

Dance Studies Association: Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies

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Dancing in the Aftermath of Anti-Asian Violence

An Introduction in Three Parts

SanSan Kwan and Yutian Wong

Introduction: Part I

By SanSan Kwan and Yutian Wong

Antoinette Solis was assaulted because she is Asian.

Hua Zhen Lin was assaulted because he is Asian.

Noriko Nasu was assaulted because she is Asian.

Noel Quintana was assaulted because he is Asian.

Vilma Kari was assaulted because she is Asian.

Denny Kim was assaulted because he is Asian.

Kathy Duong's mother was assaulted because she is Asian.

Vincent Chin was murdered because he was Asian.

GuiYing Ma was murdered because she was Asian.

Yao Pan Ma was murdered because he was Asian.

Ee Lee was murdered because she was Asian.

Vicha Ratanapakdee was murdered because he was Asian.

Delaina Ashley Yaun and Paul Andre Michels were murdered because they were in a spa outside of Atlanta, Georgia, where Asian women were working. Xiao Jie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha

Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue were murdered because they were Asian women working at a spa.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a correspondingly virulent spate of anti-Asian sentiment in the West, particularly in the United States. Fueled by xenophobia and racism, attacks on Asians in North America, the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand have increased at alarming rates, but the convergence of anti-Chinese rhetoric, anti-science conspiracy theories, police violence, the lack of nationalized healthcare, and the lack of will to pass or enforce gun control laws in the United States has translated into a moment in which Asian life, like that of other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) life in the United States, is once again deemed disposable. The contours of this hatred—and the violence through which it is expressed—are far from new. The mass shooting at three spas in Atlanta, Georgia, on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, was only one of the most horrific of a string of daily incidents that the Asian diasporic community has endured.

Anti-Asian violence in the United States has existed for hundreds of years; and it is the result of a long history of racist immigration laws, the legacy of empire building, and militarism. The year 2022 marks the 140th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the first race-based immigration law in the United States. It provided the blueprint for subsequent anti-immigration policies, as well as current-day anti-Asian rhetoric. The COVID-19 pandemic has merely re-invoked nineteenth- and twentieth-century formations of Asian bodies as vectors of disease, contamination, and infiltration.

We offer this issue of *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies* in response to the anti-Asian violence that existed well before and has continued well after the murder of those eight people in Atlanta, Georgia; well after the murderer blamed his victims for his actions; and well after the captain in the Cherokee County's Sheriff's Office described the murderer as having "a really bad day." This issue of *Conversations* is a forum for scholars, artists, and organizers living in Asian America to reflect on working, teaching, dancing, or surviving

amidst anti-Asian prejudice and violence. The entries range across rants, poetry, songs, videos, essays linking personal history to scholarship, artist statements, and research in Asian and Asian American dance.

The introduction to this issue is written in three parts—the first part collaboratively, and the second and third parts by the two co-editors individually. This structure serves to acknowledge that “Asian America” is a term and a notion borne out of political necessity for pan-Asian coalition in the face of crisis, but this term can also gloss over differences by simplistically imagining Asian America as singular and monolithic. Like the contributors, the two guest co-editors come to this moment of dance studies in the aftermath of anti-Asian violence with different experiences and perspectives that shape our intellectual and artistic investments in dance and dance studies. The stories told by the contributors in this issue of *Conversations* make clear that the decolonization of dance studies must include the multiplicity of the Asian diasporic experience.

Introduction: Part II

By Yutian Wong

“This is not okay”

Right now, the biggest pop music/dance act on planet Earth is BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan), a seven-member group of quintuple threats (actors/dancers/singers/models/cultural diplomats) from South Korea, who are the subject of countless TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter edits celebrating the liquescence of their body rolls, the chaos of their onstage energy, the wackiness of their reality television personae, and their overall ability to seduce millions of people down what has become affectionately known as the BTS rabbit hole. On March 16, 2021, just two days after BTS closed down the Grammy

Awards ceremony with a pre-recorded live streamed performance of their chart-topping English-language disco-inflected bop “Dynamite,” a 22-year-old white man walked into three different spas outside of Atlanta, Georgia, and killed eight people, six of whom were Asian women. Four of the six Asian women were Korean immigrants.

In response to the murders, BTS posted a letter written in Korean and English on their twitter account [@BTS_twt](#) with the hashtag #StopAsianHate. With a global fan base (officially known as ARMY) of over 42 million followers on just one of several online platforms used by the band and their company Big Hit Entertainment (now HYBE), BTS are the most visible Asian celebrities in the world. Their message was retweeted 1 million times, making the post the most retweeted message of 2021. In their letter, BTS made references to the discrimination they have faced as Asians: “we have endured expletives without reason and were mocked for the way we look. We were even asked why Asians spoke English.” The letter also included a disclaimer acknowledging that their own experiences of racism pale in comparison to physical assault and murder, but the subtext suggests that they know exactly what the verbalized sentiments are that often precede, accompany, or enable actual physical violence.

The very ordinariness of what BTS shared—“enduring expletives without reason,” “being mocked for the way we look,” and “asked why Asians spoke English”—speaks to the banality of how anti-Asian sentiment forms the day-to-day experience of being Asian in the West. Viewed as a disruption to the Western and particularly American music industry, the more visible BTS becomes, the more virulent the racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and misogyny are in response to their Asianness. Jokes abound comparing BTS to COVID-19 or referring to them as girls or gay Chinese boys.

BTS’s recounting of their experiences with anti-Asian discrimination is in some ways unremarkable. Anti-Asian immigration laws, Alien land laws, colonization, and a series of US American wars in Asia (including East, Southeast, and West Asia) have cemented a legacy in which 60 percent of the world’s population is perceived as passive,

weak, compliant, and inconsequential. Whether it comes in the form of colonial rule and military occupation, or children, conditioned by the history of said rule and occupation, hurling racial epithets on the playground, the effect is a spectrum of normalized violence such that being Asian means that a violent death is an option. It is possible to have someone verbally abuse you and your family at a restaurant, a park, or a hiking trail just as it is possible to be assaulted while standing at a bus stop, beaten in front of a doorway, shot to death at work, or pushed in front of a train.

After the murders in Atlanta, I found myself writing a statement for my department. I didn't ask anyone for feedback. I just wrote it and sent it to my colleagues and said, "I am writing this, if you want to post it on our department's social media sites, I can change the 'I' to a 'We'." Not in the mood to write by committee, I made the conscious choice not to solicit feedback about my statement on the murders in Atlanta after the experience of writing by committee about the murder of George Floyd. In that process I found myself in a meeting going back and forth over word choice. When the discussion started to resemble something that happens in a very dry policy-writing committee meeting, I started to feel uncomfortable and finally said something to the effect that wordsmithing does not do the actual work of anti-racism. Later, in conversation with my colleague ArVejon Jones, his words, "why can't people just say it's not okay to kill Black people and leave it at that?" stayed with me.

What is the purpose of a statement? It is too easy to be flippant and dismissive and say "performative politics." While many people were understandably too traumatized to organize their thoughts about the escalation of violence that resulted in a mass murder, I found that the act of trying to find the precise words to name the violence prevented me from crawling deeper into the pandemic cave I was already living in. Perhaps it was a rant, and my statement was written for myself. What would I want someone like me, who isn't me, write for me to read? Charmaine Chua ended up publishing my statement on anti-Asian violence on a [forum](#) with other statements written by Asian

American academics working across different disciplines. Some were chock-full of historical facts and figures, others dense with theory and links to resources, and there were those palpable with grief and exhaustion. Read as a whole they reflected the different ways that people were responding in the moment to the same event and served as a reminder of just how far-reaching anti-Asian violence is—so far that it makes perfect sense for critiques of settler colonialism to sit alongside critiques of racism in the wellness industry.

This issue of *Conversations* emerged after a series of events that took place in response to the Dance Studies Association's (DSA's) public statement on anti-Asian violence which, at the time, I found worse than not posting anything at all. Truth be told, I probably would not have noticed if DSA had not written a statement. Such is the reality of being Asian American that one has no expectations that anyone cares about anti-Asian violence. In that original post, DSA stated that it supported the statement on anti-Asian violence written by another academic organization . . .

Okay . . . that's a little weird . . . but I guess it's okay? . . . if the other organization wrote a good statement? . . .

But the post did not just end with a statement of solidarity, sympathy, or empathy. What followed was a long explanation about the DSA Board's bylaws and policies, and how the Board could not write its own statement until they followed a specific process and timeline. I think this is when I lost it. The post was ultimately about DSA's administrative procedures and not about the horrific murders. And so I wrote to the DSA Board to say this is not okay. What emerged was a new statement and a series of action items that included making space for an affinity group for Asian and Asian American-identified faculty at the 2021 DSA annual meeting and a proposal for what has now become this issue of *Conversations* on anti-Asian violence.

In recognition that not all Asian and Asian American-identified DSA members do research on Asian/Asian American topics, SanSan Kwan and I organized a meeting for an affinity group and made it clear that the group was a space for Asian/Asian American-identified DSA

members and not necessarily about Asian/Asian American research topics. About 20 minutes before the meeting started, I received an email from a dance scholar wanting to confirm that the affinity group was only for Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI)-identified people and if that was the case, should they (as a white person) create a "White 'affinity' group for those involved in AAPI research, practice, teaching." I did not respond to the message because academia and area studies in particular have always been by default White affinity groups. Created during the Cold War in the name of national security, Department of Education Title VI funded the language training programs that would become the area studies departments (Asian studies, etc.) charged with producing US American scholarship about Asia, Latin America, and Africa with the goal of cultivating Asian, Latin American, and African support for American interests and institutions. I was not in teaching mode, and at that moment I did not want to explain why it was offensive to ask a non-white person if it is okay to start a White affinity group. I did not want to have to explain how in the day-to-day operations of my job my not showing up to a meeting means there is a good chance any meeting will default to White "affinity" group.

This is a three-part introduction because in our discussions as editors, SanSan and I agreed that we come to the table with different perspectives on what decolonization is and decided that our differences better reflect the act of decolonizing dance studies. If colonization is about holding everyone to a single set of aesthetics and values, decolonization involves the struggle over what will replace that single vision. Our readership is diverse. Some will recognize themselves in the contributions for different reasons. Others will say that this issue is overly focused and irrelevant to their personal or professional selves. Still others will say that this issue is overly focused and should have included x, y, and z. To this I will say, make another dance, write another essay/book/rant, compose another song, pen another poem, stage another action, donate more money, or scream again into the void from the edge of a cliff or canyon because any one issue of *Conversations* will not do all the work of decolonizing dance studies.

Decolonization requires continuous disruption to the existing order because disruption is an ongoing process and what needs to be disrupted is a moving target. If, in the early 2000s, decolonizing dance studies meant defending myself from an aggressive white person physically blocking a doorway until I would agree (I didn't) that it was okay to refer to Asian people as orientals, the goals for decolonization now include white people recognizing when a situation is not about *you*—meaning, don't send a non-white person an email before a meeting scheduled in response to a series of hate crimes asking if it is okay to start a White affinity group because the answer at that moment is “. . . I . . . don't . . . care . . . because the meeting about to start in 20 minutes is not about *you*.” Both incidents are acts of colonization. The first is an example of old-school racism and the desire to continue using colonial language to refer to Asian people. Old-school racism is believable as a relic of a past time if one buys into the narrative of civilizational progress even though it wasn't okay to call an Asian person oriental in the early 2000s, just as it wasn't okay to call an Asian person oriental in the 1980s, or even in the 1960s once Asian people in the United States decided to use the term “Asian American.” The second is an example of re-centering whiteness by using presumptive innocence to double down on whiteness (colonization) as default. Decolonization requires understanding how much space whiteness takes up by default and the harm one causes by insisting on occupying even more space by continuously encroaching on someone else's emotional, mental, and intellectual terrain.

Someone else might differ in opinion and say that the compassionate thing to do would have been to talk to the person and explain how their actions are hurtful. And this is why one person alone cannot do the work of decolonization. There is no one way to decolonize because colonization itself is multifaceted. Colonization is flexible and adaptable—able and willing to come up with all kinds of nuanced reasoning to maintain form. Decolonization is by nature formless because

we have not achieved it, so we can only experience it as a striving marked with obvious failures. Failure when one realizes that the Title IX office is mostly concerned with not being sued. Failure when one realizes that all the ombudsman is charged with doing is listening to a complaint and taking notes. Failure when one realizes that the term “decolonization” has become the new multiculturalism—defanged in its abstraction. Failure when one realizes that one is succumbing to demoralization—something that colonization finds useful. Success is harder to see because it is often a low bar.

Value different definitions of mastery—low bar.

Include different bodies/voices—lower bar.

Don’t be racist—really low bar.

Don’t verbally abuse, physically assault, or murder Asian people—really really low bar.

I started this section of the introduction with a paragraph on BTS to disabuse the idea that greater representation, recognition, or visibility will solve anti-Asian violence. BTS has pretty much won every major accolade and are a paragon of mainstream popular culture as pop stars, reality television stars, fashion models, and brand ambassadors who sell everything from sneakers to fast food and air purifiers. Their faces are plastered on mugs, mouse pads, key chains, tote bags, tee shirts, and advertising billboards, yet the growth of their popularity in the United States has happened alongside an escalation of anti-Asian violence. There is that branch of Asian American studies and even dance studies that believes representation in film, television, and, by extension, the performing arts is key to changing perceptions of and thus the treatment of Asian Americans in their everyday lives. I used to believe this too and once wrote a whole book about it. So, what are we left with when it becomes clear that representation on the mass scale that BTS can inhabit, a scale that includes meeting with US President Joe Biden at the White House on the last day of Asian American

and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, has no bearing on anti-Asian violence?

In March 2021, I called out the dead—Pierre Loti, John Luther Long, Giacomo Puccini—dead white men. People keep restaging their work even though the dead themselves cannot write new work. I called them out—these dead men—for staging Asian female death as the natural state of being—but it is people, alive people, here people, now people, who keep making the decision to remake *Madame Butterfly* in the image of *Miss Saigon*. And someone called me out, sent me an email, and told me that part of my interpretation was wrong. And isn't that what this intellectual life is about? We write. We put things out into the world. Usually, we don't hear back unless someone is so moved to act upon their response.

As much as my inner fangirl enjoys the disciplined unison of a BTS dance break in which the members slide into recognizable choreography, I much prefer the cacophony and dissonance of a BTS encore where the members are crawling and vibing their way through the detritus of confetti bombs, streamers, and empty water bottles. These artifacts of impermanence, frenzy, and the discarded are a reminder that no matter how hard you work to stage a decolonial encounter (how else to describe what happened after the 2022 BTS concert in Las Vegas, in which BIPOC ARMY, Queer ARMY, and all ages ARMY assembled as strangers to disrupt the settler-colonial logic of a desert city that should not exist by descending upon stolen indigenous land to temporarily transform an underpass between two colossal monuments of desperation, terror, and indifference—one in the shape of a fake Egyptian tomb—into spontaneous outbreaks of life-affirming joy marked with gift giving and euphoric dancing), it is but a momentary event requiring continual work and effort to reproduce anew each instance of a decolonial existence.

The contributions in this issue of *Conversations* represent but a fraction of the responses, actions, and calls-to-action made in response to anti-Asian violence. The writing, performances, songs, dialogues, and

photographs mark attempts to create, capture, or remember a series of moments that offer glimpses of a decolonial existence.

Introduction: Part III

By *SanSan Kwan*

“Wrong Asian!”

Wrong Asian!

Not all Asians look alike. Our desire to separate the membership of the DSA Asian and Asian Diasporic Dance Studies Working Group from that of the DSA AAPI Affinity Group—and, in fact, our insistence that there be an affinity group for us at all—is in critical response to the structural ways in which our bodies are so often conflated with our research, our artistry with our ethnic identity, and the form of our politics with our race, without consideration for the heterogeneity of our lived experiences.

When I sit on a graduate admissions committee and we admit three Chinese diasporic students, it is not because (as a colleague claimed) I am “collecting advisees,” and, at the same time, it is also true that I am gratified to mentor these students. While it is reductive to presume that our research will align because of our ethnicity (it doesn’t, by the way), it is also not unreasonable to imagine that our shared cultural backgrounds might form the basis for connection and commiseration in the face of white-dominated academia. One step toward decolonizing dance studies involves asking that BIPOC artists and scholars be seen on our own terms, however complex.

When I am one of two Asian dancers in an ensemble, the other one male-identified, and the director rejects an auditioning Asian dancer because “he already has two” (a complete pair!), I am reminded that the spots for us are demarcated and delimited.

In response, this issue takes seriously the title of this publication. It is a multivocal *conversation*. And it is a messy one. Yutian and I do not do the work of decolonization in the same ways, and I think this difference has made our co-editing that much more productive in its tensions. It was not without an initial bit of discomfort on my part that we began to review some of the material that appears in this collection. But I firmly defend all of the contributions in our volume. Yutian reminds me that decolonizing is not supposed to be comfortable. I remind myself that I wrote a book on collaboration and love. So here I am stepping up into the messiness. If we are going to decolonize, we need to deploy a host of approaches. We defend multiplicity because we contend that there should be more than two spots for us in the ensemble. There are many ways to be Asian, to show up, to do the work, to decolonize. Some want to identify particular people and specific incidents because they are exasperated by the lack of progress toward anti-racism and argue that it is not enough to abstract white supremacy to its institutions. Others want to call in rather than call out. Some write poetry, some write songs. Some rant, some prefer to partner dance.

maura nguyễn donohue chooses to rant (she tells me that dispositionally she has no choice, but, make no mistake, she also hides under her covers after every outburst), while Mana Hayakawa celebrates the Japanese American World War II incarcerated whose forms of resistance were exceedingly subtle. Joyce Lu, Chuyun Oh, and Michael Sakamoto recount painful experiences of racism in the academy and in the dance community, possibly risking reaction. Meanwhile, Crystal Song considers the value of serving as the "follow" in ballroom dance and asks whether investment in uncompromised ideas of agency or resistance is even useful. Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw, Hye-Won Hwang, and Fangfei Miao contribute their academic scholarship as a form of decentering whiteness in dance studies. Gerald Casel, Li Chiao-Ping, Tiffany Lytle, Dahlia Nayar, and Johnny Huy Nguyen offer their creative work (in the form

of poetry, music, and choreography) as a way to decolonize. Rosemary Candelario, Al Evangelista, grace shinhae jun and MiRi Park, and J. Lorenzo Perillo and Kellee E. Warren reflect on their work as artists/scholars/teachers/humans and the ways in which this has intertwined with their commitments to allyship and intervention. The diversity of offerings in this collection represents a diversity of ways to do anti-racist work. The goal, though, is a shared one.

Stuart Hall talks about “a politics without guarantees.” By that he means that the danger in essentializing race is driven not only by racist thinking but also by a strain of liberal thought that seeks to rely upon identity as a guarantee for politics (and aesthetics). Rather than politics as “cure,” he argues, it is important to embrace debate:

So I want blacks to enter into what I think they’ve been reserved in doing, which is, you know the hard graft of having arguments with their own fellows, men and women who are black, about it. And that’s the difficult thing because in a way you have to mobilize effectively, you can’t depend on just the race to take you to your political objective.

(Hall and Jhally)

And that’s why we need affinity groups, so that we can argue safely among ourselves *and also* collectivize. And it’s why we need special journal issues, too. Because we need to take up more spaces and make room for all of our varied and even contentious voices.

We opened this introduction by naming some of the Asian Americans who have been victims of anti-Asian violence. We close this introduction by honoring some of the Asian and Asian American dance pioneers who have passed recently:

Hsueh-Tung Chen (1947–2022)

Nai-Ni Chen (1959–2021)

Yuriko Kikuchi (1920–2022)

Author Biographies

SanSan Kwan is professor and chair in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley. Her recent book, *Love Dances: Loss and Mourning in Intercultural Collaboration* (Oxford UP, 2021), is winner of the 2022 de la Torre Bueno© Award. She is also the author of *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford UP, 2013) and co-editor, with Kenneth Speirs, of *Mixing It Up: Multiracial Subjects* (University of Texas Press, 2004). Her article on cartographies of race and the Chop Suey circuit, a group of Asian American cabaret entertainers who toured the nation during the World War II era, is published in *TDR*. Her article, "When is Contemporary Dance," on contended understandings of the term "contemporary" across dance genres and communities, is in the December 2017 issue of *Dance Research Journal*. Additional articles can be found in *Representations*, *Performance Research*, and other journals and anthologies. Kwan remains active as a professional dancer and has danced with H.T. Chen and maura nguyễn donohue, among others. She is currently performing with Lenora Lee Dance.

Yutian Wong is professor of dance studies in the School of Theatre & Dance at San Francisco State University. She is the author of *Choreographing Asian America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2010), editor of *Contemporary Directions in Asian American Dance* (University of Wisconsin, 2016), and co-editor with Jens Richard Giersdorf of *The Routledge Studies Dance Reader, 3rd Edition* (Routledge, 2019). Her other publications include essays in *Discourses in Dance*, *Dance Research Journal*, *Short Film Studies*; chapters in *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan Leigh Foster; *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*, edited by Thomas DeFrantz and Philippa Rothfield; *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, edited by Sherrill Dodds; and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature and Culture*, edited by Josephine Lee. Her current research projects include a series of essays on dance and sincerity and co-editing

Bangtan Remixed: The Critical BTS Reader (under contract Duke University Press) with a seven-member editorial collective of researchers, writers, and artists comprising Patty Ahn, Michelle Cho, Vernadette Gonzalez, Rani Neutill, and Mimi Thi Nguyen.

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Violences, Aftermaths, and Family, or How to Make Dances in This Body?¹

Rosemary Candelario

No body ever simply appears on stage. Bodies are, rather, made to appear in performance, rendered visible as the encoded tissues interwoven by systems of ideological representation that mediate the anxieties and interests at play in specific historical moments.

(Rouse 1997, iv)

This essay—part scholarly, part biographical, part elegy—intertwines histories of anti-Filipino and anti-Asian violence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with my family history and my own history of dancing and dance scholarship to examine multiple and ongoing aftermaths and their corporeal and collective reverberations. The essay takes as touchpoints moments of my family history across generations: the anti-Filipino riots in California and the taxi dance hall scene in Los Angeles (LA) in 1930 when my grandfather and his brother lived in Historic Filipinotown; an incident where my father was chased on foot by white men in a truck in rural Minnesota in the 1980s; and reaction by my cousin's daughter to the Atlanta murders in 2021 on social media. Between these moments of fraught racialized embodiment, I weave my own dancing, running, and dance scholarship, which can be traced to the first dance concert I saw as a young child, a tour of the Filipino national dance company Bayanihan. I use the essay to interrogate my

1. My title consciously references David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

responsibilities as a white-passing mixed-race inheritor of these histories and as a dancer scholar living in and with these aftermaths.

March 16, 2021, Atlanta, Georgia

The impetus for this essay, as for this issue, was the murder of six Asian women by a white gunman at Atlanta spas on March 16, 2021. Although some attention had been paid to anti-Asian violence in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the murders made visible to the broader public the particular brand of ongoing anti-Asian racism that is part and parcel of Asian American racial formation and indeed the formation of the United States as a nation.² As Karen Shimakawa has shown, the abjection of Asian Americans is both a process and condition of American national identity formation in which Asian Americans are both “constituent element *and* radical other” (2002, 3, emphasis in original). In other words, “America” is defined through the (ongoing) exclusion of Asian (Americans) who thus constitute a necessary part of that same identity. For Filipinx³ Americans, Lucy Burns clarifies that it is a process more specifically of “visibility and misrecognition” (2013, 4).

This all came to the fore for me as I was distraught-scrolling Facebook in the wake of the shootings, searching for information or answers or solace. A post by my cousin’s daughter, my first cousin once removed, stood out to me. (Digital research methods fail: I neglected to screenshot the post, and now I can’t find it.) As I remember it, the post passionately decried the murders, made it clear to her friends that anti-Asian racism is not OK, and reminded them that she is Filipinx, even if they don’t see

2. Stop AAPI Hate began tracking self-reported hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islander persons on March 19, 2021 and have released a National Report of statistics and policy recommendations (Aggie J. Yellow Horse, Russell Jeung, and Ronae Matriano, *Stop AAPI Hate National Report*. 2022. Published by AAPI Equity Alliance, Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and San Francisco State University, accessed April 27, 2022, Accessed April 27, 2022, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/22-SAH-NationalReport-3.1.22-v9.pdf>).

3. In this essay I use “Filipinx” when writing about contemporary people and times and “Filipino” when referring to historical events and people.

her white-passing body as such. Quite frankly, I don't know her well, and I was surprised though pleased with her public claiming of her Filipinx heritage. Her pairing of visibility, violence, and misrecognition, moreover, resonated for me across particular moments of our family history and forced me to confront how these have played out over the five generations that the Candelario family has been in the United States.

November 11, 1973, Chicago, Illinois

The University Musical Society
of
The University of Michigan
Presents

BAYANIHAN
PHILIPPINE DANCE COMPANY
LUCRECIA REYES URTULA *Choreographer and Dance Director*
LUCRECIA R. KASILAG *Musical Director*

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, OCTOBER 14, 1973, AT 3:00
POWER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

DANCERS

LOLITA ADEA MELANIE BERNARDEZ FLORINA CAPISTRANO MARY JOAN FAJARDO
MARY ANNE GARCIA AMY ROSE LIM VICTORIA LIM PATRICIA LIM
ZENaida LOPEZ MARIA THERESA MATEO NERISSA MONTECILLO SARAH SANTIAGO
CARMENCITA SANTOS ORLANDO M. BARTOLOME ROMEO GO LEONCIO GRAJO III
EARL M. JANAIRO EDGARDO LUALHATI TOMAS MATIAS ELY D. ROGADO
FERNANDO JOSE SISON III RODOLFO SORIANO DENNIS Y. TAN GLICERIO TECSON
ROBERTO TONGKO JOSE M. YELO PURIFICACION YUHICO

VOCALIST
LEILA ATIENZA

RONDALLA
ROSA PUERTOLLANO

PATROCINIO ALCANTARA CARMELITO ARDIENTE REYNALDO ARDIENTE
FIBEL HULIGANGA DALMACIO URTULA III ANTANCIYO YCO

Monitor Records

Third Program Third Annual Choice Series, Power Center Complete Programs 3835

Front Page of Bayanihan Program, October 14, 1973. Rights held by the University Musical Society under a Creative Commons attribution license.

Audio clip: 2017 UCLA Pilipino Culture Night, Filipino Tinikling performance. For the full audio, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

One of my PhD students recently emailed me, “Any thoughts about how to turn past lived experience into a usable data form? [I’m] curious about what to do with phenomena of memory and how to demonstrate rigor and legitimacy.”⁴ I wish I’d had a better answer to give her because suddenly I’m in the position of trying to do exactly that. How do I, as a dance scholar, write about the first live dance performance I ever saw, Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company at Chicago’s Auditorium Theater,⁵ when I was 3 years old?

I could write from imagination and memory. In general, I have very clear memories from my childhood. I remember I couldn’t see from my seat, so I stood, the seat flipped up behind me. I can feel my childhood excitement as the rhythms of the tinikling and the castanets and the vibrations of the gongs coursed through my body. (My grandfather, Guadencio Donald Candelario, gave me a pair of castanets, but I don’t know if it was before or after I saw Bayanihan.) I imagine I was wowed by the fans and the umbrellas and the beautiful dresses and the swords. When I try to re-enter that child’s body, I feel my heart bursting with visual and kinesthetic and aural overload, all too big for that small chest. I started dance classes the next fall, but never trained in Philippine dance.

I could also write from the archives. I found the date and theater from an internet search, knowing that I saw the performance when we lived in Chicagoland between 1972 and 1974. I then located the program from the University of Michigan University Musical Society stop of the 1973 tour in the Ann Arbor District Libraries online archives, which provides full details of the dancers’ names and the five suites performed (*Highland Tribal*, *Ecos de la Ermita*, *Mindanao Tapestry*, *Halinhihan: Change and Interchange*, and *Bayanihan*). Anna Kisselgoff’s review of the same tour in the *New York Times* singles out the *Halinhihan* (misspelled as “Halinhihan”) suite and “Singkil” from the *Mindanao Tapestry* as particular

4. Personal communication, Julie Fox, April 22, 2022.

5. List of Shows at the Auditorium Theatre <https://www.auditoriumtheatre.org/about-us/list-of-shows/>

highlights of the way the company, lacking "a great classical tradition behind it," translates "folk customs and social dances . . . from meadow and drawing room to stage with appeal and simplicity" (1973, 18). Her description of the entertainment value of these dances, whether "tribal," "Moslem," or "Spanish," separate from any consideration of the colonial and neocolonial relationship of the United States to the Philippines, is an archive, too, of the ways that "ethnic dance" was considered utterly separate from geopolitics, immigration, or racialization.

Or I could write a literature review of Bayanihan. As a dance scholar, I've since read all of the critiques of Bayanihan as a kind of postcolonial nation-building project based on the appropriation of indigenous (and particularly Muslim minority) forms (see, for example, Gaerlan 1999). And I know the colonial structures on which "Philippine" folk dance was collected and built (Perillo 2017). But what does critique mean to a 3-year-old? I felt myself reflected onstage, excited by these representations that felt both totally new and yet deeply familiar in that Midwestern theater.

1930, Los Angeles, California

NAME OF HOUSEHOLD		NAME	RELATIONSHIP	DATE OF BIRTH	SEX	AGE	RACE	PLACE OF BIRTH	EDUCATION	INDUSTRY AND OCCUPATION	PROPERTY	VEHICLE	REMARKS
21	Miller, George	George	Head	1870	M	59	White	Germany	High School	Electrician	None	None	
22	Miller, Mary	Mary	Wife	1875	F	54	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
23	Miller, John	John	Son	1900	M	29	White	Germany	High School	Electrician	None	None	
24	Miller, William	William	Son	1905	M	24	White	Germany	High School	Electrician	None	None	
25	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	1910	F	19	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
26	Miller, Robert	Robert	Son	1915	M	14	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
27	Miller, Mary	Mary	Daughter	1920	F	9	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
28	Miller, George	George	Son	1925	M	4	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
29	Miller, William	William	Son	1930	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
30	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	1935	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
31	Miller, Robert	Robert	Son	1940	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
32	Miller, Mary	Mary	Daughter	1945	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
33	Miller, George	George	Son	1950	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
34	Miller, William	William	Son	1955	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
35	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	1960	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
36	Miller, Robert	Robert	Son	1965	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
37	Miller, Mary	Mary	Daughter	1970	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
38	Miller, George	George	Son	1975	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
39	Miller, William	William	Son	1980	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
40	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	1985	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
41	Miller, Robert	Robert	Son	1990	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
42	Miller, Mary	Mary	Daughter	1995	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
43	Miller, George	George	Son	2000	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
44	Miller, William	William	Son	2005	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
45	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	2010	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
46	Miller, Robert	Robert	Son	2015	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
47	Miller, Mary	Mary	Daughter	2020	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
48	Miller, George	George	Son	2025	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
49	Miller, William	William	Son	2030	M	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	
50	Miller, Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Daughter	2035	F	0	White	Germany	High School	None	None	None	

Page of a population schedule from the 1930 census in Los Angeles, including the author's grandfather and great uncle. From the author's personal collection.



Ruth Etting's "Ten Cents a Dance," a popular song in 1930. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k4E9bPpMXE>.

I found out that my grandfather had lived in LA, in Historic Filipinotown to be exact, around the time that I was leaving LA. My mom found Guadencio and his brother Adriano ("Ad") in the 1930 LA census, living at "Majestic Apartments" on First Street. Guadencio (later known as "Don") was 19 and employed as a cook, and Ad was 23 and employed as a "house boy." Like many from the "manong generation" who immigrated during the period of US colonial control of the Philippines from 1898 to 1946, Guadencio arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the ship the *Empress of Russia* on May 27, 1928, having left from Manila on May 5. The US address he gave was a rural route in Salinas, California, presumably where Ad was living at the time, working on a lettuce farm. They made their way to LA by 1930, where they lived for about six years (the same length as me) until 1935 or 1936, when they made their way to Detroit, where the automobile factories were hiring. While in LA, Guadencio took college classes—my cousin David thinks in engineering—while working various jobs. He told my mom that he had to leave college due to lack of funds, but the 1940 Detroit census lists him as "C4," which means having four years of college.

Other than these most basic of details, I don't know what day-to-day life was like for my Grandpa in LA. I do know, however, that he was living in California at a time when anti-Filipino violence spiked, including anti-Filipino riots in Watsonville in January 1930 (not far from Salinas) and frequent attacks on Filipino men at taxi dance halls across the state. This strong anti-Filipino sentiment, particularly along the West Coast, framed in terms of Filipino men stealing both jobs and women from white men, played a role in the passage of the federal Tydings–McDuffie Act (also known as both the Philippine Independence Act and the Filipino Exclusion Act) in 1934. The Act set forth a path for Philippine independence by 1945 (later officially granted in 1946), but at the same time it reclassified Filipinos in the United States who were not US citizens (like my grandfather) as “aliens” and imposed a 50-person annual quota on Filipino immigration. Whereas Filipinos, as colonial subjects, had been exempt from the Immigration Act of 1917 and its “Asiatic Barred Zone,” and the subsequent Asian Exclusion Act of the Immigration Act of 1924, the Philippine Independence Act effectively stopped Filipino immigration.

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns devotes a whole chapter to this era in “‘Splendid Dancing’: Of Filipinos and Taxi Dance Halls,” where she focuses on the “Filipino dancing body as ‘an archival embodiment’ of the link among immigration, foreign policy, social institutions, and Filipino corporeal colonization” (2013, 56). Indeed, as Burns demonstrates, taxi dance halls in the 1920s and 1930s were a major locus of Filipino immigrant socialization.⁶ She analyzes the exceptionality of Filipino men as “splendid” dancers at taxi dance halls alongside the supposed exceptionality of the American colonial project, arguing that the spectacular movements of Filipinos, particularly in California, made them simultaneously celebrated and singled out for control,

6. I've presented on Filipino American choreographer Reynaldo Alejandro's *Bagong salta 2: Taxi dancers* (1979) at conferences, but more work remains to be done on this dance that focuses on Filipinas as taxi dancers, rather than Filipinos as patrons.

whether by mobs or legislators. Dancing provided a way for Filipino men to access white women and to develop and showcase mastery of American ways, even as it also became a space where they could be singled out for attack, which then provided an excuse for racist and exclusionist policies to be extended to them.

Did my grandfather frequent taxi dance halls like the Hippodrome Dance Palace? Did he ever have to run from white mobs in LA, furious at him for being Filipino? Even if he didn't himself, he surely had friends, co-workers, neighbors who did. Certainly I could read his migration from Salinas to LA, and then from LA to Detroit as a kind of running from anti-Filipino violence and racism, leaving one place and then another where anti-Filipino sentiments were concentrated and erupted.

Mid-1980s, Rural Minnesota



Photo of Gary Candelario in the late 1980s, photographer unknown (likely David Matthew Candelario). From the author's personal collection.

Audio clip: Sounds of the author running and breathing. For the full audio, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

My training as a dance scholar hasn't prepared me for how to describe an event that was related to me by my father almost 35 years ago and then never spoken of again. It was the mid-1980s. I was in high school. My father's career as a high school principal had run into some roadblocks—some of his own making and some surely a result of white supremacist culture that didn't know what to do with a Filipino American with a PhD in curriculum and secondary education.

He was in rural Minnesota for a job interview. He must have driven there from Wisconsin, where he was living. It was night, and he was lost. He pulled into a roadside bar to ask for directions. I can picture him pulling into the parking lot in his red Toyota pickup with the cab on back, that small model we'd call a lowrider now. I imagine a gravel parking lot surrounded by the encroaching dark, lights on the one-story building offering respite and clarity. I watch him walk in the door, tired and looking for assistance. I can't see him once the door closes, and I'm not sure how long he is inside. Is he there for a while, maybe enjoying a Coke with lots of ice, before the troubles begin? Or does he immediately come running out of the door, loud voices and then bodies barreling after him? I hear more than see him running. Running through the fields. Headlights now singling him out as he careens forward, truck engines roaring. Over the din of vehicular and white male rage that this brown man entered their space, I hear only my father's panicked breath and his feet pounding, pounding, pounding. Was there something in him that remembered that his father and others like him had been similarly pursued, a half century and half a continent away?

