developments in dance technique and aesthetic

⁹⁷ Finley, Karen. "We Keep Our Victims Ready" (1990) and "Shut Up and Love Me" (2001). Carolee Schneeman, "Meat Joy" (1964). Performances.

ideals, but rather in deeply interconnected relationship to even seemingly mundane social customs and cultural trends. Examination of these quotidian, food-related social constructions delve into Bhaktin-esque notions of bodies behaving badly and subsequently into discourses around the in/appropriate. I propose that an air of this “social unsociability” lingers in contemporary theatrical settings - contributing to the “audience problem” commonly discussed in conference talks, keynote addresses, blogs, research reports and articles about the “high” arts in recent years.⁹⁸ This “audience problem” may in fact be a symptom of the pervasive reach of white privilege, and the ways in which white privilege allows for certain exclusionary “tastes” and practices to be largely accepted as “universal” norms rather than identified as white and questioned in regards to their effects in and on a potentially diverse dance going population.

The late nineteenth century desire to elevate one’s self and one’s social standing, the interest in creating exclusive environments where a certain type of controlled, decorous performed behavior was expected (even in the face of relative opulence, or leisurely ‘release’ from work time affairs), have created a spectatorial legacy that continues to thwart earnest efforts to solicit participation and ‘engagement’ from potential patrons these many years later. This “unsocial sociability,” whether or not it is the *reality* of the social scape of a concert dance performance, colors popular perception of the genre. Concert dance performances continue to offer up opportunities to socialize - to share space and a common performance experience - now as they did in the late

⁹⁸ This audience problem is explored explicitly in chapter four of this dissertation.

nineteenth century. However, the performance of a public, classed ‘self’ that used to be an integral function of such experiences holds relatively little clout in contemporary society. This, coupled with an evolving wariness of white privilege and its trappings, as well as the advent of innumerable other entertainment options, leads some to question the relevancy of the “high” arts and their more “traditional” structures, concert dance included.

As mentioned in the introduction, in chapter two I will offer further examination of the performative potential of food’s incorporation in dance performance specifically, beginning with two postmodern pieces from the 1960s by the San Francisco bay area dance icon, Anna Halprin. These two are examined alongside two contemporary performance examples from bay area dance company EmSpace Dance, querying how food’s inclusion operates in each historical context. Part of what I propose food’s reintroduction to “dance as art” encourages is a prioritization of the sensory evocations enabled through such performances. Food, especially when incorporated into the special space designated for making meaning of bodies in motion that dance performance establishes, helps to destabilize the modernist notions of an autonomous self upon which a Cartesian prioritization of “mind” over “body” insists. Food’s presence can be made to amplify bodily “presence,” urging - through a fleshy, sinewy, biochemical insistence - recognition of the many valences on which bodily activity and interactivity construct our lived realities.

The “meat” of the remaining chapters centers around choreographic analysis of select bay area performances that invite interplay between dance and food. By creatively incorporating food into performances, the contemporary choreographers and presenters featured are continuing the work of certain postmodern artists interested in bucking the legacy that figures refinement through bodily control as ideal. They are experimenting with how food’s presence in performance and/or as performance convenes people around dance differently. The work of these contemporary figures is not merely citational, or a throw back to past practices. In a twenty-first century context there exists new factors to contend with - the digitization of mass media, the social forums and networks forming in “cyber” spaces, the threats of global warming and the subsequent skepticism of the industrialized food system, the increasing wariness born of living a commercialized existence.

In each example I take up, I consider how these select performance practices, each of which incorporates food in some way, can offer multiple avenues of “audience engagement.” Close examination of these events reveals that the slathering on of foodstuffs only carries these projects so far, it cannot be depended upon as a panacea for perceived spectatorial deficiencies. In some cases (and indeed for “some” more than “others”) rather than actually breaking down the “unsocial sociality” that prevails or creating the intended atmosphere of conviviality, the inclusion of food can amplify the disconnect between how many bay area concert dance audience members view

themselves (as liberal, global, multicultural) and how they comport themselves (largely according to genteel European standards).

Chapter Two

Food and Performativity: Sensory Activation as Audience Engagement

There is a pancake pinned to the wall. A single, perfect pancake. The smell of coffee and melted butter lingers in the air, passing through the expanding nostrils of audience members seated quietly in the darkness of the Playhouse theater. There is faint music playing on the radio and a slight breeze blowing through the window that connects the stage space and the street outside. It's a cold San Francisco night but the stage lights and the densely packed bodies occupying the seats have warmed the small blackbox theater. The sounds of ice cubes clinking together in a delicate glass of gin and tonic echo in everyone's ears. She is getting a bit tipsy. Across the room a man advances, wielding a large kitchen knife, his eyes fixed on the dining table where the third and final player lies supine. The man lying has his eyes open, watching man and blade approach. Then, without warning, the knife plunges deep into the flesh.... of the orange placed just above his breastbone. With one slice innards are exposed, bursting vessels of juicy fruit, sweet, bright, orange.

It is 1965. The performance is the premiere of Anna Halprin's *Apartment 6*. The scene is an imagined one, pieced together from performance reviews, texts, and interview anecdotes I have gathered in an attempt to surmise what it might have *felt* like to sit in that small playhouse almost fifty years ago.¹ I imagine how the senses of spectators were heightened through the creative uses of food in and as performance - the choreographed blurring and blending of the theatrical and the quotidian. Each night's performance offered unexpected, unrehearsed events produced with the aid of a lightly structured improvisational score. *Apartment 6* represented a shockingly new approach to dance

¹ Information for this recreation gleaned from Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009), 188-191.

performance - one that reviewers were intrigued by even as they stumbled a bit around how to qualify the performance.²

Halprin's choreographic approach enlisted these familiar foodstuffs as performative catalysts, objects whose charged materiality bolsters her challenge to aesthetic ideals of past generations that lionize critical distance from a polished art product. It called upon the dancers to be 'present', by which she reportedly means especially sensitive and open to their feelings, reactions, and impulses in the moment.³ The performers' highly attuned gut responses, rather than the practiced execution of a choreographic set of movements, motivated their actions and reactions. The approach necessitated a willingness, from those in the seats and on the stage, to place the psychological dramas of the performers' domestic lives, their interpersonal relationships, squarely front and center as the piece's "subject." In so querying the subject matter "permissible" as dance, Halprin implicated the audience members in the performance - invoking their own bodies and their own domestic spaces rather than offering some glamorous, polished spectacle for their enjoyment. Through their activated senses and their creative imaginings the spectators became performers. The performances of all those present co-mingled, rendering the arguably banal (arguably) artful.

² See Alfred Frankenstein, "Apartment 6 New Realism in Theater," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 21, 1965, 7; and Arthur Bloomfield, "Playhouse Hilarity," *S.F. News Call Bulletin*, March 22, 1965, 11.

³ Halprin expressed this sentiment at a talk called "Leaders at the Lab: A Conversation with Anna Halprin and Brenda Way" at Margaret Jenkins Dance Lab in San Francisco on April 9, 2012.

As explored in the introduction of this dissertation, the sensory activation and accentuation within witnesses that I imagine Halprin's performance approach elicited was made possible through complex networks of biological, psychosocial, and ideological factors that shape our understandings of ourselves in relationship to material culture. *Apartment 6* used familiar set pieces and food materials to invoke the domestic in the performance space, relying on the unexpected uses of these materials to have 'actionable' effects. It is the performativity of such e/affects, analyzed through the lens of sensory activation and accentuation I see food in performance potentially enabling, that I explore in this chapter.⁴

Many have theorized the effects of the reintegration of 'life' with 'art' in the postmodern era, some like Geis and Iball have even theorized the performative effects of food in performance art and theater, respectively.⁵ Scholars of indigenous performance

⁴ Discussions of performativity often begin with the contributions of J.L. Austin and Jacques Derrida. Austin, a philosopher, uses examples of phrases such as "I promise" or "I dare you" that, when uttered in a specific set of circumstances, enact something substantive (the nature of what constitutes this substantive-ness is the subject of much subsequent debate). In other words, these speech acts are not just "constative" or descriptive, but rather "performative," or active. Common language and associations allow for those who bear witness to such utterances to feel, or literally assume, the effects. Austin disregards the space of theatrical performance, however, as one where due to its artifice such performativity is not possible. This is where Derrida intercedes, arguing that it is precisely in the space of such performances that performativity can be well understood for what it is - both a product of historical and cultural iterations and an aperture allowing for new actions, realizations, affects. Feminist scholar Elin Diamond, for her part, asserts that not all performances are, in fact, performative. If the actions align with dominant discursive standards, or the reception or perception of them is not contextually fitting, they remain as Austin might say "hollow" or even "parasitic," - they do not create the aforementioned aperture allowing for new possibilities. For more see, J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words, 2nd Edition*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1975); Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁵ Deborah R. Geis, "Feeding the Audience: Food, Feminism, and Performance Art," in *Eating Culture*, edited by Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); Helen Iball, "Upstaged by the Foodie Gaze" in *Bobby Baker redeeming features of daily life* Michele Barrett and Bobby Baker, eds. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2007): 117-128;

traditions like Browner remind how the presence of food in dance does not bear universal meaning. As with the boiling steak pulled from a pot in various forms of a “Hot Dance” adopted by different native American tribes, interaction with food can mean vastly different things in different contexts.⁶ However, as mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, there remains a peculiar hole around the performative work of food in Western concert dance contexts.

This chapter dances in that void, closely examining four performance examples, two each by postmodern dance icon Anna Halprin, and by contemporary San Francisco choreographer Erin Mei-Ling Stuart’s company EmSpace Dance. With each example I query how the choreographed use of food *in* performance and/or food *as* performance can serve as a form of audience engagement. This is engagement enabled through particular choreographic choices that highlight the sensory-perceptive capacities of bodies by playing with some of the symbolically and sensually loaded food materials that fuel human action and interaction. Drawing from Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan’s analysis of the context-specific parameters of performativity, as well as Donna Haraway and Lynette Hunter’s conceptualization of “situated knowledge” and “situated textuality,” I position this type of engagement as a feminist form of engagement - though neither choreographer explicitly makes this claim for her work.

Halprin and Stuart’s choreographic destabilization of critical, distant consumers of dance challenges what feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey characterized as a

⁶ Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*, 21-22.

‘masculinist’ gaze in favor of process-oriented performance experiences that allow for more relational, participatory spectatorship.⁷ In analyzing these works I ask the following: what factors (sociocultural, historical, ideological, theatrical, sensory-perceptive) combine to activate food’s performativity in these performance examples? How do these factors differ in postmodern and contemporary contexts? What insight does positioning these food-oriented actions and reactions as audience engagement offer?

My analyses are guided by a belief that prioritizing the sensed and/or sensual both in performance and in critical discourse around performance helps counter the distancing effects of popular Western models of spectatorship that package performances as easily digestible commodities to be consumed rather than acts of co-creation. Such packaging contributes to the perception of these dances as the sort of “white bread” consumables alluded to in the introduction of this dissertation. These are performances that, for some, fall short of the “nourishing” capacity that I believe dance performance carries. The “immediacy” of our interactions with foodstuffs - by which (inspired by Elsbeth Probyn’s use of the term) I mean food’s potential to elicit in us visceral responses, both physiological (salivating, stomach gurgling) and associative (conjuring desires, images, ‘felt’ memories of past experiences both pleasant and repugnant) - lend these materials great performative potential.⁸ In what follows I demonstrate how various choreographic

⁷ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Screen* (16.3 Autumn 1975), 6-18. Accessed online 1/30/14 at <http://imlportfolio.usc.edu/ctcs505/mulveyVisualPleasureNarrativeCinema.pdf>

⁸ See Probyn, *Carnal Appetite*, 12, for elaboration of this “immediacy.”

interventions tap into this potential, opening up possibilities for comprehending the complexities and multiplicities of our situated responses to choreographic works.

SENSING BODIES DANCING - STEPPING INTO PERFORMATIVE PRESENCE

Part of the work that these food-oriented interventions enact in performance lies in drawing to the forefront questions of bodily “presence.” Our bodies are regularly engaged in all kinds of activities (metabolic, respiratory, circulatory, cognitive, sensory-perceptive, motile) but only a few of these catch our attention. This is true even in performance settings where much work has gone into directing our attention in certain ways. Lepecki’s introduction to the 2004 text *Of the Presence Of the Body* considers an oft-overlooked conceptual split, examining the historical disarticulation of the terms “presence” and “the body” in modernity.⁹ This is a similar disarticulation to that explored by philosophers of embodied consciousness like Alva Noe and before him Maurice Merleau-Ponty, although rather than questioning the mindful nature of the body (which is presumably taken as somewhat of a given in the performance context), Lepecki centralizes questions about how bodies shape knowledges actionably rather than simply metaphorically participating in discourse.¹⁰ Honoring both “body” and “presence” as

⁹ Andre Lepecki, “Introduction: Presence and Body in Performance Theory,” In *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, edited by Andre Lepecki, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 2-3.

¹⁰ Lepecki asserts that both “presence” and “body” in the unique context of performance conjure a sort of intentional being-in-engagement-with-the-world, though that engagement does not “sit peacefully” in neatly fixed conceptual frames. It is precisely this complicated reality, he argues, that renders examination of bodily presence so vital. The flaunting of the conceptual gap between “presence” and “body” that dance performs insists on the importance of bodies as meaning makers (2-4).

destabilized conceptual constructs, Lepecki suggests that dance is now able to “rethink both itself and the social order” generating a special space wherein processual “bodies” (both onstage and off) may “step into presence.”¹¹

It is this sort of “stepping into presence,” that serves as a form of audience engagement in the examples that follow. This is engagement enabled through the sensory reorientation which the performative integration of food and dance potentially performs. This type of engagement is undertaken by the performers who are called upon to be present to the choreographic material. It is also characterized by a volitional “stepping” action on the part of the audience members as they take on new roles not as critical observers, but rather as co-creators, co-constituents, in the work.

In the choreographic analyses that follow, I invoke the power of Haraway’s “situated knowledges” as I consider the conditions, both historical and ideological, that enable and constrain such participatory modes of dance production and reception. One of the most difficult of these conditions centers around our polyvalent relationships to food, and what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls food’s “charged existence” in our lives. Citing it as both an “obstacle and an opportunity to artists,” she states:

Food’s already artfulness is an obstacle to those working in the gap and across the boundary between art and life, for the life they value is precisely that which is not (or not yet) art until their intervention makes it so. Through extreme attentiveness, contextualization, framing, arbitrary rules and chance operations, these artists are attracted to the phenomenal, towards raw experience, or towards the social as the

¹¹ Ibid.

basis for a participatory art practice, or towards process, rather than a permanent work that can enter the art market.¹²

Evocations enabled through the integration of foodstuffs in performance are slippery, they are individualized responses to the work that the choreographers have done to place these material goods, and our immaterial imaginings around these goods, front and center. What Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points to here is the ways in which artists working with food can, through certain structural elements, do more than reduce food to a “representation” of “real” life. Instead, the inclusion of food, when handled mindfully, can amplify the ways in which dance performances are already acting upon audience members polyvalently, allowing for and even encouraging various resonances and resistances by prioritizing the “phenomenal” or the “felt” over the “explanatory” modes of more narrative driven forms.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s final sentence reminds that food is incorporated through different means and towards different ends, ultimately requiring audience engagement in order for its performative effects to be actualized. In discussing certain choreographic instances as performative throughout this chapter I do not mean to suggest that the enactments I experience will prove actionable for all. Dance studies scholar Thomas DeFrantz’s article “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power” reminds how the actionable effects of a given performance can be dramatically different depending on the sociocultural background, lived histories, and relative dance “literacy”

¹² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Playing to the Senses,” 11-12.

of any given audience member.¹³ What is performative for some remains inactive for others. However, anthropologist Nadia C. Seremetakis notes that these moments (which she terms moments of “poesis” rather than “performativity”) are generative sources of collective memory - especially, she argues, when they involve psychologically loaded materials like food.¹⁴ Their very existence promotes the commensality that she urges is a vital force, a charged space for uniquely interacting with material culture and participating, in any number of ways, in the intersubjective exchange of ideas, memories, imaginings. These are spaces that assert the feminist values of the synesthetic, the mnemonic, the energetic, the engaged, as alternative strategies to the homogenizing, desensitizing, industrializing agenda of modernity.¹⁵ It is difficult to characterize when such “new possibilities” are created in light of the fact that each set of witnesses is comprised of many different individuals who bring with them intricate and changeable histories, desires, and perceptions. Therefore in each performance example, I focus on

¹³ Thomas DeFrantz, “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hop Hop Dance and Body Power,” in *Of The Presence Of The Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, edited by Andre Lepecki, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 64-81.

¹⁴ Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 7.

¹⁵ For Seremetakis, the value of these occurrences is not just in their revealing of the citational nature of identity or in their apparent resistance to commodification through the evocation of memory but rather in the possibility of the creation of feelings of interconnectedness. Seremetakis asserts that in reclaiming the attentiveness to the senses, such as in instances of food sharing (and, I would add, certain performance attendances) experiences of exchange can create feelings of commensality. In these moments of natal experience we, as perceived and perceiving beings, can become aware of our interrelated nature and, having recognized malleability around notions of self and relationships with others, we may feel empowered to create further productive, performative, scenarios. This could be a powerful tool for audience engagement, as commensal sentiments that arise around performative instances in concert dance may encourage audience members to return to and seek out further dance performance experiences. See Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 1-43.

performative *potentials* that I see choreographed interaction with food activating while recognizing that that potential may exist elsewhere for others.

HISTORICIZING FOOD'S INCLUSION: POSTMODERNISM AND BEYOND

I'd like to draw attention back to the point of inquiry that drives this study. What sociocultural factors (ideological, historical, interpersonal, etc) combine to activate food's performative potential as a means for audience engagement in the twenty-first century? This is engagement that takes up the open invitation to "step into presence" in the present, but it is engagement enabled through critical interventions into what constitutes "dance" in the past. The work of the modernists to establish dance as an autonomous, legitimate art form (explored in chapter one) was important work, but as mentioned, by mid-century artists were interested in showing how this legitimacy did not rely upon a denial of the materiality of lived experience. This assertion opened up all sorts of explorations emphasizing precisely the tropes and substances previously deemed "unfit" for "proper" art.

Postmodern choreographers emerging in the 1960s-1990s consciously took up new avenues of exploration, rehearsing not just techniques for leaping and turning and developing a certain 'line,' but for responding to gravity and momentum, for attuning to one another, for heightening sensation, for moving and being in the world. They asserted that the ways in which dancing bodies cultivated these various techniques were themselves valid points of inquiry, not only in the rehearsal halls but in performance. In

doing so, they expanded the content and contexts of concert dance, challenging spectatorial norms and popular modes of production for Western art. These radical efforts exploded the presentational preferences for audience control, analytical critique, and somatic sublimation popularized throughout the earlier half of the twentieth century (and drawn before that from “high” art nineteenth century European standards).¹⁶

Some, like Halprin (for whom dance and life are co-extensive), showcased these techniques through the use of movement scores that valued each dancer’s choices within a structure rather than asserting a singular, authoritative voice. Others, like those of the Judson Church collective, were interested in “democratizing” dance by employing pedestrian rather than virtuosic movement. Such interventions foreground poststructuralist acknowledgments of differentiated bodily experience, already alluded to by phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty.¹⁷ Explicit autobiography, often in spoken or sung as well as danced form, seen in the works of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, and others re-entered the scene. Postmodern dancers and choreographers took up themes of sexuality and gender politics, disputing and disrupting patriarchal, distanced “gazing” upon dance and (especially female) dancers. Through all of these creative

¹⁶ As chapter one showed, the ‘default’ structure of concert dance as a presentational, proscenium format, and the often unspoken rules of bodily comportment that went along with it, were constructed in accordance with past civic ideologies. These Victorian era and then modernist ideologies figured audiences as groups whose experience needed to be structured and carefully delineated and controlled. Spectatorial norms throughout the modern era asked audiences to engage as silent, critical observers rather than active, sensing participants. A Cartesian duality prioritizing a “thinking” mind over a “feeling” body was purported. The senses were not ignored, but were employed to certain ends.

¹⁷ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

interventions into modernist assertions bodies become present to one another differently, both on stage and off.

Often overlooked in all of these disruptions, interruptions, and assertions is the way in which food materials and food themes are re-incorporated into the context of “high” art performance - not just as props or narrative devices, but as performative elements. Food is employed in a variety of ways - whether to challenge hegemonic proscriptions of “appropriate” relationships between food and bodies, as in Carolee Schneeman’s 1964 *Meat Joy*, or to commemorate loss, the passing of time, and the impermanence of our existence as in Blondell Cummings’ 1981 *Chicken Soup*. The incorporation of food materials and themes proved especially potent avenues for conceiving, making and receiving dance that shifted not only perspectives, but *perceptions*, as hierarchical prioritizations of certain senses (sight, sound) over the more proximal senses (smell, taste, touch) were called into question through food’s presence.¹⁸

CASE STUDIES IN PRESENCE: HALPRIN AND EMSPACE

I position Halprin’s pieces as ‘touchstone’ performances marking the re-integration of “life” and “dance” in the postmodern era. I selected two of her early works, *Apartment 6* (1965) and *Lunch* (1968), both of which include food not just as “props” but as performative catalysts that call spectators forth into the action. Halprin’s radical

¹⁸ Foster, Lepecki, Banes, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett all theorize the effects of this hierarchical differentiation, discussed further in the introduction.

postmodern reframing of what constituted dance and dance training in the 1960s laid a precedent for the performative potential of integrating life and dance upon which the other later works could be built. In *Lunch* Halprin frames bodies engaged in the ritualized act of eating *as* performance. Using the commission to perform for delegates at a business lunch as an opportunity to slyly push back against preconceived notions of what constitutes dance, Halprin aestheticized otherwise quotidian actions. In *Apartment 6* her inclusion of food *in* performance both enhances the domestic mood she invokes in a theatrical space and serves as symbolic material that amplifies the drama of the interpersonal relationships that serve as the piece's subject matter.

In the dances by EmSpace Dance, choreographer Erin Mei-Ling Stuart stages her own version of a domestic dance drama that blurs borders between “art” and “life.” Stuart opened up her home as a performance site for *Keyhole Dances* (2008), a move that was both a response to the financial constraints of a small, self-producing San Francisco company and a remedy for the distance she perceived between contemporary dance audiences and performers.¹⁹ She positioned herself as food-wielding dancer/hostess to a choose-your-own-adventure style performance offering opportunities for engagement of all kinds. Throughout the performance EmSpace dancers shift between acknowledging and ignoring the presence of audience members in the domestic-turned-performance space, creating a compelling tension around audience members' subject positions. This

¹⁹ The choreography of *Keyhole Dances* was also edited into a film entitled *Domestic Animals* which, due to its availability, is relied heavily upon for this analysis.

subject position is altered once again as similar choreographic material is reframed through the lens of a video camera for *Domestic Animals* (2009), a dance for film.

In each example I am interested in how the incorporation of food into the performance space queries bodily ‘presence,’ playing with previously held conceptions about what constitutes ‘choreography,’ ‘dance,’ and even ‘bodies’. I explore how, in the relatively unexpected place of concert dance, and through the creative employment of the dancers and choreographers, the sensory invocations of food themes and materials are themselves a form of feminist-leaning audience engagement. These included foods become concrete, material, symbolically loaded strongholds that when mixed with the movements, images, gestures, and imaginings offered through dance create apertures for engagement of a palpable sort. They open up avenues of access to concert dance and dancers, enabling audience members to experience the dance, themselves, and those around them in ways that complicate purported hierarchies (ie sight over smell) and ideological binaries (between inside/outside, self/other, participant/spectator, etc). Instead, our shared materiality takes center stage.²⁰

These apertures for engagement are historically situated - both choreographers’ works are enmeshed in the particular culture(s) of the bay area during their respective

²⁰ For more on how what Amelia Jones calls “phenomenologically informed feminism” can be used as a framework for analyzing postmodern prioritization of synesthetic bodies see Jones’ *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Jones speaks specifically here of feminist performance art, but some of the same principles also apply to dance. She asserts, “body art can open up the entire domain of art interpretation, encouraging the development of a new reading praxis that acknowledges the masculinist, racist, homophobic, and classist assumptions underlying the disciplines of art history and criticism and their rhetoric of “disinterested” aesthetic judgment and historical narration” (19).

time periods. This ‘situatedness’ is part of what informs the performative possibilities of food’s presence in dance (taken as a radical act in the postmodern era, as a disarming gesture of hospitality and inclusivity in the contemporary context). Halprin’s work, which in some ways typifies the anti-establishment ethos of San Francisco in the 1960s, would be received differently today than it was forty plus years ago when it was created.

EmSpace Dance’s work is but one example of the types of engagement being explored in the bay, all of which are contingent upon the foundation of Halprin’s genre-bending embodiments laid long before. Both, however, are invested in the processual nature of situated knowledge, as evidenced by the freedoms and investigations they encourage in the training of dancers and the shaping of dance performances.

HALPRIN’S PRESENCE

As I began to research the bay area dance scene, one thing became incredibly clear. When it comes to dances aimed at deepening audience experience, all roads ’round here lead to Anna Halprin. Halprin has continued to create into her nineties, as of early 2014 she is still leading workshops and organizing performances that are open to the public. She has been celebrated in film, written about in several texts, and honored with numerous awards.²¹ Halprin, both a professional dancer and dance teacher in the bay area since her arrival here in 1945, has brought the senses center stage by changing the ways

²¹ Halprin’s full biographical information can be accessed online (as of 1/30/14) at her website: http://www.annahalprin.org/about_bio.html

that dancers train for performance, by incorporating ritual and improvisation into Western performance events, and by offering performances in alternative spaces with “alternative” bodies.²² Through the development and dissemination of various performance techniques, derived from psychotherapy and elsewhere, Halprin cultivated a performance style that many have tried to emulate, and that commonly gets associated with the postmodern era. In line with the sociopolitical climate of the 1960s in America, Halprin emphasized freedom of expression and personal exploration in performance. Her training and teaching continues to emphasize a deep presence in the experience of performance, rather than the creation of certain shapes and lines. Halprin views dancers as coextensive with their environments, as part of a constantly shifting, responsive, ecosphere. As a result of this work, she has spent more than seventy years generating dances that have profound effects on performers and witnesses alike.

Halprin was one of the chief champions of the reintegration of life and art. She sees the two as intimately interwoven and argues that experiencing them as such leads to a more “humanistic society” that allows for the breaking and shifting of bodily codes that bind. As a young girl in Chicago, Halprin was inspired to dance by watching her Jewish grandfather move in synagogue and to this day she claims her dance is really all in an effort to know God and to celebrate the power of people mindfully gathered.²³ Her work

²² Deborah Hay is also well known for her alternative training techniques, especially the manner in which these techniques awaken and activate the 53 trillion cells in the body (she has since revised the number up to 75 trillion). See Hay’s *My Body, The Buddhist* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000) 1.

²³ Halprin, “Leaders at the Lab,” Apr 2012.

is reliant on the sensory attenuation of the dancers to the task at hand (often derived from a movement score rather than set choreography). The audience is then able to witness the dancers experiencing something, rather than the dancers representing something.

For example, one of Halprin's most well-known works is *Parades and Changes*, originally performed in 1965 but recently remounted with new dancers for a tour in 2009. This piece is shaped by a choreographic score detailing such things as ripping paper, dressing and undressing, entering and exiting the theater. These are actions that performers fulfill with such exquisite presence, such fine attention to detail, such utter commitment that the artful nature of these otherwise unremarkable, quotidian tasks emerges before the audience's eyes.

Halprin took a radical approach to dance making - one that starts with an investigation of self in relationship to the environment. Dance scholar Janice Ross' biography of Halprin, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* details the particularities of how this approach evolved over decades and how it ripened in the special space of the San Francisco bay area. Halprin's famous dance deck, constructed by her husband renowned architect Lawrence Halprin at their home just north of the city in Kentfield, allowed Halprin to experiment in a space that was literally continuous with the natural environment. There are no mirrors, no ballet barres, no ceiling overhead. Instead, there was rain and wind, birds and squirrels, trees and shifting clouds in the sky. Making dance here facilitated a commitment to deep listening to the full sensorial experience of the body, rather than a focus on the reflection of an image of the body in the mirror. The

dancers were asked to be present to the movement with the depths of their psyche and with knowledges embedded in their skin, organs, bones.

Halprin firmly believes that limiting personal/emotional experiences hampers and falsifies or cheapens the art that is produced.²⁴ This belief parallels assertions by Seremetakis and a fellow anthropologist, David E. Sutton, that the commodification of the senses dampens the evocative, interpersonal potential carried within experiences around food. Both express a deep belief in bodies as inherently knowledgeable, and the sensory-oriented expressions of this knowledge as socially valuable.

Ross claims that in addition to such inward, personal excavations, space and the environment became “critical silent partners” in Halprin’s work.²⁵ This, in collaboration with the wide variety of people Halprin employed - actors, sculptors, psychotherapists, healers, and a mish-mash of both accomplished dance professionals and “non-dancers” - meant that the work she made had a different feel, a different focus, than the concert dance that had preceded it. She built dances from scores, honing dancers’ improvisational skills and incorporating ritual action. She was committed to a democratization of dance - expanding both the types of movement that constituted dancing and the types of bodies that took to the stage. Of course, with this came a redefinition of what could be considered a “stage.” Halprin embraced quotidian movements, seeing dance in the daily movements of things like preparing a meal or gathering with friends to eat. In fact, in

²⁴ Libby Worth and Helen Poyner, *Anna Halprin*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 20.

²⁵ Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 71.

June 1968 Halprin created a piece entitled *Lunch* in which eating a meal was the only concrete task on the score.

Lunch was commissioned by the Associated Council of the Arts as a performance to take place during a business lunch meeting at San Francisco's Hilton Hotel. Halprin took the commission as an opportunity to create a dance exploring the structure of dining out, aestheticizing the actual, quotidian tasks associated with eating in public while simultaneously satirizing the constructs, or the "overdone social ritual" of the business lunch.²⁶ The dance began as the lunch began, though Halprin remembers that a good portion of those in attendance did not notice the dance at all. The dancers were positioned around the same round table, laid with the same table setting as the diners/audiences. The dancers enacted a movement score built upon actions like sitting down, lifting a fork, sipping from a glass, picking up a fallen napkin, chewing, etc. However, in contrast to the delegates, the dancers performed all of these actions in incredibly slow motion.

The dance lasted throughout the lunch hour so delegates balanced whatever observing of the dance they did with their own tasks of eating and socializing. The simultaneity of these aestheticized and quotidian activities lent new texture to a familiar experience, bridging the gap between a concert dance performance and the structure of a public lunch. Constructed in this way, *Lunch* highlighted dining as performance, and the delegates themselves as performers. As those eating watched the dancers in the middle of the room, they would have been reconciling that intentionally performed action of the

²⁶ Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 261.

trained dancers with the “background” action of other diners who sat at tables around and behind the dancer’s table, performing similar actions. Through Halprin’s choices around how to frame the performance spatially, as well as how to let the dance ‘emerge’ into consciousness rather than be announced as a separate performance entity, she implicates all present in the room as participants in the dance. Ross quotes Halprin as stating that “[W]e wanted to stimulate in the audience a sense of community by . . . pointing up that we are all performers in the ‘performing’ of our normal activities.”²⁷

In making such a choice, Halprin was also pushing back at the organizers’ request that she provide meal time entertainment. She effectively destabilizes the divisions separating a meal from a performance, a dancer from a businessman. Ross characterizes choices such as these a “radical repositioning of dance” that existed between stage, environment, and home, and it is this repositioning that characterizes much of Halprin’s prolific and iconic body of work, including an even earlier work entitled *Apartment 6*.

Apartment 6 debuted at the San Francisco Playhouse on March 19, 1965 and went on to tour in Europe. The piece, a trio, featured Halprin herself with collaborators John Graham and A.A. Leath, who committed themselves each night to enacting their own complex relationships through a loosely structured improvisation. Halprin aimed to “deliberately confuse the divide between presence and representation” seeking in pieces like *Apartment 6* to “encompass different levels of reality - doing, feeling, and

²⁷ Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 262; 75.

imagining.”²⁸ Unlike *Lunch*, this performance took place in a theater with designated spaces for the performers (on stage) and the audience (seated facing the stage). However, Halprin used the visceral enlivening that food and food rituals can elicit to bridge the gap between these two spaces as the performance unfolded. Quotidian activities such as pancake making, potato peeling, and coffee pouring invoked a shared performer-audience experience through their familiarity, their associations with “homey-ness” and intimacy, and their literal invocation of the senses. The piece honored everyday social interaction as expressed through bodies that emphasized the staging of “reality” as dance material.²⁹

While certain tasks such as reading the newspaper or making pancakes were repeated at each performance, the events around such tasks were new every night, causing the dancers to respond to one another in the moment. They committed to playing/being “themselves” and to offering up their personal embodied responses as an artistic experience, departing from other dance efforts where gesture or action was meant to represent emotional states or create a choreographed narrative. These autobiographically leaning choices fostered the potential for visceral interaction between the performers, who were trained to be receptive to sensory and emotional stirrings both within and amongst the audience members. These audience members - getting to experience not the recreation of the idea of a sense or an emotion, but the actual, real-time thing - were arguably more likely to have an affective response.

²⁸ Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 202; 191.

²⁹ Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 188.

I imagine that the sweet smells of pancakes frying in the familial apartment-like environment of the piece facilitated such affective interaction. Complete with a bed, a working stove, a wooden table and chairs, assorted kitchen and living room paraphernalia and a window that opened out onto the street, the set allowed the quotidian rituals that constituted the action of the drama to unfold in an organic way that may have been relatable to those in attendance. However, such actions were sometimes met with “the reality” of extreme emotional responses that kept the atmosphere from being mundane.

