

TO MOVE AND BE MOVED: INTERRELATIONALITY IN/BETWEEN
DANCING BODIES

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DEDICATION

To Matty Ward for making my life beautiful.

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ABSTRACT

ROBIN CONRAD

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As human beings, we constantly navigate environments comprised of other people, animals, and objects. The way that we are in the world, our sense of self as we in move in/with/through our surroundings, is not often talked about or represented through specific language in our everyday lives but affects us on implicit and explicit levels. Interdisciplinary scholarly inquiry from the fields of dance studies, feminist philosophy, phenomenology, and cognitive and social science attempts to grasp what happens between and amongst our animate selves and our ever-shifting surroundings. However, much of this scholarship happens outside of situated and embodied contexts. This dissertation closely analyzes two adult dance communities in Los Angeles—Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot—examining both the cultural aspects of these sites and the first-person felt sensations of participants’ dancing experiences, focusing on accounts of interrelational happenings. A close evaluation of the data reveals two cultures that are built on both pre-conscious and conscious structures of intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect that foster shared kinetic understanding.

Utilizing a phenomenology-based ethnographic methodology, this study acquired data through qualitative interviews, participant observation, and cultural artifacts (including social media). Studied in tandem, the findings at these two communities indicate cultures based on a need for dancers to be individually expressive through movement while engaging in collective embodied dance practices. This dissertation argues that in doing so, they create intimacy in and through their bodies. They re-discover a vital kinesthetic way of being that is not always prioritized as we transition to speech, supported by the work of phenomenologist and dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone who theorizes the developmental phase after learning to speak as post-kinetic, or a shift away from our tactile-kinesthetic way of being in the world. These communities also foster kinesthetic belonging, or a body-belonging, that transcends the normalized traits of tastes, predilections, and verbal conversations that commonly link us to social involvement, and instead connects dancers through the action of moving together within these cultures. This research situates existing scholarship by placing it within lived/danced contexts and extends it by contributing to the theory, developing innovative possibilities for how we might conceive of dance, an articulate experience of movement, as an intervention that integrates body and theory.

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All interviews were confidential; the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Notes from the Beginning

I may have been sitting in a critical theory class, paused with book open, my face ponderously crinkled, head side-cocked and eyes fixed on the ceiling crack, hoping to absorb an idea, let it infiltrate my awareness, take hold and change me forever. Then again, I may have been suspended between tango steps, sternum pressed against my partner, a world of pathways between us, our embrace most human, our mission kinetic. Or perhaps I was improvising my way through the crowded dance studio exploring the instructor's prompt to "feel a sensation of thickness in my limbs," with my gaze softened, sensing the swirls of bodies around me. I cannot say with certainty at what point the questions that seemed to effervesce inside me, as I moved and was moved, peered over the rim of my consciousness and demanded my embrace, my attention, as we (the questions and I) together danced, the leading/following a synergistic confluence of discovery.

The questions were there—silhouettes of ideas dancing in-between the bodies, the interstitial flesh between words on a page. What do we co-create as we carve out space with our bodies in time, the consummation of moving and feeling, and feeling to move? How do dancers frenetically improvising in a seemingly chaotic exploration of texture in the body not collide? Can we reflexively *feel* each other—can I feel you feeling me? I

adjust my glittery purple leg warmer back over my knee and make eye contact in a room of fifty eyes, but I look past the visual, my gaze extending though my corporeality, through the bodies of the eyes that see. We incorporate each other; we inter-corporate; we interrelate. I know this in my body, but I search for the words to convey it. I find myself here.

My hands have palpated books full of ideas, full of answers into which I theoretically dove, still seated, and passively content to be subsumed by the words. I swam through the waters, cresting on waves of ideas such as interrelationality and kinesthesia. I discovered that theory about affect exists to clarify how, for example, when dancers at The Sweat Spot enter the studio, they describe a palpable feeling of joy that they attribute to the space itself, an energy generated by a congregation of dancing bodies. Or at Oxygen Tango the dancers intercorporeally and intersubjectively merge into a collective organism of awareness and sensitivity. But the theory does not entirely fulfill me, and I wonder, might there be more to learn from the bodies themselves? Theories developed over time to describe our corporeal-kinetic experiences lie in repose on the page, waiting for the spirited body to move them into being.

I blow onto the page and imagine the words flying through space, lurching in all directions, hovering slightly and then becoming weightless, a gentle buoyancy that eventually yields to gravity as they slowly sift the meaning from the movement before resettling. What do the words reveal when they are asked to dance? What does the dance suspend as it settles into words? Is the moving, dancing body reduced as its dimensionality transitions to an alternate form of expression, namely verbal language?

How might the dancing body speak her mind through her own expression and as she does, will the theory about her hold? Can we combine a multiplicity of knowledges and sieve them through the same container, language? Or does the language confine the dancing, bar it from its nature in order for us to grasp its disappearing meaning as it is stilled?

Ideas Emerging

In some ways the ideas (interrelationality—intercorporeity or intercorporeality,¹ intersubjectivity, affect—and kinesthesia) that inspired this research began from my sensing things that were happening before my actual conscious awareness. Only during my doctoral coursework when I first immersed myself in scholarly texts that seemed to put words to the feelings did the ideas concretize. Even then, they meandered through the openness of my not-knowing, leading my curiosity on a multi-leveled dynamic pursuit, forming more and more questions.

These questions revolved around bodies moving together; therefore, I sought answers in places where people were intentionally and with awareness dancing collectively in order to discover how other people make sense of and articulate what happens as they engage. I was curious what they perceive for instance, as fifty dancers step, twist, and glide along the floor together, jointly bringing something kinetic into being. As a professional dancer, dance educator, and choreographer I have been involved with bodies moving together in many situations—dancers in a studio, on a movie set, on

¹ The terms intercorporeity and intercorporeality can be used interchangeably.

the stage, in social settings, in site-specific work. In all cases, something seems to happen between the dancing bodies, regardless of the location, the style of dance, or even the intention—a sensing of each other on the level of/through the bodies. I thought about what this might be/mean as I attended various dance classes in Los Angeles. Two particular locations—Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot—seemed to focus on shared experience and thus appeared potentially fitting as research sites related to my interests. In this ethnographic project, I delve into these two communities with attention to the moving bodies within their cultures,² and because I also pay specific attention to first person accounts of felt-sensory information, this dissertation is a phenomenology-based ethnography, which as a whole argues for the value of bodies-in-theory, specifically moving, dancing bodies. Exploring how the interrelationality of dancing together shapes culture, this research considers the implications of what dancing bodies collectively do, the influences they have on each other, and the meaning derived from shared experience. This study attempts to bring awareness to dancing bodies in new ways with focus on their potential, the ways in which moving together constitutes worlds. This project also

² I describe the parameters for what determines a culture, and in particular, my case for these two sites being considered as cultures in more detail in the following chapter. However I briefly clarify culture for the purpose of this study here through intercultural pragmatics theorist Helen Spencer-Oatey's definition: "Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior" (2008, 3).

grapples with how to then analyze these occurrences in stillness on the page, how to linguistically mediate the body.

Being Bodies Together: A Basis in Key Terminology

Language and terminology formulated to represent bodily experience, such as embodiment, kinesthesia, interrelationality, and affect resonates in this research and deserves further explication at the onset. I succinctly introduce broad explanations here that I describe in detail in the third chapter and flesh out in the data and discussion. These preliminary descriptions provide a glimpse into the world of the study; however, other supplemental concepts emerge in the research and I clarify them as they are integrated in the coming chapters.

Embodiment is a term utilized across disciplines and often refers to, in its most basic sense, being in the body. As a concept, it attempts to re-unite the body and mind creating a perception of the self as a non-dualistic totality (Gibbs 2005, 1-13). In this dissertation embodiment refers to the process of being a body, an ongoing, uninterrupted experience of animate action. In addition to considering embodiment as an active way of being in the body, kinesthesia is a related term that describes our insuppressible sense of movement (Sheets-Johnstone 2009, xxiii). Dance is a created phenomenon (3) based on kinesthesia. Progressing through this research the body and awareness of its motility is at the forefront of the conversation, both in participants' perceptions of their own dancing bodies and as a basis for strategies at both sites to build communities. I also consider kinesthesia in the larger project of knowing—how and what we know through the moving body—as an integral component of this work, and through this phenomenology-

based dance ethnography, insights that would otherwise not be highlighted become available and describable.

Interrelationality refers to the myriad happenings in-between animate beings on both pre-conscious and conscious levels, as theorized in phenomenology (Moran 2016) as well as through the feminist perspective of situated-ness (Haraway 1988), which speaks to how we respond to and inform our environment. Affect is an interrelational body-based transmission, but rather than subsuming it under the heading of interrelationality, I consider it separately to describe the pre-reflective transference between/amongst bodies (Massumi 1987, xvi) of energy or emotional stimuli, which becomes a critical aspect of this dissertation as a way to theorize the productivity of dancing bodies sharing space.

Taken together, these terms provide some structure with which to talk about complex and ephemeral aspects of human experience. However, these elements of our animation pose a challenge to describe precisely because they occur in a modality, the sensory perceptive experiential modality of the moving body, and thus present, even with the given terminology, as evasive to language.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Dance Studies and Interdisciplinary Influences

This research is grounded in dance studies thinking on the body, focusing on alternate ways of being in the body through dancing, kinesthesia, and sensory knowledge of the body while taking into account how to write the body and include it as a vital aspect of theory. Dance theorists have utilized ethnographic methodologies exploring felt kinetic perceptions within different cultural settings (e.g., Novack 1990, Frosch 1999, Sklar 2000, Buckland 2010, Wong 2010, Davida 2011, Garcia 2013, Rivera-Servera

2012) and these sit in close proximity to the work of this dissertation. In particular, dance, performance studies, and interdisciplinary scholar Judith Hamera's (2007) *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* is aligned with this work as in it she details multiple Los Angeles dance sites and terms them "dancing communities," a conceptualization which I utilize throughout this dissertation, as do I reference her work as a platform for understanding how "urban communities are danced into being" (1) through the techniques at both sites of this study, Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot. Importantly, I distinguish my work here as an investigation of the phenomenological impressions of participants and my own participant observation, elaborating on alternate possibilities for technique, such as its intersubjective potential, and re-imagine it as a practiced affective transmission that can be a productive element of the dance experience.

Additional ethnographic studies exist, which focus specifically on Argentine Tango (Olszweski 2008, Törnqvist 2018) and I discuss two in particular, which stand out as deserving more developed treatment in terms of establishing where this study sits. First, Marta Savigliano's (1995) text, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, is a foundational ethnography for dance studies as it describes how communities are constructed through the practice of Argentine Tango. Savigliano presents a detailed history of the dance, tracing its roots and development in Argentina and relating it to the social and political climate of the times. Savigliano's comprehensive work on Argentine Tango focuses on the culture and content of the dance, whereas this study centers around the phenomenological aspects of the tango experience; my research concentrates less on

the culture of tango in Argentina and rather on the particular cultural experience of Oxygen Tango wherein the founders are not Argentine and although the origin culture is respected and taught, the focus is primarily on the movement, cultural norms necessary for the dance, music, and interactions that constitute the dance. This research does not attend to the political implications of the dancing culture but rather, the socially shared and communicated values and experiences that shape a unique type of movement-centered engagement.

Second, dancer and anthropologist Julie Taylor's ethnographic memoir, *Paper Tangos*, explores boundaries of nationalism, identity, appropriation and politics as they affect and implicate her as the inside/outsider. Taylor constructs a cohabitation of text, movement analysis, and dance on the page through the utilization of a flipbook format to register the ephemeral nature of the dance as the pages of history turn through her writing. The book has a poetic feel and Taylor's writing captures the violence, uncertainty, and connection expressed within the Argentine Tango community at the time. Again, with a primary focus on the dance as it exists within its origin context, this text was important to consider, particularly for the methods of drawing the body into the reader's experience, but does not directly align with the efforts of this study to understand a different type of tango community, one based in adult practice that teaches the Argentine traditions as they relate to the dance but focuses on the perceptions of the participants as grounding the experience and building the community.

Although this study is primarily situated in dance studies, I imagine this work in conversation with phenomenological philosophy, which concentrates on first-person

experiential and sensorial accounts of conscious perceptions, but I recognize it does not strictly adhere to the principles of this discipline with its focus beyond the bracketed experience of the self and on these dancing cultures. However, the underlying foundational concepts of the work are phenomenological in nature and much of my data collection methodology is rooted in phenomenology. Although certain dance theorists work with phenomenology (e.g., Fraleigh 1991, Kozel 2007, Pakes 2011), here I utilize it within an interdisciplinary context and in conjunction with an ethnographic framework. This study analyzes the body in motion embedded within specific cultures, exploring how, from a lived first-person perspective, the interrelation of bodies can be discussed.

My early focus on phenomenology stemmed from my deep engagement with the work of phenomenologist and dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. Sheets-Johnstone, a prolific writer theorizing the moving body as integral to who we are and how we experience the world, elaborates on phenomenology as a method of gathering accurate, descriptive data about the dancing body through lived experience [(1966) 2015, xxxiii]. However, as a phenomenologist, her own work is not ethnographic in nature—she bases her theory on intricate philosophical argument drawn from interdisciplinary sources in tandem with in her own keen understanding of movement. Through this study, I was curious as to how her concepts might soar off the page and into the practice space of the dance studio.

I would also like this work to speak to the cognitive sciences because the knowledge of the body comes into the conversation and I rely on terminology and research from the cognitive sciences to inform my approach. I look to neuroscience for

revisions of the dualistic perspective of body/mind, cognitive linguistics to clarify the function of imagery and metaphor in relation to the body as well as how to speak about the concepts of the body, and social psychology to understand the interrelational aspects of these dancing communities. Studies within social psychology theorize interrelationality and affect and some utilize the framework of dance; however, they do so in a controlled laboratory environment (e.g., Cross, Hamilton, and Grafton 2006, Lagerlöf and Djerf, 2009, Opacic, Stevens, and Tillman 2009, Bläsing, Puttke, and Schack 2010, Sevdalis and Keller, 2011) or through quantitative approaches (e.g., Kreuzmann, Zander, and Webster 2017, Malcogeorgos et. al. 2012) as opposed the lived experiential findings of this phenomenology-based ethnography. The value of the participant language bears out in understanding the elusive concepts of the moving body and thus adds value to the possibilities for how to translate the dancing experience to the page.

The questions that I hoped to answer emerged out of and speak back to these disciplines of dance studies, phenomenology, and the cognitive sciences. The interdisciplinary nature of these questions reflects the interrelational nature of this study in that I am interested in finding connections between bodies and between theories in order to more effectively understand the phenomena that shape who we are, how we move, and what we can do based on our togetherness.

In the Coming Chapters...

This research unfolds in the forthcoming chapters beginning in Chapter II, *Theory Moving In/With/Through the Dancing Body*, with a discussion of foundational texts and

theory that establish a platform for this research. Specifically, I discuss Rene Descartes and the body/mind duality that has, until the last century, permeated Western thinking on the body. I outline the pushback to Cartesianism from phenomenology and feminism that seeks to include the body in experience and knowledge formation. I detail more comprehensively the terms embodiment and kinesthesia and the interrelational concepts of intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect as they are utilized and understood for this project. In Chapter III, I outline the methodological framework for this research. I discuss phenomenology-based ethnography, the process of collecting and analyzing diverse data, and I articulate in detail the progression of this dissertation. I also describe the guidelines for rigor to which I adhered as well as ethical considerations that arose and my approach to managing them. In Chapter IV, *Oxygen Tango: Dancing to Connect*, I bring to life the interrelational experiences from Oxygen Tango and interweave theory that contributes to an understanding of participants' rich descriptions as well as how the data challenge existing theory. This chapter focuses on ways that the participants describe and conceptualize *connection* in myriad ways as a vital factor of the community. In the fifth chapter, *Let's Go! Across the Floor!: Dancing the Individual in The Sweat Spot Community*, we visit the world of The Sweat Spot, organized around the central theme of *energy* and the ways in which the studio practice re-imagines technique through an interrelational affective (energy-based) practice. In the sixth chapter, *Dancing Intimacy, Kinesthetic Belonging, and the Discourse of Movement*, I revisit and integrate the findings from the two dancing communities to discuss themes of individuality, loss, and belonging, as well as consider how the body might speak, bringing it more completely

into this discourse. In the conclusion, I take pause to reflect on the chapters, to widen the aperture of focus and contemplate the implications of the study as a whole. Here, I address future directions of this research.

Before We Begin...

Can you feel your feet on the floor? Are they even on the floor? Mine are tucked up under me on the chair. I was just curious what we can feel here together through the writing and the reading, through the screen or the paper, the flesh that extends our fingers into the keys and through the pages of text. I realize the irony of our situation—that I ask you to join me together alone in relative stillness to find ways to imagine what bodies moving, sharing space might produce. Or more, to not even ask that you personally move but to share with you accounts of others that you might sense what it was like, what it might be like. Perhaps you already know and you, like me, wonder how we talk about this complexity of movement—the ways in which our bodies connect us to the world, root us in environments; the secret knowledge that unfolds only in the doing, through interrelational exchanges with our surroundings; the possibilities which are revealed through the vastness of bodily expression, of bodily presence. This is the pinnacle challenge that set me out on this study and now if you will join me, we can remember to sense our bodies in this process of writing/reading and continue to wonder if/how we might shift the paradigm to re-conceptualize the body, to more profoundly and directly include its musings, thoughts, and responses as we theorize its potential. That we might, if briefly, resolve the conflict between experience and reflection, the disjunction between

what it feels like to move in the moment and what it is to reflect on the movement,
forever narrating dancing as memory.

CHAPTER II

THEORY MOVING IN/WITH/THROUGH THE DANCING BODY

Introduction

As human beings, we constantly navigate environments comprised of other people, animals, and objects. We dodge through a crowd on a busy city street, turn slightly to the side as a puppy charges toward us hoping to play, weave around a pothole in the pavement, or instinctively reach for a falling coffee cup. Both indirectly and through conscious decision-making, we adjust to environmental conditions. These ways that we are in the world, our sense of self as we in move in/with/through our surroundings, are not often talked about or represented through specific language in our everyday lives, but affect us at a spectrum of levels and are thus, the topic of research that attempts to grasp just what is happening between and amongst our animate selves and our ever-shifting surroundings. In this chapter, I discuss scholarship that reflects an evolution in Western philosophical thinking about the body, which broadly reconceptualizes key ideas about the body/mind in order to allow a more holistic rendering of our animate interactions. This scholarship provides a foundational interdisciplinary framework for this research as it explicitly attends to the ways that we, as body-minded beings, navigate our physical and social worlds. Additionally, this scholarly thinking, which I at times refer to throughout this chapter and dissertation as “theory,” clarifies relevant concepts and terminology developed specifically to describe interrelational happenings. I explicate

these ideas in detail, noting variations in interpretation between the disciplines and thinkers, and delineating their application to this research. This chapter is positioned within this study to provide the grounding theory that sets the stage for contemporary adaptations and extensions that often proved more effective in dialogue with the research findings, as they consider advancements in thinking on central ideas.

As this dissertation progressed, I continued to add theoretical content to support developments in the data collection and analysis. In some instances, theory was introduced as a way of clarifying the experiences participants characterized. To this point, dancers regularly described phenomena they experienced, providing imagery-based detail but without specific terminology (as these occurrences often do not have familiar names); in referring to existing theory, I came to understand that participants were speaking about intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, affect, and kinesthesia. For example, a dancer described tracking her arm motion with heightened awareness, which she spoke of as “honing her attention in on it like a laser,” and this resonates with the concept of kinesthesia, the sense of movement, though again, the particular term did not appear in the description. Although literature from a variety of disciplines seeks to describe the intricacies of our physical presence in the world, I focus primarily on phenomenology, feminist philosophy, cognitive and social science theory, and dance studies scholarship as they grapple with the moving, interactive body, both implicitly and explicitly in all its complexities.

This chapter is divided into four areas that reflect the primary trajectories of inquiry that shaped the study. First, *The Body: Traditional Western Conceptions*

addresses the repudiation of Cartesian dualistic thinking by phenomenologists, who realize the body as contributive to understanding our world, and also by feminist philosophers, whose revisions of the body in theory situate it as essential to who/how we are. The second area, *Embodiment: A Distillation of Varying Conceptions* traces an overview of thinking about the term *embodiment* and provides a working definition applicable for this study. The third area, *Kinesthesia: Sensing Self-Movement and Its Implications*, describes perspectives on kinetic experience. The fourth area, *Intercorporeity, Intersubjectivity, and Affect (Affect/Emotion and Affective Practice)* briefly addresses phenomenological perspectives on interrelationality and details a concise understanding of affect, drawing from relevant disciplines, that provides a platform for further conceptualizations in relation to the data.

As a strategy for explicating the rationale for selecting the particular literature discussed in this chapter, at the conclusion of each section and/or sub-section I summarize these thinkers' key contributions. I specify how I utilized the theory to conceptualize this study and touch on developments in complementary theory that became necessary as the research evolved.

The Body: Traditional Western Conceptions

Contemporary scholarship recognizes the body as our primary source of interaction with and animation within the world; the body is a vital component of how we make meaning. However, this is a somewhat recent rethinking of the dualistic nature of body/mind developed by French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist Rene Descartes ([1637] 1998, [1641] 1985), which has shaped most Western

conceptualizations of the body since its inception. Descartes subjugated the body to the mind, limiting the epistemological possibilities for the body and prioritizing a particular type of knowledge while eroding the validity of another. Famously, Descartes put forth the philosophical proposition *cogito ergo sum*, or “I think therefore I am” as a means to clarify his philosophical process, which is based in methodological doubt and focuses only on what we can know to be certain (Cottingham 2008, 5). Here, Descartes posits that thinking is not at all reliant on the body; he brings the existence of the body into doubt noting that the only certainty one can test is that thinking affirms oneself into being.

Descartes elaborates on the location of the mind as he states, “This ‘I’—that is to say the soul by which I am what I am—is entirely distinct from the body and would not fail to be what it is even if the body did not exist” (Descartes [1641] 1985, 127). Here Descartes affirms the mind itself, not only thinking, as separate from the body—the mind does not need the body to exist. Further, the implication of his theory is that the body is unnecessary in the construction of the rational self—it is not what makes us who we are. This perspective appears to isolate thinking as a static concept, lacking the dynamism we see play out through the body, through movement. Theorists across disciplines grapple with dismantling Cartesianism in order to shift how the body is conceptualized and to re-prioritize the lived experience. It is this animate experience in tandem with existing theory that provides the basis for this research.

Rethinking the Body: An Overview of Phenomenological Perspectives

Phenomenology grapples with Cartesian dualisms that relegate the body to a position of inferiority, privileging the mind. Phenomenologists seek to dissolve this

Cartesian influence through an effort to re-value the lived, embodied experience, positioning the body as integral to the mind and to reasoning. Further, phenomenology, as a method that influences my data collection and analysis, considers subjective perceptions within an environment. Foundational phenomenological theory that shapes this research focuses primarily on the work of German philosopher and founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl and French phenomenological philosopher working in continental Europe in the mid-twentieth century, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a major contributor to phenomenology's development.