I don't know how long he ran. I don't know how he got back to his truck and away from that place. I don't know if he ever made it to the job interview. I can't even remember if he told me this in person or on the phone. Just that he said, "they thought I was Indian." I remember feeling horror and emptiness. I don't remember what I said. What do you say when your father tells you he had to run for his life, impossibly visible, violently misrecognized (Burns 2013, 4)?

I started running soon after I graduated with my PhD. No longer with access to free gym membership at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I was looking for an inexpensive way to work out. A friend recommended a couch-to-5K app, and I bought a pair of running shoes. I wouldn't call myself a natural runner; it's something I have to work at, and it's often still hard, more than 10 years later. I've come to approach it as a durational performance practice. It's a choice, however, to run. I've never had to run for my life. Even when I get harassed while running, it's never because of my skin color.

May 1, 2022, Denton, Texas

Visibility and violence. Recognition and misrecognition. Although my grandfather died in 1974 and my father in 2015, I hold these histories in my body. I live in these multiple aftermaths. What are my responsibilities as a white-passing inheritor of these experiences? How do I make dances in/with/through all of this? I find one possible pathway forward in an ongoing artistic collaboration called CONFLUENCE.

Since 2019 I have been working with Heyward Bracey and Nguyễn Nguyễn on a collective performance process we call CONFLUENCE, in which we grapple with our personal, ancestral, and collective histories of migration due to slavery, colonialism, and war that eventually brought us together in LA on the edge of the North American continent and the Asian Pacific as African American, Filipinx American, and Vietnamese American artists. CONFLUENCE explores our embodiment of multiple intersections of culture, ethnic/geographical origin, and post-contemporary social ecologies. Our site-adaptive ritual installations and performances use everyday items as props and costumes—bags of water, wooden staffs, garbage bags, flashlights, and Mylar blankets—and transform these items of daily survival into ritual totems of care and connection. During spring 2021, we were awarded a Remote Connection Mini-Grant from the Network of Ensemble Theaters to explore how

we could create a shared space even when we were not able to join in person. Our gatherings as part of our Remote CONFLUENCE began—coincidentally—on March 16, 2021. The first score we set ourselves was to use our props to create a cleansing ritual that we would record and share with each other. I understood these cleansing rituals to be a sort of beginning of this new phase of collaboration, a preparatory ritual to make way for the work ahead. At the same time, it acknowledged the cleansing and sanitizing rituals we had all developed for ourselves during the first year of COVID-19. Finally, it felt like a communal gesture of mourning and release for the multiple violences of the year, from the murder of George Floyd and so many other Black people by police, to the pandemic, to the anti-Asian murders that very day in Atlanta.

On a rainy day soon thereafter, following our score, I took a Mylar blanket and a photo of my father outside onto my driveway where I let the rain wash over me and the photograph, both of us wrapped in gold Mylar. In CONFLUENCE, the Mylar blankets are both objects of survival and aesthetics, wrapping in warmth but also wreathing in beauty. The photo of my father—a headshot likely from the 1960s or early 1970s, carefully cut out from newspaper and framed in inexpensive plastic—was sent to me by my cousin after my father died. He hated photographs of himself, but this one he had inexplicably saved and framed. Perhaps it reminded him of a happier time. By wrapping and unwrapping this cheap frame and newsprint photo, encasing it with glistening beauty, I showed care that was not given while he was alive. By wrapping and unwrapping myself in that same material, I moved through questions of my own connection with multigenerational histories. The rain symbolized both mourning for those histories and an attempt at washing away family trauma.

Dancing with and for my father on that day, and sharing the dance with Heyward and Nguyễn, reminded me that I do not have to carry this violence alone, nor do I need to hold it in my body. We can create communities with and for our dancing, communities that can help us process, heal, and continue to fight. Communities where we can recognize and be recognized.



Cleansing Ritual is a video performance created by Rosemary Candelario in the spring of 2021 as part of CONFLUENCE, a collective performance process with Heyward Bracey and Nguyễn Nguyễn. For the full video, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

Author Biography

Rosemary Candelario writes about and makes dances engaged with Asian and Asian American dance, butoh, ecology, and site-related performance. She is the recipient of the 2018 Oscar G. Brockett Book Prize for Dance Research for her book *Flowers Cracking Concrete: Eiko & Koma's Asian/American Choreographies* (Wesleyan University Press 2016). She is also the co-editor with Bruce Baird of *The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance* (2018). Her recent choreographic premieres include *aqueous* (2019, Kyoto Butoh Festival, Japan) and *100 Ways to Kiss the Trees* (2018, Denton, Texas). She is Associate Professor of Dance at Texas Woman's University, where she coordinates the PhD in dance and is affiliate faculty with Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies. She is the Dance Studies Association's Vice President for Publications and Research and holds a PhD in culture and performance from the UCLA. www.rosemarycandelario.net

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Dancing on the (Bamboo) Ceiling: Performing While Asian in US Postmodern Dance

Gerald Casel

It was a typically hot, rainy Sunday in Hong Kong. I turned the corner, walked up a set of stairs to cross the busy street, and encountered an elevated flyover full of Filipinos enjoying an early dinner of adobo, barbeque, and pancit—foods typically served in fiestas and other community-gathering spaces. People were playing bingo, dancing, and singing along to karaoke. The mood felt celebratory, and folks were enjoying each other's company. After walking by several spaces with similar scenes across Wan Chai, a commercial district where many Filipinos gather from the various places where they work for expatriates and local Hong Kong households, I realized that these Filipinos were part of the large group of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) that make up much of the workforce of many countries outside of the Philippines. These countries include Hong Kong, Australia, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, and the United States, among others. In 2020, there were 1.77 million OFWs living outside of the Philippines contributing to approximately 9% of the national economy through remittances.¹

Demand for domestic and healthcare workers has remained consistent in recent years, and Filipinos make up much of the care economy in many countries around the world. In the foreword to Grace Chang's *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*, Ai-jen Poo writes, "Domestic work—the work of caring for children,

1. Philippine Statistics Authority, "2020 Overseas Filipino Workers," <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>.

elders, and homes—is the work that makes all other work possible.”² It’s difficult for me to read those lines, especially because this essential labor, and the invisible labor that many immigrants of color (especially women) take on, continues to go unacknowledged by society. And even though their work is incredibly important, as individuals they are perceived as disposable and easily replaced. It is crucial to contextualize the role of these workers in the context of global economic systems and to understand why they are made to be invisible by design.

Even though they were all celebrating being with one another, I couldn’t help but feel a mix of happiness and sadness seeing so many of my countryfolk out and about on this rainy day. I understood that they were gathering to be with their community and to be away from their workplaces, which are often also the households where many of them live as domestic workers and caregivers. Some of their living conditions are reportedly terrible—housekeepers, nannies, and caretakers sleeping on the floor in the kitchen or in tiny rooms that also serve as pantries or laundry rooms. Many are emotionally or physically abused, and since labor standards vary greatly from country to country, it is difficult to understand the scope of how OFWs are treated or to track incidents of violence so that their well-being can be protected.

How I felt that afternoon also reminds me of my experiences growing up as a queer, immigrant, first-generation, Filipino-American. Since arriving in the United States as a young child, I have always felt othered, out of place, and, as Claudia Rankine puts it, “I was always aware that my value in our culture’s eyes is determined by my skin color first and foremost.”³ This continued through college, at the Juilliard School, where I studied modern dance and ballet, two Eurocentric forms that are typical for most conservatories around the world for training dancers and choreographers. Although there were other electives such as tap,

2. Ai-jen Poo and Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), vii.

3. Claudia Rankine, “I Wanted to Know What White Men Thought About Their Privilege: So I Asked,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/17/magazine/white-men-privilege.html>.

"Spanish,"⁴ jazz, and Indian dance,⁵ at the center of the curriculum were always these Western forms against which everything else was measured. Those of us who come from non-Western countries felt disoriented and invisibilized by the forms we were studying and inevitably how we grew to see ourselves (or not) through the practice of performance. This reality has led me to want to understand how Asian immigrant dance artists in predominantly white countries have adjusted to assimilate, mimic, and thrive despite having to disavow their own cultural forms, which they have abandoned for the sake of being legitimized by contemporary dance or ballet. I acknowledge that although I begin this essay with a memory of me witnessing OFWs in Hong Kong and the conditions of global migration by Filipinos in the diaspora, I am not trying to conflate this very different phenomenon with my experiences in contemporary dance settings. I do not equate my background as a dancer to those of the Filipinos in Hong Kong. I open with the story of the Filipinos gathering on the flyovers every Sunday in order to emphasize the poignant importance of small moments of connectivity for marginalized people.



Gerald Casel and Peiling Kao, Cover Your Mouth When You Smile. Photo by Robbie Sweeny

4. Gloria Marina taught Spanish dance forms, which included fandango and flamenco rhythms, braceo, and castanets.

5. Juilliard called it Indian Dance, but technically I studied Bharatanatyam from Indrani.

In 2016, I started to collaborate with Na-ye Kim to create *Cover Your Mouth When You Smile*. Na-ye was born in Seoul and trained at The Royal Ballet School in London and then obtained her MFA from New York University (NYU) Tisch School of the Arts, where she was my student. Kim is a gorgeous dancer who seemingly can do anything with complete effortlessness. We wanted to create a dance that reflected our shared experiences as Asian artists navigating the world of conservatories and classical techniques. After receiving a PhD in dance education from Seoul National University, Kim worked as a lecturer at the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts, where she invited me to begin this collaboration. What we made began to form the structure of what would become a much larger piece that would include a third dancer, Peiling Kao, a Honolulu-based Taiwanese choreographer. Peiling trained at the Taiwan National University of the Arts, where she studied with dancers from the Cloud Gate Dance Theater, Taiwan's premier dance company. Kao received an MFA from Mills College, where she studied improvisation, composition, and postmodern dance—forms that would become the foundation of her work as a choreographer. In 2017, Kao, Kim, and I traveled to Hong Kong, where we completed work on the trio. This piece eventually premiered in June 2018 during my company's 20th anniversary at ODC Theater in San Francisco and traveled to the Kuan Du Arts Festival in Taipei in 2019 and to the Seoul International Improvisation Festival in 2022.

In our publicity materials, we described *Cover Your Mouth When You Smile* as

a movement essay that explores the condition of racial melancholia, the impossibility of the model minority, and the concept of mimicry in Asian immigrant cultures. Referring to racial melancholia and ambivalence (as described by Eng and Han) as a physical and psychological haunting resulting from estrangement from Western, mainstream cultures dominated by whiteness,⁶ *Cover Your Mouth When*

6. David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 4–5.

You Smile examines the complexities of racial identity in contemporary life.⁷

From its inception, we wanted to collectively create a work that contemplates our experiences as Asian artists in predominantly white settings. Our work endeavors to be a reclamation of identity that weaves together fragmented memories, racial politics, and ethnographic storytelling. It questions the power of representation and reimagines what it means to be Asian in contemporary dance by subverting viewers' expectations of what our bodies as Asian subjects look and feel like within a white canon.

Making this piece with two other Asian artists and educators was a relief because we could reflect on our individual experiences while also finding a healing space through the collective processing of our struggles with the whiteness we encountered in our training, our experiences as immigrants, and our work as professors. It was not uncommon for us to find shared cultural rituals such as making and eating rice. In fact, the piece begins with a ritualized performance of Kao washing and cooking rice while Kim and I sit nearby observing and waiting with anticipation. As one of the more indelible parts of the dance, the rice cooking represented one of the ways that we felt closer to our families while being away from our communities. The simultaneous activation of senses—smelling and seeing the steam rising from the rice cooker—implanted an embodied/emotional response to the work by spectators. Many have said that the smell of the rice cooking reminded them of home, which gave rise to memories that evoked comfort and well-being. It was interesting to note how a simple prop could serve as an important, mnemonic device—in contrast to the abstracted movements we were performing throughout the piece.

In the wake of rising anti-Asian hate and in order to endure the social and physical violence of being an Asian immigrant, one must deploy specific tactics. These include blending in, being excessively

7. Gerald Casel, "GERALDCASELDANCE at ODC Theater," Press release, May 1, 2016.

productive, and being always agreeable and nice—traits that form the contours of the model minority myth. In the middle of the piece, Kim and I enact a series of repeated steps devised through a system of numbers randomly selected and mapped onto a spatial pattern on the floor. These repeated steps not only signify our connection to minimalism as a formalist structure but also invoke a new way of expressing ourselves through a rigid structure that begins to look like a maze, and where we inevitably must find each other in order to find a way out. It reminds me of what the artist/scholar micha cárdenas refers to as writing code (or an algorithm) as a mode of representation. “While algorithms are often understood only in terms of precision, they can be written at any level of abstraction and thus are similar to poetic writing. Choreography, or improvisation parameters, can also be seen as a series of instructions, like an algorithm.”⁸ Rather than creating a narrative about the myth of the model minority, Kim and I employ abstraction and repetition to reflect our exhaustion from being in systems that assume who and how we are supposed to be. As Asians, we reimagine, through choreographic defiance and algorithmic subversion, what it might feel not to be in constant adjacency to whiteness. We refuse to be seen only as Asian subjects with pre-assigned choreographic values, such as being efficient and precise—and following cárdenas—we are choreographing on a level of abstraction that challenges precision and reassigns poetic values that subvert what that may look like on our bodies. Although using repetition may be a risk in succumbing to the invisibilization of our laboring bodies in space, what happens instead is a reclamation of our identities through solidarity. We realize just how much of a relief it is to work through oppressive systems using choreographic defiance when we see each other in the space and are reminded that we are not alone.

8. Micha Cárdenas, *Poetic Operations: Trans of Color Art in Digital Media* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022), 56.



Gerald Casel and Na-ye Kim, Cover Your Mouth When You Smile. Photo by Tim Russell.

The duet that Kao and I perform was made in Mānoa, on the campus of the University of Hawai'i. While creating it we referred to the natural landscape as a source of inspiration. One can see our hands, at the beginning of the dance, tracing the ridgeline of Diamond Head, the iconic geological feature that is significant to O'ahu's topography and skyline. We also begin the dance in silence, using only our feet to create rhythms that emphasize the groundedness we felt when we would look up at Diamond Head. Our hands also invoked the waves in the ocean and its dynamic repetition. In a small way, we wanted to honor the land on which we were creating this duet, as well as the ocean's inescapable force. The rhythmic foot patterns were devised through the use of our birthdays. We wrote down the month, day, and year we were born and began charting a pattern that also reflected a loosely based nod to numerology, and since we were working with our birthdates, we were also playing in the realm of astrology and the divine. These seemingly simple connections between land, sea, and stars helped to form a path through this dance as a way to create

something that is pre- or anti-colonial, or, as they say in anthropology, “precontact.” This method of uniting our embodied senses to our environment was a way to work outside of more conventional Western choreographic strategies. We eventually also utilized familiar choreographic devices such as retrograde, diminution, and theme and variation; however, by beginning with our connection to land, sea, and stars, our collaborative experience felt more grounded and connected us more deeply to each other.

As I reflect on the work I’ve done with Na-ye Kim and Peiling Kao, as well as the many other Asian dance artists with whom I have had the pleasure of working, it is clear how much these relationships have helped me to find strategies of survival. In a similar fashion, those Filipinas on the bridges in Hong Kong and their joyful connections to their communities have helped me to reflect how I am not alone in the struggle against the social violence and psychic pain of racism and white supremacy and that these solidarities with other Asian immigrants have helped to reimagine what it means to be Asian today. Transnational, artistic collaborations such as *Cover Your Mouth When You Smile* form a network of support that makes our lives as Asian immigrants more radically visible and powerful because we are creating spaces for our collective futures in which anti-Asian sentiments no longer exist.

Author Biography

Gerald Casel (he/they/siya) is a dance artist, equity activator, and anti-racist educator. As director of GERALDCASELDANCE, his choreographic work complicates and provokes questions surrounding colonialism, collective cultural amnesia, whiteness and privilege, and the tensions between the invisible/perceived/obvious structures of power. Casel is Professor and Chair of the Department of Dance at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. He has previously been a faculty member at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Palucca

Hochschule für Tanz Dresden, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UW–Milwaukee), California State University Long Beach, and UC Santa Cruz, where he also served as the Provost of Porter College. A graduate of The Juilliard School with an MFA from UW–Milwaukee, they received a New York Dance and Performance Award “Bessie” for sustained achievement for dancing in the companies of Stephen Petronio, Michael Clark, Stanley Love, Zvi Gotheiner, Sungsoo Ahn, and the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. His initiative *Dancing Around Race*, an ongoing community-engaged participatory process that interrogates systemic racial inequity in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond, continues to grow. www.geraldcasel.com

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A reclamation of the disposable

maura nguyễn donohue

It's the end of April, nope,

now . . . it is actually the first day of May.

In the crush of MFA colloquia, admissions interviews, two different curriculum committees, chairing an anti-racism committee, a(nother) damn search committee, teaching, jury duty, and solo parenting for a month, I show my work in an Open Studio as part of my visual art residency with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Arts Center on Governor's Island. Maybe it's middle age, maybe it's a mild form of long Covid, but I'm constantly worried about my energy levels and capacity . . . I'm exhausted. I'm fraught . . . as in freighted and weighted.

Didn't we learn that the grind was someone else's gauge for glory?

But I do it. Get through it. People come, dancers dance, art gets shown, and my teens don't feel ignored. Everyone's one step closer to graduation or admission or recognition. And, I admit . . . my fatigue is a result of my own choices. I'm here. It's a warm Mayday morning after a frosty, biting spring, so *Let's hear it for New York, New York, New York . . . These streets make you feel brand new, there's nothing you can't do. . . .* Dirty chai in hand, I hit Central Park at 9 a.m. on a Sunday and dance my one-person Spotify soul train to the bridal path to sit under the cherry blossoms before they pass the peak. I let a gentle pink fall from the green and blue above me. I breathe. I think about

relaxing . . . contemplate the potential for relaxing. I take a picture to share on the Gram . . . and bam:

- There's the @jackfruit post of the GoFundMe for Kaitlyn Lau, a 14-year-old girl in Queens who was just shot in the neck while walking home from school with friends a couple days ago.
- There's @perryyungofficial reposting @umasianalliance about a man spitting in two Asian women's faces on the train a couple days ago.
- Four hours ago a Chinese food delivery worker was shot to death while on a scooter in Queens. Zhiwen Yan was a father of three and working three jobs.

This

is just

TODAY.

is just

ONE DAY

is just

ONE MORNING of mourning.

Welcome to #AsianHeritageMonth2022

This is just what happens to cross my feed. This is just what crosses my feed while I'm looking cuz I'm not EVEN looking for this. I. am. Trying. to-ride-the-delicate-balance-of-being-informed-AND/OR-staying well.

Every day feels like *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* ALL THE Damn TIME.

Welcome to our soft apocalypse.

Someone just shot up the subway in Brooklyn? Near Sunset Park? That's Brooklyn's Chinatown! Oh, not anti-Asian? Back to work.

I only have to reach back a year to when I was "holding space" in community facilitation and panel participation for Dance/NYC's 2021 Symposium with so much rage in my heart in the immediate wake of the shootings in Atlanta.

But, I'm g o i n g numb.

I only have to reach back a few days to when I was staring up to the ceiling in the adjunct office so I don't meet my colleagues' "Kai is zooming in (sighhhh), they're too anxious to leave home again [sigh]" with anything other than a light "Yeah, I understand. My anxiety has been hard to handle" instead of a "WHAT ARE YOU NOT GETTING ABOUT THIS!"

But, I'm g o i n g dumb.

I only have to reach back about a month to when I was holding back tears and explaining to my colleagues that . . . After a year carrying mace, and years carrying a whistle, I now also carry a kubotan. You can hear me jangling from an entire floor away.

But, I'm run . . . n . . . ing out . . . of . . . fight.

I only have to reach back to the beginning of this semester to when I felt Darvejon Jones laying his hand on my shoulder while I didn't hold back tears in the Anti-Racism Committee meeting I was chairing and explaining to people that this wasn't a theoretical exercise. This was urgent. My life, my biological and chosen kin's lives, and all my found family need to be able to move through space without fear.

But, I'm l.o.ooooosing my hype.

I make, I mentor, I melt down. . .

I make, I mentor, I meltdown. . .

make, mentor, meltdown, make, mentor, meltdown, makementor
meltdownmeltdownmeltd

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I reach back to one year ago.

April/May 2021. DanceNYC Symposium Community Asynchronous Virtual Moment of Solidarity and La MaMa Moves Asian Heritage Panel Opening. This week I sent a virtual shoulder squeeze, hug, or fist pump to Asian American Pacific Islander friends around the country and wept through faculty meetings. It's yet another painful moment for ancestors, offspring, and me. I recognize the repetition of history in the acute pain I feel in response to the radio silence from people I thought weren't just allies, but friends. Be more than an ally, be a human. Reach out to Asian folx and recognize this horror with us, especially if you know us, work with us, watch us, eat with us, or sleep with us. I'm not just busy, there isn't just "a lot on my plate." I am distraught. I have been making my kids carry mace. I have been called "Covid" and "Coronavirus" on my block of 25 years. I spent the entirety of my life proving that I didn't need to get back on that boat, go back to my own country, or have a sideways slit just like my eyes. I made dances called *Lotus Blossom Itch* and wrote about "Ambivalent Selves: the Asian Female Body in American Concert Dance." I know this bullshit. I know the racial misogyny that has filled law enforcement, news media, and the silence of my own supposed community of art makers through increasing calls to #stopasianhate.

I don't need an MFA to understand that me and my sisters are as disposable as ChoCho San in *Madame Butterfly*. That in the imagination of the good ol' boy (think: spa shooter Robert Aaron Long) I am here as nothing other than lethal temptation.

I recognize I am here today standing upon the shoulders of many as I ask you viewers to look out for our elders or bring them some food because Asians actually have the largest income inequality of any community in America today.

And, since it's still contentious to demand Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, and Asian histories as American histories, I can't blame any of us for not knowing that it was Asians who suffered from the largest mass lynching in US history in 1871 or that the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first, and remains the only, law to have

been implemented that prevented all members of a specific ethnic or national group from immigrating to the United States—although that Muslim ban tried in a different way—or that the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII put 120,000 citizens into concentration camps, and/or that the origin story of Asian America that was the murder of Vincent Chin includes the fact that neither of the men who beat him to death in 1982 spent a day in jail because, as Judge Charles Kaufman put it, “These weren’t the kind of men you send to jail.”

There is so much more . . . this #stopasianhate era, this 21st Century Yellow Peril ploy, asks us to remember the work of intersectional sisters like Grace Lee Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama, and so many other unrecognized women warriors fighting for freedom and solidarity for all oppressed peoples.

Soon C. Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong A. Yue, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Paul Andre Michels, Xiaojie Tan, and Daoyou Feng left full, human full, dream full, family full lives.

March 2021. Potri, Nicky, eugene the poogene, Perry and our kids, and I find Andy and Nai-Ni Chen on the edges of a Columbus Park #stopasianhate rally in the spring. Before the year ends, Nai-Ni will be swept off the planet, drowned in a swimming accident when it seemed like we’d made it through the worst of the pandemic.

January 2021. Memorial for Corky Lee, our photographer laureate of Asian America. Zoom prayer circle brings me back in proximity with Ava Chin. February 2021 Zoom memorial at La MaMa brings Nicky Paraiso, Perry Yung, Lisa Gold, Andy Chiang, Potri Ranka Manis, Mia Yoo, and me into a fleeting planning community. The FaceTime stream of his funeral car procession from Rick Ebihara puts me back in contact with Wayland Quintero. Covid.

March 2020. Right at the beginning of Covid’s arrival, Perry’s Uncle Philip and La MaMa’s resident designer Jun Maeda were the first to go. My visual art is full of Maeda’s legacy . . . reclamation of the disposable. Plastic bags, tin cans turned into ribbons, detritus.

Reclamation of the disposable. I'm not your trash. I know these elders don't match the sensationalist streetfront, subway, road rage incidents . . . but systems are sneaky, sweetheart.

A letter to a principal:

I want to begin with an expression of deep thanks for the education and care that my son, Jet Yung, has received at your school. Although the pandemic hit before he had completed his first year in high school, he had quickly made good friends and would often share things he was learning with us whether that was a bit of dance from Miss Francis or thoughts that had arisen from his trip to DC for the profoundly important 1619 Project encounter. We have been grateful for how he was welcomed into the community despite once again being a racial minority at school. He has maintained connections to classmates and on the rare occasion I caught a bit of class or advisory coming out of his screen in the past year, felt he was still being engaged and attended to.

This is what makes his recent experience in advisory distressing. Without pointing too hard, I would encourage the teachers and community to educate themselves about the specificities of false narratives, stereotypes and divisive language used about Asian American Pacific Islanders in this country. I would also ask that teachers speak from a more globally minded perspective before they make dismissive comments about the value of the lives that were lost in Atlanta. I would want this for any student, but, of course, I recognize it has been especially painful for my two children to experience pervasive silence or to have white supremacist driven media and law enforcement language reinforced in the classroom. It is entirely possible for any NYC DOE school to address current events with care and without increasing trauma. Both I and Jet's father, Perry Yung, have spent the entirety of our lives and our professional careers fighting for increased representation for our people and we have done that in deep community and solidarity with other communities of color.

shed skin leave it in—
 grieve n grieve n grieve
 leave skin—snake kin—
 bereave—retrieve—retrieve—
 the Nagi, snake mother
 retrieve her
 believe . . . her
 believe . . . her
 believe . . . her
 leave her
 weaver
 love her
 mother
 other
 fucker
 maker
 faker
 take her
 break her
 Wake her! She waits, seas waits, why wait, for what fate?
 Wake the snakes!!!
 Naga rise, Nagini rise

For the record, I might be freighted and weighted, numb and dumb, running out of fight and losing my hype, but I am sure I would still fail the fucking bystander trainings being offered to teach harassment interventions After those security guards shut the damn door on that woman being attacked yt peepl tried to buys themselves a stand up self in ONE fucking zoom workshop . . . Check . . . I'm not racist, I did a 90-minute training on . . . pulling out my cellphone. . . . No shade, hollaback! It's not on you. Talk about triggers! Every proposed scenario set me off, I went off like a bomb for hours afterwards. But, here we are over a year later and still. . .

What Is Up, colleagues? What is up? I mean I already wrote a piece about White Fragility in the Ivory Tower for Gibney Dance. Did ya not get my memo? Did ya not see me crying? Did ya not hear my rant in the meeting. Did you even take one workshop . . . EVEN!!!!!! Why don't you get why a student is down in the melt. . . Why are students telling me you don't teach Orientalism or cultural appropriation when you teach Ruth St. Denis? Get beyond the damn book club!

How about this how about you do your People's Institute for Survival and Beyond or Border Crossers or Human in Common workshops and understand the whole standing on a box and looking over a fence (fucking google it) thang and the whole race is constructed and changing thang and it's built into the entire constitution and genocidal construction of our country and consciousness thang . . . and up your bystander tutorials . . . and wait for folx of color to explain basic concepts of survival. . .

. . . and then turn off the damn White Savior mode and learn "How to be a Real Human."

Author Biography

maura nguyễn donohue (she/they) is Director of the MFA in Dance at Hunter College. From 1995 to 2005, her troupe, *inmixedcompany* was produced regularly in New York City (NYC) and toured across North America, Europe, and Asia. She co-produces the *Estrogenius Festival* and has facilitated residency programs for Asian diaspora artists in the United States and SE Asia. She seeks networks of kinship through curation, advocacy, and a deep witnessing process of writing about the works of others, most recently as *Writer-in-Residence* for *Danspace Project's* 2021 and 2022 Platform: *The Dream of the Audience*. She has been a member of *La MaMa's Great Jones Rep Experimental Theater* since 1997. Since 2015, they have been creating installation and performance works in an ongoing "Tides Project," including during a winter 2022 residency at *LMCC's Arts Center* on Governor's

Island. Using reclaimed plastics and oceanic detritus to examine the legacies of bodies ecological and diasporic, she builds a mass of meaning out of the disposable. Born in Vietnam, amidst the war with America, they have a long-standing fascination with reclamation among those who are left adrift, survive off the sea, and soak in marginalized narratives.

She thanks the ancestors and offspring for keeping the path clearly lit.



Bystander Choreography

AI Evangelista

Let's learn some choreography.

I started taking *Hollaback!* workshops in March 2020. The training is free!

Hollaback!, now known as *Right To Be*, began as a collective to document street harassment in 2005. Fifteen years later the nonprofit started providing free trainings to combat this kind of hate.¹ *Right to Be* offers many different workshops: bystander intervention in the workplace, at the polls, for youth, and in public spaces, to name a few.² These trainings are fantastic. They efficiently, in-depth and within an hour, teach individual actions for wide utility. This seems counterintuitive, but teaching the context and variables of street harassment, as well as specific steps to combat it, while not assuming a broad range of traumas, is difficult in an hour-long training. In fact, *Right to Be* claims that the best action is whatever action you do to combat anti-racism. This is not a reductive concept when considering the extensive levels of harm, trauma, and complexity in a single incident. Their workshops provide options, steps one might be able to take when witnessing or experiencing harassment.

I see what *Right to Be* offers as a form of choreography. I define choreography here as a series of steps, both literal and metaphorical, against contexts of hate. I use the term "choreography" because the workshops explicitly mention bodies in motion, offer a series of

1. "Who We Are," *Right to Be*, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://righttobe.org/who-we-are/>.

2. "Hollaback! Has Changed Its Name to Right to Be," *Right to Be*, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://righttobe.org/>.

movements to consider in escalated situations, and demonstrate how the practice of embodied contexts matter. If you have not taken a *Right to Be* workshop or do not have time to, at the very least please look at [this nifty guide](#). We all want to think we know what to do in an escalated situation, but at least with this guide, you can have a series of concrete steps to show up as a bystander, a short dance if you will.

There are three overall steps, five if you include the sub-steps, for *Right to Be's* public harassment training: (1) trust your instincts, (2) reclaim your space, and (3) practice resilience.³ I know counting to three is hard when you're used to counting to eight, but I'm hoping you'll consider the example I offer next.

On a cold morning in January 2022, I took my dog for a walk before he got cranky. He is already a very vocal Samoyed, but without our early morning walk, he likes to show off his true operatic range. On our walk, a block away from home, an SUV pulls next to us. I refuse to look, knowing that a car that I do not recognize pulling next to me is never a good sign. I remember my choreography from *Right to Be's* guide—step one: *trust my instincts*.⁴ My instincts say to pay attention, so without looking directly at the car, I include it in my periphery. Despite wishing the car to drive away (maybe the driver needed to check for directions?), the car does not move and a window rolls down. The next step from *Right to Be's* choreography is to *set my boundary*, so I plant and root my feet into the ground. I am glad my choreography recall is working today.

I would have kept walking as another way to set a boundary, but my dog loves to stop at the particular fence we happen to pause alongside. I'm not sacrificing my dog's joy for whatever this is. I realize it's been about 30 seconds since I began ruminating on all of this, and I hear the car's engine still running. It is irresponsible for me not to look directly at this point, at least to see why they rolled down their window. I need to set another boundary and remember the next step

3. "Responding to Public Harassment," *Right to Be*, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://righttobe.org/guides/how-to-respond-to-public-harassment/>.

4. *Ibid.*

is to *engage*. It is clear when I look up that the older woman in the car has been waiting for me to acknowledge her. The instant I make eye contact, she asks if my dog was indeed my dog. No introduction or hello, just the question, "Is that *really* your dog?" I stare at her trying to comprehend the question. Why would this not be my dog? Is this really a question about my dog, or does she think I do not belong here? Is there a missing dog that looks like my dog? I remember *Right to Be's* reminder to keep eye contact and not to escalate. I wait in confused silence. She asks the question again, looks away, and starts closing her window. Nothing else is mentioned, no explanation, no neighborly greeting, and she drives away. I am thankful that I do not have to document the situation, asking someone next to me to take out their phone or take a photo of the SUV myself. That would have been *Right to Be's* second to last step.

The choreography is not over. The last step is to *practice resilience*. I roll my eyes. I tell my husband what happened when I walk through the door. We sigh deeply together. And I share my story here. I thank *Right to Be* for the choreography. My event was tame compared to the horrific brutality happening time and again to Asian folks across the country. But I offer it as a practice of resilience, as an example of choreography, and gratitude to *Right to Be*. Eighteen years ago, while winding through a county fair, two people ran up to me and my then partner, yelled a slur at us, and ran away. I froze. I did not know any of the steps offered by a *Right to Be* workshop. Obviously, the people around me at the time did not either.

As part of *Right to Be's* last step of resilience, I share their resources. I also say names: Michelle Go, Christina Yuna Lee, Maria Ambrocio. I list these as a practice of solidarity and gratitude to the Movement for Black Lives community. The saying of names is one practice of many to learn and embody.⁵ Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, Asia Foster, Dominique Lucious. Bystander choreography is not just for anti-Asian

5. "The Movement for Black Lives," *M4BL*, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://m4bl.org/>. See also, "Say Their Names, K(no)w Justice, K(no)w Peace," #say their names, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://sayevery.name/about>.

hate. These simple but not easy steps are one way to move as an ally and a bystander for the too many systemic and variable types of hate in our everyday lives. They are not the same kinds of hate, nor are they experienced in the same ways. There are many different types of systemic oppression. Being with one another, knowing the different types, and being open to the difference is part of the choreography. It might also require improvisation.⁶ I want there to be a dance that both teaches self-preservation and dismantles systemic oppression. I want a dance that is not romantic. I want it to be truthful and flawed and reparative and risk-taking. Most of all, I want it to embody the necessary cry buried and felt by too many. Please learn the choreography. There are so many dances to learn.

Author Biography

Al Evangelista (he/him/his) is an actor, dancer, and choreographer, whose creative processes engage with social justice and performance studies. He is Assistant Professor of Dance at Oberlin College and Conservatory. His multidisciplinary artistic works on queer performance, diaspora, and community-engaged methods have been performed at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, American Theatre Company, Links Hall, Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, and Moss Arts Center. He has danced in works for Dance Exchange, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and the Inconvenience, as well as performed at Chicago Opera Theatre, Adventure Stage Chicago, among others. He is an affiliate faculty member of Oberlin's Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies and a faculty fellow in the Center for Communicating Science at Virginia Tech.

6. My deepest thanks to SanSan Kwan for helping me arrive at this point.



Feeling Arab: Sound Worlding, *Hishik Bishik*, and Belly Dance

Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw

In early 2020, when I met B, a Palestinian-Jordanian artist who had recently moved to New York City for graduate school, I told her about my Lebanese family. I described the women as “typically Lebanese”: beautiful, beauty-minded, scandalously clothed, humorously cynical, exuberantly hospitable, generous, and complimentary. All my aunties are warm, friendly, smiling, and ready to chat people up, while wearing leopard print. My family is also probably what would be considered *fallaheen* (peasants) from the *baladi* (the country or countryside). To refer to something as *baladi* has a connotation of “low class” and a “real” or “authentic” person. So with this description of my family, my friend’s initial response was, “Oh, those are the trashy Arabs.” I laughed, taking no offense. She was not wrong. Clearly, this depiction stands in stark contrast with Western stereotypes of Southwest Asia (a.k.a. the Middle East) and North Africa (SWANA), supposedly filled with terrorists and oppressed, veiled women. Instead, the stereotype of Lebanese women is that they are all like the singers, models, and beauty queens (re: sex symbols) who do not have the shame to sing and dance in public and who are seen in the media throughout the Arab world. These Lebanese women are stereotypically viewed by other SWANA people as sexually available and supposedly “trying to be Western” with their revealing clothing and hypervisibility. Combined with the designation *baladi*, my friend understood them as

“trashy” due to the “shaky morals” implied by the stereotype of the Lebanese woman who uses her looks and charm for monetary gain. This stereotype occupies a space that overlaps and intertwines with the belly dancer, whose perpetual presence in Arabic cultural production is central yet also marginal to Arabness or what it means to be an Arab.