Ross’ account includes details of a moment when one dancer, Graham, slices open an orange with a knife whilst the orange is atop the chest of another dancer (the scene described in this chapter’s opening). This action was executed as if it were the chest of the man that was being sliced open, rather than just the body of the orange. As the dancer who wielded the knife recalled the event he emphasized the likeness between cutting the flesh of the orange and the flesh of the man upon whose chest the orange was lain.³⁰ Such an action analogizes the food object and the dancer’s body, asserting the fleshiness of a body that can, even in a performance such as this, become easily abstracted. In this particular slicing open, the audience is made again aware of the bodiliness - by which I mean the fragility, the strength, the porousness, the aggressiveness, the unpredictability, the resistant, the fearless, the fleshy, the sensing, the reactive, the intuitive, and so much more - of the performers, and by extension, of themselves. The slicing is likely to have evoked a visceral response in those present - drawing forth both the smell of cut orange

³⁰ Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 189.

peel and the image of bursting flesh, as well as a wariness of the proximity of blade and skin. The slicing of an orange is a familiar act, the scent familiar especially in the bay area where many locals have citrus trees laden with the fruit in their own backyards. This familiarity, coupled with the unexpected and improvised use of the orange, amplified its performative potential. This potential, while physical and material in its fleshliness, exists beyond the concretely material in the multitudinous responses experienced as a result of presence and action, responses that call audience members' forth into the action, into engagement.

Halprin cooked pancakes each night, seeking to make the “perfect” pancake for her lover. Disgustedly discarding subpar pancakes (sometimes by throwing them out the window onto the street), she worked tirelessly until she had one she felt had promise, which she then ran over to Graham for approval. Balanced precariously on the edge of her spatula, the pancake became a symbol of her desire for acceptance and perhaps a commentary on typical gender roles within both her actual relationship and love relationships in general. Halprin's effort and longing were so acute that the audience was likely drawn into her plight. The repetitive action of frying the pancake (which emits an enticing smell the audience members would have literally taken in) and the devaluing of the pancakes as being “not good enough” (even while, perhaps, audience members find themselves hungering for it), created a dynamic of longing, and perhaps a growing tension around longing's denial. This longing was actualized through the use of the food within performance that is both material and symbolic, literal and representative.

I imagine the experience of sitting in attendance at a performance of *Apartment 6*. It is a space where the sweet enticement of butter melting in the pan makes the rejection of the pancake, and the associated rejection of the loving gesture (or perhaps it is really a needy/codependent gesture?) confounding and frustrating. Choreographer and professor of dance Wendy Rogers recalls what it was like to be a teenaged aspiring dancer in the audience of Halprin's *Apartment 6*, stating that Halprin's methodologies were "shocking" and "so exciting." Halprin's decision to improvise and really "be in the moment" lent the evening's events a certain palpable intrigue. "What she was doing felt sort of dangerous, in a good way," Rogers recalls.³¹

This "danger" is, in part, what has made Halprin's incredible body of work so well-regarded. In the setting of *Apartment 6* this danger does not equal a threat of being arrested (as Halprin later was for performing nude), nor is it a danger evoked through violence, physical exhaustion or self-deprivation as is true of the performance art work of someone like Marina Abramovic. Instead, the danger that Rogers refers to is a result of the cultivation of a certain sort of intimate exchange between the performers and the audience members, brought about through Halprin's insistence on dissolving the distance between dance that happens on stage and life that happens elsewhere.

In an interview with Ross, Halprin reported that when the pancake was finally met with approval, people in the audience sometimes cried.³² These tears were evidence that

³¹ Wendy Rogers in conversation with the author November 18, 2013.

³² Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 190.

audience members were engaged, invested in the development of the action. In a performance comprised primarily of improvisatory action, the pancake was a key element to each evening's production, serving as an effective way to deeply affect audience members and performers alike. Rogers herself recalls the "thrill" of watching that part of the performance, which expanded all her previous held notions of what made a dance. She recalls the way that the stage window opened up onto a real street, the way that she could smell the pancake as it was being cooked. She marveled in the notion that dance could be "real things" rather than their representation.³³

Some have sought to explicate such affective responses by qualifying the experience according to physiological factors. As research has become available, scholars from various disciplines including philosophy (Noe) and dance studies (Foster), have theorized how such actions and interactions may occur due to the activation of specialized cells called mirror neurons.³⁴ These neurons fire in individuals who are witnessing action, like a dance concert, giving them the physical sense that they too are, on some level, dancing. Neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese reported that mirror neuron firing was especially plentiful if the action witnessed is an action in which the watcher has also

³³ Rogers conversation, November 18, 2013.

³⁴ Alva Noe, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain and Other Lessons of Consciousness*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009); Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 122-126 of 262, kindle edition.

engaged. For example, tennis players watching others play tennis will have a stronger physical sensation than those who have never played the game.³⁵

Psychologist Teresa Brennan theorized a different form of biophysical entrainment, one that happens on a chemical level. Brennan explores the pheromonal links between individuals in a group setting. She cites how the affect and mood of one individual causes that person to emit certain pheromones which traverse space and enter others, generally through olfactory passages, in turn shifting these people's affect. She calls this phenomenon the "transmission of affect" and notes how this transmission breaks down popular conceptions of autonomy, instead reminding of our porousness and reliance on one another. She is careful to assert that not everyone will be affected in the same ways, and in fact qualifies that different groups of people carry different "affective loads" which effect their physiological and psychological responses.³⁶

Investigations into the biological components effecting the ways in which bodies are and aren't present to one another concretize arguments that dance scholars (and phenomenologists) have been making for years about the affective ramifications of our

³⁵ Vittorio Gallese, "Embodied simulation: From neurons to phenomenal experience," in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2005), 23-48. See also, Ivar Hagendoorn, "Some Speculative Hypothesis about the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11 (2004), 79-110.

³⁶ Teresa, Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004) 3-23. Brennan's text details her conception of affect as a physiological change resulting from a social context (3). This change has an energetic dimension (ie. an 'air' in the room that is "felt" before it is thought about), is often projected onto people and directed at certain objects (such as food or food paraphernalia). It evokes thoughts, involves judgment, and differs from feeling in that it doesn't "have a language" or "has not found the right match in words." Transmission and reception happens between people who are busy "being in the world" - therefore the environment is equally implicated in these affects' social shifting.

social interactions. This concretization happens through scientifically-leaning studies that seem to insist upon the need to locate and identify certain “mechanisms” in the body that serve to validate and legitimize social experience. This drive towards a Western-leaning line of academics preoccupied with scientific processes (brain mapping, etc) that attempt to isolate and assign certain “tasks” to certain body parts.

In the turn towards biophysical mechanisms as “explanations” of our intersubjective experiences, the complex web of influences that shape notions like “bodies” and “presence,” - readily recognized in non-Western contexts like those of the indigenous populations scholars like Browner (2004) and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (2007) investigate - get broken down into more digestible bits and paths, newly refigured to meet post-postmodern aims. For example, seeking to trace and identify biophysical mechanisms responsible for our affective experiences negates the presence and influence of the metaphysical. It prioritizes the verifiable and identifiable over more emergent manifestations. Shea Murphy asserts that,

For contemporary Native American and Aboriginal dancers and choreographers, learning to dance and the act of dancing enact a physical and spiritual connection to land, to ancestors, to other beings, and to future generations that is held and remembered in one’s body. Contemporary Native stage dance, and not just dances performed off the stage in more clearly ritual contexts, inscribes and performs these historical, political, and spiritual relationships³⁷

The mechanisms of mirror neurons or of pheromonal transmission cannot account for such enactments. In fact, in limiting embodied experience to the scientifically

³⁷ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 24.

‘trackable’ rather than intuitive, energetic, or metaphysically instantiated such theories reassert white Western understandings of corporeality as universal truths. It is true that both Brennan and Noe are championing for an understanding of consciousness that extends into the whole of our bodies. But, even as such studies attempt to break down the philosophical lines historically drawn dividing “body” from “mind,” “inside” from “outside,” or “self” from “other,” they delimit affective experiences as products of certain identifiable functionalities rather than entertaining the possibilities opened up by the scientifically ‘unknowable’ aspects of lived interaction with material culture.

Feminist scholars like Haraway and Hunter assert that knowledge, namely situated knowledge, can and is created in acts of engagement, in the practices and rehearsals that attune bodies towards particular ways of being in the world that are not valued in hegemony (such as meal preparations, dance performances, indigenous ritual and more). In the arts, Hunter claims, these situated knowledges become a situated textuality - knowledge that is always in the making via the actions, objects, meanings, bodies, that converge. These textualities honor and make space for the complexities and ambiguities that the improvised slicing of orangey flesh conjure, rather than providing some proscriptive interpretive (and presumably objective) assignation of meaning.

What choreographers like Halprin do so well is embrace the complexities, ambiguities, and anxieties that situated subject positions offer. Such a position does not negate the important role that biophysical interactions play in shaping lived experience (like the experience of spectatorship at a performance). Indeed, acknowledging the

interpersonal plasticity of our affect and our neuronal pathways helps debunk constructed mythologies around the Cartesian distinctions between “minds” as assertive centers of thought and action and “bodies” as fickle instruments to be controlled. That said, part of what is compelling about the work that Halprin has undertaken is her embrace of the polyvalent, even incomprehensible interdependence of our embodied realities. Her methodology invites experiential contemplations of these realities through performances that often feature subtle, affective shifts, arrived at not through aggressive, overtly political confrontational methods (commonly associated with feminist body art) but rather invocations and evocations that require a certain kind of attention, a volitional engagement with the work necessary in order for it to make its impact felt.³⁸ Halprin leaves the space for audience members to “step into presence,” to let the work resonate as it will, to feel and reflect on the reverberations made by the work through its encounter with each individual’s bodily histories and experiences.

While Halprin’s methodology has arguably influenced all those creating dance work in the SF bay area, her particular techniques are not the only ones that can be employed to create performances that blur and blend “dance” and “life” while tapping into food’s performative potential. In fact, the tactics employed by Halprin forty some years ago, having now been explored in various ways by various choreographers, are

³⁸ This is especially notable given the radical public demonstrations that were occurring in San Francisco at this time. Making these more subtle contrarian statements operated differently, perhaps reaching a different audience than did more aggressive public protests. Ross frames this choice as Ann’s trust “that one’s values radiated through one’s work” and her belief that being overtly political often made for “statements that were as weak artistically as they were strident politically.” She claims that Anna “was never deliberately a politician, but she was often an astute artist-activist.” Ross, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*, 262.

arguably not going to have the same performative effects now as they did then. As time has paraded on, the devices that once shocked become less shocking, the environments in which these devices are deployed change.

In the continued spirit of innovation, responsivity, and exploration, San Francisco based contemporary choreographers like EmSpace Dance's Erin Mei-Ling Stuart have proposed other means for engaging audiences, even whilst continuing to explore domestic, quotidian themes. Stuart and her company, EmSpace Dance, de-contextualized otherwise familiar daily practices like eating, bathing, and resting by literally dissolving the distance between the private space of her home and the public space of dance presentation. The end result, *Keyhole Dances*, are dances that are choreographed, rehearsed, and performed inside her home. Further shifting "concert" dance outside of concert spaces further destabilizes how audiences are asked to be present - to the performed work, as well as to others with whom they interact as spectator/houseguests.

EMSPACE DANCE'S PRESENCE

Two dancers sit at a kitchen table, surrounded by onlookers lining one wall, filling the doorways, peering over the counter. The man, dressed in a crisp striped button down shirt and khakis, sits quite upright, methodically flipping the pages of a magazine. A piece of dry toast lies on a white plate in front of him. To his left are a fork and knife, a butter dish with butter, and a glass of orange juice, precisely three quarters full. It is a very neatly complete table setting, for one. In contrast, a woman sits slumped in the chair to his right. She wears a red robe, a mass of disheveled red "morning" hair tumbles around her tiny face. She clutches a large mug of coffee between her hands, the steam of it is barely visible as it gets sucked up her nose. She looks straight ahead. With eyes slightly narrowed, she

drums her fingertips on the side of the mug. There is tension in the air... a sense of drudgery and resentment seeps into the relative stillness.

Audience members, sitting and standing in extremely close proximity, subtly mimic the physicality of the dancers. Muscles tense slightly despite slack faces. No one dares to move, as if in shuffling something might be disrupted or missed - some gesture unseen, some utterance unheard. There is a palpable anticipation building. The characters' histories weigh heavily upon them. The pair looks dejected, stilted, squirrely, in spite of their postures of 'repose'... such a stark contrast to the convivial atmosphere of those gathered in the living room nearby. Some witnesses grow uncomfortable, others intrigued. The dancers' closeness and stillness is unnerving. Is this all there is to 'see'?

Then, action. The woman brings the oversized steaming coffee mug up to rest heavily against her forehead. The warmth of it smoothes the creases in her skin. She closes her eyes and takes a deep inhaling breath before dragging the cup with two hands down the profile of her face. Tracing the contours of her porcelain nose with the cup's hard ceramic edge she rests it against her bottom lip, pressing slightly in against the giving flesh. She parts her lips, opens her mouth and slowly turns her face up to the ceiling. What appears at first the familiar movement necessary for the ritual action of drinking down coffee morphs into a silent cry of agony or desperation. This coffee will not be drunk. She pauses in the strangeness of the gesture - head thrown back, mouth agape, ceramic against teeth. I find my own head slightly tilted up as well, my tongue plastered tensely to the roof of my mouth. We are on the edge of something...

It is 2008, more than forty years after Halprin offered up her own domestic dance drama. The performance is *Keyhole Dances* by EmSpace Dance, set in one of San Francisco's famed old Victorian town homes. This is a home occupied by choreographer Erin Mei-Ling Stuart and her roommates, who have all agreed to turn their living space into a 'stage' for exploring imagined theatricalized versions of private domestic 'dances' made public. The performance structure is part artistic inquiry, part survival strategy. It was born of an entrepreneurial response to the financial hardships with which emerging

dance companies must contend. Rehearsing and performing in one's own home skirts the prohibitive costs associated with self-producing in San Francisco in the twenty-first century.

Stuart is one of many bay area artists who have responded to the contemporary conundrum around how to engage audiences, how to call them to “step into presence” rather than sit as silent observers (or worse yet, not attend dance concerts at all). She has created an active performance environment with opportunities for sensory accentuation literally behind every door. She employs a voyeuristic style of audience participation, wherein audience members huddle in doorways and line the halls as they move through a home, witnessing dances unfolding in these unexpected places. Stuart allows audience members a choose-your-own-adventure style performance rather than attempting to dictate what is concealed and revealed in any given moment.

Upon arrival, audience members ring the doorbell and Stuart answers the door in a housedress, addressing ticket holders as one would guests. They are offered snacks and drinks, encouraged to mingle, introduced to others, instructed to feel free to explore what is happening throughout the house. The pre-show activities, performed by one to two improvisers in each of nine rooms, reveal such scenes as a drag performer dressing and undressing, a woman hysterically crying in front of the toilet with her cell phone, a man sitting in semi-darkness watching tv, a couple playfully tangoing in the drawing room, someone playing twister, alone. Tension arises as audience members, bumping elbows with fellow spectators, encounter a “danced” version of private activities. Each

participant regulates his or her own involvement. Some choose to enter rooms, sit on the furniture, fondle found objects, even physically touch the dancers. Others move tentatively through the house, ‘politely’ glancing in on the action and then moving on.

The living room of the house serves as a central meeting place. From here groups of spectators are directed by Stuart and other dancers towards the three more highly structured, or “choreographed” offerings at regular intervals (one in the kitchen as described above, one in the bedroom, one in the bathroom). When “attending” one of these danced segments or peering in on the improvised offerings in the adjacent rooms the distinction between performer and audience member remains fairly clear. However, in the living room, the dancers interact with the audience members by bringing them food and drink. In this way, they highlight the ‘performance’ of party going and concert attendance, of acts of hospitality and leisurely pursuits.

The particularities of the performance space, the demand for spectators to move through it, the detailed, sensual nature of the choreography, the smells and sounds of food and beverage being prepared and eaten, all merge to create a particularly evocative sensory experience. Choosing to create a performance that grapples with domestic themes in a private home rather than represent such themes in a more traditional theatrical format (as Halprin did with *Apartment 6*) means that spectatorship becomes an especially physically active endeavor. Existing in a liminal space as both actually present and theatrically invisible (outside of the living room the dancers do not address the presence

of the audience) audience members' own bodies are implicated, their positionality as 'consumer' destabilized.

This is especially true, I believe, in the kitchen section of the performance where the smells of bread toasting and coffee brewing activate the olfactory in a direct manner. These scent-producing elements heighten the sense of realism present in the scene. Simultaneously, it accentuates the sense of voyeurism that accompanies the actions of audience members anonymously watching the dance unfold. The oscillations between broad, sweeping, physical movement and contained gestural details in the choreography dramatize the kitchen vignettes. The juxtaposition of these elements keeps the dance from becoming pantomimed and predictable, the broad sweeping arm gestures or swivels of the body designed not for their pretty effects but as indicators of inner turmoil that is alternately suppressed and released.

The audience members are not actually offered mugs of steaming coffee like the one the red-headed dancer Julie Sheetz holds, nor are they munching toast like the slice resting on the plate, and yet as with the Halprin performance, audience members are taking these substances in. Their ingestion happens in a manner that heightens the awkwardness of their voyeur subject position, rather than disturbing it (as it would if they were suddenly addressed directly by performers). And, of course, the toast and coffee are not the only olfactory stimuli - what about the hypothetical bodily odors of that too-close patron standing to one's right? or the woody perfume of old kitchen cabinets? None of

these stimuli are isolatable, and each rubs up against an individual audience member's psyche and skin in a unique way.

Staging the performance in a home complicates the separation between audience members and performers, not just in terms of physical proximity and style of spectatorship, but in the thoughts and images - the associative memories - that the space draws forth (the smell of old oak furniture, for example, transports me directly to my grandmother's dining room). Different scholars have theorized how the many factors of memory and materiality co-mingle in performance. Both performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan and anthropologist David Sutton emphasize the role that associative memory plays in performative creation. Phelan (1993) contends that performance's life exists only in memory - memory that is inevitably a variation of the "thing done" or presented according to an artist's intentions.³⁹ This remembering operates in us cellularly and at all times, so that we-the-audience don't have to have lived through the kind of strained intimate relationship these two dancing characters seem to be enduring in order to engage with the work.

As mentioned in the introduction, Seremetakis contends that the "project of modernity" smothers such associative memory in favor of rationalist-oriented responses that are more easily controlled and commodified.⁴⁰ In performances such as *Keyhole*

³⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge Press, 1993). In the section "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" Phelan's discussion centers around the irreproducibility of performance claiming that it is in performance's resistance to traditional product-oriented commodification that its power lies.

⁴⁰ Seremetakis, *Senses Still*, 9-10.

Dances, there are no right or wrong interpretations, no one way of witnessing the work, no distanced, “objective” observations that can contain it. As such it, and performances like it, become powerful places for unlocking the creative connections, simultaneously individualized and collective, that “real” reality discourages. Ripping open the complexities of this otherwise private (and, unlike with Halprin, fictional) relationship in this otherwise private place takes what is at least on some level familiar (breakfast, kitchens, tension with another person) and uses it to transport us - into ways of experiencing ourselves and our surroundings that are not limited by preconceived notions of what is “appropriate” private or public behavior.

Phelan, who does not speak of food per se, asserts that performativity occurs in interactive space between an “art object” and the spectator, as well as in spoken words or text that attempt to articulate the memory of a performance experience.⁴¹ Seremetakis revels in how deeply this plays out, how it is created and recreated and recreated, when the “object” in question is food. Helen Iball merges the two thoughts when she contends that the presence of food objects goes beyond just pointing to the sensing bodies of both actors and receivers.⁴² Instead, she focuses on the powerful performative nature of the food itself, even its ability to “upstage” the bodies present, particularly in the anticipatory moment just before food is actually consumed (remember back to that coffee cup,

⁴¹ Sutton identifies these moments as the source of historical consciousness. However, Phelan’s discussion focuses heavily on the effects of sight, or the spectator’s (inevitably masculine) gaze in perception of a performance, and both Sutton and Seremetakis allow for a broader, sensory-oriented field of interaction. Their attentiveness to the work of the sensing nature of the body expands upon some of Phelan’s assertions.

⁴² Iball. “Melting Moments,” 70-81.

perched precariously against lips and teeth, steam rising in a tantalizing flaunt of the passage of time that seems to last forever in this moment of relative stillness...). In such a setting the anticipation of food's ingestion or contamination amplifies the evocations experienced, materializing our anxieties about bodily border crossings, about gifts and acts of hospitality or care-giving, about hunger and waste and loss.

Iball points to how food's performative presence is often linked to bad behavior - which relies on a shared understanding of "good" behavior - and to mess and desecration which can be both exhilarating and disgusting.⁴³ Utilizing food in ways other than how it was "meant" to be used (as the feminist performance artists mentioned in the introduction so audaciously illustrated) often causes dis-ease. This uneasiness can be productive in the space of performance, packing a visceral punch rather than merely representing the ideological or narrative tensions at play.

This elicitation can be seen in a later example from the same kitchen segment of *Keyhole Dances*. In this moment, the aforementioned piece of toast (now buttered) which has been sitting on the plate in front of the man throughout the performance is vindictively tainted by the female dancer. With a great arching hoist of her leg she thrusts her red-painted toes into the toast's crunchy surface. In response, the male dancer picks up the toast and, staring at his counterpart, smears the tainted, buttered bread across the wet surface of his tongue. Their eyes lock. The toast is thrown to the floor. She explodes in a reaction of protest in her chair, head swirling in all directions but at him. He, seizing

⁴³ Iball, "Melting Moments," 75.

a moment where she is otherwise occupied, spoons much too much sugar into her coffee, eventually dumping the entire granulated contents of the sugar bowl into the mug and recklessly around on the table. Her swirling movement stops. In a show of indifference, she instead swirls her spoon in the coffee. Casually she licks the spoon, then forcefully brandishes it over head as if to strike her partner. He remains, unflinching. In a flash, she rethinks her assault, returning the spoon gingerly to the table where it rests as she frowns down at it.

In this context, both the dancers' bodies and the toast, coffee, sugar, and spoon have activated performative potential. The food is pushed past expected, everyday uses, creating (in interaction with the bodies) what Walter Benjamin has termed "dialectical images" for the viewers to take in.⁴⁴ Dialectical images (related to Brechtian *gestus*), Diamond notes, destabilize familiar objects and historical narratives and prioritize the social relations that shape action and perception. Our interaction with these images in the select dances performs a challenge to their stability - not only through future actions and retelling of memories, but in the moment of their occurrence. Through strategic reimagining the images, such as a breakfast scene, can challenge the machine of

⁴⁴ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 142-154.

reproduction and create dialectical contradiction that Diamond (and Benjamin) value as productive.⁴⁵

In the examples I offer, the food is not used merely as a prop that theatrically aids in setting the scene, though this is a commonly employed theatrical tactic. Audience member responses are not simply neuronal knee-jerks lending a sedentary body the excitement of action. Instead, these dancers imbue the foodstuffs with performative potential by manipulating it in imaginative ways, inverting, subverting, highlighting audience expectation.⁴⁶ They rely on our participation, our “stepping into presence” acts of co-creation, our ability to bring with us the memories and images and histories and imaginings that the presence of food helps stimulate and prioritize. Depending on how the food is wielded, effects can be felt even if the food is never eaten by anybody, and sometimes even when food is implied but not actually present.

Notably, in these particular performance examples the interactions with food are not pushed too far to extremes. Other dance companies, like Yubiwa Hotel (2002) and Fabulous Beast Dance Company (1999) utilize rotting food and grotesque imagery to

⁴⁵ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 147. Diamond refers to performativity that “shocks the myth” of a historical continuum (say of peaceful, daily breakfast rituals) and then releases the experiences (of the senses, emotions, understandings) for use in the present. This occurs in “aesthetic time” that allows for fragments, associations, and conflicts without trying to smooth them over with popular myths that are both pre-packaged and ponderous. Such images and altered temporality can be unruly - what engrosses some can cause others to disengage entirely. Dialectical images, like the actual presence of food in performance, can subvert artist’s intentions.

⁴⁶ Iball, “Melting Moments,” 76-77. Here Iball suggests that in these instances the items’ usual uses are destabilized in our minds through a process she calls “defamiliarization.” She asserts that food’s performativity is context-dependent (ie. a banquet of mundane/cheap foods performs differently than one laden with lavish/decorative foods). For her, context determines food’s potency and in certain situations theatrical performance becomes a place in which food, when used imaginatively, can be experienced as out of “place” or unexpected, and therefore generative.

elicit responses in audiences. *Keyhole Dances*, *Apartment 6* and *Lunch* instead take a more subtle approach that confounds distinctions between life and art. In doing so, there are repeated invitations for the witnesses to identify themselves within the work, and in turn, to rework their identities in subtle ways through their participation. Eating and manipulating food in the relatively unexpected place of dance performance reflects back on food's not-permittedness in "dancey" spaces and its repeated devaluation as a generator of critical knowledge. Performative interactions with food, in a feminist turn, recognize the parts of our selves that have also been 'not-permitted,' recuperating them from their sublimated state in the act of placing them front and center for consideration.

The question remains whether or not this sort of stepping into performative presence through the situated textuality of food is reliant on food's material presence. This notion was tested as Stuart created a series of dances alongside *Keyhole Dances* under the title *Domestic Animal*. In line with a popular twenty-first century trend in dance making, *Domestic Animal* is a dance for film.⁴⁷ Mediated through the lens of the camera, the distances collapsed through the material interactions undertaken by audience members and dancers sharing physical space and time could potentially resurface. Does

⁴⁷ This trend is substantiated by the advent of many dance for film projects and festivals that have emerged in the twenty-first century, like the San Francisco Dance Film Festival established in 2010 (<http://www.sfdancefilmfest.org/2013/about/about-sfdff/>); Dance Camera West's Dance Media Film Festival established in 2002 (<http://www.dancecamerawest.org/previous.htm>); Frameworks Dance Media Series started in 2010 (<http://www.frameworksdance.org>); Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema begun in 2004 (<http://www.sanssoucifest.org>); the Okalahoma Dance Film Festival started in 2008 (http://www.okdancefilms.com/Oklahoma_Dance_Film_Festival/Film_Archives/Film_Archives.html); Third Coast Dance Film Festival started in 2010 (<http://thirdcoastdancefilmfestival.wordpress.com/past-festivals/>); and more. these joined older projects like the American Dance Festival's International Screendance Festival started in 1994 (<http://www.americandancefestival.org/projects/isf/>) and Dance Film Association's Dance On Camera Festival inaugurated in 1971 (<http://www.dancefilms.org/festivals/>).

food's performative potential in this context hinge upon its physical presence? Are the same actions, mediated through the lens of the camera, still performative? Are they even still the "same" actions?

Stuart renamed the dance, despite the fact that the choreography remained more or less the same. This choice indicates a recognition of the ways in which framing the dance for camera dramatically reinvents it. *Domestic Animals #1: the most important meal of the day* features the same two dancers in the same kitchen described above. They perform the same sequence of events. However, now rather than responding to the presence of tightly-packed bodies filling up all of the nooks and crannies of the physical space, the two dancers must contend with how the video camera fills and frames the space, and their dancing bodies in the space. Gone are the possibilities for olfactory entrainment. Eliminated is the threat of tactile encounter. Narrowed are the possibilities for participation enabled through choosing one's own vantage point. This dance for film is indeed a different dance.

But, the transition from one form to the other need not be marked only by loss. Opportunities for engagement remain, albeit altered. On a very basic level, a dance for film enjoys a reproducible existence, the dance can be visited again and again online (and it was as I analyzed the movements for this discussion). Elements that might have drawn attention away from the dancers' movements in the live performance (ie a neighbor's proximity, the actions taking place in another room, the discomfort of standing still, etc) are no longer distractions. The editing of the film (done by Stuart herself) guides the

dance's witnesses in specific ways, creating a literal frame through which to view the dance.⁴⁸ This frame allows for movement where there is none - as in the panning shot which takes in, from left to right, the two dancer's bodies slumped in chairs, heads lolled up towards the ceiling, bodies flaccid and seemingly dismembered by their domestic dispute.

The video also allows proximity not possible in a "live" performance. We see up close the frenetic fervor with which one dancer butters his toast, the sugar spilled in and around the tightly shot coffee cup becomes 'larger than life.' Without the direct sensory input of the food objects "upstaging" the actions of the dance, in *Domestic Animals #1* the food can clearly be seen as the repositories for the unspoken aggressions these two characters have for one another. Physical assaults get redirected through the foods - the toast thrown to the floor, the spoon shoved off the table, the contents of the sugar bowl upended, the rim of the coffee cup licked roughly by a pierced tongue. These actions all happened in *Keyhole Dances*, but they request a different sort of engagement from witnesses when allowed to assume the entire frame of a shot. When framed in this way, these objects and actions differently formulate a narrative of choreographic intention. They have been singled out, they demand our 'full' attention, they are layered according to the choreographer/editor's design.

⁴⁸ I am aware of my use of the verb "view" rather than "experience" in this sentence - an obvious marker of the ways in which I subconsciously reduce the experience of taking in a film to the visual, despite the ways in which the other senses remain implicated. I began to edit it out, and then thought better of it. I am leaving it in as a material sign of my own shift in perspective.

Stuart does not use the transition to film to expand the timeframe of the narrative, or to push the uses of the food further beyond their relatively “believable” or “realistic” deployment. The film therefore retains a representational quality that, with the “thrill” of “live” action stripped away, effects its performative potential (especially for those who crave more ‘extreme’ or unexpected imagery in their art). Some may find this digitized format of an otherwise “concert” dance provides them with a level of familiarity that allows them to engage with the work. Others may contend that this digitized format flattens the sensory evocations enabled in the space created by *Keyhole Dances*, deflating the novelty of a domestic-turned-private performance. Still others may disengage with the film based on its resolution quality relative to other available films depicting dance.

The dance will undoubtedly be received differently in different contexts, its resonances within particular viewers continuing to be shaped, among other things, by whether their viewing happens at a film festival (*Domestic Animals* was shown at Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema in 2010) or in front of a computer screen at home (the dances are available on the company’s website).⁴⁹ However, the reception(s) of the film in both of these places (and the reception of the live performances of *Keyhole Dances* as well) are shaped by a twenty-first century context in which most Americans’ lives are saturated by video, a barrage of digitized images meant to “represent” our lives or “evoke” certain feelings. How does this saturation, and our often handheld accessibility

⁴⁹ Information accessed Feb 12, 2014 on the website for Emspace Dance, <http://www.emspacedance.org/rep/domestic-animals.php>

to a variety of dance offerings via the internet a/effect the performative impact of the food-oriented dancing bodies, whether presented to us in “the flesh” or on “the screen”?

Foster suggests that the pervasiveness of digitized media and mass-produced entertainment has affected our understandings of ourselves and our surroundings, resulting in a “cyborgian synthesis of digital and physical matter” with which she sees choreographers and spectators creatively contending.⁵⁰ She is particularly attendant to the ways in which this contemporary arrangement redefines corporeality, influences our capacities for empathy, and complicates the boundaries of what constitutes “dance” and “choreography” in a twenty-first century setting. Foster cites examples of highly mediatized dance works as well as others that employ only bodies and the natural environment, prioritizing neither one as more “authentic” or “accessible” in terms of its empathetic potential. Well crafted choreographies on both ends of the technological spectrum are shown to “demonstrate the many ways in which the dancing body in its kinesthetic specificity formulates an appeal to viewers to be apprehended and felt, encouraging them to participate collectively in discovering the communal basis of their experience.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 178 of 282, kindle edition.

⁵¹ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 218 of 282, kindle edition.

CONCLUSION - (RE)VIEWING PRESENCE

I include Foster's work at the end here in part because I continue to grapple with my own urge to uncritically reinforce an ideological binary, one that valorizes the apertures for engagement that I see in "live" performances over those possible in technologically "mediated" performances. I know these categories, like others I have explored (inside vs. outside the body, self vs. other, participant vs. spectator), have been effectively deconstructed by contemporary theorists, and yet I find myself reluctant to release my own ideological prioritization of dances, and especially select food-oriented dances, as especially potent when the interaction is live, interpersonal, and a little unpredictable.⁵² For me, participating in a real-time encounter - one that is fleeting and non-reproducible and that requires an uncertain stepping outside of one's self-regulated sphere - means participating, in whatever small way, in honoring the dynamic exchanges that aren't palpable across digital forms. Especially in a twenty-first century context where the digitization of entertainment, dance included, is the norm, I find such practices offer opportunities for spontaneous action and interaction that opens up ways of being and moving in relation to one's environment that cannot be predetermined or recreated.

As I unpack this bias I find myself circling back around to my own bay area roots. My personal version of bay area-nism is the varietal that employs technology regularly (I am not sure what I would do without my wifi access, emails, video streaming, Facebook,

⁵² For more on the debate around "liveness" see Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

etc) but remains left-leaningly skeptical of the ways in which the pervasiveness of such technologies negates the physicality of engagement modalities that rely on shared space. Somehow, regardless of well executed arguments to the contrary, I hold tight to the sense that the action of laying one's body on the line that is inherent in showing up to a "live" performance indicates a willingness, shared on some level with others doing the same, to engage - and risk being witnessed engaging - in a manner that the anonymity of interacting with more mediated performances defers.

Perhaps it is the ways in which my own training as a dancer and choreographer have been shaped in the San Francisco bay area - by salty ocean area air and balmy weather outdoor dance explorations, by the pervasive San Francisco release technique (invented and reinvented by various teachers and choreographers throughout the city) that trades on weighted connections with earth, tilted experiments with gravity, blood swirling, inverted ways of being that causes this bias. Perhaps it is the rapid mirror neuron firing that witnessing such action produces in me that creates a seemingly inexplicable affinity, a feeling of "home" when in the physical presence of such dances. Perhaps this affinity is related to my own version of the same "artisanal imagining" of past (and presumably unmediated) practices as a panacea for social ills that I critique in the final chapter of this dissertation. All combine to create a subtle resistance to the technological, and decided prioritization of the "live" and "bodily" in me.