Husserl contemplates how embodied beings interrelate and what these interactions yield in terms of how we come to understand the world. For the purpose of this dissertation, Husserl's work offers a basis for how I conceptualize bodies sharing space and generating meaning. Additionally, Husserl stresses the vitality of movement, which is not always at the forefront of philosophical conceptualizations of the body. Rather, the body is often stilled in order to "capture" aspects of it, which can then be analyzed. Husserl considers movement, along with touch/contact and proprioception as integral factors to how the body is understood. Movement is the root of all sensory experience (Moran 2017, 34). Husserl states, "A body is constituted as a sensuous schema by the sense of touch and the sense of sight, and every sense is a sense through an apperceptive conjunction of the corresponding sense-data with kinaesthetic data" (1977, 257). This reliance on motility as an aspect of how the body is theorized lends itself to dance research. Husserl discusses our understanding of other bodies as filtered through our own awareness with his conception of intersubjectivity, significant to an

understanding of affect, or an energetic inter-body transmission. He states, “the outward conduct of someone who is angry or cheerful...I can easily understand from my own conduct under similar circumstances” (1970, 120). Here Husserl provides a perspective on the productivity of interactions between bodies, focusing on how we influence each other in ways both subtle and often prior to our full conscious awareness.

Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as a philosophy focused on lived experience ([1945] 2012, 62). Notably, he places the body as interactive within its environment stating, “The body is our general means of having a world” (147). He elaborates that although sometimes the body is restricted to necessary gestures, other times it can, through motor habits such as dance, bring forth new significations (148). Here Merleau-Ponty asserts that the body might be utilized as an instrument of expression and through training that enhances communicative possibilities “project a cultural world around itself” (148). The body then, imbued with significance, creates a world in which it contributes to structures of meaning making. Merleau-Ponty considers the body as the site of subjective experience—we understand the world through our sensorial perceptions. Further, Merleau-Ponty constructs a relational understanding of the world based on his conception of “flesh” as a reciprocal means through which we extend ourselves and interact with others beyond the limitation of our finite frame. He states, “It is already the flesh of things that speaks to us of our own flesh, and that speaks to us of the flesh of the other” (1968, 193). Here he speaks of a bi-directional exchange between bodies, a conception that provides scaffolding for understanding how bodies at the two research sites interrelate with and/or without physical contact.

In response to Cartesian dualism, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty advocate for the value of subjectivity, beginning the process of reintegrating the body into theory. They discuss the ways in which bodies consociate through intercorporeity, an inter-kinesthetic resonance between bodies (Meyer, Streeck, and Jordan 2017, xvii-xviii), and intersubjectivity, a state of conscious subjective shared experience (Moran 2017, 27), offering insight into what happens between bodies on both pre-aware and conscious levels. Both philosophers implicitly prioritize and address a body knowledge that cannot be filtered through the prism of traditional systems, even as their work is structured in lecture/text. Although their theorizations are a basis for a number of interdisciplinary conceptualizations, I not only incorporate much of their work directly, but also utilize contemporary extensions of their theories in conjunction with the research data, to provide a more detailed presentment of intercorporeity and intersubjectivity, and of the “in between bodies” phenomena of affectivity and emotions, integral to this dissertation.

Rethinking the Body: An Overview of Feminist Perspectives

Feminist philosophers challenge foundational phenomenological accounts of the body, particularly as theorized by Merleau-Ponty for his universal “white male” perspective, but even so, they recognize the possibilities for re-integrating the body, an enterprise begun by the phenomenologists. In this section, I focus on feminist theory to advocate for an ontology that is non-binary, situated, subjective, and immanent, rather than the binary, transcendent ontological assumptions that Cartesianism propagated. The feminist framework revises possibilities for how the body is perceived, valuing it as a constitutive element of our experience. I first address several theorists who challenge

Merleau-Ponty's perspective to explicate the relationship between the two philosophical strands and then continue with several prominent late 20th century-to-contemporary feminist theorists who clarify a shift in the landscape of thinking about the body, including: philosopher Elizabeth Grosz who argues for the eradication of binaries as they create a hierarchical structure, placing emphasis or importance on one aspect over the other; science and technologies scholar Donna Haraway who animates the body as situated within an environment and as an integral component to agency and the reasoning process; contemporary culture scholar Susan Bordo who revalues the subjective experience; and, contemporary philosopher Rosi Braidotti who reimagines our corporeal immanence, theorizing the body as a potentiality, a process of becoming.

Merleau-Ponty's ambiguous approach to gender is subject to philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's (1989) critique in "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception." Butler argues that Merleau-Ponty perpetuates the dominant male gaze and the subject-less female by avoiding discussions of gender and insisting on a universality among bodies that exists prior to historical and cultural influence. Butler's provocative description of Merleau-Ponty's perpetuation of a master/slave dynamic within male/female sexuality affords the reader the shocking revelation that even if gender is unspecified, there is a strong subtext reflecting the cultural and historical assumptions of Merleau-Ponty's day, exactly what the philosopher hoped to avoid.

Philosopher of the body Philipa Rothfield (2005) follows Butler's view that Merleau-Ponty's failure to address his own corporeal presence and the specificity of

bodies and their sexualities skews his analysis of sexual experience. Rothfield cautions against these kinds of omissions: “In the case of phenomenological universalism, there is an ethical danger that corporeal forms of difference which occur within networks of domination will be elided; that the desire to achieve universality will blind itself to the discriminations performed in the name of sameness” (45). Rothfield posits that universal impulse is typically appropriated by dominant structures, normalizing the hegemonic perspective (45). Thus, the phenomenologist must be concerned with the positioning of a particular corporeal sensibility in a hierarchical structure with other kinesthetic expressions (49). Instead, Rothfield advocates for a more pluralized body and suggests that somatic attention might signal lived corporeality as the manner by which one person engages with another (48).

Keeping these critiques in mind, Merleau-Ponty is still widely utilized to advance feminist thinking. Grosz (1994) affirms the value of Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of experience, even figuring his supposed neutrality as a compelling device to further feminist causes. Grosz notes two key insights that Merleau-Ponty might offer feminist theory. First, he emphasizes experience, which he views as both active, passive, and inscriptive, yet, potentially subversive. Second, he positions experience as always embodied: “between mind and body—or across them—in their lived conjunction” (95). Through Merleau-Ponty’s foundational discourse, Grosz is able to re-theorize the inclusion of the body and experience as a challenge to patriarchal norms (94).

Grosz delves into the body as depicted through Cartesianism and notes its devaluation as a “source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (5).

Grosz advocates for the body's presence in philosophical practice, particularly by theorizing the female body. She refutes normative accounts of bodies—the predilection for the outside over inside—and the reliance on binaries in general, such as public/private and self/other (23). The body is not one or the other of the binaries; it is always already both.

From a biological perspective Haraway (1998), reconsiders the relationship between organism and environment, offering possibilities for how to conceptualize the biology of the body as reliant on and influenced by environmental positioning. She states, “Difference at every level is theorized *biologically* as situational, not intrinsic, at every level from gene to foraging pattern, thereby fundamentally changing the biological politics of the body” (594). The body thus becomes resourceful, not simply a thing to be observed or inscribed upon.

Additionally, Haraway examines the potential for the body to be the location of situated viewing, rather than gleaning knowledge from the “god’s eye view” above (589). She terms this perspective “feminist embodiment,” which she explains, “resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning” (590). In this conception, there is not one accurate view, but multiple perspectives. This shift is important in redirecting the Cartesian focus on the mind as a singular disembodied entity to our body-mind as an integral component in our rational experience.

Bordo (2007), like Grosz and Haraway, confronts Descartes’s emphasis on a stark impersonality equated with truth and objectivity, which undermines subjective experience by perpetuating dualistic thinking that negates the body. Bordo argues that Descartes’s

focus on pure thought and perception highlights a separation between the mind and body that disentangles aspects of knowledge (672). She states, “In the history of philosophy, the role of the unclean and the impure has been played, variously, by material reality, practical activity, change, the emotions, ‘subjectivity,’ and most often— as for Descartes—by the *body*” (673). Bordo asserts that Descartes segregates body and mind and favors the mind as objective and “pure.” Descartes considers the body as a “prison of the mind” (681) and only with proper training can one overcome its sway (682). Descartes (though he was not the first, nor the last) had an aversion to the body and considered it only in terms of its mechanical functioning (684). To him, the body and mind were mutually exclusive, within a world that was conveniently knowable only to the mind. For Descartes, the mind was not spatially situated (685); it was not embodied. On the other hand, for Bordo, the body does not restrict us, but rather grounds us in the vitality of lived experience.

Braidotti (2002) provides a framework for the valuing of the embodied experience. Braidotti develops the term “enfleshed” (5) as an evolution of Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the flesh and advocates for inclusion of “embodied materialism” (5) to formulate a different representation of the body. To describe this further she utilizes the concept “radical immanence” (265), which she considers as a means to “think through the body, not in a flight away from it” (5). Here she is addressing the acknowledgment of the flesh as a way of being in the body and not a reason for disclaiming it. Further, she envisions the body as a potential or an in-process becoming.

Building on the work begun by phenomenologists, who deconstruct Cartesian dualistic thinking and revalue the body, the feminist philosophers who influence this study utilize a variety of interdisciplinary scholarship, which they then filter through a feminist perspective to reconsider the body and its importance in subjective experience. Each theorist contributes to the growing possibilities for how the body can transition from passivity to an active, movement-based role in the shaping of experience. Grosz contemplates the body as a crucial component of philosophy and posits that the relationship between the body and mind must be rethought in order to understand how the body contributes to alternate modes of knowledge (22). Grosz's perspective supports the integration of theory and practice, allowing the dancing body to take the page, coordinating its knowledge and language into scholarship. Haraway's consideration of the resourceful body underscores possibilities for theorizing the dancing experience in both selected research sites—the environmental factors influence the dancer, situated as an agentive force within the structures of the respective studios. Bordo reconsiders embodiment as a concept, which prioritizes, for the purpose of this research, the value of our subjective experience as embodied beings. Braidotti's theorization of body-as-potential is significant to understand the practice of dance at both sites—it relies on variation, interaction, intuitive adjustment, and a bodily awareness/consciousness. These feminist perspectives advocate for the body as non-binary, situated, resourceful and, as a structure of immanence, brimming with potential.

Overall, this development from Cartesian dualism to phenomenology to feminist theory charts a course in which the body is better integrated into theories of what it means

to be human and interact with the world. Within this dissertation, phenomenology and feminist philosophy provide a movement-forward justification for my approach, as well as a foundation for considering the body as a critical aspect of our knowing, as the *means* through which we experience the world. Even though the phenomenological and feminist moves are critical to this project, I find them abstract and wonder what more grounded descriptions of body and interrelationality would bring to this conversation. This dissertation then builds on this basis of these theories through empirical accounts of danced interactions, probing further the possibilities for what happens when moving bodies share space.

Body, Subject, and Agency: Advancing Constructions/Extensions of the Body

In tracing an overview, rather than an exhaustive historical account, of the trajectory of philosophical theorizations of the body in western culture that ground this study, I position this research within (and contributing to) contemporary evolutions of thinking on the body. Theoretically, my study begins at this moment when the body has been reincorporated into conceptions of being and the animate situated moving body is understood as having specific access to knowledge, subjecthood, and agency. Some contemporary advancements of these concepts elaborate on the relationships between humans, animals, objects, and energies and I am aware of scholars that have continued to think in even more radical ways about these ideas. Although the interrelational unfoldings between non-human animals, for example, is not the focus of this study, I identify certain pathways of thinking that influenced the course I traced in order to robustly develop the conversation. Accordingly, I briefly outline a selection of three 21st

century theorizations of the body, which contemplate it primarily for how it might be considered as “extended,” or suffused beyond the parameters of the skin. I focus here on Haraway’s conception of the cyborg, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s and French psychoanalyst and political activist Felix Guattari’s “Bodies without Organs,” and speculative philosopher Graham Harman’s “Object-Oriented Ontologies,” to illustrate approaches that grapple with further disengaging from restrictive frameworks.

The “Cyborg Manifesto,” Haraway’s seminal essay first published in 1985, reimagines a diffusion of boundaries that segregate all matters of being—human/animal/machine. The cyborg is a metaphor for the dissolution of dichotomies; it is an integrated and dynamic system synthesizing technology and repudiating identity. Although the conception of the cyborg, with its reference to posthuman mechanistic extensions of body, is not entirely applicable to this project, within its construct Haraway calls for language that appropriately reflects the system it describes, which is relevant to this dissertation. The historical struggle to reduce and restrain the body in order to analyze it is not unlike the power dynamic of language, which Haraway articulates reflects a white male dominant construct. Haraway thus equates language with power and argues for an alternate, imperfect a-patriarchal communication (57). The effort to develop linguistic renderings that adequately describe without limiting the body, particularly the moving body, is a challenge when the power has been given to the “mind” or the Cartesian idea of a computational center that negates the body. This study necessarily strives for the moving body to participate in theory-in-action, or theory enactment,

integrating the role of animate interplay *as* theory and revising how text distills the moving body on the page.

Dismantling of the organism of body and reconsidering it as an assemblage or a virtuality (Massumi 1992, 70), the term “body without organs” appears in a radio play by French dramatist, theater director, and poet, Antonin Artaud,³ but was conceptually established by seventeenth century Jewish-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza to describe the pre-awareness, potentialities, affects, or connections of a body. Spinoza conceptualized bodies not as defined by their parts or perimeters but rather, as situated. Spinoza viewed bodies through the scope of intensity and interactive possibilities with other animate beings (Angel 2009, 123-124). Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on Spinoza’s theory and adapt Artaud’s phrasing, “Bodies without Organs” (BwO) to describe a shift, a fracture away from stability and towards an experiential, processual understanding of the body. This body that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize is always in motion, disorganized, and without boundaries. They state, the BwO “has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image” (1983, 8). Whereas the focus here can seem to obscure the body itself as something that can be theorized, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is utilized by a host of philosophers who advocate for reassessing the limitations of the body to reimagine it as means to think *through*, rather than as a location on which to fix concretized ruminations of being-ness. This conceptualization is inherently motion-based and is therefore

³ *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947)

informative to my research, particularly as it utilized as a basis for affect that I discuss further in relation to the data, particularly the work of philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi, who is considerably influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization. I consider affect in discussing "energy" as a generative aspect of the cultural experience at The Sweat Spot, one of the sites of study for this research, although the destabilizing construction of BwO does not play into my understanding of the specified dancing cultures.

Object-Oriented Ontologies (OOO), a 21st century school of thought influenced by German continental philosopher Martin Heidegger and developed by Harman, grapples with the interrelationality of all beings/things (subject/object), rupturing priority and privilege to propose an invalidation of hierarchical structures (2009, 146). Within this construct, the body is as the wall of the dance studio is as the scarf tied around the neck is as the neck itself. In contrast to the principle criterion of 20th-century phenomenology that prioritizes subjective human experience, OOO proposes that objects exist beyond our conception and are beyond our understanding. Harman states, "The world is not the world as manifest to humans; to think a reality beyond our thinking is not nonsense, but obligatory" (2009, 26). This radical notion might make one wonder about the tools that hang from the walls in the Oxygen Tango dance space, which I describe in Chapter IV. What if we were not to privilege the dancing body over the hammer, the saw, the planer? This idea decenters the subjective viewpoint and thus rejects the perspective that value is correlative with shared experience, a tenet of this study. This conception then, although a

contemporary extension of theory that grounds this research, limits the worldview that this research assumes—interrelationality is a way of shaping community.

I realize that work in this area of conceptualizing the body continues to develop, and although the three previously mentioned constructions are not entirely applicable to this study, they are positioned within the broader spectrum of body-related research and advance the possibilities for considerations of the body, continuing with the work of developing ideas from the foundations that form a basis of this research. The phenomenologist and feminist frameworks described thus far that are foundational in shaping the direction of this dissertation, provide an historical trajectory that traces philosophical accounts of the relationship between the body and the mind. In the next section I move away from this historical lineage of thinking on the body to investigate concepts about the body prevalent in efforts to integrate the body and theory.

Embodiment: A Distillation of Varying Conceptions

The shift away from Cartesianism in theorizing the body as depicted in the previous section sets up my approach to this study and is more necessary than a particular definition of the *body* would be in understanding this research, although the advancements by Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari, and Harman are useful to consider. Participants, however, frequently utilized the term *embodiment*; it is a familiar descriptor for the body and its interrelation with experience, though its intended meaning remains obscure. Because it appears in the data, the definition of embodiment influences *how* the data were analyzed and therefore, warrants a more explicit delineation to establish parameters for its use and further explicate its significance. As such, I explore different

conceptualizations of embodiment refining a definition that addresses its meaning for the purpose of this study.

The term embodiment is promoted as a response to Cartesian ontology, which, as previously discussed, preferences a particular understanding of cognition that occludes the body. Scholars who construct a philosophy of and around embodiment prioritize movement over sensation, often understood as static, although our sensorial perceptions are also movement-based; these scholars elaborate on the dynamic complexity of our interactions. Having had a number of encounters with varying uses of the word *embodiment*—from a scholarly conference on dance and philosophy where a philosopher described dancers as “particularly embodied,” to a Los Angeles dance class advertised as a “heightened embodied experience”—I considered the questions: what is a suitable definition of embodiment and how do we determine the varying degrees to which one can be *embodied*? Meaning itself seems folded into the fleshy experience—subtle sensations of a breeze on the skin or the heightened reaction to a harmless spider crawling up a leg. Attending to the sensations of the body through conscious awareness perhaps influences our sense of embodiment, but can a heightened sensitivity to our corporeal experience sustained at sub- or pre-conscious levels affect our own and others’ perception of our embodiment? Is this what constitutes a heightened sense of embodiment?

In order to construct a meaningful interpretation of embodiment for the purpose of this research, it is useful to first consider some basic approaches that shape possibilities for how embodiment is perceived. Often embodiment refers to a characteristic or trait made tangible by someone possessing it. For example, to state that a woman is the

embodiment of altruism suggests that an otherwise non-spatial concept such as altruism finds home in an animate being and through action is brought into existence.

Embodiment is also useful in bridging the dualistic construct of body/mind; it is from this starting point that I clarify its meaning, drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship that addresses embodiment by considering it as our way of being in the world, integral to our reasoning, and brimming with potential.

Husserl's conceptualization of embodiment places the body as situated, the center of experience (from a phenomenological standpoint), connected to others through intersubjectivity—shared subjective states—and in possession of kinesthetic consciousness—not only an awareness of movement, but a consciousness of self-movement, how one can freely move and respond through the body to one's environment (Behnke 2018). Husserl's work is the foundation for Merleau-Ponty who discusses embodiment similarly, but, as mentioned, considers the experience of flesh, not only bodies, because of its sensorial dimensions, which are active and dynamic (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 140).

Feminist revisions for how the body is conceptualized also influence the notion of embodiment. Braidotti offers an explicit definition of embodiment, which encapsulates its potential and redirects the dualistic structures. She states, “Embodiment means that we are situated subjects, capable of performing sets of (inter)actions which are discontinuous in space and time. Embodied subjectivity is thus a paradox that rests simultaneously on the historical decline of body/mind distinctions and the proliferation of discourses about the body” (Braidotti [1996] 2003, 242). Here Braidotti affirms a situated perspective and

notes the significance of the presence of the body as it appears across disciplines.

Embodiment in social psychology “refers to the assumption that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are grounded in sensory experiences and bodily states” (Meier et. al. 2012, 2). This begins to broach the gap between what it means to be embodied as though one is almost reunited with one’s body and that one is instantiated as a self through the body. From a neuroscience perspective, Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991), utilizing the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, consider the body from the perspective of both biology and phenomenology; they theorize that the physical structure of the body and the lived, experiential structure are not in opposition but function in tandem. In an effort to avoid creating another dualistic structure that separates first-person experience of the body from its physiological make-up, these scientists argue that embodiment reflects a “double-sense,” which they describe as encompassing “both the body as a lived, experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms” (xvi). This conception refers back to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh as described in the previous area.

Dance theorist Sondra Horton Fraleigh (2004) discusses the term embodiment as a non-dualistic designation. She dismantles its components and dissects “embodiment” to its parts—the “body” as “material intelligence” and the “em-” as motion (21). She problematizes the notions of *being* and *having* a body, noting they are both dominated by possession. She posits that embodiment captures the complexity of the world’s interactions (21). Embodiment, Fraleigh asserts, implies metaphysics or “the ongoing mystery ruminating behind reflection” (21). Fraleigh also states, “movement *is* body”

(1987, 13), rather than a separable act. Further, she describes embodiment as active, as a “body-of-motion” (13) in which “body, movement, self, and agency” (13) are inseparable.

Dance scholar Jane Carr (2013) envisions a more relational conceptualization involving intercorporeal exchanges (64). Carr observes that although embodiment seeks to diffuse the binary of body/mind, it may merely obscure an ingrained dualism (63). She examines how the dualistic nature of inside and outside, or performer and spectator, influences our sense of what it means to be embodied, ultimately privileging the performer’s kinesthetic experience over that of the viewer. Carr conceptualizes an interdisciplinary approach to embodiment, grounded in phenomenology and social science theory. She argues for inclusion of culture, as its influence on bodily experience and agency is critical to “understanding of the interrelationships, not just between mind-body, but between consciousness-world and self-other” (64).

Sheets-Johnstone (2015) asserts that embodiment is deficient in describing the dynamism of kinesthetic experience (29). The term embodiment is thus a “lexical band-aid” and needs to be rethought in terms of dynamic kinesthesia (25). She argues for a more comprehensive understanding of the body, as a dynamic, interactive, and kinesthetic organism. This shift from embodiment to a dynamic system is critical in rethinking how language can limit the possibilities for how we consider aspects of the body and movement.

Embodiment then, as a term, functionally encapsulates the body, but also implies an “ongoing-ness,” an act always folding in on itself—a “body-being.” Yet, it is also a

single term that fixes a process in the moment of naming it. Specifically, in dance, I cannot conceive of “disembodiment” in correlation with the animate dancing body. For dancers and artists, or theorists with a long history of engagement with the body, the challenge lies less in defining “embodiment,” which might erroneously imply a static state of being, and more with understanding the “body” as the following: the centrality of experience; a site of resistance; a means of affecting identity; and the potential for intercorporeal exchange.

I propose a working definition of embodiment that reflects, as Sheets-Johnstone advises, movement. However, although she offers language that might supplement embodiment such as “animate organism” or “bodily-kinetic experience,” these terms still feel fixed and I wonder if embodiment might be conceptualized as a process of coming to understand how we are a body. (This does not suggest a spectrum on which one is more or less embodied.) I consider embodiment as a project undertaken to understand and explain the historical subjugation of the body. Embodiment, as a process, must include all the aspects that make a body: environment, cultural inscription, gender, race, history, health, age, biology, self-perception, and ability. The body then is its own individual project, enmeshed in commonality, and situated in worlds constructed for it, by it, and through it. I am in agreement with Butler (1990) who affirms that the body is not predetermined by some interior essence, an argument likely supported by Haraway. Butler acknowledges that this kind of essentialism erroneously suggests a separation of the body and the act of embodying. Instead, she argues that the body is always being a body in the act of embodying (1990, 521). Embodiment thus implies movement.