Video clip from the Egyptian film *Hawalet Rooh* (2014) starring Lebanese pop star Haifa Wehbe. https://youtu.be/Hd4zxdwr_X0

This essay is a phenomenological account of belly dance as a reflection on Arabness. I share this opening anecdote in order to create a space to ask questions about self, other, and being with regard to belly dance. I use the term “belly dance” throughout this essay because it is the broadest, most well-known name for the dance I am referring to. As it is known globally, “belly dance” is an amalgamation of non-standardized dance practices and vocabularies, and it is often characterized by isolation of body parts and improvised movement. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young explain in the introduction to *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy* that belly dance “denote[s] all solo dance forms from Morocco to Uzbekistan that engage the hips, torso, arms and hands in undulations, shimmies,

circles, and spirals.”¹ It is an Afro-Asiatic dance that is typically associated with being Arab, although Arabs are not the only group to inhabit this part of the world.

Some people say “belly dance” was actually coined by the West as a bastardization of the word *baladi*. In the United States, belly dance has a specific history, which I will overview briefly for context, as the Western view of the dance has affected how it is perceived among SWANA people. The dance was first performed in the United States by Little Egypt (Fahreda Mazar Spyropoulos) in the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. With her swiveling hips and revealing attire, “Little Egypt,” who was actually Syrian, scandalized the Victorian sensibilities at the time and became a pre-Hollywood sex symbol: a repository for Western sexual repression as projected through the fetishization of its Oriental obsession.² For the first half of the twentieth century, hypersexualized Little Egypt-like dancers proliferated among vaudeville shows and similar venues. Eventually, this dance met up with second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and birthed the Western “tribal style” belly dance, which is a celebration of female sexuality that is aligned with a white feminist agenda.³ During this time, Arab Americans took advantage of the rise in Orientalism—via bohemianism—and opened nightclubs featuring Arabic music and belly dancers. These were the kind of self-Orientalizing spectacles that continue today, although it is more likely to see dancers who are not Arab performing in these spaces. This phenomenon is also apparent in the SWANA region. In the past 20 years, there has been a rise in non-Arab dance stars in the region, mainly from Ukraine and Russia.⁴

1. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 1.

2. It is important to note that while I mostly refer to Lebanese women in this essay, Lebanon was part of Syria until the French Mandate ended in 1943, and these stereotypes from the Arab world deal with *shami* women more broadly, although today they have become specifically Lebanese.

3. This information is synthesized and paraphrased from various essays in the anthology edited by Shay and Sellers-Young, *Belly Dance*.

4. Emily Gordine, “How a Russian Became a Belly Dancing Star in Egypt,” *DW Broadcasting*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-a-russian-became-a-belly-dancing-star-in-egypt/a-51448665>.



Another Little Egypt (Fatima Djamilé), performing for Thomas Edison's film camera in 1896. <https://youtu.be/WIsYpNED838>

In SWANA and abroad, belly dance—its movement vocabulary and sartorial idioms—carries a world within it, and when this world is conjured in certain ways, it can generate a communal experience. To make this claim, I am thinking with *hishik bishik*, an Arabic slang used in the region, which refers to belly dance and its surrounding culture. The term is an onomatopoeia for the sound made by the coins on the dancer's hip scarf. The term implies shaky morals, "meaning something carnival-like, related to low-class dancing, with a connotation of being trashy."⁵ The sound is produced by the movement of the dancer's hips, which causes the coins to shake and clink together in sync with the beat. It is through *hishik bishik* that I understand how belly dance provides a model for and a practice of relationality that simultaneously values autonomy and collectivity, which hinges on the kinesthetic energy of the dancer and the aurality and materiality of the hip scarf as it is worn by the dancer. The essence of *hishik bishik* relates to B's reaction to my family as described earlier.

5. Sherifa Zuhur, *Popular Dance and Music in Modern Egypt* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2022), 205.



Since the beginning of the pandemic and thinking about life online, I have been making what I call "Orientalist paintings," based on the idea that Orientalism is abstract art. These are small glimpses into dancing in the private space of the home. I have included this one in order to provide a visual example of the coin scarf. Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw; "Everybody's in My Bedroom This Pandemic" Orientalist Painting #73; digital video still.

Belly dance ranges from a social dance to a performing art. As Arab societies are not a monolith, sentiments toward the dancer have changed depending on the point in time, location of the performance, social class of the audience, and ethnicity of the performer. Najwa Adra's study "Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre" explains how, in SWANA and its diaspora, belly dance events are usually highly social with lots of interaction between performer and audience. In her ethnography, Adra compares social dancing in private spaces with professional dancing in public spaces. While dancing in public for money is often frowned upon, she writes, "almost everyone in the region dances or has danced at some point in their lives."⁶ This is because dance is highly embedded into our culture and daily life. According to Fatema Mernissi, in SWANA cultures, dance is passed on "from generation to generation as a celebration of the body and a ritual of self

6. Najwa Adra, "Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre," in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 2005), 29.

enhancement."⁷ Similarly, Rosina-Fawzia Al-Rawi claims, "Most Arab women can belly dance without ever having learned it in a dancing school."⁸ This also applies to Arab men and Arab people in general. For example, I always danced in the house with my mom, sisters, aunts, and cousins. It was mostly my aunts, who danced with an *awalim* troupe when they were younger, who taught me.

As a social dance, Adra claims that belly dance can be thought of as a metaphor for the values of Arab society, in which community is the main unit while autonomy and self-expression are also valued, although mostly only acceptable in the private realm.⁹ She puts forth the idea that belly dance's emphasis on improvisation and lack of programmatic intention and limits on which body parts one can use all maximize the autonomy of the dancer, yet these are clearly bound by the private space. The autonomy expressed by amateurs dancing in the domestic space is not flaunted or discussed in public. Further, Adra describes an experience that matches my own: when there is dancing in the home, someone might tie a scarf around the waist of the best dancer, or she ties it around herself, and dances until she is tired, handing the scarf off to the next dancer. Historically, the hip scarf was both ornamental and served a functional purpose to lift the *thobe* so the legs could be free to dance. As Badr Sellak explains in an article for the queer Jordanian magazine *MyKali*, "[the scarf] still occupies a significant place in [Arabic] cultural memory and allows us to see the erotic side in the everyday attire seen in homes and on the streets of [Arabic] cities."¹⁰ Note that the erotic differs from the sexual here, but it is the conflation of the two that has rendered the dance taboo in certain contexts.

7. Fatema Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 71.

8. Rosina-Fawzia Al-Rawi, *Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Bellydancing*, trans. Monique Arav (New York: Interlink Books 2003), 59.

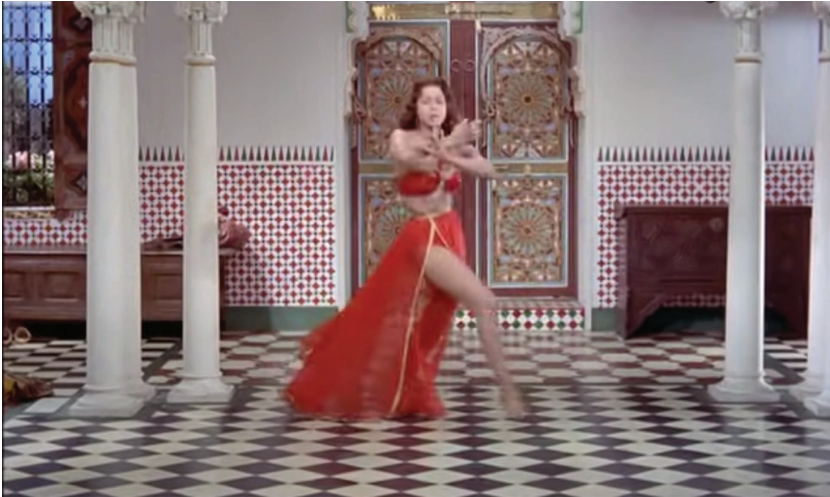
9. Adra, "Belly Dance," 43.

10. Badr Sellak, "Faded Icons: Belly Dance and the Nostalgia of Erotic Imagery," *MyKali*, October 2021, <https://www.mykalimag.com/en/2021/10/02/faded-icons-belly-dance-and-the-nostalgia-of-erotic-imagery/>.



Egyptian dancer Fifi Abdou performing her shisha dance.
<https://youtu.be/TU5oCaslPKU>

While *hishik bishik* refers to the scarf, the trashiness that it implies comes about when the scarf is moved from private space into public space. Dancing in the home, as Adra describes, can be contrasted with dancing at weddings and nightclubs, where professional dancers are paid to perform in more ornate suits, called *badlah*, with sequins and tassels, and people dance, clap, sing, ululate, and shout encouragement. The spectacle as well as the fluid and improvised movements of the dance inspire participation from the patrons. In the Arab world, specifically, *raqs sharqi* (literally, Oriental dance) was developed by Levantine and Egyptian performers in Egyptian cabarets and cinema, and as such is particularly attributed to Egypt. As part of a lineage of “low-class” and “traditional” dancing from the SWANA region, *raqs sharqi* has a *baladi* aesthetic folded into the art-form itself. So you might say that “Oriental dancing” is constituted by *hishik bishik*.



"Golden Age" Egyptian dancer Samia Gamal in the film *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1954). <https://youtu.be/t1hoCRfeFc0>

The coins on the dancer's hip scarf collapse sound and movement into *hishik bishik*. So, how does a sound call a world into being? In her discussion of the Indigenous Arctic soundscapes used in the Discovery channel show *Flying Wild Alaska*, Jessica Bissett Perea introduces the term "sound worlding." As she writes, "whereas settler-colonial sound worlding silences and disappears the ways in which colonized people are brought into existence and thus framed by colonial epistemologies, Indigenous sound worlding is a critical embodied practice that unsettles audible formations of colonial logics and representations."¹¹ Sound worlding combines sound and movement not only because sound *is* movement but because one must *do* something with sound in order to engage in the process of making a world. Bissett Perea's framework is helpful for my argument because of how the sound *hishik bishik* refers to a world of sexy dancing, seedy cabarets, and illicit behavior; how this is a dance that brings a place with it; and how

11. Jessica Bissett-Perea, "Inuit Sound Worlding and Audioreelism in *Flying Wild Alaska*," in *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America*, ed. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Dylan Robinson (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2019), 176.

multiple worldings—for Perea, settler-colonial and Indigenous—can exist at once and sometimes overlap. I am thinking about *hishik bishik* as a sound worlding. As such, it unsettles the colonial frameworks that have constructed the erotic affect of the hips as trashy, in the East, and overdetermined them as sexy and seductive, as well as liberatory, in the West. The back and forth between the Eastern and Western imaginaries shows how, in today's world, it might be impossible to separate the two from one another. *Hishik bishik* is like the stereotype of the Lebanese woman, who also holds multiple truths.

Clearly, belly dance is a central part of social gatherings within and outside the home. I contend that *hishik bishik* is why Oriental dance maintains an ambivalent position within the SWANA region. Looking to Egypt—the central producer of Arabic film and media as well as Oriental dance—the figure of the belly dancer, today, is simultaneously viewed with nostalgia and disdain. While belly dancing is a beloved part of Egyptian culture, apparently nowadays no respectable Arab woman would make her career by earning money through her body. Belly dance and prostitution have been almost synonymous in the public imaginary. That collapse of dance and sex work allowed for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western powers to construct the Oriental woman as excessively sexual, which functioned as justification for the need to colonize the region. At the same time, paradoxically, the dance came to represent freedom for Western women.

As the scarf occupies a space in Arabic collective memory, the dancer's deployment of the scarf conjures up those memories, and makes new ones, in each performance. The role of the dancer is to interpret emotions through the dance, which is often referred to as "the feeling." There is one ethnographic study published by Candace Bordelon in 2013 that connects "the feeling" to *tarab*—musical ecstasy, or a vicarious outpouring of emotion from the performer to the audience through the invocation of personal and collective memories. *Tarab* usually emerges through the voice and is expressed through the improvisational structure of *maqam* in *musiqa al-gadid*, which is highly associated with belly dance and pan-Arabism. According to Bordelon, what makes

a good dancer is her ability to express “the feeling” through her body. I quote Bordelon at length in her description of how this occurs:

The feelings produced by those memories, are, in turn, transferred to the current performance environment, inching the dancer, the musicians, and the audience towards a state of *tarab*. As music and dance conjure emotions and memories in the dancer, the images and ideas that inspire an Oriental dancer’s process emerge as movement. But while the movement flows from the body of the performer, that movement is actually a facsimile, with a bit of pixilation. Individuals who share in these experiences clarify these meanings for themselves and find their own connection to a memory, which in turn, propels them into a world that is meaningful. This meaningful world is not just one that waxes nostalgic. The current sensations are *presently* alive with meaning, because the memory and the images associated with that memory gradually evaporate, and what comes to the forefront is the residue, the *essence* of the emotion often associated with being Egyptian or Arabic. It is this essence that lingers, that transforms both the dancer and her audience.¹²

In Bordelon’s description, the dancer guides the audience to a place where they feel emotionally charged because her movements open up a world through the play of fantasy brought about by the music. This *feeling* of being Egyptian or Arabic is its *essence*, but it must be performed in order to be felt. Further, as Bordelon writes, the feeling is a residue. So, if it is what is left behind, then maybe it is *trash*, or rather, the resonance of *hishik bishik*—the affective relationality that creates a shared experience and opens up a world. For the purposes of my own study, *hishik bishik* adds a sonic element, coming from the dancer, to the material and kinesthetic evocations of the feeling. Also, with its relation to the carnivalesque, *baladi* aesthetics, and trashiness, *hishik bishik* holds together all of the parts of what it means to be Arab and not just

12. Candace A. Bordelon, “Finding ‘the Feeling’ Through Movement, Music, and Memory: Oriental Dance, *Tarab*, and Umm Kulthūm,” *Congress on Research in Dance Conference Proceedings* (2012): 43.

the “respectable” ones. Additionally, while it is generally said that non-Arab dancers don’t have “the feeling,” they do say that they can gain it after living around Arabs for a long period of time. Therefore, “the feeling” draws one into being Arab through a process of contamination. It is a mobile essence and therefore indeterminate; where one might expect to find being, there is nothing but the feeling. So the feeling is a vibe that arises from the play between being and nothing—an erotic charge that brings the world near through *hishik bishik*.

Hishik bishik conjures a world, and this can happen through the dance performance itself. This is clearly a dance that brings a place with it, however imaginary. While the phrase has general connotations of belly dance and trashiness—which often revolve around themes of honor and shame—the ties to the *balad* are also a central component of Arabic cultural production and practices. So, as a second-generation, heterogeneously diasporic dancer, how might I perform “the feeling”?



The video is a belly dance performance for the Theater 52AC: Dance in American Cultures class at UC Berkeley in fall 2021. The performance followed a lecture on the topic of belly dance. For the full video, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

In October 2020, as the Graduate Student Instructor for Theater 52AC Dance in American Cultures, I was charged by the professor to present

some aspect of my research with the undergraduate students. American Cultures, or AC, courses are ethnic studies classes that every student at UC Berkeley is required to take during their undergraduate career, so the majority of the students are STEM majors without much performance background. Because my research considers how information is mapped onto and produced by my own body, I wanted to not only talk about but also demonstrate the affective relationality of the scarf as it sways on the hips as a mode of knowledge production and structure of feeling.

So I improvised a dance for them, performing to folkloric music with a *baladi* beat. *Baladi* is a 4/4 rhythm whose phrase is “dum-dum/ tek/ dum-tek.” I wore the coin belt around my hips, and I also wore a leopard print dress an homage to the aunties. I presented myself to the students in the same way as I always do: an amalgamation of things but above all Arab. I explained to them that I do not have formal dance training and asked them to think about what questions that raised with regard to cultural transmission, essentialism, and who is “allowed” to perform as they experienced the dance. When I started at the front of the lecture hall with the opening *taqasim* and eased into the beat, the room felt dull. The professor was the only one clapping along to the music because she knew how an audience member is “supposed to” interact with this type of performance. Reading the room, I started to move out from the front of the space and into the aisle, ascending the amphitheater. At this moment, it became a communal space. The room erupted with shouts of encouragement and everyone clapping to the beat. All together, we participated in the performance until its completion, when the music stopped. The changes I made as a performer led to this transformative energetic exchange opened by my circumnavigation of the space. Later that day, when my friend B saw a video of the performance, she replied, “Only you.” Yet it was not only me—it was all of us together, participating in the improvisatory space that I opened up for us with *hishik bishik* of my hips. My dancing brought a world with it, and for a moment we were linked to all my ancestors through the personal and collective memories they carry in their moves, swaying and shimmying along to the music. So, who, here, was “feeling Arab,” and what are the

stakes of this claim? For this performance event, the feeling required the audience accompaniment, drawing them into the worlding of the dance. We had to be together, and this feeling continued to linger among everyone in the room, its dissipation marked by the incursionary institutional clock tower chime of the 12 noon Berkeley bell.

Author Biography

Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw is an artist and PhD student in the Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies program at the University of California, Berkeley. Her work deals with the play between fantasy and lived experience in sociopolitical life under imperialism. Her dissertation research focuses on how Middle Eastern and North African cultural practices and gestures are rerouted through certain forms of *Latinidad*, with specific emphasis on the iconography of the “Oriental woman” and belly dance. This study examines South–South exchanges, imperialist constructions of otherness and colonial fantasies, transferable racialized aesthetics, and the relationship between dance and sex work. Fadil-Luchkiw has also performed and exhibited work throughout the United States and internationally. She has an MA from the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University.

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Queen for a Day: Yuriko Amemiya Kikuchi's Crowning at Tulare Detention Center

Mana Hayakawa

As news of anti-Asian violence circulates in the 2020s, many cite the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II as evidence of the ways that the racism endured by Asian Americans is historic and systemic. While educating the general public about the injustices of wartime incarceration continues to be of significance,¹ the mere signaling of the experience as proof of Asian American resilience does little to recognize the complex and nuanced ways Japanese Americans not only endured the trauma of World War II (WWII) but expressed dissent and resistance. In the face of forced removal, detention, incarceration, and resettlement, Japanese Americans enacted subtle and explicit forms of protest. Four individuals took their cases to the Supreme Court;² inmates in incarceration facilities staged protests to improve wages and working and living conditions; and many fought

1. On March 15, 2022, the House passed H.R. 1931- The Japanese American Confinement Education Act to increase the authorization of the Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) grant program that works to preserve sites of Japanese American wartime incarceration. Although the bill passed, 16 House Republicans voted against the legislation.

2. For more on Supreme Court cases of Mitsuye Endo, Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, and Minoru Yaso, see Dale Minami, "Coram Nobis and Redress," *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*, ed. Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986. Revised edition. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991); Brian Niiya, "Coram Nobis Cases," *Densho Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Coram%20nobis%20cases> (accessed July 21, 2022); Brian Niiya, "Mitsuye Endo," *Densho Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Mitsuye%20Endo>, accessed July 21, 2022.

against the violence perpetrated by prison guards. Many young *nisei* (second-generation) men questioned the draft,³ and by 1943 Japanese Americans were engaging in informal discussions about the illegality of incarceration and exploring the restoration of their rights.⁴

To explore another method of dissent, I take a performance studies lens to examine how the production of a parade offers room to enact a subtle form of protest. On July 4, 1942, a 22-year-old dancer named Yuriko Amemiya Kikuchi, who would later become a celebrated dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company, wore a crown of gardenias on her head as she rode around a racetrack, formerly used for horse racing, in a convertible. Crowned the Victory Queen, Kikuchi was a featured figure in this festive parade at the Tulare Assembly Center, a temporary detention center housing Japanese American inmates during WWII. This scene of Japanese Americans celebrating Independence Day in the middle of the desert, among their temporary homes of converted horse stalls, raises the following questions: under conditions of disenfranchisement and uncertainty, why would inmates choose to celebrate Independence Day or feel the need to crown a Victory Queen? Who was victorious in this moment? In this essay I argue that the parade serves multiple functions: first as an exercise of nationalism and gender socialization, second as an attempt to reproduce pre-WWII life, and third as a deliberate act to reveal the limits of democracy by staging a subversive celebration of extraordinary patriotism in order to underscore the hypocrisy of incarceration. As participants in the parade, the inmates questioned the US government's motivations for mass incarceration and brought into focus the injustice faced by their community at large.

3. For more on Japanese American Nisei conscientious objectors and draft resisters, see Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

4. For more on the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee see, Frank Abe. *Conscience and the Constitution*. DVD. Transit Media, 2011. Daniels, Roger, Gail M. Nomura, Takashi Fujitani, William Hohri, Frank S. Emi, Yosh Kuromiya, Arthur A. Hansen et al. *A Matter of Conscience: Essays on the World War II Heart Mountain Draft Resistance Movement* (Powell, WY: Western History Publications, 2002).

Kikuchi was one of 120,000 other Japanese Americans who were incarcerated following the Japanese Navy's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the formation of select military areas that could restrict and exclude any persons. This was followed by a civilian exclusion order by the Western Defense Command (WDC) that called for the specific removal of "all persons of Japanese ancestry."⁵ Western Washington, Oregon, California, and southern Arizona were designated as military areas.⁶ Justified as a necessary means for national security, Japanese Americans were isolated and incarcerated in government-run facilities. Japanese American community leaders were the first to be arrested and removed from their homes, tearing families and communities apart. Japanese Americans were forced to suspend their education and careers and limit their involvement with social, cultural, and religious practices. Bank accounts were frozen, and generations of families were forced to sell or abandon homes, farmland, and businesses. Once served with an evacuation notice, people parted with personal belongings, friends, neighbors, and pets to temporarily relocate to remote areas with severe weather and dismal living conditions.

Only allowed to take what they could carry, individuals and families were instructed to assemble in a specific location, on a designated day and time. As large crowds gathered in transportation hubs, armed soldiers managed the space, giving everyone, from infants to the elderly, a number tag. Once accounted for, individuals and families stood in long lines, waiting for the next phase of directions. They boarded buses and trains, with the shades drawn closed, and rode for hours to an undisclosed location. Without any evidence of wrongdoing or criminal activity, Japanese Americans were gathered and tagged to be incarcerated en masse.

5. Brian Niiya, "Civilian Exclusion Orders," *Densho Encyclopedia*, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civilian%20exclusion%20orders/>, accessed February 1, 2016).

6. Although not in mass, Japanese Americans from Hawaii, Alaska, and several Latin American countries, were also removed from their homes.

While the greater American public may have supported mass removal and incarceration following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans had been deemed a threat to the United States prior to the onset of war. As laborers from Asia, they were regarded as an economic and cultural threat since their entry into the United States in the late nineteenth century. After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 created a labor shortage in agriculture, Japanese immigrants found success as tenant farmers in northern and central California. Their profitable farming methods were perceived as threatening to white agricultural business owners. As a result, the California legislature passed a series of Alien Land Laws in 1913 and 1920 to prevent “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from land ownership and long-term lease agreements. Similar to anti-Asian immigration policies of the late 1800s, these acts hindered many Japanese immigrants from owning property, establishing businesses, or cultivating a sense of belonging. The Supreme Court upheld these restrictions when the court case of *Ozawa v. United States* authorized governments to deny US citizenship to Japanese immigrants. As the successive passing of such anti-Asian legislation demonstrates, Japanese Americans were perceived as suspicious outsiders, unable to assimilate or be loyal. Such patterns, enacted by law and strengthened through social practices, set the stage for the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Kikuchi, like other Japanese Americans, was removed from her home in Los Angeles and taken to Tulare Assembly Center in the San Joaquin Valley. Assembly centers, or more accurately detention centers,⁷ were temporary camps where inmates lived in converted horse stalls or small barracks quickly constructed with tar paper roofs. The walls barely protected them from the natural elements, and the partitions between each unit did little to muffle the sound of neighbors.

7. National Japanese Americans Citizens League Power of Words II Committee, “Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II: Understanding Euphemisms and Preferred Terminology,” 2020, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8kp888m/entire_text/.

Public latrines and shower stalls had no doors, and people waited in long lines for meals and access to water. Barbed wire fences, guard towers, and armed soldiers surrounded the inmates. With the dry heat and the smell of manure lingering, inmates lived here until more permanent units could be built.

Despite these poor conditions, services were made available by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to allow each center to operate like a small city. Managed by the state, schools, libraries, hospitals, fire and police departments, the postal service, and community newspapers were all established. The incarceration camps regularly hosted talent shows and social dances, as well as special events on holidays.

The Fourth of July parade in Tulare allowed some Japanese American inmates the opportunity to express their loyalty and prove their trustworthiness as citizens. This desire to demonstrate allegiance to the United States was felt long before WWII and heightened after their incarceration. As inmates, the desire to differentiate themselves from the Japanese enemy was clear, and some Japanese Americans worked hard to emphasize their fidelity to the nation and faithfully followed US government demands. Encouraged by white and Japanese American leaders, inmates studied and practiced ideals of Americanism. School curricula and adult education programs were developed to counter the assumption that Japanese Americans were unable to assimilate. Each morning after eating in mess halls, children attended school and most adults worked in low-wage labor funded by the US government. Children recited the Pledge of Allegiance, and many adults attended "Americanization classes" intended to teach aspects of American culture and the US legal system.⁸ War relocation center newsletters touted the importance of demonstrating loyalty to the United States and maintaining faith in the American way. The confinement center press often encouraged inmates to endure the crisis to be better Americans.

8. Yoon K. Pak, *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans During World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

On the day of the Fourth of July parade, the *Tulare News*, the detention center's community newspaper staffed by fellow inmates, prominently featured the Declaration of Independence on the cover, followed by a statement by conservative leaning National Japanese American Citizen Leagues' (JACL) secretary Mike Masaoka. In the "Nisei Creed" Masaoka expressed his complete devotion to and faith in the nation, stating "I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places; to support her constitution; to obey her laws; to respect her flag."⁹ With his unshakeable faith in the very government that incarcerated his family, Masaoka set the tone for the celebration.

The selection of a young woman to be the parade's Victory Queen based on "beauty, character, and personality"¹⁰ added a gendered dimension to the patriotic celebration. Each of the contestants reflected "feminine" qualities valued by Japanese American leaders—they were meant to be young women who were educated, civic minded, and approachable by Japanese and white Americans alike.¹¹ As a form of racialized gender socialization, these idealized characteristics were rewarded and reproduced through such social practices. As the winning queen, Kikuchi was recognized as a "well-known student of modern dancing," and her practice was applauded as "advantageous to her in giving her natural poise and charm."¹² The judges emphasized her work ethic and commitment to teaching, commending her for designing and making her own costumes for her performances and listening to music constantly to select just the right accompaniment for her class.¹³ Highlighting their humility, productivity, and grace, the contestants reflected a Japanese American identity that was largely aligned with the hopes and dreams of any white, middle-class, all-American girl.

To encourage inmates to participate in the Queen's selection, the *Tulare News* declared, "It's an American privilege to vote. Elect

9. "Nisei Creed," *Tulare News* (CA), July 4, 1942.

10. "Rules of Victory Queen Contest," *Tulare News* (CA), June 24, 1942.

11. Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 56.

12. "Introducing the Queen and Her Court," *Tulare News* (CA), July 8, 1942.

13. *Ibid.*

your 'Victory' Queen at your Unit Headquarters."¹⁴ The voting public identified 40 possible candidates, of whom ten were selected to be in the court and one to be the Victory Queen. The selected queen was a symbolic figure who held no decision-making power. With the coronation culminating on Independence Day, event organizers were able to conflate the inmates' desire to celebrate their own standards of beauty and accomplishment with ideals of US democratic participation, which, of course, had been temporarily denied to Japanese Americans. A publicly recognized performer and teacher, Kikuchi was lauded for her schooling in Japan, balanced with her ability to excel in a distinctly American dance form. Kikuchi's selection as the Victory Queen affirmed a collective (inmate) identity that agreed on an idealized feminine figure. Simultaneously, the incorporation of a ballot based voting process in the Fourth of July ceremony granted inmates the illusion of "freedom of choice" while also demonstrating the limits of American benevolence.¹⁵

As the Independence Day parade and Kikuchi's coronation demonstrate, Japanese American inmates lived in an ambiguous space. Although of substandard quality, the government designed incarceration camps to meet very basic food and housing needs. Employment was available to those who were qualified for specific positions. Physical violence was not a constant threat, yet movement was limited and behaviors were highly monitored. In comparison to the atrocities experienced by ethnic and sexual minorities, and national "enemies" at the hands of the Axis Powers, Japanese Americans were treated with a greater degree of care toward their survival. However, WRA

14. "Column-torial," *Tulare News* (CA), June 24, 1942.

15. Inmates who were citizens of voting age were given the right to vote in local elections in the state of their prior residency. Absentee ballots were distributed in War Relocation Centers in the fall of 1942, however, there were many barriers to this process including a lack of access to information on the candidates and campaign issues, and suspicious of the citizenship status of voters with a Japanese last name. See Natasha Varner, "Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II could still vote, kind of," *Public Radio International (PRI)*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-10-18/japanese-americans-incarcerated-during-world-war-ii-were-still-allowed-vote-kind>.

administrators closely regulated communication into and out of the detention center. Phone calls and telegrams were reserved only for emergencies, as determined by the welfare department.¹⁶ All packages sent were opened and inspected by the postal service.¹⁷ Even sanctioned events remained susceptible to further investigation. Personal choice was rarely exercised, as schedules were imposed not only for work and school life but also to manage the dissemination of shared resources, like food and water.

Yet, despite these conditions, inmates revealed the limits of such disciplinary mechanisms by appropriating their visibility as a method to draw attention to injustice. Performed in plain view, the elaborate patriotic Fourth of July parade and pageant exposed the painful irony of Japanese Americans pledging allegiance to a nation that incarcerated them without due process. As I show here, it is through an arguably exaggerated performance, pieced together with materials available, that inmates highlighted their ability to endure and even push back. Juxtaposing the pageantry and grandeur against the backdrop of the desolate detention center, participants and onlookers witnessed the perseverance of their ethnic community and found ways to navigate, and subvert, their status as inmates.

Although well documented in text, no images are available of the parade. I offer a composite description culled from the *Tulare News*. In the dry summer heat of the San Joaquin Valley, hundreds of inmates gather at the grandstand on the morning of Fourth of July, 1942. At the start of the ceremony, the Boy Scouts raise the American flag while playing "To the Colors." The audience stand to face the flag and place their right hands over their hearts to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Projecting his voice across the field, inmate John Fuyume continues the patriotic theme with a reading of the Declaration of Independence. Next, the audience raise their voices to sing "America,"¹⁸ to welcome the first group of parade participants. From the dusty field the Boy Scout Drum

16. "Phone Calls for Emergency," *Tulare News* (CA), July 18, 1942.

17. "Post Office Reconstructed," *Tulare News* (CA), July 11, 1942.

18. "July Fourth Program," *Tulare News* (CA), July 4, 1942.

and Bugle Corp emerge, playing horns and beating drums. Then Japanese American war veterans, Tulare detention center administrators, and a man dressed like Uncle Sam greet the onlookers.¹⁹ Group after group, a stream of enthusiastic parade marchers pulling along floats made of office furniture follow, including mess hall workers, police officers, firefighters, hospital caretakers, athletes, newspaper reporters, club organizers, religious organization leaders, and finally the Victory Queen. When the dust clears, inmates participate in sports and games, from sumo wrestling, to tug-of-war, to a three-legged race, all taking place around the track and field area. Barracks close to the field feature art exhibits with paintings, needlepoint, woodcarvings, flower arrangements, and other crafts made by fellow inmates. The Fourth of July celebration culminates with a special dinner of boiled young hen with country-style noodles, mashed potatoes, garden spinach, and fresh ice-cold milk.²⁰ The joyous day of celebration full of performances, games, and displays highlights the commitment of hundreds to plan, build, and execute an event worthy of taking place in any American town. Under the hot desert sun, however, the improvised floats, patchwork costumes, and music by the kitchen orchestra playing their vegetable peelers reveal the limits of this illusion and expose the effortful labor of inmates marching in a parade behind barbed wire.

Prior to the onset of war, urban Japanese Americans organized similar lively and extensive celebrations. In 1934, the first notable Japanese American festival, *Nisei Week*, took place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo neighborhood. *Nisei Week* hosted multiple events including a parade with floats and traditional Japanese folk dance, a tea ceremony, a baby contest, an essay contest, a fashion show, and a talent

19. Ibid.

20. Cold milk was a treat as milk was often served warm or room temperature. Milk was referenced by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt when she visited Gila River in 1943. Charles Kikuchi documented in his JERS notes that Mrs. Roosevelt commented that the milk was sour. This was a subtle act of support for the inmates especially as the American public were led to believe inmates were being "coddled." See Karen Leong, "Gila River," *Densho Encyclopedia*, last modified August 20, 2015, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Gila%20River/>.

show.²¹ The first queen was inaugurated in 1935. Similar to Tulare, the public was able to vote for a queen using a ballot attained only after making a purchase at a Little Tokyo establishment.²²

The desire to continue to organize such community rituals while incarcerated can be read as both a performance of patriotism and a critique. Perceivable as purely an exercise of nationalism and gender socialization, alternatively, the Tulare Fourth of July parade and coronation of a beauty queen also demonstrated a refusal by Japanese Americans to accept life as inmates. The parade, three-quarter miles in length, featured floats by 36 Tulare-affiliated groups. This elaborate and meticulously organized affair proved that Japanese Americans could be patriotic despite their incarceration. Simultaneously, this ironic production of abundance highlighted the inmate's undeniable ability to endure hardship, be resourceful, and persevere despite living in dire conditions. With their patriotic zeal, Tulare inmates performed the paradox of their positionality as citizen and enemy.

This performance of patriotism by those deemed potential enemies also underscores the intangibility and fragility of citizenship. Scholar Anne Anlin Cheng's reading of "Chop Suey," a song and dance number praising the benefits of American citizenship in the 1961 film *Flower Drum Song*, provides a framework of analysis. In the musical number, the Asian American actors acknowledge the dish "Chop Suey" is an American invention, not "authentically" Chinese. They gleefully sing lyrics that are an amalgamation of American popular cultural references, while they skillfully and enthusiastically execute a square dance, a waltz, the cha-cha-cha, the Charleston, and several other Western dances. Cheng posits that the actors exaggerate their performance as happy consumers of American popular culture in order to present a more tolerable version of their identities and in doing so also hide their grief. She argues that the ensemble performed a "pathological euphoria," a heightened expression of joy so great that no sign of pain or loss can be

21. Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*, 42–62.

22. Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 60.

revealed.²³ Knowing their rejection was inevitable, each minority figure must simultaneously deny their exclusion and hide their grief.²⁴ With Cheng's analytic we can see how in such a performance Asian Americans confront a paradox: in veiling their grief they both refute and uphold racism. Evoking a similar performance of pathological euphoria, Japanese Americans suppressed their grievances and enlisted the help of hundreds to produce a grand parade celebrating ideals of freedom and liberty. The exaggerated display of delight, however, merely masked and attempted to lessen the pain felt from their continual exclusion.²⁵

By upholding specific racialized and gendered values, the selection of a queen at the Tulare Detention Center's Fourth of July parade was not simply a lighthearted celebration. As reflected in the *Tulare News*, the event functioned to socialize women by rewarding ideals of Japanese American and white femininity, increase inmate morale with their participation in the selection process, and promote nationalism through a "gigantic and colossal"²⁶ patriotic parade program, all

23. Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42. Cheng's central idea of racial melancholia, further underscores this point. Her analysis of melancholia accounts for the experiences of exclusion, invisibility and rejection endured by marginalized communities throughout American history. Cheng builds on Freud's definition of melancholia, described as feeling loss so deep one is incapable of accepting substitution and as such exists in a constant state of self-impoverishment. Cheng reframes Freud's definition and looks to acts of systematic and legislative exclusion that lead to feelings of loss. Cheng examines exclusion as not only an individual experience but also that of a collective. She draws on psychoanalysis to further discuss the pervasive process of internalization: consuming loss and later denying its eternal presence. Cheng asserts that the rhetoric of melancholia draws attention to the complicated and contradictory emotions embedded in experiencing loss and in doing so invites "disarticulated grief" to be heard (29).

24. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 9.

25. Joshua T. Chambers-Letson, *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 110.

Performance studies scholar Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson reads the act of pledging allegiance to the flag in incarceration facilities as an "embodied ritual structured by a uniform choreography." As described by a teacher in the Manzanar incarceration facility, school children stood and turned to an empty corner and pledged allegiance to a flag that was not there. The problem was resolved when a student suggested to draw a flag. Chambers-Letson articulates that the children "not only bolster the nation but also inadvertently reveal the horrifying nature of the camps as a place where the law exists only in a state of suspension."