My argument in this chapter for the ways in which the feminist food-oriented choreographies that Halprin and Stuart have undertaken serve as vital forms of audience

engagement are meant to expose how the *potentiality* for audience engagement is often present in dance works that demonstrate rigorous attention to the “kinesthetic specificities” of which Foster speaks. With the right sort of “directed attention” (Brennan’s term) cultivated through the creative employment of food’s “already artful existence” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s proposal) in the specialized realm of concert dance, I maintain that avenues of access to sensory-enlivening and alternative knowledge-producing engagement are opened. These openings enable the vital “stepping into presence” that is arguably more necessary than ever now that bodily presence has been destabilized through digitized means. These articulations are especially important for women who are bombarded with images that dictate impossible ideals and whose work in the realm of food production and dissemination is systematically undervalued. Under such conditions, these situated articulations bear affective weight, and can be generated not just through dance ‘accessories’ or community building activities added on to a performance as will be explored in the following chapters. Instead, in Halprin’s, Stuart’s, and countless others’ works, we see and experience these e/affects as embedded in the danced offerings themselves.

Chapter Three

Foraging for (Grass)Roots: Amara Tabor-Smith's *Our Daily Bread* Model of Community Engagement

Deep Waters Dance Theater choreographer Amara Tabor-Smith smiles jauntily as she asks a woman sitting in the front row, “you want another berry?” Extending her arm forward she offers up a small bowl of big, ripe blackberries as part of her already-in-progress 2011 performance of *Our Daily Bread*. The woman reaches in and plucks a berry from the bunch. She pops it in her mouth and as she chews the two women nod their heads with knowing smiles. “Good, right?” Tabor-Smith says. “Here, hand another berry back to him, he’s hungry” she notes nodding at a bearded man in the second row. She keeps her berry bearing arm extended as she turns to hug some exuberant newcomers. “Welcome! So glad you are here!!”¹

The space is bustling. There are apron-clad women swarming in and out of an impossibly tiny kitchen located stage right. The effect is one of a clown car - the largesse of the action that is teeming forth seems incompatible with the kitchen’s modest size. The seating space, though raked, seems to be a continuation of the stage rather than really separated from it. We are comfortably packed in, and though there is already action happening on stage - musicians setting up, dancers moving a small stool here, a wooden

¹ *Our Daily Bread* performance, CounterPULSE, San Francisco April 15, 2011.

spoon there - this onstage action has not quelled the audience members' interaction with one another. Everyone, it seems, is abuzz....

The performance that unfolds is one of several food-oriented performance events hosted by Tabor-Smith and Deep Waters Dance Theater collaborators. It is commissioned by CounterPULSE, one of San Francisco's leading experimental arts organizations. The performances incorporate foods associated with Tabor-Smith's African-American roots (think black bean stew, gumbo, and cornbread). These foods are incorporated both materially as substances prepared and shared with audience members and/or thematically as source material for movement motifs and oral histories. Dancers weave in and out of the audience a couple of times during the show, distributing food to eager dance concert goers. They also sing about food, tell food stories, reminisce about learning family recipes from now-gone ancestors. Actions of slicing, picking, stirring, kneading, eating, and gathering pepper the danced movement of the performance from start to finish.

These incorporations highlight the often overlooked work of women, especially women of color, as bearers of cultural meaning and memory as well as agricultural and domestic laborers. In addition, part of the 'women's work' enacted here is the work of hospitality - not in a commercialized sense but in the homegrown care taking embedded in the cooking and sharing meals with those you have welcomed into "your" space. The dancing, singing, food-serving cast of female performers reminisce about past experiences of hospitality but also, simultaneously, make overt efforts at creating a

hospitable concert dance experience by warmly addressing and even physically interacting with audience members.

This does not mean that the content of the performance is limited to warm and fuzzy, easily digestible topics. Tabor-Smith and her dancers ask the audiences to consider the ways in which we are all implicated in a complex web of food production and consumption by exploring the ways in which food politics play out in their own lives. For example, Tabor-Smith centralizes the tension she experiences between her beloved family food histories (specifically her family's seafood-laden gumbo recipe) and her conviction to not eat fish due to overfishing. By mobilizing her cast of multiracial company members to create a welcoming environment for audience members to have a participatory intercultural experience, Tabor-Smith boldly engages dance audiences not only in the presented performance, but also in the politics of contact with others. This chapter attends to the particulars of this contact, asking the following: how are Tabor-Smith's African-American inspired methodologies for engaging audiences enabling a type of commensal exchange not possible through the more formalistic or institutionalized models? What do these methodologies reveal in terms of the politics of contact amongst people of different backgrounds, specifically in a concert dance setting, in the bay area? How might the success of *Our Daily Bread* events help elucidate the ways in which audience members' perceived desire for commensal exchange is often intertwined with a desire for an experience of an ethnic "other"?

Tabor-Smith is extremely successful as a community organizer and her methodology of merging the personal and the political as source material for original music, dance, and text has been met with great acclaim. Through deliberate choices about the structure and content of the various food gatherings, performances, workshops, and outreach ventures she has spearheaded, Tabor-Smith and her collaborators activate commensal potential that often lies untapped and yet yearned for in the experimental dance scene.

Our Daily Bread has been deemed an unparalleled “success” - labeled as such by the press, by the producers, by the performers, by the public. Seven of the eight performances sold out and received standing ovations. San Francisco Bay Guardian critic Rita Felciano stated, “*Bread* is a theatrically cogent, emotionally rich piece of dance theater...”² Audience feedback surveys included comments like, “The most sensual, delicious, thought-provoking piece I have seen yet. It brought me back to my grandmother’s kitchen and got me dancing on my feet....” and, “I saw what was one of the best shows I’ve ever been to. It was fun, interactive, touching, thought provoking, and inspirational.”³ Because of this acclaim, what began as a short-term artistic residency granted in order to explore an idea has now grown into a number of creative projects

² Felciano, Rita. “Laughing and Screaming: Amara Tabor-Smith brings *Our Daily Bread* to CounterPULSE” *San Francisco Bay Guardian* April 19, 2011. Accessed on San Francisco Bay Guardian website on Feb 2, 2014, <http://www.sfbg.com/2011/04/19/laughing-and-screaming?page=0,0>

³ Audience data gathered by survey from shows spanning April 14-24, 2011. Audience comments included: “Wonderful. Life Saving,” and “Beautiful, artful and too important not to be performed on stages around the Bay Area, and across the planet.”

completed in conjunction with a number of community partners.⁴ *Our Daily Bread* has become the Our Daily Bread Project and continues to grow.⁵

I was drawn to investigate these performances because I was struck by the popular fervor that surrounded them. Any time I mentioned my research interest in the interstices between dance and food people would point me towards Tabor-Smith. I was curious about the complicated reality of what might be produced and consumed at these events. In the four years that I have been researching the project my perceptions of the work have shifted dramatically. In what follows, I do my best to honor the complicated, awe-inspiring reality of what I witnessed. I consider my own experiences as a participant at select events, conducting choreographic analysis of parts of the staged work while centralizing the offstage actions that might otherwise be considered the “periphery” of the performance. The choice to emphasize these seemingly marginal activities was made because it is in these moments - where bodies of all kinds lead and are led, reveal and conceal certain suppositions, and make meaning of embodied actions - that I feel dance events like *Our Daily Bread* can really contribute to critical dialogue. This is dialogue about the fluid parameters of concert dance and how danced offerings can help those

⁴ The list of community partners includes the following: Eastside Arts Alliance, The Luggage Store Gallery, Oakland Asian Cultural Center, Oakland Food Connections, People’s Grocery, Rainbow Grocery Cooperative, Tenderloin National Forest, and La Pena Cultural Center, as well as Mission High School, The University of San Francisco, Catholic Charities Youth Organization, Edith Witt Senior Housing, and 10th and Mission Housing Facilities.

⁵ Due to the way that the work developed, Tabor-Smith and Robinson-Love officially renamed their efforts the “Our Daily Bread Project” in spring of 2012 (rather than the heading “Our Daily Bread,” used for gatherings prior to this time).

present think and move through new positionalities with regards to how we understand ourselves individually, culturally, and globally.

In addition to my own embodied experiences as an audience member at several events, I rely on written materials like programs, press releases, funding reports, blogs, reviews, and audience feedback, as well as anecdotes gleaned from interviews with Tabor-Smith and the Executive and Artistic Director of CounterPULSE, Jessica Robinson-Love. These bits provide some sense of the scope of the work in terms of both the expressed intent of its creators and its reception in the community. I attempt to place these findings in conversation with selected materials from feminist critical race theorists like bell hooks and Psyche A. Williams-Forsen as well as dance studies scholars like Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Susan Manning, Jayna Brown and Thomas F. DeFrantz. This collection of scholars all attend to the complexities of the black experience in America, most specifically theorizing the historically fraught interstices of black performance (including black bodies in performance as well as African diasporic aesthetics that infuse performance settings like “high” art concert dance). These theorizations are relevant to this examination, which I see as a unique merging of the multiethnic (and explicitly African American, Brazilian American, and Filipino American) food gathering traditions, with concert dance (which, in this instance, is an explicit blend of African diasporic and

Western dance performance techniques).⁶ My hope is to show how the choreography of the events that unfold, both onstage and off, operate on multiple registers at once. These are choreographies designed to entertain and prod. They represent bold responses to histories of racial inequality and to industrialized food systems that are decimating the planet. They reveal the complexity of the desires of bay area artists and audiences for art that engages with pertinent questions about personal and cultural identities.

THE POLITICS AND PRACTICALITIES OF INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

I frame *Our Daily Bread* events as sites for intercultural exchange, deriving my understanding of “intercultural” from Susan Manning’s employment of the term in her 2004 text, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*.⁷ Manning uses the term to describe the historiography she aims to write which takes into account “the spectrum of hyphenated American identities” and recognizes seemingly different cultural histories as mutually constitutive. She proposes this intercultural approach in contrast to historically

⁶ Though there are several diverse cultural representations at play in *Our Daily Bread* events, both in the content of the show and in the backgrounds of those witnessing this content, my selection of these theorists frames my analysis most specifically in terms of the dynamics of “black” and “white” ethnic contributions and conflicts. This choice was made in order to more fully tug at my positionality as a white woman with primarily Western dance training investigating the work proposed and produced by Tabor-Smith, who identifies as black, is interested in bringing her autobiographical work to the table, and produces dance that incorporates Afro-Haitian, Afro-Cuban, and Western dance technique. This choice is not meant to indicate that the dynamics at play are in any way limited to dynamics between black and white individuals or cultural traditions. Rather, I find the ways in which these scholars talk about hidden racist agendas that come into play in performance helpful for unpacking my own experiences and the experiences of others I encountered. For more on the ways in which contemporary dance practices have been historically interwoven with indigenous dance practices see the work of Jacqueline Shea Murphy (2007), and Asian-American dance practices see Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

⁷ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, xv-xviii.

popular approaches which rely on racist positioning of black histories in contrast to, and separated from, dominant histories that are often written as “universal” histories, but feature primarily white contributors.⁸

Intercultural exchanges connote the possibility of what Manning calls “cross-viewing” a phenomenon wherein “theatrical performance affords spectators an opportunity to consider perspectives other than those conditioned by their social identities outside the theater.”⁹ She says, “Cross-viewing has the potential to alter how publics read bodies in motion and thus to effect social and artistic change.”¹⁰ In the space of *Our Daily Bread* events, this cross-viewing becomes a sort of cross-doing, with would-be spectators given many opportunities to take part in the work (detailed in what follows). Not only are participants asked to consider themselves in relation to the array of specific racial and familial identities presented onstage, but the relatively broad demographics of the audiences and participants that Tabor-Smith attracted means a broader range of embodied responses to the work (polite clapping from some, stomping and cheering from others, shouts of “amen” from some, carefully written contributions from others). Participants benefit from an experience of “difference” - watching others watching, or as it were, dancing or dialoguing with others dancing and dialoguing - that allows them to experience, however fleetingly, the fluidity of their own subjectivity and that of others.

⁸ Find further discussion of this phenomenon in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

⁹ Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, xix.

¹⁰ Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, xvi.

Those who engage make meaning together, creating value and insight in modalities not readily recognized in the confines of hegemony.

I am interested particularly in the racial implications of gathering people together in spaces like CounterPULSE where Western contemporary concert dance and what Tabor-Smith calls “food gatherings” or “food parties” gleaned from her own African-American heritage blend together to create unique performance offerings. How does such a scene offer up “different” opportunities for audience engagement? These spaces represent a special type of intercultural experience, where the work of the many women of color Tabor-Smith has taken on as dancers and collaborators is offered up for consideration (consumption?) by audiences representing a broad demographic and vastly varied knowledge of concert dance. Furthermore, CounterPULSE’s overt interests in artists as political activists encourages those in attendance to apply their performance experiences to “real world” concerns and actions.

According to CounterPULSE’s grant report to the Creative Work Fund, over 750 people attended the eight performances of *Our Daily Bread*’s inaugural run. Of the surveyed audiences, 57% reported this event as their first time at CounterPULSE, and 68% of attendees were viewing the artists’ work for the first time. Additionally, 55% of audiences identified as people of color, 63% identified as low-income, 22% as LGBTQ, 3% as disabled, 76% as female. This demographic material means that the audiences present were relatively well diversified, with people from different walks of life rubbing elbows. Unfortunately, this does not mean that such productions escape being effected by

deep currents of racism and class difference that permeate American culture, despite helpful, overt gestures of inclusion, ranging from CounterPULSE's 'NOTA', or no-one-turned-away-for-lack-of-available-funds, policy to the mid-performance invitation for all to join in the dancing that is discussed later.

DeFrantz contends that the concert dance space is always a white space, a "space of production and consumption, a modernist space, a fetishized space, a Europeanist space."¹¹ Whether or not this is true at a place such as CounterPULSE in the year 2011, concert dance spaces remain spaces where black artists like Tabor-Smith can make critical interventions, taking a place amongst the lineage of dance artists, from Katherine Dunham to Alvin Ailey, Bill T. Jones to Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, who have challenged this norm. A presentation such as *Our Daily Bread*, which foregrounds the experiences of women of color even as it urges all present, regardless of race, to participate in similar projects of self-investigation and hospitable reaching out to others, becomes fertile ground for addressing and redressing racism.

The informal, inviting, "come one, come all" mentality that *Our Daily Bread* events espouse belie an aesthetic ideology favoring active participation from would-be spectators that is right on trend with what various funding institutions have reported as a need for "active participation" or "opportunities for engagement" for audience

¹¹ Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 198. Notably, Shea Murphy argues differently, citing in her 2007 text how native performers have used the concert space in ways that are not just Europeanist throughout concert dance's history. She contends that "Native peoples continue to engage the Western concert stage as a tool for spiritual and cultural resilience and self-determination." Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 24.

members.¹² This ideology is a move towards community building that eschews concert dance's "high" art background - where participation is often based on purchases and membership-enabled accessibility - in favor of potluck-like practices more commonly associated with the "lower" classes, with folk traditions, and with people of color.¹³ The success of the shows indicate to me how, in San Francisco especially, engagement that equals politically tinged intercultural exchange is just what the dance community ordered... but then often can't deliver. Again, I turn to audience survey remarks, which state things like the following: "Personal, political, participatory, interactive! Wow!" and "Amazing! This was beautiful: choreography, visuals/set, story, video... and nice to see so many people of color in the cast, crew, and audience, so rare in performances in SF;" and finally, "The integration of movement, food, and stories made the space itself so incredibly welcoming and carried a message that meant so much more than a conventional performance."¹⁴ These audience members remark on the elements that stuck out as significant to them about the performance - its welcoming environment, the unconventional presence of food, the diversity of those present - and in so doing hint at the relative lack of these things in concert dance (or at least in popular perception of

¹² This terminology is taken directly from a research report entitled, "How Dance Audiences Engage: Summary Report from a National Survey of Dance Audiences" (2011). The research was conducted by Wolf Brown, and commissioned by Dance/USA as part of their Engaging Dance Audiences initiative, discussed at length in chapter four of this dissertation. For the full report visit, http://www.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/DanceUSA_EDA_HowDanceAudiencesEngage.pdf

¹³ For example, DeFrantz notes that, "Modern dance had largely been created by artists to engage the individual psyche, to explore the impulses of a single artistic vision. This individualistic impulse contradicts a core tenet of black art: that art exists to serve the larger (black) community." DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, 88.

¹⁴ Audience survey data gathered Apr14-24, 2011 by CounterPULSE.

concert dance). In *Our Daily Bread* audiences can “perform” both the familiar behaviors and traditions that mark the spaces of concert dance as such (sitting in the dark watching, clapping in appreciation, etc) and in “new” modes of engagement (like call and response, drum circle clapping and dancing, etc) that urge them gently out of their comfort zones. That said, the fact that *Our Daily Bread* audience members are getting their fix for engagement by engaging with practices derived from African diasporic traditions means that, within any given audience, the potential exists for critical acclaim to be a product of cultural appreciation, cultural appropriation, and the enactment of a new sort of “culture” all at once.

At the first show of Tabor-Smith’s that I attended called *Visceral Feast*, which played over two nights at Berkeley’s La Pena Cultural Center in April of 2010, I was rather quick to chalk up the experience as just another iteration of a feel-good, “multi-culti”, overtly-political, neoliberal, bay area presentation of ideas expressed through gestural dance (a not uncommon trope for bay area performance which has, especially since the influx of the hippies with the civil rights movements of the 1960s, cultivated a popular persona as celebratory and inclusively multicultural). The danced gestures, many of which seemed improvised, referenced ceremonial presentations of food gifts at an altar. The dancers reverentially raised loaves of bread, spun and lunged holding the corners of their aprons, held a hand over their hearts and then extended that arm towards one another or towards the heavens. I was served only one of the three courses of food offered because the performers did not have enough food to go around. There were technical

difficulties. However, the house was packed. In fact, it was packed with people who were having a great time. Furthermore, it was packed with people that I hadn't seen before. I did not see a familiar contemporary dance concert going face in the crowd, an altogether uncommon experience.

I was also initially quite wary of *Our Daily Bread* performances as potential examples of a sort of cultural tourism - a "trying on" of coveted and often exoticized African-American behaviors and practices (for example - eating gumbo, engaging in call and response participation "I say "good" you say "food!", even dancing in a drum circle - all of which do happen during an *Our Daily Bread* performance).¹⁵ However, as I have continued to attend events, I have come to realize my own aesthetic biases (prioritizing, for example, a "finished" product over an opportunity to "participate"). I have begun to realize that *Our Daily Bread's* appeal does not lie solely in the foods being offered, and certainly not just in the promise of an "experiment" within the walls of CounterPULSE's theater. A good portion of its appeal lies in people's excitement about it, people's sense of it as something accessible, relatable, relevant. There is a sense from audience members that they are experiencing something heartfelt, meaningful, important. Tabor-Smith and Robinson-Love employed rather tactical grassroots efforts aimed at building a *Bread*

¹⁵ Hula scholar Adria L. Imada discusses this cultural tourism in regards to hula performances in Hawaii, a state whose economic well-being is largely dependent on the influx of overworked, overwrought, (and perhaps overweight) individuals seeking asylum from their regularly scheduled lives through utopic visions of cool pina coladas, hot sandy beaches, and warm, inviting natives who welcome them with flowered leis and open arms. Though Imada does not focus specifically on food exchanges as part of this cultural tourism, her work is insightful in understanding white, mainstream, Americans' propensity for uncritically consuming an "other's" culture. Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

community, a community of people who cared about and felt invested in the unfolding of the work. In doing so, they effectively sparked interest in the participatory experience of *Our Daily Bread* as greater than the sum of its parts, whether gustatory or terpsichorean in nature.

With food so blatantly at the core of all *Our Daily Bread* gatherings, there are particularly potent opportunities to do the kinds of “pushing back” against the pressures of modernity that Seremetakis (1993, 1994) suggests are possible. As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, Seremetakis sees spaces that assert the validity of mnemonic associations, sensory-oriented memories, and encounters with symbolically charged material goods as integral in the fight against the commodification, homogenization, and literalization of lived experience. Concert dance, especially the experimental variety that CounterPULSE encourages, quite often operates in these ways - favoring the evocative over the invective, or at least recognizing and leaving space for multiple interpretations to materials presented. Seremetakis notes that food materials, the loaded markers connecting people to places and pasts through gustatorily governed prerogatives may, under the right conditions, take on special, heightened significance in realms of performance.¹⁶ In *Our Daily Bread*, the evocations and sensations of food sharing, of autobiographical storytelling, of strong female dancing bodies articulating personal and political concerns, and of bodies gathering in space to witness and take part

¹⁶ Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 7.

in such actions, coalesce to pack a powerful performative punch, giving credence as they do to alternative and historically overlooked ways of knowing and being in the world.

Concert dance audiences are an arguably more mixed group of individuals than they may have been at different points in the past (see chapter one on the establishment of dance as an autonomous art form in America). A given crowd is likely to be a blend of different races, ages, sexes, classes, and sexual orientations, especially at a place like CounterPULSE, where it is an explicit goal to be a safe place of radical inclusivity. However, even in spaces such as these, the “high-art” histories of concert dance spectatorship (which favor quiet, receptive, critical, listening audiences) continue to influence audience behavior (creating ‘mannered’ distance between people, amongst patrons and between patrons and performers). These habits of critical distance, I argue, effectively generate and then confound possibilities for commensal exchange in a twenty-first century live performance context. By incorporating food into the event, Tabor-Smith is re-opening the scope of what is “permissible” within the space, pushing back against such boundaries.

This blurring of the boundaries around what are “permissible” audience behaviors for concert dance opens up possibilities for commensal exchange, for nourishment. These opportunities are experienced in a show like *Our Daily Bread* as a novelty, despite the fact that commensal exchange, especially those exchanges grounded in the making and sharing of food, have been and remain prevalent in dancing cultures across the map. From the Mexican-American religious gatherings that anthropologist Dierdre Sklar

details in her 2001 text entitled, *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiestas of Tortugas, New Mexico*, to some of the Northern pow-wow events that Tara Browner details in *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* (2004), scholars have investigated the ways in which food practices intertwine with dance, albeit through rituals designed to produce effects within a community rather than specifically in concert dance settings.¹⁷ Food dance mergings have been discussed in symposium and conference talks by colleagues exploring traditions based in Greece, Malaysia, New Zealand, and even in the wilds of Northern Vermont where Bread and Puppet Theatre continue to stage secular processions on a farm, filling paraders bellies with bites of bread derived from the same sourdough starter yeast used at the company's beginnings in the 1960s.¹⁸ Even within more overtly Europeanist influenced practices like cabaret and burlesque dance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in New York and San Francisco there is a strong history of dance practices that incorporate food. These dance practices have historically relied on the various types of intimacy and sociality that food

¹⁷ Deidre Sklar, *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); and Tara Browner's *Heartbeat of the People*, 2002.

¹⁸ Here I am referencing unpublished work by the following individuals: Natalie Zervou, *Dancing Under Construction* conference paper presentation, UC Riverside, 2012; Prema Thiagarajan in an informal interview, UC Riverside, 2011; Jack Gray during a talk given as part of the Indigenous Choreographers Residency at the Culver Center in Riverside, CA in April 2012; and Michael Bodell, *Congress on Research in Dance* conference paper presentation, November 2012, respectively. These discussions all represent further possible avenues of investigation with regards to the intermingling of culturally specific food traditions and concert dance outside of the bay area context explored in this dissertation.

sharing engenders (different in each specific context) to have certain effects on how audiences receive and participate in performance.¹⁹

THE (GRASS)ROOTS

Our Daily Bread's initial full-length performances, which took place from April 14-24, 2011, grew out of an in-house CounterPULSE residency that Tabor-Smith secured for herself and her company back in 2008. CounterPULSE's Artist Residency Commissioning (ARC) program lends selected artists extensive organizational support and performance opportunities, both during the six months of their residency and beyond. The residencies are highly coveted, highly competitive incubators for emerging artists to explore new ideas without the financial risk commonly associated with self-producing.²⁰ Very few continue to develop into creative partnerships as has *Our Daily Bread*. However, the popular fervor that developed around the work, along with Tabor-Smith and Robinson-Love's desire to continue its development, meant treading into new territory for all involved parties.

¹⁹ For more on the histories of cabaret and burlesque see Erenberg (1984), Vogel (2009), and Allen (1991), all referenced in chapter one of this dissertation.

²⁰ CounterPULSE totals the support package at a value of over \$7,000. artists receive assistance generating publicity materials, access lists of vetted designers, technicians, stage managers and more who can assist in the getting the project the artist has proposed up on its feet, and are sometimes granted further opportunities for partnership with and performances at CounterPULSE. A breakdown of this value can be accessed at CounterPULSE's website: <http://counterpulse.org/programs/artist-in-residence-program/>

Under the careful direction of Robinson-Love, CounterPULSE has detailed an ambitious strategic plan for their organization that aims to change who gets the opportunity to produce and attend performances, talks, and community events that fall under their purview. Curatorially, CounterPULSE especially encourages performance works by those traditionally underrepresented, namely “queer artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities.” They embrace creative collaborations and work that “addresses current social, political, or environmental issues.”²¹ They select proposals that push at the boundaries of contemporary performance - blending disciplines and articulating creative visions for the use of the performance space and organizational resources.²² All this is done in the hope of altering what Robinson-Love refers to as “performance trends in America” that favor certain aesthetics - and their attendant raced, classed, gendered, sexed, abled bodies.²³ Tabor-Smith’s proposed project, which grappled with social justice issues raised by the industrialized food system as well as her own African-American family food legacy, fit the bill nicely. Especially, I imagine, when she stated her insistence on feeding the audience as part of her performance, and her intent to explore the issues with her multi-racial company of collaborators - dancers, singers, actors, musicians, directors, and cooks.

²¹ CounterPULSE’s ARC webpage, listed under the subheading “our curatorial philosophy,” <http://counterpulse.org/programs/artist-in-residence-program/>

²² Ibid.

²³ Robinson-Love in conversation with the author at CounterPULSE, Oct 2, 2012.

When I sat down to interview Tabor-Smith about *Our Daily Bread* in 2012 she began by commenting on her surprise at how the Our Daily Bread Project has grown, and how it has transformed her life. The ideas and conversations generated in it, the choreographic and methodological fodder that emerged from it, the partnerships she has forged because of it have all been more than she anticipated. She says in a blog post on her Deep Waters Dance Theater website, “Listen... the making of this piece, Our Daily Bread has been life changing for me and my work as a choreographer and performer” and “... I had no idea when I embarked on this journey where it would take me, how it would conjure up senses, tastes, and feelings within me that I never knew possible.”²⁴ These source materials and budding relationships continue to propel and inspire new offshoot projects created in the same spirit as the first, even as they expand outside the walls of CounterPULSE. This is due, in part, to the concerted efforts made by Robinson-Love and Tabor-Smith from the outset of the project to provide a variety of ways for a variety of people to get involved with the work.

In addition to avenues of publicity CounterPULSE traditionally employs (postings on websites, email blasts to mailing lists, printed postcards, etc) Tabor-Smith took the initiative to walk into places like The People’s Grocery in Oakland offering to cook for employees in exchange for their food stories (some of which were later woven into the texts and movement motifs of the dance performances). Tabor-Smith and CounterPULSE

²⁴ This information accessed Feb 2, 2014 at Deep Waters Dance Theater’ blog entitled, “The Food Chain is Only as Strong as the Weakest Link and Other Thoughts Leading up to this Monster Called, “Our Daily Bread”” March 31, 2011 <http://www.deepwatersdance.com/blog/>

began co-hosting events with other organizations serving the neighborhood like The Luggage Store Gallery and the Tenderloin National Forest, and with individuals with interests in sustainable food culture like acclaimed bay area chef Bryant Terry. The presenters crafted events that were welcoming, often free of charge, and ultimately geared towards the creation of art, the sharing of stories, the building of a community - and a community consciousness - around the food justice issues they felt were important. Participants were urged to dig in, to reconsider their own food legacies and to acknowledge their interconnectedness to and interdependence on others.

In my initial interview with her, Robinson-Love stated, “From the beginning, *Our Daily Bread* was designed so that audience members could actually affect what would take place in the performances.”²⁵ The many potluck parties, quilting circles, symposiums, and work-in-progress showings with feedback sessions helped build source material for the performances. From these events anecdotes about favorite meals and food memories were solicited from guests and recorded, often artfully on things like fabric aprons. Some of these autobiographical tidbits were later written into the performance dialogue and songs or displayed in the lobby installation built into CounterPULSE’s entryway. Tabor-Smith regularly blogged, both on her company’s website and on CounterPULSE’s artists’ blog with comments by readers enabled and encouraged.²⁶ Here she remarked on the process of making the piece, sharing otherwise

²⁵ Robinson-Love in conversation with the author Oct 2, 2012.

²⁶ CounterPULSE blogs and information about Our Daily Bread Project events can be found at <http://counterpulse.org/programs/our-daily-bread-project/>

untold project developments, rehearsal discoveries, inspirational conversations/poems/recipes. This was done with candor. For example, in her post entitled “Letting Go of Gumbo” she describes a ritual event wherein she asked her mother to make her one final gumbo with seafood, in celebration of her birthday. It was a very emotional event for her, as evidenced by the following statement: “Leading up to the day, anytime I was asked about this looming event, I cried. It felt like a death to me. To lose Gumbo even though I only ate it rarely was a traumatic notion.”²⁷ Sharing the story as she does means that those who are privy to this process may watch the danced piece with new eyes, more informed sensibilities, reading the loss and letting go across all the actions that transpire.

According to Tabor-Smith, the heart of the project really blossomed at the food parties, events where all were welcome at the table but the majority of those in attendance were not necessarily regulars to the concert dance scene. In her view, there is a critical link between food and survival, food and intimacy, a link that enables deeper connections with strangers and acquaintances than are otherwise possible. Food for her is a great equalizer, an evoker and marker of home.²⁸ Because of this sentiment, people are fed at every event that she hosts. They are not fed pre-packaged concessions-style snacks or boxed lunches reminiscent of corporate brown bag events, but foods she identifies as deeply “hers,” foods she often prepares and serves with her own hands. People are

²⁷ Deep Waters Dance Theater website, “Letting Go of Gumbo” blog dated Feb 12, 2011. accessed Feb 2, 2014, <http://www.deepwatersdance.com/blog/>

²⁸ This belief is evident in her blog posts, and was also stated by Tabor-Smith’s during a presentation about her work at *Dance Discourse Project #11: Food* (CounterPULSE), June 2011.

sometimes even encouraged to bring a favorite dish to share, as in the Mardi Gras parade and gathering at CounterPULSE in 2011. The presence of food, both as the thematic crux of the performance work and workshops and as a physical material that is shared and eaten at the events, provides a point of access - to concert dance and to commensality (and, in this instance to cultural traditions like those cultivated in black churches and community organizations) - for people with widely varying aesthetic tastes and cultural backgrounds. It causes people to show up... and then to open themselves up to sharing their own food histories. This creates a much longed for sense of community amongst participants that Tabor-Smith finds inspiring. Ultimately, this also opens up whom is being served by contemporary dance and how.²⁹

All of this is in line with a popular trend, that emerged in the postmodern era as cited in chapter two, which allows potential audience members to feel that they are privy to the process of art making.³⁰ However, with the Our Daily Bread Project, efforts to engage audiences didn't end with the close of the show or end of a grant term. The food

²⁹ Evidence of this is taken from participant feedback at food gatherings, with statements like, “a wonderful experience celebrating community and sharing” and “the hostess’ were amazing. very friendly and knowledgeable. Everyone made you feel welcomed. It was a great way to spend a Saturday afternoon.” (Our Daily Bread: Eat-In Jan 14, 2012); and “I’ve enjoyed my time here. I loved the stories, the energy of the event and the spirits of the people seated at the table. Walking away in deep thoughts about my own sense of community” (Our Daily Bread: Eat-In March 10, 2012).

³⁰ This trend is evidenced in programs like the YBCA project discussed in chapter four and in Margaret Jenkins’ CHIME (Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange) which started in San Francisco in 2004 and has now grown to include several offshoot programs. Part of the exchange involves hosting open rehearsals or work-in-progress showings where collaborators talk about their experience. See Margaret Jenkins’ Dance Company’s website: <http://www.mjdc.org/CHIME/chime.html>. This trend can also be seen in recent choreographic projects taken on by relative newcomers like David F. Martinez who performed at RAW Dance’s Concept Series: 9 on September 3-4, 2011 and bay area dance veteran Joe Goode’s 2012 creative endeavor entitled, *The Human Kind Series* - both of which are driven by audience contributed content about the state of our lives shared via an interactive website. See Joe Goode Performance Group’s website: <http://joegoode.org/see-us/human-kind/>)

parties continued to occur, the number of community partners increased, and the full-length performance was reworked over the weekend of November 15-18, 2012.

Community outreach endeavors were created. A related five-week intensive was offered in collaboration with Urban Bush Women's Leadership Institute both to students at UC Berkeley as academic coursework and as a workshop for interested community members. All of these efforts mark concerted commitment to building community by coupling the personal with the gastro-political and rendering it into food-oriented performance.

QUERYING COMMUNITY

It is tempting to talk about this community that is being built - around bites of food and bits of song and bursts of full-bodied dancing - as a sort of utopian fantasy full of experiences of communion, conviviality, and commensality, where everyone shares and grows and feels full. However, the broad range of responses that are possible at any performance, perhaps especially at these particular 'genre-bending' performances, complicates the notion of 'community' building - especially in light of a show that deals so explicitly with racialized difference in America.