Our sense of movement, or kinesthesia, is then significant to embodiment; in discussing kinesthesia, we are always already inferring embodiment. People with a heightened sense of awareness of their movement, or exceptional kinesthesia, seem as though their corporeal kinetic experience translates as more self-connected and thus, we might call them more *embodied*. It is this conception that I understand participants to be speaking of when they describe themselves or others as embodied. The body as a static concept becomes animated through embodiment. Thus, embodiment is the active state of the body as animated entity. The degrees to which one becomes embodied seem to be linked to the awareness of the body's movement and expressive capability. Embodiment is movement, the spectrum of which, the artistry of which, is measured by our ability to perceive a unity between intention and commitment.

Kinesthesia (Sensing Self-Movement) And Its Implications

Kinesthesia, considered by Mark Paterson (2012) as “the subjectively felt qualitative dynamics of movement” (471), exists at the intersection of phenomenological experience and cognitive science. Kinesthesia takes into account the sensory experience of the mover as well as the neurological response to action, addressing not only how the body feels movement, but also how those within sensory range perceive it. Although discussed by theorists across the disciplines within the scope of this study, kinesthesia is an emergent concept, which provides a basis for the knowledge of *how* we are in the world. The dimensionality of the body, particularly in motion, permeates all aspects of our presence and thus reshapes or resituates the body in theory, requiring a more active

presence, compelling body scholars to utilize our moving bodies in the *doing* of philosophy.

Sheets-Johnstone, who specifically addresses the moving and/or dancing body describes kinesthesia as a “sensory modality in its own right, one that is experientially resonant in and of itself, thus one that can be phenomenologically investigated and analyzed and its dynamic qualitative structure made apparent” (2012, 42). She addresses how kinesthesia cannot be suppressed; it is a vital ongoing component of our being (42). Further, as movement is considered critical to cognition, she describes kinesthesia as leading us “to the experiential core of constituting consciousness” (2011, 129). Movement is also theorized as the meaning itself in kinetic experience. In this construct, kinesthesia is a form of animate knowledge.

From a slightly different perspective, Rothfield (2005) utilizes the term, “kinaesthetic context” to describe how the body is situated within a style of moving (in dance) that is “embedded within the conditions of its articulation” (2005, 47). She posits that structures of movement are different, such as styles of dance, and therefore, we cannot apply universal terms to movement (47). This implies that when analyzing the dancing body, one must consider not only the cultural and historical inscriptions on the body and its cognitive possibilities, but also the situated-ness within a specific kinesthetic framework.

Sheets-Johnstone and Rothfield are thus connecting to movement from different pathways; Sheets-Johnstone is concerned with the knowledge of the body as experienced through the moving/dancing body and Rothfield is interested in how the dance practice is

tied to kinesthetic sensibilities. Sheets-Johnstone speaks to what the body knows and Rothfield portrays the body from a situated position in relation to both the mover and the viewer. In the work of both Sheets-Johnstone and Rothfield, the means by which the body constitutes knowledge—bodily knowledge, or what the body knows—is a vital concern in analyzing movement.

Dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster addresses kinesthesia and links it to empathy in order to consider possibilities for discussing bodily communication across cultures and through time. Foster notes that both dancer and viewer are adjoined through the connection between movement and emotion. She cites the work of neurophysiologists who similarly claim an intrinsic connection between the dancer and viewer based on mirror neurons, or “synaptic connections in the cortex that fire both when one sees an action and when one does that action” (2011, 1). Foster argues that kinesthesia is embedded within choreography as a means of physicalizing movement that evokes specific feelings in bodied response. Thus to “choreograph empathy” one must consider what specific kinesthetic actions cultivate and connect bodies in response (4).

Conceptualizations of kinesthesia are critical to understanding how participants describe the sense of their bodies in the respective dancing experiences. Much of the data revolve around participants sensing their moving bodies and as a result, kinesthesia, although not a commonly considered “sense” becomes a critical aspect of interpretation. Kinesthesia seems to provide various angles from which to understand dance as a self-aware practice of one’s own body, but also as a self-aware practice in the perception of

others. The integrated sense of movement is a useful connection to other interrelational bodily occurrences, such as intercorporeity and intersubjectivity.

Intercorporeity, Intersubjectivity, and Conceptions of Affect (Affect/Emotion and Affective Practice)

As depicted at the opening of this chapter, the human body responds to the environment in which it is situated; it also informs it. Constituted by inanimate forms and often, other bodies—bodies share the space we move through—the environment is shaped by the interactions between bodies, which are undergirded by motion; bodies subtly adjust to each other at various levels of our awareness. For instance, in relating to someone with crossed arms, we might subconsciously cross our arms, mirroring body language and coordinating behavior (Rosenthal et al. 2015), or conversely, we deliberately choose to step out of someone else’s path. Phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke (2005) affirms that our bodies also coordinate together in mediated ways, which can range from functional connection—bodies coordinating together for a specific task—or an expressive connection—bodies playing instruments in a musical orchestra (74). In these cases, bodies can be understood to have a “collective bodily consciousness” (Sudnow 1979, 77), or an experience of intercorporeity. Intercorporeity establishes a platform to understand how bodies share space, a necessary component of this research. My focus on the interrelationality of moving bodies sharing and shaping environments, or intercorporeity, will be explored in tandem with intersubjectivity, or “the sharing of experiential content (e.g. feelings, perceptions, thoughts, meanings) among a plurality of subjects” (Zlatev et al. 2008, 2). Intercorporeity and intersubjectivity are not solely

phenomenological experiences, but also require an understanding of both subjective perceptions and group interrelations.

Merleau-Ponty conceptualized intercorporeity as a pre-reflective interrelation between bodies (1968, 141). For Merleau-Ponty this dynamic engagement is “the layer of the world that is first encountered in sensory experience and is the ground and condition for the ‘objective’ world (which is always the outcome of intersubjective constitution) but paradoxically is also reconstituted by the objective world” (Moran 2017, 38-39). Here he is addressing the reversibility of things in the world—that our sensory world manifests in a shared subjective world and that we are also sensed and subjects from other perspectives.

Husserl’s initial conceptualization that Merleau-Ponty builds on emanates from his explorations of “intertwining.” According to Husserl, this already occurs in the body through double sensations—a hand touching a hand that “prefigures embodied relations *between* subjects in the constitution of the ‘we-world’ (*Wir-Welt*) of intersubjectively shared culture” (Moran 2017, 31). The world then is created through shared subjectivity, constituted through moving bodies as, “freely engaging in movement seems to be a major characteristic of how the body inhabits the world” (Moran 2017, 42).

Affect and the Affective Turn

Intercorporeity and intersubjectivity are closely linked with affect, conceptualized here as a pre-conscious relational intensity between bodies and a method of intra-body communication (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1). Discourses on affect appear across a number of disciplines and the definitions and terminology vary significantly. Many

theorists dealing with affect seem to struggle to find ways of describing what can seem an elusive and complex phenomenon. According to Deleuze and Guattari, affect is conceptualized within the framework of “becomings,” which refers back to the feminist reimagining of the body. Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization provides a platform for many of the theorists who influenced my initial research on affect. These theorists describe affect and also address it in terms of the “affective turn.” However, as this study evolved, I found that the data more closely aligned with definitions from the social sciences. In this area, I trace the pathway through an understanding of affect that led me to social psychologist Margaret Wetherell’s concept of affective practice, which I integrate into the data analysis.

Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987) consider affect as contagious; it is an intensity that moves between at least two bodies (162). Massumi clarifies Deleuze’s and Guattari’s intended meaning of the term by describing it as the “passage of an experiential state” (xvi). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi (2002) also considers affect as intensity (27), which he explains is outside consciousness, beyond meaning, and delocalized (25). Intensity or affect is neither passive nor active: it moves but its movement is not directed (26); it circulates freely among bodies. Language operates on a different track, providing structure but disrupting intensity. Language has a standardizing function; it serves to make linear connections (though the referent of the signification may be obscured in communication), although affect is non-referential and not static (26). As such, language is inexact but accepted as precise, whereas affect is an inherently non-verbal event. This speaks directly to the challenge within the data of participants

attempting to describe phenomena existing in experience through a means designed for schematizing and representing it—verbal language. Through the integration of theory and practice, this project attempts to find ways to bridge those tracks.

Massumi does not apply fixed, contextual labels to affect since it is already situational, or “eventfully ingressive to context” (2002, 217). In fact, Massumi considers affect as “*trans-situational*” (217). He asserts that affect is “as processional as it is precessional,” adding that it “inhabits the passage.” He continues, “It is pre- and postcontextual, pre- and postpersonal, an excess of continuity invested only in the ongoing: its own” (217). Massumi is concerned with troubling the distinction between continuity and discontinuity and sees it as the foundational distinction of dualisms (217).

Contemporary critical theorist Patricia Clough (2007), like Massumi, traces the lineage of thinking on affect to Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza, and French-Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson. For Clough affect is a “substrate of potential bodily responses, often autonomic responses, in excess of consciousness” (2). Clough utilizes the term “affect” and the “affective turn,” which is based on scholarly efforts to theorize the non-representational bodily responses to experience. Within the construct of the affective turn, theorists “address the reconfiguration of technology, matter, and bodies” (2007, 3) that reflects new thinking on embodiment. Clough argues that the affective turn shifted critical and cultural theory to focus on the body, which had previously been subsumed by postculturalism and deconstruction. She affirms, “The turn to affect points instead to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally—matter’s capacity for self-organization in being transformational—which may be the most

provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn (2010, 206–207). Thus, the incorporation of the body as a contributive component to theory reconfigures dualistic imbalances of body-mind and vitalizes possibilities for thinking through and about the body, lived experience, and agency.

Theater and critical theory scholar Erin Hurley and arts and activism theorist Sara Warner (2012) also discuss how the affective turn reflects a refocusing of theory on the body and embodiment producing dimensions which they argue “cannot be grasped through semiotic analysis or a constructivist perspective” and contain “forces that cannot be fully socially determined and may be less prone to discipline and regulation” (99). Their perspective also grapples with the challenge of using language to describe affect. For Hurley and Warner, the affective turn also reflects a shift in focus on the arts, which becomes relevant due to its “bodily entanglements” and “sensate lures” (99). Although this perspective potentially connects affect to dance, it falls short of imagining how all bodies are affected, not just the audience.

Although Massumi equates affect with intensity, cultural theorist Melissa Gregg and communications and theater scholar Gregory J. Seigworth (2010) consider affect as a force or forces of an encounter (2). They consider affect as “in-between,” describing it as waves of intensities that pass between bodies, not bound by skin, or other surfaces, but rather, by their potential to participate in the circulation of affect (2). Within their construct, the body can affect and be affected; thus, its potential is multidirectional. They affirm that the openness of affect is critical to the body’s perpetual becoming, and through the encounter affect is manifested and instantiated (2–3). They do note, however,

that not all potential can be actualized. Within potentiality, there is a possibility for refusal (1), and this is understood as proof of the body's immersion in a situated environment.

Affect and Emotion

Massumi differentiates affect from both emotion and feeling. According to Massumi affects are pre-personal, or they exist even before they are known to the self (1987, xvi). In contrast, emotions are personal and subjective, confined to the rigidity of sociolinguistic structures (2002, 28). Massumi asserts, "Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized" (28). Massumi, stressing the importance of this distinction, suggests affect is challenging to critique because it is not intrinsically contained (28). However, affect is captured the moment it becomes emotion and in this confinement there is that which always escapes, an excess (35). This is why, according to Massumi, "emotion is more or less disorienting, and why it is classically described as being outside of oneself, at the very point at which one is most intimately and unshareably in contact with oneself and one's vitality" (35). Massumi suggests that without the escape or excess, we would be without potential (35). He means here that the remainder of the intensity continues to circulate building to a new point of potential manifestation.

Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and affect scholar Adam Frank (1995) elaborate further on the relationship between affect and emotion suggesting that once we

are aware of affect, we cognitively assess or process it and it materializes as a feeling. We only then translate the affect-turned-feeling into emotion through our memory of similar experiences (496–97). Thus, Sedgwick and Frank argue that affect and emotion are part of a sequence: we become aware of affect, then feeling, and then emotion. Massumi offers a slightly different perspective. For him, affect is always pre-conscious, and emotion is a manifestation of the affect and the point at which it becomes distinguishable. Although the delineations between affect and emotion described by these theorists differ, as do their actual approaches, all are closely entwined with our bodily response to external stimuli and seek to present a more complex picture of how we move in the world.

Taken from these theorists, affect for the purpose of this project is an amalgamation of different conceptualizations but, as I will discuss further in Chapter V, is closely aligned with Gregg and Seigworth’s understanding of affect as an intensity that exists between and among bodies. Its circulation can be produced and reproduced as dancing bodies choose to participate in affective experiences, which I talk about in detail through the conception of affective practice (Wetherell 2012).

Affective Practice

Wetherell (2012) elaborates on Massumi’s description, focusing on affect and its potential for bodily communication. She states, “Sometimes ‘affect’ includes every aspect of emotion and sometimes it refers just to physical disturbance and bodily activity . . . as opposed to ‘feelings’ or more elaborated subjective experiences” (2). Linking affect with emotions, according to Wetherell, allows one to locate affect within

multimodal resources without excluding bodily states, offering the opportunity to theorize aspects of affect and emotion simultaneously. Further Wetherell locates affect as a pervasive aspect of social relations stating, “Affect is always ‘turned on’ and ‘simmering,’ moving along, since social action is continually embodied. But, affect also comes in and out of focus. The ongoing flow of affective activity can take shape as a particular kind of affective performance, episode or occasion” (12). In her construction, affect differs from the Deleuze and Guattari thread of thinking whereby affect exists only in potentiality; Wetherell suggests affect is the potential and through the practice component is made manifest.

Wetherell considers social construction, environment, and what we derive from the experience of affect and proposes the term “affective practice.” Affective practice establishes connections between aspects of embodiment, movement, and emotion. Enhanced by the use of the term practice, this conception is entrenched in action; practice connotes doing, being, becoming, and moving. Further, affective practice clarifies the relations between subjects and objects, positioning them as always situated and embodied (2015, 159). Wetherell’s conceptualization of affect can aptly be used as a lens for this research as a generative part of a dance practice.

Theorists dealing with affect seek to find ways of decommissioning representational models of the body in favor of immanence and dynamism, which destabilize previous theoretical structures particularly as related to Descartes. Affect theorized as a situational intensity, or potential between bodies, seems to describe the

openness of this model and links it closely with feminist theory. Affect within all these various conceptions is a bodily form of communication.

Summary

The starting point of the theory in this chapter, the dismantling of Cartesianism, permeates this study. It directly drives the need for embodiment as a concept that re-integrates the body into our experience. Further, in so doing, we draw attention to kinesthesia—its vitality an exploration, an unwinding of limbs, spirals through space, felt and present. The possibilities for what happens when bodies share space—intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, affect—reveal alternate ways of conceptualizing worlds that are based in animation, action, and subtle communications—bodies whispering to each other without words. The way of the animate being seems somehow here a relatively new way, but it is also our most ancient selves revealed to us again and again as we move. We are, to return back to the beginning of this chapter, first and foremost tactile-kinesthetic beings.

Picking up then at the historical moment in theory where the body is re-integrated as a vital component of how we understand our world, this dissertation is grounded in these concepts that develop in response and often in resistance to Cartesianism. Contemporary scholarship in phenomenology, feminist philosophy, cognitive and social science, and dance studies provides varied perspectives to analyze the data collected from the two dancing communities, in which participants share their lived experiences. Although these disciplines provide valuable contributions in how to conceptualize the body and movement, they fall short in that they are not grounded or situated in a physical experience and also,

they speak to individual experience without including first-person accounts. Therefore, in this study I situate this theory and privilege first-person accounts, providing the specific intervention of a close consideration of these elusive concepts (embodiment, kinesthesia, intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, affect) situated in cultures.

The theory and data dance together; they reciprocally inform and animate each other. Like the fluidity of bodies in motion, the theory enhanced my understanding of the data, while it remained flexible to considerations that arose from the research and was re-envisioned accordingly. In both cases, theory and data, the movement of the study was captured verbally, utilizing language to communicate what is happening at these levels of the flesh, of action, that seem so challenging to describe. Dance as a discourse can provide a system for exploring the regions of these theories that exist outside linguistic mappings. This research then attempts to bridge the tracks between language and movement, between scholarship and data, by prioritizing lived experience in order to find alternate ways of accessing and comprehending the knowledge of the body, all the while contemplating how to dance the theory into being.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: PHENOMENOLOGY-BASED ETHNOGRAPHY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach to this qualitative research project, beginning with a statement of purpose and providing a detailed rationale of the research design including guiding questions that shaped the structure. As a means to acknowledge my own biases within this study, I disclose my positionality. I also describe the process of data collection and analysis, noting themes and questions that emerged. Lastly, I elaborate on conditions that demonstrate the study's rigor and elucidate ethical considerations existing at the onset of the project as well as concerns that arose during the data collection and analysis process.

Research Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenology-based ethnographic study is to describe the interrelational experiences of participants at two adult community dance sites in Los Angeles—Oxygen Tango,⁴ an Argentine Tango school and The Sweat Spot,⁵ a studio offering a variety of Western contemporary style dance classes. I accomplished this

⁴ <http://www.oxygentango.com/about-oxygen/>

⁵ <http://www.thesweatspotla.com/aboutus.html>

through phenomenology-based ethnographic methods, including participant interviews, participant observation, and the writing of field notes and analytic memos. I collected a secondary source of data through hybrid interviews in which the participants both spoke and danced responses. This research is important because it brings the moving body into philosophical conversations highlighting interrelational embodied experiences in lived communities. At the onset of this study, the guiding questions included:

- What interrelational practices between participants, instructors, leadership, environment, and artifacts at The Sweat Spot and Oxygen Tango define them as unique communities and what are the values specific to these cultures?
- How do participants in classes at The Sweat Spot and Oxygen Tango describe their lived experiences in relation to the environment—other bodies and also space, music, fashion, lighting?
- How does the researcher’s first-person experience participating in specific dance practices contribute to her understanding of intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect?
- How does dance—particularly first-person accounts of bodily experience in specific dance classes in specific communities—inform existing discourses on intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect?

Design

In this section, I articulate the disciplinary sources that directed the overall approach to this study, for which I set out to understand the two designated cultures with particular attention on the participants’ kinesthetic experiences. I divide the section into literature from methodologies that surround and inform the selected phenomenology-based ethnographic approach, namely ethnography, dance ethnography, and kinesthetic modes of attention. This design is rooted in, albeit with possible modifications, accepted practices in the field, which I address in this section. Although I ultimately settled on a

particular approach to ethnography (phenomenology-based), I provide an explanation of the key elements of ethnography as well as dance ethnography, which speak more specifically to/from my field and enhances the possibilities for the ethnographic techniques used in this study. I also briefly explicate kinesthetic modes of attention, an approach developed by dance researcher Shantel Ehrenberg (2015), which clarifies the phenomenological aspects of this study from a particularly dance oriented perspective.

Ethnography

I consider this project first an ethnography, which is a qualitative methodology concerned with culture that “places an emphasis on in-person field study and includes immersion through participant observation in a setting to decipher cultural meaning and generate rich, descriptive data” (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 21). I understand culture here as constituted through particular social behaviors, norms, and values that shape the perspectives of the designated groups of people at both Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot. In order to define the cultures at both sites, I examined the ways in which the participants understand, describe, and enact the cultural parameters. I did not assume results but rather, I was influenced by the fieldwork as a strategy for enabling an emic perspective, that of an insider in both cultures, to emerge and guide the research (Buckland 2010, 335). I gathered ethnographic data for this study including: participant observation, both formal and informal interviews, document analysis, artifacts, and field notes (Merriam 2009, 28).

Dance Ethnography

Although I utilized the term ethnography broadly, I was influenced specifically by dance ethnography, which considers embodiment as a potential data source (Frosch 1999, 259). However, as dance ethnographer Joan D. Frosch cautions, “felt” data must be checked against participant experience (259). For this study, the data were confirmed through the interviewees at both sites and my own felt sensations recorded through field notes and analytic memos. Frosch further asserts that a dance ethnographer must determine “what and *how* dance means in relation to the context of which it is a part” (250). Here, she is referring to identifying the position of dance within the culture as a vital component of how it is studied. Through the interview questions, I sought to determine how participants felt about the dancing cultures. Frosch also introduces the construction “observing participant” to indicate an ethnographer deeply engaged with the practice of the culture, particularly dance (1999, 258). As I was actively involved with the dance practices at both sites, this perspective reflects aspects of my position within this research, though at times I did purely observe in both locations.

Kinesthetic Modes of Attention

Ehrenberg presents a concept for data collection within an ethnographic research methodology that she terms “kinesthetic modes of attention.” Ehrenberg clarifies that this mode refers to an “intentional consciousness while dancing, which includes a number of elements, such as listening to the body’s movements, problem solving with the body, a curiosity about bodily feelings in conversation with different choreographic and performative contexts, and various types of embodied translation processes” (2015, 44).

This particular type of datum was useful in gathering information about the body and what is felt while dancing.

Phenomenology-based Ethnography

Over the course of eight months, I conducted a two-sited phenomenology-based ethnography, which allowed me to collect and analyze diverse data concerning participants' experiences at The Sweat Spot and Oxygen Tango. Within the overarching methodology of ethnography, this study is phenomenology-based as I prioritized data in regard to participants' felt-sensations in their bodies. Although the sites focus on different styles of dance, both place an emphasis on dancing bodies sharing space. Oxygen Tango teaches the social dance of Argentine Tango which requires close physical touch and contact; The Sweat Spot teaches a variety of styles based in Western contemporary dance that for the most part do not require physical contact. Collecting data from these two sites provided the opportunity for comparison and thus, a more holistic understanding of the intersections between ideas described by participants at both sites. Based on publicly available website materials, articles, and at least two years prior experience sporadically taking classes at each site before initiating the study, I identified both locations as engaged in cultivating a dance experience that involves shared energy and intention. Although this is likely common to a certain degree in most if not all dance practices, these sites were unique in that teachers and participants both explicitly and implicitly prioritize shared energy.

The data, collected through interviews, participant observations, and artifacts (including publicly available material from the Internet, such as social media and website

announcements) focused on the totality of each culture as well as the perceptions of the participants' corporeal experiences—their energy-based and kinesthetic interactions with their environments/communities. I positioned myself as an insider, a longtime practitioner of dance who embodied the styles through participation, and an outsider, observing and writing analytic memos to gain insight into the data. Given that I hoped this research would contribute to theoretical discussions of interrelational embodied experiences, existing interdisciplinary conceptual frameworks and definitions were used as a lens during both data collection and analysis.