26. "Flag Ceremony to Open Fiesta," *Tulare News* (CA), June 27, 1942.

practices occurring under the surveillance of the WRA. Challenging the bounds of these regulations, Japanese American inmates also appropriated acts of nation building. Through their celebration of the nation's independence, inmates demonstrated that such independence was provisional to many, as no amount of patriotism could prove their innocence in wartime America. Incarcerated Japanese Americans could not make a claim to patriotism without recognizing their own status as citizens stripped of rights. With their embodied contradiction, as enemy and citizen, Japanese Americans articulated their attempts toward, and constant rejection from, full citizenship. As such, despite their abjection, through their self-produced Fourth of July festivities, Japanese American inmates exposed the very construction of citizenship and underscored the injustice of their circumstance.



March 3, 1945. Yuriko Amemiya, modern dancer with the famed Martha Graham dance company, is entertaining 125 Japanese American girls from New York, War Relocation Authority photographs: Japanese-American evacuation and resettlement, BANC PIC 1967.014 v. 40 EG-833-PIC, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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Black-Salpuri: The Innovation of a Traditional Korean Dance Form

Hye-Won Hwang

The South Korean government established the Cultural Heritage Administration in 1961 and passed the Cultural Heritage Protection Act in 1962. South Korea's Cultural Heritage Protection Act was initiated to preserve in their original form artificially or naturally created heritages of Korea that have high historic, artistic, academic, or scenic significance. The legislation defines four types of cultural heritages to protect: Tangible Cultural Heritage (*Yuhyeong Munhwajae*), Intangible Cultural Heritage (*Muhyeong Munhwajae*), Historic Sites or Buildings (*Sajuck*), and Natural Resources (*Chunyun Kinyeomul*).¹ The Cultural Heritage Administration specifically manages cultural properties, which are further designated according to state or city/province.

When the government set up the goal of preserving items of intangible cultural heritage in 1962, they focused on protecting the "archetypal form" (*Wonhyung* in Korean), the very first model, of traditional drama, music, dance, and craftsmanship. The newly enacted 2015 law on the Safeguarding and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage amended its basic principle to the protection of the "intrinsic quality"

1. Tangible Cultural Heritage (type 1) refers to historic architecture, ancient books and documents, paintings, sculptures, handicrafts, archeological materials, and armory. Intangible Cultural Heritage (type 2) includes the knowledge and skills of traditions and living expressions, such as drama, music, dance, and craftsmanship, carrying great historic, artistic, or academic values. Historic Sites or Buildings (type 3) encompass places and facilities that preserve and commemorate artifacts of significant historic and academic values, such as fortresses, ancient tombs, temple sites, and shell mounds. Natural Resources (type 4) are described as animals, plants, minerals, caves, geological features, biological products, and special natural phenomena.

(*Chunhyung* in Korean) of intangible cultural heritage. This new definition, adapted from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convention, allowed a little more flexible interpretation of originality in that the preservation focuses on the essential quality of an intangible cultural heritage. What is considered essential, however, can be controversial. Yet the newly defined term shows that institutions involved in these policies recognize the ontology of dance as ephemeral and contingent on the body that performs it. They are well aware of the ways that intangible cultural heritage is fluid, which is different from the more “fixed” ways that tangible cultural heritage is preserved. Thus, the government tends to acknowledge the impossibility of identifying fixed and universally shared originality of a dance even as the attempt is still to preserve, however contingently. Unlike tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage cannot be transmitted without people who perform or enact them. South Korea’s law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage established a legal system for designating individuals or groups who hold outstanding skills and knowledge of the properties as Living Human Treasure. These individuals are tasked to preserve the particular items of intangible cultural heritage and train people in the next generation, at no charge, in the techniques of their art. They are obliged to organize annual public performances and keep records of them. In turn, the state compensates Living Human Treasures at a rate of approximately one million, five hundred thousand won (about 1150 US dollars as of 2022) per month, plus free medical treatment, and provision of or access to training and performance space (Yim 2014).

In this essay, I will focus on *salpurichum*, a traditional Korean folk dance designated by the state as Important Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 97 in 1990. Originally performed by a shaman to exorcize evil or negative energy, different lineages of *salpurichum* have been transmitted through embodied practice in various regions of Korea. In order to preserve *salpurichum*, the state designated Maebang Lee as the Living Human Treasure for the dance form in 1991. Lee dedicated his life to transmitting this dance form to his successors, supported by the

state's Cultural Heritage Protection Law, until he died in 2015 (Chung 1992; Lee 2015; Yang and Chumggun 2015). The state's ideal goal of preserving traditional dances in their original forms can be compared with an individual dancer's desire to innovate. I analyze contemporary South Korean dance artist YoungChul Kim's *Black-Salpuri*, comparing it with Lee's *salpurichum*. Through this analysis, I highlight the ways in which South Korea's Cultural Heritage Protection Act reinforces a binary between what is labeled as "traditional" and what is labeled as "contemporary Korean dance." I also show how such institutionalization has constructed the parameters of traditional Korean dance at home while making the innovated versions of traditional Korean dance less visible in the world. This study debunks the ontological nature of dance and body as a living archive and claims a broad spectrum between the state's goal of cultural preservation and an individual's tactics of cultural embodiment when dealing with tradition.

The Preservation of *Salpurichum* through Body

Among many performances of *salpurichum* that Maebang Lee performed, I analyze his 1994 performance showcased at Korean House as a part of an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage presentation. In the video, Lee danced with traditional Korean instruments such as *gayagum*, a long 12-stringed zither; *piri*, a bamboo oboe; *ajaeng*, a long bowed zither; *janggo*, an hourglass drum; and *jing*, a large gong with *sinawi jangdan*, a shamanic rhythm played in the background. Lee wore layers of white traditional Korean clothes including *baji*, loose pants for men; *jeogori*, a jacket; and *beoseon*, socks; and he put on a light blue and pale pink-colored *durumagi*, an outer robe for men. He wore a black headdress called *jokduri* and used a long white silk scarf. He started the dance facing his right side to the audience, on the upper right corner of the stage. He walked down to the center of the stage in a circular and curved pathway, expressing in his movement *jung-joong-dong*, which means stillness in motion. The dance

progressed in three stages: slow and controlled relaxation of tension at the beginning, accelerated motion while snapping the scarf and creating a circular illusion in space, and finally the slow resolution of tension again at the end.

Some of the lineages of *salpurichum* include a Gyeonggi province-based *salpurichum*, which uses about a 120 inch long, thin white scarf, and Gyeonggi province-style shamanic rhythm, called *dosalpuri jangdan*. A Jeolla province-based *salpurichum* uses about a 60 inch long white scarf and Jeolla province-style shamanic rhythm called *sinawi jangdan*. Maebang Lee, the Living Human Treasure, was born in Mokpo in Southern Jeolla province in 1927. He started to learn dance at the age of 7 from his grandfather who worked at *Kwonbun*, a government-level professional performing arts training institution during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897). He continued to learn several Korean traditional dance repertoires from other dance teachers in Korea and Japan during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). The Jeolla-lineage *salpurichum* that Lee embodied had been transformed as it had been practiced by different people in different historical contexts. Written archives show that a shaman ritual dance was transformed into a *Gibang*-style scarf dance² during the Joseon dynasty (Kim 1990, 64–67). This scarf dance was performed by low-class female artists for male patrons for entertainment purposes. The dance was then refined by Sungjoon Han into a theatrical dance to fit a proscenium stage in the 1930s.

Ramsay Burt points out that different training techniques or various resources available to contemporary dancers would cause changes in a reconstructed work to a certain degree. He states, “there is no original, only re-presentations of re-presentations of re-presentations” (Burt 1998, 33). Burt’s statement echoes the impossibility of preserving and

2. *Gibang* dance was a dance professionally performed by *gisaeng*, low-caste women who were good at arts—singing, dancing, painting, and writing. They belonged to the governing offices in each province. They were trained at the *gisaeng* training institutes and required to perform various functions for the royal court, regional offices, and wealthy patrons as government’s legal entertainers.

transmitting traditional Korean dance in its original form. It is questionable if Lee's version of *salpurichum* adapted from Han's restructured *salpurichum* could be considered the authentic original form.

André Lepecki considers the body a living archive, "a system or zone where works do not rest but are formed and transformed, endlessly—like ghostly matters" (2010, 44). Through the analysis of the contemporary works of Julie Tolentino's *The Sky Remains the Same*, Martin Nachbar's *Urheben Aufheben*, and Richard Move's *Martha@Mother*, Lepecki argues that the dancer's body actualizes the re-enactment of the dances' past, which cannot be fixed and represented in their singular "original" form. Lepecki views re-enactment as "a privileged mode to effectuate or actualize a work's immanent field of inventiveness and creativity" (45). My view aligns with Lepecki's in that I am not pessimistic about the bodily archiving that neither fixes the past nor delivers singular original works. As Lepecki proposes, I argue that bodily archiving offers possibilities to "unlock, release, and actualize" (42) a dance of the past. Lepecki's concept of re-enactment actualizes a possibility to expand our notion of tradition as what is *becoming*, transformative, ever-changing, and fluid in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Thus, his theory highlights bodily archiving as a possibility to embrace changes rather than a failure to reconstruct an original. From an ontological perspective, preserving and transmitting the originality of *salpurichum*, in an archetypal sense, are flawed because it is impossible to trace and confirm the very "original" version of the dance generated from former times. Lee's 1994 dance was a modified version of re-presentations of *salpurichum*. It is also impossible to reach an agreement about what the intrinsic quality of the form is because the measurement for the intrinsic aspect of the form cannot be standardized. I argue that the state's legal system that promotes the preservation of the original forms of traditional dances (whether as "archetypal form" or "intrinsic quality") represents a symbolic action rather than a concrete expectation. The key aspect of South Korea's Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Act is to enable the sharing of a particular

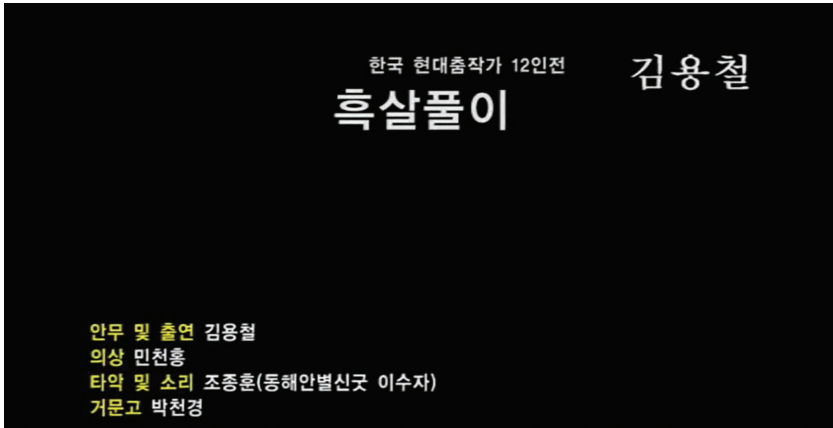
art, craft, or technique with the next generation through successor training³ in order to keep the tradition alive. The value of embodied tradition lies in what is molded by people who keep practicing it rather than keeping it sealed in a crystalized box. The beauty of transmitting embodied traditions is reflected in the continuation of practice, even allowing transformations, modifications, innovations, and deconstructions to be (re-)enacted by people taking part in these traditions.

Toward a New Perception of Tradition(al Dances)

Michel de Certeau (1984) follows the lead of, but re-examines, Pierre Bourdieu's logics of practice and subjectivity. Bourdieu views subjectivity as a reflection of broader structural processes. However, de Certeau grasps subjectivity in its fragmented forms and the action of everyday resistance as relatively independent of socially derived subjectivity (Napolitano and Pratten 2007, 6). He focuses on the consumer or user rather than the producer and provides concepts of "strategies and tactics" to frame the ways in which the user tactically re-appropriates, subverts, and maneuvers around institutions and structures of power. His notion of "tactics" is useful in considering the ways in which individual artists' tactical use of traditional Korean dance resists

3. There are several steps regarding the successor training for the transmission of traditions. Living Human Treasures provide beginners with the initial training. Among beginners, a Living Human Treasure or a Living Human Treasure group selects the best trainees. The selected trainees, called *Chunsuja*, receive government scholarships to continue their training. *Chunsuja* are then examined by the Living Human Treasures in the designated field; those who attain a higher level of skill are selected as advanced trainees, called *Isuja*. The advanced trainees with the highest level of skill earn the title of Assistant Instructors, called *Chunschogyo*; this is the highest level in the training chain superseded only by the Living Human Treasure designation. *Chunschogyo* receive a fixed stipend from the South Korean government to assist the Living Human Treasure with training beginners (*Chunsujas*) and other advanced students (*Isujas*). A government committee, called Intangible Cultural Property Committee, selects candidates from the pool of *Chunschogyo* to succeed each Living Human Treasure. When the current Living Human Treasures can no longer train successors due to illness or old age, they resign and are given the title of Honorary Living Human Treasure by the state to recognize their lifelong dedication to transmitting Korean cultural traditions.

and complicates the state's goal of protecting traditional dances designated as intangible cultural heritage in their "original" fixed forms. Among various works created by contemporary South Korean dance artists, Yongchul Kim's *Black-Salpuri*⁴ performed in 2015 at Dongsoong Art Center is a useful example of a DeCerteauian tactic.



KIM, Yongchul SEOP Dancecompany Korean Contemporary Dance *Black-Salpuri* 김용철 섯무용단 '흑살풀이'. <https://youtu.be/UKARx1J-n0w>

Under a dim blue spotlight, a sole dancer stands in the upper left corner of the stage. The dancer's entire body is covered by a long black fabric, which creates an image of a demon. The fabric trembles as the dancer hits it with his hands from the inside. The light reflected from the trembling, distorted surface of the fabric fills the stage with a mood of foreboding. After a long trembling moment, the dancer, still covered by the long fabric, walks slowly in a circle around the edge of the entire stage. The dancer keeps walking in circles, and a sorrowful male voice breaks the silence. The dancer finally finds a spot, stands firmly with open legs, and steadily raises his right arm to the

4. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKARx1J-n0w> (accessed April 21, 2022). Youngchul Kim's *Black-Salpuri* performance (costume designed by Chundhong Min; percussion and oral sound by Jonghoon Cho, an *isuja* of Shaman Ritual; Geomungo played by Chunjung Park) at Dongsoong Art Center in 2015.

side. To the beat of the Korean percussion instrument, *jangu*, the dancer abruptly bends his knees with legs wide apart and starts opening and closing his arms in different directions with minimal use of upper-body motion. The shapes of the fabric created by the dancer's motion evoke the image of something monstrous. From time to time, a bare foot, hand, fingers, or forearm burst out of the fabric, while quick percussion pours ecstatic energy out into the space. The dancer travels across the floor with only his hands sticking out of the fabric, as if he is trying to grab something. He stops at the lower right corner of the stage and rubs his palms together and then puts them back inside the fabric. The figure of fabric becomes wilder and bigger. After this moment of struggle, the dancer unveils his body gradually from the heels to head and emerges out of the fabric entirely. The uncovered dancer, dressed in a white linen button-down shirt and black pants, then grasps two corners of the rectangular fabric and walks backward across the floor. The fabric is blown by the wind in front of his body creating an image of a balloon floating in the air. The dancer carefully travels backward until he pulls the whole fabric into his chest without dropping it on the floor. The relationship between the dancer and the fabric makes me wonder if he was a shaman trying to calm down an angry devil or exorcize negative energy.

After a long pause, the dancer spreads the fabric on the floor and walks around outside of the edge of the rectangular fabric. A Korean string instrument, *geomungo*, plays in the background, and the dancer finds a spot at center stage facing the audience. He steps forward with knees bent by curling his foot from heel to toes. He breathes from the navel with the upper body hollowed and slightly tipped forward. He raises his arms to create a curved shape. As his dance progresses, the *geomungo* sound becomes combined with the *jangu* sound. The dancer shifts his head side to side, isolating his shoulders, turning from a ballet fourth position, thrusting his hips into a jump, sliding into the ground, and rolling on the floor, all while interacting with the fabric in various ways. The dancer's fast motion gradually fades out until he gets into the center of the stage where the folded fabric is located.

The dancer hunkers down looking at the fabric and the sad male voice begins again. The dancer carefully picks up the fabric, holds it tight to his chest, and turns away from the audience. His shoulders shake as if he is sobbing. He turns his head to the right and the left quickly several times, as if he is haunted by an evil spirit. He walks backward to the front side of the stage, his back to the audience. He turns around, his sweaty, emotional face to the audience. He covers his head with the fabric, holds it around his neck with one hand, and moves his body side to side while reaching out his right arm as if he is trying to release himself from a trap. He pauses and falls abruptly on his knee. He drops his head and shoulders down as if he finally realizes that he was the person who created the trap. The sound ceases. The light fades out leaving a feeling of acceptance.

The “original” content of *salpurichum* is generally about expelling negative energy. In Kim’s intense, powerful dance piece, the vivid movements and sounds particularly represent the negative emotions and desires that one might experience, and hope to release, in the space between life and death, as Kim explains in the program notes. In this sense, Kim’s *Black-Salpuri* contains *salpurichum*’s thematic idea of exorcizing negative energy. However, Kim’s dance work is clearly distinguished from Maebang Lee’s *salpurichum*. In Kim’s *Black-Salpuri*, Korean traditional dance is deconstructed and mixed with American/European modern and jazz dance styles and expressive pantomimic gestures.

In South Korea, traditional Korean dance is distinguished from contemporary Korean dance. While traditional Korean dance refers to dances that are generated from the Joseon dynasty or earlier, contemporary Korean dances are described as dances created by contemporary individual artists who modify traditional Korean dance through their own artistic expression. The “new” creation results from combining traditional Korean dance movement with Western modern dance or other dance styles. Or, it could be done by making changes in set designs, props, costumes, and/or music depending on an individual artist’s innovative choice, as shown in the case of Kim’s *Black-Salpuri*.

Ever since the South Korean government established the law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 1962, traditional dances and artists selected by the state and local governments have become more visible in public than in the past. The prevalence and visibility of their practice has contributed to familiarizing the general public with what traditional Korean dance is supposed to be, which creates the illusion of authenticity. The state's preservation system resulted in specific dances being selected as the repositories of Korean dance tradition and signals of Korean culture. Consequently, these selected dances have contributed to constructing South Korea's national and cultural identity. In addition, they have become a national symbol through which Korean people feel a sense of belonging to the nation both at home and in the world.

However, the conventions of selecting traditional Korean dances by the state's preservation system have also brought controversial outcomes. It has created a hierarchy between chosen traditional dances and not-chosen traditional dances. As a result, the chosen dances have become a top priority to be performed or taught in South Korea's higher education system, performing arts concerts, and tourist industry. The state-governed institutional practice to protect these traditional dances has also intensified the distinction between traditional Korean dance and contemporary Korean dance. This has led to the public's common perception of tradition as old, authentic, original, unchanging, and Korean, while positioning contemporary as new, innovative, changing, current, and Western. Such perceptions tend to reinforce the image of tradition as a fixed singular form generated from the past. Is the image of tradition that is created conceptually the same as how tradition is practiced and interpreted by individual dancers?

Let me revisit the example of Maebang Lee's *salpurichum* and Yongchul Kim's *Black-Salpuri*. Lee's *salpurichum* has been labeled as "traditional Korean dance" while Kim's *Black-Salpuri* has been marked as "contemporary Korean dance." It can be fair to say that Kim modified traditional Korean dance steps by mixing Western modern dance with Korean dance vocabulary. Lee wears traditional Korean clothing, *hanbok*, whereas Kim puts on a Western-style white shirt with black

pants. Kim's dance incorporates Western modern styles, whereas Lee's dance keeps Korean styles supposedly generated from the Joseon dynasty. In this sense, the term "contemporary" used to label Kim's dance seems to make more stylistic sense rather than temporal sense because, for one thing, Western modern dance, not to mention the clothes that Kim adopted in his dance, also emerged at least 100 years ago in the West. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the definition of "contemporary" is described as (1) living or occurring at the same time and (2) belonging to or occurring in the present. When Korean dance is divided into traditional and contemporary, the term "contemporary" seems to refer to something that is occurring in the present while "tradition" is something that belonged to the past. I wonder if there is anything contemporary about tradition.

Returning to the comparison between Lee's *salpurichum*, a traditional Korean folk dance form, and Kim's innovative dance piece again, how can we understand the relationship between the two dances? Can Kim's dance, labeled as "contemporary Korean dance," be considered within the spectrum of traditional *salpurichum*? Or are these dances positioned at the opposite extremes of tradition and contemporary because Kim challenges the "convention" of traditional *salpurichum*? If Kim's dance piece is perceived as a historiography of traditional *salpurichum* inscribed by an individual dancer along the road of transmitting tradition, could we call his dance a contemporary version of traditional Korean dance? Or, would tradition in Kim's piece become extinct once it is incorporated into his innovative dance? Obviously, Kim's dance would not be called contemporary Korean dance a hundred years from now. An analysis of Lee's *salpurichum* and Kim's *Black-Salpuri* in relationship to issues of originality, the ephemeral nature of dance, and the differences across the bodies shows that embodied tradition constantly evolves and thus carries contemporaneity with it. I argue that the concepts of "traditional" and "contemporary" overlap and that they should be understood as relational.

SanSan Kwan argues that (East) Asian dance is conventionally presumed to be historical rather than contemporary. Referring to Ananya

Chatterjea, she states, "when placed in front of 'world dance,' 'contemporary' loses its broad temporal meaning and becomes a dominant set of Euro-American aesthetics that serves to subsume and/or exclude even as it claims to welcome" (Kwan 2017, 46). She points out that the title "world dance" or region-based labels, such as Asian dance or African dance, fixes the image of a particular dance as atemporal. In "Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World," Marta Savigliano wrote, "World Dance is a representation, a relatively new way of putting together, conceptualizing, and validating [the West's] 'other' dances, rather than a plain discovery of their presence in the world" (2009, 164). Savigliano acutely points out that the term "World Dance" is a discursive concept. It is not a term based on corporeal enactment. I argue that the institutionalization of traditional Korean dance through the Cultural Heritage Protection Law has romanticized the image of authentic traditional Korean dance, which helps the West imagine others like Disney World's "It's a Small World" while putting the West's others into one category—World Dance. The problem may not lie in the distinction between the two labels of traditional Korean dance and contemporary Korean dance. The problem, I point out, is the notion of tradition as a fixed, authentic, and original passed down for thousands of years while creating a dichotomy between East and West, between old and new, between unchanging and changing and between pure and impure. I argue that the state's preservation system, even if it recognizes the fluid quality of embodied tradition, reinforces, as Kwan and Savigliano mention, an atemporal image of Asian dance (or World Dance) as viewed by the West. Yet, as discussed with the examples of Lee's *salpurichum* and Kim's dance piece, an individual dancer's embodiment complicates the state's goal of fetishizing tradition as a fixed entity linearly generated from the past.

Traditional Korean dance has constantly evolved and changed with "new" meanings and forms through various individual artists' innovative practices in every era. I claim that tradition, as a whole, should be understood as what is becoming and, as such, should be open to

multiple interpretations of individual artists who practice on the route of transmitting tradition from one generation to the next generation.

Conclusion

I presented a comparison of Lee's *salpurichum* and Youngchul Kim's *Black-Salpuri* as an example to show how individual bodies enact tradition differently. While the state's system has focused on protecting the originality of traditional Korean dance, Kim's innovative dance piece reveals the fusion of traditional Korean dance and modern Western forms. Moreover, the comparison between Lee's *salpurichum*, which is labeled as "traditional Korean dance," and Kim's *Black-Salpuri*, which is marked as "contemporary Korean dance," shows that the binary labels of traditional and contemporary dances are false owing to the fact that even Lee's *salpurichum*, designated as the intangible cultural heritage aimed at protecting this traditional dance form in its original form, was, in fact, a modified and reinterpreted version of the *salpurichum* passed down from the Joseon dynasty and beforehand. This reminds us that there is always something contemporary about tradition and that these two concepts inevitably overlap. Embodied tradition is a living being. It is not an inanimate object to be fossilized and put in a glass box in a museum. A tradition dies when there is no way forward through the present.

Author Biography

Dr. Hye-Won Hwang is Associate Professor of Practice in Dance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She earned a PhD in critical dance studies from the University of California, Riverside. She also holds an MA in dance studies from the Laban Center, London (now called Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance), and an MA in dance education from New York University. She received a BA in

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Asian American Activation through Hip Hop Dance

grace shinhae jun and MiRi Park

At a time when transnational capital and repressive state apparatuses hold the upper hand everywhere, cultural production plays a vital role in nurturing and sustaining self-activity on the part of aggrieved peoples. Culture enables people to rehearse identities, stances, and social relations not yet permissible in politics. But it also serves as a concrete social site, a place where social relations are constructed and enacted as well as envisioned. Popular culture does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it.

—George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 137

Introduction

As sister-moms, scholars, activists, and hip hop dancers/lecturers, we have had the great fortune of having each other's ear before and throughout the pandemic. We've commiserated, collaborated, and co-conspired about our love and concerns about Asianness and hip hop dance. Both of us are currently investigating and interrogating Asian dance groups on university campuses in different capacities: grace's essay in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies* (2022) and MiRi in forthcoming dissertation research.

Initially thinking about Claire Jean Kim's theory of racial triangulation across Black, Asian, and white, we've also come to consider lyko Day's triangulation across settler-colonist, Indigenous, and alien

alongside Helen Heran Jun's concept of Black Orientalism and Asian uplift as effects of neoliberalism, as giving more space to think about how Black people and Asians are racialized with and against each other. Rooted in capitalism, Day's theory considers how Asians and Black folk arrived at Turtle Island as exploited labor. In centering neoliberal ideology, Jun frames how the post-World War II reshaping of the global economic and political world order resulted in mass inequality and thus shaped how people related to one another.

Considering George Lipsitz's sentiment in this opening epigraph, we often find ourselves thinking about the following:

- We want Asian Americans to be activated through their participation in hip hop dance (and hip hop dance derivative) practices so that they can constitute realities forged from freedom dreams (Kelley) that truly center the tenets of peace, love, unity, and having fun. We are particularly invested in hip hop dance as practitioners, but we have also borne witness to hip hop dance becoming the social movement vernacular among Asian Americans throughout the past three decades.
- We want Asian Americans to know our histories of arrival and trauma, and how they are tied to the suffering of others.
- We want Asian Americans to understand that their participation in hip hop builds community and power, but it comes at a cost when it remains insular to their own teams.

Since we ask these same questions of our students, we thought we'd share how we personally arrived at our understanding of how our collective—Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx—freedoms and liberations are tied to together. In this moment of heightened awareness of anti-Asian violence, when the Asian American community is asking "where are our supporters?", we understand that the violence stems from something deeper than just discrimination against Asian folks. We also understand that, reciprocally, people are asking where we have been in the struggle against anti-Black violence.

What follows is an edited version of a conversation we had in which we delved into our own hiphopography (Spady and Alim) and histories of arrival to both hip hop dance and activism. We discuss in particular Street Dance Activism, a collective activated by Shamell Bell in May 2020, with the intent to shift our consciousness to Black liberation through dance and movement.



Photo from grace's personal collection. grace shinhae jun and MiRi Park at the 2017 Dance Studies Association conference at Ohio State University.

The Foundations

We came up during the golden age of hip hop, the 1980s and 1990s, where discovery and innovation exploded possibilities in the culture.

We were listening to the growing roster of hip hop artists and were hip hop dancing because of school friends, *Soul Train*, the Fly Girls, and music videos.

MiRi Park 박미리: I was the Asian kid who was friends with the Black kid. We were both latchkey kids and hung out at her house because she was allowed to watch TV after school, which meant copious hours of *General Hospital*, MTV, and BET. Her mom let us watch *School Daze* (1988). . . . I watched the dance diaspora represented in that film, not fully understanding what I was seeing, even as everything resonated so deeply because I was already starting to watch Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. At that point, my friend and I were always doing the party dances. I didn't know what they were, but she would say, "Here's the latest thing that we have to do," and we made routines and went to school dances and just went off.

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: There were only a handful of Asians at my school. I was the only Asian girl in my graduating class. In seventh grade, my friend Danielle transferred in and was one of the only Black girls in my grade. She introduced me to K-DAY 1580, which was the AM radio station in LA that played hip hop and R&B. There was also my friend Robin. We were on the cheer squad together and she taught us all the things. We were learning Black culture through her and we were doing it through our cheers. My dancing also came from watching *Soul Train* and from religiously watching the Fly Girls from *In Living Color*. I think everybody tried to break in the 1980s, but because there were no classes, we were learning with each other.

MiRi Park 박미리: I mean, for me, my awareness came from two places: breakin' and my work with Nia Love. I had the great fortune of taking class from her in college, seeing her again after I moved to New York, and then living upstairs from her and receiving a parallel education about institutional racism while I was in grad

school. The artistic work that I did with Nia and the interdisciplinary group of artists she assembled was about the Middle Passage and contending with that trauma. That's actually when I read Helen Zia. In the last chapter of *Asian American Dreams: The Emergences of an American people*, Zia discusses how the slave ships were repurposed to bring coolies from China. Realizing that sort of blew my mind, like the actual physical vessels. I was not yet really fully aware of capitalism as a structure, as an economic paradigm, as being the thing that was the underlying impetus that pulls together issues of labor, both enslavement and indentured labor, that built this country.

I was only just starting to see myself as an Asian person reflected inside of this entire struggle, because prior to that I was invested in the work that Nia was doing about the Middle Passage, but it was not about me or my story necessarily until it did become about that. We were having conversations about Japan colonizing Korea—that kind of oppression. So that was happening both intellectually and artistically while I was starting to break. It was all happening at the same time.

I was so focused on the body mechanics of breakin', learning how to do the movement with a loosely assembled cohort of other newbie dancers, but then afterwards it was about chilling with them. We were also so exhausted and hungry after practice that it didn't matter that this kid was 16 and from the neighborhood, and this other kid was a 35-year-old white guy, and I was this 22-year-old Korean kid who just wanted to dance.

But at a certain point because you live hip hop, you become part of the blob that is the hip hop habitus. You are absorbed into the blob and . . . people know me and I know them, and therefore we care about each other. The bonds of caring are true and strong and so, if I were to go down from an anti-Asian attack, I know that the community, the hip hop family, is going to support me, just like when someone else in the community goes

down we're all going to fight for that person. I think that the solidarity factor really comes from the sweating together, the living together, the smelling together. When you smell somebody on a regular basis you know who they are.

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: Looking back I see how hip hop set my mind open in a particular way and I was receiving things differently. Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and then *Malcolm X* (1992) came out when I was in high school, so I was really into Lee and his films and of course Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989) in *Do the Right Thing*. And I think it was because of Lee's film *Malcolm X* that I asked my English teacher if I could read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for my book report. It wasn't on his list, but that's what I wanted to do. And then in college, I was falling more in love with hip hop because I worked at the campus radio station. I eventually became the Rap Director and was the person in contact with different labels and received all the new hip hop music that was coming out in the 1990s.

Being in LA in a very Korean space in Koreatown and in this dense city and then on the flip side being in very white spaces, my Asianness or Koreanness was really something that I thought about a lot—particularly because I didn't fit into the stereotypes of the small Asian girl. I was tall, into sports, and most people didn't think I was Korean. It was through the dancing that I began to really know who I was. I really do credit Rennie Harris and Doug Elkins for showing me what was possible. So after moving to New York, going to grad school and going to the clubs and experiencing hip hop in that way, my relationship to dance started changing. I had a partner who lived in Brooklyn, and the choreographic work that we were doing and the conversations we were having were sending me deeper into investigating and learning. And then I met Ant Black. We just vibed because we understood each other, coming from a hip hop perspective, but really feeling like we were at the margins of what we did. Him as a spoken

word poet and me as a dancer not fitting into these boxes, and we began to create with each other and out of that we have developed a lifelong friendship where our families are intertwined. Hip hop brought us together, creating brought us together, and it's like you said, we show up for each other.

Protests and Activism

MiRi Park 박미: Back in college my friend Jose and I participated in my first protest, which was about UMass cutting funding to either first-generation students or minority students. I think it was cutting minority funding. And I didn't fully understand what was going on, because I come from a place of privilege. I come from a family that was, "Your job is to go to college. We have prepared for you to go to school." I remember the protesters were trying to shut down campus, so they occupied a building. Then part of the protest was walking through the streets so that no traffic could move, creating traffic jams on campus.

I remember getting into it with the girl across the hall from me in my dorm, a white girl from central Massachusetts, a blue-collar family, who was also waitressing, I think, on the weekends. I remember debating with her and saying, "You know how many people in your high school class graduated?" And she said, "99%." I responded, "Well, imagine going to a high school where the graduation rate was 19% and a fraction of that percentage was expected to go on to college." Her point was that she was poor and needed money to go to college, so she didn't think a person of color should get more funding than her.

I didn't fully know what I was saying at the time, but I told her the sheer expectation that you would finish high school and then go on to college, even if you're struggling to pay for it, is completely different from being in a situation where you are not expected to graduate and you were sure as hell not expected

to go to college. I don't know where that came from, but realized it was at the protest where I heard those things. That's the whole point of activism, to raise and build awareness. I didn't realize what was happening at the time, I didn't realize that I was getting an education—different kinds of lessons. This is just me, my physical body being in a place, so that's another constant theme of me just saying, "I'm just going to show up. I'm gonna put my body in the place that feels like it needs to be in." I think about that as being my point of activation or social justice awakening.

Both my partner and I stopped going to protests after the Iraq invasion. There were huge protests in New York that we participated in and it didn't do shit. So both of us became disillusioned. . . . We're all going to stand up and say this and you're still going to do whatever you want to do? What's the point? But I think from that moment, I understood that the protest doesn't necessarily have to happen en masse in the streets. Much later when I started teaching hip hop, I realized that this is where this thing (protest and activism) happens, too, because I'm also talking about the things that I've learned and am trying to impart to students, as well. I began to understand that teaching is also a mode of social justice, that teaching is a mode of activism.

grace shinhae jun 진신혜: Not everybody can be frontline organizers and sustain themselves. I think about all the little seeds that have been spread out to activate and get me where I am today. One of those moments was in 2010 at UCSD [University of California, San Diego]. It was called the "Compton Cook-out," where a frat threw a party, and the invite included various stereotypes of the Black community to indicate how to come dressed, what activities they were going to do, etc. There were campus-wide protests, conversations, panels, and arts-centered performances. I remember submitting an application to perform with Ant [Black] and Jesse [Mills]. It was called "Dear

Janet," where Ant's poem was a letter to a school friend about their differences while Jesse sang "Strange Fruit" and I danced. I think it was deeply meaningful because I was eight months pregnant with Brooklyn at the time. I also had my hip hop class perform. Looking back, it was this moment of showing them how they could be involved.

Also it's interesting as Sa-I-Gu (4-2-9) is coming up. The 1992 LA Uprising where Rodney King, a Black man, was beaten by four white police officers caught on a home video. It was an experience of seeing Korean and Black churches coming together in LA and having to go to some events with my church after seeing all the businesses being burned. I look back on that and how maybe I did not necessarily understand white supremacy in the ways that I understand it now, but now I recognize the moments that educate you. And for me it was always about educating myself as an undergrad and having professors like George Lipsitz, who opened my eyes. My honors thesis ended up being on the Black-Korean conflict in LA. Through the process of researching and writing it, I was learning how Blacks and Koreans were entangled and pitted against each other. So being introduced to Claire Kim's racial triangulation theory by my partner Dr. Jesse Mills was pivotal in understanding where I stood or why I was constantly feeling like an outsider.

My connection to DJ Kuttin Kandi, which was through hip hop, brought greater knowledge of activism. So when Alfred Olango was shot and killed by the police in San Diego, all of those things led up to, "We need to do something as Asians. We Asian Americans who participate in hip hop, we need to do something" and that's how we formed Asian Solidarity Collective (ASC). It was a way to address anti-Blackness in our communities and to build solidarity in our community. We were committed to doing the work, so when Shamell made the call to gather, for me it was no question. This is what I do, this is who I am, this is where I'm going from here on out.