Proponents of Afro-pessimism like Frank B. Wilderson, III would likely claim that the community that *Our Daily Bread* performers, arts programmers, and audience members are interested in cannot, in fact, be effected. Such efforts, Wilderson says, are thwarted by the impossibility of the empathetic feelings or relational connections between black and non-black community members in cultural exchange. Wilderson

proposes that the history of slavery confounds white attempts to identify with black experience, that Blackness is inextricably linked with the conditions of slavery, conditions with which white subjects cannot empathize or understand.³¹ My own analyses of intercultural exchange aligns more with cultural theorist bell hooks', who instead of focusing on empathetic potential suggests that America's history of slavery and disenfranchisement has resulted in unequal distributions of power, wealth, and access, as well as a resultant tendency to "Otherize" any ethnic group against a presumably raceless, universal, whiteness. This means that encounters that tout an experience of honoring and recognizing difference often devolve into a scenario where the white "One" desires a bit of a more obviously ethnic "Other" to "enhance the blank landscape of whiteness."³² Richard Dyer illuminates the development of this presumably blank landscape in his text *White*, noting that "White people have power and believe they think, feel, and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's; white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image."³³

Theorizations such as these draw into sharp relief the difficulty of intercultural exchanges that Manning proposes are possible in the special contexts of select dance performances. This difficulty is evidenced, as she points out in her 2004 text, in the ways

³¹ Frank B. Wilderson, III. "'Raw Life' and The Ruse of Empathy," in *Performance, Politics, and Activism*, ed. by Peter Lichtenfels and John Rouse, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181-206.

³² bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" in *Eating Culture*, ed. by Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1998), 189.

³³ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1997), 9.

in which contributions of African-American, Latin-American, Native American and Asian-American individuals, among others, are often overlooked in favor of creating a narrative that touts modern dance itself as a primarily white art form that can freely borrow from other cultures for its artistic purposes. Examples of such borrowing date back to Ruth St. Denis' 'exotic' representations of 'Oriental' culture in the early twentieth century (ie, her solos *Incense* and *Radha* (1906) which spring from her own Orientalist fantasies about Hindu ritual) and may, in some respect, even include recent works like French choreographer Jerome Bel's 2004 duet with Thai dancer Pichet Klunchun.³⁴

Dance studies scholars like Manning, Dixon-Gottschild, DeFrantz, and Jayna Brown, among many others, have made critical interventions into these narratives, specifically illustrating the ongoing presence and contributions of African-American artists and African derived, or Africanist, aesthetics throughout the twentieth century. In chapter four of her text, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, Dixon Gottschild notes that many of the tenets of postmodern dance (including but not limited to an interest in pastiche, non-narrative, nonlinear structure, as well as in blurring lines between audience and performer and between daily life and performance) all stem from Africanist principles. She also notes that African influence in America spreads well beyond the arts, stating, "American society is

³⁴ *Incense* is historicized as St. Denis' first public performance, presented at the Hudson Theatre in New York on March 22, 1906. Thom Hecht, "Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968) America's Divine Dancer" *Dance Heritage Coalition* (2012). accessed Feb 19, 2014 http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/stdenis_essay_hecht.pdf. Jerome Bel's work *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* is analyzed by Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 197-207.

permeated by Africanist attitudes, forms, and phenomena, from African agrarian practices, which were basic to the success of plantation agriculture, to such African American specifics as potato chips, peanut butter, revival meetings, and the Charleston.”³⁵

These scholars are responding to the longstanding American phenomenon to which hooks alerts her readers - the white desire for contact with a racialized “Other” that leads to conspicuous consumption of the practices, behaviors, and aesthetics of that group. Hooks refers to this process as a “commodification of difference” which “promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of the Other’s history through a process of decontextualization”.³⁶

hooks wrote about this process of commodification over twenty years ago, and yet it is clear that this desire to consume the ‘other’ remains (themed restaurants, very popular methods for ‘taking in’ another’s culture by eating ‘their’ regional cuisine, abound even in the progressive bay area).³⁷ But, might this commodification also be present in experimental ventures taking place within the walls of CounterPULSE?

³⁵ Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 4.

³⁶ hooks, “Eating the Other,” 191.

³⁷ Finkelstein, “Dining Out,” 205. Finkelstein theorizes restaurants in Western contexts as sites for elaborating individual fantasies in a relatively structured and codified environment. She points to Roland Barthes’ (1982) analysis of the ways in which Europeans exoticize Asian culture through the ingestion of Asian cuisine at ethnic restaurants. She says “Our pursuit of the new, exciting, and interesting through these mediated, circumscribed gestures [of eating in ethnic restaurants] allows us to contain the challenge of the exotic while simultaneously indulging in it” (205).

Beyond the coconut cornbread served, the Our Daily Bread Project offers up a space to consider contemporary responses to this phenomenon. The events I attended seem to be deliberately providing alternatives to this process of decontextualization, instead carefully carving out images of multiracial individuals with overlapping and intersecting traits, unique and yet intertwined. They seemed contingent upon the belief that community, or a sense of kinship and caring (if not empathy per se), between all types of people is possible.

The reception of performed material, as innumerable dance scholars have pointed out, is contingent upon each individual's sociocultural history and 'literacy' of potential meanings born by black (or brown) bodies dancing. So, within any particular performance or workshop context there will be those who view the happenings as positive portrayals of black culture, or as calls to political action, or as simply pleasant entertainment that is theirs to consume at will. There will be some who consume uncritically, willing to buy in, to be served, to try new things - but who are not really concerned with how their personal responses to such activities may in fact implicate them in the perpetuation of racist notions of an "exotic other's" culture as theirs for the taking. Actually, through their (white) consumptive acts, these same participants may feel like they are doing their part to promote racial understanding, or to pretend that we are 'postracial' and that racialized distinctions do not matter. In contrast, there will be others who are interested in the ways in which the process-oriented structures of Our Daily

Bread events allow for the generation of knowledges and relationships and experiences that seem to offer alternatives to limited, hegemonic acts of consumption.

Given the fact that there is no way to account for all possible participatory scenarios, I choose to focus my analysis on the efforts at resistance to commodification, or perhaps more accurately, *alternatives* to commodification in which I see Tabor-Smith and CounterPULSE engaging. I suggest that the specificity and, dare I say, generosity of what Our Daily Bread offers up allows for the possibility of an intercultural experience that does more than reinforce people's respective subject positions - which hooks proposes many, if not most, encounters between black and white subjects do. I see this happening (via versions of what Dixon-Gottschild has termed "Africanist tropes" and DeFrantz has termed "African American performance strategies") in the following three vital ways: through acts of creative self-definition and invitation for spectators to do the same; through contact - not just physical proximity or a Brechtian breaking of the fourth wall, but through 'intimate' acts of food sharing, hand washing, and dancing together; and finally, through what I'm calling "reinvention" - or the constant expansion of the scope of the project such that it happens in different settings, includes different

populations of people, and provides an alternative to the static status as an identifiable and stable commodity.³⁸

SELF-DEFINITION

Plainly stated, Tabor-Smith has created a show that is both accessible to diverse audiences and at the same time contingent upon/constituted by very specific personal and cultural histories. She is an African-American woman whose family comes from Louisiana, though she is herself a California native. Her company, Deep Waters Dance Theatre (DWDT), was founded in 2006. It is a company comprised of women of various ethnic backgrounds, none of whom read as white, and each of whom bring autobiographical material to the work, whether in spoken narrative, song, or as a jumping point for a movement motif. Thematically, Tabor-Smith and her dancers affirm their own overlapping and divergent personal histories, activating their agency by employing what Patricia Hill Collins, referring specifically to black women, calls “self-definition.” Collins notes, “When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do

³⁸ My employment of the term “reinvention” builds upon Thomas DeFrantz’s term “versioning” which he identifies as a strategy of African American performance that enacts “the generational reworking of aesthetic material.” The term “versioning” arises in studies of Afro-American and Caribbean music, but DeFrantz applies it to select choreographic works of Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Alvin Ailey, and to breakdancing. He states that “in certain concert dance formations” the “contributions of the group of dancers outweigh the choreographic plan of an individual artist.” DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, 82-83. My use of the term reinvention departs slightly from this idea, as the choreographic strategy of Tabor-Smith and her collaborators is to build the work(s) precisely upon the contributions of the dancers and other community members. This means that each in each performative instance, the project is reinvented in line with the expressed concerns, needs, and interests of those involved.

so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definition, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects."³⁹

The backbone of the *Our Daily Bread's* choreographic content stems from Tabor-Smith's explicit desire to explore her own food struggles.⁴⁰ In a direct address to the audience, she reveals how she aches for the feelings evoked by her mother's seafood-based Louisiana-style gumbo but has chosen to no longer eat seafood due to unsustainable fishing practices. Tabor-Smith is worried about the potential dissolution of her family's food legacies due to the boundaries necessitated by her food politics.⁴¹ In her articulation of this tension, and similar tensions that arise from the stories shared by the other dancers, Tabor-Smith works to present living bodies as both repositories and inventors of always-in-motion cultural memories - constituted in conjunction with overlapping and seemingly contradictory social concerns. Despite Tabor-Smith's decision not to eat fish, her sociopolitical concerns get played out in and around the gumbo pot, which is central to the "plot" of the performance laden with images and stories of Hurricane Katrina victims, and a projected video of a news report about a pregnant

³⁹ Psyche A. Williams-Forson, quoting Patricia Hill Collins, 1133 of 4388 (kindle edition). Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Tabor-Smith recorded parts of this story in one of her February 2011 artist-in-residence blogs for CounterPULSE entitled "Letting Go of Gumbo." accessed Feb 2, 2014, <http://counterpulse.org/2011/letting-go-of-gumbo/>

⁴¹ Interestingly, Williams-Forson confessed to a similar tension in her 2006 text. In chapter three she analyzes connections between chicken and travel in black communities. Speaking of her own customs, she recalls a time when she did not prepare fried chicken for her family's meal on the go as her mother had. She expressed a "sense of sadness" and "an interesting sense of loss as I struggled over historical continuity and self-preservation" (*Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*, 1715 of 4388, kindle edition).

teenage Mexican farm worker in California who died from exhaustion and overheating while at work. There are scenes of jovial women cooking in the kitchen that lead into danced movement sequences, talk of the dangers of gentrification and fast food, and a video projection of a cow being slaughtered ceremoniously in Haitian culture so that hungry people can eat.

One particularly potent moment of choreography has continued to resonate with me long after the close of the show. It was a section of the show where the energy that had been jubilant was channeled in a quite different direction. In this section, the lights are dimmed and colored red. A video montage plays silently in the background, revealing images of hungry people of color waiting in line for bread, marching in streets amidst fires and rubble. The bright, colorful kerchiefs that the dancers had tied around their hair are lowered to cover their mouths. They gather in a relatively tight formation down stage right, near the front row of the audience. The “base” movement of the section is a running movement wherein the feet are kicked up behind the body and stamped flat footed into the ground in a driving percussive rhythm 1-2, 1-2-3, reminiscent of marching feet. The bodies of the dancers are tilted sharply forward, seemingly propelled headlong into an imagined fray. The dancers’ faces are stern and bodies squarely forward for the first time, a marked difference from the inviting smiles, the coquettish smirks, the sassy pronouncements, from the swaying and swinging, dipping and undulating movements that they have issued forth throughout the performance.

Each dancers' right arm is uplifted, clenched tightly in a fist, a symbol of revolution, of uprising, of the power of the masses in revolt. This fist pumps into the air in time with the stamping feet, whilst the dancers' simultaneously contract their chests in time to the rhythm, exemplifying polyrhythm, one of the Africanist aesthetic principles Brenda Dixon-Gottschild discusses.⁴² This step is used to transition the bodies into different formations in the space. It portends violence and confrontation.

This base movement is interspersed with another, one in which the right foot paddles rapidly behind the left. The spine is rounded and the body grounded slightly lower. The right hand that was raised in a fist is now open, palm facing the body, drawing upward in front of the torso to the mouth before being turned fingers forward, palm up, to join a fiery breath expelled from lungs and a widely gaping mouth. These two rhythms combine with other sounds - the slapping, clapping, exhaling, and grunting, that combines with movements of arms slicing, of bodies whirling.

This movement dissolves into a series of jumps across the space, interspersed with crouching, alarmed looks to the left and right. They then scramble back to clump tightly in the center, beginning again with a pulsing rhythm. They rotate in a tight circle several times, tiring themselves, until they collapse their upper bodies into a criss-crossing heap. This moment of repose is fleeting, just long enough for one dancer to emerge from the group and walk downstage, arm extended in supplication towards an audience member in the front row. Her face and stance are neutral, her upturned palm and

⁴² Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 14.

outreached arm both proud and pleading. This moment of relative stillness is broken again by a return to the marching, fist pumping base step, a move that gradually transitions, incrementally, back into the more familiar tone of the show.

All that I have just described lasts only a minute or two, and yet because it exists in sharp contrast to the rest of the tone of the show (particularly the first act), it remains quite memorable. It is a moment that honors the rage, the anger, the fury that accompanies injustice and often motivates change. In the most recent version of *Our Daily Bread*, which took place November 16-18, 2012, this choreographic sequence happens very near the top of the show and with a portion of it repeating again at its close. Structuring the performance in this way seems to indicate that this current of anger and its associated drive towards revolt undergirds all else that transpires within the space. It lends depth and breadth to the play and the celebration that follows, grounding the various stories sung, danced, and spoken in a unifying motif yearning for change.

This sequence of choreography is also representative of much of the choreography that continues to unfold throughout the performance. As mentioned, it is stylistically a mashup of African diasporic traditions (like the recognizable movements of Ogun from Afro-Haitian dance practices) and more Western modern dance tropes (like expressing emotion through gestural movement, and organizing moving bodies in a presentational way that balances and makes full use of the stage space). Tabor-Smith employs the postmodern technique of pastiche, a patchwork overlaying of multiple narratives, some of which utilize theatrical props like chairs, pots, and draping cloths. She

employs many of the expected concert dance theatrical devices like lowering and directing light to produce certain effects, incorporating thunderclaps, voice overs, and other recorded sound. These sounds exist in addition to musicians who, in a much more African diasporic mode, occupy space fully visible on stage throughout the performance.

This setting creates a rich environment in which the dancers' acts of self-definition take place. The bodily investigations happening throughout the show are in line with the feminist frame that is laid out in Elisabeth Grosz's text, *Volatile Bodies*, which acknowledges bodies as unknowable and processual, always grounded in historical context, changing. Building on this, she claims "... the body is never finally constituted, like a sealed envelope, but is continually a contested field and an instrument of contestation and question."⁴³ This contestation is, arguably, especially true of the dancing bodies of women of color. The selves powerfully presented in performance, I would argue, inherently resist consumption in their assertion of the multitude of possible "black" experiences and identities, many of which will prove illegible, or perhaps more accurately untouchable, to even the most savvy or sensitive audience members, white or otherwise.

While the women in DWDT would not all necessarily define themselves as black, they all are engaged, under Tabor-Smith's choreographic direction, in such agentic acts of "self-definition." These acts of self-defining are not an attempt at marking one's

⁴³ Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 60.

autonomy, individuality, or “specialness” as sometimes happens elsewhere in the context of contemporary dance, but rather embody a popular trope often associated with Indigenous peoples of a ‘self’ that is inextricably linked to others and the earth.⁴⁴ In this instance, this means that the images of themselves that the women present are made legible through stories about their favorite childhood meals, gestural images of lessons learned from grandparents, as well as choreographic enactments of displacement and visitations by ancestor spirits. These “selves” that are presented come with strong claims of kinship both to actual family members as well as to a larger community of people of color engaged in struggle. The stories shared and sung and spun into choreographed movement by the dancers reveal conceptions of their bodies as powerful, and as powerfully interconnected.

DWDT’s mission statement marks the group as interested in dance’s potential to shift unequal distributions of power that dominate even within the allegedly progressive realm of experimental concert dance. And while Tabor-Smith does not explicitly cite the oppression she bristles against as happening within the space of concert dance, her work is rather powerfully addressing just that. The fact that Tabor-Smith, like Urban Bush Women, continues to work in the concert dance realm is significant. She is not gathering people on a mountaintop (as does Halprin who is discussed in the previous chapter), nor is she working through avenues already poised to provide education like elementary

⁴⁴ As mentioned in chapter two, Shea Murphy notes how for many contemporary Indigenous choreographers and dancers the act of dancing, whether in ritual or on concert dance stages, “enacts, and doesn’t merely portray, relation to ancestors, animals, and land.” Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 25.

schools. Unlike other postmodern and contemporary companies whose interest in motivating social change has led them to take dance to the streets of civic centers and farmers markets or the walls of community centers and grain silos, the dancing that DWDT does often (though not always) happens within the frame of the proscenium arch. This commitment means that those privy to Tabor-Smith's work have not just stumbled upon it as they have gone about their day. Nor is the company enacting its agenda through a sort of Guy Debordian derive. Rather, the choice to continue to engage with concert dance necessitates attracting potential spectators in a manner significant enough that they venture to an arts presenting venue, perhaps into an otherwise unknown theater, in an otherwise unvisited part of town, to take in what Tabor-Smith is serving up.

As it turns out, this emphasis on self-defining also links DWDT to a lineage of American dance makers who share the goals of focusing on (or perhaps "refocusing" is a better term) the experience of people of color, and most emphatically on community-oriented efforts towards "healing from environmental, sexual, and racial oppression."⁴⁵ These notions, drawn from DWDT's mission statement, reveal Tabor-Smith's roots as a former associate artistic director for New York's Urban Bush Women, a dance company whose similarly multi-ethnic cast of women has been creating critically acclaimed works under the direction of founder Jawole Willa Jo Zollar since the 1980s. DWDT's scope connects them to African-American artists like Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey, Urban

⁴⁵ More information available from DWDT website. accessed Jan 7, 2014, <http://www.deepwatersdance.com/portfolios/deep-waters-dance/>

Bush Women, and Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, among others, whose explicit goals include carving out a place for artists of color and broadening public understanding of African contributions to American consciousness. These goals also, and perhaps less obviously, connect DWDT to a long line of bay area dance makers attentive to the work performance does not just through the danced representation of ideas, but through mobilization of otherwise non-dancing bodies.⁴⁶

This choice to use the concert dance realm to then invoke feelings of home, or one's family of origin, or one's favorite childhood meal, helps to reduce some of the distancing effect often experienced when sitting in the dark watching a dance unfold. This, for some, may have the effect of lessening the kind of cool, removed spectatorial mode that I see standing in the way of commensality. Williams-Forsen notes that, "Childhood experiences... have become a filter through which objects, like fried chicken, take on meanings that fashion a collective memory. These are often experiences that validate one's existence."⁴⁷

A choreographic instance of this invocation of memory can be seen in *Our Daily Bread* when one of the dancers recounts how as a child her father would send her to the corner store to buy him an Orangina soda. She embodies her childhood self, her

⁴⁶ The work Anna Halprin has done to this effect is well-documented - especially in her recent biography penned by Janice Ross, and most notably in the forty plus year history of her *Planetary Dance* where non-dancers within the community are urged to join her in a dance ritual at sunrise on Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County. Lesser known bay area players include Zaccho Dance Theater's educational outreach program which instructs Bayview youths and Erica Chong Shuch's movement choruses of thirty plus community members, some with little to no dance training, in recent works like *After All (2010)* and *In the Circle (2012)*.

⁴⁷ Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Bones*, 1714 of 4388, kindle edition.

movements bouncy and rambunctious, as she revels in the memory of being able to purchase candy for herself and her friend with the change from her father's bill. While this specific story is unique to the dancer, the energy emitted through the movement, the uncontrollable childish exuberance of getting to pick out and enjoy a special treat is highly relatable. She plays on the nostalgia for a certain time by breaking into the pop culture dance move called the running man, an easy, bouncy, celebratory, repeating step made popular in the late 1980s by black pop artists like Janet Jackson, MC Hammer, and Milli Vanilli.

Enlivening these memories through the lens of concert dance effectively amplifies these otherwise domestic or familial experiences, these evocative memories and notions of "home", through the use of dramatic lighting, framing, staging, and an accompanying sound score. Tabor-Smith's encouragement and framing of each dancer's project of self-definition capitalizes on the potential these elements carry to direct attention, heighten sensation, build anticipation, and highlight certain realities of embodied experience. It also highlights each dancer's humanity - they are revealed through their dancing and storytelling to be women with pasts, losses, desires, rather than merely instruments for executing some singular choreographic agenda as is common in contemporary dance.

Tabor-Smith's skillful manipulation of these theatrical tools ultimately urges observers to engage in their own process of self-definition. As she says, "the person sitting there [in the audience] maybe hasn't had gumbo, but they remember their own

favorite meal, and think “yeah, i get that” and they are right there with us.”⁴⁸ In case this remembering wasn’t enough, at the aforementioned *Visceral Feast* event I attended each audience member was given a slip of paper upon which to write down the meal memory they had conjured. We were then invited to share it with someone next to us, and even to shout out some of the words we had written. At the *Our Daily Bread* shows, the lobby of CounterPULSE was decorated with crafts made in workshops that attested to these shared memories - words and images on quilting squares and cloth aprons, as well as thoughtful scribbles etched in a book on a baker’s rack laden with kitchen paraphernalia.

Tabor-Smith’s invitation for everyone to engage in this act of self-definition insists that it is a project necessary not just for those who have historically been denied their agency based on race, class, or gender. Self-definition (though the term is never used in performance) is proposed as essential for all to undertake, especially, Tabor-Smith seems to say, given the pervasiveness of the industrialized food system that effectively destroys and disconnects us from the source of our foods and the people who labor to produce it. Participants who, even here in the bay area, are perhaps (in a rather ‘white’ fashion) prone to universalize their own experience and hold it at an uncritical distance from what is being presented, are instead urged into action and critical reflection.

⁴⁸ Tabor-Smith in conversation with the author at the University of California, Berkeley, October 13, 2012.

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What to do with all the memories, words, and energies resulting from these acts of self-definition? I see Tabor-Smith employing what, in her 1992 article entitled, ““What Has Happened Here”: The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics” scholar Elsa Barkley Brown calls “gumbo ya ya” practices of overlaying several different, even seemingly conflicting histories.⁴⁹ Barkley Brown talks about how this African-American derived discursive model frames a metaphorically jagged-edged, asymmetrical, cacophonous whole that she feels is necessary for relevant cultural analysis. I couldn’t resist the food metaphor that was so appropriate for an event actually centered around the making and sharing of gumbo. But Barkley Brown’s assertion that “gumbo ya ya” approaches, which honor and leave room for difference - and the tensions that difference creates - is apropos beyond this coincidence.

This gumbo ya-ya imagery describes the tone set at *Our Daily Bread* events, which I alluded to in the opening paragraph of this chapter. The performance space is bustling, exuberant. For example, in the moment just before the marching “base” movement described earlier, the stage space was occupied by a video playing, a woman singing from a rocking chair downstage left, a poem being spoken by another woman close to the kitchen door, and the chorus of dancers performing gestural movements including holding the corners of their aprons, pointing their fingers, and gliding their

⁴⁹ Elsa Barkley Brown, ““What Has Happened Here”: The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics,” *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), 295-312.

hands along the contours of their bodies. The overlaying of these many tidbits - drawn from audiences as well as the images and movements presented by the performers - are but part of the confluence that constitutes the performance.

The merging that takes place is not merely metaphorical. Instead the structure of the performance necessitates very physical overlapping - both in terms of the spaces occupied by performers and spectators, as well as in the tasks each can take on. For instance, one dancer sits on a stool in the aforementioned lobby display. She is surrounded by a stove with a pot, a tower of recycled glass bottles, a baking rack full of kitchen utensils and ingredients, and a ceremonial arch that I was told had to be taken down after the second performance because the fire marshal deemed it a safety hazard. The performer, an older black woman wearing an apron and a colorful kerchief tied around her head sits on a stool grinding grain with a large African mortar and pestle. She explains to the passersby the origins of the tool as she works or rests from working. She lets not a single spectator pass without acknowledging them verbally, without engaging them in at least the most basic conversational exchange.

As audience members move through the threshold that separates the lobby from the stage space another dancer conducts a pre-show hand-washing ceremony with each person. When I was there my hands were grasped and dunked in warm water, and then cold water, gently rubbed and then gingerly dried with a soft, white towel. The dancer commented on the ritual's practicality, "now you've got clean hands so you can eat" she said before she gestured my friend and I forward into the theater. Throughout the show

the dancers move easily between the stage, the raked seating of the 100-seat studio theater, and the kitchen. They are the ones who deliver the food prepared in the kitchen to audience members' (clean) hands. They ask the audience questions "salmon or shrimp? vegan or paleo?" and they expect answers. They host a drum circle center stage in lieu of a typical intermission, inviting everyone into the space often regarded as "for performers only".

This drum circle activity proved a particularly significant activity for opening up the politics of intercultural contact. The ritual unfolds in a rather organic way, with the dancers gathering small, wooden boxes to sit and beat on as well as stools and a few maraca-like instruments to shake or play. They form a loose semi-circle center stage and, before they begin singing, Tabor-Smith explains that while people can use the short break to go to the bathroom or get some air, she hopes they will join the performers in song and dance. "Come dance with us!" she urges before signaling the group to begin the chant. "Gumbo adobo.... gumbo adobo..." their singing begins quietly, with pulsing bass notes and increasingly soulful pronouncements. It grows into a song with strong food imagery that invokes ancestors and celebrates women's contributions in "black nations" as well as "east Oakland" (a historically, and perhaps notoriously, black neighborhood). Several of the company dancers rap or sing about their particular food legacies ("my granny made jambalaya to knock your socks off, it cured my sickness and healed my people..."). One of the choruses of the song states, "let's be fed, get out of our heads, channel the dead, spirit be fed..." and "we are the brown, spiritual, the feminine...." The song is contagious,

the beat is driving, the vocal harmonies raucous, full-hearted, and impressively executed. It effectively calls people forth from their seats, where they form the other half of the circle onstage. Company dancers take turns with audience members improvisationally dancing solo, or in pairs, in the center of the circle while everyone else, claps, sways, and grooves at the circle's perimeter.

As a CounterPULSE regular, I have seen many artists' attempts to involve audience members in various activities onstage, but I have never seen the attempt garner as much audience involvement as this did. At the first performance I attended, I would estimate that at least 80% of the audience was down on the floor dancing with the performers. The inviting atmosphere that Tabor-Smith and her collaborators had created from the moment that people arrived paid off here. By the time this intermission rolled around, enough people felt comfortable enough in the space to risk this sort of contact. I, however, did not participate, at least not in the sense that I got down on the floor to dance and sing. I was enthralled by what was happening - the drum circle had a magnetism to it that built as it progressed and more and more people joined in. I was struck by the brilliance of enacting this kind of participatory activity in lieu of a standard theatrical intermission, which often seems more a convention than a necessity. I stood in awe, but remained sort of paralyzed, feeling a bit awkward about my own curiosity and aware, but wary, of my desire to just dive in as I saw others doing.

Looking back, I find this drum circle moment an especially potent one for considering the ways in which the performance both fosters a sense of community and

raises issues around the commodification of an “exotic Other.” As the previously seated participants of all backgrounds join the drum circle, intermingling with the performers who proclaim “we are the brown, spiritual, the feminine...” it appears they are invited not only to dance, but to identify as participants in the struggle towards a collective reality that is both mindful of divergent (and undeniably violent) pasts and hopeful for a future where all can “be fed.” Participation is ritualized through this modern interpretation of the practice of dancing and drumming, of responding to rhythms, of conversing through bodies, of channeling ancestors. Such drum circle experiences are not unique to this context, they have and do occur within various indigenous cultures worldwide, and they have certainly emerged in other forms of postmodern dance (like Anna Halprin’s aforementioned embrace of ritual) as well as in hip-hop club dancing. That said, in this instance, they are clearly an expression of the panoply of “brown,” “spiritual,” “feminine” experiences of the singers and initiators of the performance, meant to celebrate and honor these realities especially. So, what happens when Tabor-Smith and her collaborators have invited all to join the dance, to partake, and on some level, to identify with the struggles and accomplishments the dance commemorates and embodies? Embedded in this invitation, perhaps, is a rejection of a singular, insular, and immutable black identity. Also embedded in this invitation, perhaps, is an opportunity for a sort of racial cross-doing wherein white participants can act as “others” in a way that potentially disregards their complicity in racism. As Jayna Brown notes, white participation in black dance practices has often historically done little more than reveal “the powerful ability

for these racio-social, political, and economic hierarchies to recalibrate, adjust, and reform in new moments.”⁵⁰ For even given white participants’ earnest enjoyment of the actions initiated by the company, and though they may certainly feel the thrill of the thrumming invocations danced and sung in their own bodies in a very real way, they cannot understand the impact of these actions outside of the limitations of their white embodied experience.

In fact, Brown might call such actions of identifying with/as an “other” via ritual action associated with African and African-American ancestry an example of racial mimicry, even in the suspended space of performance. She explicates the dangers of racial mimicry as follows:

The dangerously unequal politics of “contact” are at the heart of how racial mimicry works. The historical availability of black bodies, as commodities, allows for a sense of entitlement to these bodies’ abilities and efforts. This extends into the cultural imagination as access to sets of (often contradictory) imagined properties associated with blackness - spiritual, sexual, obedient, rebellious, strong, weak. This sense of entitlement is affirmed and strengthened by the performance.⁵¹

This reality of the “dangerously unequal politics of contact” persists today as some variant of the way it happened in the early twentieth century performance settings Brown focuses on in her 2008 text. As I point to moments of contact at *Our Daily Bread*

⁵⁰ Brown, 129. Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵¹ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 72.

performances for their potential to create a sense of community, I find I must qualify that not everyone will understand or participate in that community in the same way. It seems to me quite impossible in the instance of this drum circle to draw a firm line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation. In fact both are likely occurring, simultaneously, perhaps even within a single individual. Attending to the particulars of those in attendance fails to simplify matters, for these distinctions cannot be made along racial lines alone. For example, does the fact that there were more black people in attendance (and therefore participating in the drum circle) at these shows than CounterPULSE usually sees ‘counteract’ or somehow lessen the effects of appropriative acts in which white attendees might engage? Does the explicit invitation for all people to join in the activities, coupled with palpable, positive energy that these same actions generated, matter more than the negative effects of the commodification of black culture that white participants may have been unknowingly enacting? I imagine how different the moment would have felt if the company’s invitation had been met with only the kind of awkward gawking I found myself able to offer. What an awful vision that is!

As I attempt to give credence to some of the many experiences at play in this performative moment, I find my thoughts wandering back to Seremetakis’ commensality. She proposes a commensal exchange not as one devoid of racial misunderstandings and appropriative blunders, but rather as one wherein attention to sensory experience and materiality promotes vital exchanges of ideas and beliefs that better reflect the lived reality of community. In a contemporary setting, it seems to me the value of commensal

exchange lies precisely in these tensions and frictions raised by an intermission-turned-drum-circle. What is being exchanged in these moments of contact? Food gifts and cultural memories? Understandings of self and community? Experiences of “blackness”? Cultural difference itself? “Black dance” redefined? “Concert dance” redefined? Perhaps all of these things and more.

I move to a second potent moment of contact, one which revolves around anxieties perhaps less racially tinged. This contact comes during a section of the work which centers around the question, “If my food would make you love me, would you eat it?” Here dancers talk of love, of sensual and generous sharing of bodies, by speaking unabashedly and directly to the audience and to each other. They are close, gathered downstage, some leaning on each other and others with trays of sweet smelling hunks of cornbread. These bits of bread are distributed to audience members with instructions that are to hold but not yet eat what they have been given. The love themed banter continues. The bread itself is referred to as “love.” They flirt and tease as they pass it out saying, “don’t worry, there is enough love to go around” and “be patient, this love is worth waiting for” and “who needs some of this love?” There are smirks and “ooohs” from the dancers - connoting the coupling of joy and naughtiness the discussed expressions of love hold. We are asked to raise our bread in gratitude for love in its many forms... and then, with urges not to be shy, we are instructed to feed our bread, our “love,” to someone sitting near us.

The act of food-sharing here is clearly being coupled with a notion of giving and accepting not just sustenance, but love, affection, intimacy, all embodied in the bread. Practically speaking, feeding another person brings one's hands in close contact with a stranger's mouth, tongue, teeth, saliva (and vice versa). Though physical contact is not necessarily required, the proximity of these body parts may push up against the bounds of bodily comfort. Not only are people being asked to take in edible material - the cornmeal, flour, salt, and sugar that comprise the cornbread, but with it the labor of those who have made it and distributed it, and now, the residue of a stranger's (or perhaps a friend's) touch. In this a yielding is required, an openness invoked, a vulnerability foregrounded in a manner that matters when considering the show's potential to create a community. In this tasting turned trust-fall connections are forged through the framing - the ritualization - of the most seemingly mundane of acts.

Here a different kind of ritual is being invoked. It seems pertinent at this point to explore briefly the religious implications that this act of bread sharing brings forth. The title of the show *Our Daily Bread* summons visions of Christian acts of communion, of communities linked materially through the ingestion of bread meant to represent (or actually be - if we speak of Catholic transubstantiation) the material, sacrificial reality of God on earth in the figure of Jesus Christ. The call and response invitations that open the show set up a churchly state of mind - where spectators-turned-congregants participate in the proceedings with snapping and clapping, with answered "amens," as one might experience in black (namely Southern Baptist and Methodist) churches. The bread

sharing ritual happens in the latter part of the show, where communion usually happens within a Mass or church service, and in a similarly highly stylized manner. However, there remain distinct differences between bread sharing in Christian churches and bread sharing in *Our Daily Bread* performances - many of which center around the nature of the divine figure referenced. The religious expressions within the show are very much invocations of spirit ancestors made present, of goddess guides, and of a Mother Earth who we are reminded is suffering incredibly due to our narrow-minded negligence. Tabor-Smith employs some of the tactics traditionally used in churches (many of which remain locked in deeply patriarchal and misogynistic practices) but reappropriates them with a distinctly female and feminist twist. Swapping out dry cracker bread with moist, coconut milk infused, crumbling, cornbread is an embrace of pleasure. Feeding each other, rather than being fed by a (male) authority figure emphasizes the existence of the divine in everyone. Conversation centered on nurturing and comfort rather than persecution and powers that defy death seem an embrace of a mother-soother rather than a father-forgiver.