Positionality

Over the last twenty-five years, I have been fascinated with movement and explored it extensively through Western contemporary dance training and teaching as well as somatic techniques utilized to enhance body awareness and capacity for dance, such as Pilates, Gyrokinesis, and yoga. My interest in the creative, expressive potential of dance as well as my commitment to sensory experiences of the body in motion is augmented by my study of dance theory, which further shapes my research interests and enhances my understanding of dance as a philosophical enterprise unto itself. Through dance, questions of the body and how it interacts with other bodies can be explored. Further, dance offers a targeted inroad to understanding the deeper implications of the body in motion by engaging with a variety of discourses including: “kinesthetic, visual, somatic, aesthetic, as well as intellectual” (Albright 1997, 5). In tandem, interdisciplinary theory and the dancing body articulate possibilities for how the moving body is productive of theory and how theory can inform the moving body.

This perspective is foundational to the prioritization of dance in this study. Although in dealing with questions of the body, some other medium, art form, or practice, could provide suitable entrée to the questions at the heart of this project, the unique sensibility of the aforementioned dance practices—the physical sensitivity to the qualitative dynamics of movement, expressivity, and my previous experience with it—contribute to the selection of it as the catalyst to study phenomena surrounding the body and theory.

I began this study with prior experience at both of the selected sites. For over two years before the first contact I made specifically regarding this project, I attended classes and social dance events at Oxygen Tango and classes and performances at The Sweat Spot. As a Los Angeles-based dance artist with a background in contemporary dance and an interest in Argentine Tango, I became involved at both sites as a casual participant in order to continue my own education and to connect with the local dance community. I did not have close affiliations with anyone at either studio but at Oxygen Tango, I was acquainted with one of the founders and both of the owners prior to considering it as a site for this study and was familiar with several dancers in the culture. I also had prior connections at The Sweat Spot from the Los Angeles dance world as well as from a brief study I conducted there, (which I discuss in more detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation), for a class, *Scholarly Writing*, as part of my doctoral coursework in 2015. For this research, out of twenty-five total participants at both sites, I had some prior acquaintance with five. Although my attendance at both locations had been sporadic over the years, I understood these sites to have particular approaches that seemed as though

they would be rich for exploration. As I began the research process, I felt outside the communities and positioned myself within their structures in order to best understand the respective dance practices and the participants.

There are certain assumptions that I bring to this study. I believed a valuable insight to be gained from in-depth phenomenology-based ethnographic data that might clarify theory that speaks about moving bodies but does not provide a vital experiential component. I hoped the research data would capture the felt sensations of dancing bodies in/through the lived experiences of the participants, but I suspected this would be challenging to perceive and describe. I was curious how dancers from various backgrounds at two different locations would discuss their experiences and whether or not there would be connections within the data and with the theory that initially sparked my interest. Although I had no particular notions about what the participants' responses would yield, I hoped that they might clarify some of the theory that speaks specifically about interrelational occurrences between bodies, such as affect, and give me tools to better understand and discuss these experiences.

This study is grounded in a particular conceptual framework that was primarily constructed from phenomenological theory, such as intercorporeity and intersubjectivity, as well as interdisciplinary literature on affect. As a result of utilizing theory in framing this study, there were noted influences in the processes of data collection and analysis. Theory that influenced my perspective both directly and indirectly affected the interview process. For example, I was curious about energy and affect and thus, I followed up on specific questions in which participants seemed to be grappling with these ideas.

However, I was careful not to lead participants or guide them to specific ideas or outcomes. Rather, I was curious about if/how participants would describe these interrelational bodily happenings. Further, as I was engaged in either participation or observation or both, I did privilege certain aspects of the experience based on existing theory. For instance, if I had been reading about intersubjectivity, I might make special notice of how people interact without speaking or the sense of meaning that certain activities or combinations of movement generated. I did document my reflections about these moments during the study, so I had an explicit record and understanding of my thinking and process. Overall, the experiences I recorded were not altered to reflect ideas but rather, were articulated through the lens of my own knowledge and experience.

Data Collection

In this section, I detail how I came to acquire approval from each location and the means by which I contacted the site personnel and participants. I discuss my approach to the interviews and note certain issues that I encountered. I outline my experience as a participant and observer. I describe the process of writing analytic memos and the effect this had on the quality of the research. I mention other aspects of the data that contributed to a holistic pool of information about these two cultures.

Site Approval

After receiving IRB approval and before commencing with data collection, I visited each site in person at which time I introduced myself to the owner or manager. I inquired as to whether or not I might provide them with more detailed information about my project and upon their mutual agreement, I emailed them at public business addresses

about the purpose of the study, site involvement, and information regarding the protection of participants' confidentiality. Upon receiving positive responses, I acquired site approval letters. Following the same protocol, I approached teachers whose classes I was planning to attend. I worked with the site managers and instructors to secure further participants by making public announcements and posting flyers. In all cases I described the project, outlining the commitment, and noting the rights of the participants should they consent to involvement.

After securing administrative approval to conduct my research at The Sweat Spot and Oxygen Tango, I visited each site over a four-month period for approximately four hours per week respectively. During these site visits, I familiarized myself with the instructors, classes, and participants through more formal in-class introductions and casual chats. I always arrived early, allowing time to set myself up for the research, whether I was participating in the dance experience or purely observing. In all cases, the extra time allowed me to feel integrated in the space and notice different aspects of the experience, such as the lighting or changes in the studio configuration. I could greet the dancers that I came to know and have some extra time for casual conversations.

Interviews

I utilized the phenomenology-based ethnographic method of open-ended interviews to collect data from a range of participants. I conducted interviews at locations convenient for the participants, ranging from public parks, private residences, and coffee shops. I audio and video recorded the interviews, although there were a few instances where I could not video record as the locations were not conducive. Further, the video in

the more public settings was not effective at capturing the full body of the participant. Nonetheless, I was still able to transcribe and code physical and gestural material from the majority of interviews. As a result of the challenge of capturing the body in some of these interviews and also because participants regularly spoke about the difficulty describing some of the ideas through words alone, I also conducted danced responses, which were hybridized movement and spoken interviews that were audio and video recorded in The Sweat Spot studio.

Initially, I requested interviews with two instructors at each location by emailing them at public work addresses obtained online. In these emails, I provided detailed information about the study, commitment, and risks. My initial projection supposed approximately six interviewees at each site. However, I recruited nine participants at Oxygen Tango and seven participants at The Sweat Spot through in-class announcements and by posting flyers describing my research project and requesting interested parties to contact me by email or phone. I conducted the interviews that integrated danced and spoken responses in the studio at The Sweat Spot and had ten total participants, two of which were cross over, or follow-up interviews from the initial Sweat Spot interview pool. The remaining eight were first-time interviewees for this project and spanned a range of levels of dance experience, ages, and abilities. In all cases, the parameter of selection for the participants stressed involvement at the site for at least three consecutive months with a minimum of one class per week. The interviewees' spectrum of association spanned four months to eleven years, with a broad cross-section of levels of

engagement. I selected these participants with the intention of collecting data that would become theoretically meaningful in the analysis.

At the onset of each interview I reviewed the consent form—which was emailed to the participant in advance and included all aspects of the study: intention, timeline, potential risks, potential benefits, confidentiality, reciprocity, compensation, and my contact information as well as that of my advisor at Texas Woman’s University—and sought permission to record (audio and video). I notified the interviewee of her or his right to stop the interview at any time and to veto any data offered at any point in the process. Although for the most part the data I collected as part of this research did not seem to reveal personal information that might be compromising, I did have two instances where participants asked me not to name other people they had spoken about. I assured them that I would remove any identifying characteristics from the study and would give them a further opportunity to review my write up of the findings through a member check.

I chose a research role positioning myself within the culture in a way that is “understood and accepted in the interviewees’ world” (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 74). As a participant in these two communities, I came became familiar with other dancers, who knew that I was conducting research and also was in and of these dancing practices. Through consistent attendance, conversations, and openness about my project—explaining my position and providing clear goals—I built trust.

I designed open-ended interview questions that guided conversation but allowed the voices of the interviewees to be the primary focus. In order to construct the initial

ideas for interview questions I adhered primarily to the guidelines detailed by Rubin and Rubin (2012), who suggest dividing the questions into three categories: main questions, follow-ups, and probes (116–19). The main questions were phrased in advance but were flexible to alterations if needed (116). As an example, I started most of the interviews by asking “Could you tell me about your dance experience and how you came to dance at Oxygen Tango/The Sweat Spot?” This would often lead to a lengthy response describing personal details about the interviewees’ relationship with dance, sometimes how they felt about their bodies, and also reveal aspects of the respective studio’s culture. I would then ask follow-up questions delving into details and asking interviewees for clarification or examples (117). These questions often came up during the interview; for instance; after the first question I would ask, “Could you describe one of your most memorable experiences at The Sweat Spot/Oxygen Tango?” This helped me identify what was important to the interviewee and how the culture of the dance studios shaped something they valued. As I was interested in their phenomenological experiences as well, I asked them to describe their experience dancing with the other participants.

Sometimes during the interview or as I was reviewing the data, I noted a need for further clarification of an idea or elucidation of a statement expressed by the participation. I would then follow-up with questions designed to gain more intricate details about participants’ initial responses. This also ensured that I accurately understood what they were saying. These follow-ups were often about sensations/awarenesses/perceptions that participants experienced in relation to each other.

I presented the follow-up questions via the interview, email, or an additional in-person meeting.

Rubin and Rubin also suggest probes, which manage the conversation by directing the interviewee to elaborate, often revealing her or his slant or bias (119). For example, I used probes frequently to clarify what participants at The Sweat Spot meant about the use of the term “energy.” On multiple occasions I asked a clarifying probe such as, “So when you say ‘energy’ is something that you feel, can you describe how or where that resonates in your body?” These three types of questions were critical to my interview process as I noticed that often the preliminary interview, once transcribed, opened pathways to probes, which revealed more in-depth information. Also, in asking interviewees to dig deeper into what they were articulating, they often had further reflections on their experiences.

I considered each participant as contributing something of value to the study and I was concerned it would be difficult to determine the saturation point. However, as Rubin and Rubin articulate, once you are hearing similar data, you have likely reached the point of saturation where new information is likely not forthcoming (63). After nine interviews at Oxygen Tango, seven at The Sweat Spot, and ten danced responses, I concluded that the data would provide both breadth and depth of content as I began to hear similarities through a variety of perspectives and decided additional interview data would not have contributed further to the study results. Although the language between the responses differed greatly, the key components indicated recurring themes and conferred with the larger body of existing theory as well as my own experiential findings. I conducted two

less interviews at The Sweat Spot primarily because, based on the set up of the studio, I was able to have more casual conversations both before and after the classes, which provided supplemental data.

During the transcription process, I utilized the audio to create a document of the questions/responses and the video to make notes about pertinent body language or physical responses to the questions. This gave me embodied information, which was a useful component of the data. I tagged the data that was corporeal as well as that which was collected from a written email follow-up as not corporeal. Ultimately, I did not notice a difference in written responses versus the majority of integrated (audio/video) responses. Once the transcript was completed, I provided the interviewees with a word document of the interview so they could review and amend or withdraw statements. During the process of transcription, I began preliminary coding, which I will discuss further in the forthcoming section on coding.

I faced several challenges during the interview process. It was difficult not to lead the participants and to remain open to the process. As I was transcribing the first few interviews, I made memos of my own interactions and critiqued how I might better serve the participants and the study. I utilized Rubin and Rubin's description of "conversational partnerships" (71-94) and found helpful information about recognizing my role. Although I do have a dance background, which I disclosed to participants, I approached the interviews as though I was a novice and wanted to find out as many details as possible regarding their dance experiences (75); I was hoping to find out how each participant noticed her dancing body and how she related to the group, as though the information

was new to me, which it frequently was. In many instances, the wording or descriptions were highly individual, though much of the underlying information contained similarities.

On a technical level, I was at times concerned about the quality of my recordings as I conducted the interviews in some private spaces, but also in coffee shops and parks. I always set up two audio recording devices and I always had at least one clear copy. I did notice that in more crowded spaces the participants physicalized their responses or gestured less than in private settings where they often stood up to demonstrate something specific. This made me realize that instead of sitting for the interviews, perhaps it might be useful to conduct the interviews in a dance studio. As mentioned previously, this led me to experiment with the construct of the interviews by holding the previously mentioned set of hybridized responses at The Sweat Spot.

Observations and Field Notes

During the four months at each site, I observed classes and events, participated by dancing in the classes, and engaged with the community. In order to record these encounters, I utilized Clifford Geertz's conception of "thick description," or comprehensive observations, which he considers the heart of ethnography, as the guideline for my approach to field notes. He states, "Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is—*thickly*—described" (1973, 14). In writing field notes, I created detailed descriptions in order for the observations to contextualize the culture and contribute to the data. I focused on various aspects of the experience, noting the participants and their interrelations, the space itself,

and my own bodily perceptions. Merriam asserts that thick, or as she terms it “rich” description, is not only a highly detailed account of an interaction, setting, or experience, but also can be used as a strategy, rendering the data transferrable to other settings (2009, 227). By this, she means the field notes might serve as a potential database of information regarding a specific culture that might be applicable to another setting. However, Geertz cautions, “What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1973, 9). In processing my field notes, I regularly utilized analytic memos to record my position and potential bias—sometimes even information about how I felt that day or why I thought I was taking note of certain aspects of the experience. For example, after observing a *Sweaty-Sundays Slow Jams* class, I noticed that my description focused primarily on how the dancers interacted without verbal language. I had been reading about language as a community construct earlier that day and realized that my lens for this particular observation was influenced by the theory, by my effort to notice how/if it played out in this lived environment that utilizes agreed upon physical signals to communicate specific ideas.

In addition to my observations of the communities, I utilized the field notes to record my own experiences, sensations of movement in my body, and relational perceptions of other dancers. At times I would take a moment away from participating in classes to jot down notes about kinesthetic perceptions, as per Ehrenberg’s kinesthetic mode of attention (2015, 44). Sometimes during my participation, I also held theoretical ideas in mind and explored how they might manifest through movement. I justified this approach through curriculum and dance theorist Donald Blumenfeld-Jones consideration

of movement as data; he suggests dancers focus on the body “not *only* as an object of inquiry and gaze, but also as the mode of inquiry itself, working from ‘inside’ the body. That is, the dance person doesn’t merely analyze bodily action, but puts that analysis into action with her or his own body and studies the actions as a personal affair of motion” (2008, 175). This thinking influenced my field notes as I fluidly responded to different stimuli and tried to intake a variety of different sensory modalities without preferencing one over the other. Data from these explorations were folded into the broader data pool for coding and analysis.

Analytic Memos

Through analytic memos I reflected on the process of conducting the research including: data collection, interviews, transcriptions, and participant observation, noting patterns and themes in the data and coding choices. An analytic memo is similar to a journal in which I could muse on the data, “while critically assessing personal assumption and actions that shape the study” (Saldaña 2013, 42). Memoing in ethnographic data analysis provides information about the subjectivity and bias of the researcher in the process of researching (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 70). Analytic memos served as a reflexivity tool and were coded as part of the data in order to contribute to the validity or trustworthiness of the research. I primarily utilized two different modes for analytic memoing: I wrote in a document on the computer or in a notebook and I recorded voice memos, which I then transcribed. I also transcribed the handwritten notebook and coded my memos to keep up-to-date with the interviews. I made regular notes on my ideas throughout the process and these memos provided an on-going analysis of my

positionality, as well as commentary on the experience of research. For example, during one observation I noticed that my focus was skewed toward certain moments in between the exercises. With my memos at hand, I was able to reflect on the possible causes. I had been reading about affective practice and was looking to find ways that participants might choose to share in an experience, specifically when not dancing. Memos also revealed holes in my data; I was able to identify imbalances in the amount of support for one aspect of the study over another and then seek out potential data sources to become aware of and/or address these issues. I did not want to favor the phenomenological perceptions of the participants over the ethnographic data. The memos ensured a fluid and dynamic research process by consistently acknowledging my position within the structure of emerging possibilities. I was also able to note how my thinking shifted as I gathered more information. An example of this is my understanding of the concept of “technique” in both locations—it has different meanings but a similar intent of building connection and community albeit through varying means. However, I was considering it as the “steps” at first and realized it speaks to a much greater phenomenon of how the spaces are constructed—less about the steps and more about the intention.

Complementary Data Sources: Casual Conversations and Artifacts

In order to collect different perspectives on the two studios and the participant experiences, I had casual conversations with dancers at both sites as well as engaging in online activity. After participant agreement, these conversations were captured on a small voice recorder or in some cases, I immediately wrote down the gist of the conversation in a notebook. In the instances where I wrote from memory, I did not incorporate quotes in

the study. In addition to casual conversations, I also regularly read Facebook posts for both sites and checked advertised classes/events/social happenings. Through these sources, I was able to evidence some of the happenings I include as aspects that shape the communities. There were also threads of response in which I could observe the presence or absence of themes or ideas that were emerging in my data. Creswell affirms this approach of developing a holistic account of phenomena in a study by considering a variety of different data from a diversity of perspectives (2014, 185–86).

Because I both announced my research in the classes and introduced myself to a number of students, many dancers at both sites knew about my project. However, I always introduced myself and briefly spoke about my research if I had a casual conversation that I intended to incorporate into the data. If they were comfortable participating, I informed those I spoke with that, if quoted, they would be cited anonymously or given a pseudonym. I did not at any point encounter resistance to these casual chats. In fact, for the most part the dancers seemed interested in talking about their experiences. At The Sweat Spot, it was easier to connect with dancers and converse before or after class. At Oxygen Tango, it proved more challenging as dancers begin almost right away with a tango, leaving limited opportunity to engage in conversation. During the research process, I joined social media groups for both sites as an observer. This allowed me to track what was happening in the social spheres of the communities as well as what they placed value on through the choice of announcements.

Data Analysis

In order to effectively analyze the data, I adhered to the guidelines set forth by Ravitch and Carl, which describe the process as iterative, recursive, formative, and summative (2016, 223). During analysis, under their advisement: I contextualized responses; noted emphasis placed on certain words or phrases; clarified my role so that my arguments were valid; and, delineated how early analysis shaped the findings (226). I accomplished this through analytic memos, which were coded and considered alongside the data. Further, Ravitch and Carl discuss analysis through coding as a process that includes data and theory triangulation (226-227), a valuable perspective for the integration of theory, the voices of participants, and my own observations. I detail here my approach to analytic coding.

Coding

In this section, I discuss qualitative coding and its value to the research process. I provide examples of coding methods and techniques that I utilized. I address how coding disrupted my assumptions and biases. I detail how coding enhanced dialogic possibilities between my own observations, the research participant community, and theorists working within my areas of interest. Finally, I consider how these connections might be important to emerging theories.

I utilized coding, an integral aspect of qualitative research, to organize data and determine connections that guided me to my findings. Creswell explains that through coding, large amounts of data can be organized into manageable chunks tagged with labels (2014, 197–98). This allowed me to find, group, and connect various pieces of data

as they related to research questions or other aspects of the inquiry process. Saldaña clarifies: “A code in qualitative research inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (2012, 3).

Coding allowed me to organize and interpret the data collected from a cross section of sources. I began developing preliminary codes as the data was collected. As I transcribed the interviews and reviewed participant observation field notes, I began to notice or pre-code recurring words and themes. I highlighted these in the data and utilized the word cloud feature in the software program “NVivo” to determine frequency and prevalence of usage. I simultaneously utilized analytic memos to record my initial responses to the data. This assisted me in identifying emergent themes and developing codes that shifted as the data pool became more robust. Throughout the process I tried to find codes that best captured the experience focusing first on more horizontal or general codes and then on more specific in-depth vertical approaches. I sought to deeply understand the code and then figure out how it would enliven the data/research/theory.

In my first cycle of coding interviews (including movement analysis of body language from the video footage) and field notes, I noted “connection,” “community,” and “energy” appeared as recurrent as did an articulation of “why dance?” I also created a sub-heading called “gestures of connection,” within “connection” which contained accounts of interviewees’ physicalized responses. Upon reviewing the data repeatedly, I contextualized various uses of the words and recorded distinctions in what participants *meant* by connection, community, or energy and also whether the code of “why dance?”

referred to a personal account of dance experience, how dance was different from other physical activities, or a perspective on the benefits of dance that related to personal experience but described a broader sense of its value. The initial codes were productive but required a round of revisions, as I wanted to ensure that I understood the terms correctly. For example, after reviewing and reflecting on the transcripts and field notes, looking for reference to “community,” I realized that “community” was an outcome of “developing connections.” I returned to the data to look for reference either explicit or implicit to “connection.”

The coding process in qualitative research is emergent and flexible. Merriam notes that the codes should adapt to shifts in the research (2009, 182). For example, some categories themselves may undergo revision or may move to subcategories. In the second round of coding, I moved from grosser to finer structures. For example, I split the code “connection” to more specifically indicate the *type* of connection: “connection to community,” “connection to other dancers physically,” “connection to self/body,” “connection as concept.” As I continued with the coding and integrated data from both sites, I recognized a needed further sub-division of “connection as concept” to “connection as inter-body/non-physical,” “emotion and/as connection” and “energy as connection.”

I recorded concerns in my analytic memos about ambiguity in the responses. This arose out of the challenge participants expressed in finding words for their movement experiences. I sought to appropriately code what was often spoken about in metaphor or imagistic language and therefore, would not appear in a word cloud. After multiple re-

examinations of the data, I added the categories “awareness” and “senses” as codes to organize what might otherwise seem ambiguous. Because in the data for this study, some of the language was obscure, as participants were describing sensations or concepts, I closely reviewed the data many times to determine what the participants were trying to say and frequently required follow-up questions. For example, one participant at Oxygen Tango stated twice that she could feel “past her dancer partner.” Another participant discussed a “heightened awareness that made her feel like she was dancing *through* her partner.” Initially, I coded these under the sections: “connecting to other dancers physically,” and “connection as inter-body/non-physical.” Ultimately, during follow-up questioning I came to understand that these participants were both trying to describe a sensation of merging with their partners through a shared intention. I created a new code based on “connection as inter-body/non-physical” and labeled it “interrelationality,” which became a theme of the research. It is worth noting here that the language for the code, “interrelationality,” emerged from the theory I was engaged with, which provided not only terminology but also a deeper understanding of what was being described.

The coding continued throughout the process, as did my analytic memoing, which provided on-going reflection on the codes/process. Merriam asserts, “This process of refining and revising actually continues through the writing up of your findings” (182). As such, I coded throughout my writing process to check my findings and view the data from different angles. I viewed the coding as a data filtration system that showed the data confirming or veering from proposed themes. I discovered that although I attempted to use the software program NVivo, I preferred coding by hand with highlighters as well as

in word documents. At various points, I also pinned different codes on a bulletin board and arranged quotes and information in clusters. This helped me add dimension to the ideas and also gave me the freedom to move them around, which I noted was fitting since I was attempting to track moving/dancing bodies through the research.

Reporting

I initially conceived of this study as an investigation of primary source data gathered through the lived experiences of participants active in specific dancing communities in collaboration with established interdisciplinary thinking on embodiment. My goal was to understand how these theories and practices might intersect, inform, or extend each other. During the course of the study, I merged traditional theoretical underpinnings with advancements by contemporary thinkers in order to contemplate a more inclusive understanding of how we mediate the world in and through our moving/dancing bodies, focusing on theory that enriches an understanding of the participants' lived experiences. As such, I integrate contemporary phenomenological analysis, cognitive science perspectives on embodied social understanding, and cultural theory that explores the interplay between practice and philosophy.