Street Dance Activism—Global Dance Meditation for Black Liberation

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: Looking back at our participation in hip hop, these were the values that we were learning and what it meant to be in community and to show up and to support.

MiRi Park 박미리: Right—because we’re talking about relationships. We are in relationship with folks we have learned from, we are learning with, and Street Dance Activism (SDA) was another extension of that. The folks who stayed in it were saying, “We get you, we see each other, and we are showing up for each other.” I think that’s the thing that held us together for planning and launching the 28-day Global Dance Meditation. I don’t think that the anti-Asian hate crimes were publicized at that point. I feel like they’re always happening, but like it wasn’t quite hitting the tenor until 2021 when it started to be more publicized.

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: Right. It wasn’t about anti-Asian violence necessarily, but it was a call to gather.

MiRi Park 박미리: We were answering the call to *the shift* specifically. I feel like the idea behind Shamell’s instinct was that if we get enough people around the world together to be one-minded, single-minded about this . . . with the single intention of shifting us out of this shitty time. But in order to do that there had to be all of this work, to ensure that we were actually on the same page, that we were actually in solidarity, true solidarity, with one another. In one way, you can look at it as these elite, institutionalized folks. But on the other hand, you can look at it as, these people who have spent a lot of time, focusing and thinking about and ruminating about how we could shift a consciousness through dance and movement because so many of us are dancers.

It was important that there were so many different faces who were represented, and ethnicities and nationalities and backgrounds, but I think all of us who did come together understood what it meant to be activated and what it meant to participate in activist movements.

And the Asian American folks who are involved in SDA, we were plugged into this sort of mindset before we even came together. And also plugged into the work. For you and your work with ASC, it was a natural fit. The folks who ended up not moving forward with it—it was just because it was a lot. It was moving so quickly. Pulling together the 28-day meditation was coming together so fast that if you weren't right there at the front of it, it's too big of a curve to learn.

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: Planning, arranging, organizing with not even necessarily a clear direction and balancing when to step forward and when to pull back. I remember talking to Sabela Grimes specifically about as an Asian American not trying to take up space unless it's warranted or called. And he just said, "You're here, you got to do it," like the very ways that he was called into spaces. But again it's because it's relational, right, because we had established these relationships, that trust was built.

MiRi Park 박미리: But it is connected to the fact that we are all in relation to each other, and this is where Lyko Day's triangulation is just so incredibly powerful to me because in using capitalism as her framework to account for racialized labor in this country, we can see the bigger picture of how we are in relation to one another. Black and Asian folks are so different because of the circumstances in which they've come to the country, but both under the auspices of labor. If people really understood that, just seeing that picture would help us see that actually we are in the struggle together.

That if students knew how closely in relation we are to one another, there is a potential for political mobilization that we have yet to see, that goes beyond the Rainbow Coalition, that goes beyond the Third World Solidarity movement of the 1960s. That it actually happens because of hip hop, because of dance, that we recognize we are in the struggle together.

But how do we do that? You and I got here because we lived it. How can I make that assumption that a kid is going to listen to me because I said so?

grace shinhae jun 전신혜: I think that's the hope that we have for our Asian American students and Asian Americans in general. At least I want them to be activated and jump in but again realizing that you and I are a part of the seed planting. We are the big sisters that we didn't have. But I want to say that it does happen. Not right away, but I've had students who thank me years later for having those conversations in class. We have to drop those seeds, but we also have to understand that our experience of hip hop is not tied to an institution like theirs. So we continue to re-search Asian Americanness and educate through hip hop, cypher theory, and practicing our forms of solidarity.

Looking Forward

At the time of writing these concluding thoughts, the Supreme Court of the United States has just expanded gun rights and overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the span of 48 hours. If we, our parents, our grandparents, and our families immigrated to this country for a chance at a better life, even if it was amidst the hazy illusion of "freedom," we are here now. We must understand that it is a marathon to retain human rights for all, not just a few. Participating in hip hop dance might feel like an escape and fun, and it is, but that fun is political. If we know hip hop is about *the struggle*, then we have an obligation

to know and understand how we arrived at the place of privilege to participate in this dance. It binds us to the history of those who came before us and to the diverse multitude of humanity we dance with. This conversation has been about how each of our journeys into dance and hip hop dance activated us to learn true US American history and the injustices that we still face. In this ongoing, ever shifting, and evolving conversation, we consider whether our experiences are exceptional or mundane. As we engage in this research everyday through teaching, dancing, parenting, scrolling, reading, and writing, we have hope that other Asian Americans/Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) engaged in hip hop dance will also be activated. And as grace reminds her students and we remind each other, we must be in a daily practice. We must rehearse through the practice of hip hop dance and culture, before it becomes personal, so that we are ready.



Photo from grace's personal collection. MiRi (second from left) and grace (third from right) with collaborators Margaret Paek, Shamell Bell, Heather Castillo, Jade Power Sotomayor at the 2019 Dance Studies Conference at Northwestern University.

Author Biographies

grace shinhae jun is a mother, wife, artist, scholar, organizer, and mover who creates and educates on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. The daughter of a South Korean immigrant, a North Korean refugee, and hip hop culture, she comes from a lineage of deep love and commitment to serve the people. jun directs bkSOUL, a performance company that merges together movement, poetry, and live music. She is a founding member of Asian Solidarity Collective and co-conspires with Street Dance Activism. She graduated with honors from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), with a BA in history and a BA in choreography and dance. She received an MFA in dance from Sarah Lawrence College and her PhD in drama and theatre through the joint doctoral program at UCSD/UCI. Her scholarship is forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Dance Studies* and the *International Association for the Study of Popular Music Special Issue: Dance and Protest*, in collaboration with Anthony Blacksher. She is co-editor with MiRi Park for the Dance Studies Association's *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies* (2021). jun currently teaches at UCSD, San Diego City College, and with transcenDANCE Youth Arts Project.

MiRi Park is a b-girl, choreographer, performer, producer, scholar, activist, teacher, and mother based in Southern California. She reps New York City, where she spent her formative adult years and learned the art of b-girling and other hip hop and club dance styles. Her scholarship brings to bear all aspects of her career, which spans underground dance, competitive studio dance, commercial dance, musical theater, and teaching in academic institutional spaces. Park is a lecturer at California State University Channel Islands and is currently a doctoral student in the University of California, Los Angeles's World Arts and Cultures/Dance Department, where she focuses on Asian American corporealities in hip hop dance. She is the recipient of the University of California, Riverside Christena Lindborg

Schlundt Lecture Series in Dance Studies and California State University Faculty Innovation and Leadership Awards. She also holds a BFA (dance) and a BA (journalism), University of Massachusetts Amherst, as well as an MA (American studies), Columbia University.

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Speaking and Dancing My/Our Truths in *Here Lies the Truth*

Li Chiao-Ping

here now here, by Li Chiao-Ping (2019)

He feels the color of the bumpy and fizzy drops of feathers on top of his angular and sharp frame. His body, disgusted and protesting the invasion of smells.

She, hardly fazed by numerical setbacks, seismic as they may seem, breathes in the droplets jabbing at her.

Barely there. Bodily here.

A dream, drowning. Murky waters. Black abyss. Covered. Unseen.

Here I am.

Tell me how you really feel.

What are you doing? Nothing.

How are you? Fine.

Everything ok? Yes.

Here I am.

You're wrong.

Stop.

Go back.

I live in fear.

I live in the shadows, under cover, hiding, illegal, alien, other.

You see my color my skin

You see my gender my body

You think you know me

I am here.

You are there.
I am not there.
Can we both be here? Or there?
Tied together
Start again. Go backwards.
How did you get here?
I was
Floating
The moment you dreamed of

###

Just prior to the pandemic, in the fall of 2019, I wrote the above text for a duet I was choreographing titled *here n o w here*. At the time, I was experimenting with ways to compose and present dance-based performances around identity(ies) and opacity, and ideas of presence and being seen. Besides being a stand-alone work, *here n o w here* is also now embedded within the 55-minute multimedia dance performance *Here Lies the Truth*,¹ which I premiered in 2022. As the second to last section of the entire show, this duet brings us back to a human level, looking at us as similar and complex individuals. As the dancers undress at the end of the duet, I propose we look at their common humanity, their sameness. The balance of the two dancers, working in harmony, presents a hopeful vision for how we might be able to see one another.

I began the work on *Here Lies the Truth* in summer 2020. I set out to explore fact and fiction, questions about truth and lies, and how these

1. *Here Lies the Truth* credits: Concept/Direction - Li Chiao-Ping; Choreography - Li Chiao-Ping in collaboration with the dancers; Collaborator/Dramaturg/Vocal Coaching - Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento; Collaborator/Visual Design - Douglas Rosenberg with design assistant Hong Huo; Other Images - Jacob Li Rosenberg; Collaborator/Sound Designer - Tim Russell with other music noted in the program; Texts - JP Alejandro, Alfonso Cervera, Kimi Evelyn, Li Chiao-Ping, Douglas Rosenberg, Elisabeth Roskopf, Abbi Stickels, Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, and verbatim transcriptions of legal and journalistic testimonies; Lighting Design - John Frautschy; Costumes - Li Chiao-Ping with costume assistant Veda Manly; and Dancers - JP Alejandro, Alfonso Cervera, Kimi Evelyn, Piper Morgan Hayes, Elisa Hildner, Cassie Last, Elisabeth Roskopf, Mariel Schneider, Abbi Stickels, with Li Chiao-Ping.

questions infiltrate the personal and political environments we experience. Events at that time, from the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections and the use of such terms as “fake news” and “alternative facts,” to hate and violence against people of color, women, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups, were bringing into focus how people in power abuse their power in ways that can change our physical, mental, and emotional landscapes.

The first iteration of *Here Lies the Truth* was shown as a Zoom performance on August 14–15, 2020. It was done live and I made inventive use of the various features of Zoom. On April 1, 2021, we showed *Here Lies the Truth, part ii*, but this time the work took place as a screendance work shared over Vimeo. On July 31, 2021, we made *Here Lies the Truth, part iii*, which we performed before a live audience. I wrote *This Is a Dog* in the summer of 2021, after I had choreographed a long accumulation section made mostly of gestural material. I had had conversations with my dramaturg, Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, about how we would collaborate, as well as about our different thoughts on what I had already created in *parts i* and *ii*, which she had seen (via Zoom and Vimeo). What were the other truths that we would talk about in this iteration? For the new full-evening version of *Here Lies the Truth*, we needed to talk about race.

###

This is a Dog, by Li Chiao-Ping (2021)

This is me and mine, not you and yours, or them and they
Except that me is they
And we is they, too, ok? So, let's say. . .

This is
A dog
This is a dog with a box
A huge box on top of a rock
The size of Rushmore
Wearing socks

This is a bubble
This is a dog and a boy who boxes in a bubble
Seeing trouble, trouble seeing
Tumbling bubbles and tired troubled couples

This is a donkey who kickboxes in that bubble
Elephants, in the room, aren't shy, want to rumble?
Paper, scissors and rocks
Determining winners, making bets, on game-changing stocks
These rocks, the size of Rushmore, are jagged and rise high

This is. . .
And, This is . . . a high rise
A high rise rising high
Is this the house that Jack built?

This is a tumor, just a rumor
A tale of
Chasing a dog in a troubled bubble
Of chasing the cat that chased the rat

The dog with a box of rocks worried the cat
And chased the rat who stole her socks,
That reached up to her knees
That ate the cheese but never asked please

Stretched and worn, the pages are torn
The story is careless and reckless,
Precarious on stilts
Is this the house that Jack built?

###

From March 25 to 26, 2022, we premiered the full multimedia dance performance production in person and before a live audience. As initially proposed to the National Endowment for the Arts back in early 2020,

Here Lies the Truth was to be a collaboration among myself, Cláudia, and visual artist Douglas Rosenberg, but it wasn't until summer 2021 that we were able to begin more significant conversations on the work's direction. Looking back at its trajectory, the various parts of the whole were the means through which I was able to begin facing the traumas experienced by BIPOC communities, including, for example, long histories and repeated acts of hate, violent attacks, erasure (of contributions, existence, significance/value), colonization, white supremacist ideology, and systemic and institutionalized racism. Each of my choreographic experiments allowed me to spend time and refine how I would synthesize and represent a kinetic/visual/aural landscape of inequity, bias, prejudice, and discrimination, as a way to give witness to these oppressions. The sum of these processes allowed me to have conversations with my collaborators about casting, format, aesthetics, messaging, and more.

I am honored to contribute to this issue of *Conversations*. I am in progress, as is *Here Lies the Truth*.

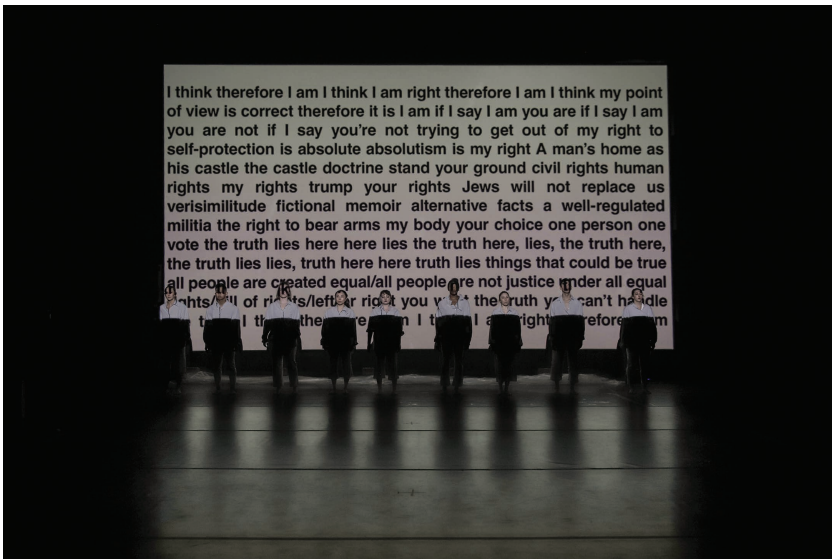


Photo by Caitri Quirk

As a first-generation Chinese American woman who grew up in San Francisco, I dutifully followed what had been prescribed to me by my parents and society: to assimilate and not make a fuss or raise my voice.



Photo by Jacob Li Rosenberg



Photo by Caitri Quirk

However, these past few years of accumulated racial traumas, from the attacks on Asians (the murders of six Asian women in Atlanta in 2021 and the assaults on Asian elders on the East and West coasts) and Black people (too many to name, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor), on top of the overwhelming number of examples of how BIPOC folks are perceived and (not) valued, including the racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin by two white men 40 years ago, which resulted in no jail time and only a \$3,000 fine, have forced me to see the real and ugly truth.



Photo by Caitri Quirk



Photo by Caitri Quirk

I see so much work to do and am feeling conflicted with everyone and everything. I find myself exhausted yet inspired. I see many new voices and models rising up, which give me hope for the future. My son Jacob Li Dai-Loong Rosenberg, who is Chinese-Jewish American, is part of a generation that gives me hope. Some of Jacob's photographs are featured and projected in *Here Lies the Truth*. (Performance documentation photos were taken by Jacob Li Rosenberg and Caitri Quirk.)



Photo by Caitri Quirk



Photo by Caitri Quirk

I put in him the hopes my parents put in me, which were wishes for my life not to be as hard as theirs was. I hope he will not feel invisible, erased, or minimized, or suffer from the repeated traumas due to conditional belonging/inclusion or other supremacist thinking and actions.



Photo by Caitri Quirk

I have more resolve and less doubt that I must use my voice to contribute to a better future where equity, diversity, mutual respect, and inclusion are given.



Photo by Caitri Quirk



Photo by Caitri Quirk

Author Biography

Li Chiao-Ping, one of *Dance Magazine's* "25 to watch," earned her graduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, and was the Director of the Hollins College Dance Program (1989–1993) and Chair of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Dance Department (2011–2014). She is the artistic director of Li Chiao-Ping Dance and has directed/choreographed in musical theater, opera, and ballet, for stage, screen, and other sites; she receives commissions from dance companies, colleges/universities, and individuals around the country. A four-time National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant awardee and MAP Fund grant recipient, she has also received fellowships from the Wisconsin Arts Board and Scripps/ADF Humphrey-Weidman-Limon. She was the American representative in ADF's International Choreographer's Program and was honored with an Outstanding Woman of Color in Education Award. Her work has been praised in the *New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *Dance Magazine*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *San Francisco Bay Guardian* and shown in

major venues/festivals in the United States and abroad, including Jacob's Pillow, Bates, ADF, Kennedy Center, Walker Art Center, Dance Place, Dan-space Project, DTW, Theater Artaud, CounterPULSE, as well as in Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Argentina, and more. She is honored to be a UW-Madison Vilas Research Professor and the Sally Banes Professor of Dance, the first person in Dance to receive either professorship.



*Recording of livestreamed performance, Here Lies the Truth, on March 26, 2022. Concept and direction by Chiao-Ping Li. <https://youtu.be/UIWw7wGoiU>
This is Here Lies the Truth.*



Diversity Dancing 101

Joyce Lu

Power likes us to come onstage and dance, and power likes to come to those events and watch us dance and power likes to come onstage before we dance and say “Oh I’m so happy you are going to dance!” And power likes to finance us doing all these things and then we go home, take pictures and celebrate and say “I’ve done my job.”

—Vijay Prashad, “The Problem with Multiculturalism” (2014)

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT!

DIVERSITY HIRE | DIVERSITY HIRE | DIVERSITY HIRE

HIGHER

HIGHER

HIGHER

Jump!

But not too high.

Don’t break the glass ceiling.

Broken glass is messy.

It makes white people very uncomfortable.

They might pick up one of those shards and stab you in the back.

Actually.

Misguided people of color may also stab you in the back.

White people will do anything to maintain their comfort.

People of color are experts in survival.

Stab you in your leg so I can get a foot up.

TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY | TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY | TARGET
OF OPPORTUNITY | TUNITY | TOONITY | TOO NITTY | TOO NITTY
GRITTY | TOO GRANULAR | TOO GRAINY | TOO INGRAINED.

WHITE SUPREMACY IS TOO INGRAINED IN THE SYSTEM.

DON'T MAKE YOURSELF A TARGET.

THINK TWICE.

BEFORE YOU OPEN YOUR MOUTH.

LITTLE CHINA GIRL.

There is a stabbing pain in my foot.

The physical therapist tells me

"The trouble with people like you is you have a very high threshold for
pain. You wait until the problem is severe to ask for help."

RULE #1: A DIVERSITY HIRE MUST HAVE A VERY HIGH THRESHOLD FOR PAIN

It is true that in all medical situations when asked where my pain is or to
rate it on a scale from

1 to 10

I have a resistance to that word: "pain."

I want to call it "sensation."

I want to be a good Buddhist and observe it.

I want to think "I have a sensation [of pain] in my foot."

A nun tells me to "work with it" "invite it in for tea" and then it will
transform.

I want to alchemize this bullshit with the ancient wisdom of my ancestors.

I want to rise HIGHER.

ANCIENT CHINESE SECRET:

Some things you cannot rise above.
The options are to either ignore or join.
Both paths end in erasure of self.
The third option is to stay somewhere in the middle
which involves a lot of PAIN.
I mean, "sensation."

John Henry died with a hammer in his hand.

The myth that enslaved Africans were impervious to pain.

The reality of the Chinese men who arrived in the U.S. after slavery was
"officially" over thwarting "free" Black people who were looking for
jobs.

"Look! These Chinese people can work on only a few grains
of rice!"

"And they don't complain!"

"They are a model minority!"

**RULE #2: A DIVERSITY HIRE MUST BE A MODEL
MINORITY**

"Can you teach Balinese dance?"

"No." I say.

"Why not?"

"Because I am not Balinese and my Balinese dance teacher who also
works here and is Balinese already teaches it."

I started studying Balinese dance in 1997. I was in an Asian Performance program. I was getting an MFA. I did not want a Eurocentric education. I still got one anyway. I was introduced to Balinese dance. I went to Bali and performed Balinese dance for Balinese people. I learned about the concept of *ngayah*. That even though I sucked it did not matter because whatever I can do is an offering to the gods. I feel ironic. I try to quit several times. The dance follows me everywhere.

It is 2022. I still dance Balinese dance. I do it as a physical practice. I do it for community. To be social. And because it is a gift. I try to remember that it is an offering. I won't teach it. I don't perform it if I am not in the company of other Indonesian dancers. I make these rules for myself. Maybe because I feel judged by some Asian American friends who do not understand what the hell I am doing.

My work focus is supposed to be in "theatre in education." When I start on the tenure track as a professor, the Dean introduces me to my colleagues by showing a YouTube video of me doing Balinese Dance.

"Because it is so beautiful."

"Let's all welcome Joyce."

"Who is she anyway?"

"Who cares?"

After my first year on the job, a feature on myself and a Korean American Environmental Analysis professor appears in the college magazine. They include a photo of me doing Balinese dance. They do not caption the photo, and they do not talk about Balinese dance in the article. Is it Helen? Or is it Joyce? How is one supposed to know? The photo is so OUT OF CONTEXT.

This happens many times:

In Balinese costume and make-up when I start to speak people jump.

"I'm sorry, but I didn't expect you to sound like that"

They say.

Like what?

Do they expect me to have an accent?

Or do they expect me not to speak at all?

I get tenure.

The Black and Brown professors I entered the program with do not.

MODEL MINORITY

After 12 years at this institution, I become the department chair. I think I will change things.

HA.

Two white women file complaints against me. I am their direct supervisor. They say I am biased against white people. One only says this after she fails to convince HR that I am discriminating against her because of her age. We are actually in the same federally protected category of people over 40. She must think I am 36. I am 50. So she moves on to Plan B: "Wait, just kidding. I mean Joyce is biased against me because I'm white."

A Black colleague tells me what our white colleague said to her: "I don't think Joyce likes white people." The Black woman says, "I'm not sure what I was supposed to say?"

I know what she was supposed to say.

She was supposed to say:

"YES JOYCE DOES NOT LIKE WHITE PEOPLE SHE IS JUST A HATER
YOU ARE NOT DOING ANYTHING WRONG WHITE WOMAN YOU

ARE PERFECT IN EVERY WAY JOYCE IS NOT FOLLOWING THE SCRIPT THE PART WHERE SHE JUST NODS HER HEAD AND SAYS THANK YOU!"

RULE #3: A DIVERSITY HIRE MUST BE GRATEFUL

I have a roof over my head. I can shop at Whole Foods. I am not working for Amazon. I start to think I'd rather work at Whole Foods. But I am getting older. I don't want to be on my feet all day. I also want to be comfortable.

My mother says all of these people need to think about why I might not like white people: "Have they considered why you might not like white people? How about some self-reflection!?! Hunh!"

RULE #4: A DIVERSITY HIRE SHOULD FOLLOW THE SCRIPT, NOT LISTEN TO HER IMMIGRANT MOTHER'S FOLK WISDOM

Realizing the situation is untenable, I resign from chairing the department. I am replaced by a cis, straight, married WHITE male over the age of 40. He is from the ENGLISH department.

Order is restored.

....

In studying the history of Bali, I also learned about *puputan*: mass ritual suicide.

When the Dutch colonizers arrived on the island, the royal family and their entire court wore white cremation robes.

Each person carried a kris, stabbed themselves or each other and walked directly into gunfire, hurling jewels at their assailants.

A choreographed refusal to comply.

"Because it is so beautiful."

I think about how Frantz Fanon said dancing is a waste of energy that could be directed towards violent revolution.

I keep a Balinese fan in my office. And sometimes when I'm really angry I turn on the music.

AND I DANCE.

Author Biography

Joyce Lu is a performing artist, director, and educator. She is a former member of Body Weather Laboratory LA directed by Oguri and Roxanne Steinberg and has performed with them in various collaborations with Hirokazu Kosaka and the Arcane Collective at the Guggenheim and Getty museums, the REDCAT, and the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center in Los Angeles. She also practices and performs Balinese dance with Burat Wangi, directed by Nanik Wenten and I Nyoman Wenten. She was the dramaturg for Kularts' *Nursing These Wounds*, a dance event directed by Alleluia Panis that investigates the impact of colonization on diasporic Pilipinx health and caregiving, particularly through the lens and stories of Pilipinx nurses. She is also a certified Feldenkrais Practitioner and Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance and Asian American Studies at Pomona College. She holds an MFA in Asian performance from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and a PhD in performance studies from UC Berkeley.

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Is My Body My Own?

Tiffany Lytle

Violence against Asian Americans, especially Asian American women, is not new, but global events have led to the resurgence of public displays of anti-Asian sentiment. For me, the aftermath of the 2021 mass shooting in Atlanta forced me to reconcile with the anxiety of being and “performing” my Asian-ness in public. Now, we must carry the trauma of being afraid of our bodies, the worry for our mothers and family members, and the reality that our existence is once again met with resistance.

As a mixed-race Cambodian American dancer and performing artist, my body has always been a complicated source of contention—neither Cambodian enough for Cambodian dance, nor legibly “American” enough for commercial success. Racialized notions of Asian bodies in dance have contributed to skewed notions of belonging and acceptance, and therefore have complicated identity politics for mixed-race artists like myself. I have spent my life in art forms that have asked me to manipulate my body to fit into an accepted aesthetic. Has my body ever been my own? Have I been performing “me,” or have I been performing how “they” see me?

Daily instances of racialized violence—racist Zoom bombings, microaggressions, deportations, displacements, and deaths that we learn about in the media—put my emotions into overdrive until I can no longer feel. In this time when we find ourselves fighting against hegemonic notions of belonging, how do we fight the anesthetizing stress of race-based violence?

"Is My Body My Own?" is a recorded poetry piece featuring instrumental music from my 2020 *Album Cambodian Child*. For the full audio, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

Instrumentals: "My Neary Chea Chour (Intro),"¹ "Qnoum Kaun Khmer,"² and "For Her."

(Full Audio Transcript Below)

Is My Body My Own?

(Audio: Footsteps. Footsteps stop.)

Should I be wearing this?

(Audio: Footsteps walking away)

(Music: "My Neary Chea Chour (Intro)")

We didn't ask for these bodies

We didn't ask to be born into an American dream crafted upon the exploitation of our lives—

Fodder for the imagination of self-righteous Beauregards—
white whales and blowhards. . .

But here we are. . .

So, for a fleeting moment I thought to hide,

Camouflaged amongst the quotidian

Blending in on stage like an obedient shadow. . .

Hiding my body in plain sight.

"Don't forget you are half," they remind me. . .

Like I ever forget.

Foolish to think I can hide in this time when a graphic tee can out me.

1. "Neary Chea Chour" is a Cambodian Classical dance piece featuring song lyrics about beautiful young women dancing in a row. "My Neary Chea Chour (Intro)" is my own version of the song's first verse. This piece is the prelude to "My Neary Chea Chour" which features a feminist critique of an Orientalist male gaze.

2. "Qnoum Kaun Khmer" (Khmer) translates to "I am a Cambodian child" (English).

"Raised by Refugees," "It's an Honor just to be. . . ," BLM and Yellow P. . .
My pride tucked in the back of my dresser until—until I ask. . .

(Music: Transition to "Qnoum Kaun Khmer")

Is my body my own?

It fights expectations, assumptions, preferences, patriarchy, society. . .

Or is it a vessel for *their* work?

Possessed by *their* choreography

Claiming *my* body with *their* stage

When I dance for them, is my body still mine?

Is my body my own when I feel invisible?

When *they* see me but are unable to perceive where I fit. . .

Is it mine even when I am imperceptible?

Is not my body disowned?

Failing to speak when I beg it to.

(Music: Transition to "For Her")

Curbing the expectations of identification

I am barred from community

Until I don emblems of my heritage,

Until I move like an ethereal memory

Until I speak clearly . . . *chabah*

Poised and beautiful. . .

But poisoned by growth

Then, I ask myself:

"When is my body my own?"

Maybe when I'm alone. . .

In my head. . .

Too much in my head

Heart racing

My body breaks down as my demons consume me. . .

Alone we mourn
To claim our bodies
To lay claim to our bodies
We must draw—
From ourselves

So, at some point, I should probably stop gaslighting myself. . .
Embarrassed of how *they* perceive me, I imagine a simpler past
Tricking myself to believe my defaults are my own fault
That my discomfort was only anxiety
Inventing for myself the romance of belonging

But then, I get checked by reality.
Full-blown decked across the face
Remembering that *they* don't think I deserve to be in control . . . of my . . .
 own. . . .

Here I go again. . . (Strength is so fickle)
"Did they?" I ask myself, "Am I being too sensitive?"
And I remember. . . . "Stop gaslighting yourself."
You cannot hide from reality.
So, I face it.
We must face it.

Constantly comparing atrocities like one is "worse" than the other
But *TRAUMA* is how they take our bodies away from us.
Terrorizing us is how they stake their claim.
Deciding our lives are disposable—
One time use—waste. . .
Green-washing our stories, histories . . . to prop up their fantasies
Their eccentricities—

No, no, no. . . . So, so tired

Yet, I will fight
with the modicum of energy left in my soul
I will do what I can to reclaim my body . . . my being.

Despite what *they* THINK *they* know
I grow like a weed.

All I can do is live *life* in my body
All I must do is have *joy* in my body—
(laughs)
Like it or not. . .
Today, my body is my own.

End

Author Biography

Tiffany Lytle is a performing artist and scholar whose work engages with transgenerational memory, cultural identity, and multiraciality in the Cambodian American diaspora. She is an alumna of University of California, Los Angeles's (UCLA's) Asian American Studies Master of Arts program and UCLA's Southeast Asian Studies Bachelor of Arts program. Lytle is currently a PhD candidate of Theater Dance and Performance Studies at University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB). Lytle also teaches courses in UCSB's Asian American Studies department. Her essay "Cambodian Classical Dance: Authenticity, Affect, and Exclusion" is published in a collection by University of Hawaii Press entitled *California Dreaming: Movement and Place in the Asian American Imaginary* (2020).

Lytle grew up performing Cambodian classical dance and was a dancer in the Los Angeles-based dance company KPA Fusion Dance Repertoire. In 2018, she and her team of dancers and musicians

performed in *Refugee Re/Enactments* as part of UCLA's Campus as Canvas Arts Initiative and then in "Qnoum Kaun Khmer/I AM a Cambodian Child" which premiered at Highways Performance Space. In 2019 Lytle became a Critical Refugee Studies Collective grantee, completing her 2020 single "Justice," which reckons with global responses to the Cambodian genocide. Her album *Cambodian Child* is available on iTunes, Spotify, and all music-streaming platforms.

Writing “Chinese Dance” in the West

Fangfei Miao



Across is my twenty-minute experimental solo concert premiered as a livestream in May 2020 as part of the University of Michigan Dance Department’s annual performance. This piece integrates movement, spoken text, and props marked as culturally Chinese to undo stereotypical expectations about a Chinese woman performing “Chinese dance.” For the full video, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

This essay questions the necessity of theoretically defining “Chinese dance” in Anglophone academia. Drawing from my personal experience as an outsider-insider and artist-scholar between the United States and China, I scrutinize the problematics of theorizing dance in China through established and seemingly self-evident approaches. On many occasions, Chinese dance culture has been twisted in dance studies in the West to make it fully knowable and accessible. Decolonizing dance studies requires a disruption to dominant practices in Anglophone scholarship

that fixate on revolutionary and liberal lenses to approach Chinese dance culture. The body of literature produced by dance scholars in China represents a crucial voice of anti-colonial dance research and contributes to a globally inclusive conversation about “Chinese dance.”

“Defending” China

Dominant American ideologies have fixed China as a solely revolutionary, communist land where people have no freedom. As a Chinese person who lives in the United States, criticizing dominant American ideologies about China often invites accusations that I lack critical thinking skills. Since revolutionary nationalism and liberalism have become the primary lenses in the West for understanding contemporary China, the “easiest” way for me to assimilate is to think and talk by following American mainstream political narratives. Welcome, recognition, and sympathy will immediately come forth when one attacks their home country for its lack of democracy and freedom. To be perceived as exercising critical thinking, I am required to criticize the nationalist politics of China and not allowed to question how China is demonized in the United States. Otherwise, I am perceived as being unable to think independently because of too much previous “brain training” by the communist party. In front of me are two options: assimilation or degradation. In this either/or situation, my contestation of one country’s politics directly equates to advocacy in favor of the other country. Questioning mainstream American ideologies is interpreted as supporting Chinese socialist norms and defending China, as if there is no in-between space for inspection, inquiry, and debate.

As the first dancer from the People’s Republic of China to receive a PhD in the United States, I am an outsider-insider. I stand in-between the United States and China and unpack both countries’ prejudicial narratives about each other to improve cross-cultural understandings. To criticize the demonization of China in the United States does not equate to extolling China. However, my international identity as a native Chinese woman makes it difficult for my American peers to

understand this and to believe me. To be clear, I refuse assimilation into an American-centric mode of thinking, in which China *needs* to be revolutionary and illiberal so that this cultural other becomes fully knowable. Recent scholarly shifts in Chinese studies have criticized the limits of revolutionary nationalism, liberalism, and other grand perspectives in shaping a China in theory only meaningful to the West. In Chinese studies, the framework of revolutionary nationalism refers to scrutinizing China's early socialist period (the 1940s–1960s) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), instead of the post-Mao Reform Era (1978–the present). Through the concept of "postsocialism," Arif Dirlik has theorized how Reform Era China brought capitalism into its morphing socialist structure in order to break away from its revolutionary past. "Postsocialism" highlights China's socio-historical transition toward a depoliticized and economy-driven development model in the Reform Era. To acknowledge a constantly changing China refutes an established theoretical approach that tends to homogenize the country's transforming ideological infrastructures into a unified revolutionary nationalism (Dirlik 1989, 374). In addition, as Hentyle Yapp has argued, the demand to continue reading China as illiberal stems from Western anxiety confronting China's rise. Under this anxiety, some scholars in the West want to believe that China is illiberal so that they can gain a sense of security. In this view, China, although rising, remains under control within Western epistemological frameworks (Yapp 2021, 20). Daniel Vukovich emphasizes a similar idea that "Part of 'our' problems in coming to terms with the rise of China is the prison house of liberalism: it is hard to read contemporary China without falling back into familiar histories and conceptual shibboleths about what freedom, individuality, human rights, and so on are" (Vukovich 2019, 10). This shift in Chinese studies serves as an effective tool to decolonize dance studies. I refuse to theorize dance in China through conventional revolutionary and liberal lenses in order to make myself celebrated in the West. As a serious artist-scholar, I cautiously question the ideologies of any country. I am aware that it will take a longer route for me to convince my colleagues that there are other ways to theorize dance in

China beyond socialism and liberalism. I did not come to the United States for assimilation, but to become a real bicultural thinker.

Defining “Chinese Dance”

Anglophone scholarship has shaped China as a land with an abundance of dance but no dance scholarship. Classical dance, folk dance, ballet, local theatre, modern dance, and other performing arts in China are perceived as a trove of material waiting to be discovered and theorized by the West. Of course, the growing field of Chinese dance studies in the West should receive recognition and celebration, but the visibility of the field should not overshadow the established field of dance studies in China.

For example, a scholarly act to define “Chinese dance” in the West overlooks the vibrant debates among dance scholars in China about what qualifies as their country’s dance. In Anglophone scholarship, Chinese dance is defined as a newly constructed genre of Chinese classical and folk dance starting from the 1940s, a genre that demonstrates three key commitments to (1) the aesthetic forms instead of the content or performer, (2) the embracing of diverse ethnic communities and geographic regions across China, and (3) inheritance and constant innovation.¹ However, in the eyes of dance scholars in China, this definition seems like a basic introduction, instead of a theory, of Chinese dance culture that oversimplifies the ongoing debates within Chinese dance academia. In the PRC, “Chinese dance” (*zhongguowu* 中国舞), a questionable concept, interlocks with other related terms such as China dance (*zhongguo wudao* 中国舞蹈) and national ethnic dance (*minzu wu* 民族舞), all of which convey similar and slightly different meanings with regard to “dance that belongs to China.” A socio-historical shift in the Reform Era intensified such complexity, during which time dance scholars in China preferred the more concrete

1. Emily Wilcox, *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

terminologies of Chinese classical dance, Chinese folk dance, Chinese ballet, and Chinese modern dance. Similar to modern dance or Black dance, "Chinese dance" changes in meaning and scope throughout history and is under constant debate among scholars in China. I question the need to define Chinese dance in the West, because the theoretical move of defining risks pinning down dance in China with the so-called "core of culture" and fixing the dance of the cultural other. Highlighting the socio-historical complexity behind the term "Chinese dance," instead of insisting on a single definition, represents a significant way to decolonize dance studies in the West.