Tabor-Smith noted that with the second iteration of *Our Daily Bread* (Nov 2012) this focus on divine women became even more evident. She linked the “three sisters” of southern black farming practices - beans, corn, and squash - with three “goddess” characters in the show. The crops, when planted together, provide for each other - shade, structure, fertilizer, respectively. Their corresponding goddess-dancers are meant to represent our intertwining and mutually dependent nature, the ways that our powers, our

bold expressions of our individuality, can be made manifest tenfold through recognition of our interdependence and willingness to offer support to the systems and peoples that need it. The foregrounding of these dancing figures also represents Tabor-Smith's, and director Ellen Sebastian Chang's, interest in fighting back in what they call a "War on Women" currently being effected by the industrialized food system and its giants like the notorious Monsanto corporation whose genetically modified seeds have come under scrutiny recently.⁵² Referring to her 2012 incarnation of *Our Daily Bread* Tabor-Smith says, "We continued to deepen our questions about our local and global food systems, our food traditions and the impact our society's fast modern lifestyle is having on our environment and ourselves. This lifestyle is troubling for us..."

I provide these details as evidence of how the performers bring more than a pre-rehearsed image of themselves to the stage. They show up, up close and personally, asking attendees to make themselves open to the cup of stew being placed in their hands and, along with it, the notion that the same cup of stew perhaps foregrounds how we are all implicated in the politics of food pathways, and in intercultural exchange. My hope is that these details paint a picture of the performative potential activated in the spaces Tabor-Smith and her collaborators created for this project. However, hovering over these proceedings certain questions linger, unaddressed. Does all this - the grounded padding of feet pounding the floor in supplication, the quilted square reminding "food is love," the

⁵² For more on Monsanto, California's defeated Proposition 37 (which would have required identifying labels on GMO produced foods), and the "War on Women" see Tabor-Smith's CounterPULSE blog post, entitled "Digest In Peace: The Beginning..." (November 13, 2012). accessed Jan 4, 2014, <http://counterpulse.org/2012/digest-in-peace-the-beginning/>

paper cup with remnants of fishless stew now crushed underfoot, the casual strum of the musician's guitar, the beat sustained on the overturned wooden crate, the spectator's swaying shuffle side to side and back again, the ticket sales, the audience surveys, the sweat dripping down Tabor-Smith's back, the earnest stories of durian fruit and posole twinged family sense-scapes, the invocation of the ancestors and goddesses presumed to guard and guide, the flour smears on aprons and cheeks, the tears of the woman sitting in my row as she rises to her feet, applauding - does this add up to the possibility of something more than an enactment of a "commodification of difference" characterized by a hegemonic and cannibalistic "eating the Other"?⁵³ Have the we-who-were-present ripped open possibilities for intercultural exchange that laugh belly laughs in the face of such capitalistic tendencies?

I can't say that the specificity Tabor-Smith employed in her investigation-turned-performance event negates the potential for the commodification of difference to occur in these spaces, but it does seem a vital effort towards resisting it or providing an alternative to it. This seems especially true given her political ideology regarding the industrialized food system and her choice to make these performance spaces, at the very least, forums for discouraging the mindless consumption of unethical goods. Concert goers' desires for an experience of alterity, satisfied here through African-American inspired food-dance mergings, may, in some instances, override the careful attention collaborators have given to more socially responsible modes of participation. But, the commensal exchanges

⁵³ hooks, "Eating the Other," 191.

taking place here do effectively complicate the presumably fixed boundaries of “difference,” *via* theatrical decontextualization, in a manner that promotes awareness of our interconnectedness and encourages a sense of responsibility to each other and the planet.

These encounters are messy, and unruly, and slippery despite the best laid plans. In a perfect world, “exchange” would connote an equitable transfer, a repositioning of goods and/or services between parties mutually invested in the exchange. However, this notion relies on a somewhat shared value system, whether material or symbolic, that simply does not and perhaps cannot exist. I contend that the fact that these seemingly contradictory things are operating, simultaneously, at any performance of *Our Daily Bread* are precisely what constitutes these sites of commensal exchange as so vital - perhaps what constitutes commensal exchange as such in the contemporary moment. I like to believe that this energy of complicated, intertwining, exchange is part of what causes the aforementioned fervor. When Seremetakis’ term “commensal exchange” is fleshed out for the specifics of these crowds, when the nature of the sensory evocations and cultural memories are probed, the complexities of these notions become palpable, if not fully visible by those in attendance.

This is not to say that everyone has the same, or even a similar experience in attending *Our Daily Bread*. Robinson-Love asserts that the opportunities for potential audience members’ to engage with, even implicate themselves in the creation of the work before, during, and after performance helps combat exoticization that occurs through

more casual contact with someone outside of one's "group." Of course, not everybody who comes to the show chooses to engage in this way. Robinson-Love hopes that these opportunities provide a possibility of a reciprocal relationship between performer or producer and spectator rather than establishing what she calls "missionary" style of community outreach wherein a presumed "expert" enters a foreign "field" to help, or even save, a group perceived as less capable. However, some spectators may remain blithely unaware that any of this is happening. I experienced a fellow choreographer flippantly disregard the work as uninteresting or "not her style" despite its acclaim because of its decidedly "folksy" (or Africanist) style, or perhaps because of its overt and "overdone" foodie politics. I imagine others commended it uncritically for precisely the same factors. In interviews I was told most people loved feeding each other and having a chance to dance - but also that a staff member vociferously refused to do either, considering it an affront. All this said, certain things about the work are undeniable. That it brought new audiences to experience concert dance, a genre that otherwise seemed foreign and uninviting, is undeniable. That these audience members were able to take part, in whatever way they were able, in an intercultural experience with a potential for commensal exchange opens up participatory possibilities. Then there are some, like me, who were interested enough to attend several events, who have grown in appreciation for how Tabor-Smith and her collaborators are engaging and expanding the dance community, and who are beginning to question the hidden racist assumptions embedded in what we thought were merely "aesthetic" valuations.

REINVENTION, REACHING OUT

This final section of this chapter considers how *Our Daily Bread* continues to be reinvented, becoming the ever-expanding Our Daily Bread Project. The original ideas built in residence have been channeled into further community building projects designed to open up possibilities for self-definition and contact aligning on axes that co-exist with but are not limited to race. These projects address other identity markers such as age, class, and body size. The various forms of the project use participatory art principles developed during the CounterPULSE residency to raise awareness of racism, ecological concerns (like agricultural problems presented by genetically modified food), food justice issues (like unequal distribution and access to healthy food), and the importance of community building (namely the benefits of meal sharing and storytelling).

This work, I suggest, further resists the commodification of difference through an expansion of the boundaries of what and whom the Our Daily Bread Project represents. Tabor-Smith's willingness to let the project continue to unfold in new ways (as opposed to attempting to market a polished performance piece to tour to other performing art venues) emphasizes Our Daily Bread related work as a methodology for effecting change within the bay area community rather than as a product to be sold and consumed.

Dixon Gottschild suggests that one of the markers of an Africanist aesthetic is a focus on process rather than product, a concept that she argues became one of the

defining features of postmodern dance (without being recognized as Africanist).⁵⁴

Postmodern choreographers have interpreted this processual aesthetic in countless ways - often resulting in work that is characterized as “unfinished” or “in its beginning stages” or “a work-in-progress” (even if that work, often due to financial constraints, doesn’t get further developed). However, with the Our Daily Bread Project, the processual ideology is not used to dismiss to the audience any perceived shortcomings in the more formal performances with the label “in process,” nor does it (solely) produce iterations of the same work (though, as mentioned, an updated version of the original *Our Daily Bread* performances were mounted in 2012). Rather, the commitment to process-oriented art making has led to varied manifestations of the founding ideas, manifestations that utilize Tabor-Smith’s trademark melding of the personal and the political by way of the gustatory.

As alluded to above, the *Our Daily Bread* performances in 2011 spawned a project under the same title in spring of 2012 that engaged residents of two housing projects recently built on the venue’s neighboring streets in workshop activities geared towards examination of their respective food habits and histories. CounterPULSE reported that the project “consists of food parties at the housing facilities, workshops on local food resources, after-school programs for the youth, a documentary compiled of interviews with the residents, and a cumulative performance by the youth and artists in

⁵⁴ Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 17-19.

May 2012.”⁵⁵ For this project, Tabor-Smith and her collaborator Ellen Sebastian Chang worked with CounterPULSE and the staff at Catholic Charities Youth Organization (CCYO) to develop curriculum around the principles being explored (variations in the workshop materials were then created for the seniors at Edith Witt). The source material for the show came from the participants’ choreographic ideas and food stories. They were encouraged to explore the issues that they felt most effected their lives.

During the same time frame, Tabor-Smith began developing another project by applying for institutional support from her employer, the University of California at Berkeley, in order to collaborate with Urban Bush Women’s Leadership Institute on a course offering for the fall of 2012. This project added to regular Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies department listings a five-week intensive called “From The Field to the Table,” bringing together more than forty bay area participants, namely, “college students, grandparents, teachers, artists, and gardeners... to research issues of food justice and access, as well as to cultivate and share their own cultural relationships to food.”⁵⁶ For this second project, rather than work with CounterPULSE, Tabor-Smith brought in Paloma McGregor, a faculty member of Urban Bush Women’s Summer Leadership Institute, to co-teach throughout and to direct the final performances. This collaboration revealed Tabor-Smith’s roots as a former member of the New York based dance company Urban Bush Women, whose People’s Institute program of community engagement is

⁵⁵ This information is pulled from CounterPULSE’s final report to the Creative Work Fund, who granted funds for the work through a Performing Arts Grant in 2010.

⁵⁶ Program note from *From the Field to the Table* dance performance, Oct 13, 2012.

well-established. In a talk that Urban Bush Women artistic director Jawole Willa Jo Zollar gave in conjunction with “From the Field to the Table” she articulated how these principles came about noting that like Tabor-Smith, UBW acted upon a perceived need within the communities where they performed (many of them comprised primarily of African-Americans or other people of color) to both see themselves reflected in performance, and to have a forum to experientially and artistically address the social concerns they identified as important.⁵⁷

Both of the projects encouraged participants to engage in self-definition as individuals involved contributed stories, recipes, and/or movement ideas. Cross-viewing was enabled as participants in the UCB project engaged with community partners brought in to educate them on food justice concerns, and as they shared ideas and experiences with each other (unlike most student productions, the “From the Field to the Table” project was open to interested members of the community, about one third of the participants were not students). In the Our Daily Bread project cross-viewing happened most obviously during the aforementioned “From Seeds to Sprouts” performance. The seniors from Edith Witt were invited to attend the performance put on at CounterPULSE with the youth - which was also open to the public and advertised to CounterPULSE patrons. These various groups of spectators would likely not have otherwise existed in such a configuration. Intercultural exchange also undoubtedly happened amongst

⁵⁷ Jawole Willa Jo Zollar dance workshop at UC Berkeley, Oct 13, 2012.

residents of each of the two housing developments outside of the performance setting as they shared stories and ideas with one another.

Interestingly, in the version of the performance staged as a final effort of the coursework at UC Berkeley where most of the participants were relatively privileged college students, “difference” was explored along an axis unrelated to age or race.⁵⁸ For me, the most poignant moment of this show was when a heavy-set young white student in the cast climbed atop a square table set center stage. Addressing the audience, she said “it makes you nervous, doesn’t it? ...because the table is no place for a fat girl...” her exclamation led into to a poetic recognition of and challenge to the ways in which her body codes her - both in society at large, but also within the performance - as one “unfit to eat” and “unwelcome at the table.”

Her performance of this seemingly simple and yet defiantly significant act was potent. The truth of the matter is I did, involuntarily, catch my breath when I saw her step up on that table. It did make me nervous. When she turned to face the audience, stance bold and self-assured, to call us out on our suppositions she was right on point - she was speaking to me, and to others like me who had unconsciously limited what we deemed “appropriate” for her based on her size. Through her recuperative act of self-definition she was able to re-define what is “allowed” a “fat girl” in her own terms. She asserted her

⁵⁸ This show, entitled *From the Field to the Table* was performed on Oct 12-14, 2012 in the studio theater of Zellerbach Hall on UC Berkeley’s campus. It was actually directed by Urban Bush Woman dancer and Leadership Institute instructor, Paloma McGregor. However, Tabor-Smith co-facilitated the project and had written the curriculum proposal that helped shape the show, having insisted that the show’s subject matter revolve around food issues.

agency and abilities, while effectively urging us to the same. I was dumbstruck by my own narrow mindedness and really impressed by her willingness to meet people's biases towards her head on. Her assertions also highlighted the ruse of the popular trope that gathering to eat together automatically brings people together in a way that promotes conviviality and a sense of ease. In reality these moments are also fraught with the dangerous effects of the unequal politics of contact and can prove distancing and isolating. When a presentation of food is slathered on to a performance event in the hopes of promoting interpersonal connection (in the form of, say, a hosted wine and cheese hour) it is not necessarily promoting commensal exchange.

This example illustrates how gleaning autobiographical food-related stories and transforming them into performed action can address and redress a different layer of bodily politics. Other dance artists have explored this in various forms. For example, Blondell Cummings' 1981 *Chicken Soup* solo, Roger Sinha (SinhaDanse's) 1992 *Burning Skin* solo, and Dance Naganuma's 2008 *Noodle Women*, among others. Each of these pieces mobilized the mnemonic sensory invocations of food by coupling them with specific, autobiographical (or semi-autobiographical) danced work. This type of work brazenly calls forth spectators' assumptions about appropriate versus inappropriate behaviors that get imposed upon others - based often on race, but also on size, age, manner of dress or speech, etc.

As I sat in the audience of the final performance of "From the Field to the Table," there was a sense that the performance, while interesting enough to watch, was secondary

to the work the group had undergone together in the five weeks of sharing, exploring, and probing that they had undertaken. My minimal participation in the project left me with the feeling that I was witnessing a joyful retelling of the experiences they had... a sort of highlights reel of their important discoveries about themselves and their community. The emphasis of the project was decidedly less about the creation of a choreographic work offered as finished and finalized polished product to be sold, but rather represented process-oriented reflections and offerings made to further the exchange of (as Seremetakis calls them) “sensory evocations,” “cultural memories,” and ideological expressions made manifest through moving bodies.

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

This final section details the last performance initiative undertaken by the Our Daily Bread Project as of 2013. When speaking of the genesis of the partnership with Edith Witt Senior housing and the 10th and Mission Youth Organization, Robinson-Love notes a desire to “get to know the neighbors... and to have them know what we do around the corner here at CounterPULSE.”⁵⁹ The neighborhood partnerships she speaks of were enabled by a grant called Arts and Communities: Innovative Partnerships (ACIP) from San Francisco Arts Commission’s Cultural Equity Grant division. It calls collaborators to “engage in innovative creation processes - exploring artistic practice potentially outside of one’s comfort zone - in order to address pressing community needs or celebrate

⁵⁹ Robinson-Love in conversation with the author, Oct 2, 2012.

community assets.”⁶⁰ For Robinson-Love the obvious choice was to co-create with these new neighbors, all of whom had moved in to the recently opened buildings within the last two years. For Deep Waters Dance Theatre, as well as documentary filmmaker Erica Jordan, who joined the project, what soon became apparent was the pressing needs of this particular community around access to good food.

The definition of “good” food used by the art makers is one that is commonly touted by foodies, gleaned from foodie organizations like Slow Food USA. It refers to food that is healthy, sustainably harvested and distributed, and preferably local. It is one thing to make a general pronouncement that everyone should eat “good” food, as the DWDT dancers did in their 2011 concert dance performances. It is another issue all together to propose this in a context where access to such food is limited by financial means, and where education about nutrition and sustainability are difficult to come by. Residents at the above mentioned Mercy Housing developments live well below the poverty level, many were previously homeless. For some of these people being concerned with where their next meal might come from has been a question of the existence of said meal, not of its artisanal origins. In other words, eating is no recreational activity here as it often is for foodies, yet materials developed in these workshops centered around foodie ideology - proposing changes to residents’ quotidian food habits. This ideological fodder is used as means to deepen connections between CounterPULSE as a socially

⁶⁰ More detailed information about the grant can be gathered from the San Francisco Arts Commission website. accessed Feb 4, 2014 <http://www.sfartscommission.org/ceg/grants/index.html#ACIP>

responsible, civic action-oriented art making institution in the rapidly gentrifying San Francisco neighborhood called SOMA (south of Market) and the public service organizations sprouting up around it. But how does an artistic exploration of fairly foreign foodie principles benefit these residents?

Tabor-Smith and the others used the workshops as opportunities to address the challenges that the community members themselves had identified as important. They asked questions, held discussions about what food the participants ate, wanted to eat, knew about but didn't eat, etc. They talked about how food choices affected other aspects of their lives. In these activities the dancers helped educate the youth about making healthy eating choices. They also helped the students express their previous experiences and newly found knowledge in a final performance event at CounterPULSE, entitled *From Seeds to Sprouts: how does your garden grow?* which took place on May 6, 2012. While the performance gave the children a chance to strut their food savvy stuff, it also marked a moment of merging between the family residents of 10th and Mission and the invited residents of their associated elderly development, Edith Witt Senior Housing, where DWDT was also conducting workshops.

With the seniors the workshops took a different format - the artistic expressions focused more on storytelling and writing than the singing and dancing that thrilled the kids. DWDT helped arrange and staff potluck food parties similar to those held by Tabor-Smith elsewhere. Through these parties residents were able to pool what resources they had to make their meals go further. Through participation in future potluck parties they

were offered opportunities to combat the loneliness and inactivity the residents reported often comes with life at community homes. (Robinson-Love shared that an Edith Witt staff member had reported the establishment of a Filipino potluck party, the idea for which came from residents' encounters with DWDT). Residential food gatherings around specific themes continued past the artists' tenure in the building.

These workshop encounters foster exchanges perhaps more overtly geared towards activating social change than do the concert performances of DWDT. They are explicitly aimed at planting the seeds for future neighborhood events with CounterPULSE and at effecting long-ranging change to the manner in which participants' foods are requested, selected, prepared, and shared. As mentioned in the introduction, eating is seen as a means of representing one's self and of identifying or dis-identifying with certain groups.⁶¹ Claude Fischler, in discussing why food is seen as so intimately linked to identity asserts that "cooking helps to give food and its eaters a place in the world, a meaning."⁶² If we apply this statement to the workshop participants, who have recently settled in these new living situations, it is possible that the acts of rethinking how they shop, cook, and eat together may empower them to define their places in the world in a way that feels more agentive. While an insufficient amount of time has passed from the initial studies to consider too seriously their long-term effects, it is interesting to note

⁶¹ Scholliers presents a helpful timeline of burgeoning interest amongst food scholars in identity politics. Scholliers, "Meals, Food Narratives," 9.

⁶² Fischler, 3. Claude Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27, (1988) 275-293, accessed online.

that some of the activities used to generate creative materials around the topic of food have proved attractive - even useful - to such a wide range of bay area populations. It is also clear in these projects that the focus of the creative experimentation (whether in song, dance, or potluck) is not on enabling an encounter with an exotic “other,” but on facilitating a forum for the exploration, through art and food, of individual and collective realities experienced in these relatively new living spaces.

CONCLUSION

The many iterations of Tabor-Smith’s work offer up something much more complex than I first recognized, something that has proven incredibly attractive to both new and existing contemporary dance audiences, something that lends texture to the notion of “commensal exchange.” It asks each person, via food and art, to remember their respective pasts, recognize their connectedness to others present, and through a reexamination of their food choices to consider their role in shaping a more just future. It does not shy away from the complex and fraught territory of the raced, classed, and gendered nature of these investigations. In fact, through Deep Waters Dance Company’s commitment to using self-definition, intercultural contact, and revisioning to constitute *Our Daily Bread* works, they have modeled one type of programming that addresses and redresses the problem of dwindling audiences by tapping into the offerings of those typically being underserved by concert dance. In doing so, they broaden the concert dance community, simultaneously blurring distinctions that are often upheld in the realm

of concert dance - those between dancers and performers, stage and seats, even beginning and end of performance - in ways that draw upon non-European cultures and encourages intermingling and even co-creation between people who on the surface may appear very different from one another. And, perhaps most importantly, in the bold pursuit of a “community” that honors and respects cultural “difference” Tabor-Smith’s and CounterPULSE’s collaboration employs methodologies that help those present face their own biases and presumptions, elucidating the complexities of the embodied realities - the “daily bread” offerings - each individual participant brings to the collective table.

Chapter Four

Slow Dancing: the Choreography of Audience Engagement at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' *Smart Night Out*

As we gather in a gallery with glasses of champagne, swapping stories about art that embraces a place's history, I find myself wondering what lies ahead. I am attending the first official *Smart Night Out* evening offered by San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in October 2011, and am one of about twenty people enduring the mild awkwardness of "ice breakers" designed to merge our minds and melt our steely facial facades. Over the next four hours we will dance, dialogue, and dine together in accordance with the direction of a YBCA facilitator and hired experts. And so we stand, circled up, in YBCA's Room for Big Ideas, a seemingly fitting setting for the big ideas encompassed by this program which experiments with ways to engage contemporary dance audiences.

Jump ahead with me to my second *Smart Night Out* (March 2012), as I shuffle through YBCA's visual art gallery preparing to take part in our directed viewing experience (the second component of the program). We turn the corner and catch our first glimpse of the installation we've been instructed to silently "take in." It is a huge wooden sculpture shaped like a the bow of a ship, worn and torn, but towering over our heads impressively. It is a piece that commands attention. We obediently meander and observe,

each in our own style, until our leader gathers us to discuss responses. She opens with a question that YBCA has long used in other educational programming. The question is deceptively simple. She queries, “what is going on here?” In my head the question echoes, what exactly IS going on here?

About half an hour later I find myself perched precariously just above my seat in YBCA’s Youth Arts Studio. Leg muscles burning just a little, I am staring across the room into the eyes of a woman I do not know, but who is perched just as I am above the edge of her chair. We are engaged in a movement moment of slow, steady descent to our respective seats, as are the rest of the pairs of participants in the room. This practice of rising and sitting in synchronicity rather than plopping our backsides down is designed to give us a small taste of the Butoh style movement we will encounter in tonight’s featured performance by the acclaimed duo Eiko and Koma. The woman across from me is wearing glasses that are reflecting the overhead lights and so it is hard to make eye contact because I can’t really see her eyes. And yet, as we perform variations of rising and sitting together, we get progressively better at attuning our bodies from across the room. We respond to subtle shifts, speed and slow together, anticipating each other’s actions. I never did learn her name...

Finally, join me in a moment from March 2013 where, at the latest *Smart Night Out*, I am lifting the last morsels of Chinese food to my lips with my chopsticks. I think to myself that the food is surprisingly tasty - even as I hear an older man behind me lament that it clearly has too much sugar and MSG. I am dining at the end of a table

covered in paper and strewn with crayons for doodling and musing. I have been talking with the *Smart Night* participants on either side of me and have just learned that both of my dinner companions are artists who gave up their art to pursue more lucrative careers in finance and information technology. “But,” says the Romanian gentleman to my right, “it is nice to come here and to have this kind of experience, to meet other people who care about art, people who know things about dance. And, to have such good people running the program - she (he acknowledges our program leader by indicating with his thumb over his shoulder a few times), she is my art angel!” The art angel urges us to wrap up our conversations and head downstairs. The show is about to begin.

What is going on here? The question continues to resound for me as I have watched the *Smart Night Out* program develop over the past few years. YBCA has cultivated this program as a means to address and redress the problem of reaching out to and building meaningful connections with twenty-first century would-be audience members (whom research has categorized as needing something different than patrons who came before them).¹ How do the programmatic actions of a *Smart Night*, which employ a sort of audience-oriented choreography of shifting, leaning, opening, of inquiring, probing, and responding - how are they helping to sustain the field of contemporary dance? What does the selection of these particular activities reveal about the potential inadequacies of current spectatorial modes and the perceived desires of bay

¹ The research alluded to here has been conducted by WolfBrown Associates and others, both independent of and in conjunction with the EDA initiative discussed throughout this chapter.

area audience members for an “artisanal” experience? How might this program serve as a model for interventions in spectatorship that are arguably necessary for concert dance to be considered a vital and thriving force within a given community? Conversely, how might parts of the *Smart Night* structure be reinforcing some of the divisive principles that have contributed to popular conceptions of concert dance as inaccessible, or made for a select few?

In pursuit of these questions, I use as a starting point my own semi-awkward experiences as a participant in the program (in October 2011, March 2012, and March 2013), underscoring the effects and affects I perceived as the program found its metaphorical legs. It gradually gained popularity and shifted from a public to a members-only (or almost only) endeavor that is sold out more often than not. Inspired by a perceived connection to the Slow Food movement popular in the bay area, I frame the program as a metaphorical “slow dance.” This is inspired in part by the Slow Food Movement, discussed in the introduction, which is a social movement born of an ideology that resists the “fast food” and “fast life” culture it perceives as dangerously disconnecting consumers from the processes and histories around vital material culture - namely that of food. *Smart Night Out* asks participants to slow down their concert-going experience, and to engage in a multi-moduled choreographic structure designed to bring them face to face with some of their own preconceived notions of dance, as well as face to face with others who are similarly interested in broadening their dance knowledge.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, *Smart Night Out* is one of nine projects selected for development through the Engaging Dance Audiences initiative sponsored by Dance/USA. Notably, three of the nine projects, like YBCA, propose gathering people around food or drink in order to promote engagement. Like select Slow Food events, *Smart Night* attempts to resist some of the effects of “fast life” by giving participants the time, space, and structure to better ‘digest’ their experiences, to forge connections to others in their community, and to inspire different behaviors and attitudes towards the makers and presenters of the work at hand and the networks of action that make that work possible. As with a slow dance, participants arrive with varying social agendas, levels of ‘dance’ experience, and likely a blend of willingness and reticence to being vulnerable to others in the ways the program suggests.

Anyone who has slow danced can attest to how the conditions must be just right to get in a good groove - the right lights, the right song, the right partner, the right blend of anticipation and ease in the air. I analyze how YBCA has attempted to provide optimal ‘slow dancing’ conditions, adjusting program offerings based on feedback, both stated and unstated, from participants. I consider who is invited to this metaphorical dance and who actually dances, who seems to enjoy the dance and who self-consciously shuffles out onto the floor. To do this, I rely heavily on information gleaned from interviews with the former and current program managers, Laurel Butler and Julie Potter respectively, each of whom have a unique perspective on how *Smart Night Out* operates within the larger

network of offerings made by YBCA as well as the larger arts ecosystem of the bay area.² I put these first person accounts in conversation with select contemporary theories of production and reception and available research materials connected to both YBCA and Dance/USA's Engaging Dance Audiences, a grant initiative that enabled the program.

Drawing from these many sources, I offer up my analysis of *Smart Night Out* as a case study for considering some of the benefits and downfalls of a certain strand of programmatic strategies that I have seen popping up in the past five years. These are efforts aimed at vivifying theatrical spectatorship through the cultivation of special insider experiences for select audience members (many of which, perhaps surprisingly, incorporate food offerings in an attempt to differently orient attendees). *Smart Night Out*'s model of engagement trades on what I am calling an "artisanal imaginary," a bay area-bred fantasy that valorizes artisanal - or handcrafted, small-batch, do-it-yourself - experiences and methods of relating to the world. This artisanal fascination is a by-product of the kind of nostalgia Svetlana Boym speaks of in her 2001 text *The Future of Nostalgia*.³ It is a manifestation of the longing for an other, "sideways" time Boym indicates is coextensive with twentieth century industrialization and the blossoming of the digital age. It both perpetuates and is perpetuated by the idealization of past or pastoral practices that often did not exist in reality as they do in (the most often white, middle to upper class generated) fantasies of them.

² Laurel Butler and Julie Potter in conversation with the author on May 3, 2012 and April 11, 2013, respectively.

³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? ALTERING EXPECTATIONS

On a very basic level *Smart Night Out* is an attempt to alter what theater scholar Susan Bennett refers to as an audience member's "horizon of expectation."⁴ In Bennett's 1997 text, she borrows the term from the 1969 work of Hans Robert Jaus, updating it to better account for the multiplicity of expectations that any audience will inevitably encompass. Essentially, the theory is that an audience member assesses her or his current performance experience in comparison with a "horizon of expectation," an imagined standard that is socially constructed and used to characterize or classify the person's experience. This "horizon of expectation" effects how receptive an individual is to a performance and shapes her or his understanding of the genre. It also sets an imagined standard against which programming decisions are made as dance producers attempt to attract, challenge, and stimulate audiences. Bennett remarks, "Cultural assumptions affect performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions."⁵ These cultural assumptions are historically specific, changing dramatically across time and circumstance. Embedded in these assumptions are decisions about whom should be served by the art and how. *Smart Night Out* is carefully designed to make contemporary dance more understandable, desirable, accessible - digestible if you will - to bay area audiences. Its presence connotes a popular expectation that

⁴ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception, 2nd Edition*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 48-50.

⁵ Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 2.

contemporary dance is none of those things, or perhaps not quite enough of these things to adequately thrive in a twenty-first century entertainment environment.

Modern dance is often construed as incomprehensible, and yet throughout its history dialogue around concert dance has made claims for a “natural” connection between dancers and audience members. Susan Leigh Foster historicizes and challenges this assumption, harkening to reviewer John Martin’s early twentieth century claims of the “vital rapport” between dancer and viewer made possible through the danced expression of emotion. She discusses the twenty-first century fascination with mirror neurons, special neural circuits which fire both when witnessing action and when taking action, as scientific proof of an “intrinsic connectivity between dancer and viewer.”⁶ She takes the stance that these seemingly “natural” connections are actually carefully constructed encounters and that both dancers and viewers are “shaped by common and prevailing senses of the body and of subjectivity in a given social moment as well as the unique circumstances of watching a particular dance.”⁷ Investigating “what is happening” on multiple levels during a *Smart Night Out* offers opportunities to consider the complex particularities of this historical moment - and how it shapes and is shaped by our evolving bodily schemas in relationship with globalized, mediatized cultural norms. Such a sociocultural context yields (multiple) “horizons of expectation” that circulate around a

⁶ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 1.

⁷ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 2.

program specifically designed to address the relationship between contemporary dance presentation and reception.⁸

As detailed in chapter one of this dissertation, the “high” art histories associated with concert dance have effectively cultivated an ideal of a relatively quiet, receptive, autonomous audience. According to research conducted in the past five years by various institutions aiming to assess the audience aspect of the current “arts ecosystem,” this spectatorial mode does not jive with many potential concert-goers lifestyle. Between 2008 and 2011 Wolf Brown Consultants and Callahan Consulting for the Arts conducted research commissioned by Dance/USA and others in order to determine how audiences are currently engaging with concert dance and how they might like to engage in the future. Research methods included surveys with current dance audience members (7,454 patron responses were compiled) as well as interviews with arts presenters and case studies on existing programs.⁹ Overwhelmingly the research indicates a necessity for arts organizations to adapt to what one report calls the “participatory arts culture” of the

⁸ Another of the projects selected for EDA funding in San Francisco was Oberlin Dance Collective’s (ODC’s), *I Speak Dance*, which combats this mantle of illegibility specifically with college students by offering educational videos, workshops, performance opportunities, and access both online and in person to dancers.

⁹ ”How Dance Audiences Engage: Summary Report from a National Survey of Dance Audiences” (WolfBrown, research report commissioned by Dance/USA, with funding support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation, 2011). Accessed August 23, 2012, http://www.danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/DanceUSA_EDA_HowDanceAudiencesEngage.pdf

Surveys were conducted online July and Aug 2010, open to Dance/USA members with at least 500 ticket-buyer email addresses. While this information is helpful overall, the report qualifies that it may not be accurately representative of ticket buyers for contemporary/modern dance audiences specifically.

twenty-first century.¹⁰ In response to the findings, Josephine Ramirez, the Arts Program Director at the James Irvine Foundation issued a call to action in her foreword to a 2011 study entitled “Getting In On The Act: How arts groups are creating opportunities for active participation.” She says,

We are in the midst of a seismic shift in cultural production, moving from a “sit-back-and-be-told culture” to a “making-and-doing culture.” Many forces have conspired to lead us to this point. The sustained economic downturn that began in 2008, rising ticket prices, the pervasiveness of social media, the proliferation of digital content and rising expectations for self-guided, on-demand, customized experiences have all contributed to a cultural environment primed for active arts practice. This shift calls for a new equilibrium in the arts ecology and a new generation of arts leaders ready to accept, integrate and celebrate all forms of cultural practice. This is, perhaps, the defining challenge of our time for artists, arts organizations and their supporters - to embrace a more holistic view of the cultural ecology and identify new possibilities for Americans to engage with the arts.¹¹

I include this lengthy quote in its entirety because it relays the “seismic” nature of concert dance’s (as well as other “high” performance arts like opera, symphony, and ballet) current conundrum, listing several factors seen as attributable for the change in the “arts ecology.” In addition to the reasons listed in Ramirez’s statement, arts administrators and researchers often cite the “aging out” of season ticket subscribers from the baby boomer generation and beyond (which decreases overall ticket sales at concert venues), the decline in arts education in the schools (which decreases overall arts

¹⁰ Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, in partnership with Shelly Gilbride, PhD “Getting In On the Act: How arts groups are creating opportunities for active participation,” (WolfBrown Associates, October 19, 2011). One hundred arts organizations in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia were interviewed.