During the process of analyzing the relationship between theory and data, I encountered the challenge of capturing the dynamism of the moving body on the page, attempting to avoid reductive two-dimensional assessments of the animate experience. Theory, in particular, can often seem static, fixed in the circumstances of its development—the era, societal conditions, and lineage of thinking from which it evolved. In an effort to enliven the theory utilized here, I consider it metaphorically engaged in a

tango with the data, which are primarily comprised of rich narration of the dancing experience as chronicled through the participants' illustrative accounts and my own field notes. The theory and data thus move synergistically, allowing each other to give voice to aspects of the experience, working in tandem to reveal correlations and contradictions.

Rigor

During the process of this study, I was guided by four ethical considerations related to rigor in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 188-190). Credibility, or validity, ensures that the data is fairly represented. Transferability addresses how the data of a study may be compared to a broader context "while still maintaining their context-specific richness" (189). Dependability refers consistency and stability of the research project and data. Confirmability acknowledges the researcher's bias and mediates it through practices of reflexivity (189-190). In this section, I discuss each of these considerations detailing how they pertain specifically to this study.

Credibility

Credibility "refers to the ways that researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences" (186). To achieve this, I practiced reflexivity by regularly writing analytic memos, which detailed my reflections on all aspects of the research process: participant observation, interviews, and field notes. I also searched for negative or contradictory information by investigating online reviews and commentary on affiliated sites that might indicate varied perspectives. In this sub-section I focus primarily on the process of member checks as a key method of accountability, which

ensured that I presented “an accurate description or interpretation of human experience that people who also share the same experience would immediately recognize” (Krefting 1991, 218).

In order to commence with the study, I secured approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas Woman’s University, which acts to assess risk for participants in a study and thus is an essential part of the process of ethically grounded research (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 346). As representing others is complex, I considered potential ethical issues that might arise. Performance studies scholar D. Soyini Madison details a series of considerations necessary to conduct ethical research through the framework of critical ethnography and although my research does not strictly fit this structure, critical ethnography offers a rigorous ethical foundation that was transferrable to my phenomenology-based ethnographic approach. Madison stresses that the priority of the project must first and foremost be the participants. She asserts, “Researchers must make every effort to ensure that their work does not *harm the safety, dignity, or privacy* of those with whom they work” (129). I was concerned about protecting the research participants and their contributions. Participants were eager to discuss their experiences although I offered no tangible compensation for participation. I wanted to involve them in the process even after the interviews were complete. As such, I emailed transcribed interviews to the participants for their feedback so that if they wanted to make changes or clarify they would have the opportunity to do so.

This method of affirmation, known as “participant validation” (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 197) or member checking, reinforces the collaborative nature of ethnographic

research and allowed me to receive input from the participants about my interpretations. Utilizing this technique ensures clarity of meaning and lack of misinterpretation. In addition to the transcripts of the interviews, I also sent the applicable chapters and findings to the interviewees for approval (Merriam 2009, 217). At this time, I also notified them that they could take any of the information off the record. I had only one instance of this in which one participant mentioned the name of a dance studio and requested that I not include it. I removed it immediately. If participants were not in agreement with my findings, I re-evaluated the data. Although I did not have any major disagreement, I had multiple participants enlighten me on details ranging from changes or locations of classes I mentioned to suggesting social media sites. In particular, a participant recommended one social media site wherein dancers were tracking progress of a series of exercises performed daily. I did also get feedback about the interpretation of the role of leader and follower at Oxygen Tango and I revised with more nuanced language. In all cases, once I incorporated feedback, I re-sent the document for final comments.

I should also note that although I heard back about most of the interviews, only about half of the participants read and responded to the chapters. The majority emailed and said they would look it over at some point and felt confident that they were respectfully represented. Regardless, I did receive important feedback from a number of participants and thus, this technique did achieve the goal of further including the participants in the later stages of the process, ultimately serving to enhance the credibility of this research.

Transferability

To achieve transferability, or the applicability of the components of the study to other populations investigating similar phenomena (Ravitch and Carl 2016, 189), I was transparent in the process, revealing my positionality at the onset of the study (and in this chapter). I depicted in detail the components of the study, particularly the steps taken in coding and analysis. This step insures comparability of process and results. In addition to the comprehensive approach to coding described previously, I discuss here two components of the coding process that disclose aspects of my positionality.

During the interviews, I was acutely aware of the language of my questions. Concurrently with the data collection and analysis, I had continued to read theory that scaffolds this study. The theory reflected my effort to better understand what participants were describing. For example, in some cases I would hear recurrent words/themes in the data and attempt to locate supplementary information that would help me clarify the meaning. However, I was careful not to let these concepts and themes infiltrate my language to the point where they would guide the responses of the interviewees (Rubin and Rubin 2011, 195). Through a close examination of my analytic memos, I noticed that theoretical language appeared concurrently with my reading, but it did not shape my questions nor guide the participant responses. As an example, at The Sweat Spot, the word “vibe” came up a number of times across a majority of interviews. I noticed that it actually usually came out of my simply asking “What draws you to The Sweat Spot?” I was curious about the energy, or affect, of the studio. I then would next ask, “Could you tell me a little bit about what “vibe” means to you?” We would continue from there and I

would attempt to remain open in my approach. During the coding process, I noticed that particular line of questioning often led from vibe to energy to emotion/expression. At the time, I was reading theory about affect, which is linked to how I wound up interpreting energy, but the theory remained free-floating as the participant data guided the direction of the study.

I also examined my biases through the coding process as they might appear in the research. I listed codes that related directly to the research proposal or questions with brief descriptions in a designated codebook. Through the process of creating a codebook, I tracked assumptions as they were revealed in the prioritization of data. The codebook offered me an overview of what was included or omitted in the research process, revealing any gaps. Creswell advises that the researcher include “negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes” as these different perspectives add credibility to the study (2014, 202). As such, I did include data that seemed oppositional or contradictory to emerging themes; however, I ultimately noted that there were apparent points of consensus in the data pool and these were more applicable than the slight variations. Further, in comparing the results with findings from similar studies and existing theory, I affirmed that this dissertation aligns accordingly and thus, ultimately provides transferability that can be utilized in broader research contexts.

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl, dependability “entails using appropriate methods (and making an argument for why the methods you use are appropriate) to answer the core constructs and concepts of your study” (2016, 189). To achieve this, I was thorough

in descriptions of design, purpose, and methods, as well as detailing how and why the participants were selected and how the data was handled for analysis. I discussed interpretations of the research findings as well as triangulated different sources of data to establish a confluence of information (Creswell 2014, 201).

Triangulation specifically involves, “convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell and Miller 2000, 126). This can include varying data sources, theoretical perspectives, or methods (Schwandt 2015, 307). In utilizing complementary data sources—from online materials, and casual conversations—I triangulated connections within the database and avoided overlooking key ideas that might not emerge from only one type of data. Further, existing theory can be considered a means to triangulate data as an important component of validity (Denzin 2017). According to Ravitch and Carl, using theory in triangulation helps researchers “from coming up with atheoretical findings...as well as encouraging researchers to broaden the relevance of studies by considering different theories” (2016, 196). Throughout the study, the interdisciplinary theory aided in the process of understanding the data without controlling its outcomes. This dissertation provides detailed justification for the approach to the study, incorporates triangulation to insure the stability of the data, and therefore, provides dependable results.

Confirmability

Similar to dependability, confirmability, or the effort to access neutrality for the researcher (189) can also rely on triangulation. I addressed confirmability through the writing of analytic memos, as a reflexive awareness that was concretized in the initial

research design. This allowed me to track interpretations of the data as they unfolded as well as to understand in greater depths my positionality and biases. Another key aspect of confirmability was to consciously follow the direction of the interviewees by asking for clarifications of terminology and allowing their lead to structure the direction of the interview. Through my analytic memos, I noticed a learning curve in my abilities as an interviewer. As I critiqued myself during the transcriptions in the memos, I came to understand that I needed to remain comfortable in periods of silence during which the interviewees might be thinking. In allowing these moments to naturally unfold, participants seemed more at ease and had more time to muse upon their responses. Ultimately, I taught myself to follow and not lead.

A researcher can also secure confirmability by including participant quotes directly into the write-up of the study. Coupled with member-checks, this anchors the study within the community and provides assurance that the data was correctly interpreted. As such, I have integrated quotes and paraphrased material that has undergone member-checks within the data chapters of this study.

Further Considerations

Before the onset of this study, I had specific concerns about a few aspects of the project. Given the difficulty of putting language to the phenomena I was interested in investigating, I was concerned about my ability, as a novice researcher, to guide the participants to describe something that might not be describable. Further, I was concerned about potential disparities in the types of data I would get through interviewing a cross section of people with different levels of dance experience and that the findings would be

relevant. I realized that in the research process I must remain present and open. I found sometimes that the more relaxed I was in both the participant observation and interviews, the more revealing the descriptions that emerged. I also realized that there is no perfect marker for what this project is, but rather, an effort to grapple with a very elusive topic that warrants engagement. This was validated by the interest that the participants displayed when we talked and what they experienced when they danced. Speaking to a cross-section of the populations at these two sites proved to further confirm that many of the experiences they are having, despite their levels or number of years dancing, were similar though expressed in unique and creative ways.

A further concern was the format for reporting the data. I sought to best capture the experiences the participants described while keeping the moving body at the forefront of the writing. I tried several approaches for reporting the data in order to integrate moments of kinesthetically rich descriptions, I settled on organizing each data chapter by the class or learning structures unique to the experience at the respective sites.

Summary

After initially struggling with what would be the best pathway to understanding interrelationality, moving bodies, and existing theory in dancing communities, I selected phenomenology-based ethnography as the appropriate methodology for this study. In the interest of maintaining rigorous ethical standards for research, I maintained a “horizontal perspective” described by Ravitch and Carl (2016) as focusing on “criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor” (13). A critical perspective is crucial, as the role I played also influenced the process of data collection. As an insider in the dance world, I brought

certain assumptions to the research. Although this is unavoidable, through the process of transparency and reflexivity, I attempted to disclose biases that influenced the research by utilizing analytic memoing, which assisted me in identifying my position as the research evolved. Through an in-depth process of coding the data, I was able to articulate specific findings at each site and discuss the intersections between the two.

The findings of this research study are not generalizable but indicate the dynamism of individuals, groups, and phenomena situated within these two specific contexts. The primary tenet of qualitative research, according to Merriam is to understand “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (2009, 13). Rather than focusing on a specific outcome or hypothesis, Merriam stresses that the researcher interprets data collection and analysis through an inductive process (15). The qualitative paradigm allowed this research process to shape the project, rather than the research being guided by an a priori hypothesis. As a result, the voices of the research participants configured the direction or emphasis of findings within the study.

CHAPTER IV

OXYGEN TANGO: DANCING TO CONNECT

Introduction

Oxygen Tango is a Los Angeles-based dance school teaching the fundamentals of Argentine Tango, an improvisational social dance that relies on a vocabulary of steps, strung together and embellished by dancers communicating through a corporeal language. After a few years of studying Argentine Tango with a variety of teachers, I became involved with the culture at Oxygen Tango, but without consistent commitment. Based on the richness of my experience and my preliminary research, which included publicly available information about the school's events and casual conversations with dancers in the community, I decided to deepen my engagement through a more formal empirical inquiry. During a four-month phenomenology-based ethnographic study, I explored how the practice of learning and dancing this particular form shapes the Oxygen Tango culture. I positioned myself as a participant observer in twice-weekly ongoing classes and recruited a pool of nine participants with whom I conducted qualitative interviews. I accessed online information about the community and joined social media groups affiliated with school. My intention was to illuminate the reasons why participants

identify with this dancing community,⁶ what they gain from belonging, and how they perceive of themselves as contributors to the culture.

In this chapter I describe Oxygen Tango, piecing together imagery and experiences contributed by participants and underscored by my own field notes and observations. I intersperse *cortinas* throughout the chapter. In tango, *cortinas* are short breaks between the dance sets; in this case, *cortinas* become interludes used as a rhetorical device to illustrate the components of the Argentine Tango experience—namely a class, a *practica*, or practice session, and a *milonga*, an Argentine Tango social dance event—that shape an understanding of how Oxygen Tango functions. I delineate the findings, which focused primarily on the concept of *connection*, an overarching motif of Argentine Tango in general and specifically at Oxygen Tango, whose byline is “The School of Connection.”⁷ Every participant described connection at some point during the interview process, not always by specifically utilizing the word, but noting some aspect of its varied meaning. I organize the remainder of chapter around three main themes that emerged from these interpretations of connection. The first, *Intercorporeity and Intersubjectivity*, examines how moving bodies in the space influence each other. Intercorporeity, a concept developed by Merleau-Ponty and elaborated on by phenomenologist Dermot Moran refers to “the dynamic encounter of one lived body with another” (Moran 2017, 38). Through tango, dancers manifest intercorporeal relations,

⁶ Judith Hamera utilizes the gerund *dancing* communities to describe, “where participants actively confront and engage tradition, authority, corporeality, and irreducible difference” (2007, 2).

⁷ <http://www.oxygentango.com>

often prior to or not reliant on physical contact; these relations lead to intersubjectivity, depicting how dancers develop common meaning through embodied interaction (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 465). The shared meaning is based in kinetic understanding and, although emotional or symbolic elements may be incorporated, it is first and foremost movement-based. Although the dancers did not explicitly use the terms intercorporeity and intersubjectivity (they are not commonly known) their prevalence at Oxygen Tango is evidenced through terminology, like connection. The second theme, *Body Tactics and Techniques*, analyzes how the tactics of dancing bodies and technique of Argentine Tango deepen community understanding. The third, *Corporeal Becomings*, utilizes theories of potential to examine how bodies interrelate, realizing possibilities for how dancers shape the tango experience.

From these themes, I contend that participants dancing at Oxygen Tango build reciprocal relationships in which they bypass verbal language and through practiced embodied exchanges—the technique of Argentine Tango—transmit meaningful cues that ultimately manifest as shared kinetic understanding, a centralizing principle in the community. Although the corporeal conversations materialize in couples, they manifest in the larger community via interrelational body-based responses, creating in-the-moment singular experiences. Continued engagement with this system reifies the cultural value of connection, which effectuates collective meaning and advances potential for what participants can do together.

Classical and contemporary phenomenological philosophers as well as current interdisciplinary theorists who blend philosophy, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience

expound on intercorporeity and intersubjectivity; however, these concepts have not been extensively explored in empirical accounts, charting how they manifest in and between moving bodies embedded in cultures. Further, the philosophical language of existing theory can be somewhat abstruse, obscuring accounts of what these ideas might be like in a lived environment. Phenomenology-based ethnographic research prioritizes embodied knowledge and provides a language that enlivens the potential for how these experiences manifest. In particular, at Oxygen Tango these occurrences are markedly detectable, not only in the dancing couples who engage through physical contact, but also amongst dancers in the shared space as the participants vividly describe their sensory awareness of one another and the impact of moving together.

Oxygen Tango

Oxygen Tango is rooted in the community of Venice, California by more than its physical presence in the storefront on Washington Boulevard; Oxygen Tango permeates outside the confines of the space. It is not just the bodies that come and go, tango shoes in drawstring bags slung over shoulders; it is the music tinkling out onto the street; it is the muted images of silhouettes clutching each other as seen through the hazy windows as cars whiz by. The tango calls out from the space, an enticing siren beckoning possible dancers to enter, connect, and sense their own bodies and others moving together in the space.

The location itself is by day a workspace for “hands-on making with sustainable materials.”⁸ Tools cling to the walls, every inch utilized for storage. A sign reads, “Nail it down if you want to keep it.” In the evening the workbenches line the perimeter, pushed to the side to make room for the dance floor; the functionality of the space becomes obscured by decorative candles and a mass of tango dancers bordering the walls. Some sit scanning the room for a *cabeceo*, eye contact that invites a nonverbal agreement to dance (Denniston 2007, 198), while others chat with friends. Oxygen Tango has been around for over ten years and many of the dancers have developed relationships that extend beyond the dance floor. The tango school even hosts non-tango related events—nature hikes, karaoke, and the like—to create bonds and build community.⁹

Sometimes in the cooler months, the windows fog up, obscuring the dancing forms from the outside. The effect from the inside creates an intimate sense of being suspended in a moment and because the music in the social dance of Argentine Tango is typically from the Golden Age of Tango (1935-1955) (Denniston 2015, 2) the vintage soundtrack enhances the nostalgia and timelessness. This dance is not a performance—as a social dance it does not exist to be viewed; it is a dance to be felt.¹⁰ The bodies feel the space, each other, and themselves, absorbed into the sensations of movement. They

⁸ <http://rediscovercenter.org/about-us/mission-vision/>

⁹ One participant also mentioned that some dancers in the community become tango DJ’s and learn and practice within the community. In becoming a tango DJ, dancers develop sensitivity to group dynamics from a particular insider/outsider perspective and make musical choices to support the collective experience.

¹⁰ There are performances within the context of Argentine Tango but most of the dancers who practice it as a social dance do so as an experience within a social setting.

generate an atmosphere of relaxed focus. The lines blur between bodies as couples mesh together and the dance floor fluidly rotates as a cohesive organism.

On any given Thursday night¹¹, participants have the option of three class offerings—an all-levels technique class, The Famous Tango Learning Lab, which is a signature feature of Oxygen Tango, and a *practica*, in which dancers can work on specific areas and communicate with their partners about improving. The class is instructed by established dancers in the community, usually a couple that teaches both the leader and follower roles. The instructors present *figures*, or short choreographies, constructed around specific steps. They offer technical tips and encourage the students not to simply memorize the figures but to integrate them into other familiar movements so they can be danced spontaneously. The Famous Tango Learning Lab is a unique model of instruction in which the participants are assigned levels and work in pairs to teach each other aspects of the dance, including cultural features of the Argentine Tango experience. Partners receive a small sheet of paper with a list or sequence of steps and terms. Often the higher-level dancers are paired with beginners in order to ensure that the material is being properly executed. Knowledgeable instructors are available for questions; however, participants in the class are meant to learn from one another, alternating roles of student and teacher. Partners rotate every fifteen minutes with an opportunity to showcase their work at the end of class. In the lab, participants ultimately

¹¹ The Oxygen Tango location and schedule for certain classes/events has shifted since the time of this study. The most up-to-date information can be found on the Oxygen Tango website: <http://www.oxygentango.com>.

learn to describe the movements and communicate on both verbal and physical levels with their partners.

One significant feature of Oxygen Tango is the organization's commitment to all dancers learning both roles—leader and follower—thus challenging gender conventions that might normalize women as followers and men as leaders. Tango has a history of same-sex *practicás*, notably men dancing with men, but this is more an outcome of the separation of genders and greater presence of men in Buenos Aires during the development of tango than of choice (Denniston 2015, 15). Various instructors mentioned during class and labs that learning both roles has the value of building sensitivity to what one's partner is experiencing during the dance. One of the participants, Risa affirms, "Knowing both roles helps the partnership during the dance. We understand what the other person is trying to do and can help each other or work together to make our connection more clear." This suggests that in learning to both lead and follow participants not only become more adept at the dance, but also develop better skills to collaborate.

As part of my fieldwork, I attended the Thursday night program at Oxygen Tango as well as similar offerings on Sunday evenings. Each time I arrived, the volunteers who sign students in at the door welcomed me warmly as did the soon familiar faces in the community. I felt an almost immediate sense of belonging. I wondered, how much of this is constructed by the fact that many of the people in the room have held each other closely, dearly? In a lifetime, we hardly hold a close friend as intimately or as long as we

do a tango partner. What does this holding and being held reveal about us individually to the community?

Richard commented on the tension in my shoulders today. The traffic was crazy. I do feel stressed. Mary noticed that my steps are bolder when I lead than last week. Am I becoming more confident as a tango dancer, as a leader, as a person?

What do our bodies tell each other as we silence our voices and transmit sensations through our fleshy, corporeal encounters? Some of the instructors teach us to care deeply for our partners, to put their experience before our own. In this environment, Argentine Tango seems to foster awareness through the focus on others during the dance; the dance simply will not work without consideration of one's partner. In addition to the attention on embodied coupling, one must also take into account the larger navigation of the dance floor, which engenders group sensitivity and dynamics. I sought to find out whether my participant partners had similar observations.

Together Dancing: Participant Partners in/and Oxygen Tango

The participants at Oxygen Tango come from a wide range of backgrounds including careers in creative writing, cooking, acting, sound editing, and executive leadership. They joined the Oxygen Tango community through varied circumstances—some had previous dance or tango experience and others were, as many say at Oxygen Tango, “newbies.” The school was recommended to some; others got their first classes through a “Groupon” and became so invested in learning the dance and the culture that, years later, they are still active members of the community. Others just happened to pass by the studio and were beckoned by the tango. As an example, three years ago, Esther was driving on Washington Boulevard in Venice, CA with her husband. They passed the

little storefront, noticed people dancing inside, and parked the car to take a closer look. Esther returned for a class a few weeks later and fell in love with tango. She now dances five or six nights a week. She supplements her training with yoga and other embodied modalities that enhance her biomechanics and improve her technique. She is no longer exclusive to Oxygen Tango as she seeks out more advanced and specialized tango training, but it is where her dance journey began, and she continues to participate as an active part of the community.

Whether or not they had studied dance before, generally the participants, like Esther, come to Oxygen Tango out of curiosity, often from seeing a tango performance. Geoff had been involved in swing dancing and happened upon the weekly outdoor *milonga* at the Third Street Promenade, a popular shopping venue in Santa Monica. The music, reminding him of his background in classical cello, peaked his interest. He found the pace of the tango inviting as opposed to the rapid athleticism of swing. Although he started learning from different Los Angeles-based instructors, he migrated to Oxygen Tango when it opened up in his neighborhood, rooting himself in the community. The curriculum was a draw as it focused on basics for beginners and was open ended for more advanced dancers to continue to grow. Another participant, Lucas, had a background in hip-hop, R&B, and salsa. On occasion, his salsa partners would incorporate tango moves and he was intrigued. He ultimately found his way to Oxygen Tango and became involved as a student and also as an assistant, committed to tango and social scene it created.

Both in interviews and casual conversation, the dancers at Oxygen Tango revealed that they identify with the culture because of the shared interest in the dance and the social interaction. They have the chance to move together and to get to know members of the diverse community. Maggie confirms:

What drew me to it [Oxygen Tango] in the first place is that it's beginner friendly. There was also a strong emphasis on community rather than just dance technique or dance steps. I was interested in getting instruction, but I also sort of started dancing tango here in L.A. because I was looking for a way to meet people, another hobby, and just a way to become more a part of the community. So, I felt like there was a strong sense of that at Oxygen and the people leading Oxygen were really cultivating that sense of community. It was very important to them and I liked that. And it was an interesting mix of people—people I wouldn't meet other places, people that I wouldn't meet professionally, and I just enjoyed coming so I kept going.