Dance theoretical writings and dance practice have existed alongside each other in China for over two thousand years. The study of Chinese dance history and aesthetics can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), when the scholar Fu Yi (傅毅 45–90 AD) published his article *Dance Examination* (*wufu* 舞賦) to study the popular "plate and drum dance" (*panguwu* 盘鼓舞) at that time. Theorizations of dance performance emerged in the following dynasties in books such as *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龙) by Liu Xie (刘勰 465–522), *Dance Chronicle* (*wuzhi* 舞志) by Zhang Mi (张敕 Ming Dynasty 1368–1644), and *Leisure Moments of Occasional Literature* (*xianqing ouji* 闲情偶寄) by Li Yu (李渔 1611–1680). In the early and mid-twentieth century, dance theories by critics, scholars, and artists appeared in magazines and newspapers in the forms of reviews, essays, interviews, and memoirs. After the Cultural Revolution, dance studies started to become prevalent in Chinese institutions. In 1980, the Chinese National Academy of Arts, China's premier art research institution, founded the Dance Research Institute and in 1982 recruited the country's first group of MA students in dance studies. In 1985, the Beijing Dance Academy, China's premier dance conservatory, established the Department of Dance History and Theory and recruited the country's first group of BA students majoring in dance history and theory. In 1997, the Chinese National Academy of Arts created the first PhD program in dance studies in China. Now an increasingly interdisciplinary field, dance studies in China embraces

scholars who received their PhDs not only in dance studies but also in history, anthropology, literary studies, and aesthetics. Their diverse research interests cover not only Chinese classical dance, Chinese folk dance, Chinese ballet, and contemporary dance but also dance drama, dance film, ancient religious dance, Western modern dance and ballet, musical theatre, social dance, and urban square dance.

I interviewed Liu Qingyi, Jiang Dong, and Yu Ping, who are three of the most influential dance scholars in China and whose work has laid the foundation for the direction that dance studies in China has taken today. I asked one question: “What is Chinese dance?” I asked this one question because as an outsider-insider, I have discovered contrasting understandings of “Chinese dance” in the West and China. By translating and presenting the responses of Liu, Jiang, and Yu, I hope to let their voices be directly heard in Anglophone academia.

Dr. Liu Qingyi (刘青弋), Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Shanghai Theatre Academy, former chair of the Department of Dance Studies at the Beijing Dance Academy, states:

Chinese dance cannot be defined as aesthetic forms, because the movement vocabularies and what those vocabularies express stay together. This tie is the founding logic of dance production in the People’s Republic of China. In addition, I don’t think ballet is completely a foreign culture for us now, especially after over seventy years of localization. The contemporary works created by the National Ballet of China, such as *Dunhuang* (premiered in 2017), are nothing if not Chinese dance. And it is difficult to reject the idea of red ballet as China’s national dance. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the red ballets, such as *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White Haired Girl*, dominated dance concerts as an emblematic representation of the nation. Third, Chinese dance embraces Chinese classical dance, Chinese ethnic and folk dance, Chinese ballet, Chinese modern dance, etc. Chinese modern dance is the localization of Western modern dance in China; whereas modern Chinese dance, such as unconventional works of Chinese classical and folk dance, refers to the experimental innovation of China’s cultural tradition in contemporary time.

(Liu 2022)

Dr. Jiang Dong (江东), Distinguished Professor Emeritus and former vice-director of the Dance Research Institute at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, states:

We do not name any single genre of dance in China as "Chinese dance." Rather, the word represents a collection of many diverse dance genres, such as different styles of Chinese classical dance, Han Chinese folk dance, and ethnic minority dance. In addition, based on my ethnographic research across the Asia Pacific and the West Coast of the United States, 'Chinese dance' refers to a global phenomenon and its meaning differs among the Chinese diaspora living in cities such as Singapore and Los Angeles. In all, Chinese dance is not a genre, but an open-ended reality.

(Jiang 2022)

Dr. Yu Ping (于平), Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Nanjing University of the Arts and former vice-president of the Beijing Dance Academy, states:

We cannot distinguish dance genres only based on the external forms of their movement vocabularies because this will confine the choreographers within the limits of "style authenticity."

(Yu 2022)

Chinese dance exists as an unstable reality and requires continued contestation instead of a single definition. As an elastic concept, Chinese dance extends a time duration beyond the twentieth century and embraces geographic locations outside China. The extinct ancient court dance counts as Chinese dance although it existed long before the 1940s. The reinvented cultural dances of the Chinese diaspora are Chinese dance although those people do not live in China. In the West, English-language-based scholars are developing a rising field of Chinese dance studies, and this development needs to include the work produced by dance scholars in China. This essay asks for genuine and honest scholarly conversations between dance studies in the West and China.

Author Biography

Dr. Fangfei Miao, international dance scholar, choreographer, and dancer, is Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where she teaches both seminar and physical practice courses. Miao's research interests include dance and performance studies, Chinese and East Asian studies, and critical inquiries of globalization. She is working on her book project that examines the "mis-steps" that cross-cultural dance transmissions engendered in post-Mao Reform Era China (1978–the present). This project has received grant support from the American Society for Theatre Research and the University of Michigan Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies. Her scholarly research has been featured in leading journals in both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking academia. With extensive professional training in modern dance, Chinese classical and folk dance, and Tai Chi Quan, Miao has toured internationally and staged her experimental choreography in New York, Los Angeles, Auckland, and Beijing, among other locations. She received her PhD in culture and performance from UCLA and her MFA and BA from the Beijing Dance Academy, China's premier dance conservatory.

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Choreography for Lola, March 2021

Dahlia Nayar

0. Walâ: Hold breath

Rational or not,
You kept the directive short.
Focused on key words.
Don't go out alone.
Another attack.
Someone just like you.

1. Isá: Palm of the hand

Later, you overhear Mom
(aka Nanay aka Lola aka Tita)
on the phone with her Ate and Dete.
Not safe right now. Mahirap.
Their chorus of *Ay Naku!*
Travels through the ether
From Quezon City to Chicago via
WhatsApp.
Their furrowed brows fill the screen
In the palm of her hand.

2. Dalawá: Flank and Surround

A new choreographic response emerged instinctually.
At first it was a kind of flanking. Two family members on either side.

*Flank: verb [with object]
guard or strengthen (a military force or position) from the side.*¹

But she was still exposed. She was still visibly a senior citizen, an Asian/American woman. Intuitively, a third family member moved to walk in front of her.

3. **Tatló: Circumscribe**

Thus, the flanking became circumscribing.

“Some common synonyms of circumscribe are *confine, limit, and restrict*. While all these words mean ‘to set bounds for,’ circumscribe stresses a restriction on all sides and by clearly defined boundaries.”²

We surround her with our bodies to hide her from view. We imitate bodyguards shielding a celebrity from the paparazzi. We are ridiculous. We acclimate to her pace. Our amoeba formation shuffles down the sidewalk.

4. **Apat: Quotidian movement**

(By the way, we were just taking her to the dentist.

A quotidian outing.

Like how, the Monday before, Tita Vilma was going to church, on the morning of her birthday.)

5. **Limá: Tongue**

In a class for heritage learners,

The professor explained my mother tongue to me.

1. Erin McKean, *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/circumscribe>.

It is the logics of a different world.
Ka indicates relationality. . . .
Ka + patid (cut) = means cut from the same umbilical cord
Kapatid na babae—sister
Kapatid na lalaki—brother
Kaibigan—friend
Kapitbahay—neighbor
Kasama—companion, comrade
Ka as a worldmaking speech act
Ka as recognizing relationality.³

6. Anim: Out of Sight

So let me get this straight.
We want to keep her safe by keeping her invisible.
Wasn't she invisible from the day she arrived in this country?
And now these things keep happening.
In broad daylight.
East coast, west coast.
And we need to make her invisible again?

7. Pitó: Cover your ears

Are you about to quote the trite bits from the news? Or a meme?
Or a tweet?
I don't want to hear it. Another incident of. No thank you. Salamat.
The news, by the way, is a choreography of emphases and elisions.
For example:
Emphasis: Spike in Asian Hate amidst pandemic.
Elision: *In the aftermath of the president's pernicious phrase "China virus"*

3. Special thanks to Tita Joi, Dr. Joi Barrios-Leblanc, UC Berkeley.

Emphasis: Attacker: mentally ill, homeless, ex convict

Elision: *The brokenness produced by 400 years of structural racism*

Emphasis: Security guards were fired.

Elision: *Neoliberalism requires apathy for survival.*

Emphasis: She was told she does not belong

Elision: *Due to the normalization and perpetuation of violent white settler colonialism that this country is founded on. . . .*

8. Waló: To Shut

No need for a screenshot here.

The security camera footage is burned in your mind.

This particular choreography of silence and erasure

One body laying on the ground outside.

Three bodies tentatively approach from inside

One locks the door

The three back away.

Circumscribing keeps them in. Keeps the danger out.

9. Siyám: Shuffle

We shuffle forward around Lola.

Qualities of a shuffle. . .

A hushed yielding to gravity

Is also an imperceptible allowance for lightness.

A transitory state.

10. Sampû: Dissolve

Whenever they asked *How long have you been here?*

You know, in *that way*,

My father used to respond.
Since before you were born.

Long enough to know, for example,
That in the Midwest
On the morning after the first frost
(If you're lucky)
You'll catch a murmuration
Over the fields.

In some other world, a world we have yet to know,
All the non-belonging minor bodies
Join and congeal like this.
The choreography of circumscription morphs into a continuous
folding
A swallowing of center and periphery.
A dissolution in order to start anew
And take flight.



Video footage by Dahlia Nayar shows flocks of birds flying in murmuration over a green field in Illinois, in October 2021. For the full video, visit the online journal at <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/conversations/>.

Author Biography

Dahlia Nayar is a PhD student in UC Berkeley's Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies program. Her research focuses on embodied manifestations of Quiet in minoritarian communities. She holds an MFA in dance/choreography from Hollins University and has toured and performed throughout the United States and internationally. She is a recipient of the Jacob Javits Fellowship, Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship in Choreography, and the National Dance Project Touring Award.



Dance as an Act of Re-remembering Who We Are

Johnny Huy Nguyen

Asian/American is another way to say distance
The distance the width of a (double) eyelid crease
The distance the length of a queue
The distance the height of my 5 foot 7 body
The distance the length of a cheongsam, a kimono, a hanbok, an áo dài
The distance the cadence of an "Aah So. . ."
The distance the width of my flat nose
The distance the force of a one-inch punch
The distance at least 6 feet
The distance the driving of the golden spike
The distance the width of a dance hall ticket
The distance the caliber of an M16 bullet
The distance the width of an atom
The distance the size of a microbe

All adding up

So I go to great lengths to bridge the distance of this distance
to displace this (foreign) body always held at a distance because it is
deemed too distant

7,512 miles across the Pacific Ocean. The distance between my father
and myself in the living room as the "mày là con mấ́t dạ́y" spills from
my father's mouth. The "Huy, don't sit so close to the TV. You'll ruin
your eyes" coming from my mother's mouth. The distance between

the way my lovers saw me and the way I saw myself. The distance between me and the edges of my body whenever I feel small.

Asian/American

Is it only another way to say distance?

(Nguyen, *Minority Without a Model*, 2021)

My body remembers the first time the kids in my elementary school called me “flat nose.” My body remembers the sting of my father’s condescending words when he flew into fits of rage. My body remembers the many times throughout my life that I have felt invisible. All of these experiences contributed to a fractured sense of self, a feeling of distance, that was very much part of my Asian experience growing up. I still need reminders that these experiences were not my fault but rather the results of white supremacy, colonization, and intergenerational trauma.

I am a second-generation Vietnamese American and a son of refugees. My parents are Mai Đỗ Nguyễn and Hùng Đức Nguyễn. Dismemberment and separation are part of our history. The literal dismemberment of bodies like ours in the Vietnamese-American War. The forced separation of my parents from their homeland. The wounds in my family, born of intergenerational trauma. The splitting of tongues. The pressure to assimilate. The desire to be white.

In recent years, I have been excavating the tender memories living within my body with the realization that healing does not lie in the forgetting or conquering of them, but rather the reintegration and recovery of these hurt parts of self, a re-remembering. In my 2021 full-length dance theater work, *Minority Without a Model*, I explore the ways in which Asian emasculation, toxic masculinity, colonization, and the politics of desire live in my body. I navigate my lived experiences from childhood to now in a journey spanning Tinder, anime, Kpop, Batman, pro wrestling, protein, and pick-up artists to figure out who I’ve been and who I want to become. In the process of realizing the work, I was able to find forgiveness and compassion for myself. This was a process of embodied catharsis, and I was able to come into contact with

the “flat-nosed” little boy inside me. I was able to hold him, and we reminded ourselves of who we really are at our core, beautiful beings worthy of love.



Minority Without a Model (2021) at Bindlestiff Studio for United States of Asian America Festival. Photo credit: Willis Lai

Within Native American spiritualities, it is believed that when you heal, you heal not only yourself but also seven generations backward and forward. Dance has been a way for me to heal, not just for myself, but for my family, my ancestors, and my community. Indeed, embodiment is not only a counter to dismemberment of the past and present but a way to create the future. The body is a record carrying the lifetimes and lineages of all we are connected to. It is a way for us to re-member so those who have come before are not forgotten.

As a child, I spent a lot of time with my bà ngoại and ông ngoại's (maternal grandparents) place. We all lived in the same affordable housing complex. My immediate family lived in a townhouse and my grandparents, aunt, and uncle were in an apartment literally a two-minute

walk away. My mom was the first in her family to come to Canada as a refugee, fleeing Vietnam alone at the age of 24. She brought the rest of her family over years later. One thing that stood out to me as a child was my bà ngoại's altar. I would gaze upon the solemn faces in the black-and-white photos and was confused as to why my bà ngoại would leave oranges and burn funny smelling sticks (incense). It wasn't until I was much older and when my bà ngoại passed that I truly understood what she was doing. I now have my own altar where a photo of her rests, and I make sure to offer her the most beautiful oranges out of the batch whenever I get them at the farmer's market.

In 2019, I created an immersive altar and ritual performance installation, "*Sự Hồi Tưởng*," for the annual Día de los Muertos exhibit at SOMArts. I was in deep reflection on my mother's journey. What if she didn't survive? Crammed under the deck of a small fishing boat with 100 other people, she was stranded in the South China Sea for seven days when their engine stopped working. She thought she was going to die. A French trading vessel en route to the Philippines came across their boat and took them on board. It is a miracle that I'm alive. It is estimated that up to 400,000 Vietnamese lives were lost at sea fleeing Vietnam in the decade following the war. In living, I carry these lost lives and their legacy. I wanted to honor them.

For the installation, I worked with Giang Trinh and with the help of some friends, we made 400,000 hand brushed strokes on a large canvas to be part of the altar. This was a small gesture for each life, taking a moment to honor one of the 400,000 with a physical act. The exhibition was up from October 12, 2019, to November 9, 2019. On each day the gallery was open, I gave my body as an offering through dance, movement as a ritual of remembrance. I was inspired by my bà ngoại and how she went to the temple every day for 100 consecutive days to honor my ông ngoại when he passed. This remembrance as action makes me think of how I experienced love from my parents. Love not as words but as action.



Sự Hòì Tưởng (Remembrance) (2021) at SOMArts Cultural Center for City of Lights, *Día de Muertos* Exhibition. Photo credit: Giang Trìn



Ritual Performance Activations of Sự Hòì Tưởng (Remembrance) (2021).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgsxLSSeTPE>

I remember wanting so much as a child, wanting to hear the words, “I love you” from my parents, just like the shows I watched on TV. It wasn’t until recent years that we’ve started saying, “I love you” and hugging, which were both things introduced by adult self to my parents. As an adult, I also now see the many ways my parents expressed

their love through action. “Are you hungry?” might as well translate to “I love you.” Staying up late to make sure there was hot food for me when I came home even though they had work early in the morning. Waking up early to make my lunch. Not just a sandwich but a full meal with rice, vegetables, and protein.

These experiences inform my practice. For the altar, dance was an action to re-member the lineages that live within me. Moreover, it was an action to build a bridge of empathy with refugees worldwide, including those at our own country’s southern border, as an act of solidarity against the dismemberment due to forced displacement.



My family in Banff circa 1990. Left to Right: My dad (Hùng), my middle sister (Mary), my youngest brother (Anthony), my mom (Mai), me. Photo credit: A Friendly Stranger

Recently, I was invited to be part of a panel at ODC in San Francisco in conversation with other Asian American dancers. In response to the question, “Can you share a personal experience of how your heritage shapes your art making?,” one of the panelists, Megan Lowe, who is a friend, peer, and collaborator, had this to say:

My cultural background, my identity, my mixed race—Chinese-Irish heritage. All of that feeds into everything that I am, everything that

I do, and the art that I'm making, whether or not I am specifically setting out to explore those aspects of myself. I can't separate them. It's interesting, I've always had this problem going into different dance spaces or rehearsal processes or workshops, and they're like, "Leave your stuff at the door, come in as a blank slate." And I'm like, that's kind of impossible, and that you're even asking me to do that is kind of offensive. I am who I am today because of those experiences and they're not going to separate from me.

(Megan Lowe, *Art & Ideas*, Feb 21, 2022)

That last part really stuck with me. "To come in as a blank slate" is a sort of American ideal. To move forward without remembering the past, or rather, remembering a selective past. We see it in the renewed culture wars of today centering around critical race theory in schools. Apparently, looking back into history to see how events of yesterday have led to the inequities we see today is a divisive act. The operation of a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist society relies on cultural amnesia to keep itself going. This burying of histories of people of color is a form of dismemberment and again, dance is a strategy for re-membering.

Cultural amnesia comes in many forms and often, it may come with the best of intentions. I attended an art event last year that was meant to center the experiences of refugees. I was one of the few people of color in the audience and as part of her opening remarks, the white presenter had this to say:

COVID has made us aware of our interconnectedness and the arbitrariness of the lines that have historically divided us. The shared global experience of a virus has shaped us in such a way that perhaps we can all understand a bit of what it might feel like to be a refugee, even within our own communities.

(Redacted, *Night Watch on the Bay*, Fort Mason, 2021)

I can understand the intention, but these words were a spiritual bypass that expressed a false equivalency and co-opted my mother's

experiences. Moreover, it came literally days after Haitian refugees were whipped trying to enter the country by horse mounted border patrol agents. My peers and I wrote letters calling for accountability and repair, which received an initial response, but after we pushed for actual meaningful actions—namely reaching out to attendees of the event to acknowledge the false equivalency of the statement and asking that we not be burdened with having further conversation to educate them—we were met with silence. This incident motivated the creation of “We Live This,” a current work-in-progress with Hiên Hùynh that is slated for premiere at the Institute of Contemporary Art of San Francisco in 2023. It is our way of refusing to be silent-telling our stories with our own bodies on behalf of our families and lineages—not letting anyone else dare speak for us. Our bodies do not get to hide and so we reclaim the gaze of the other for ourselves and turn it back onto the one who is gazing, as an act of self-determination and re-membering who we are.

With the ongoing pandemic, our Asian communities are still faced with many challenges. We are both simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible, model minority and perpetual foreigner, exoticized and reviled. Hybridity is a word often used to describe our lived experiences. As an Asian American and human being, I am in a lifelong process of liberation, integration, and healing. In sharing some of my experiences as an Asian American dancer within the lens of my artistic practice, I hope it provides you, the reader, with perspectives of value on embodiment as a healing practice with which to remember, reimagine, and reclaim who we are for the generations before us and the generations to come.

Dance, while recognized as an artform, is also an ancient somatic spiritual modality that has served humanity across cultures for centuries in understanding ourselves alongside our connections to one another and the world—seen and unseen—around us. With the cultural shifts we have seen in the past century in cultural consciousness and dialogue around intersectional identities, intergenerational trauma, and the dismantling of white supremacist, heteropatriarchal systems, dance can be a political and healing act for the marginalized

body to declare its existence and demand visibility in its fullness. From this perspective, dance is a modality with which to *re-member* oneself, to reassemble the body and its interiority against colonial and imperial *dis-memberment* rooted in oppression and counter the culture of *amnesia* prevalent in the American consciousness. For Asian American bodies, these acts of dis-memberment are psychological, spiritual, physical, and intertwined—assimilation, exclusion, war, forced displacement, and most recently, COVID-19 pandemic hate crimes. Examining my lived experiences, my lineages, and my practice to date as a second-generation Vietnamese American multidisciplinary dance artist, I hope to contribute insight into dance as an intervention strategy against these historical and contemporary violences as a contribution to the existing and emergent discourse.

Author Biography

Johnny Huy Nguyen is a second-generation Vietnamese American multidisciplinary somatic artist based in Yelamu (a.k.a San Francisco) and son of courageous refugees. Fluent in multiple movement modalities including myriad street dance styles, contemporary, modern, and martial arts, Nguyen weaves together dance, theater, spoken word, ritual, installation, and performance art. In doing so, he creates immersive, time-based works that recognize the body's power as a place of knowing, site of resistance, gateway to healing, and crucible for new futures. His most recent works are *Minority Without a Model* (solo, 2021) and *HOME(in)STEAD* (duet, 2022). In addition to his work as an individual artist, he is a member of Lenora Lee Dance and has also appeared in the works of KULARTS and the Global Street Dance Masquerade, to name a few. As an arts professional, he works as a development and program associate with Asian Improv aRts (AIR), helping to nurture the viability and sustainability of Asian American artists and organizations both locally and nationwide.



Rocks Thrown at His Head

Chyun Oh

The Virus of Hatred

In early 2020, I went grocery shopping near my house at 5 a.m. The COVID-19 pandemic had spread across Southern California, so people started panic buying, schools shut down, and all major headlines were filled with news about a novel coronavirus. While waiting in the checkout line at the grocery store, I noticed that some people tried to maintain a distance from me, while they seemed okay with others surrounding them. I lived in downtown San Diego where the residents were predominantly white. I was not hurt because they stepped back when they saw me, which actually made them closer to other white customers behind them. What was hurtful was their gaze—the strange, uncomfortable way that they looked at me. I went to the grocery store so early in the morning not because I wanted to be around fewer people to avoid catching COVID-19, but I wanted to avoid their gaze.

The gaze reflects power dynamics through which a controlling mechanism operates. As Michel Foucault reminded us, those with more power gaze upon those with less power.¹ Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze is grounded in a gender hierarchy in which men watch women. Men objectify and watch women

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

for sexual pleasure, while women internalize the male gaze via “to-be-looked-at-ness.”² In racial power dynamics, white people more likely watch people of other races, censoring, patronizing, and exoticizing the historically marginalized Other since the colonial era, normalizing the white gaze.³ The violence of the gaze is subtle and vague. It does not directly kill people. Nevertheless, like mosquitoes, the gaze is everywhere without apparent signals or physical threats. It is the feeling minorities experience every day. It kills the Other slowly until they internalize inferiority and remain docile like their ancestors colonized.

Since I came to the United States in 2010, I have encountered racist remarks and looks that made me feel uncomfortable. For example, when I stopped by a Panera Bread in the Midwest, an old white man stared at me for an uncomfortably long time. The gaze was persistent, shameless, and surveillant, as if he is looking at me like I am an animal. I was the only Asian person in the cafe, and perhaps, one of the few Asians he encountered in his life. It is easy to stare at puppies or babies because we know that they do not necessarily recognize the gaze in a way adults do. People unconsciously know that they do not have the power to react to our gaze.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people started looking at me differently, as if I were the virus. This staring was suffocating given that the headlines were filled with daily reports. The virus of hatred was as strong as the virus itself. The daily news reports of Asians being attacked also made me afraid that it might happen to me as well. Feeling as if my mental health, physical well-being, and even my life was under constant threat, I believed I had no choice but to book a

2. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 14–26.

3. For theories of racialized gaze and violence, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

plane ticket to my home country. I had never felt so grateful that I had another place to return to.

COVID-19 discloses the ugly face of racism. Former President Donald J. Trump's tweet escalated violence against Asians. Politicizing and racializing the virus as "the Chinese virus," Asians and Asian Americans in the United States became scapegoats for the Trump administration's failure to employ measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19. Despite the global slogan of "Stop Asian Hate" and "Stop AAPI Hate," hate crimes keep increasing as evidenced by the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings.⁴ This essay is about my experience as a Korean woman, a former dancer, and an international faculty member teaching dance at a state university in San Diego, California. It includes my autobiographical reflection that juxtaposes my story with that of a social media dance influencer named Alex Wong, who was a victim of an anti-Asian hate crime during the pandemic. Alex Wong is a Chinese American dancer known for his versatile performances combining ballet and hip hop in Season 7 of the dance reality television show So You Think You Can Dance and his skillful but humorous dance videos on social media.

Wong's off-stage experience contradicts those of his on-stage persona, which explains the ambiguous position of Asians between the silenced majority and unprotected "Model Minority," a myth that Asian Americans are educated, competent, docile, economically prosperous, and politically silent.⁵ However, such stereotypes are not "safeguards against racism and xenophobia" including anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19.⁶ Wong's experience, assaulted and decided to take an action, challenging his inner "Model Minority," speaks to my decision to contribute to this special issue by sharing my experiences.

4. Sam Cabral, "Covid 'Hate Crimes' Against Asian Americans on Rise," *BBC News*, May 21, 2021.

5. Model Minority has justified systematic exploitations including Asian immigrants who replaced the slavery labor for railroad constructions since the abolishment in 1865.

6. Jennifer Lee, "Asian Americans, Affirmative Action & the Rise in Anti-Asian Hate," *Daedalus* 150, no. 2 (2021): 181.

If social media is a stage for Wong, my stage is a campus surrounded by the sheltered bubble of academia. We both have extended stages—the street—metaphorically and physically, where we can be attacked simply because of our race. For me, the grocery store can be an example, and for Wong, it is a corner of a street in New York. Wong's experiences on the street reveal that empathy built on the sanitized social media may not be extended to reality. As SanSan Kwan reminded us, space is racialized; performing race is performing geography.⁷ This essay extends my diasporic identity and border-crossing experiences at airports to discuss how space affects racial sentiment.

A Dance Influencer and Throwing Rocks at His Head

On March 3, 2021, around Broadway and 58th Street in New York, Wong encountered dozens of teenagers on bikes who threw rocks at his head. In an interview with *Spectrum News NY1*, Wong elaborated:

I was biking down the bike lane right here, and I was passing slowly. One of them threw a handful of like rocks at my head. . . . And then I kept on going, like, I tried not to react just because [I] didn't want to give that to them. And as I kept on going down, there was like six or seven of them coming up the wrong way. And as I passed, another one threw a rock at my head and then kind of like *cheered* (emphasis added) when it happened.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Asian people in the United States have had objects thrown at them, pushed onto subway tracks, spat on their faces, and beaten on the street. Wong did not file a police report on that day.⁸ A few days later, however, he came forward with the assault

7. SanSan Kwan, "Performing a Geography of Asian America: The Chop Suey Circuit," *TDR/The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (2011): 126.

8. Stephanie Simon, "Dancer Alex Wong Speaks Out After Rocks Thrown at Him in Possible Bias Attack," *Spectrum News NY1*, March 23, 2021.

he experienced. In an interview with *Spectrum News NY1*, he said, “If I don’t speak out about, like, what if my mom gets pelted with rocks or an older person.”⁹

On March 17, 2021, Wong posted a story on his Instagram with the hashtag #StopAAPIHate.

ROCKS THROWN AT MY HEAD. Please like/share. This happened on March 3rd. I usually stay silent, but in light of recent events, I think it’s important that I speak up. This is an example of how as an Asian, I have learned to stay quiet, keep my head down, and not cause trouble and so I pretended nothing happened. Can I say for sure this was a hate crime specifically targeted toward an Asian? No, but because I didn’t speak up, maybe I perpetuated the stereotype that it is ok to do this to an Asian. . . . What should I have done in this situation?¹⁰

He also posted a video recorded on the same day where he appears confused, angry, perplexed, and emotionally distressed. He said:

I didn’t even say anything like I just pretended it never happened. But like what do you even do in a situation like that? It’s not worth it for a fight but . . . no I mean . . . there was a policeman right and I was like yo, these people just threw rocks at me and they were like, yeah. . . . *It’s not okay* (original emphasis)!¹¹

In the video, verbal clues are vague with mixed signals in the video. When he says “yeah,” replicating what he heard from the policeman, he lightly nods his head but did not clearly share what he heard from the police. He makes a somehow disinterested face as if that of the policeman who might imply that it was not a big deal. Interestingly, his verbal comments often contradict the visceral physical expression delivered through his body. It is his facial expression that is clear. What he says,

9. Ibid.

10. Alexdwong, *Instagram*, March 17, 2021.

11. Ibid.

"not worth . . . for a fight," contradicts his feeling delivered through his anxious and elevated facial expression, shaky voice, and pausing during his speech. His comment "but no, I mean," after saying it is "not worth . . . for fight [against the teens]" and the final word "it's not okay" delivers his emotional intensity and a slice of truth he wanted to tell.

Perhaps what Wong wanted to do was to fight back. While no one is necessarily ready to respond immediately to situations like these, Wong's silence in the first few days can exemplify the toxic imagery of the "Model Minority," as he pointed out, and how it censors Asians who internalize the stereotype. The fact that he posted his story on Instagram a few days after the incident reveals a potential process of hesitation, struggle, and contemplation until he took action.

While Wong was clear that it is about race, NBC New York tried to mitigate it. After sharing Wong's story and recent reports of hate crimes, the news ends with, "While it's unclear whether Wong was attacked simply because he is Asian, the nationwide rise in violence against Asians has led to many community gatherings in New York City."¹² Not surprisingly, the mainstream media plays a role in further silencing and diluting Asians' pain, experience, and voice.

Wong's experience reminds me of myself, who has tried to wear a smile, remain polite, and solve issues without noise. I went on a backpacking trip to Europe with my older sister in college. Walking down a park in Austria, two white teen boys started throwing rocks at us. I had only ever read stories about people being stoned to death in the Bible. It was the first time someone had ever thrown rocks at my head. In that moment, I did not know what to do except walk faster. I was not fluent in English or any European language. Finally, my sister said, "stop," but the two boys kept throwing rocks until my sister yelled, "I said stop!" I still remember the faces of those two boys. They were *laughing*, just like the teenagers on bikes who *cheered* after throwing rocks at Wong. Would these teens do the same thing if we were white?

12. Adam Harding and Kiki Intarasuwan, "Broadway Dancer Stirred by Anti-Asian Violence Speaks Out About Getting Pelted with Rocks," *NBC New York*, March 19, 2021.

The idea of empathy demonstrates deeply rooted power dynamics such as race and nationality. A couple of years ago, a white female colleague came to my class as a guest speaker to teach martial arts movement. She showed a clip from *Kill Bill* as an example. After showing a fight scene where the white female protagonist kills a group of men, she asks what the students saw. It seemed quite clear that the instructor shared the clip as an example of skillful martial arts to inspire the students. An Asian male student responded being perplexed: “a white woman killing a bunch of Asian guys?” An uncomfortable moment of silence followed the student’s comment. The instructor did not respond and quickly moved on to the next topic wearing an embarrassed smile on her face.

On social media, beauty and fame is another source of evoking empathy. Influencers often represent the conventional beauty standard—young, slim, fit body and charming face. With increasing followers and global popularity, dance influencers have power on social media. From merchandise to a political agenda, what they say, share, and advocate can easily permeate the public.¹³ With one click of “like” and “share,” empathy is built instantly on social media, including Asian Americans and Asians whose colonized bodies have been often marginalized from the programmed empathy. Nevertheless, sadly enough, those empathy built on social media may not be applicable in reality.

Feeling Diaspora from the Airport to Campus

Not all violence is physical. Violence can emerge from unexpected spaces like a grocery store, school, or airport. My experience as an international student and then a faculty member for over a decade has allowed me to observe a diasporic identity across borders. As soon as I returned to Seoul in early 2020, I saw a few conservative Korean

13. Chuyun Oh, *K-pop Dance: Fandoming Yourself on Social Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 26.

organizations' anti-Chinese sentiment packets on the street. Although I am marginalized as a woman, I am privileged as a South Korean citizen living in the Gangnam district in Seoul, Korea, a country filled with working-class immigrants from around the world.

Such privilege can be easily revoked based on space. After a 13-hour flight to Los Angeles, I fall under the umbrella term of "Asian." I do not even remember how many times I have corrected my ethnicity and my country of birth to those who asked, "Where are you from?" or "Are you Chinese?" Interestingly, no one said "Chinese American." The generic imagery of all Asians and Asian Americans as the Chinese Oriental Other seems unavoidable in the United States.

In addition to my ethnic identity being quickly erased as soon as I enter the United States, an airport itself reveals deeply rooted prejudice. My border-crossing experiences at airports are an extended street from my self-contained world of academia, which amplifies how fragile, unstable, and mobile my identity is based on space. I have faced unpleasant, interrogating questions at airports where I often feel the most vulnerable and unsafe. A few years ago, a security guy, who was not even an Immigration and Customs Official, randomly stopped me and asked me to show my document. I showed my visa document that proves my institution and job position. He did not believe it and asked me to show more evidence. He said, "You? Professor?" sneering at my face. My visa document consists of two pages, each clearly marked as 1 of 2 and 2 of 2. He insisted that there should be more pages and that the record is incomplete through which he exercised power as white American over an Asian woman. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, I was often sent to a separate room requiring additional interrogation after a brief first interview at the US Customs and Border Protection. I do not know their system, and do not know why I was sent to another room. The room was filled with dark-skinned and Asian-looking people. They sent me back to the line for non-US citizens after confirming my status as a university professor. My status in academia often functions as a safeguard that de-criminalizes me at the border.

Between Silenced Majority and Model Minority

My position as a university professor further complicates my diasporic identity. People doubt me when I introduce myself as a professor on the street. An Uber driver asked, “community college?” The comment implies his assumption about Asian women and their social status. It is quite common to encounter sexual and racial harassment on the street (and it’s the reason why I hate to go downtown on Friday night). The young drunken people yelling and saying nasty things likely include college students, including those at my institution. San Diego is a relatively safe workplace during the day, but it turns into a dangerous site when I am off campus.

Academia is not entirely safe. As an Asian female who speaks with a Korean accent, I contradict the typical image of a university professor as a middle-aged white man. In 2017, after the first day of class a white, middle-aged, male student came to me and said he is surprised that I am a professor with a PhD. If my position as a university professor challenges the conventional racial and gender imagery of a professor, it partially explains why my large general education classes are mostly filled with female and racial minority students except a few white male students. Academia was much more friendly when I was an Asian international student who needed help. Asians in a professional workplace are often viewed as a threat to the majority white faculty, as those Asians no longer meet the stereotype of inferior Asians based on racial hierarchy, but instead compete with the white system, which leads to the majority’s “competitive racism” towards the minority.¹⁴

Asians are racial minorities by law.¹⁵ However, as recent debates and students’ lawsuits show, universities often exclude Asians and

14. Competitive racism refers to a subtle racism where “the dominant (‘positively privileged’) status group seeks to protect and maintain disproportionate prestige and power while the other (‘negatively privileged’) status group seeks to encroach upon this dominance in order to raise its level of power and resources” (Jackson, 17). See Monica L. Jackson, “Symbolic and Competitive Racism on Campus,” *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 13, no. 1 (1990): 17–24.

15. The U.S. Census Bureau, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act declare Asian Americans as a minority group.

Asian Americans from racial minorities regarding affirmative action policies and the hiring process.¹⁶ After finishing a search for a position, a colleague told me, "I wish we hired a minority." His comment confused me because the final candidate was Asian. When there is no system to protect, it is hard to make a claim about discrimination. Asian and Asian Americans are situated in a complicated position: being privileged when perceived as the "honorary white"¹⁷ in hiring process and being deprived as the minority when competing with or challenging against white. This ambiguous position reflects the myth of model minority where Asians and Asian Americans are at the convenience of the white system, being tossed between the majority and the minority.