¹¹ Jennifer Ramirez, “Foreword” of “Getting in On the Act” (WolfBrown Associates, October 19, 2011), 3.

competency/literacy for the “high” arts), and even coming-of-age of the “ADHD” generation who are thought to no longer have the “attention span necessary” to engage with these performances without the aid of participatory accessories.¹² Ramirez’s statement relays the sense of urgency that this shifting landscape has wrought, an urgency that (not unlike the warnings of global warming, rainforest devastation, ocean pollution, and more) has inspired calls to action for creative solutions designed to meet the perceived needs of the public.¹³ It is time to change or risk financial demise and social irrelevancy, they seem to say.

These statements also contain rhetoric around supporting a multiplicity of cultural forms, a project that even modern dance, which has espoused an embrace of all cultures and traditions as generative inspiration that often led to racist reappropriation, has at times failed to do well (Ted Shawn’s early twentieth century ‘borrowing’ of Indigenous

¹² Tom Jacobs, “Live-Tweeting the Symphony,” *Pacific Standard Magazine*, March 12, 2013, accessed Nov 14, 2013, <http://www.psmag.com/culture/arts-organizations-twitter-live-tweet-interaction-53746/>; Terry Teachout, “Theater’s Expiring Subscription Model,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2013, accessed Nov 16, 2013 at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324493704578431101033080228.html?mod=wsj_share_tweet. Teachout claims that “According to the Theatre Communications Group, nationwide revenue from subscribers plunged 18% between 2007 and 2011”

¹³ The other performing arts are getting in on the action of “engaging” audiences as well. For example, there is Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company’s “Crack It Open” program where patron responses to performances were solicited by questions placed in fortune cookies that were distributed in the lobby before the show. See Alan S. Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin “Making Sense of Audience Engagement: Volume 1” (research report commissioned by The San Francisco Foundation and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, 2011). Accessed Feb 19, 2014, http://www.wolfbrown.com/images/articles/Making_Sense_of_Audience_Engagement.pdf

The San Francisco Opera has offered free opera screenings at the Giants baseball stadium, and the Pacific Symphony in Orange County, California conducts seminars wherein amateur musicians can play along with symphony members. Orchestras from Mobile, AL to the Denver Philharmonic, and from the Cincinnati Symphony orchestra to San Francisco Symphony and Oregon Symphony, have initiated “tweetseats” where patrons can send and receive live feed about the concert. Jacobs, “Live-Tweeting the Symphony.”

practices that Shea Murphy (2007) explores provides a compelling example of this).¹⁴

The report does not detail exactly how a “more holistic view” of the cultural ecology might manifest, though it does propose a detailed Audience Involvement Spectrum framework to consider when plotting programmatic changes. At the report’s urging, I find myself wondering how an interpretation of this mandate as a call to reconsider the economic models, and their itinerant determination of performance’s value within society, might produce long-ranging effects. The report notes the necessity of shifting models of production and consumption, but does not note how other currently operative performance cultures already do so.

Many cultural traditions, like those based in the Africanist principles that Dixon Gottschild discusses, the Native American Pow-Wow practices Tara Browner examines, and the Mexican-American festival traditions that anthropologist Diedre Sklar investigates, historicize how in other “cultural forms” performance can be viewed not only as a commodity to be purchased and judged, but rather as actions that serve, reflect, and effect communities.¹⁵ Such a view changes the horizons of expectations surrounding the performance. Each author (as well as many other performance scholars like Shea Murphy, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Paul Gilroy, and Adria L. Imada) details the ways in which

¹⁴ Additionally, Dixon-Gottschild’s claims “There seems to be a general assumption on the part of Europeanist cultures that African visual arts, music, and dance are raw materials that are improved upon and elevated when they are appropriated and finessed by European artists.” Dixon-Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*, 41.

¹⁵ For example, Browner says “[o]ne aspect of pow-wows, after all, involves reaching out to all those in attendance,” a task in which concert dance now seems to be interested. Browner, *The Heartbeat of the People*, 15.

different performances (and even different ways of performing what may appear to “outsiders” as the same actions) can be employed as a means for celebrating, honoring, remembering, bringing-into-being, contesting, and more.¹⁶ This performativity is not just acknowledged by an authoritative “creator/choreographer” as a source of inspiration, but rather is made possible through a shared value system amongst spectators and performers that imbues performance with (at least the potential of) such agentive power.

Dixon Gottschild, Browner, and Imada also each point to the complexities of this notion of a shared value system, emphasizing how any given performance will produce effects differently for different people dependent upon, among other things, their affiliations with, investments in, and abilities to read the “codes” embedded within the performed actions. Neither proposes “authentic” dances that exist outside of the commercial realm, but rather emphasize how non-capitalistic (or perhaps non-Europeanist) understandings of the multiple purposes of performance can produce different sorts of relationships to performed actions and performance spaces.

The authors of the Irvine report take the stance, long popular in these other dancing traditions, that arts presentation must consider its role and function within a larger cultural ecology, arguing that art’s value now lies in its “ability to connect people through shared experiences and to contribute to vibrant, livable communities” as opposed to the more “twentieth century” values of “economic impact, professionalism, and

¹⁶ DeFrantz, “The Black Beat Made Visible”; Imada, *Aloha America*; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*.

virtuosity.” They propose that this shift has created a “participation economy in which social connection eclipses consumption” and propose an “ecological view” that demands deeper integration of the arts within the community.¹⁷

These broad statements beg the question - what is our (the creators and consumers of concert dance’s) current horizon of expectations around the role of the consumer/spectator in a performance setting and, beyond that, around the value of concert dance performance in our societies? The Irvine report statements above are but one institution’s opinion, (stated as fact) but as one of the major funders of contemporary dance in California this institutional stance is pivotal in shaping popular horizons of expectation. If a shift in the dynamic between spectator and performer is indeed urgently needed, how does this effect the operational models of the institutions and individuals dedicated to making and disseminating contemporary dance?

Those versed in the roughly century-long history of modern dance may at this point be thinking to themselves that modern dance has arguably always been concerned with changing the status quo in regards to the dynamic between performer and spectator. Indeed, a desire to change the way in which concert dance was perceived is considered one of the foundational principles of the genre. The oft cited American dance critic John Martin is known for his claims that the earliest modern dances’ focus on emotional

¹⁷ They note that “[i]ncreasingly, Americans want to meet the people who make our products, share in the work of the makers, and make things ourselves.” “Getting in On the Act” (Wolf Brown 2011), 6.

expressivity impacted the viewers in a novel way.¹⁸ Many of the postmodern moves in the 1960s and 70s aimed at altering audience relationships. For example, the democratizing efforts of Yvonne Rainer's works composed of "found" pedestrian movements and Trisha Brown's dances outside on the sides of buildings and other public spaces happened in part so that audience members could more readily see themselves in the dance. Alternatively, the "movement for movement's sake" crowd led by Merce Cunningham and others actively divorced themselves from the emotional expressivity and narrative dance making of those who came before them, in part in order to force audience members into a different kind of relationship with the structure and form of the dances.

In the twenty-first century examples of manipulating the relationship with the audience abound. Examples range from site-specific pieces that allow audiences to choose their vantage point (Joanna Haigood's Zaccho Dance Theater in San Francisco does an exceptional job of this - often linking the current site specific dance with the place's unrecognized history, especially in regards to the unseen labor and movement of people of color); or works that necessitate an audience's physical participation (NYC choreographer Miguel Gutierrez's *Death Electric Emo Protest Aerobics* (2011) asks select audience members to join in athletic movements during the performance). Sometimes the interventions are educational like those of Chitresh Das Dance Company

¹⁸ Foster, "Movement's Contagion the kinesthetic impact of performance" *Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed Tracy C. Davis. accessed online Feb 20, 2014, DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521874014.004>, (2009), 49.

and Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu, who both expanded the more traditional post-performance “talkbacks” to include opportunities for audience members to get up out of their seats and learn dance steps in a dancer-led tutorial.¹⁹ Sometimes the interventions actually effect the content of the performance, as in Joe Goode Performance Group’s 2012 work *When We Fall Apart*, which incorporates narrative contributions solicited from their fans online.

Articulating the circumstances of the “present moment” via the performance content and/or structure has been part of what has constituted modern dance as a genre. So in some ways this contemporary call to action is but the latest in a long line of attempts to keep modern dance “modern,” (by which I mean reflective of and responsive to the time in which it is made) and attentive to the perceived needs of a hypothetical audience (perhaps even as a driving force contributing to the generation of these needs through the cultivation of novel content). However, in the examples given above, the interventions necessitated alterations to the artwork itself.

This call to action aimed not only at artists, but also presenters, programmers, funders, and advocates is therefore slightly different from those that came before. This current call to action urges presenters to not just curate but to contribute their own creative content to the “participatory economy” of the current “arts ecology.” As we will see in what follows, organizations like Yerba Buena Center for the Arts are responding to the call by attempting to initiate systemic change - change that is generously funded, researched, and developed with the intention of creating a model for others to adapt and

¹⁹ Brown and Ratzkin, “Making Sense of Audience Engagement,” 71.

implement. Change that, in the instance of YBCA, involves the opportunity to gather around food - a presumably collegial, convivial, and/or informal community-building environment - in order to exchange thoughts and ideas. In this scenario, the artistic content of the performance does not necessarily change, but rather there are participatory embellishments that actively alter the horizons of expectation and (ideally) bolster the performance experience so as to enrich the experience of concert going and create a craving for more.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? THE SIX-MODULE MODEL OF A *SMART NIGHT OUT*

Smart Night Out is one such intervention. This is a program where, for an additional fifteen dollars added to the regular ticket price of one of YBCA's curated dance performances, patrons are led and fed, mind and body, for an additional two to three hours. The "choreography" of these event consists of six modules that happen in at least four different locations within one of YBCA's buildings. As mentioned, the experience begins in the Room for Big Ideas, a micro-gallery and gathering space with rotating installations that is free and open to the public during YBCA's business hours. This gathering spot "sets the stage" - people are asked to arrive promptly, to introduce themselves to the group not only in name, but with a response to some question thought to be pertinent to the evening's experience. The group is asked to stand in a circle, a formation that brings people in close proximity and facilitates everyone seeing and hearing one another. The circle is often interrupted by the presence of the installation in

the Room for Big Ideas - one time it was with a hut like structure that could be walked into and climbed, another time with a large, bright pink car-like structure with feathers. It would be possible to just gather in the adjacent lobby space - a much larger thoroughfare serving as the entry point to YBCA's gallery and the ticket office and foyer of their transitional theater space called the Forum. However, gathering within this smaller room begins the process of negotiating space - both physically within the confines delineated by the glass wall separating the space from the larger lobby, and metaphorically, as participants stand amongst artworks and are asked to make room for both their own sensory experiences and the responses of others.

Smart Night Outers then move through viewing exercises in YBCA's gallery. Here participants "warm-up" their critical thinking muscles with an opportunity to engage in dialogue about one of the works on display. The conversation is structured according to a system called Visual Thinking Strategies, a pedagogical model developed out of research conducted by psychologist Abigail Housen in the late twentieth century.²⁰ VTS is designed to alter what the founders term "aesthetic thought," building skills in and through "observing, speculating, and reasoning on the basis of evidence."²¹ Participants reflect on "what is going on" within a particular piece by observing it, identifying what about the art has led an individual to her/his conclusions, and then

²⁰ Information on VTS accessed Nov 16, 2012, <http://www.vtshome.org/what-is-vts/about-us/history>. VTS is implemented through a non-profit organization called Visual Understanding in Education which was founded in 1995. It is currently used in educational settings throughout the country, including YBCA's Youth Outreach program.

²¹ Information drawn from "Understanding the Basics" from Visual Understanding in Education curriculum 2001, available online and given to me as resource material by program director Julie Potter.

probing for further observations. This discussion inevitably leads to the expression of several, sometimes seemingly conflicting interpretations - a process which highlights the subjective nature of experiencing art and encourages people to both own their observations and recognize that others experience art differently. VTS requires the facilitator of the group to reserve judgement, reflect back what is shared, and be careful not to prioritize any one interpretation over another. This is thought to promote a “safe space” where the sharing of honest opinions flourishes and it becomes clear that there is no one “correct” way to view art. These exercises, though designed for visual arts, are presumed to be translatable to the participants’ experience of the pending dance concert.

The group then transitions to a movement workshop led by an expert who has special insight into the style of dance being presented in that evening’s performance. In this activity, participants are perhaps pushed the most outside of their comfort zones. They are asked, as the dancers are, to put their bodies on the line, to “try-on” some variation of the movement they will see performers enacting onstage. This is also the module where I experienced the most variation from one *Smart Night Out* to the next. The first time I attended I was forced into an awkward rhumba tutorial in the embrace of a man with a very strong smelling leather jacket. We were allegedly recreating the Congolese club scenes from which choreographer Faustin Linyekula drew inspiration for his 2011 *more more more... future*, but I certainly could not transport myself imaginatively out of the confines of the lobby where we were stationed. If anything the

experience rehearsed the awkwardness of cultural clashes that often occur as Westerners try to embody African practices.

At my most recent *Smart Night*, the dance segment involved only a hand gesture or two in the midst of what was otherwise a lecture on the geopolitical implications of the work of Shen Wei, a Chinese-born American artist.²² Though I found the speaker's comments illuminating, I wondered at how the "sit and watch" activity affected participants differently than a "get up and do" activity might. Was the lecture format reinscribing a quiet, critical, listening audience as ideal? The content of the lecture brought forth the ways in which a danced work could participate in and activate political concerns, but we the participants were not encouraged to bodily identify with these efforts as we had been with Linyekula's work. Taken together the choices made in each instance seem to indicate that the African practices are "available" for us to try on, while the Chinese American (a member of New York's "elite" contemporary artists) were not. Were these choices coincidental? Were they products of the ways in which the artists, harking from different cultural traditions, prefer to have others encounter their work? Or, were they indicators of how the work is perceived by the presenters?

Smart Night Outers then eat together - a dinner that is very loosely linked to the show. This activity is the most improvisationally structured, geared as it is towards conversation and community-building. With eating and small talk the only tasks at hand,

²² These comments refer to *Smart Night Outs* I attended on October 1, 2011 and March 24, 2013, respectively.

Smart Night Outers are left to their own devices - cut loose to forge their own connections, to form duos or trios or perhaps, if they prefer, to go solo during a truncated dinner hour. It is here when they must rely on the skills and techniques they have built for socializing in the adult world - asking leading questions, chewing with one's mouth closed, discerning topics of interest in order to keep the 'dance' going.

I recall feeling disappointed at my first *Smart Night Out* experience when I purposefully sat myself at a table of strangers rather than with the one other person I knew in attendance so that I might mingle, only to discover that everyone else at the table were neighbors who had all come together as a group. They politely asked me a few questions, but mostly spent the dinner talking about their families and mutual acquaintances in the neighborhood while I stared down at my kale salad and missed my newborn back home. Rather than the dynamic experience of commensal exchange that I was hoping for, I was faced with the reality that shared meals do not always open us spaces for new ideas and experiences, that food in performance settings does not always manifest as a situated textuality. Quite the opposite, as we sat with our salads and sandwiches we re-inscribed pre-existing social boundaries. The task of eating meant that I could hide away in myself a bit, bearing witness to but not engaging in their chat. I was forced to recognize and reevaluate my own research bias towards this "slow dance" space as one of interface, with the meal time especially being a moment in the proceedings wherein I, as participant, could enjoy the social bonding and casual conversation I needed.

When I asked the program managers if this meal-time element was merely a product of necessity (the program runs right through the dinner hours), they responded that, in fact, it was seen as an integral part of the event. Each expressed that eating together in this context is thought to provide the space for participants to be themselves, to casually mingle with other people, to create conversations that they want to have. They seemed to share a belief, expressed by choreographer Amara Tabor-Smith who is discussed in chapter three, that sharing food allows for intimacy that is otherwise difficult to cultivate between strangers. This stance reveals a presumption that food sharing leads to easy sociability - but perhaps does not consider the contextual elements that allow for this to be true in some cases while producing quite the opposite effects in others.

Next, having hopefully been primed for an optimal spectatorial experience, patrons join the masses to watch the actual performance. I found this transition to be another awkward moment, especially when I finished eating early and then found myself alone and awaiting the performance (at a later version I was actually reticent to get up and leave the conversation that carried on past the allotted time for dinner). However, in both scenarios, the tentative bonds afforded through shared experience are tested as participants, whether relieved or not about no longer having to “mingle,” disperse amongst a larger crowd oblivious to *Smart Night Outers*’ participatory efforts. The performances I attended did not have assigned seats (in fact, for the recent Shen Wei Dance Arts performance there was no seating at all), so *Smart Night Outers* may end up in close proximity to each other but more often than not they are scattered amongst other

audience members, some even meet friends and acquaintances with whom they may chat before and after the show.

YBCA generally curates artists with extensive dance making backgrounds, some who are local, like Keith Hennessey, and others who are touring from elsewhere in the country or the world. They are dance artists with an established fan base, many of whom have been presented at YBCA before. I find myself wondering, does the *Smart Night Outer*, bolstered by newly ingested knowledge and experience about the art, experience a different sense of belonging, a kinship even, with other patrons (who, if one believes the research documenting that the vast majority of concert dance audiences, are well versed in dance and often dancers of some sort themselves)?²³

I enjoyed each of the performances I attended, and am certain that my time as a *Smart Night Outer* had effects on my viewing. For instance, when I attended the performance by Eiko and Koma, a duo of Japanese-American dancers whose Butoh-influenced works feature incredibly slow, stark movements I found myself reflecting on the movement workshop experience described at this chapter's opening. In the workshop we went through a series of activities wherein we were asked to accomplish a rather simple movement task (such as standing up and sitting down in a chair) at a very slow, deliberate pace. As I watched the performance I recalled the subtle struggle of a particular moment, just before I had taken enough of my bodily weight into my legs to heave

²³ Brown and Novak-Leonard, "Getting in the Act," 10. The report states, "A 2010 national survey of more than 7,000 dance ticket buyers (ballet and contemporary dance) found that a majority are *currently* dancing themselves, either socially or more formally."

myself off the chair I had been occupying. At such a juncture it was difficult to keep the elevating or descending movement of my body happening smoothly and gradually, with an uninterrupted flow. Eiko and Koma took on a similar task of uninterrupted, gradual movement in their opening dance. As I watched I was able to appreciate differently the labor involved in the stark work. My movement task lasted maybe three minutes. Theirs lasted many times that. Having just embodied my movements, I was better able to appreciate the intense work undertaken by the performers. I was also reminded of Anna Halprin's work on *Lunch*, a 1960s dance work discussed in chapter two. In both instances the manipulation of time is intended to reorganize our perceptions of the everyday activities in which we engage. The movement choices employed by Eiko and Koma and in Halprin's *Lunch* insist on the coextensive nature of "life" and "dance." My own bodily practice of manipulating experiential time raised my visceral awareness of the the deep commitment these artists made to their craft. It also effected how I perceived others moving through the space in performance. Did this increased awareness lead to a profound or transformational experience for me? No. Did it begin to open up potential for a sort of "empathetic" awareness that Eiko and Koma's website informs me that they want their viewers to have? Yes.

I also offer up my experience as an audience member at Shen-Wei's performance entitled, *Undivided Divided*. The piece was constructed so that rather than sitting, audience members were to move around the performance space at their will. The space was set up as a grid, with many canvases laid on the floor as well as a couple of structures

like a plexiglass cube or stacked platforms. The show opened with each canvas occupied by a nude performer, who lay supine in a neutral body position, offering themselves up for viewing. The audience was able to move between the canvases, but the spaces were only large enough for two bodies to sidle past each other. As the performance progressed the dancers moved on their own canvas, as well as onto others, with some venturing to the structures as well. The audience members jostled to see from different vantage points, some moving throughout, others staying relatively still. The dancers got covered in paint, some also with great piles of hair or feathers, and of course, sweat - the messy co-mingling of these elements fully visible to audience members who were close enough to touch these substances should they decide to do so (I did not see anybody who did).

In this performance example the content of other modules did not influence my viewing of the dance in any obvious way. Instead, it was the relationships afforded me by participation in the modules that affected me. Throughout the performance, in addition to watching the dancers, I was regularly encountering other *Smart Night Out* participants. I was able to watch them watching, move amongst them moving. Even though I had minimal contact with them prior to our joint excursion as audience members for the evening, this cross-viewing contact made me interested in their experience. I became materially aware that I was experiencing this dance within a community of sorts, rather than with a roomful of random patrons (as in, say, an art gallery). I exchanged smiles and glances with some participants, others passed me right by, but our collective engagement in a shared task became notably palpable.

This engagement is reflected upon in the final module of the evening. After the performance, *Smart Night Outers* gather for a “download,” or reception, with wine, coffee and tea, berries and sweets that features both docent-led and peer-to-peer reflection on the dance performance and on the state of the arts in general. Unlike a more traditional “talk-back,” this space does not involve the presenting artists themselves, a strategic move made in the hopes of encouraging more honest and critical feedback of the work than might otherwise be possible. In fact, it is notable that the artists themselves are not involved in any of the six modules’ activities. They are not required to alter the work they present in any way, to give additional time to lectures or demonstrations, or even to provide the group with an “expert” to facilitate participation (though some have chosen to do so). In my experience, not all those in attendance for the program participated in the “download” portion, and the intermittent conversation that ensued was often not about the work just witnessed.

An exception to this was seen at the last *Smart Night Out* I attended, where the participants - all members of YBCA:You, a program described later - gathered in a circle for a leader-led, VTS-inspired discussion specifically about perceptions of the concert. This was the “download” following the Shen Wei performance I just described. The feedback was enthusiastic, many people commenting on how the performance was completely unlike anything they had seen before. They talked about intimacy, and vulnerability, about proximity and visibility (though they certainly shied away from my suggestion that the encounter could be reminiscent of a sex club -with people connecting

with one another and presenting themselves in the nude while others watched, participating primarily through a gaze that is perhaps simultaneously desirous and repulsed). I myself enjoyed the show enough, but these people's enthusiasm increased my enjoyment. I found I valued the show more highly, was less of a critic, because I was able to hear about the experiences of others (particularly 'others' new to, and therefore dazzled by, such 'avant-garde' dance).

Interestingly, other dancer and artist friends I knew who attended the show but did not participate in the *Smart Night* program reported that they disliked *Undivided Divided*. They found it "disappointing" compared to Shen Wei's past works, and were, in fact, "bored."²⁴ For them there was nothing novel or shocking about the performance, and without the additional modules in which they could build relationships, gather contextual information, or surround themselves with people who were enthusiastic about sharing their varied art experiences, these friends (dance experts, relatively speaking) came away from the performance with a feeling of lack. These artist acquaintances' horizons of expectation was not met. They had all agreed, more or less, on a set of aesthetic parameters (valuing, for example, the "original" and "innovative" and "easy to see" thrust of prior Shen Wei contemporary dance performances over the crowded frictions and voyeurism of the current one). Contact with relatively uninitiated dance-goers would

²⁴ In conversation with attendees at Shen-Wei performance dancer Celine Alwyn and jazz musician Sebastian Parker, March 24, 2013.

have contextualized these parameters, destabilizing pre-conceived notions that limited the experiential possibilities enacted through the dance.

Those who do participate in the “download” gathering do so in the Youth Arts Studio space, a smallish room situated high above the lobby of the performance venue. The wall of the room facing the lobby is lined with large glass windows, offering occupants a view of the entire lobby space now teeming with people engaged in post-performance chatter. This literal standpoint provides a nice opportunity to reflect on possible metaphorical positionings of *Smart Night Outers* in relationship to the rest of the audience. Both a part of and apart from the “masses,” participants may envision themselves in a position of privilege, literally looking down upon those who have not had access to the performance accessories they just enjoyed. Alternatively, such a position could reproduce an anxiety about an “outsider” status characterized by a sort of deficiency, where participants required special tutoring in order to make them “smart” enough to participate in the concert, while those below enjoy a convivial atmosphere of post-show socializing unadorned by docent-led prompts.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? CHOREOGRAPHING SPECTATORSHIP

These six modules are not haphazardly thrown together, but rather carefully choreographed in the pursuit of certain effects. I use the label “choreography” here intentionally, and not only because the actions of the program involve the intentional movement of bodies in space and time. Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster describes

choreography stating that it “constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds,” noting that the term can be used to describe phenomena as varied as DNA construction, the structuring of web services, and the action of everything from birds in flight to soldiers in combat.²⁵ Furthermore, she notes, “choreography presents a structuring of deep and enduring cultural values that replicates similar sets of values elaborated in other cultural practices...”²⁶ The structure of a *Smart Night Out* reveals presumptions about the cultural values of the audience members and produces/rehearses those presumptions, too. It prioritizes the knowledge/experience gained through (purchased) exclusive, hands-on, access to the work of artists - who we might be able to characterize as artisans in this space where they present performance and products to be bought and sold - as a means of self-edification, or a way to “get smart.” The program offerings can be construed as reinforcing the notion that contemporary dance is, on its own, incomprehensible or in need of further explanation (and a promise of chocolate) in order for it to be bearable. Conversely, they can be seen as adaptations that help illuminate the ways in which concert dance exists not in some sort of pristine space ensconced by the proscenium arch but in relationship to tangible life experiences.

²⁵ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 2 of 282, kindle edition.

²⁶ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 4 of 282 kindle edition. Here she eloquently traces different uses and understandings of the term choreography from scholars like Cynthia Novack, Mark Franko, Andre Lepecki, Thomas DeFrantz, Diana Taylor, and Randy Martin to those of Marta Savigliano, Jens Giersdorf, and Anthea Kraut in the introduction of her text *Choreographing Empathy* (2-6 of 282). She highlights the multitudinous ways in which the term is employed within dance scholarship, as well as tracing her own developing understanding of the term.

Adding to its characterization as choreography, the program was ‘rehearsed’ or piloted over a period of time (from Oct 5, 2010 to April 9, 2011), with each successive session a variation of the one before it in terms of content, duration, location, and instruction.²⁷ These various ‘rehearsals’ of the program were held in search of just the right choreographic structure - one that, through a convergence of strangers sharing novel hands-on experiences, would set a social tone of dynamic interpersonal interaction, inquisition and experimentation. Some of the events were day long intensives, others even shorter than the existing four hour structure. One prototype experimented with involved a longitudinal approach that brought participants back several times, but that model was subsequently dropped. During each ‘rehearsal’ the tenor of the participating bodies was assessed and a slew of techniques for mobilizing and organizing bodies employed, all with a rather specific choreographic vision in mind.

Picture the moderately sized group of bodies gathered with heads tilted slightly and gazes focused intently on each other, not uniformly but rather with each in a way befitting their ‘character.’ These bodies appear relaxed with muscles loose, casual stances, and ready smiles, and yet seem alert and engaged, poised for action. These bodies pass in and amongst each other easily, here organizing into a messy queue with plates in hand, there aligning efforts in a shared physical task. Framed by the backdrop of YBCA’s sleek, modern architecture and provocative installations these ‘dancers’ read as

²⁷ These pilot sessions were conducted with audience/participants who were solicited by programmers and paid for their time and feedback. They occurred as follows: Ralph Lemon Oct 5, 2010; Sankai Juku Nov 1 2010; Jess Curtis/Gravity Feb 5, 2011); Lemi Ponifasio/MAU Apr 9, 2011.

representatives of a familiar ideal of a participatory public comprised of individuals of varying ages and backgrounds united in their common goal of self-advancement through intellectual and artistic pursuits. This shared goal creates a loose collective of at least somewhat like-minded people reveling in their shared experience - enamored by the experiment in which they are engaged - an experiment that urges them, ever so gently, to stretch beyond themselves.

This, I argue, describes aspects of the “ideal” dance produced by the choreography of a *Smart Night Out*. But how to attain this vision? How to organize and fund this venture in such a way that it attracts the right combination of dancers to dance? What is the “right” combination? As a choreographer I have often been frustrated with how to communicate a vision, how to effectively get the dancers to embody not just the form but the feeling of what I am aiming for in a dance. Toying with the choreographic directives given can change the way the dancers move, but these directives are often not revealed to onlookers - in other words, there are many ways to elicit the actions desired. A clearly defined set of instructions about how and where and when to move is not enough, there has to also be space allowed for exploration, for investigation, for personal investment on the part of the dancers or the work risks feeling shallow, contrived, or formulaic - the microwavable TV dinner version of what could have been a sumptuous feast. How to operate based on a vision and simultaneously leave room for unexpected inspiration is a complicated process often discerned through choreographic trial and error.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? EXPERIMENTS IN ENGAGEMENT

This “ideal” choreographic vision for a *Smart Night Out* that I laid out above was never explicitly stated as such by YBCA. This is because, in part, such behaviors (leaning in, focused gazes, relaxed but alert gaits) are presupposed when Westerners are “engaged” in some sort of shared, instructional, physical task of leisure. But attention to this vision belies a specific choreographic intention, cultivated by the programmers in conjunction with a few key players - namely Dance/USA, whose Engaging Dance Audiences (EDA) grant initiative funded the development of the project. Launched in 2008, this two round endeavor offered support of over three and a half million dollars (from partners the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation) to the research and development of what those involved call “audience engagement” practices. *Smart Night Out* (then called *Dance Savvy* after YBCA’s successful *Art Savvy* program) was one of nine Dance/USA member submissions selected for financial support and development.

Smart Night Out then begins to come into focus as an experiment... a well-funded, well strategized experiment in the burgeoning practice of “audience engagement” that arts presenters big and small are being tasked to undertake. This push for audience engagement is happening in response to a perceived nationwide crisis that centers around the conundrum of dwindling and/or disinterested concert audiences (EDA focuses especially on contemporary dance audiences, but as previously mentioned, similar thrusts can be seen happening across the country with presenting organizations for symphonies,

operas, ballets). This choreographic intention of audience engagement is never stated as such in marketing materials for *Smart Night* and yet, in review of the EDA materials, it is obvious that the various modules of the program are aimed at fulfilling different aspects of how audience engagement is defined therein.

Dance/USA defines “audience engagement” as practices and attitudes that empower people to “better understand and appreciate” dance through offerings that are “participatory rather than passive” and “actively two-way rather than presentational.” Audience engagement is thought to “deepen relationships with existing viewers” and to “build connections among prospective audiences.” Good engagement practices are seen as bolstering kinetic awareness (ie the dance workshop module), knowledge about artistic practices (VTS practices and the dance workshop modules), and social bonding (meet and greet, dinner, and wrap-up modules). They involve “risk, investment, and innovation” and are geared towards impacts that extend beyond marketing concerns of increased attendance or ticket sales. They are therefore considered distinct from (though overlapping with) the project of audience development, which concerns itself with these more financially-based goals. They are also different from “community engagement” projects which often involve outreach towards traditionally underserved populations, though exactly how to define each of these terms continues to be a subject of dispute.²⁸

²⁸ For more on the distinction between audience engagement and audience development see Doug Borwick, “Engaging Matters,” *Arts Journal* blog. Accessed online Feb 4, 2014, <http://www.artsjournal.com/engage/2012/05/audience-engagement-community-engagement/>

Part of the research sponsored by EDA was a survey required by those desiring to submit an idea for funding that queried the perceived difference between audience development and audience engagement. Responses included the following: “Audience development can be measured quantitatively; audience engagement can be measured qualitatively” and “Audience development is focused more on filling seats; audience engagement is more about filling souls”²⁹ Statements like these beg the question of who created the standards against which engagement practices’ quality are measured, as well as whose souls the engagement practices are purporting to fill. Presumably audience development efforts at YBCA and elsewhere have been aimed primarily at those with ample expendable income, with potential season subscribers and potential donors certainly sparking interest over those who might only attend a single performance. However, YBCA has a systemic commitment (evidenced by their community engagement department and elsewhere) to serving the interests of not just an elite few, but a wider swath of bay areans characterized (on YBCA’s website) by an interest in varied perspectives, beliefs, modes of expression, co-creation, and transformative experience.³⁰

While the EDA research and other studies on audience engagement practices qualify that potential audience members represent a spectrum of engagement interests (ranging from things like reading a review of the performance on one end to things like

²⁹ Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak, “Audience Engagement: Working Toward a New Vision,” (WolfBrown Report), 21. accessed online Feb 20, 2014 http://www.ddcf.org/Global/Arts/Audience_Engagement_WolfBrown_Presentation.pdf

³⁰ YBCA’s mission statement accessed Feb 4, 2014, <http://www.ybca.org/about/mission>

actually dancing or otherwise creating performance on the other) there is evidence that dance enthusiasts are ready and willing to shift beyond the relatively quiet, receptive, analytical mode of spectatorship concert dance in the twenty-first century often calls to mind.³¹ It is thought that these audiences crave more than a ‘sit-and-watch’ style art experience, perhaps, in part, due to the effects of an increasingly interactive media-saturated cultural ecosystem. Other factors include a shift in the economic model driving ticket sales, namely the decreased attendance of an older generation of concert goers who were more likely to purchase a subscription to a season and the advent of younger potential patrons who are more “interested in keeping their options open” and therefore more “likely to make last minute decisions about their entertainment.”³²

In 2009 and 2010 the EDA provided YBCA and the eight other round one grantees with online and in-person networking opportunities as well as ample funding to try out several versions of their proposed programs in search of just the right blend of educational, experiential, and social components needed to get people “engaged.” These projects now serve as templates for projects proposed by round two grantees (selected in 2013) who will receive a portion of an additional 1.7 million dollars to build off of the research findings of the round one projects. The goal is to make a systemic change in the realm of contemporary dance, a change enabled through the development of not one

³¹ Brown and Ratzkin, “Making Sense of Audience Engagement”

³² WolfBrown Associates, “How Dance Audiences Engage,” 10.

uniform program, but rather several different options which have been carefully tailored to the perceived needs of different spaces, places and audiences.