In a casual conversation, I asked one dancer why she attends the *practicas* at Oxygen Tango and she responded, “Where else can you meet a Beverly Hills realtor, a neurosurgeon, an Egyptian comedian, and a dentist all in one night on the same dance floor?” In addition to the various careers, I also took note of the mixed ages of the dancers—the range, as a rough estimate, spans from eighteen to the mid-seventies. It is not uncommon to see intergenerational couples dancing together. Tori, one of the participants in her thirties, described following another woman in her sixties as inspiring not only because of her skills as a leader but also the ease of dancing with another woman—there was a different sense of safety in the physical contact and expression of the dance.

The participants at Oxygen Tango are committed to improving their tango ability. Tango is a particularly challenging dance with continued room for growth. I did not meet

a single dancer who was “satisfied” with her level. I found this compelling—tango is not simply a pastime wherein one freely dances. Rather, learning is built into the process and the culture. For example, the majority of the participants spoke during the interviews of the complexity of negotiating all the details of the dance in one’s own body as well as considering one’s partner in sharing the experience. Developing increased ability allows for a more evolved dance experience. Tori states, “The more skill with your body and the more body awareness, you have more choices for what the next most comfortable thing could be.” Esther confirms, “So if I want to express my life and what’s in my heart and contribute and have a meaningful experience, (not maybe every dance, it's not one size fits all!), but if that's my intention then I have to be able to dance with every body type. That means I have to truly expand my capacity and be very active in my endeavor to have that capability.”

Classes and workshops are built into the structure of membership in the community. Participants may purchase one-off classes, *practicass*, or *milongas*, but most pay a monthly fee that allows open access to all the activities Oxygen Tango offers. The more advanced dancers continue to attend classes and work on complex movements, musicality, and form, or assist with classes for beginners. Through the participants’ statements as exemplified above, I understood this aspect of the commitment—expanding technical capability and increasing awareness—to be a means of furthering the depth of the experience. This is vital in how the community is structured as the diverse offerings allow participants to remain engaged and the school itself is supported via the ongoing memberships. Also, the process of learning through continued classes, which are

integrated into the structure, brings together dancers of all levels to share knowledge, as in the Learning Lab, which augments the community affiliation.

Cortina: Class

Class begins by dancing a tango to warm-up. There are no particular stretches or exercises that the dancers execute to condition their bodies, though some classes focus on repetitive drills through which to hone their skills. For the most part, concepts and steps are practiced within the structure of the dance. My background in Western concert dance makes me yearn for a stretch or two, so I do a quick bend forward, teetering in my low practice heels, feeling the tug of my hamstrings as they ease into length. I circle each ankle a few times and then look up, scanning the room. I catch the eye of a leader I know, and we meet on the dance floor to start the first dance. There are three warm-up songs this evening and by the third, I have reviewed the material from last week with two of my partners and had brief chat about an Argentine couple teaching next week in Los Angeles. They are, I am told, superb at breaking down basics and extremely dynamic performers.

After the third song, the instructors enter the center of the room, or the middle of the *ronda*, the line of dance—the counter-clockwise ring of dancers that hugs the perimeter of the space maximizing the room to move. They show a short figure—roughly four movements—that they perform with continuous variations in the direction and dynamics. It is difficult to memorize because the angles keep changing. They pause. “We are going to teach you a pattern but the pattern itself is not important. What do you see happening?” No one in the class responds. “We’ll repeat it again. Look more closely at

what's happening in terms of the axis." We watch as they repeat the movement effortlessly two times more. A student blurts out, "I think you're shifting the axis." "Okay, good. But how?"

The exploration continues until the principle is exposed. The shift of the leader's axis causes the follower to also shift axis. We spend some time examining this through the movement example the instructors initially presented and then are asked to find other possibilities for the same principle. We play with the idea, shifting partners every song. The instructors stroll around the room making comments and suggestions. "Can you relax your free leg?" (This is the leg that is not weight bearing.) At one point, they pause with my current partner and ask him to imagine he is a straw in a pan of Jell-O. He must cut pathways through the Jell-O rather than tipping the straw on a diagonal. The whole body moves as one piece.¹² We attempt the pattern again and it feels much more natural and on balance. Success! We thank the instructors and they move on.

The class ends with a brief showing of what we worked on and couples demonstrate how they incorporated the principle into other steps. The goal here is to teach foundational ideas that can be applied across of range of movements, creating more versatile, thoughtful dancers. The instructors end the class by telling us that focusing on

¹² As a brief disclaimer here, in my experience as a student and in conversation with participants, many teachers approach tango with differing ideas of how to describe the concepts and also what the actual biomechanics of the movement are. This happens even sometimes among different teachers within the same community and it is understood that students work with the material of the instructor with whom they are learning, but have the liberty to explore what works best for their particular level and physicality during *practicás* and *milongas*.

the concepts improves the connection, as the dances are more aware of each other's body placement.

Connection: A Multimodal Experience

The participants mentioned some form of the idea of *connection* numerous times during interviews and casual conversations as a pervasive concept that drives the Argentine Tango experience. There are extensive variations on the meaning of the term. Some of the participants described connection as purely anatomical. Jordan mentions, "The connection is the chest to chest, or heart to heart contact of the dancers," suggesting the connection is based in a tactile sensory-kinetic experience. Other participants described it in terms of the music—the music animates the connection, or the dancers connect through their mutual bodily expression of the music. Maggie affirms this by stating that it is not just about the steps, but also about "feeling the music together." Some participants discuss it as something almost spiritual. Esther states, "People who really immerse themselves in tango carry in their hearts some kind of deep yearning in terms of connection." This suggests that it is much more than the dance itself that people are seeking, but what the dance does for them, how it moves them both literally and figuratively.

Participants spoke specifically about a *tango connection* and on further probing, they mentioned that it includes many aspects of the dance experience: the connection to the dance of tango and all that it encompasses—the connection to the other bodies in the space; tango shoes and fashion; the body-to-body or heart-to-heart connection to another

person; the connection to the music; the communication between partners; the way partners dance together; the quality of the dance experience; the way in which one perceives one's own body through the experience of feeling oneself in relation to someone else; the connection to empathy or love for the other people in the community; the community itself and how it brings people together.

Based on my ethnographic notes and interviews, in this chapter, I contend that connection is a significant draw to Oxygen Tango and acts as a portal for communication between bodies.

I meet Luisa not by name, by handshake, or any common social introduction, but rather, with my chest, my breath, our shared interest in speaking through our bodies. In a few moments Luisa and I, like all the other dancers on the floor for this tanda, are immersed with/in each other, stepping as a system, while sustaining our own instrumentality, our own musicality, although at times we seem to respond to the same intricacies of sound, connecting to each other, and also to and through the music. Where does Luisa end and I begin? Where do we as a coupled system end and the dance floor begin? Dancers here foster relationships built on bodies-feeling-bodies. As we move together our bodies converse: Luisa's ribcage tells my right leg to poise in readiness for a step back; but just then, my right foot hears a mournful note on the violin and draws a small circle on the floor, an adornment that replicates the sound through the movement, bidding Luisa to pause; completing the circle, my right leg lengthens back in extension, conveying a readiness to move and Luisa steps forward. My torso reciprocates her slight advancing pressure connecting us through the vital pulse of sensation.

Whether through bodies-in-contact or bodies-sharing-space, participants dance together and acknowledge each other's presence. This recognition of acceptance amongst the dancers creates a supportive space, a necessary component for the dancers to hold each other intimately within both the boundaries outlined by the dance—the vocabulary, musicality, technique—and the roles within the dance—leader and follower. Connection,

as based on my observations and participant input, also seems to be a descriptor for a deeply human need to make contact, build community, care for others, and allow oneself to be held.

After identifying connection as a pervasive concept with multiple meanings, I sought to identify more specific intersections and divergences in participants' experiences and understanding of the term. How might I comprehend what participants are saying through a different lens? Within the overarching conceptualization of connection, what other motifs emerge from the data? What happens on the most basic level of bodies gathering in the space to purposefully move together and create shared kinetic understanding?

Connection: Intercorporeity and Intersubjectivity

Sitting across from Risa at a hip Venice coffee shop, I ask her to talk about her experience of herself in relation to others dancing at a *practica* or *milonga*. I take a sip of my iced oat milk latte and notice that she is describing the way that bodies exist together in tango by swirling her hands in space, articulating her fingers one-at-a-time like a slow-motion air massage. Although tango is a coupled dance, instead of interpreting this question as only two bodies, Risa is articulating how multiple beings and varying energies interact and produce the tango space. The circulating gesture seems to indicate connectivity between and among the dancers. Her movements start small but as she speaks, she elevates and expands her hands demonstrating that the reach of this connective force surpasses the intimacy of the couples dancing and permeates the larger space. As her verbal comments subside, her hands drift slowly down to the table and rest

on her iced matcha, and she leans in and sips. She is describing how dancers of Argentine Tango cannot help but influence each other. Every class, *practica*, or *milonga* can feel different based on the dancers there and how they interact. She gives the prime example that at Oxygen Tango many of the instructors teach the dancers that, once in the embrace, they should take a moment to breathe together before taking the first step as this can synchronize not only the couple, but also contribute to the larger group dynamic. Through the physical sensorial contact of the embrace dancers become attuned to each other's corporeal experiences and this is reflected in the way that they interact as partners and with the other dancers on the floor.

The Embrace: Data and Theory

During the research process I noticed that portraying phenomenological experience through available language often proved challenging for participants. Much of what happens in the dance is not verbalized. Participants frequently describe moments in which they felt they were merging with their partners or other dancers in the space. This seemed to generate a loss or suspension of their sense-of-self as they prioritized the corporeal connection with other dancers. Jordan speaks about feeling connected to her partner from the moment of eye contact and states, "there's a pull to their body, for our bodies to meet. Right before the embrace it's heightened and once we start to dance I lose myself to the experience of everyone in the space and how we're all moving together. There's some kind of unspoken connection between all of us." Tori affirms, "There's a loss of the sense of self because you've melded with the other person and also with the

world at large.” In these examples, participants talk about what is happening between physical bodies in the space, indicating an unspoken intrinsic connection.

Husserl illuminates an elemental aspect of how bodies influence each other that is useful to further articulate what the participants above describe. He asserts:

For I do indeed actually experience others, and I experience them not only alongside nature but as integrally intertwined with nature. But at the same time, I experience others in a special way: I experience them arising not just in space and intertwined psychologically with nature, I experience them as also experiencing the very same world I myself experience—I experience them experiencing me experiencing them. (Husserl [1931] 2003, 31)

This passage captures the potential reflexivity of the tango embrace. Merleau-Ponty elaborates on Husserl’s theory with his concept of intercorporeity. He posits that through the body we can experience a reversibility wherein human subjects touch each other and feel the sensation of both the touching and the touch. He determines that through this fleshy encounter subjects become “organs of one single intercorporeity” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 168), or as Moran further clarifies, bodies join within the world as an intercorporeal beings (Moran 2016, 68). Imagine here if I, acting as the data, were to embrace Merleau-Ponty, acting as the theory. I would feel his right shoulder under my left arm, supporting it while at the same time I could sense my arm through its relation to his shoulder. The reversibility of my self-feeling through the contact I make reflects back to me a connection, our bodies meld not just as a couple but, through our heightened corporeal awareness, with all the other dancing bodies.

Intercorporeity allows us the potential to identify ourselves as animate beings as well as to sense others in the space reflecting back to us who/what we are. It is important

to note here that for Merleau-Ponty, intercorporeity is not reliant on physical contact, that in fact he considers it as a relational occurrence between and amongst bodies (Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2012, 368). Daria confirms:

...Tango is like one body with four legs, the idea of like a big animal or something. You become part of a big animal. It's even bigger than that. It's like an animal with a hundred legs. There's this sense of being part of a nervous system that's larger and more complex than your own nervous system. It's aligned with the one of your partner, but also all these other ones, including the nervous system of the musical orchestra that is co-creating the dance.

Based on observations like Daria's, intercorporeity seems to be one of the ways through which participants describe connection—as a means by which bodies inevitably become components of a larger functioning system. Although they utilize terms, like connection, the attempt to capture the corporeal and relational components of the experience linguistically is necessarily enhanced by the physicality of, for example, Risa's hand gesture, to make up for what the familiar wording lacks.

Merleau-Ponty describes intercorporeity as a pre-reflective state (249) and as such it is impossible to capture the perceptions of the participants before their contemplations of an experience. In my field notes, I realized that as soon as I was in the act of writing about an experience, I was no longer having it, but rather, processing it as a previous occurrence. Often during my field research, I would pause to take notes, in one case sitting at a *milonga* to quickly write about how I vacillate between the embodied experience and my reflections on it. This clarifies how the intercorporeal component of the Oxygen Tango experience happens prior to consciously naming it; it is in conjunction with our reflections on our sensorial awareness that it comes into our consciousness at all.

However, the participants seem to sense its presence and desire a means to articulate this experience of intercorporeity, the invisible swirls of in-between-ness that flow around and through our bodies.

At Oxygen Tango intercorporeity seems to be a motivating aspect of engagement, offering participants a chance to have an experience led by bodily sensations. Participants seek this embodied connection as Tori exemplifies, stating that dancing tango, “can just be the body responding as opposed to me having to think about it. Lots of stuff happens without me having to think about it.” Tango allows the possibility for a deeper responsiveness to the senses through which the body becomes the primary source of expression and communication. Moran asserts, “the experience of embodiment is *also* always already expressive and communicative, intersubjective and intercorporeal, and intimately and seamlessly integrated into and mediating the social and collective cultural and symbolic worlds” (2016, 57). Here Moran affirms that intercorporeal and intersubjective happenings occur when bodies assemble. As Daria proposed above, participants become part of a larger experience and that sense of merging into a larger ecosystem of dancers is appealing.¹³

¹³ In a member check one of the founders of Oxygen Tango informed me that built into the construct of the community was an explicit philosophy about tango being a force for good in the world. This philosophy posits that contributing to the bigger picture improves the dancing experience. As such, from the onset one dollar of each entrance fee to the milongas went to plant a tree. Over the years, Oxygen planted over 12,000 trees.

From Intercorporeity to Intersubjectivity

Many of the dancers at Oxygen Tango discuss seeking both a personal and shared experience. Jordan asserts “tango helps me work on myself and as I process stuff—whether it’s psychological like feeling uncomfortable dancing that closely with someone or just improving my balance—I want to share those experiences because I have more fun dancing and I can dance with more people and have it be successful.” However, the data suggest that it is not just the shared experience; participants seem to be seeking a connection of shared understanding. As intercorporeity manifests and becomes articulate—we become aware of the influence of other bodies sharing space—it transitions from an intercorporeal experience to an intersubjective one. These two states, intercorporeity and intersubjectivity, rely on multiple bodies in the same location and are closely linked and often discussed together; however, they have differing implications. Psychologist Shogo Tanaka (2015) affirms that intercorporeity (intercorporeality) “focuses on the relation between one’s own body, and that of the other to illuminate intersubjectivity and social understanding in an alternative way” (461). When bodies come together, intercorporeity is a given; intersubjectivity deals more specifically with how the bodies shape experience. Husserl addresses this relational structure, stating, “I experience each and every thing in myself, in my transcendental conscious life, and I experience the world not merely as my private world but as an intersubjective world, one given to everyone and making its objects available— a world in which others as others are at the same time there for one another, for everyone” (Husserl [1931] 2003, 31-32).

Through the lens of this theoretical language, Jordan is pursuing an intersubjective experience, based on apperceptive congruency between dancers.

There are personal lessons within the practice and yet the dance of tango is not a solitary affair. Although the colloquial expression suggests it takes two, this study contends that participants respond to the draw of the community for the social and cultural possibilities produced by a multiplicity of dancing bodies or its intersubjective potential. If intersubjectivity refers to how animate beings generate common meaning through embodied interactions (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 465), it becomes necessary to uncover more specifically what the meaning is that Oxygen Tango participants produce.

Participants describe the phenomenon of shared meaning in myriad ways. For example, Jordan explains, “In moments of flow with my partner, I feel both understanding and understood.” Esther recounts a similar narrative, calling these moments the “Holy Grail” of tango, or the type of tango connection that once dancers feel, is the pinnacle experience they seek. Esther expounds:

It’s like one mind and four feet kind of feeling. ...Once you've found it and experienced it then you're always trying to recreate it. ...But ultimately, it's like this connection to self, the other, and the environment that feels kind of uninhibited. It feels like being fully present and the only way to experience it is if the other person is experiencing that as well—that uninhibited connection to self, the other, and the environment.

Tori affirms:

I remember the first time I had an experience like that pretty early on it blew my mind and I spent like so long trying to chase that, trying to get it back. I'm still really in the place where I just luck into it every now and then. If they're really good and we just happen to be really compatible or have a similar sense of the

music and I'm for whatever reason really relaxed and open and they're really relaxed and it's just kind of like a magic random occurrence almost. I think the more technique you have and the longer you do it the more you're going to have that experience. Somebody is giving you their attention. It heightens things in a way that helps you get to that state.

These examples convey co-created experiences that reflect a deep connection between partners. However, based on the data these types of occurrences happen frequently on a much smaller scale, often interpreted as a feature of the body-to-body communication the dance requires.

Meaning then is derived from a shared intentionality that is embedded in the interactions between dancers (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 470). The meaning itself is reliant on a feeling of “rightness” or an “underlying comprehensibility” about a stimulus (Hicks et. al. 2010, 967). Accordingly, “It is embodied subjects who coordinate which means that in these couplings there is also a coordination of meaning. In fact, meanings emerge, become aligned, change and so on through the interpersonal coordinations of movement” (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 471). The synchronous mergings with their partners that Jordan, Esther, and Tori characterize exemplify the progression from intercorporeity to intersubjectivity as not only a given because they are bodies together in space but rather, emerges from their coordinated efforts. This coordinated effort, which is registered as embodied comprehensibility, acts as a foundation for shared meaning: what it means to be in this culture, what it means to move in this culture.

Intersubjectivity and the Communication Connection

Intersubjectivity produces an aspect of connection through the language of tango, particularly as meaning is shared through body-based, non-verbal exchanges. As Esther

states, “There's the communication with the self, the other person, and the environment (including the music), or the other people in the room and on the floor. So those communications are just heightened in a way through this particular form of expression, this tango... So when does nonverbal communication happen? Constantly, constantly.” Rick corroborates, “You send a signal. You send information through your body and your partner receives it and responds in a way that makes the whole thing work.” These comments confirm the transmission of social understanding through the interactive movement.

There are depths to the possibilities of how communication is transmitted. In its most basic conventional sense, there is a one-to-one relationship between a signal or invitation to move from the leader and the response of the follower.

I sense Ronny's chest swell slightly, spiraling to the right in combination with an almost imperceptible shift of his axis to his heels. He is signaling a back step and in response my axis shifts to the balls of my feet, freeing my right leg to slide along the floor behind me in preparation.

However, to clarify further the follower does have agency in contributing “micro-content that fits within available time and space that is sometimes related to musical features.”¹⁴

Ronny's indications are slow, clear, dramatic. We pause, and I have already started to sense further information for the next direction—a back ocho (a figure-eight style step with varying degrees of cross-body rotation) with my left leg. I slightly bevel my left foot and tap it twice on the floor near the ball of my right before sliding my whole left leg to cross behind my right. Ronny feels this choice I make to play with the music through an embellishment and pauses until he senses my readiness to continue.

¹⁴ This addition to the more nuanced role of the follower comes from a contribution during a member check in reference to a publicly available online document “Tango Levels: The 22 Techniques of Tango” developed by one of the founders of Oxygen Tango. https://gdoc.pub/doc/146klPJqdxajsBSw83bFmLhNjQ_Bj9vRYiF7HtEt4VF8

Some participants describe the role of the leader as akin to how a master chess player might be thinking moves ahead of his opponent. In Argentine Tango, the leader may signal the follower information beyond the immediate move. Geoff states, “Even if we're doing a side step and it's slow, I'm also sending information...there's a side step going east and west but there's also some subtle information that north movement is happening next. So be ready for it. And all that happens in the blink of an eye.” Lucas affirms, “So if I do a side step that side step has information and it also says, we're going forward next and so theoretically, if my partner feels that we're doing a side step but we also might be doing a back step after that, that gives her time to do embellishments and other things because she has a general sense of where we're going.” In both cases, there is a technical capability that the dancers possess, but there is also a common understanding that they share in order to effectively transmit/receive this type of subtle information.

As established, there are steps and figures that are specific to the dance that once learned can be executed in a “conversation” with another dancer. However, sometimes even with the knowledge of the steps the signals can be unclear. Tori confirms:

Tango is a language that's totally physical. It's a very subtle language and there's a grammar to it. And the most frustrating thing as a dancer is dancing with people with whom I'm not understanding everything they're saying. I can tell they're saying beautiful things, but I don't have the language for it yet. I don't have the language and sometimes I don't have the technique to basically to hear it in my body and have it come out, sort of untouched by my manipulation of it.

Because the social dance of Argentine Tango is improvisational and no two dancers are alike, it can be challenging to feel the indicators that partners send to one another and interpret them accurately, especially for beginners. The shared meaning between partners

can falter. Geoff illustrates, “When everything goes wrong...this current partner is not on the same wavelength, not on the same page, not focused, or struggling just way too hard to do something that I'm not leading at all.” He offers the remedy: “I have to step back and simplify and it's like talking with someone who isn't that comfortable with the same language, so you have to choose a vocabulary that's much simpler. You have to choose ideas to communicate that are much simpler.” Esther affirms this in terms of the embrace, “My sensory awareness is based on the connection or person I'm dancing with—heightened or frankly, diminished. If I'm not in a comfortable embrace I can feel myself holding back and then I go much more into my head as opposed to into my body.” Regardless of whether the signals are clear or obscured, the interactive movement-based conversation is the basis for tango engagement, the platform on which the potential for shared meaning is built, and a foundation for the organization of the culture.

Using connection as an organizing theme in order to make sense of what is occurring in this culture and how these participants are describing their experiences, I have articulated the ways in which the social dance at Oxygen Tango co-creates an experience of connection. This connection is reliant on the dynamism of the group interaction. Intercorporeity and intersubjectivity provide a platform for understanding these interrelational exchanges between beings in the space. Through embodied encounters, dancers relate to one another through the common language and experience of Argentine Tango, establishing shared kinetic understanding through moving together.

Cortina: Practica

The overhead lights are bright, gleaming down on dancers who are paired off and appear to be in deep concentration—some pause to discuss what they are doing before resuming the embrace and tentatively trying to integrate ideas into their dance. A tango song, *Poema*, plays at a moderate level and conversations buzz over it. I hear one follower ask her partner whether or not she feels heavy. “I’m working with tension. I’m trying to make myself feel dense in the legs but still relaxed in the upper body. What does that feel like to you?” Her partner responds, “I couldn’t tell that much difference, but I guess I’d say you feel more grounded. You’re already on pretty good balance. Can we try it again so I can see if I notice more difference?” This interaction is one of many of its kind at a *practica*. A leader says, “I’m trying to lead a cross, but I can tell you don’t feel it. What do I need to do?” Although at a *milonga* there is limited conversation on the dance floor among dancers regarding technique, at a *practica* dancers share what they are working on and help each other improve. Once the agenda is discussed between partners, they resume dancing, attempting to sense the often-minute distinctions between weight, rotation, and energy in their partners. In this case, the real communication is not happening through verbal language, which is being used solely as a tool to enhance the depth of communication possible through the body. The ultimate goal is to discard verbal language in favor of inter-body transmissions.