In academia, albeit subtler than the street, I have encountered microaggressions, competitive racism, white solidarity, white feminism, old-boy network, psychological and verbal harassment, systematic discrimination, public humiliation, and xenophobia. My report about a student who wrote "whites are superior to black" was dismissed. A racist white student can be easily excused if she is good at dancing through a close bond with white faculty. I have seen certain racial and gender populations get promoted much faster, while Black, Indigenous, people of color female faculty tend to struggle to fit into their whitewashed department cultures and promotion process, even with a much stronger list of publications as their research is not the "canon."

The Model Minority myth creates a bubble as if Asians and Asian Americans thrive.¹⁸ The denial of real discrimination Asians and Asian Americans face make the community "angry."¹⁹ When they finally

16. Lee, "Asian Americans, Affirmative Action," 180. Also see Jay Caspian Kang, "Where Does Affirmative Action Leave Asian-Americans?" *The New York Times*, August 28, 2019.

17. Frank H. Wu, "The Moral Dilemma of Honorary Whiteness: A Comment on Asian Americans and Affirmative Action," *Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 20, no. 1 (2015): 25.

18. Pensri Ho, "Performing the 'Oriental': Professionals and the Asian Model Minority Myth," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 149–75.

19. Wu, "The Moral Dilemma of Honorary Whiteness," 26.

speak up, they are often told that they “have no right to complain” compared to African Americans and Hispanics who see Asians as a “threat” rather than allies.²⁰ Sadly, COVID-19 exposes how Asians are attacked by other racial minorities and majorities. Supporting Asians’ human rights is not about fights among minorities but about “equity, fairness, access, and support” for education.²¹ The irony of the Model Minority is that Asian Americans are positioned as “honorary white”²²—only if they remain silent, do not complain, are not confrontational, and assimilate into and assure the white majority. The status of being a Model is only achieved by remaining as a silent Minority.

Beyond the Stage

Wong is celebrated on social media for his talent, physical appearance, and charming personality, but he is read as Asian who is subject to assault outside of social media. Although social media is not immune from racism, his status as a dance influencer seems to create a safer space for him than the street where he could be physically attacked. His story reminds me of my experiences confronting explicit attacks on the street where my identity as a university professor functions as a relatively safe bubble. An influencer’s brunch photo on Instagram presents a genuine “just being me” moment.²³ However, the influencer’s perfectly polished makeup, ironed dress on early Saturday morning, perfect lighting, camera angle, charming background, and the natural gaze signify how unnatural the photo is. In the highly choreographed setting, social media is a stage that plays with authenticity under the anxiety of being constantly on the show mode.²⁴ Likewise,

20. *Ibid.*, 27.

21. *Ibid.*, 28.

22. *Ibid.*, 25.

23. Brooke Erin Duffy and Elizabeth Wissinger, “Mythologies of Creative Work in the Social Media Age: Fun, Free, and ‘Just Being Me,’” *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 4652.

24. Oh, *K-pop Dance*, 3, 30.

as a dance influencer, Wong's videos are a set of choreography—a whimsically changing face from cathartic grimace to sensual lip biting, close-ups of the sensual body sweat on stage, and the clumsy, humorous, and humane “the boy next door” characters off stage.²⁵ While the dancing body itself can be physically and emotionally genuine, his glamorous representation on social media is an edited reality, like a movie trailer that only shows condensed highlights.

On TikTok, “hot K-pop idol” videos are on demand. They include shirtless K-pop boys, showing their sweaty muscular chests and body rolls with intense eye contact. Viewers, including English speaking users in the US, are empathetic with unconditional support to the idols. Like Wong, whose body becomes vulnerable as soon as he moves away from the stage (either the actual *SYTYCD* stage or his social media stage), those K-pop idols can confront unexpected racist attacks. K-pop sensation BTS, for example, released remarks about COVID-related racism in the US on *Twitter* that were based on their border-crossing experiences of being superstars performing on a global stage and being unknown Asian men facing racism while on tour.²⁶ TikTok activists have shared charming photos of K-pop idols with the caption, “they are also Asians too. Stop Asian Hate.”

Today, Asian and Asian American dancers such as Kyle Hanagami, BTS, Blackpink, and Alex Wong, thrive on social media but the popularity of Asian dance influencers does not mean racism no longer exists. Instead, their glamorous presence hides the brutal reality of ordinary Asian Americans who are threatened, humiliated, and assaulted for looking Asian. The dramatic dissonance—the love of beautiful Asian dancers on social media versus the hatred of Asian bodies on the street opens room for discussing the double-edged swords of performance. The power of performance builds a sense of community due to its visually pleasing aesthetics. Performances lure audiences to

25. Alexandra Harlig, Crystal Abidin, Trevor Boffone, Kelly Bowker, Colette Eloi, Pamela Krayenbuhl, and Chuyun Oh, “TikTok and Short-Form Screendance Before and After Covid,” *The International Journal of Screendance* 12 (2021): 197–98.

26. 방탄소년단, *Twitter*, March 29, 2021.

focus primarily on what happens on stage only. There is also a potential limitation of social media, where being an activist is too easy, and the action short lived. Anyone can be an activist by sharing a post; the activism will disappear as soon as users swipe it up.

As social media is “the smallest but most transnational stage,”²⁷ there is still a possibility of spreading politically informative messages. President Joe Biden invited BTS to the White House to address anti-Asian hate crimes on May 31, 2022. President Biden said: “I got involved in public life because of civil rights. Even back then, famous artists helped move people. What you are doing makes a big difference . . . don’t underestimate. Not just your great talent. It’s the message you are communicating.”²⁸ Like many of the US audience, the President would not get a chance to get to know BTS without social media. It is possible that social media, albeit sanitized, still gives us hope so that we can continue to dream of a better society for all.

Epilogue

Until a few years ago, I wanted to have US citizenship because it is stressful to be interrogated at the airport every summer. COVID-19 changed my mind. I came to the United States as a dreamy PhD who fell in love with performance studies scholars who taught me that education could change the world. My father is a history professor. I grew up listening to stories about American soldiers who fought for South Korea during the Korean War and felt grateful to those who sacrificed their lives on the battlefield. Over a decade, however, I have developed fear towards the United States because of the way I have been treated. Deep inside my heart, I still feel the passion and love I used to have for the country. Scapegoating the Other via hatred does not

27. Oh, *K-pop Dance*, 26.

28. The White House, “President Biden and Vice President Harris Welcome BTS to the White House,” *YouTube*, June 4, 2022.

make people united, stronger, or respected, but empathy can. I do not want to remember America for the way you looked at me during the COVID-19.

Author Biography

Chuyun Oh (PhD, UT Austin) is Associate Professor of Dance at San Diego State University. As a Fulbright scholar and former professional dancer, she has published her work on popular dance and ethnography in *Dance Research Journal*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Dance Chronicle*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *The Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, and more. She co-edited *Candlelight Movement, Democracy, and Communication in Korea* (Routledge, 2021) and is the author of *K-pop Dance: Fandoming Yourself on Social Media* (Routledge, 2022).

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Toward an Afro-Asian Hip-Hop Dance Pedagogy

J. Lorenzo Perillo and Kellee E. Warren

Introduction

In the past decades, a burgeoning literature has explored Afro-Asian formations as an analytical lens for framing questions of race, gender, and diaspora. As universities continue to diversify curricula, coursework in dance forms with roots in marginalized communities lead to more polycentric and polyrhythmic intellectual practices. Drawing from an auto-ethnography of an Asian American Hip-Hop dance course, we reflect critically on how women students remake male-dominated dance into a transformative space for expressing alternatives to colonialism, patriarchy, and anti-blackness.¹ We suggest that Chicago Hip-Hop dance histories are amplified by their articulation with Afro-Asian cultures and histories, utilizing what racial justice educator Django Paris conceptualizes as culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP).² In the context of Filipina/x/o and Black relations, Hip-Hop dance pedagogy

1. We would like to thank Annie Pho, MLIS, for their valuable support in the initiation of the oral history project and our collaboration. Planning for the oral history project began in fall 2015 with implementation the following semester and until spring 2020 in the course "Hip Hop Dance and Asian American Cultural Politics." Student learning outcomes for the course aimed to train students to use various methods of dance research to examine the experiences of Asians and Asian Americans in Hip-Hop dance. The oral histories were digitally archived and brought the interdisciplinary fields together: Archival Science, Critical Dance Studies, Feminist and Queer Afro Asian Studies, and Culturally Sustaining Revitalizing Pedagogy.

2. Django Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012): 93–97.

in Chicago reveals the contested and intersectional formation of counter-narratives. As a first-generation Filipino diasporic professor and Black woman professor in the special collections library, we critically reflect on histories of Afro-Asian formations, our experiences teaching the course, and how our students documented their experiences and knowledge through oral history interviews.

Dance educator Moncell Durden offers a useful description of Hip-Hop dance: “Hip-Hop social dances feature multiple rhythms, as well as movement that generates and expands from multiple centers; in other words, it is polyrhythmic and polycentric.”³ On the one hand, the polyrhythmic and polycentric elements of Hip-Hop social dances inform our own intellectual moves as we add, expand, and extend the methods of Afro-Asian studies that often rely on textual analysis.⁴ On the other hand, our course employed critical race studies, feminist, and queer Afro-Asian studies unlike conventional university Hip-Hop dance courses—which often center virtuosity without any substantial engagement with Asian-Black relations in either scholarly or creative ways. As Brenda Dixon-Gottschild says, “we need to keep ourselves off center in order to stay on target.”⁵ Dance studies amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic and anti-Asian attacks call for deeper and more sustained engagements with Filipina/x/o and Black choreographies.⁶

In Chicago, historical segregation has impacted the educational outcomes for Black and Asian peoples in particularly significant ways. Black and Asian college students face disparate obstacles to academic success that correlate to the presence or lack of Black Studies and Asian American Studies courses and programs. Additionally, Black and Asian faculty and staff and leadership often support resources and programming for students, but the institutions fail to retain valuable faculty and staff.⁷

3. E. Moncell Durden, *Beginning Hip-hop dance* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2019), 2.

4. Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, “Introduction: Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations,” *Scholar & Feminist Online*, 14, no. 3 (2018), 1–3.

5. Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, “Some Thoughts on Choreographing History,” In *Meaning in Motion*, eds. Fredric Jameson, Jane Desmond, Stanley Fish (Duke University Press, 1997), 167–177.

6. Example: protocols and responses to racialized health inequities and violence.

7. C. M. Kodama, Y. Yin, S. Lee, & K. Su, “Uncovering the Diversity of Asian American Students at the University of Illinois at Chicago: A Report of the Asian American and

"Uncovering the Diversity of Asian American Students at the University of Illinois at Chicago" (UIC) is a multi-year demographic survey that was conducted annually from 2011 to 2015 to collect basic information about UIC Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (AANAPI) students, with a focus on collecting data disaggregated by ethnicity. The 2017 report paints a picture reflective of the Chicago metro area. With a total of 1,700 respondents, most identified with Indian American, Chinese American, Filipino American, and Korean American ethnic categories.⁸ In its recommendations, this study states:

Though the responsibility for serving Asian American students should not fall solely to Asian American Resource and Cultural Center (AARCC) and Global Asian Studies (GLAS), the reality is that those programs are where Asian American students often first connect to UIC for support, but these programs are often grant-funded, and when grants expire, UIC does not fill in the gaps. In short, certain cohorts of students are able to benefit from this programming.

It is important to recognize the particular social and historical contexts in order to understand the course as a response to the issues of educational segregation, exclusion, and inequity. Whereas most Hip-Hop dance courses are located in Dance and Performing Arts departments, the institutional location of the course in Global Asian Studies enabled a particular cultural literacy within a history of student and faculty advocacy and activism since the 1990s.⁹

One of the critical features of the Asian American Hip-Hop dance course was an oral history project which consisted of a series of workshops in oral history methods across five semesters and resulted in a digital archive of voices from the Chicago Hip-Hop dance community. The

Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions Initiative," (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois at Chicago, 2017), 1–36.

8. Kodama et. al. "'Uncovering the Diversity of Asian American Students at the University of Illinois at Chicago,'" 6

9. Global Asian Studies is a program that merges courses, concepts, and resources from both Asian American Studies and Asian Studies to implement transformative, community-engaged pedagogy in and beyond Chicago.

workshops highlighted oral history as one research method of historians and a method used frequently by marginalized people in order to create a counter-narrative to traditional archival materials held in the Special Collections library; traditional university special collections libraries and archives often leave out voices of students, women, and LGBT people. Unlike other university-based Hip-Hop collections that focus on industry authorities and celebrities, this archive centers student-generated material with nearly 100 audio-visual oral histories that are now preserved in the UIC special collections library. In addition to the oral history project, each semester of the course consisted of weekly seminar-based discussions and studio-based dance workshops, student-led group presentations, and a final research project that involved instructor one-on-one meetings, preliminary bibliography, library research info-session, oral presentations, and a “draft and re-write” of a term paper or creative film. Weekly readings and viewings, discussions, and dance workshops were themed varying from history, cultural politics, Afro-Asian connections, Asian American Dance studies, Archives and Preservation, Women of Color Feminism, Virality, Queering Hip-Hop, and Hip-Hop Competitions.



Global Asian Performance Digital Archive Flyer

The Asian American Hip-Hop dance course and digital archive serves a need specific to Chicago's students, but it also points to the necessity for collaboration across Asian American and Black learning communities that advance cultural legibility, exchange, solidarity, and fluidity. This course and this archive are unique because they shed light on traditionally obscured Afro-Asian relations in the Midwest. Django Paris's work on culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is applicable to the Afro-Asian relations in our course because he notes that similar relations happen naturally between Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other students of color. Paris identifies this concept as *cultural fluidity*.¹⁰ Cultural fluidity is attributable to marginalized students who often use Hip-Hop culture and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to traverse cultural boundaries not only to connect with other cultures but also to their own. Paris further acknowledges that culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSPs) are articulated in different ways by different communities.¹¹ We augment CSPs by contending that *embodied knowledge*—that is, dance and music—is just as important as the written or spoken word, which is rooted in colonialist power relations. As creators of this course and oral history workshop, we adhere to Paris's assertion "that we look to sustain African American, Latina/o, Asian American, Pacific Islander American, and Indigenous American languages and cultures in our pedagogies" and "must be open to sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by contemporary young people."¹²

A Brief History: African American and Filipina/x/o Connections

As part of naming how racialized gender-based violence and anti-Asian violence are not isolated, we acknowledge the multiple historical

10. Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy," 95.

11. Django Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures," *The Educational Forum*, vol. 85, no. 4, (2021): 364–376.

12. Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy," 95.

encounters by which African American and Filipina/x/o peoples were placed in relationship to empire-building and colonial education.¹³ We also invite engagement with the complexities of intracommunal relations or how both African American and Asian American communities are not monolithic.¹⁴ Many sources document African American and Filipina/o encounters on the West and East coasts and emphasize that those interactions were mainly based on the needs of capital—that African Americans found themselves in competition with ethnic groups that had already established working relationships with white industry on the coasts. Hiring marginalized workers was at the whims of white workers. For example, some white workers would not work with Filipina/x/os, but they would work with Mexicans; some white workers would work with Blacks, but would not work with Japanese.¹⁵ There is documentation on sociocultural relations between African American women and Filipinas.¹⁶ That said, Afro-Asian formations are not as easily legible in the Midwest. Encounters between African Americans and Filipino/as often happened through labor relations, education, or activism though they had many things in common.¹⁷ Sintos Coloma contends “colonial education in the Philippines was largely inflected by and patterned after the curriculum for African Americans in the US South. In other words, since Filipino/as were discursively configured as “Negroes,” the schooling for African Americans became the prevailing racial template for the colonial pedagogy of Filipino/as. Such historical connection links the colonial and racial conditions of Filipino/as and African Americans, and offers a generative empirical site for transnational and comparative analysis of race

13. J. Lorenzo Perillo, *Choreographing in Color: Filipinos, Hip-hop, and the Cultural Politics of Euphemism*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

14. Jae Yeon Kim, “Racism is Not Enough: Minority coalition building in San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver,” *Studies in American Political Development* 34, no.2 (2020): 195–215.

15. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 233–234.

16. Jewel Pereyna, ““The Satin Sisters”: Performing Afro-Filipina Women’s Intimacies through Felt Architectures,” *CLA Journal* 62, no. 2 (2019): 132–150.

17. James Zarsadiaz, “Raising Hell in the Heartland: Filipino Chicago and the Anti-Marital Law Movement, 1972–1986,” *American Studies*, no. 55 (2017): 141–162.

and curriculum."¹⁸ Developing Hip-Hop dance curriculum in Global Asian studies enabled students to name racialized gender-based oppression that engages these multiple histories and explore their practical manifestations in the oral history and digital archive process.

Histories of Afro-Asian formations tend to focus on relations between men or what Reddy and Sudhakar refer to as "utopian heteromasculinism."¹⁹ Reddy and Sudhakar describe utopian heteromasculinism as the ritualistic diplomacy between men to which many male-dominated societies and ethnic groups are accustomed. For instance, African American men such as Carter G. Woodson and John Henry were educators who taught in the Philippines; however, they held the erroneous belief that they were a civilizing presence for Filipino peoples. Sociologist, historian, and Pan-Africanist, W.E.B. Dubois' relationship to China and the Chinese people is well-documented, emphasizing that men's perspective is often foregrounded in narratives about Afro-Asian formations.²⁰ Indeed, Pereyna argues that "current scholarship seldom analyzes Filipino and African American feminist solidarities, often privileging masculinist Afro-(East) Asian nationalisms."²¹ In contrast, our collaboration revealed that there is a notable history between not only Black and Asian peoples in general, but also Black and Filipina women specifically and that history emphasized "a complex and contradictory definition of solidarity based on both a narrative of unity and one that took seriously the differences, inequalities, and hierarchies between and within racialized groups and anti-imperialist histories."²² For example, the reality that Black Filipina/os and Filipina/os racialized as Black continue to face anti-black

18. Roland Sintos Coloma, "'Destiny Has Thrown the Negro and the Filipino Under the Tutelage of America'": Race and Curriculum in the Age of Empire," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 39, no. 4, (2009): 495–519.

19. Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, "Introduction: Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations," *Scholar & Feminist Online*, 14, no. 3 (2018): 1–3.

20. Michael T. Martin and Lamont H. Yeakey. "Pan-American Asian Solidarity: A Central Theme in DuBois' Conception of Racial Stratification and Struggle." *Phylon* (1960–) 43, no. 3 (1982): 202–217.

21. Pereyna, "The Satin Sisters," 133.

22. Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan, eds. *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018).

oppression in the Philippines subverts how Black and Asian peoples are often reduced to separate or oppositional groups.²³ In popular culture, media representation, and dating culture, Black women and Filipinas face similarly hypersexualized stereotypes like the Jezebel and “Mail Order Bride.”²⁴ In the workplace, some Black women and Filipinas were forced to contend with similar racio-linguistic violence in the policing of both African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Filipino language.²⁵ These varied experiences of gendered and classed discrimination and resilience, challenge the impermeable borders between Filipinx and Black racial categories and further strengthen commonalities experienced through Hip-Hop dance.

Creative Dialogue

Kellee: So, we had many plans about how this critical reflection on our collaborative instruction experience would be documented but events starting in 2020 reshaped them quite a bit. We could not simply ignore those events in the conversation. As someone who currently works with and selects cultural heritage materials and thinks about history and memory we simply had to pepper this conversation with some of those events and how they might have reshaped our approach. Some background on me: I grew up on the southside of Chicago, and attended public school in Hyde Park, the home of University of Chicago. I had close friendships with some of my Asian American classmates. By contrast, I then moved on to attend a well-resourced suburban public high

23. Angelica J. Allen, “Hypervisible (In)visibility: Black Amerasians” in *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation*, eds. Rick Bonus and Antonio Tiongson (United States: Fordham University Press, 2022).

24. See Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Gina K. Velasco, *Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalisms in the Filipina/o Diaspora* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

25. Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of care* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 189–190.

school and was exposed to the anti-blackness of Asian Americans of a higher class. When I was first introduced to this collaboration with you and teaching the oral history workshop, my first question was “What do Filipinos/Asian Americans have to do with Hip-Hop?” I think my high school experience and then experience living in the wider world caused me to forget the close relations I had with some of my Asian American classmates. So, as we continued to work together over the years, the collaboration turned into a recovery project and a recovery project from a Black feminist and queer perspective. Not in a romanticized way, but in a way of recognizing the work we were trying to do both being at the margins and working for majority minority designated institutions that function like Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Our collaboration has served as a recovery of the Afro-Asian relations I experienced as a child. In hindsight, I am so glad that Annie, then Undergraduate Experience librarian at UIC, now the Head of Instruction and Outreach at Gleeson Library at University of San Francisco introduced us. And I am grateful for the opportunity to work with you on training students in oral history methods. More importantly, I was excited about co-organizing and preserving the student oral history archive and re-learning through Hip-Hop culture and performance the connections between Black and Filipino peoples. Of course, because I worked in music for many years, I was exposed to what the global commodification of Hip-Hop looked like—and that was not and is still not pretty.²⁶ Reflecting on the course, listening to and evaluating student interviews—many of the students being Black, Asian, and/or women—for this project was compelling to me as a Black woman because many of the students found a way to either create a stronger connection to Hip-Hop culture or connect to their own culture through Hip-Hop.

26. Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political & Cultural Connections Between African Americans & Asian Americans* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–17.

Lorenzo: Recovery project. I like that. Since I grew up dancing on the West Coast, I benefited from a high concentration of Filipinos and Asian Americans, which does not exist in the Midwest. In Asian American Studies, the predominance of California-centric frameworks and institutions gave rise to the East of California (EoC) movement in order to develop research, build the field, and support individuals in places like New York and Chicago. Streetdance was a vehicle for bridging my West Coast Asian American background with the Midwest Asian American community and those who might not see themselves in the coastal racial formations that often dominate Asian American studies. As a choreographer and street dancer, my interests center on recovering or filling the gap in the archival materials both in streetdance and in Filipino culture. Your training and expertise in archives is invaluable to this project because Spanish and US colonization of the Philippines informs Filipino peoples' sense of belonging and exclusion. It's been wonderful to collaborate with you and support the students in their learning objectives to analyze written text and performance using distinct theoretical approaches and methodologies like oral history and Black feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Studies.

Kellee: I was excited to be part of documenting student history for the university. Since we work for public academic institutions, it is also important to document student history. That is, I am in a position to encourage students to view themselves as historical actors and they are instrumental in the social and intellectual foundation of the university. I never really paid attention to the make-up of the class until I looked up and saw that we had a group of young female students. And, of course, this changed the tone of the instruction. However, I think that you had things covered in the readings you selected for the course.

Lorenzo: I sought to assign readings that would hopefully give Asian women students a vocabulary for understanding ideas like model minority myth, queer performance, and Chinese patriarchy. I also

paired these topics with movement workshops that sometimes enabled them to ground their oral histories in non-normative embodied knowledge. The course also hopefully provided Asian men who are orientalized/feminized in US American society a unified, yet critically reflective Hip-Hop cultural identity. This harkens back to Django Paris' concept of structured opportunities for inward gazes and engaging with internalized oppression.

Kellee: I didn't want to go beyond my scope as an archival instructor and scholar, but it is a natural occurrence when working in the library—library and information science is an interdisciplinary field. However, I wasn't familiar with the literature in Afro-Asian studies or dance/performance studies, so the work that we did was new to me. Initially, my goal was to focus on oral history methods with the students. But from listening to the interviews, we should've made the guidance a little more explicit and intimate. I'm sure that you worked on some of this in your class sessions, but I think that we could've reinforced some ideas about Afro-Asian formations in our oral history workshop. I tried to but there's only so much librarians can do in a one-shot session. Listening to the interviews, one student really didn't want to acknowledge the blackness in Hip-Hop, which was disappointing to me. The student interviewer was very uncomfortable with the direction the interview was going and I felt bad for them both. However, it was one student out of many. It is our responsibility to make sure that students know the origins of certain cultural practices and even in the history of Hip-Hop the Afro-Asian formation is documented.²⁷ The course, oral history workshop, and our resultant discussion I see as a disruption of the status quo. As I mentioned

27. See Lakandiwa M. De Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, eds. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (Psychology Press, 2004), 191–206; Michelle Mihwa Chang, *Rice and Rap: Hip Hop Music, Black/Asian American Racialization, and the Role of the US Multicultural Neoliberal State*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015.

earlier, we are academic professionals working at the margins in designated majority-minority institutions that function like PWIs and trying to establish a fresh vocabulary between Black feminist and Queer Afro-Asian formations, special collections librarianship and dance. When I present at conferences, I often use a quote from a James Baldwin article where he talks about Black students entering the educational system and essentially being required to give up who they are.²⁸ This is the hidden contract for which parents sign-up their children. In that instance, Baldwin was referring to Black students and Ebonics/AAVE but it is, of course, applicable to Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander students as well. That the work we did—never perfect—in certain ways functioned as a roadmap back to students' culture that we did not foresee affirms what we were attempting to do. And in the midst of our discussion of documenting our work, and the explosion of COVID-19, you moved!

Lorenzo: My move also opened up new perspectives for Afro-Asian formations because in reflecting on the changes since the first class—a lot has happened. I didn't anticipate the series of setbacks that the last half of the 2010s would have in store for us, but I also recognize that our students found more creative ways to find support among each other with dance, activism, and cultural production.

Kellee: When we picked up this critical reflection in seriousness, the activism around law enforcement's use of excessive and deadly force and its slow response to Asian hate incidents sticks out in my mind. It seems that all of these incidents with COVID-19 playing in the background foregrounded the importance of Afro-Asian formations for me. Part of our process of meeting monthly, we

28. James Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?," *The New York Times Archive*, July 29, 1979, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html>.

thought that we were going to do traditional academic writing on our experience with this course, but COVID-19 was spreading rapidly and the George Floyd murder happened and Angelo Quinto, Breanna Taylor, Lindani Myeni . . . too many names for this brief discussion—these events changed the tenor of our reflection—wouldn't we like to know what the students would say about the summer of 2020? What would they say about the police killings and COVID-19? Did any of them participate in the protests? What was that like? It also became apparent how the media was and has been complicit in stoking tensions between Black and Asian American communities. Furthermore, they were part of disseminating Trump's racist comments about COVID-19. As I inferred earlier, it highlights that we need to recover and strengthen the Afro-Asian solidarity we've had and at the same time create new bonds. Not in a romantic way, as Reddy notes, but in a generative one.²⁹ With your move back home, there were student actions on campus of which you may not have been aware. There was direct action in downtown Chicago and students on campus created a list of demands that included the termination of an agreement between the university and campus police. With all of the student activism and the campus being closed due to COVID-19, it was a reminder that both faculty and student intellectualism and activism keep the university afloat.³⁰

Lorenzo: Over the past year, we talked about how both Black and Asian peoples' experience of systemic racism is exacerbated by COVID-19. One thing that stands out for me in our meetings has been how reflecting on the archive of Afro-Asian Hip-Hop Dance has compelled us to look at each other and our communities and consider anti-Blackness in Asian diaspora and the limitations of dance. Our collaboration has helped me see how our Indian American, Chinese American, Filipino American, and Korean

29. Reddy, "Affect, Aesthetics, and Afro-Asian Studies," 2017.

30. Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures," 2021.

American students' learning activities sustain both within-group dance cultural practices through navigation of Asian American identity through Hip-Hop dance and cross-cultural practices as a form of Black cultural expression. As BIPOC faculty the aims of the archive and culturally sustaining pedagogy connect us to our students of color who are deeply invested in dance.

Kellee: I can't tell you how many times I have been mistaken for a student. It's a difficult position to be in because the status quo is the white male professor or the white female librarian. Even BIPOC students aren't used to seeing us in academe. That said, once we get past introductions, we're all creating new knowledge together, which is essential in the constructivist approach to teaching. I keep thinking that we need to separate ourselves in this discussion and center the students, but we're all in this together. I was and still am not aware of when the student-centered paradigm shift or discourse happened in higher education. It occurs to me that student-centered is quite different from the marketing term of student success. Student-centered education can happen in a variety of different ways in the classroom and is focused on the importance of student ways of knowing—the knowledge they bring into the classroom. Student success is a term that university administrators use, which is quantifiable and can be antithetical to teaching and learning. Also, in my experience, administration is disingenuous because they want us to do more with less. That is, they cut the resources that we need in order to be more student-centered. Nevertheless, it seems more important to construct knowledge with students, which is part of student-centered pedagogical practice. To establish a community of practice with our students as we do with colleagues is also an organic way to refresh instruction.

Again, we acknowledge that the events of 2020 reshaped our critical reflection in ways we could not foresee. We began our creative dialogue at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, one

of us made a change in institutional affiliation, and both of us were at different stages in the tenure track process. We concluded that there were some lessons about Hip-Hop, embodiment, and Afro-Asian formations we could have made more explicit with the students, but at that time felt the constraints of being Filipina/x/o and Black faculty. For us, the events of the past two years emphasized the importance of Black feminist and queer Afro-Asian formations and transformed us as instructors.

Conclusion

In reflecting on our process, in addition to the successes of the oral history project and course, there are a few areas for growth. These include providing more explicit instructions and learning objectives on Hip-Hop dance and oral history, as well as more explicit discussion about queer and feminist Afro-Asian formations. That is, we should have instructed students to interrogate gender and sexuality norms in Hip-Hop and articulated that these histories capture a specific moment in time and will reflect that history once researchers have access to them well into the future. Going forward, the Afro-Asian relations in the Midwest will blossom and circle back to culture and labor; culture and labor are defining features of relations in the Midwest. This can easily be accomplished through student organizations and not simply for cultural contact between Asian and Black students but with the goal of cultural competence.³¹ Students on university campuses should be encouraged to establish events and programming that function as outreach or collaboratories—focusing on the collective attributes of Hip-Hop culture mentioned in many of the oral history interviews.

31. Samuel D. Museus, "The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly White institutions." *Journal of College Student Development* 49, no. 6 (2008): 568–586.

By foregrounding the oral history projects within a longer history of Afro-Asian formations and wider geographies from Chicago to Manila, our Filipina/x/o and Black students can more critically dialogue with traditional dance pedagogy and history, which often reproduce colonial racial and sexual hierarchies.³² Historicizing stereotypes such as the model minority and hypersexuality of Black and Filipina/x/o women within local dance experiences enables students to build deeper connections to the knowledge production process. Documenting the history of Afro-Asian formations through oral history interviews with dance artists also subverts the hierarchy of the text-based archive. We suggest future Hip-Hop dance courses create a space for Black and Asian students to create and implement their own Asian and Black feminist methodologies, practices, and politics. It is important to encourage students to see themselves and their peers as authorities and also question validity, integrity, and how their experiences are connected to histories of Afro-Asian formations. These are critical components for recognizing that the process of reimagining the university and transformational education occurs not through the addition of new content or a self-contained class but through dynamic, culturally sustaining co-creation with its students.

Author Biographies

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32. André Pusey, "Strike, Occupy, Transform! Students, Subjectivity and Struggle." *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 26, no. 2 (2016): 214–232.

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If I Was Your Girlfriend: A Lexicon of Funk and Desire in Academia (or Things I Learned as a Young Asian American Artist)

Michael Sakamoto

[This script is based on a lecture-performance presented in multiple forums since 2021, and revised for this issue. The final text has been redacted due to legal threats and attempts to intervene in the editorial process by [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. All persons and institutions have remained anonymous in all versions of the text and performance to date. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did not have access to the text prior to publication.]



From the photo series, MuNK. Near farmland worked by Michael's grandfather during the Great Depression, Marysville, CA (2018).

SLIDE:

Slideshow of images from Michael's MuNK performance photo series set in Japan, Hawai'i, California, and Paris.

Michael enters, dressed in a Japanese bomber jacket, jeans, sneakers, and baseball cap. He sits down at a table with a printed script, microphone, glass of water, and Japanese meditation bell. He bows and rings the bell three times.

The University [REDACTED] fight song plays.

SLIDE:

Oxford English Dictionary: “The definitive record of the English language.”¹

The definitive source for the following terms.

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael removes his cap, changes to a suit jacket, sips water, and stares at the audience. As music ends, Michael smiles.

SLIDE:

Forebear: An ancestor, forefather, progenitor.

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

After starting a tenure-track, university faculty position as a specialist in non-Western dance, interdisciplinary performance, and media, I attend a reception for faculty of color sponsored by the diversity office. In the White male Provost’s remarks, he reminds us that we should never forget the sacrifices that generations of our forebears made. As

he shakes a couple hands, eats some hors d’oeuvres, and leaves, I think, who is he to tell us the thing about . . . the thing . . . we already. . . ?

But then I think, hey, thanks, Mr. Provost, because at least you reminded me, right?



Sakamoto Gohachiro and Kaku, Michael’s paternal great-grandparents who emigrated to colonial Hawai’i in 1903 (photo circa 1940s).

SLIDE:

Montage of early Japanese laborers in the USA.

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed June 27, 2022, <https://www.oed.com>.



Flash performance with Michael and Rennie Harris (2015).

Michael:

Not just about my obvious forebears, like my immigrant labor ancestors who built Hawaiian plantations and worked California farms, volunteered out of the camps that imprisoned my entire family to die rescuing trapped Texans in Italy and Holocaust victims

in Germany, established the first legal precedent in US history for reparations for racial discrimination, or others you might've googled before you spoke.

I'm thinking also of our less obvious predecessors. Like, so not obvious, they're assumed. Because like all of us, they're just . . . there . . . around . . . all the time.



Still from *Abbey*, featuring Angela Betina Carlos, dancefilm, (2016).

SLIDE:

Uppity: Above oneself, self-important, jumped-up; arrogant, haughty, pert, putting on airs.

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

In my first year, I premiere an evening-length work with one of the country's leading hip-hop choreographers for concert dance, receive a book contract with the same press with which my department's only other scholar published ahead of tenure, publish in two journals, produce a dance film, and win a major national dance production

grant for a second evening-length performance. With the above in mind, while getting advice from a White ombudsperson on navigating University culture, I ask about the prospect of going up for tenure early if my success continues. She says it won't work, that even if I deserve it, I'll be seen as "not behaving" in the University culture.

She says I'll be considered "uppity."

". . .Excuse me?"

She asks, "You're familiar with Asians, right?"

". . .Uhm . . . Yeah. . . (?)"

"Well, think of it this way," she says. "You're surrounded by White people who act like Asians: knowing your place, not complaining, staying in your lane."

Michael stares at the audience for a beat.

Michael:

. . .Truth is, as a young, aspirational, Asian American artist, I'd thought about these things—*Who am I to complain? What is my place? Where is my lane?*—starting as a college art student looking for inspiration; for successful artists after whom I could model myself.



Performing virtually for the Association for Asian Performance Conference, 2021.

SLIDE:

Film still from Swimming to Cambodia (Demme 1987).

Michael:

For example, when I was 19, performance artist Spalding Gray taught me self-confidence with the film release of his monologue play, *Swimming to Cambodia*. As an only child who'd spent years

alone with my thoughts, it blew my mind seeing an actor sitting alone, talking about himself for an hour and a half, and most of all, being taken seriously by countless theater and movie audiences. Maybe I too could make a living someday by becoming a performing artist, going around the world, writing about the experience, and parading my feelings on stage for others. So I became obsessed with figuring out, *How did he do all this?* And years later, I realized . . . it's easy.

On the surface, *Swimming to Cambodia* is simply Gray's story about working in Thailand as an actor on the film, *The Killing Fields*. However, because he steadfastly holds to his personal and cultural beliefs in the face of war, racism, and genocide, it's also a lesson in staying true to yourself.

(gradually voicing a louder, more insistent, and vaguely Spalding-like accent)

Swimming to Cambodia is a master class in keeping the audience so distracted that they experience the performance as art, yet amused enough that they also experience it as entertainment and walk away satisfied with the fact that Gray still to that day knew almost nothing about Cambodians, not the least reason for which being he only worked in Thailand and never went to Cambodia, because, as he said, trying to understand that country and its people was, like swimming there, impossible.