A research report summarizing findings from the EDA project idea submissions stated that almost 90% of the 179 submissions received mentioned the use of technology as a means of deepening connections, whether through live video streaming, interactive websites, informational videos, or other methods.³³ However, of the nine projects actually selected for development, three of them propose the seemingly simple act of gathering folks together around food and/or drink in order to promote engagement. It is these few, *Smart Night Out* included, in which I am most interested. The presence of food and drink in these projects belies popular belief in the convivial atmosphere generated during food gatherings - an atmosphere that seems to be missing from the popular “horizon of expectation” around contemporary dance going... and perhaps, missing from people’s lives with the rise of mass media and digitized socializing. These technological advances enable socialization to happen in a vastly different way than it has in the past. While it is beyond the scope of this project to explore in too detailed a manner the effects of what is often termed “new media” on the development of interpersonal relationships, relevant to this project is the notion that such advances serve to build a sort of nostalgia for non-technologically oriented gatherings, practices, and ways of being in the world. This nostalgia adds allure to programs like *Smart Night Out* which encourage participation not

³³ “Overview of Project Idea Submissions” (Callahan Consulting for the arts, research report for Engaging Dance Audiences/ Dance USA). accessed on Feb 4, 2014, http://danceusa.org/uploads/EDA/Summary_Report_EDA_CallForIdeas.pdf

through digital means like live video streaming of a performance (ie Seattle's On The Boards project³⁴) but through an enriched live performance that necessitates participants to "slow dance" with strangers.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? SLOW DANCING TO THE TUNE OF NOSTALGIA

In the instance of *Smart Night Out* I see the presence of food as providing a critical link to a larger social movement with a lot of clout in the bay area, the slow food movement. Slow food ideology officially came out of Western Europe, rising to popular consciousness in the 1980s amongst self-proclaimed "foodies" and food culture scholars. The organization Slow Food International was started in 1986 by Italian founder, Carlo Petrini. As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the movement is a response to "the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world."³⁵ This quote comes from the website of Slow Food International, which has grown into a nonprofit organization with over 100,000 members worldwide who are interested in the transformative effects of educated, pleasurable, community-oriented food experiences. Though it happens on a dramatically different scale, I see a parallel between the push for "audience engagement" through

³⁴ On the Boards, an EDA round one grantee based out of Seattle, has started "OtB TV," where those interested can buy, rent, or subscribe to broadcasts of live performances that take place at On The Boards. More information available at website: <http://www.ontheboards.tv>

³⁵ "About Us," *Slow Food International*. accessed February 20, 2014 http://www.slowfood.com/international/1/about-us?session=query_session:AD0B57910a28d363CB1p3151D26A

intimate, in-person, participatory gatherings that YBCA and others are promoting, and slow food efforts to offer alternatives to the industrialized food system that pre-packages, homogenizes, and disconnects people from the food that fuels and forms them.³⁶ Both efforts represent a fight against the metaphorical (and perhaps literal) machine of consumer culture that feeds the public not only certain products over others, but also pre-determined ways of processing these experiences.

Slow Food International offers interested parties a smorgasbord of opportunities - from farm dinners to food film screenings and organized political actions like publicly petitioning for healthier school lunches. They even promote creative conservationism through the promotion of cooking with foods that can be found on the organization's "endangered" list. However, the bulk of the activities offered, at least for the San Francisco chapter or "convivium" of Slow Food USA are themed dinner gatherings open to members interested in learning more about age-old food practices like, for example, fermentation - the theme of a November 2012 upscale Asian inspired dinner and a June 2013 potluck. These are activities designed to bolster participants' engagement with their food through what I am calling "artisanal encounters." Like *Smart Night* activities, these artisanal encounters are designed to bring participants in closer proximity (both physically and metaphorically) to carefully cultivated "handmade" goods by drawing back the curtain that has separated producers and consumers in the industrial era. In both

³⁶ Other arts organizations engaged in these types of participatory audience engagement programs include Walker Center in Minneapolis, MN, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, and Trey McIntyre Project in Boise, ID to name just a few.

instances, through their dabbling encounters, participants are invited to view themselves as a sort of epicure or aesthete - a person with a more refined understanding and appreciation of the product than the general public. Both these dinner gatherings and efforts like *Smart Night Out* rely on the not-so-new premise that gathering people together to break bread, exchange ideas, and take action can be transformative, personally and societally. These are notions that have long existed in religious rituals, some of which might be considered “dance,” and yet they are being treated as innovations within the concert dance realm.³⁷

Like many of Slow Food’s efforts - from fancy farm dinners to \$60 per person corn tortilla making workshops - *Smart Night Out* seems at first glance to trade on the rather utopian fantasy of the inherent benefits of returning to “simpler times” of shared meals and shared ideals. However, the popularity of the program belies an honest hankering for interpersonal interaction that implicates rather than absents the bodies of would-be consumers, and promotes deeper appreciation of those bodies hard at work to produce the goods and services being consumed.³⁸ The nature of this hankering is of interest to me. It seems likely to be connected to a hankering for an experience of an “other” discussed around Tabor-Smith’s work in the last chapter but made manifest in a

³⁷ For example, in Catholicism the breaking of communion bread is a way of unifying a community of believers, both those present and those who have likewise shared in communion across the globe and across time. Through ritual action the bread is thought to actually become, rather than just represent, the sacrificed body of Christ. In partaking of this bread/body, participants are thought to be transformed - cleansed, forgiven, formed anew. They are subsequently thought to be better equipped to participate in the world around them. A collective humanity and divinity is honored in this food sharing act.

³⁸ In fact, the Slow Food International website promotes the development of what they call “co-producers” - a term they use to refer to the transformed consumer who, through his or her educated consumptive practices, are seen as significantly shaping local production.

different form. The “other” here is not directly linked to an experience of someone of a different racial background, but rather practices associated with an “other” pre-industrialized, pastoral, past time.

This longing for the imagined connectivity enabled in an imagined past begins to take the shape of nostalgia, a vastly theorized condition of (perhaps especially Western) human existence. Actions taken in response to this nostalgia for “simpler” times of “deeper” connections are, in a way, the “going native” narrative for the new era.³⁹ As interpersonal acts like those taken on in a *Smart Night Out* are increasingly framed as practices that resist the machinations of modernism (Seremetakis) and allow for the rediscovery of our sensory-oriented selves (Sutton), those involved become implicated in the construction of an ideological imaginary that, as scholar Svetlana Boym points out, eludes realities associated with these practices. Nostalgic imagining romanticizes past practices, reshaping them so as to instantiate current practitioners’ desires. Boym’s text traces a history of this longing-for-a-homey-something that we call nostalgia, emphasizing how conceptions of nostalgia are socially constructed and have shape-shifted over time. She theorizes nostalgia stating that it “came of age at the time of Romanticism and is coeval with the birth of mass culture.”⁴⁰ In the seventeenth century,

³⁹ This notion of “going native” stems from a popular literary and film plot line wherein a (usually white male) lead character discovers the “lost treasures” of more “primitive” (usually non-white, non-European) civilization and, leaving his world and its worries behind, he joins them - often saving himself from his unhappiness and ennui and, inevitably, allegedly “saving” the native population from unforeseeable disaster as well. In addition, he usually takes his pick of the women who “naturally” favor him over their own kind. Though this narrative has been analyzed and deconstructed by feminist scholars and others it persists in popular media. Twenty-first century examples can be found in movies like *Braveheart* and *Last of the Mohicans*, as well as the more recent film *Avatar*.

⁴⁰ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 16.

nostalgia was seen as an affliction, an incurable disease. She notes “[g]astronomic and auditory nostalgia were of particular importance” as researchers reported that strong bouts of homesickness could be triggered by encounters with foods and melodies that reminded one of home.⁴¹ In nineteenth century America nostalgia was blamed on idleness, slowness, and inefficiency, and by the dawn of the twentieth century she asserts that “[t]he rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people’s longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition.”⁴² This longing for another time is a phenomenon that continues to influence behaviors today. Romanticizing the slower rhythms thought to exist in a mythical “other” space outside of modernity’s reach lends appeal to programs like *Smart Night*, which, under the right conditions, effectively slows down, deepens, and intensifies the art encounter.

Boym goes on to make a claim for modern-day nostalgia as a symptom of the conditions of our age, what she calls “a historical emotion” that is a direct result of how time is viewed and valued culturally. She links the type of nostalgia she now sees with the popular societal conception of forward-moving linear progress as the goal for both individuals and communities. This is a conception that favors the future over the present and the past. She quotes scholar Reinhart Kosseleck, who like Bennett discussed above, theorizes a “horizon of expectation” that governs behavior and exists in contrast to one’s

⁴¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 4.

⁴² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 16-17.

“space of experience.” This space of experience, Boym notes, was deemphasized during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with industrialization’s and then capitalism’s urgent thrust towards the next best thing - whether that’s the latest technology or toy or tourist destination.⁴³ Contemporary nostalgia, then, is a longing for the expansion of this shrinking experiential realm. Part of what I see fueling trends like “audience engagement,” is a reclaiming of the importance of one’s present experience. This is especially true in projects like *Smart Night Out* and Slow Food dinners - projects that reclaim time and space around a featured event in order that those participating may better savor their experience.

The particular activities comprising the *Smart Night Out* modules further demonstrate the effects of nostalgia in shaping the program. The activities are grounded in physical presence and sensation, in gathering and sharing. These are activities not generally associated with the bells and whistles of progress, digitization, and globalization, but rather the fantastical realm of an imagined past boasting the social cohesion, tradition, and continuity alluded to above. They are, however, activities associated with people’s imagined ideas about “folk” or Indigenous practices.⁴⁴

⁴³ She claims, “Thus nostalgia, as a historical emotion, is a longing for that shrinking “space of experience” that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations. Nostalgic manifestations are the side effects of the teleology of progress.” Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 10.

⁴⁴ For more on the ways in which such fantasies have influenced notions of Indianness see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998). Deloria tracks how American national identity has been constituted in contrast and concert with imagined visions of Indianness, changing with changing times. Indianness is constructed by whites as a past, primitive way of being that is simultaneously desired and feared.

Boym asserts, “Modern sociology was founded on the distinction between traditional community and modern society, a distinction that tends to idealize the wholeness, intimacy and transcendental world view of the traditional society.”⁴⁵ This view of a ‘traditional’ society often includes visions of home-cooked meals shared around a table rather than take-out containers in front of a computer screen, of convivial outings in plazas and marketplaces rather than meet-ups in cyber space. The program becomes attractive to contemporary nostalgics who believe that this savoring of the present moment, made possible through invocations of ‘past’ practices like meal sharing and salon-style dialogue (activities which of course are not “past” at all, but very much alive in many, especially non-Western, cultures presently), can not only contribute to their personal projects of self-improvement, but perhaps even satisfy some sliver of their longing for belonging. My Romanian *Smart Night Out* dinner acquaintance comes to mind. Recall that over dinner he said, “It is nice to come here and to have this kind of experience, to meet other people who care about art, people who know things about dance...” people with whom he might experience a kinship unlike his technologically inclined business associates.

A key component of nostalgia is that the insatiable longing is generally aimed at an imagined place that no longer and perhaps never did exist as it does in one’s imagination. The yearning is for a different time, but also for what Boym identifies as “an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in

⁴⁵ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 24.

a fragmented world.”⁴⁶ This trope is particularly prevalent as Westerners imagine and long for the connectedness and groundedness of peoples they characterize as other than themselves - whether due to differences in race, class, or religion.⁴⁷ This commonly involves a racist and/or elitist erasure of the conditions that bring about the traditions coveted (the original ‘slow’ foods were cooked slowly in order to better safeguard against potential contaminants in lesser quality meats; large family meals are for some a product of a large family needing to live in cramped conditions under one roof). Scholar Arjun Appadurai speaks of what she calls “ersatz nostalgia” or “armchair nostalgia,” which is “nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory.”⁴⁸ This is a varietal of nostalgia endemic to (though certainly not exclusive to) privileged peoples (ie. the privileged fantasy of farm life catered to through Slow Food sponsored farm dinners rarely lines up with the grittier realities of life on a farm). This armchair nostalgia might inspire dabbling in activities that make participants feel a fleeting sense of kinship with others. This armchair nostalgia might make participants feel more equipped as connoisseurs of art or food. But, do such dabbings serve a function beyond yet another moment of self-satisfaction for a privileged few? If the success of such engagement activities is to be measured not in the “filling of seats” but the “filling of souls,” attention must be paid to whose souls are at stake.

⁴⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiv.

⁴⁷ For example, Deloria contends that the “indeterminacy of American identities stems, in part, from the nation’s inability to deal with Indian people.” Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 5.

⁴⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 78.

As mentioned, I like to imagine that what is happening here choreographically is that both *Smart Night* and select Slow Food efforts are creating a sort of social slow dance towards deepened engagement with not just the products but the processes that generate our most familiar material culture (food, bodies). They offer opportunities to slow down, get intimate, attend to sensation, come to terms with anxieties and desires - all in a relatively benign and 'safe' setting that has clear boundaries, structure, and a certain modern aesthetic appeal. Such a setting provides a safeguard that the song will inevitably end, and with it, the 'risky' encounter of physical contact with strangers, or of sharing one's opinion about art, or of showing up alone to an event. Both organizations rely on educational, convivial gatherings as methods of cultivating conscientious citizens committed to community and sustainability, whether food or art related. But both operate on a membership basis that encapsulates these artisanal experiences within a certain sphere. As is common in slow dancing, some folks are being left out... who exactly is being engaged? Who is being excluded?

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? THE MEMBERSHIP MODEL

In 2012, the *Smart Night Out* program shifted under the purview of the YBCA's Community Engagement department and has undergone significant changes. The program is now offered for one or two performances of every contemporary dance artist on the organization's season as opposed to just four times during the year. In addition, there are now *Smart Night Outings* scheduled for the off-season (summer) months as

well. An *Outing* is like a field trip - it takes on a similar, though truncated, *Smart Night* format at an off-site performance venue (and generally includes a pre or post show dinner at a local restaurant). The featured performances are selected by Julie Potter, the *Smart Night* program manager, as of potential interest to Smart Night Outers. These *Outings*, therefore, serve a dual purpose that extends beyond the program benefits of a standard *Night Out*. They rectify a potential lapse in programming through YBCA that might negatively effect participation in YBCA:You, and they introduce participants to other locations throughout the bay area that offer contemporary dance, all while still maintaining the familiar structure of the program.

These expanded offerings equal many more *Smart Nights* offered throughout the year, but they are actually being offered to a smaller number of people. The majority are now open only to members of YBCA:You, a membership program focused on deepening art engagement through exclusive offerings and sometimes even a custom-made action plan developed in conjunction with an art advisor. In my experience (and in Potter's recounting of the development of the program) this conversion to a membership model did wonders for the *Smart Night Out*, which now benefits from repeat visitors who are familiar with the modules and therefore more willing and active participants. However, even at a low cost, this method of participation is setting up an economic model associated with "upper" class hierarchies (images of country clubs and philanthropic

societies come to mind), effectively reinscribing the idea that contemporary dance is not for everyone.⁴⁹

From a personal perspective the difference between a public *Smart Night* and a You-er *Smart Night* was palpable. All of the social awkwardness that I experienced (and I experienced quite a bit of it) during my first two visits dissipated in this new format. While the structure remained the same, the choreography subtly shifted. The participants were more interactive, the responses to the VTS questions more varied and articulate. The conversations during the latest download module were lively whereas before the module resembled the early hours of a networking mixer, with people standing alone or in a small group, clutching coffee cups and checking their watches. In its later iterations, downloads might resemble something more akin to the seminar class-like setting the title of the program connotes, with participants who were more skilled at and comfortable with sharing honest observations.

There are many factors that contribute to this reality, not the least of which is the benefit of experience gained in the first year of the program, especially when partnered with YBCA's commitment to incorporating feedback from participants in order to continue to improve the offerings. There was also a change in the leadership of the program, and actually a shift in the director of the performing arts, someone who is key in curating the performance season. The appointment of the new director of the performing

⁴⁹ Membership costs are low. Potter reports that as of April 2013 many of the current members had joined during a subscription sale where membership was offered for \$8 a month, rather than the standard \$15 a month.

arts, bay area performer/educator Marc Bamuthi Joseph, marks an interesting shift for YBCA as an institution. Kenneth Foster YBCA's executive director (Foster left YBCA in 2013) is quoted as saying "YBCA has a huge commitment to diverse points of view, and Marc's outlook will create a vibrant mix of thoughts, opinions, and ideas about the artistic trajectory of the organization."⁵⁰ What he doesn't state explicitly is that Bamuthi Joseph is a young, hip, charismatic, African-American artist/activist. Bamuthi Joseph did not initiate the *Smart Night* program, but the program is effected by his selection of certain presenting artists over others. Additionally, Bamuthi Joseph, who states he is "excited to expand the risk-taking mandate and community-building mission of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts" and to "institute an undercurrent of activism" at YBCA, has been part of a team instituting a number of other engagement activities, including 50 cent dance class days and late-night dance parties open to the entire community, regardless of people's membership status.

Interestingly, at first glance the demographics of the participants in the program remain more or less the same despite the shift to the membership model. In a March 2013 interview Potter shared that each event is capped at 20-30 participants, with the majority being white, well-educated men and women aged 40-60. But the "You-ers," as Potter refers to them, actually represent a more strategically recruited group of people than it initially seems. You membership is offered to three groups - the general public who pay

⁵⁰ "Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Selects Marc Bamuthi Joseph as Director of Performing Arts," *Artdaily.org*, January 9, 2012. Accessed Feb 20, 2014 <http://artdaily.com/news/52897/Yerba-Buena-Center-for-the-Arts-selects-Marc-Bamuthi-Joseph-as-Director-of-Performing-Arts#.U1kiA17yHwI>

an monthly fee (\$15 per month), the high level YBCA donors who receive complimentary membership as a perk, and a third group of recruited teaching artists (many alumni of other YBCA programs) who are treated as fellows. Representation from these three groups at any single *Smart Night Out* helps stimulate conversation and the exchange of ideas amongst participants, especially given the fact that memberships are individual, which means people often show up unaccompanied and therefore ready to mingle. However, this “diversified” group still represents roughly the same (very small) segment of society one might already expect to see at a contemporary concert dance performance. So, while the program may effectively change the “horizon of expectation” of a concert dance experience for these individuals, it is perhaps not altering the overall “horizon of expectation” for whom is served by the art.

One of the chief criticisms of the slow food movement is that it is elitist - and that as such, the perhaps well-meaning but relatively well-to-do members squeal for an artisan salumi tasting but wouldn't be caught dead actually assisting with, say, pig handling on a struggling farm. Though Slow Food International membership fees start at \$25 a year, the events advertised in November 2012 by the local San Francisco chapter include a corn tortilla making workshop for \$60 per person, and a soul food soiree for \$80 per person.⁵¹ This means that those in attendance are generally going to be the middle and upper class bay areas with the financial means and the leisure time to attend such events. Furthermore, this particular selection of events seem on the surface a clear example of the

⁵¹ Slow Food San Francisco calendar. Accessed Nov 2, 2012.

exoticized fantasies of a white (or white-acting) member population for whom both tortilla making and soul food are not necessities as they have been for those poorer people of color who have historically developed the food practices. While there are occasional potlucks (the one I signed up for in April 2013, which was based around the fad of fermenting, got cancelled) and other low-cost gatherings (films screenings are often only \$5), even these events - which sometimes take place in the private home of a presumably wealthy member - maintain an high society aura of faddish fascination that I imagine is off-putting to many.

This aura of elitism is, I'm afraid, another of the parallels I see existing between select Slow Food events and *Smart Night*, despite YBCA's good intentions. The fact that both are based on a membership model that offers engagement through specialized "insider" access attracts certain people, automatically privileges some people over others, and limits the spectrum of who is represented in the room when bread is broken and discussions undertaken. Paying for membership in order to gain access to dancing, dinner, and dialogue around art contributes to a participation economy that continues to insist that products of value must be bought from an expert rather than generated communally. How might the event happen differently if it was a potluck out in the gardens adjoining the theater? The current structure ensures that part of what is going on here is that the those being engaged by the program remain those who have historically been engaged - the small slice of the population who already have financial means and power, or who already have education and resources, the culturally savvy artists and

educators and/or middle and upper class potential patrons who are perhaps already being served by an institution like YBCA.

That said, demographic information relays only certain types of information about those in attendance. So, even though the Youers in attendance may on the surface appear more or less the same as a “typical” concert audience, there are some distinct differences. Part of the YBCA:You program initiative is to expand the diversity and frequency of the art experiences that its members take in. This means that someone may come in to the program because they have identified that they have too little art in their lives and would like assistance in determining events of interest. Another member may have extensive experience with contemporary music but have never attended a dance concert. The research gathered by Wolf Brown noted the exceptional prevalence of dancers (professional, recreational, or former/non-practicing) in attendance at dance concerts (a reality to which any dancer or choreographer tapped into the community can attest).⁵² This ratio is notably lower amongst the *Smart Night* population, so those in attendance are more likely to be new to the genre, and are looking to the event to help them better understand the performance in terms of comprehending the artists’ intentions and position within the art world, the experience and input of the dancers, the choreographic structures and dance techniques employed.

All of this leaves me feeling a bit torn... because I believe in the program. In fact, I believe in it now more than ever. The original reticence I had about a program that

⁵² Brown and Novak-Leonard, “Getting In On the Act,” 10.

slapped accessories (like a themed dinner) onto a performance experience in order to make it more appealing has been upstaged by my growing fascination with how the program may be effectively creating a “new” community of people actively interested in the complexities of contemporary dance. Are those people in attendance having an enriched experience? Their survey answers resound with an indubitable “yes.” I think *Smart Night Out* is providing a valuable service to those who choose to take advantage of it, and YBCA is actually doing an exemplary job of diversifying its community engagement offerings (I continue to be impressed that there is a community engagement department that is distinct from a marketing department and an institutional development department - such an emphasis indicates a vested interest in enriching audience experience). There are many other free and open to the public engagement options. Just as the slow food movement encompasses much more than what is undertaken in its \$95 a head “Convivial Table” dinner events, the “slow dance” of *Smart Night Out* is but one of the program developments YBCA has made in recent years in order to reach out to the bay area community. There are outreach programs specifically targeting underrepresented populations in struggling and transitional neighborhoods, youth of all backgrounds, and aspiring artists. As previously mentioned, there are late-night public dance parties, \$.50 dance class days, and fellowship opportunities. In exploring such a variety of opportunities for community engagement, YBCA follows through on their commitment to embodying the same contemporary spirit of inquiry and experimentation as the artists they showcase. They truly stand committed, as their website claims, to an innovative

strategy of modeling their programming decisions after the processes they see at play in the artists they curate as a means to “talk about ideas, share art experiences, question widely held beliefs, celebrate the human experience” through various participatory modalities.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? SPECTATOR SPORTS REDEFINED

Smart Night Out is accomplishing its goals of risk-taking, increasing awareness, and stimulating much needed dialogue around contemporary dance. However, I’m left wondering in what ways deepening the engagement of these individuals who have chosen to get “smarter” will change what Potter calls the “arts ecosystem” of the bay area? of the nation? I do believe that having more people moving about in the world with an appreciation for contemporary dance is beneficial, regardless of participants’ socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. However, I find it a little troubling that rather than looking to those dance communities for whom sharing time, ideas, and even food have always been part of what comprises certain performance experiences, we the “dance community” instead opted to spend relatively lavish funds (recall that over \$3 million dollars went in to the Engaging Dance Audiences initiative) on elaborate scientifically-oriented data-collection research efforts in order to justify the development of programming that offers approximations of these more relational practices. Furthermore, rather than open community efforts, the practices are rehearsed with a self-selecting few within a closed, contained, structured, exclusive environment.

I do not mean to practice my own version of “armchair nostalgia” by appearing to naively suggest that the economies of these other dance communities exist outside of capital concerns. Many performance scholars, including Imada , Shea Murphy, Fiona Magowan, Anita Gonzalez, and others attend to the specific complexities that emerge as different aboriginal or Indigenous populations merge culturally specific histories of ritual dance performances with commercialized performance modes and capitalist economic models.⁵³ Such work has served to push back against the exoticization and subsequent marginalization of these groups. I do not mean to suggest another “cultural borrowing” of the more participatory or relational modes of performance historically witnessed within these populations as a salve to be slapped on to a struggling concert dance scene. I do, however, propose that it would do the “dance community” good to assess what the participation economy proposed entails, and to consider how those who throughout the twentieth century have contributed to the legacy of concert dance in often unsung ways may serve as guides for navigating the shifting terrain we face. How might the program offerings change if those engaged in these practices were invited to help structure the program in ways more specifically geared towards community-building? It is possible that such efforts would create effects similar to those discussed in chapter three with Our Daily Bread Project gatherings, but the placement of such activities within the walls of YBCA would undoubtedly alter them - and who felt welcome to participate in them. Will

⁵³ Imada, *Aloha America*; Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*; Fiona Magowan, “Dancing with a Difference: Reconfiguring the Poetic Politics of Aboriginal Ritual as National Spectacle,” (*The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11, 3 (2000): 308-321; Anita Gonzalez, “Mambo and the Maya,” *Dance Research Journal* 35/36, 2/1 (Winter 2003 and Summer 2004): 131-145.

YBCA's current engagement efforts cross-germinate in a way that helps intercultural exchange, and the "cross-viewing" that Manning proposes occurs during such exchanges (see chapter three), to blossom and really effect the role that contemporary dance plays in the bay area community?

Part of YBCA's stated mission is to revolutionize the way that those who interface with YBCA engage with contemporary art. They say, "We need to step out of our long traditions of neat packages of artistic "product" and create a completely new, multi-cultural, artistically challenging and humanly satisfying contemporary arts center, one that today's world needs and deserves." This is a lofty, if admirable, goal. It is one that even while it proposes boundary breaking reinforces a division between past practices and present "multi-cultural" aspirations as if the two could be severed. This valorization of innovation threatens to reinscribe/reinstall/recreate/reboot the exclusionary horizon of expectation around contemporary art that the organization seeks to erase, especially if it is not also mindful of how our conceptions of past, present, and future are imbued with nostalgic imagining. YBCA remains an institution - an organization that must be financially solvent and attractive to touring artists from across the globe. Is *Smart Night Out* disassembling the neat art packages they continue to produce? Or is it actually creating a new product, more savvily created to meet the perceived desires of contemporary consumers?

The bold headline of YBCA’s “about” page on their website reads, “At YBCA, art is not a spectator sport.”⁵⁴ However, I propose that part of building a participation economy to suit the contemporary sensation-seeker involves redefining our conceptions of the behaviors and responsibilities involved in being a contemporary art spectator. If, as both the James Irvine Foundation report and the Slow Food Manifesto propose, these times call for a dramatic shift from consumer mentality to “co-creator” or “co-producer” mentality made possible for some through artisanal experiences, and perhaps for others by other means, real headway might be made in also shifting the valuation of contemporary art within American societies. Participating in the spectator sport of contemporary dance could be seen not only as self-serving, but as community serving and community constituting.

YBCA is not the only group in town striving to form a ‘new’ community of folks around dance and food. Wendy Rein and Ryan T. Smith, co-choreographers and co-creators of RAWdance have created their own program, the CONCEPT Series, where spectatorship actually does require some sport-ly activities - mainly the willingness for those in attendance to pick up their chairs and reframe the space according to the differing needs of the various pieces of choreography on the evening’s program. I conclude this final chapter with a look at the CONCEPT Series because while it covers some of the same “engagement” territory as does YBCA’s offering (introducing a “wider” audience contingency to contemporary dance, offering food for consumption and

⁵⁴ YBCA’s website. Accessed Feb 20, 2014 <http://www.ybca.org/about>

community building around the event) it serves as a model for how San Francisco dance artists are taking initiative to make changes on a smaller, but equally effective scale. Rein and Smith did not recruit test groups to try out their programmatic methods, nor did they receive major grants from a national initiative to help produce them. Instead, they utilized their positions within the city - as choreographers, producers, and co-creators of a young contemporary dance company, as professional dancers for other major companies, as dance teachers at ODC Dance School, as residents working and playing and scraping by in the city - to tap into a perceived community need.

WHAT IS GOING ON ELSEWHERE? RAWDANCE'S CONCEPT SERIES

“Who needs more popcorn?” chimes the lithe Ryan T. Smith as he stands, center stage, donning black booty shorts, a sexily sweaty tank top, and a generous heaping of heavy black eyeliner. His long legs spread in a deep plie, he coyly eyes the crowd who has gathered to watch the work that he, along with co-choreographer Wendy Rein, are in the process of creating for their company RAWdance. Smith holds dixie cups of salty snacks out to the crowd. “If you love me you will eat more popcorn,” he says, handing one of the cups over to a young moustached man sitting in the front row. Rein charms the other side of the crowd with an offer of cookies. “You want another cookie, I know you do...” she says to a woman seated on a cushion on the floor whose hands are empty. The woman initially shakes her head and moves her hands to indicate “no” but cannot resist the imploring look Rein lays on her with the blinking of impossibly big, blue eyes. The

woman acquiesces. She bites into the cookie, savoring it for a fleeting moment before she hurriedly picks up the crumbs that have fallen from her fingers to the yoga studio floor.

The woman to this woman's left is precariously balancing a coffee cup between her knees as she arranges an appropriately sized cheese and cracker bite for her young, tutu-clad daughter. The couple behind are feeding each other grapes. Presumably on a date, they can't keep their hands off of each other - they might as well be occupying one chair. To their left is an older man with a shock of white hair steadily picking what I can only guess is popcorn kernels out of his teeth. Next to him a woman reads a program. These are just a few of the murmuring hundred person crowd who are jostling about as they settle into new spots in order to view the third piece on the evening's contemporary dance showcase. All have ventured out to see what awaits them at the James Howell Studio in San Francisco, home for the past five years (2008-present) to Smith and Rein's brainchild, The CONCEPT Series.⁵⁵

The CONCEPT Series is a semi-annual series dreamt up by Rein and Smith as a marketing and community building project for their young company. Each showcase features re-worked selections from RAWdance's repertory or nascent works just in the process of being created. Each iteration of the event is also rounded out by a curated selection of works-in-progress by three or four other local choreographers. Rein and

⁵⁵ The James Howell Studio is considered a historic place to those "in the know", though it is an unassuming and easy to pass-by yoga studio on a residential street in the relatively unknown neighborhood called the Duboce Triangle. Howell worked with the Joffrey Ballet before moving west and opening the studio in 1973. He created what has been noted as a ground-breaking ballet *Ritual: Journey of the Soul*, a dance that grapples with the topic of AIDS. Howell died of AIDS-related causes in 1982. For more information see <http://blogs.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2011/05/rawdance.php>

Smith self-produce (with assistance from their company board members and volunteers) the now extremely popular event where audiences are promised an informal atmosphere, complete with coffee, popcorn, and other snacks, in which to witness the latest from the bay area's budding dance artists. Tickets are pay what you can (with a suggested donation of \$20), and nobody is turned away for lack of funds. Generally, each work is presented with a small introduction about content, without designed lighting, and within close proximity to audience members. Actually, at least twice during the show the audience is asked to move themselves, their snacks, and their chairs or cushions around in the small yoga studio space in order to view the work from the perspective the choreographer has requested.

Rein and Smith themselves perform dual roles throughout the event - appearing as fierce, sexy, athletic, dancers during RAWdance dances, and then, in the interstices (sometimes even immediately before and after the dances they create and star in), the pair perform an unscripted schtick duet of direct audience address. Think cyberbots turned Jewish or Italian grandmother and back again. The effects are quite astounding, and in fact, have become the key feature of the events, and subsequently of this analysis. What Rein and Smith are adept at doing is a sort of code-switching, wherein their knowledge and prowess as artists allows them to manipulate the concert dance form just enough to make things interesting.... but not so much that they lose completely the audience-performer dynamic they hold dear as concert dancers and dance makers.

Rein and Smith walk a fine line between innovation and ‘tradition’ in terms of the content and structure of CONCEPT Series events. As such, the events become an effective sort of primer for those uninitiated, or otherwise put off by, the notion of concert dance. Participation in the event is elicited, but not instructional or really risky. Participation does not come with a promise of deeper knowledge of dance or the artists, nor are there generally opportunities for the audience to influence the content of the show in any overt way. Audience members are not asked many (if any) questions about what they saw, nor are they invited into structured discussion about the work. Instead, they are encouraged into a certain participatory presence in the space - their roles as dance witnesses activated by the ways in which this presence is acknowledged and tended to.

For example, audience members enter into a relatively informal atmosphere, a yoga studio, where they are encouraged to snack and mingle before finding a chair or taking up one of the floor cushions, pre-set in some configuration in the space. The dancers who will be performing are often stretching and warming-up in the space adjacent to the snacks, visually present and even available to greet those they know. The performance is low-tech, with lighting flipped on and off by the wall switches, and music played from the studio sound system via Smith’s laptop. Some choreographers bring props or set pieces and wear costumes, some don’t.

The works are introduced as in-progress showings, many being seen for the first time. However, unlike other showcases throughout the city (for example, The Living Room Series produced by CounterPULSE and Dancers’ Group) contributions or formal

feedback from the audience are not solicited.⁵⁶ Audience members are in close proximity to the dance and the dancers, but they are not invited to dance - there is no dance tutorial, no inclusion of audience members in performance pieces, no post-show dance party (as is the case with another popular ongoing showcase run by choreographer Ben Levy, called The Salon).