Dancers of different levels work together. I partner with a leader who is more advanced than my intermediate level and I expect she may want to try leading a *volcada*, a more complex off-axis lean into one’s partner that we learned in an earlier class, but she

says, “Do you mind if we just walk? I’ll be trying to perfect my tango walk until I’m eighty.” She laughs. The dancers adjust to each other’s level and interests. Geoff stresses the importance of this at a *practica*, “you’re there to practice and work through things... I try to make a point of dancing with as many different people as possible in part just to make sure that the technique that I’m developing works, as compared to ‘I only dance with one person—that way she knows exactly what I tend to do and will recognize the moves/sequences with very little effort on my part.’” At a *milonga*, these explorations are not the acceptable norm, nor is stopping on the dance floor as it interrupts the flow of dance. Whereas in a *milonga* dancers rotate counter clock-wise on the dance floor, in a *practica* couples disrupt the continuity by pausing to analyze their movement and as a result, the bodies in the space appear much less organized.

In casual conversation as well as interviews, multiple participants acknowledge that they appreciate the experienced dancers taking time to work with them when they started dancing and now, they promote that within the community by doing the same. Esther states, “There’s never a *practica* that I attend that I don’t try to dance with at least one new dancer. I want to welcome them into the community and help them become a better dancer; I feel like it’s important to do so as a human being and as someone who’s respectful to others. If strong dancers hadn’t danced with me, then obviously, I wouldn’t have been able to progress.” This “giving back” is not only an act of patience and generosity, but actually functions to support the growth of the community. Risa confirms, “The dancers that are beginners now may be your favorite partner in a year or so. It’s worth it to make the investment.” This reciprocity and recognition of being part of

something lasting is one of the ways in which participants experience connection to each other, the community, and to their own specific tango journey.

Connection: Body Tactics and Techniques

I make eye contact with a leader I dance with regularly. We stand facing each other waiting for the song to begin. We make small talk about whether we danced at any *milongas* this week, and then he asks about my research. (I introduced my project to the class on multiple occasions and posted flyers inviting potential participants to become involved.) I mention that I am thinking about what constitutes the technique of tango. I ask him what aspects of the dance he considers part of the technique. At that moment, the first bars of the song begin. He holds his left arm up and I settle my right hand in his. We ease into the embrace. We begin dancing with close contact and focused concentration. It takes half of the first song to understand each other's cues. Once we are confident in our ability to communicate physically, I can feel our bodies relax; we are settling in to how each other moves; we separate slightly into a more open embrace and he muses on my question, composing a somewhat extensive list. Technique, according to a casual conversation with Joe includes: executing all the steps correctly, the embrace (how the dancers hold each other), the amount of pressure in the signals from the leader to the follower (part of the technique is honing it so that it is just the right amount and the follower does not feel pushed around), staying on one's axis (staying on balance and properly aligned), and integrating musicality.

During the course of the evening, I poll a few other participants and they mention the same criteria adding only etiquette and knowing the culture (understanding the

traditions and conventions in Argentine Tango). The website for Oxygen Tango does not explicitly describe the technique necessary for tango but does specify some integral movements taught in the weekly all-levels class that were not mentioned specifically by the participants I polled: walks, pivots, turns. In my observations and from my background in dance I would add: improvisational skills, *adornos* or embellishments (decorative additions made by the leader or follower with the free—not weight-bearing—leg), and spatial relations.

This list assembled by the community, the website, and my own assessment, reflects the expanse of criteria involved in the technique; I begin to consider the *goals* of technique. What do these conditions allow the dancers to experience? Again, I pose the question in casual conversation. I speak first with Samantha, who began dancing tango wanting to lead, but also follows. She informs me that technique serves the connection and the connection serves the dance. People are searching for the perfect tango connection, but until a dancer has at least some technical skill, the experience will fall short. I chat with three other dancers, two of whom mention technique in relation to connection and one who posits that technical skill enhances the dance—the more advanced the dancers, the more enjoyable the experience can become. So, then it seems that the training and technique build ability and connection, which renders the dance more satisfying and enhances shared kinetic understanding. As previously described, the more proficiently the dancers communicate (based on skill level, technique, and connection), the more effectively they share meaning.

The training contributes to the community at Oxygen Tango; dancers take classes to advance technical skills, which in turn develop the connection, which ultimately enhances the dance's potential. The better the experience for the dancers, the more likely they are to continue to dance, building the community. Participants discuss technique through practices that relate to the body/movement—learning vocabulary, developing skills and sensitivity in the body to execute the steps with proper form. Although, there are integrated cultural aspects of the technique (both of Oxygen Tango and Argentine Tango)—etiquette and floor craft—I focus on the key components of the technique here that participants described as based in sensory-kinetic first-person experience.

Technique: Vocabulary, Skills, and Sensitivity

Dancers learn a vocabulary of movements, which can be strung together accordingly to form intricate phrases that reflect the sensibility and musicality of the dancers. Maggie states, “If someone leads you into an *ocho*, you do an *ocho*; if someone leads you into a cross, you do the cross. There's that element of it which is pretty mechanical just based on how the torsos are placed. But then there's also the other level of feeling what the other person is feeling and trying to match on that level as well and that's the more satisfying type of communication to me.” Maggie is describing how the technique teaches the steps, but once that is communicated and understood another layer of technique expands the capacity for the dancers to inhabit the music, or dance with musicality and again, this deepens the connection.

As a platform to analyze the technique, I utilize Hamera's scholarship, which presents technique as the means by which community is formed. She asserts, “Dance's

communal enchantments are intimately linked to technique's lexical function of making the body legible in a shared idiom" (2007, 13). This is precisely the function of the vocabulary of Argentine Tango. This aspect of technique integrates the corporeal knowledge of the steps to a point where they are no longer the central focus and other components of the dance can take precedent.

As Maggie noted, the dancers must pay attention to one another. For example, the leader must consider the follower's ability and musicality, adjusting choices accordingly. Some of the comments, particularly from participants who primarily identify as leaders corroborate the necessity of the leader to exercise sensitivity to the follower's level of dance. The idiom is no longer "shared" if the dancers do not consider one another. Lucas elaborates, "depending on who I'm dancing with, I'm trying to figure out her tango, how she moves. And then I try to mold into that and then lead from there. If it's someone I've danced with and have a history with it's a little bit more automatic because we know each other's movement, we know how to communicate with each other." Jordan adds:

I use almost the whole first song to figure out the level of my partner if I haven't danced with them before. Sometimes I can tell right away but sometimes, if they have other dance training, it can be a little deceptive. They may seem like they know what they're doing but when I lead a more complex step, they've just never done it before, so they don't know what it is. It's like using a fancy word; you kind of need to explain it so you both get what's being said.

This aspect of adjusting to one's partner reflects the quality of connection, reinforcing or exemplifying Hamera's lexical function of technique, which links the previous sections and discussion of shared communication. Whether leading or following, each dancer is

responsible for her partner's safety and well-being; the collective experience is the focus of the dance.

Dancers at Oxygen Tango describe the ways in which they take into account their environment and make often-imperceptible shifts and changes to adjust to conditions they perceive. Lucas states:

The first day you ride a bike you can't just ride without your hands on the handlebars. But somehow over time you can balance yourself and you can ride without using your hands. So, it's a whole-body awareness kind of thing. Because depending where you are, there's all kinds of stuff happening in the front and the back of you and I have to keep my partner safe and manage the space and still have us dance. So, I don't have to think about it as much as I used to when I was first starting because now, I guess I have this whole-body awareness about my space around me.

They also discuss an incorporation of their partner's body into their own field of perception. Geoff states, "Just from the connection of the upper body I know where the follower's feet are. I don't have to look at them." As partners increase sensitivity to one another, some describe a concept that appears in scholarship on body schema. Grosz (1994), following Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, discusses the body schema as a pre-reflective system of self-monitoring in which the body interacts with the environment through regulation of posture and movement (66).

In Geoff's case, the incorporation of his partner's body and in Lucas's, the extension of his awareness into the space, exemplify the concept of schema in which another's body or the space itself becomes an extension of the dancer's own bodily field of awareness; it is as though it belongs to his body. Within this schema, there is a sense of embodied knowing. Phenomenologist Shaun Gallagher discusses body schema as "a

system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring” (2005, 24). Gallagher analyzes in detail the effects of proprioceptive awareness, consciousness, and perception in relation to how the body functions to receive, analyze, and respond to its environment. He affirms, “In dance, for example, I may in some instance be conscious of precisely where my body stops and where my partner’s body begins. In a certain movement, however, to maintain proper balance, my body has to take into postural-schematic account the moving extension of my partner” (37). Geoff explains, “I think about dance for my partner as weight management. Do I know where her weight is? If I’m feeling the need to do some kind of movement, I have to manage where her weight is and even pivot that weight on whatever foot.” As a leader, Geoff must always be aware of which leg his partner’s weight is on as it shapes his decision about which movements to execute. He trains his awareness of this important feature of the dance through his sense of the follower’s body as he feels it through his own body rather than a visual assessment; his body actively perceives hers and adjusts accordingly. The incorporation of one body into another through body schema allows heightened sensitivity to what leg is free and therefore what movement is possible.

The body schema is extended—as Risa so adeptly illustrated with her fingers in the air to portray how bodies in tango affect each other—through the practice of dancing the tango. Looping back to the dancing warm up for class at Oxygen Tango, perhaps this approach hones the awareness of one’s partner and the other dancers, training the senses through both the contact and the spatial relations.

As the dancers embrace, they make contact in the arms and the chest. The technique of the embrace is discussed frequently in the classes at Oxygen Tango. If the embrace is too rigid, it is difficult for the signals to be transmitted; the field of potential perception is diminished and instead there is tension between the bodies. Geoff states, “In a way your sense of touch—more so than your sense of sight or hearing—can give you a feeling for what's going on in the room.” So, there is a priority on the awareness of the quality of the touch. Behnke distinguishes between *touch* and *contact*. She considers *touch* as two surfaces convening and *contact* as, “a mode of sensing ‘through’ immediate spaces and surfaces into invisible spatial depths” (2005, 74-75). Jordan elaborates on this idea stating “There are times when I dance with someone who I feel fine about, but our bodies end at our respective skins and other times when I feel like I blend with my partner. We have some kind of deep contact through the embrace like we’re reading each other’s souls through the dance.” This is substantiated through other participants’ comments that the quality of the embrace, of the contact, impacts the dance and can inhibit the connection.

The difference between touch and contact is a felt sensation and as such, difficult to describe. However, it seems that touch is more superficial, whereas contact transmits information through the body. I considered contact from the vantage point of action. What does contact *do* for the dancers? Movement researcher Gerda Alexander analyzes the distinction between touch and contact and posits that contact can lead “to a dynamic expansion of each individual member of a group toward a genuine togetherness” (1985, 28). Here the dynamic quality of the embrace generates an intersubjective experience

beyond the dancing pair and into the broader dance space. The embrace, when executed dynamically, connects the dancers through and beyond the point of physical contact.

Technique as a tactic for improving movement and as a means to integrate cultural practices assists participants in refining their ability to dance while cultivating connection to the community. Connection, as a broad range of aspects of the Oxygen Tango experience, seems to be part technique and part shared intention. The depth of the experience is enhanced by the components of the technique. By developing shared understanding through existing vocabulary and enhancing bodily awareness and sensitivity, participants advance the culture—deepening the possibilities for what they can do together.

Cortina: Milonga

The dance floor is empty. Daft Punks’s “Get Lucky” is blaring from speakers set on the floor at either end of the room. In most other social dance situations this song would be a draw for pulsing bodies to sway together, friends in groups with elevated hands snapping fingers in the air as they step, keeping time to the even, seductive pulse. But here, the floor is a void, a space that still holds the palpable conclusion of some entangled prior moment, a space that occupies the potential to again be the canvas upon which moving bodies shape messages of closeness, secrets whispered without words, an intimacy of limbs.

Sweaty dancers crowd the perimeter of the floor reaching for a quick sip of water, brushing sticky strands of hair from their foreheads. A man with a drenched shirt pulls

the fabric away from his chest and makes swift fanning motions—an ineffective attempt to air out and dry off in the few seconds before the next *tanda*—a series of three to four songs by the same orchestra that makes up a “set” during which partners stay together to establish communication and connection (Denniston 2007, 208). The dancers clear the floor for this break between *tandas*, known as the *cortina*, in order to switch partners (199). Snippets of conversation can be heard all around:

She looks elegant.
I’m all over the place today. I’m going to take off my heels.
I couldn’t feel his lead.
He’s fun to dance with. You should definitely get his attention.
I wonder where she got that dress.

“Get Lucky” fades out, replaced by a tango song from the 1940s—the quality of the recording scratchy and brittle in contrast to the glossy pop song. The dancers break off their conversations and begin scanning to initiate the *cabeceo*. Some dancers move around the room for more optimal vantage points to navigate the sea of eyes. Others stay planted, searching for possibilities. “Make yourself seem available if you want to dance,” said one of the teachers during class a few weeks before. Intention manifests in posture and I notice spines emerge out of rooted pelvises, shoulders soften down away from ears revealing long necks supporting faces immersed in the process of securing contact. Through crowds of people, eyes lock. Smiles, tilted heads, and almost imperceptible nods seal the agreement. Dancers at a *milonga* have the choice to glance away from initial eye contact, effectively not committing to a dance. This process eliminates the more traditional western approach of verbally asking a person to dance and provides a simple means to accept or decline. In addition, participants cannot always be certain that the

person they think they are making contact with is looking at them and not at someone just behind them slightly to either side; as a remedy for this potential confusion, followers wait for leaders to approach. The intended partners rarely speak as they make their way onto the dance floor and position themselves in the line of dance. Face-to-face they may briefly introduce themselves, sometimes a quick kiss on the cheek for acquaintances or a few words of small talk.

My partner, James, an accountant with whom I have danced on a few occasions, is a courtly man in his sixties with a polished look that matches his gliding dance steps. As it is common for leaders, James offers his left hand up and I move in to drape my left arm around his shoulders, settling my hand on his mid-upper back and feeling the fabric of his dress shirt melded with perspiration into the form of his spine. Followers typically set the embrace, determining the proximity of the dancers. In a “close embrace,” which is most common at this *milonga*, the dancers are chest to chest. Dancers may maneuver in and out of “close” and “open embrace,” shifting so that there are a few inches of space between bodies. This allows for a more comfortable dance for beginners as well as an opportunity to execute bigger and showier movement for more advanced dancers if the space allows. In close embrace, dancers’ faces almost touch and steps are often smaller, adjusting as necessary to a more populated dance floor. I place my right hands in James’s left; he wraps his right arm comfortably around my back at the bottom tips of my shoulder blades. The embrace is fitted but not stiff as it sometimes is in ballroom styles; it is by necessity fluid and flexible given that the dance is improvisational. Dancers work for years to perfect their embrace so that it stays relaxed, offering just enough support

without stifling the movement. James and I breathe in and exhale together, tension drains out of us and our bodies dissolve into the embrace.

Connection: Interrelational Becomings

You never know how a dance is going to turn out. You make eye contact with someone, and even if you know them and had a great dance last week, you could just not ‘click’ tonight, and it could easily feel off. But I think that’s one of the things that draws me to tango. Everyone is searching for those experiences where it all lines up and it’s magical. The channels of communication are clear. The potential for anything to happen in any given moment is exciting and I can feel that energy, but I stay present in the moment and experience each and every sensation as the whole thing unfolds. (Risa)

To this point I have argued that dancers co-create the experience in tango; no dance is like any other. Each *tanda* brings something into being that, as it is becoming, is also vanishing. From moment to moment, the dancers have potential—they make decisions that manifest in movement. Cultural theorist and political philosopher Erin Manning (2009) constructs a language to articulate the relationship between thought, sense, and movement. One of the terms she proposes, preacceleration, speaks to the moment of intensity experienced just before the manifestation of action. Advocating for motion rather than stability, her philosophical work is particularly applicable as her background in dance and Argentine Tango lend specificity to this project, and I consider this term specifically as a way to further understand the data. In considering Manning’s concept and in thinking about Risa’s comment about potential, I asked some of the participants how the tango begins, and they responded in various ways.

How Does the Tango Begin?

The tango can sometimes begin days before the actual partners step face-to-face into the line of dance. The feeling of a dance coming on is described by Tori as a deep tingling sensation, a feeling so inevitable that those who sense its call cannot resist its manifestation. And then, at a *milonga*, dancers' gazes meet across the room through the *cabeceo* and the moment is initiated. Some participants suggest that a tango begins with this gaze into a partner's eyes; others say it is the physical embrace; still others, the first notes of music and the anticipation of a step, bodies pressed together, breathing synchronized. In all cases, participants describe an intra-body communication, a convention within which the knowledge of an impending dance is founded, but also something more, something that exceeds convention. This suspension of verbal interaction heightens the body's awareness and as Jordan eloquently suggests, "We stand poised in silence waiting for the moment of movement to overtake us. There is a stillness or concentration not only between each couple, but also in the space. All the dancers on the floor are connected in this experience. Everyone is waiting to feel the impulse to move. It heightens your senses to pay attention to your body in this way." This descriptive account affirms the intimacy of bodily interrelationality in Argentine Tango and the potential to transcend verbal language through sensory articulation.

The impulse to move described by Jordan is elucidated through Manning's concept of preacceleration, the instant before thought becomes articulated in action, a process of becoming. She argues that movement becomes thought and vice versa within an interval space of potential. Manning asserts, "These bodies in the making are thought

in motion. Thought here is not strictly of the mind but of the body-becoming. Thought is never opposed to movement: thought moves a body” (2009, 6). Lucas describes the moment before he executes a movement as a leader: “It’s a split-second decision to do something because the bodies are in positions that kind of feel familiar to some movement, maybe this is possible, and I might go for it. You’re trying to make sure each move is pregnant with where we might be going next.” In Lucas’s account, information is embedded in the detail of the lead but is still fluid. For example, his partner may respond differently than what he anticipates, and he will adjust accordingly. The body is a process that is never complete; it is always engaged in the act of moving, of making itself. Likewise, there is no beginning or end to the body’s movement.

In this way, partners shape the dance. Manning states, “We move not to populate space, not to extend it or to embody it, but to create it. Our preacceleration already colors space, vibrates it. Movement quantifies it, qualitatively” (13). The moment before the action seems to be when the communication between partners is shared and there is a heightened perception prior to the actual moment of movement.

The breath that we take seems to expand us in all directions, to intertwine our intentions, to send feelers from our bodies out to the dance floor. In this moment brimming with possibility, senses are activated, knowing something is coming, something unique to this moment, this breath, these bodies.

In my observations, I notice that often more experienced dancers pause in this moment, suspending time with their bodies before taking the eventual step. I sense no separation between them; they move as one being, weaving through the dance floor, inextricably incorporated into the larger network of moving bodies. The interrelationality of the

dancers both shapes and alters the environment from moment to moment in unexpected ways.

“La Cumparsita” (Traditionally, the final song of the evening at a *milonga*.)

Oxygen Tango is based on a culture of learning—learning the dance of Argentine Tango and through this process, exploring new ways of being in one’s body, communicating with others, and building shared meaning through the experience. Under the broad umbrella concept of connection and its multifold meanings, participants tune into aspects of the culture that animate them. Technique assists the participants in developing skills and awareness that contribute to their own development with the knowledge that working on one’s own technical ability improves the group dynamic and intensifies potential for what might happen during the dance and among the dancers. The practice at Oxygen Tango creates a counter narrative to verbal communication that exceeds the vocabulary of Argentine Tango and concretizes the possibility that alternate knowledge systems can not only evolve one’s perceptions of their own bodily potential (through the technical learning of tango and the increased sensitivity to or body awareness of one’s partner, the space, the qualitative dynamics of the movement) but can also actualize shared intention, which builds and strengthens the culture.

CHAPTER V

LET'S GO—ACROSS THE FLOOR! DANCING THE INDIVIDUAL AT THE SWEAT SPOT

Introduction

The Sweat Spot is an adult dance studio in Los Angeles that offers classes geared toward fitness and self-expression. The studio brings together diverse dancers, both professionals and non-professionals of all levels to effectively democratize dance. Although similar studios exist in Los Angeles such as Heartbeat House, LA Dancefit Studio, Swerve Studio, and Broadway Bodies,¹⁵ to name a few, The Sweat Spot is an influential contributor to the trend of adult studios because of its signature, accessible class offerings, opportunities to perform in recitals, and commitment of the teachers who come from a variety of dance backgrounds and create assorted class offerings that reflect their interests.

The studio's full name is *Ryan Heffington's The Sweat Spot*, after the founder/owner whose vision shapes the space, directing the style of classes offered and influencing the accessibility to all level of movers that the studio promotes. Heffington, a style icon with his shaved head and handlebar mustache, is a well-known dance instructor, commercial choreographer, performance artist, and costume/clothing designer. He has been active in the Los Angeles dance scene for over twenty years and was

¹⁵ The proprietary name for a specific dance workout housed in various studios around Los Angeles.

propelled into the world spotlight with his choreography for Sia's music video, *Chandelier*. The original version of *Sweaty Sundays* that Heffington introduced in his underground club became so popular, requests emerged for him to teach a weekly dance class for everyone.¹⁶ In 2008, he started *Sweaty Sundays* in a rented studio in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, and taught a diverse crowd of varied ages, mixed levels, fluid gender identities, different ethnicities, body shapes and sizes. The number of participants grew rapidly and Heffington eventually opened The Sweat Spot,¹⁷ adding a variety of classes and a cadre of teachers all promoting a similar belief in the potential of dance to elevate the spirit and build community.

Since The Sweat Spot opened in its current space in 2010, I have attended a variety of classes on a semi-regular basis. As an active dance artist in the Los Angeles community and a resident of the nearby Eagle Rock neighborhood, I took classes at The Sweat Spot as a creative outlet, a fitness supplement, and as a way to engage with friends and acquaintances by meeting them to dance. During my doctoral program coursework at Texas Woman's University, I wrote a paper reflecting on the technique of a particular class there, *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* and discussed it in relation to affect, which I contemplated as an energy-based (Brennan 2004, 34) practiced component of the dance experience, one that is considered "as social activity, woven in with other social practices" (Wetherell 2012, 114). For that paper, I collected data through participation,

¹⁶ <http://cargocollective.com/HEFFINGTON/filter/Ryan-Heffington%27s-Dance-Studio/THE-SWEAT-SPOT>

¹⁷ The classes were held at a different studio in Silverlake prior to The Sweat Spot's opening.

observation, informal interviews, and publicly available information from the website and social media. Based on the compelling data from this brief initial study, which seemed to indicate the possibility of an interaffective experience (which I explain later in this study as affective practice) that drew participants to the site, I considered a more comprehensive project to better explore this phenomenon—an in-depth empirical inquiry that would provide a more complex understanding of The Sweat Spot culture. During a four-month phenomenology-based ethnography, I positioned myself as a participant observer attending two to three classes weekly and recruited a pool of seven participants with whom I conducted qualitative interviews. In addition, I documented numerous casual conversations, accessed online information about The Sweat Spot, and joined social media groups that connected me to the community. My intention was to more deeply comprehend why participants attend The Sweat Spot, what they gain from belonging to the community, how they identify themselves in relation to the culture, and how they articulate sensations and perceptions of dancing with others. I then sought to integrate and analyze the data in relationship to existing theories.