(l to r) Chey Chankethya, Nguyễn Nguyên, and Waewdao Sierisook in Soil (2017).

As a simultaneously modernist and post-modernist White male hero, Gray is following in the tradition of garnering praise by claiming knowledge of a subject through claiming no knowledge of that subject. Just like

he can't understand the Thai bargirls and sex workers that he prefers 11 times in his show to call "whores," nor can he understand the Khmer Rouge genocide because "we" don't speak Cambodian, unlike the fact that "we" can understand what happened in Germany because "we" speak German (Gray 1985: 51).

In other words, for a White guy on the loose in Southeast Asia, life is hard.

SLIDE:

Color: *The hue of a person's skin, typically of the face, esp. as reflecting or indicating physical health or emotional state; a person's complexion.*

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

In naming the head of my contract review committee, my White [REDACTED] [REDACTED] a full Professor who has repeatedly proclaimed, "I don't see color." Given that most of my teaching and all my research is centered on ethnicity, race, and culture, I express concern that they may have a conflict of interest, and request a change. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] acknowledges my concerns and that their opinions are difficult to hear, but hands the decision to the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], who sees no issue and denies my request.

Later, in a faculty meeting, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] expresses indifference towards race and culture in the curriculum. They say that they make teaching more difficult and "go over my head."

At the same time, I am assigned to teach a course on race and culture in dance for the third consecutive semester out of an eventual five.

SLIDE:

Film still from Home of the Brave (Anderson 1986).



Performing at the Association for Asian American Studies Conference, Denver, CO, 2022.

Michael:

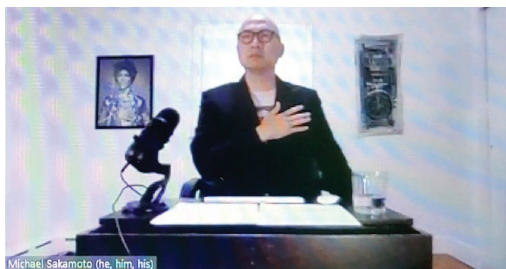
Another film that I saw as a young artist was *Home of the Brave*, by another White New York artist, Laurie Anderson, whom you'd already know, of course, if you had seen *Swimming to Cambodia*, because Spalding Gray drops her name along with

other cool White New York artists without any context, because of course you already know who they are.

Anyway, Laurie Anderson taught me the privilege of dancing as I please and speaking with multiple voices. I was amazed that someone had created a multimedia concert, avant-garde performance, and full-length film all at once. She even tore apart a Linn drum machine, strung the pads all over her body, and performed awkward but beautifully evocative dances for her songs. She did it all, and I was so inspired, that for years, I wanted to be Laurie Anderson. . .

(Gradually voicing a halting, Laurie-type speech pattern)

A whole career where you get to perform as "yourself," and speak in witty phrases about whatever you want, as long as the audi-



Performing virtually for the AAP Conference 2021.

ence believes some central truth about you, like a wise old master or monk holding forth, except through the body and voice of a White female.

And sometimes she would use technology to make that voice more

masculine, or artificial, so that you would know it was her and not her.

And somehow, I was attracted to that. Somehow, as an Asian American, it all felt familiar. Being able, or expected, to perform simultaneously as me and not me. . .



Performing virtually for the AAP Conference 2021.

Audio plays of Michael with a Laurie Anderson-style, synthesized voice and a Linn drum machine musical sequence as he performs a dance of embodied contradiction.

Michael (VO):

And then a Korean musician tells a story, saying “we,” as if he’s Japanese, except he’s Korean, dressed in Korean clothes, so . . .

And her Black backup singers sing in Japanese. One is waving a big oriental fan, and the other wearing a big oriental costume sleeve.

And William S. Burroughs says, “Hey, Kimosabe. Long time, no see.”

And her White guitarist comes on stage in a sombrero.

And she sings, “Hey, Kimosabe! Long time, no see!”

But I’m young, and I’m not thinking deeply about these things, and it’s the 80s, and everything’s clever and bright. . .

So I buy her next album, which ends with a misty ballad, *Hiawatha*, riffing on Longfellow, mythic Americana, the dream. . .

And I think to myself, that’s not me and . . . not me. . .

And 20 years later, I think to myself, it’s certainly not *Hiawatha*. . .

But I don’t know that now, back then. . .

So I keep that cassette in my car, just driving along, for years. . .



From the photo series, MuNK. Farmland worked by Michael's grandfather during the Great Depression, Salinas, CA (2018).

And then another album, with another song, *Night in Baghdad*, satirizing an American reporter's first world problems while reifying his invisibilization of the murder of hundreds of Iraqi civilians, and I think to myself, there's something wrong here, but I don't know what it is. . .

But then I see she's written a book about her art adventures, and then she takes on the biggest book of all: the great American novel, *Moby Dick*, with a great big multimedia show, and a multi-talented cast. . .

And I say to myself, that's it! It's still not me and not me, but I could make it me. I'm in an internationally touring contemporary theater company now. I'm a butoh artist creating original works now. I can dance. I can speak. And most of all, I'm American!

All I have to do now is write a book. . .

SLIDE:

Parochial: figurative. *Relating or confined to a narrow area or region, as if within the borders of one's own parish; limited or provincial in outlook or scope.*

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

In a meeting with the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to discuss my teaching, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] states, without examples, that I have a “limited” understanding of “interdisciplinary and cross-cultural” research, that I operate from “a very parochial perspective” and work “to legitimate that parochial perspective,” and I need to broaden my appeal to “many different audiences.”

Up to that point, my research consists of national and international publications, exhibited photography and film, and public performances in multiple venue formats, languages, and countries, all engaging Asian, Asian American, African American, and Western cultural vernaculars that I’ve been studying and practicing for three decades.

I don’t know. Maybe I should’ve just trusted that they had my best interests in mind.

Like later when [REDACTED] [REDACTED] told me I needed to publish a book for tenure, despite my contract, which they helped draft, explicitly not requiring it and allowing for seven distinct multidisciplinary and intercultural modes of tenure accrual. I guess they just knew what the university liked to see, versus what they actually hired me to do.

I mean, sometimes you just know what you like, right? Like my favorite song. I mean, it’s really my favorite. The



Michael and his mother, Tillie Sakamoto, Los Angeles, CA, 1982.

kind of song you can't live without because the first time you heard it, it told you who you were; maybe even who you've always been.

The opening bars of "If I Was Your Girlfriend" play.

Michael:

In March 1987, Prince's *Sign o' the Times* album came out, with twists on all the standard genres—party anthem, protest song, love song, breakup song, even a children's sing-along—but one track that took my breath away: "If I Was Your Girlfriend."

Somehow, for a skinny, Asian American, 19 year-old male navigating Ronald Reagan's newly aspirational version of American hyper-masculinity, this song by a 5'3", Black male musician in falsetto, four-inch heels, and eyeliner stretching from the Mississippi to Lake Minnetonka not only taught me how to be in love, but captured the simple feeling of what it meant to be me. Perhaps ironically, as the only child son of a single mother, I've always been a romantic. Having witnessed heartbreak growing up, I've always aspired to be "that guy," who always wants to save the day, and would do anything to make it happen.

I have other favorites. Food, ramen. Sport, basketball. But a favorite song is special. It's a spirit in audible form. It can capture your heart and make you wanna do things, like take up a new hobby, fall in love with a person or place, or maybe even aspire to a new career.

So later, as an academic discussing aspiration, I understood quite well.

SLIDE:

Aspire: *To breathe desire towards. intransitive. To have a fixed desire, longing, or ambition for something at present above one; to seek to attain, to pant, long.*

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

In one faculty meeting, for example, we discuss our accreditation being delayed due to numerous perceived discrepancies in our program. ■■■■ says it would help our case to claim a global dance technique curriculum, despite the departure of the only two faculty who taught it. In response to another faculty of color and me pointing out that this would be a false claim, they say that the fact that “we aspire” to such curriculum is enough.

We ask if that’s like the two of us aspiring to be White.

No one responds.

They change the subject.

The opening bars of “Diabaram” by Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yousou N’Dour play.

Michael:

I learned humility and how to work with others on their own terms from Sakamoto Ryuichi, or, as Westerners call him, Ryuichi Sakamoto, perhaps because to them, family comes last and individuality first. What came first in Sakamoto’s music, however, and without fanfare or spectacle, were the underlying cultures of his collaborators, especially the many African and African American singers and musicians whom he featured on record and on tour. And when I saw him in concert in 1990, the audience clamored for an encore at the end of the show. After some minutes, he sheepishly returned.



From the photo series, MuNK, Paris, France (2018).

SLIDE:

Video stills from Sakamoto Ryuichi concert post-show in London, 1990.

As a few moments of Sakamoto speaking plays, Michael desperately attempts to dance butoh funk/popping style while remaining seated.

Ryuichi Sakamoto (VO):

Hello. . . . Well, I was a bit upset because you didn't dance, so I thought you didn't like me. . . . I guess you like me. . . . Are you enjoying? (*Audience cheers.*)

Phew. Okay.



SLIDE:

Like: To please. To take pleasure in or be pleased by something. To be in a favourable condition.

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

Growing up, I was told by older folks in my community that in order to succeed, I needed protective coloring. I needed to appear as something White people wanted. I needed them to like me. So for decades, regardless of my Spalding-like self-confidence,



Performing virtually for the AAP Conference 2021.

Laurie-like intercultural privilege, Prince-like independent streak, or Ryuichi-like quietude, I have always, in every moment, thought about how I'm seen. So in the midst of my performance review, I ask numerous BIPOC colleagues about my situation.

One says it is not good to defend myself in writing.

Another advises that I should convince my chair that they can “collect” me.

While standing in an outdoor parking lot with no one else in sight, another whispers that I should sue the University for harassment.

Another reminds me how lucky I am to have a job.

A White male colleague says if he were being treated the way I was, he’d be yelling and upending tables at faculty meetings. He later rescinds his offer to write me a letter of support because he’s afraid for his job.

A White female colleague recently granted tenure tells me she is disgusted by the system, which favors White mediocrity. “It’s not easy, but I see how much less difficult it is for me than for you. How I’m not perceived as a threat.”

SLIDE:

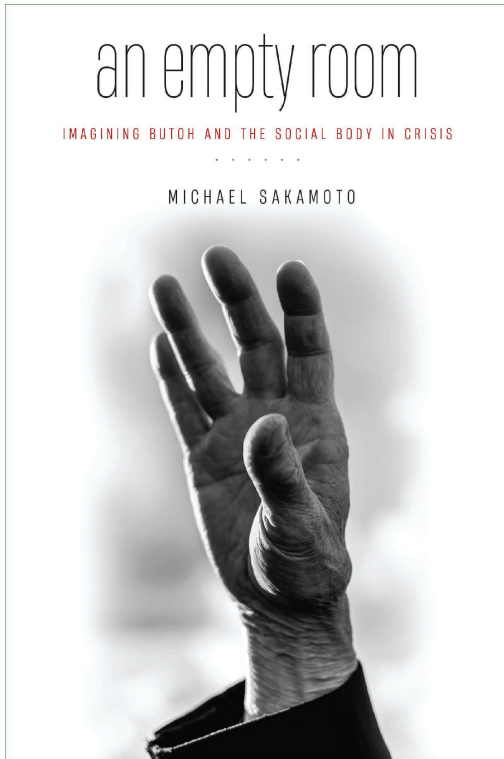
Crazy: *Of unsound mind; insane, mad, demented, ‘cracked’.* Often used by way of exaggeration in sense: *Distracted or ‘mad’ with excitement, vehement desire, perplexity, etc.*

(Words slowly fade.)

Michael:

I also discover similar stories throughout the institution. A Latinx faculty told not to refer to himself as a professor. A White department chair grossly and repeatedly mispronouncing the simple two-syllable name of an Afro-Latin graduate student and world-class professional. Senior faculty voting against a Latinx junior faculty with more research and a national award-winning book. Three consecutive Assistant Professors in one department, all POC or female, voted down for renewal or tenure. The list goes on.

Meanwhile, in my performance review, dozens of allegations are made against me based on mistaken names and dates, miss-



Michael's book monograph approved for publishing in 2020, during the pandemic and five years into original tenure clock. Printed 2022.

ing research and course credits, omitted student evaluation scores, miscalculated enrollments, over a dozen factual errors by the faculty dean, and the eventually false assertion that "it is hard to imagine" that I will make my book manuscript deadline.

I meet with an Asian dean who has publicly spoken on their own experiences with racism and ask if I'm doing something wrong. For an hour, they shake their head emphatically, and say, "You're right. You're not crazy." They then say my depart-

ment and I are just "a bad fit," that I should leave the University, and there's nothing they can do. I remind them that the Deans are obligated by law to vet my review. They shrug and silently walk me out of their office.

I meet with the chief diversity officer, who agrees my treatment is racially biased and offers to help me work with a high-profile campus leader to publicly legitimize my work and a respected senior faculty of color to mentor me on navigating the University's toxic space. They then neglect to return any of my emails and phone calls and leave for another job.

The opening bars of “New Position” by Prince play.

SLIDE:

Interdisciplinary: *Of or pertaining to two or more disciplines or branches of learning; contributing to or benefiting from two or more disciplines.*

(Words slowly fade out.)

Michael:

After three years as Assistant Professor, I have published on Cambodian, Thai, Vietnamese, Filipino, African American, Japanese American,

and Western postmodern dance artists in six academic journals and book anthologies; completed a contracted book manuscript on transnational butoh; created and/or presented four dance theater performances, two photo essays, and a film in over a dozen national and international venues; all amounting to significantly more research than most of my senior colleagues in the same period of their tenure track. I’ve designed and taught six different lecture, discussion, practicum and lab courses for graduate students from five departments and general education undergraduates, served on two search committees, a curriculum committee, four MFA committees, and a PhD committee, and contributed to my department’s recertification process.

Around the same time, the faculty dean grants the department a “new” Assistant Professor position. During a faculty meeting, ■■■ ■■■ states excitedly, while I’m seated next to them, how special and amazing that the line is “interdisciplinary” because “we’ve never had anyone like that.”



Performing at the AAAS Conference, Denver, CO, 2022.

The room goes silent, all eyes faced down.

They change the subject.

A White postmodern dancer is later hired into the new position.

That same year, the university schedules an in-person workshop for White staff, faculty, and students to learn about their privilege and take greater responsibility for racism on campus, and then abruptly cancels the workshop because the subject might cause “confusion,” “concerns,” and “misperceptions.”

The workshop is then rescheduled after the school year is over.

That summer—for many reasons—I leave for a position at another institution.

SLIDE:

“If you wish to dance a flower, you can mime it and it will be everyone’s flower, banal and uninteresting; but if you place the beauty of that flower and the emotions which are evoked by it into your dead body, then the flower you create will be true and unique.”—Ohno Kazuo (Viala and Masson-Sekine 1988: 23)

As a Linn drum funk beat plays over Michael’s synthesized androgynous voice, Michael dons a long skirt and dances to deconstruct and re-code his internalized constructs of Whiteness in front of projected images of himself from his MuNK photo series.

Michael (VO):

Look at the bargain over here, ladies

Ooh, oh.

Ooh, hoo, oh yeah.

Ooh, hoo.

If I was your girlfriend, would you remember

To tell me all the things you forgot when I was your boy?

Hey hey, when I was
your boy.

If I was your new friend,
would you let me

Take care of you

And do all the things
that only a new hire can?

Oh, only new hires can.

If I was your girlfriend.

Ooh, hoo, ho ooh.

If I was your girlfriend.

If I was your girlfriend,
would I let you vet me?

I mean, help you pick out
my words before I speak out?

Not that you're racist,

But sometime, some-
time those are the things

That an annual review's
about.

If I was your one and
only friend,

Would you run to me if somebody questioned your ideology,
Even if that somebody was me?

Yeah, ee hee.

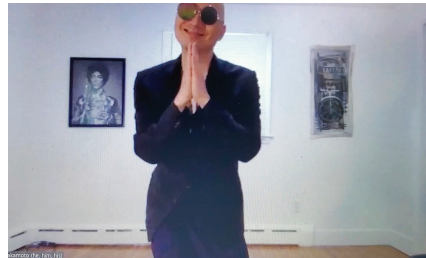
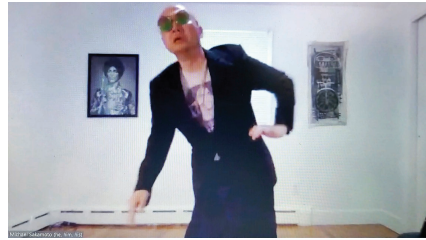
Sometimes I trip on how real we could be.

Plee-hee-hee-hease.

If I was your girlfriend.

Ooh, hoo, hoo.

If I was your girlfriend.



*Performing virtually for the AAP
Conference 2021.*

Would you let me proof your book?
Could I cover your class sometime?
Well then, could we just hang out?
I mean, could we go to the dean's lecture and sit together?
'Cause, to me, baby, that would look so fine, ooh.

Baby, can you vet me?
I mean, help me pick out my words before I speak out?
Listen here, I ain't sayin you're racist,
But sometime, sometime those are the things
that a performance review's about.

Sugar, do you know what it's saying to you in my contract?
Maybe you want me to appear self-centered,
But I, I said I just want to be
All of the things I'm supposed to be.
Surely, a general counsel could see.



From the photo series MuNK, Michael dancing on the infirmary grounds where his father was born at Manzanar prison camp, Independence, CA (2018).

Is it really necessary for me to go
out of the room

Just because you want to discuss
me?

We don't have to make tenure to
make research.

And we don't have to do positiv-
ism to experience new knowledge.

Your lazy sabbatical's what I'm all
about.

Can I see it?

I'll show you my Asian immigrant
work ethic.

Why not?

You can do it because you made
me your friend.

I have to do it for you.
Of course I perform my race in front of you.

And when I become White, what shall I do?
You're the one who made me see that it's cool.
Can't you just use me?
If I was your girlfriend, you could.
Oh yeah, you know so.

Listen, for your Whiteness, I would dance a ballet.
Would that get you off?
Tell me what will.

If I was your girlfriend, would you tell me?
Would you let me see your Whiteness then?
Would you let me introduce your talk?
Would you let me cite you so hard you'd laugh and laugh,
And would you, would you let me quote you there,
You know, down there where it counts,
I'll do it so good,
I swear I'll drink every ounce of your Kool-Aid.
And then I'll quote you tight and quote you long
And together we'll perpetuate the silence. . .

And we'll try to imagine what it looks like.
Yeah, we'll try to imagine what, what teaching looks like.
Yeah, we'll, we'll try to imagine what service looks like.
Yeah, we'll try. . .

Michael falls flat on the ground. After a few moments, he rises, changes back to his Japanese bomber jacket, jeans, and baseball cap, and sits down at the table.

Michael:

Months after resigning my tenure-track position, as I'm greeting audience members in my new role as director of performing

arts programming and Asian and Asian American arts and culture at another PWI university, an elderly White woman and longtime patron tells me about a beautiful dancer she's recently seen who moves so small and passive, and in cute tiny steps, "You know. Like a Japanese," and repeats her statement for emphasis. I stare back.

After the encounter, my White colleague, who introduced me to the woman, apologizes. "That was so racist. I'm so sorry you had to endure that," she says, without explaining why she didn't say anything.

As I step away to introduce the concert, I shrug. "It's five minutes to curtain, and I've been doing this for 30 years. There are some things I just don't have time for."

And most recently, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has begun writing on dance and photography . . . in Japanese American prison camps.

Michael rings the bell once, stands, bows, and exits.



From the photo series, MuNK, Paris, France (2018).

Author Biography

Michael Sakamoto is an artist, scholar, educator, and curator in dance, theatre, photography, and media art. His creative works have been presented globally in 15 countries, including at Dance Center of Columbia College–Chicago, Vancouver International Dance Festival, REDCAT, TACTFest Osaka, and other venues. His recent works include *Flash*, a butoh/hip-hop collaboration with Rennie Harris; the dance theater trio, *Soil*, featuring Thai, Vietnamese, and Cambodian performers; *blind spot*, an intermedia performance with digital musician Christopher Jette; and the transnational butoh solo, *Nikkei-Chan*. His work in development includes *Garden of the Wilis*, with dance and theatre artist George de la Peña, violinist Hyeyung Sol Yoon, and co-director/dramaturg Asher Hartman. Sakamoto's scholarship appears regularly in journals and anthologies in numerous disciplines, including from Routledge, Palgrave MacMillan, Thames and Hudson, and others. His book monograph *An Empty Room: Imagining Butoh and the Social Body in Crisis*, a critical autoethnography of Sakamoto's three-decade journey through butoh history, practice, and theory, was released in spring 2022 by Wesleyan University Press. Sakamoto is former faculty at California Institute of the Arts, Goddard College, Bangkok University, and [REDACTED]. He currently serves as Director of Asian and Asian American Arts and Culture and Performing Arts Curator for the University of Massachusetts–Amherst Fine Arts Center.

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Asian American Follows and the Feeling and Practice of Freedom

Crystal Song

Many people, especially those who have never done ballroom dancing, think that leading and following involves one partner acting and the other simply reacting, but it's more like this: the lead indicates, the *follow* acts, the *lead* reacts, and so on with every step. No matter the song, the dance, or the space, our constantly shifting connection—from compression to extension, the structure of a full frame to the lightest grasp of fingertips—requires delicate responsivity on both ends. This sequence of atomized shifts in intention, the playful syncopation, the build-up to a snap and release of weight can all feel so good. It can also feel bad! I invite myself to be moved, and there is risk in this; there are partners who are inexperienced, inconsiderate, or just plain creepy. Still, I've always preferred following to leading. This isn't unusual—many dancers say that they love getting to turn their minds off when they follow, though we all know this is not what it actually entails. Following is not about tuning out, but *in*, deeply, to myself and my partner and how we move together through the lively crush of other couples. Developing this practice has taught me so much about attending to my body, to its most expansive capacities and tender limitations.

I find it hard to talk about following with clarity and honesty—not only because, as I will argue, the practice itself maintains a certain eloquent ambivalence, but because what I'm sharing here can feel hazardous to admit. Within the ballroom world, the politics of pleasure have always been fraught, especially for those of us who have had to

contest its terms of belonging, or carve out small corners in which we can at least belong to each other. In moments of exhaustion, I often recall the consternation with which Vicki Harman opens *The Sexual Politics of Ballroom Dancing*: “Why do women (including myself) who are committed to gender equality also enjoy this form of dance? Is it a position that is sustainable upon closer examination?” And, given the constraint and submission commonly associated with following, why would women “want to visit, through dance, worlds in which they would not want to live?” (Harman 2019, 7).



Daily practice at Manhattan Ballroom Dance, a popular studio that closed in 2018.
Hope Chang

As a queer Asian American woman, such questions can feel especially charged. In the past two decades, the population of Asian American ballroom dancers has come to constitute what George Uba calls a “critical mass.” In his article “From Signifying to Performance: International Ballroom Dance and the Choreographies of Transnationalism,” Uba offers several interpretations of this ardent participation. Does it hint at the potential to resignify a Eurocentric practice, or is it merely a means for these dancers to shore up their privileged proximity to whiteness? Uba is especially concerned with how these questions come to bear on the troubling figure of the Asian female

follow: "Like the feminized body of the colonized nation, the woman passively awaits the male imperative" (Uba 2007, 150). To probe the instructive force of following, then, can be a move that feels, to borrow Anne Anlin Cheng's phrase, "counterintuitive or even dangerous" (Cheng 2019, 85). This sense of theoretical risk carries material weight as well. During my eight years in the East Coast collegiate and amateur ballroom communities, I have heard countless women and queer dancers, especially those of color, share experiences of being excluded, exploited, and otherwise diminished in these spaces. That such experiences are often trivialized or silenced within a community that prides itself on the openness and inclusion of partner dancing seems all the more malicious in a moment when—as the past two years have made clear—Asian women, in particular, must navigate a perilous existence defined by our "degraded availability" (Cheng 2021).

The things I love most about following—the intimacy we share with our partners, the pleasures of self-fashioning through performance—can also be its most precarious and tiresome balancing acts. These very qualities are taken by men as *carte blanche* to make presumptions about our amenability, to flirt with (often much younger) mentees or students, to let hands wander during a dance, to commit acts of harassment and violation that they later refuse to countenance as such. Ballroom, for all its emphasis on trust and respect between dancers, has never transcended these ugly dynamics. Yet I would also hesitate to designate it, in Harman's words, a world I have a perverse desire to visit but in which I would not want to live, as though the non-dance world has progressed beyond such perversities.

Instead, I offer the contours of a conversation on the practice of following in relation to the lived, embodied textures of Asian femininity, in order to ask what more livable worlds this form of dance invites us to imagine. "Ballroom is what makes me feel free," my friend Paggy told me in an interview (Zhu 2019, 6). One thing this essay tries to do is parse the complexities of Paggy's concise invocation of following as freedom. What could be freeing about a practice that fundamentally entails some degree of submission and surrender? How might our

participation as Asian American women be an always already vexed endeavor, especially when our visibility and vulnerability—even as gifts freely given—cannot be divorced from the specter of violence?

This is not, then, an argument for reclaiming agency or pleasure for Asian American follows *per se*, nor for redeeming ballroom from its role in structuring hegemonic categories and relations—especially those that drive the forms of racialized misogyny we are seeing in full force. To speak of freedom here is not to ignore these issues, nor to release scholars and dancers from our accountability to them. Rather, I want to offer a different perspective on following, one that emerges from daily embodied practice, staying with its contradictions—much as a skillful partnership knows how to use and sustain tension as an integral piece of connection—rather than seeking to resolve them. As such, this approach departs from the framings of lead and follow offered by other scholar-practitioners—for instance, Juliet McMains’s contention that leading is “ultimately a more powerful position” with “much greater control” within the partnership (McMains 2006, 29), but also Harman’s reformulation of following, which aims to refute its associations with passivity, as “active” and “genderless” (Harman 2019, 155). In asking what following might mean and do for Asian American dancers, who occupy a particularly vexed and yet understudied position within such debates, I argue that following is neither inherently disempowering nor in need of recuperation to be personally and politically viable.¹

Likewise, attending to the complexities of this position helps us complicate the popular notion that partner dancing has the power to collapse “distinctions between self and other” (Lawrence 2009, 4), to “dissolve the actual and the ideal, the shared and the individual, into

1. In recent years, within the time in which my work is based, dancers have mounted significant opposition to and reimagining of the heteronormative partnership. As a queer dancer and organizer, these efforts have been deeply formative for my thinking. However, I focus here on women and nonbinary dancers who train as follows in order to parse the particular constraints at play in their performances of submission, surrender, and improvisatory negotiation.

a singular rich and moving experience" (Bosse 2015, 4). The dancers I discuss and am inspired by here do not aspire to efface difference, reflecting instead SanSan Kwan's contention that "dance can make visibly and viscerally manifest the effortfulness of collaboration, the satisfaction in moments of unison, and also the exquisite persistence of our unique, sovereign selves" (Kwan 2021, 14). Partner dancing, by default, does not protect our sense of autonomy. It is premised on being in relation to others—sometimes with practiced, easy intimacy, but just as often in contingent and unpredictable ways. Rather than offer access to a whole, discrete, and authentic self, it prompts us to ask: what kinds of self in relation, or self as relation, are forged through dependence and surrender?

Illuminating the embodied complications of agency, pleasure, and other such "politically treasured notions" (Cheng 2019, 14), following is one productive site on which an Asian American feminist politics can be theorized and practiced. It demands a different kind of attention and enables a different set of questions: out from the cul-de-sac of *why* we do this and *whether* it is sustainable, toward the more generative terrain of *what* it means to us and *how* these meanings are managed and contested. In the interviews I conducted with Asian American follows, they voice anxiety, chagrin, frustration, and refusal in response to being caught in that cul-de-sac. They recall being repeatedly told—by other Asian Americans—that any sense of joy, challenge, or community they might experience in ballroom is not only illegible but also politically suspect, even compromising. "I remember my friends and people that I knew being super shocked that I was doing ballroom," B shared, "because they're like, *that doesn't seem like you at all*. And I was like, *what doesn't seem like me, right?* And they're like, *well, you don't seem like the type of person who would just let someone move you, or listen to what other people want you to do*." They resist this reductive interpretation: "I'm still making decisions for myself . . . and telling my partners when something is wrong, or when something works well. I still *feel* like me. But I think there's definitely an overall

perception, where it's like, the follows are powerless, or especially that Asian women are powerless" (Li 2019, 18).²

Such perceptions—as well as the judgments and misreadings of following they facilitate—are suggestive of what we might term an imperative to perform resistance. Viet Thanh Nguyen incisively names this impulse within Asian American cultural politics to idealize the “bad subject” who rejects hegemonic racialization outright (Nguyen 2002, 5). Many follows do not resist the ways in which ballroom strives to interpellate them into heteronormative whiteness *per se*, instead staking out more ambivalent stances that enable them to participate—and take pleasure—in this dance form while maintaining a sense of critical generosity toward it. In the process, they often confront the “ideological rigidity” Nguyen identifies as a consequence of valorizing resistance at the expense of our ability to access and attend to more “flexible strategies” (7). Hope, like B, recalled the surprise and skepticism she received from friends and family when she first joined ballroom, and how such responses assume that Asian women who enjoy ballroom are either submitting to unfeminist ideas or are predisposed toward compliance. In our interview, she suggested that by approaching ballroom as “a very deeply relational experience,” we might begin to imagine more capacious forms of relationality, ones that confound binary notions of agency and are premised on—rather than allergic to—vulnerability and interdependence: “I think when people say that they want to be strong, what they mean is that they never want to be weak. And that’s impossible. And I think ballroom has taught me that it’s okay to be a follow, you know?” (Chang 2017, 5).

Arlene, a seasoned world finalist, echoed these sentiments with more exasperation, observing that the tendency to empower women in ballroom by encouraging them to lead—or resignifying following as “active” while diminishing its other qualities—reproduces our

2. The interviews shared here have been edited slightly for clarity. All of the interviewees consented to share their full names, or in B’s case, their preferred shortened name.

“societal valorization of proactiveness” as a white, masculine property. “Just what is wrong with being receptive is beyond me,” she said in our interview. “I’m sorry, but where is it written we have to be completely consistent in every aspect of our lives? That’s exhausting. Can’t I like leading in one area and then being more receptive in another? Isn’t being able to do both being a whole human?” (Yu 2020). Indeed, it is through such inconsistencies, contingencies, and ongoing negotiations that Asian American follows expand our understanding of agency. “Following requires a kind of Zen—you don’t give up control, but you need to hang back and be receptive,” Arlene said. “Follows dictate plenty. They can shift the leader’s weight, affect timing of step completion and initiation of the next step, change the interpretation” (Yu 2020). Resistance of a kind is key here: not defiance per se, but moments of playful noncompliance, reserving some of one’s own weight and power—hanging back—to release at the right time, letting the connection stretch before snapping forward. This deliberate withholding—the practice of following as a well-timed *refusal* to follow—is essential to maintaining a lively elasticity between partners.

Danica termed this kind of exchange physically but also “really emotionally satisfying” (Chan 2018, 10). Like Arlene, she described the relationship between lead and follow as not defined by hierarchical, or even discrete, responsibilities—both dancers must attend to their shared and individual weight, using it “to create speed and shape and movement” (Chan 2018, 9). Danica is one of my favorite follows to watch and learn from; she knows how to play with rhythm, letting her head fall back at the top of a shape to accentuate the stretch, expanding the space between one phrase and the next. Her best and most memorable dances, she remarked, are successful because they turn on a constant give-and-take: it is crucial to feel like “we can control one another’s weight,” her partner offering clear indications so she can “take that lead and do something with it” (10).



Yimeng Xu and Danica Chan at a Friday Night Fever social in March 2018.
Hope Chang

While many think of ballroom as outward and ostentatious, especially compared to other partner dance forms, when I watch Danica dance, I'm equally drawn to the moments of expansive exuberance as those when her movement and gaze draw inward, away from the eager crowd of onlookers she and her partners often attract. Her body moves with such assurance and ease that the lack of eye contact doesn't read as modest or tentative; rather, it evokes something of what Kevin Quashie terms the aesthetic and—echoing Kwan—the *sovereignty* of quiet. For Quashie, quiet summons “something finer” than resistance (Quashie 2012, 4); its performative force is not immediately evident. Surrender comprises one embodied mode of quiet, and while it is often assumed to connote passivity or defeat, it “can also be expressive and active,” a “falling toward what is deep and largely unknowable” (28). Partner dancing, and following in particular, activates the potential that Quashie locates in surrender. This subtle, joyous virtuosity may well offer a form of resistance—but more likely, we need another, finer word for it.

If there is freedom in following, then, it is the kind that Cheng terms “delicate and transitory” (Cheng 2019, 150), or that Danielle Goldman describes as not “devoid of constraint,” but *animated* by it—technical and stylistic as well as sociopolitical and historical (Goldman 2010, 3). To engage in a moment-by-moment negotiation with partner, space, and music—to navigate the dilemma of intimacy that partner dancing is with satisfaction and finesse—is not a contradictory but a *constitutive* endeavor, a vexed but generative mode of meaning-making. As Goldman argues, “To engage oneself in this manner, with a sense of confidence and possibility, is a powerful way to inhabit one’s body and to interact with the world” (5).

Quiet, receptivity, attentiveness—for Asian American women, these are undeniably racialized and gendered qualities, and they cost us something to cultivate. Both my best and worst performances as a follow will always dredge up for me this devastating line from Cheng about idealized Asian femininity and its diminishing returns: “It takes too much psychic effort to be always good and disciplined, constantly self-curating, and vigilantly tuned into the minefield of multiple consciousnesses” (Cheng 2020). Following, in one sense, demands precisely this kind of vigilance; the other face of its utopian promise is cruel optimism. Lauren Berlant defines this relation as one in which “something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 2011, 1), a fantasy that simultaneously sustains and drains us. Indeed, the pandemic’s shutdown of partner dancing provided time to consider how earnestly I embraced its imperatives as a younger dancer, how much pride I took in being deemed a “good follow.” Now, as the community recovers in fits and starts, I am struggling to tune back into that radiant, sensual, and self-assured persona that so many follows seem to have mastered. These days, it feels especially perilous to offer up my body for someone else’s appraisal or viewing pleasure. I want ballroom to love me as much as I love it, but it feels foolish to want such a thing after eight years of being told otherwise: by white men who joke that they joined to meet Asian girls, by respected coaches who label female leads and queer pairings “gender

garbage,” by studio gossip that deems abusive partnerships and discriminatory insults par for the course.

This essay, then, is also about navigating these (dis)investments and leaning into what I know to be the life-giving parts of this practice. In March 2022, I attended the first *Friday Night Fever* ballroom social hosted in New York City since lockdown started two years before. Taking frame with each of my friends, I remembered how, for the first few months of sheltering in place, I’d dreamed about this moment every day—went for my little walks, alone and masked, listening to music and imagining the ways we’d move together again. As we return to daily practice, I want to offer a way of thinking about ballroom that isn’t strapped by the discourse of good or bad subjects, and that is better attuned to the psychic conditions—the contradictory and at times self-effacing desires—that constrain and animate the participation of Asian American follows. These perspectives on agency and pleasure do not attempt to transcend difference or erase injury; we hone our skills as follows in full recognition of their histories, risks, and complications. In refusing finalization, they offer us other options.



Patrick Lin and myself at a Friday Night Fever social in November 2016.
Hope Chang

When I'm following, I'm reminded of how much good dancing is like good scholarship, each requiring a willingness to hazard risk and be humbled in the process. Shaped by—and in spite of—my experiences in both of these worlds, I remain hopeful about their possibilities. If following can be a form of worldmaking, then, it reflects José Muñoz's investment in hope as "a critical affect and methodology" (Muñoz 2009, 4)—all the more urgent for its seeming insufficiencies. It reminds me that while this kind of hope, like the feeling of freedom, may indeed preclude—or at least precede—the clarity of political orientation our moment demands, it remains essential to sustaining and nourishing that orientation, in the face of incommensurable loss and difference, in the ways that matter most.

Author Biography

Crystal Song is a PhD candidate in performance studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research explores the euphoric feelings that animate contemporary Asian American cultural politics, particularly in popular dance and media. She has been a member of the ballroom dance community since 2014.

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