Despite the informal atmosphere, the dances are curated to maintain a certain level of professionalism in the work. The curatorial stance leans heavily towards “emerging” but not unknown local contemporary choreographers that represent a range of contemporary styles.⁵⁷ Each contributor is asked to keep their offering to fifteen minutes or less, and despite an aura of informality, Smith carefully keeps the program moving along at a clipping pace so that the “energy of the audience doesn’t drop out.” “We don’t want people getting bored or restless,” Rein says. “Yeah, we don’t want them falling asleep on us,” Smith adds.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ At the “Living Room Series” audiences are invited to engage in quite a different way. The showcase employs the an audience feedback process developed and codified by Liz Lerman. Works are selected and created based on choreographer’s interest in receiving and utilizing audience feedback. Choreographers offer information about the work as well as a few key questions they have for audience members, who are encouraged to take notes during or after the performance. Following the showings of each piece, there is a question and answer period led by a facilitator, complete with suggested language for commenting on things seen in the dance, and for making suggestions to the choreographer for the development of the work.

⁵⁷ When questioned about the definition of “emerging” in this context, Rein and Smith both noted how that label is used to describe work from companies that seem to have little in common. “Emerging” does not denote a certain length of performance history, nor is it determined by operating budget, company size, or even really the amount of press the company receives. Rein and Smith they would not use the term to describe any of the companies in the city that owned and/or ran their own performance spaces.

⁵⁸ Smith and Rein in conversation with the author July 20, 2013.

Sleep is certainly not possible at the CONCEPT series. Shuffling the audience around the space throughout the performance means that audience members inhabit the space more fully than in most proscenium or blackbox contexts. The densely packed and moving bodies facilitates, and sometimes necessitates, conversation with those nearby rather than positioning everyone as silent observers with eyes focused on a distant stage. Participants touch and handle their chairs and cushions, get down on the floor where the dancers dance, see the studio from a number of vantage points.

Beyond all of this, Rein and Smith shatter illusions about aloof, unreachable dancers by offering up themselves as food servers and joke makers. However, they never compromise the more formalistic, shape and action driven (rather than narrative or character driven) dance they enjoy making by taking these roles on only “outside” of their official performance offerings. In performance, they maintain the relatively neutral-leaning-towards-serious facial expressions commonly associated with modern dance. Their work, though at times emotionally evocative, shines because of its intense physical intricacies (often played out in seemingly impossible lifts, throws, catches, and entanglements of the two choreographers). The choreography depends upon the dancers’ athletic prowess - in a way that makes them quite unrelate-able to audience members who are not encouraged to see themselves in the dancers’ experiences so much as they are to be dazzled by the dancers’ feats. That said, when within seconds of the dance’s finish the formidable Rein and Smith become the affable Rein and Smith audience members are

invited into a new relationship with the pair, and subsequently with other audience members according to Rein and Smith's example.

I maintain that serving and sharing food plays a significant role in the effectiveness of this dynamic code-switching. Foundational anthropological scholars looking at food and culture like Mary Douglas (1971), have pointed to food as an especially potent "boundary marker" perhaps, as Sutton points out, because ingestion of food incorporates what is "outside" the body into matter of the body.⁵⁹ Over the course of the last century, the nature of the boundaries explored have shifted with the times. Scholars have explored food's relationship to kinship symbolism - considering how sharing food constitutes individuals as "part of a physically commingled and communal whole," especially in non-Western societies that emphasize relatedness over autonomy.⁶⁰ In the 1980s and 1990s this grew into discussions about food's role in identity creation, and how ethnic, national, or gender based consumptive norms and deviations bonded and/or created distinctions between groups of people both within and far from their hometowns and families of origin. Sutton notes that more recently food scholars have focused explicitly on issues of power and hegemony. For example, especially in the bay area where Alice Waters' history of valorizing the local and community oriented nature of food has been strong since the 1970s, many make food-oriented choices explicitly resistant to industrialized food systems and pathways.

⁵⁹ See also Lupton, *Food, The Body and The Self*; and Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity."

⁶⁰ Sutton, *Remembrances of Repasts*, 5.

I mention this brief history to underline the fact that distributing and consuming food carries with it potent opportunities to reposition ourselves and to re-imagine relationships, both in regards to other people and to the structures in which these foods are shared. Including food in an informal concert dance event is a strategic contribution to creating a certain aura of accessibility around what is popularly perceived as an “inaccessible” art form. The foods selected - popcorn, cookies, cheese and cracker snacks - only add to this mood. As Seremetakis points out, certain foods elicit certain ‘sensory-perceptual dispositions’ - and in the American context such “low-brow” snacks are associated with ballparks, movie theaters, and living rooms - and their related activities of convivial pleasure and leisure. Furthermore, the fact that Rein and Smith choose to serve the food themselves, even in the midst of what is obviously a lot of work dancing, managing, and producing the show, breaks down the separation between dancers and audience members, both physically and psychologically.

The stark contrast between the “selves” seen as appropriate for dancierly-presentation and the “selves” seen as conducive to convivial socializing is a point of interest. Rein and Smith’s invitation for engagement happens on two distinct levels. The first maintains, and even insists upon, a distinction between performer and observer. The dances RAWdance creates are not attempting to reach out to or include audience members in any overt way. The works RAWdance presents for the CONCEPT Series have not been dumbed-down, explained, deconstructed, or contextualized so as to give audience members a different kind of access to what they are encountering. The dancierly

“selves” presented by RAWdance dancers are not warm and inviting, they are sleek, sexy, and angular. The company members are remarkably strong and appear formidable, especially as they are often clad in relatively little clothing meant to emphasize the contours of the bodies the work sets into motion. These same bodies (often in these same skimpy clothes - though sometimes with a sweatshirt or athletic pant thrown over the base costume) are then backgrounded in favor of schticky, food-pushing, self-deprecating, even apologetic or coy “selves” employed specifically to set audience members at ease and make them feel “at home.”

In taking on these schticky interstitial selves Rein and Smith seem to be, in a way, making up for the perceived inaccessibility of concert dance (discussed at length in chapter one). Their performances alternatively assert concert dance’s validity (the dancer selves are quite accomplished, the curated selections relish “dance-y” dance rather than performance art or theatrical hybrids), and apologize for dance’s inaccessibility (by offering an antidote in the form of a charming, disarming, cookie-wielding character). The tension between these two realities means that audience members, too, are asked to code shift. This is a unique sort of audience engagement, quite distinct from the edifying principles offered up by YBCA. In a July 2013 interview Rein and Smith remarked upon how glad they were to see people genuinely enjoying themselves, laughing and chatting and sharing food between the pieces, and even hanging around afterwards to mingle and eat. People enjoy themselves, get surprised, and act warmly towards one another, realities reviewers who attend a lot of bay area dance like French Clements and Rita Felciano, feel

merit mentioning - due to the relative lack of these social realities in other presentational dance settings.⁶¹

Smith noted that often his pre-show banter (which includes everything from asking how many attendees are having a “virginal CONCEPT series experience” to apologizing for possibly sweating in someone’s coffee) is met with jocular banter from audience members. However, both Rein and Smith reported that audiences snap into “watching mode” when the lights dim. “They are quiet, and respectful, and really, really focused on the dances,” Rein says. SF Weekly blogger French Clements commented on how “watching dance in such a climate changes your perception of the art.” In his Apr 23, 2012 article Clements notes Rein and Smith’s affable code-switching and revels in how the event lets him “focus less on the choreography, and more on the dancers themselves.” This is an effect he claims counters the tendency to “ignore a performer’s humanity” in more grand settings.⁶² Perhaps it is these moments of refreshment, both literal and figurative, that occur between the dances that allow audience members to freshly engage.

For example, in my interview with the pair, Smith mentioned how dramatically he noticed this shift when they performed their duet entitled *After 5:00*. Smith and Rein spend the duration of the dance in an intense physical tug-of-war that borders on the abusive (Smith noted that the physicality of the piece, when at its best, causes “both me

⁶¹ French Clements, “Concept Dance Series Mixes Performance, Socializing -- and Helping Out,” *SF Weekly Blog*, Apr 23, 2012. accessed Feb 20, 2014 http://blogs.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2012/04/concept_dance_series_rawdance.php; and Rita Felciano “RAWdance Concept Series: 8,” from “Our Weekly Picks: May 25-31,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, May 24, 2011. Accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.sfbg.com/listing/2011/05/24/our-weekly-picks-may-25-31-2011>.

⁶² Clements, “Concept Dance Series.”

and at least a couple people in the audience to cry”). The gut-wrenching work ends with Smith collapsing dramatically to the floor, drenched in sweat and sometimes tears. In other performances this moment is followed by a blackout and Smith is allowed the darkness and the refuge of the wings to gather himself emotionally and to transition to what comes next. However, he recalls that at the CONCEPT Series this act of being splayed on the studio floor lasted for just a moment..... and in the moment following Smith found himself jumping back up to his feet, smile on his face, to declare “Ok, who needs more popcorn?”

The audience, if they have indeed taken the emotional ride along with the dance, may find themselves completely moved by the piece (perhaps re-experiencing their own experiences with abusive relationships, perhaps fearful for the dancers involved, perhaps with muscles taught in anticipation, breath trapped in the throat). However, Smith’s code-switching insists that they not hold this moment of being swept up by the dance too preciously. The show clips along, and with it the audiences’ attention must follow. In choosing these actions, Rein and Smith effectively command attentiveness - engaged attentiveness. They manipulate audience members’ sensibilities (no nodding off in the back of a dark theater allowed), while simultaneously building an appetite for future glimpses of the work. Additionally, by changing from his “dancerly” self to his “host” self before the audiences’ eyes, Smith insists on his own humanity and resists the fetishization that often serves to separate and divide dancers from their viewers.

Rein and Smith set out with the same goals many dance companies have, and must have, to stay afloat in a twenty-first century economy (perhaps especially in the San Francisco bay area where the cost of living is exceptionally high). They wanted to increase the visibility of their company in the city while keeping their expenses to a minimum. They wanted to build a broader audience for concert dance while still making the dances they wanted to make, rather than, say, building an educational or outreach based component to the company, or creating “accessorizing” or “enriching” structures that explicate their dances or choreographic processes as does YBCA’s *Smart Night Out*.

The CONCEPT Series has, by these measures, been a successful venture. It has always been well-attended and has made enough money for the company to cover its costs and then some. It is a compelling event that has caught much coveted media attention and is a sought-after opportunity amongst young companies. At most shows at least a quarter of the crowd raises their hands to indicate that it is their first time attending the CONCEPT series, and about the same amount report it is their first time seeing RAWdance. The very first piece of publicity written about the first series makes the lofty claim that it “is bound to be the quintessential San Francisco experience of traveling to a new neighborhood and discovering a hidden jewel in the city.”⁶³ This claim may be coming true, as in 2012 the showcase was awarded one of SF Weekly’s annual “Best Of” Awards, deemed the “Best Way to Sample S.F.’s Contemporary Dance Scene.” Another

⁶³ *Bay Area Reporter*, Nov 29, 2007, accessed Feb 20, 2014 <http://www.rawdance.org/company/concept-series/>

SF Weekly writer praised it as a sort of dance anthology, having featured over thirty local artists and companies.⁶⁴ Bay area dance critic Rita Felciano warns that “RAWdance’s Concept Series can become addictive” and it has been lauded as a “first date heaven” given its unique charm.⁶⁵

Hosting informal dance showcases in places like yoga studios is not a new concept. In fact, similar series have been happening since the 1930s with Leftist Dance Movements, and multiplied in the 1970s when dance makers actively sought to democratize dance. However, in this instance, the CONCEPT Series is being treated as a novel occurrence, a refreshing and much needed accompaniment to other dance offerings in the city. It is not because the performances are so exceptional. It is not because the location is so ideal. Instead, I argue, the event makes people present to one another differently, it elicits a sort of intimacy with strangers that more formalistic concert dance environs do not.

CONCLUSION

This sitting-on-the-yoga-studio-floor presence that the CONCEPT Series offers is quite distinct from the type of participation YBCA’s *Smart Night Out* program provides. *Smart Night* attracts those interested in the self-edifying potentialities of high arts engagement, served up in a “high” arts establishment that is attempting to expand out into

⁶⁴ Heidi De Vries, “RAWdance Brings Big Ideas to An Intimate Space” *SF Weekly Blog*, May 27, 2011. Accessed Feb 20, 2014 <http://blogs.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2011/05/rawdance.php>

⁶⁵ Felciano, “RAWdance Concept Series: 8”; Clements “Concept Dance Series.”

a wider community. Conversely, the mystique around the CONCEPT Series, tucked unobtrusively as it is on a quiet, residential street in the relatively low profile neighborhood of Duboce Triangle, trades on the excitement of engagement solely by those “in the know” - whether on a first date, sampling concert dance for the first time, or simply taking a break from more “formal” presentational modes of dance production.

Both engagement offerings trade on nostalgic imaginings of community and belonging and challenge strangers to step gently outside of their comfort zones. However, they go about it in very different ways, offering up “belonging” to different “communities” through different means. In one instance, participants distance themselves from the masses, embolden themselves with insider knowledge, and can be found literally looking down from above upon pre and post concert proceedings unfolding. In the other, all participants mix and mingle, perhaps physically touching or assisting one another in creating the space of the dance, which is delineated by the participating bodies, crowded in and peering up from cushions on the floor. In *Smart Night*, the participants are led by confident, articulate, art “angels,” or “experts” who faithfully guide and shape their experience. In the other, the messiness, the slippages, the carefully controlled DIY environment is instantiated by the presence of a code-switching, food-schlepping comedic duo of dancers. The program at YBCA has been carefully shaped, researched, documented, think-tanked, restructured, evaluated, and developed in order to align with institutional (YBCA and EDA) protocol. Rein and Smith answer to no-one. They shape the CONCEPT series events based on their hunches - honed through years of professional

dancing and dance going. They continue the program as it is because they like what it is doing - for their company and for the community. When that changes, they say, they will move on. If they are inspired to alter some aspect of the offering before then (or if the James Howell studio closes, as it is threatening to do thanks to increased bay area property taxes), they will adjust accordingly.

Both of these ventures occupy vital terrain in the “arts ecosphere” of the bay area. They represent the further cultivation of “communities” - overlapping but not identical - around the kind of shared, artisanal, artistic experiences that adventurous San Francisco bay areas devour. They fulfill different versions of similar desires - desires for specialized access to dances and dancing bodies, and to the commensal exchange that this access engenders. They are actively reinventing the popular horizon of expectation around San Francisco bay area concert dance, reasserting - or perhaps redefining the parameters that shape - its sociocultural relevancy and its performative, material, potency.

Conclusion

The case studies that fill the previous four chapters query the capacity of institutional actors and individual dance artists to ‘engage’ audience members with and through the inclusion of food themes and materials in dance events. Throughout I have tried to articulate the ‘bay-areanness’ of these happenings, emphasizing their connection to particular San Francisco bay area histories, ideologies, ecology and ethos. I have examined various factors that enable and/or constrain the ways in which the choreographies carve out space, or ‘make a home’ for the development of tacit, situated knowledges, unexpected commensal exchanges, cross-viewing and doing, and a certain sort of volitional ‘stepping into presence’ (to borrow Lepecki’s phrase) that is requested of performers and audience members alike. These occurrences have the potentiality to change, however subtly, the ways in which we operate and understand ourselves and our relationships to others, while simultaneously expanding knowledge of contemporary dance and dance-making processes.

Most of these “choreographies” (and I use the extended meaning of this term to refer to the thoughtful organization of bodies in time and space that is not limited to actions that take place on a “stage”) are performances that, on their food-laden, largely woman-driven, and relatively “accessible” aesthetic surfaces get easily overlooked in the formulation of historical archives. As mentioned in the introduction, there exists a long history of artists interested in working with food, and a perhaps equally long history of

gastronomes who render their work with food works of art. However, there remains a gaping hole in contemporary scholarship around the specific intersection of food and secular Western dance performance. In theoretically grouping these particular food-oriented dance gatherings together here my aim has been to illustrate a spectrum of choreographic responses that make clear how food can be used in and as performance to open up discursive and experiential realms of possibility, specifically investigating them as strategies for “engaging” dance audiences.

These case studies do not represent a particular organized food-dance movement in the bay area. In fact, even as food-related choreographies seem to abound, there is no concerted systemic effort to link them one to another, or even to ensure that dance is included in the food/art/educational efforts of various organizations. For example, 18 Reasons, a non-profit community food space that hosts cooking classes, food discussions and more in the mission district has a rotating exhibition of food-related visual arts, and even events like vegetable printmaking, but no dance or movement work. Feast of Words at SOMArts is a monthly literary potluck program that celebrates food and writing around a theme inspired by the space’s current art exhibition. Many of its participants have commented on how the sharing of writing and homemade food has effectively created a sense of warmth and community, but there is no parallel program in existence that focuses on dance/movement.¹ Additionally, dance seems to have been left out, once

¹ Information on Feast of Words accessed online April 2, 2014 at <http://www.somarts.org/programs/feast-of-words-a-literary-potluck/>

again, of the 2014 version of New York’s premier food-art festival, the Umami Festival, as well as last year’s Eat Real Festival in Oakland which includes musical guests and other types of staged performance. Further examination of why these oversights occur merit consideration. Are the curators of these events unconsciously embodying a persistent psychological disconnect that insists upon formidable distance between dancing bodies and food? Is there a prevailing presumption that asking participants to move through their food-related ideas and experiences (or to witness others moving through food-related ideas and experiences) is somehow asking “too much”? Or are the presumptions simply that there are not enough people interested in such work to merit regular gatherings? Are potential dancing contributions seen as less “high” art, and therefore less artistically desirable, than their performance art counterparts? Or are they considered somehow too “ephemeral” in comparison to artists who have performed at food festivals like Alicia Rios, whose work is often durational, or the “Orphic Feasts” of Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch, who are self-proclaimed as the “world’s only sustenance artists”?²

It is likely that because food is not the singular, explicit focus of most, if not all, of the choreographers who incorporate food into their work it tends not to register with those writing about/attending/curating food events. Whatever biases or oversights have historically limited works lying at the nexus of food and dance theory and practice to rise

² Information on Alicia Rios’ work can be found at <http://www.alicia-rios.com/> accessed April 15, 2014; information about Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch is available at <http://www.orph.us/> accessed April, 15, 2014.

to prominence, my hope is that this study lays some theoretical groundwork for the impact such works can have, especially within the field of dance studies. The smorgasbord of food-oriented dance interventions analyzed here perform the pertinent work of promoting the viability and visibility of dance-as-art in Western society. Through experimental, sensorial, participatory means they embody new strategies for keeping dance relevant, for building and sustaining audience interest, for continually redefining and expanding the genre of contemporary dance. They address the current call for “audience engagement” by unpacking how these particular food-oriented efforts enable and constrain different sorts of audience participation, but also by querying some of the possible reasons why audience engagement is seen as a pressing concern at this particular sociocultural juncture.

In these four chapters I have illustrated how various ‘horizons of expectation’ with regards to contemporary dance shape its production and reception. Chapters one and two revealed how these expectations are historically constructed and are sometimes constrained by legacies of white privilege and elitist and misogynistic exclusion while chapters three and four focus more on the contributions of nostalgic or exoticizing imaginings constructed around the presumed accessibility of the practices of various “others.” Chapter one provided historical imaginings based upon real events in New York and San Francisco. These imaginings queried how shifting social ideologies between the mid nineteenth century and early twentieth century regarding public food consumption, “proper” bodily comportment, and decorous interpersonal interaction effected the

cultivation of “high” art aesthetics and determined who was and wasn’t deemed desirable audience members at a given performance site. Chapter two built upon these histories, focusing on food’s reintroduction in postmodern and contemporary choreographies like those of Anna Halprin in the 1960s and early twenty-first century offerings like *Keyhole Dances* by EmSpace Dance. In these instances food’s inclusion in the dances foregrounded synesthetic, process-oriented art making. Such work participates in feminist efforts that disrupt the stronghold of hegemony by offering alternative, situated avenues of knowledge production and informational/experiential exchange - in this instance substantiated through traditionally female-dominated domestic realms.

The case studies presented in chapters three and four all incorporate food specifically as a means of community building, each with dramatically different means and ends. Deep Waters Dance Theater’s grassroots approach promoted free, potluck community events and forged partnerships with local non-profits with overlapping interests to expand the scope and perspectives encompassed by their prospective audience members. The performance works were made in concert with the participatory efforts of the public who joined in for various events leading up to and following structured performances. Alternately, YBCA’s *Smart Night Out* events took a more overtly educational, institutional approach, using generous granted funds to carefully cultivate and document enriching experiences for a select few. These activities served as accessories to pre-determined choreographies by major touring companies. They helped build skills in critical dialogue and provided a forum for people to practice these skills

while sharing snacks and meals in structured settings. The events were meticulously documented and are being used as a template for other arts organizations to borrow from and build upon.

As these chapters have illustrated, the choreographic and programmatic interventions of Anna Halprin, EmSpace Dance, Deep Waters Dance Theater, YBCA, and RAWdance actively alter audience expectation around dance's potential to address and redress questions of live, experimental dance performance's relevancy in the twenty-first century. This has been accomplished through their creative tackling of concerns that are specific to the San Francisco bay area dance community, but also translatable beyond it. These concerns include but are not limited to sustainable and equitable food production and dissemination, escalating costs of living and producing dance, gentrification and displacement, respectful and mindful intercultural exchange, valuing women's work in and out of domestic settings, and building, sustaining, and engaging new and existing audience members for all kinds of dance. Addressing these concerns, this dissertation argues, simultaneously choreographs the affective, performative, and even political import of performance works examined herein.

I began this research hoping to find that food's inclusion in dance performance actually did the work of generating community, that it provided a much needed aura of conviviality that would enliven the experience of encountering dance and revivify a genre that is arguably disproportionately concerned with self-expression (generally of an authoritative choreographic figure) as compared to audience reception. This bias was

based in part upon my own choreographic interests in utilizing food themes and materials in performance to create works that felt accessible to broader audience bases. As a choreographer, I was deeply invested in audience members not just witnessing movement, but enjoying themselves as participants in a contemporary dance experience. My hope was that the messy materiality of food in dance performance was both unexpected and relatable, that our mess-making and memory excavating translated to movement and text that allowed others to, on some level, unleash and maybe even reinvent their own food histories and fantasies.

While this is certainly part of the work that food-oriented choreographies can perform, what I have found is that food can play many, and infinitely more complicated, roles in interactive, movement based performance spheres. I have discovered that rather than serving as the social salve they are sometimes intended to be, foodstuffs can be the vehicles through which artists foreground existing relational tensions that get otherwise subsumed and that, occasionally, the creative incorporation of foodstuffs into performance can propose new ways of being (a la Merleau-Ponty) ‘a being engaged in the world.’

This is accomplished both via the tangible and material properties of food - the ways in which, for example, the scent and sight of certain foods permeate our physical bodies and prompt salivation, hunger, or repugnance. It is also accomplished through the associative and mnemonic properties of food - the memories and fantasies born of foreign or familiar uses of food, and the semiotic import of hospitality felt through food sharing -

all of which resonate in our bodies. Operating in these many registers simultaneously, food's inclusion in dance proceedings represents a unique strategy for foregrounding questions of embodiment, performativity, and agency.

Inevitably this research has posed questions and avenues of exploration that can open out in many different directions. Each of the artists and institutions studies have continued to develop further methodologies and choreographies relevant to this study. For example, Halprin's process-oriented, exploratory work continues to thrive, with people coming from all over the world to take part in her classes, workshops, and performances. One prominent example of this lies in her Planetary Dance, an annual community healing ritual that she has led locally for over thirty years. The event is free and all are welcome and encouraged to join in the dance. There is a sunrise gathering to perform a simple dance score designed to heal community hurt around an issue that those participating have identified as important. The dance continues into the late morning in the form of a potluck gathering. This work has spawned similar Planetary Dances which have sprouted up in countries across the globe.

Halprin also recently participated in a new bay-area born social movement called 'Dance Anywhere' Day. Dance Anywhere, a "simultaneous worldwide public art performance" is a movement started nine years ago by bay area artist/performer Beth Fein.³ The idea is that once a year, at a given moment, people across the globe join together in dance. The dances can be elaborately choreographed or spontaneous, designed

³ Information about Dance Anywhere Day accessed April 2, 2014 at <http://www.danceanywhere.org>

to further artistic ideals that Halprin herself has always been interested in - the alignment of dance and daily living, and the belief in the artistry and value of dance as a *practice* and not just the means to a formal performance. For her part, Halprin and her students gathered and danced in Woodlands Market, the local grocery store. Halprin explained they would work with a basic score, dancing amongst the products and shoppers for a few minutes without getting in the way of the workers. “We all have to eat,” she said when I attended her class in March 2014, “and everyone in town shops at Woodlands, so it seems like just the place to get together for a dance.”

Further research could be done to detail how Halprin’s ongoing presence in this dance community has e/affected the work that is made and valued here. Additionally, a strong case could be made for how Halprin’s steady presence and current position as the 93-year old doyenne of bay area dance has enabled other women choreographers and dance presenters to thrive and rise to prominence in the community. Examples include but are not limited to choreographer Margaret Jenkins, whose company just celebrated its 40th anniversary, Brenda Way and KT Nelson whose Oberlin Dance Collective theater and school serves as a major hub for dance of all kind in the Mission district, Sara Shelton Mann and Krissy Keefer whose bold political works have been celebrated for decades, and Joanna Haigood whose site-specific explorations unveil the city’s hidden histories, specifically the triumphs and hardships associated with the area’s and nation’s racial and social inequality. The bay area dance community has no doubt been uniquely shaped by the work and presence of so many many prominent female choreographers,

and perhaps further research could solidly link this prominence to other oft-cited bay area dance attributes like a willingness to experiment, decreased pressure to “perform” for dance critics or to respond in line with or resistance to the legacies of renowned dance figures of the twentieth century.⁴

EmSpace Dance has continued to make works, both site specific pieces like *Keyhole Dances* and dance films like *Domestic Animals*. Choreographer Erin Mei-Ling Stuart has refined the company’s mission to focus on relationships and claims inspiration in the “intimate gestures of day-to-day life.” Her latest choreographic effort is tapping into crowdsourcing methodologies in a work that will contribute to the archiving of the San Francisco bay area’s rich and diverse dance history. As of April 2014, she is soliciting stories and memories from the public of memorable dance performance moments. Participants are urged to call into a hotline to leave a voicemail message recounting such memories, especially ones that were made in the bay area. These messages will serve as source material for a new dance work and the voices of contributors may end up in the show. In her embrace of concerns and methods that are inter-relational, technological, and grounded in the physicality of every dance experience, EmSpace Dance is a company that embodies the contemporary conundrums associated with digitized, mediatized lifestyles. Her work, and the work of others similarly engaged, purposefully propose alternatives to more proscriptive, commodified, individualized

⁴ These views and others about bay area dance can be found in the film entitled *Artists in Exile*, (Rapt Productions: 2000).

forms of relating to one's world - and more commercialized forms of dance entertainment. They exist alongside and intermingled with the various globalized, mediatized informational and experiential economies that comprise 'popular' culture. There is more work to be done examining the ways in which they merge and morph with, constitute and are constituted by these forms. Such work would delve further into tensions touched upon in chapter two, namely those that persist between "live" and "mediated" performance, between "physical" and "virtual" networks of interconnectivity, even between "imagined" and "felt" stimuli and the ways in which all of these act upon our bodies.

As mentioned in chapter three, Deep Waters Dance Theater's Amara Tabor-Smith has continued to perform excerpts of her *Our Daily Bread* in various settings. At the time of this study, the work that her company and CounterPULSE undertook with the local housing developments was just in its initial phases. Further research could analyze the longer-term effects of the artists' interactions with their neighbors. Investigation into how hands-on, physical learning about issues of "good" food production and consumption effected the outlook and practices of the youth involved in *From Seeds to Sprouts* could be used to develop curriculum and shape program initiatives in schools and community centers that have already become popular through First Lady Michelle Obama's national Let's Move campaign. Let's Move aims to fight childhood obesity and increase awareness about issues of food security, sustainability, and accessibility through food education and physical activity. Analysis and extended study of dance workshops and

performances that promote healthy food and lifestyle choices could contribute significantly to such a movement.

YBCA continues to run and refine their *Smart Night Out* program, examined in chapter four. They are building their YBCA:You membership and actively helping interested parties grow in their understanding and exposure to the contemporary arts. They were recently granted new funds from the James Irvine Foundation's New California Arts Fund to further their community engagement programming that will "move community engagement into the core of their mission." These funds require the organization to "expand opportunities for a greater diversity of Californians to encounter art, expand and deepen the ways Californians experience the arts and to provide arts experiences outside the walls of traditional arts spaces."⁵ According to Potter, YBCA staff will spend much of the spring of 2014 brainstorming how to further develop community-oriented programming that will expand upon YBCA's current offerings, perhaps in some of the ways this dissertation proposes.

Additionally, Dance/USA's Engaging Dance Audiences Initiative is now in its second round and the *Smart Night* program that YBCA developed is being tried on and reconfigured to fit the needs of Portland, Oregon's Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Their version of the program, overseen by artistic director Angela Mattox (who is the former YBCA performance curator), is called *Field Guide*, and it is similarly, but not

⁵ Information about the new grant monies obtained through a YBCA press release, dated January 8, 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014 and available at http://www.ybca.org/sites/default/files/press/201401_irvine_grant_press_release.pdf

identically structured. Wesleyan University is also piloting a model with their *Dine/Dance/Discover* program, meant to accompany their Breaking Ground Dance series events.⁶ I am curious about whether food-sharing gatherings will remain a component of the program and its future offshoots, and if they do, how food related activities and concerns might be more fully integrated into the program offerings. Additionally, further analysis of the research gathered by Dance/USA over the course of the two rounds will undoubtedly alter and expand working understanding of “audience engagement.”

RAWdance’s CONCEPT Series continues and has spurred other similar showcases in the area. As mentioned in chapter four choreographer Ben Levy hosts an in-process dance showcase called The Salon, featuring artists from the area who have been selected from a pool of applicants. The Salon often also includes music from a live DJ and rounds out the evening with a dance party following the performances. This atmosphere creates a lively exchange, albeit one that differs from RAWdance’s. The audience it attracts is of a somewhat younger and more homogenous demographic, including many dancers. Choreographer Mary Armentrout began her own version of a salon called the Milkbar Salon, with shows that have happened a few times a year for the past several years. The Milkbar Collective, spearheaded by Armentrout and collaborators from a variety of disciplines, produces the shows in their rehearsal/performance space which lies inside the old Sunshine Biscuit factory in an industrial part of East Oakland.

⁶ Further information and links accessed April 10, 2014 and available at <http://www.danceusa.org/grantees>

The neighborhood is far from trendy and the venue difficult to find, which effectively creates an atmosphere of bohemian intrigue and discovery for those who manage to make their way there. By the door there sits a bucket of beers for the taking and Armentrout keeps a table of “silly snacks” stocked so that everyone may partake. There is no curtain, very little lighting, and mismatched furniture (including an old bed) for patrons to sit on. The atmosphere is cozy, and people in attendance respond accordingly, daring to mingle with their neighbors before, during, and after the show. Milkbar has recently expanded its offerings by teaming up with two other dance presenting venues in the east bay, The Subterranean Arthouse in Berkeley, and Temescal Arts Center in Oakland. They are “touring” a curated performance one time to each venue over the course of a weekend instead of offering but one show, as was previously done with the Milkbar Salon. Such local “touring” evidences creative solutions to the ever-present struggle for small arts venues to make themselves visible to a larger audience pool and represents a way for these small arts presenters to make meager resources extend further.

These various dance offerings combine with so many more innovative programs and performances by San Francisco bay area artists and organizations, together yielding a rich and varied dance community that begs for greater scholarly inquiry. Throughout the dissertation, and especially in chapters three and four, I have alluded to the possibilities that could arise from greater collaboration between Western dance artists and presenters and dancer/choreographers from traditions where dance is more deeply enmeshed with ritual food sharing, community gathering, and other quotidian practices. The San

Francisco bay area is home to many indigenous peoples who strive to maintain dance and food cultural traditions that have been threatened by displacement and political demonization. Many of them participate in local pow-wows (one is being hosted in April 2014 by Mills College) and gather to dance, dine, and garden together through organizations like Oakland's Intertribal Friendship House. The bay area also represents a diverse immigrant population, and has become home to people who bring with them many different dance and food traditions from around the globe. In many of these cultural traditions dance is created, shared, developed, and reflected upon in ways that deemphasize capitalistic tendencies that structure dance performances as commodities that can be bought, sold, and critiqued. Instead, they emphasize the value of co-creation, and of process-based, experiential learning - and in doing so they generate the participatory economies that the granting institutions conducting research around audience engagement suggest is integral to contemporary dance performance's survival in the twenty-first century.

My own knowledge of these practices remains limited, but as contemporary dance artists continue to seek ways of 'engaging' or reconfiguring relationships with audiences (or as in the case of YBCA of explicitly diversifying and expanding the audience base reached via programming) I think that perhaps the most pertinent avenue of exploration for the continuation of this research lies in exploring how to make contact, develop relationships, and provide and grow the resources necessary to enable collaborations between non-Western and Western dance practitioners to thrive. I wonder at the effects of

deliberately including such collaborations - whether in the form of dance workshops and intensives, dialogues, potlucks, or other creative performative ventures in the bay area's annual Ethnic Dance festival, CounterPULSE's Dancing Diaspora festival, the West Wave Dance festival, the ever-growing Bay Area Celebrates National Dance Week events, or as part of monthly offerings to places ranging from Berkeley's La Pena and San Francisco's SOMArts to YBCA and ODC Theater. Such collaborations, if done mindfully, would undoubtedly benefit all those involved - effectively strengthening the bay area dance community and providing a template for similar collaborative efforts elsewhere.

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