As a starting point, I argue that The Sweat Spot dance instruction is predicated on particular pedagogical practices, constituting a technique, which rather than attending to specific dance steps, shape the culture by actively creating a space wherein the dancers can explore their individuality while simultaneously connecting to the community. I contend that the technique utilizes imagery and metaphor to encourage investigation of movement and its qualitative dynamics and also incorporates interrelational body-based occurrences—intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect—as a tactic for both feeling

connection and manifesting it. Through interaffectivity, body-based exchanges of affective states (Thankdeka 1997, 91), dancers are influenced by and contribute to a cultivated positive energy that supports self-expression while generating collective meaning, which reifies the cultural value of individuality and reinforces its method of attainment as a community practice.

In this chapter, I describe The Sweat Spot in detail, merging the participants' illustrative experiences, fragments of casual conversations with other dancers, and short passages from my field notes. I introduce the participants and briefly synopsise the classes that I attended for this project, namely *Gaga*¹⁸, *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams*, and *Contemporary Modern and Jazz*, which reflect the broader Sweat Spot experience as confirmed by dancers who frequent a wide range of classes and my own observations. I then focus on delineating the components of The Sweat Spot technique that contribute to how it is physicalized and articulate them under the broad umbrella of *The Sweat Spot Technique: Dancing the Individual* through three themes. The first theme, *Technique: Together Dancing at The Sweat Spot*, examines the conditions of bodies sharing space. The second, *Technique: Imagery and Metaphor in/and the Body* examines how verbal cues convey movement quality. The third, *Technique: Affect and Affective Practice* reflects participants' frequent mention of a pervasive phenomenon of positive energy,

¹⁸ *Gaga* is an improvisational movement class developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin and is taught by instructors primarily trained in his program. There are two styles of *Gaga*: *Gaga/Dancers* and *Gaga/People* geared toward either professional dancers or people of varied levels, respectively (Gaga Movement, Ltd., 2019). At The Sweat Spot, I attended an open format *Gaga* class and therefore in this dissertation refer to the class simply as *Gaga*, although The Sweat Spot website more recently specifies the distinction.

which I discuss as affect, constituted by the instructors and dancers' interactions as well as other contributing factors—music, lighting, fashion, environment—which I implicitly integrate into the descriptive narrative.

As a rhetorical device to vivify the theoretical analysis, I incorporate brief sketches of The Sweat Spot experience drawn from my field notes, memos, and casual conversations with dancers. These excerpts are infused in a chronological experience, from an initial arrival at the studio through the elemental features of the classes—a warm-up, across the floor, combination, and *reverence* (a ballet term utilized in other western contemporary dance forms that signifies the end of class).

Because the phenomenology-based ethnographic methodology that this study utilizes prioritizes embodied knowledge, these vignettes provide a pathway through which lived experiences of theory are made manifest. The interdisciplinary theoretical framework I apply to understand the data blends philosophy and social and cognitive science and expounds on the interrelationality between bodies from intersubjectivity to affect (Fuchs 2017 2-23); however, there is limited analysis of these phenomena in relation to lived empirical accounts, particularly in dance cultures where they are often lucidly exposed. At The Sweat Spot, the potentiality of these vital practices is distilled to a heightened concentration through the culture's creative expression. Further, the language to describe affect is often self-erasing, its containment on the page suppressing its vitality as an inherently kinetic phenomenon. It is even considered by some theorists to exist beyond language (Massumi 2002, 25). However, at The Sweat Spot, affect contemplated through the lens of affective practice (Wetherell 2012) plays out more

legibly in/through the dancing bodies, as described in examples from the data. Research that leads with the body and experiential data offers a unique potential to contribute to the ways in which dance, as an embodied practice, builds community, and shapes culture.

The Sweat Spot: A Brief Overview

The line at the reception counter spills out onto the front steps of the studio entrance. The doorway is propped open by a young woman in her twenties with safety orange leopard print leggings and a black tube top. The warm sunny day merges with the cool interior, mingling the scent of street exhaust with the faintest whiff of sweaty bodies; no one seems bothered by the wait. The woman in front of me sets her large tote bag covered in political buttons on the floor at her feet, stretches her neck side-to-side, and rounds her upper back forward. I muse on “tax big oil” and “tits up.” Three dancers behind me chat about weekend plans. Two smiling, bright-faced attendants sign the students in one-at-a-time, taking payment and wishing everyone a good class. I register and pass through the short hallway into the dim anteroom lined with benches and shoe racks, dancers sprawled in stretch, chatting and texting. A large observation window exposes the studio, a porthole into a world of possibilities.

The Sweat Spot exists at the intersection of concert and commercial dance, of dance class as group exercise and dance class as self-expression, of the outrageous and the sublime. With its storefront on Sunset Boulevard, The Sweat Spot’s cheerful reception faces out onto the artsy neighborhood of Silverlake, where boutique shops, auto mechanics, coffee bars, tattoo parlors, and even an elementary school line the street, attracting an assortment of Angelenos all battling for limited parking. The entry is set slightly off the curb with a large mural on the perpendicular wall identifying the studio in a teal 1970s graffiti font. From the street I recognize the coming-and-going dancers often based on their attire, which ranges from typical dance gear—a leotard and tights—to more adventurous fashion choices—cheetah leggings with a hot pink top strategically ripped to expose a strappy green sports bra.

The community of The Sweat Spot spills out onto Sunset Boulevard and as the participants described and I witnessed, the surrounding shops act almost as an extension of the studio. For example, at the neighboring café, the participants fuel up with juice, matcha, and coffee, meeting friends before dancing or continuing conversations after class. One participant, Malin tames her curly blond hair into a fashionably disheveled bun as she tells me about a non-dancer friend who sat with her in the café before class and remarked on the number of people that either waved to her or called out “hello.” She said, “We’re all part of the community. And the class starts before the class—like somewhere on the block between Micheltorena and that other winding street.”

Dancing Participants

As part of the research process, I spoke with, danced with, and learned from a cross-section of participants from a range of backgrounds, levels of experience, and commitments to The Sweat Spot. Danae, a vibrant instructor and breathtaking performer, whose class I regularly took, started dancing at the age of two with her mom, a dance teacher. She talks about dance in relation to other physical activities as being skilled and highly athletic but also emotional stating, “You get to tap into your heart. It's everything. It's so special.” Another participant, Lani, pulls a polka dot sweater over her head and points to a hip vegan leather briefcase leaned in one of the studio cubbies as she divulges that she is an entertainment lawyer and regrets never taking dance classes when she was young. Her family stressed the importance of making a good living, but she now confesses, “It makes perfect sense to me that dance is part of quality of life. What’s a

good living if you aren't happy? I mean it may be different strokes for... [different folks], but some kind of art or outlet is really important, and I wish I would've known that sooner." Adina, a professional dancer who teaches, trains, and creates within a variety of styles, mentions that she views all of life as dance. She asserts, "Within dancing it's not just the movement, it's the stillness and everything encompassed within that. The moving and the not moving that is communicating between physical bodies; that is dance." The remaining participants have differing levels of engagement at The Sweat Spot, from taking two to three classes per week for the last few years to more sporadic drop-in students. They identify as part-time dancers, documentary filmmakers, musicians, and writers.

Participants come to The Sweat Spot for a variety of reasons. Danae became friends with Heffington through performance opportunities she had while in high school and college. Two first-time dancers who have exclusively taken classes at The Sweat Spot were encouraged by friends to try it and found it to be a welcoming community and a singular opportunity to express themselves through their bodies. Alex, a regular at The Sweat Spot who started dancing at the age of about twenty, mentions that he is drawn to the emotional and imagery-based content in most of the class offerings. A few said it was their method of relieving stress and a majority expressed that it was a much richer experience than the gym and they still got a good workout.

All the participants recognize The Sweat Spot as unique from other dance studios. Danae remarks that at The Sweat Spot dancers are encouraged to look at/watch each other. At other places where competition is important, people are "scared and they're

afraid to mess up. They're afraid to be themselves. They're afraid to breathe. Here...all that's out the window and you're just here to have a good time." Danae appreciates the social aspect of the space. She goes on to say, "People describe it as church, community." She meets interesting people from a variety of walks of life and different levels of dance. Alex depicts it as "a hip but relaxed environment where people come really to shake it out." He is drawn to the studio because "the teachers are involved," he agrees with their views on movement (that it should feel expressive and safe for each individual) and is drawn to what feels emotionally and physically good in his body. He finds that "a lot of non-dancers or non-professionals come to The Sweat Spot because they're looking to feel something different than they feel on a regular basis, which gives someone who is a professional dancer that freedom as well—to just come in, no inhibitions." When I chat with Adina at the café she also talks about how The Sweat Spot is not competitive. She confirms, "There's a vast range between novice dancers and professional dancers—you have everything in between. It creates a space where I find that most professional dancers that go there are way more comfortable. And having that comfort gives comfort to all the other people in the room."

In casual conversations I ask a few other dancers, regulars in the various classes I attended, what drew them to The Sweat Spot. One young woman had just finished her undergraduate degree in business and now works at a stressful job in downtown Los Angeles. She jokingly tells me she has a split personality, and actually likened herself to a mullet haircut (business in the front/party in the back) in that she has to dress in

business casual all week and then on Sundays she puts on her colorful workout clothes and “cuts loose” in *Sweaty Sundays*. She said at The Sweat Spot she can fully express herself; she is allowed to have fun; it is actually encouraged. Another student, Ernst, who presents as a thirty-something hipster, wears peach-colored dolphin shorts over maroon checkered leggings and a light turquoise tank top with the words: “Make Tacos Not War” across the front. He tells me he never thought he could be comfortable dancing until a friend took him to The Sweat Spot and he saw such a mix of different kinds of people and everyone seemed friendly. He expected to feel intimidated, but instead felt free. He loves learning new moves and did not before consider the different possibilities for how the body can be expressive. His favorite class is *Gaga* because of the free-form approach.

In these examples, the dancers note that the studio provides more than a conventional Western-style dance class might through the opportunity to express oneself, make new friends, and build community. Participants who self-select to be a part of The Sweat Spot culture seem to do so to have an expressive experience through the body that is multimodal—emotional, connected, kinetic—which is prioritized over the learning of steps, and this reinforces the focus of the culture as atypical in its efforts to promote individual exploration to enhance the experience of dancing together.

To round out this overview of participants and disclose contrary impressions of the studio, I conducted an online investigation to discover perspectives of those who might not self-select to participate at The Sweat Spot (but did try it based on their reviews). Although I cannot speak to the many people would *never* seek out this type of

dance experience. I found that of the seventy-six reviews on Yelp¹⁹ the vast majority gave positive (five stars) feedback. On the other end of the spectrum, of the six one-star reviews five were about the front desk service and administrative policies (lack of attentiveness of receptionists, how long the class cards are valid, the sign-in policy, and excessive class crowds) and not directly about the experience in the studio dancing. There were some in-between (under ten) reviews at roughly four stars, and these dancers mainly seemed to have a good experience and would return.

Classes at The Sweat Spot (*Gaga, Sweaty Sunday-Slow Jams, Contemporary Modern and Jazz*)

Let your limbs float and focus your attention on how that feels. Fifty sets of eyes drift to half-mast as our arms levitate to the side like buoys. How light can you be? Torsos elongate, sinewy spines drawing long from billowy tailbones. How much space can you sense between your joints? Helium balloons replace our elbows as they float in space; our shoulders soften away from tense necks. Drink the air into your lungs inflating your ribcage; we inhale together creating the sound of an underwater scuba tank. Breathe into the webbing of your toes letting them spread into the floor. We inhale more deeply trying to ground into our feet as our bodies swell with the expansive breath. Suspend your breath in a hover. In stillness, we pause. Sigh it out through the mouth and let the body soften into ease. We release the air from deep within our lungs. A faux velvet curtain covers the mirrors so the dancers can focus on feeling. It rustles gently and settles back into repose. An ambient soundtrack filters through the speakers as if it's being played in a room down the hallway of an old house with the door only slightly ajar, the music drifting on the air and filling out the space between the bodies.

The *Gaga* class is entirely improvisational and guided by prompts from the instructors that range from creating different textures in the body to changing tempos and intensities. The focus of the experience is to tap into new ways of moving, shedding habitual patterns. Although this style of class is not specific to The Sweat Spot (nor is the

¹⁹ <https://www.yelp.com/biz/the-sweat-spot-los-angeles>

contemporary modern and jazz, which I describe shortly), its emphasis on individual movement, accessibility to wide range of ages, levels, and abilities, its emphasis on dancing together, and the use of imagery and metaphoric language, made it valuable as a selected aspect of studying this site. On the website of The Sweat Spot, as adapted from the official Gaga website, it states that *Gaga* “improves instinctive movement and connects conscious and unconscious movement, and it allows for an experience of freedom and pleasure in a simple way, in a pleasant space, in comfortable clothes, accompanied by music, each person with himself and others.”²⁰ Reflecting in field notes I write about the *Gaga* experience as a group journey—I noticed that while I moved I watched and sensed others and both picked up on, and likely contributed to, their movement choices. So as my right arm sliced through the space, perhaps across the room, another dancer sliced her arm, or even adapted the movement to a leg, embodying the conception that the website lays out for the class—conscious and unconscious, with herself and others. Based on this description and my experience, dancers attempt what might be considered “free-writing” or stream of consciousness through movement. This type of thinking may not resonate in or through language, as it is non-propositional, but it does reverberate in the performing body and in those sharing the space.

In contrast to the entirely improvisational structure of *Gaga*, *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* and *Contemporary Modern and Jazz* reflect typical Western contemporary dance classes—a warm-up, movement across the floor, and final combination—and are

²⁰ <http://thesweatspotla.com/index.php/project/classes/> and also <http://gagapeople.com/english/>

comprised of steps drawn from modern, jazz, yoga, and 80s-era aerobics. Although there are aspects that are improvisational, these classes feature more choreography. Dancers less familiar with codified dance movements can follow along by watching the instructor or more experienced participants. Sheree, a dancer with warm eyes and a shy smile, professes to usually standing in the back to be able to “learn from the pros,” and also mentions the lack of need for words—the teacher often just claps or makes a sound like “hup hup” to change to the next exercise. She clarifies, “It sort of gets you out of your head. When you hear the signal to change you just sort of look around if you don’t know what’s coming and figure out what to do.”

Contemporary Modern and Jazz is less standardized in terms of movement and more dependent on the instructors’ design; whereas, the warm-up for *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* is mostly set as is the across-the-floor movement though it shifts slightly with different teachers. Some of the dancers I spoke with commented on the moment in *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* when the instructor (often Heffington) yells, “Let’s go!” and the dancers reply, “Across the floor!” The exultant class crowds to the left side of the room, lining up for the series of high-energy traveling combinations. I questioned one of the less experienced dancers about this moment as we stretch on the floor before class. Lee has been taking *Sweaty Sundays* and its spinoff *Slow Jams* version for a few months and could not believe the first time he heard the excited response; he had no idea what was going to happen. As he eases into a lunge, he explains that he has realized, “You get out of the class (probably like most things in life) what you put into it.” Further, Lee remarks, “I guess we all get that and just decide that this is gonna be the greatest thing

ever and then it kind of feels like it is.” Lee’s statement here seems to support the research findings, which I will discuss further, that the dancers co-create the experience by deciding to engage with and sustain positive energy.

Many of the classes at The Sweat Spot attract a following of devotees. I surveyed a mix of the regulars and a few people that popped into these three classes in particular, inquiring as to their experiences—whether they were loyal to a specific class and if so why/why not. A few mentioned they preferred specific teachers, but many in *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* and *Contemporary Modern and Jazz* felt the classes were somewhat interchangeable. Generally, the *Gaga* participants consider the class as a chance to research their own bodies and as Nichelle, a professional dancer who works with a company in Los Angeles, mentions, “This class helps me get out of my ‘go-to’ patterns for improv. It makes me a better dancer and I think a better choreographer too. I think it’s because I’m using more of my body in different ways than if I just put on music and dance on my own.” I note here (and I talk about further in the sub-section on affective practice) that the stimulation of the space—the energy created by the moving bodies, the vivid prompts, and the ability to look to other dancers for inspiration further shapes her experience. Sam, who has limited exposure to dance training (this was approximately his third class) states, “I am twenty-four years old and I’ve always been too freaked out to dance in public. This class is amazing. I get to do whatever crazy thing pops into my head, and no one cares how it looks.”

Despite the different class offerings at The Sweat Spot and the range in codification—some classes having a more open interpretive structure and others focus on

a particular style—the teachers focus on individuality. In all cases, there are choices within the movement. Adina reinforces this idea stating, “At The Sweat Spot individuality is highly, highly celebrated and so none of the professional dancers in the room look the same or dance the same.” The steps then, although certainly instructed and corrected, are not the sole focus. Rather, the technique reflects a pathway through the styles, through the teaching and participation to individuality and community.

The Sweat Spot Technique: Dancing the Individual

Western contemporary dance studios often focus on a particular kind of technique, which refers to both knowledge and ability and colloquially describes the fundamentals of dance training through which dancers work to achieve excellence in bodily control for optimal performance in a particular style (Pouillade 2017, 255), such as Graham or Horton Technique. However, based on the data, I propose that the focus for participants in these classes is on something different—a reconfiguration of technique that exceeds the “steps.” As such, I conceptualize the overarching technique at The Sweat Spot as centered less on the particulars of how movement is executed and instead reliant on consciously constructed strategies, which serve physical and stylistic exploration and reflect the values of the culture—expressivity, diversity, and community. These strategies are implemented through the instruction and perpetuated through dancer engagement; the classes, although presenting different material and styles, adhere to the larger mission of

the studio in that they offer dancers the opportunity to explore their own identity and creativity with supportive people engaged in the same process.²¹

According to the data and online promotional materials, The Sweat Spot seeks (through its technique) to build a sense of inclusion and community in various ways, one of which is to promote personal investigation through the collective group experience. To bolster this conceptualization of technique I draw on the work of Hamera (2007), who examines how community and cultural cohesion emerge from specific techniques of movement in the social space of dance. She expands on the potential of technique to communicate the community values and create a sense of connection as explicitly described in her comparison of dance technique to common language.

Dance technique is relational infrastructure. It offers templates for sociality in the classroom and in the performance space. Technique translates individual bodies into a common ‘mother tongue’ to be shared and redeployed by its participants: a discursive matrix, a vocabulary and a grammar, to hold sociality together across difference and perpetuate it over time. (19)

Although she describes what might be considered a more traditional rendering of technique (from a style that has a particular set of steps or vocabulary), I contend her construction is applicable here. The structure of technique I propose, which relocates the focus to inventive expression, realizes similar outcomes—connection and community bridging diversity (while fostering it). The instructors teach specific choreography in certain classes and/or verbal descriptions of movement phrases to inspire improvisation (as in *Gaga*) and the participants are tasked with exceeding the attempt to replicate

²¹ <http://thesweatspotla.com>

movement or ideas precisely and to instead include themselves, how they move, and who they are as a necessary component of the process. Jewel, a lifelong dancer and Pilates instructor at a nearby studio, who has been on again/off again in attendance at The Sweat Spot since 2010 stated, “I would say they're trying to promote an individual’s creativity and experience. It's more about the experience than how something looks on the outside, more so what they feel on the inside.”

Within this structure of individuality, the dancers are not performing isolated solos, but rather are encouraged to look at each other, engage with each other, and be inspired by what they see in other dancers. Lani mentions, as did a number of participants who dance at other studios in addition to The Sweat Spot, that she experiences a “breakdown of barriers” between dancers and she notes it happens because “there is less effort to be the best and more emphasis on...sharing stuff. The other dancers actually seem to like seeing people pick up on their moves or their timing. It kind of reminds me of being an ‘influencer.’ It’s very much built into our broader culture and the community here.” She continues, “But it’s not like people are trying to force their moves on you. It’s pretty reciprocal.” In the classes *Sweaty Sunday-Slow Jams* and *Contemporary Modern and Jazz* this often manifests in how the dancers interpret the musicality of the phrases and how they respond to brief improvisational moments regularly integrated within the classes. In *Gaga*, which is designed as an exploratory research class, the instructor facilitates the journey of the dancers, who generate their own movement but can play off

other dancers and are at times specifically invited by the instructor to pull from someone else's movement ideas or to send/receive energy to/from other students.

In one *Gaga* class, the instructor asked us to pick up on someone else's movement and integrate it into our bodies. Observing dancers in the studio during the exploration of this prompt, I noticed cross cycles of influence. A young dancer in parachute pants and a black tank shifted her flowing quality to sharper movements seeming to emulate a dancer moving with staccato limbs in the far-left corner. Almost as though trying on a coat, after a few seconds she shrugged off the movement and picked up on another dancer's seamless weaving of her body up and down from the floor. A third dancer noticed the floor integration from the dancer in parachute pants and began a similar simpler version of it, adapting the movement to her ability. Throughout the translation or the filtering of movement from one person to the next, each adjusted it to their particular bodies and ways of dancing.

Reflecting on the value of creative exploration the technique facilitates, multiple participants mentioned the moments of improvisation within the more choreographed classes as a highlight, as an opportunity for self-expression. Serena, a dancer who takes whatever class fits into her schedule each week, mentions a particular exercise in the *Sweaty Sundays* series (previously discussed as proceeding the call and response: "Let's go! Across the floor!"), in which the dancers form two lines and interact as they runway walk/dance in pairs, feeding off of each other's movement as they make their way across the floor. They create short duets together in a loop pattern so that once the dancers reach the far side of the room they sweep back around for another turn to possibly pair with

new partners. They cheer each other on, lauding the most inhibited to the most audacious. Serena considers these moments “a chance to really connect with someone and share their spirit. If you get with someone who is really feeling it, you totally feel it and you try to give it back to them.” I ask her to expand on what it is that is being transferred and she tells me, “it’s the energy, the amazing vibes.” I chat with another dancer, Mariah, as we put on our shoes after class, about these improvisational components. She pauses with shoe in hand, telling me that if she had known about it before she came she never (she flicks her shoe out to the right for emphasis) would have taken a class here, imagining herself too terrified to just dance. However, Mariah continues as she finishes lacing and stands up, because it is set up that “anything goes and everything and everyone is celebrated you feel free to just go for it.”

Participants also discuss this freedom from self-judgment in *Gaga* as the ability to transcend self-editing, which can feel like a restraint in the creative process. I spoke with Neal, a novelist with a shock of brown hair covering his left eye and a pair of thickset glasses he takes off for class and sets unfolded on a shelf at the back of the studio. He shares that the improvisational movement in *Gaga* helps him with writers’ block because it teaches him to “be in the flow,” and that “the flow is not about good or bad, it’s about how much you can feel like you’re in it and let whatever needs to come out, come out.”

In my experience in this class, the verbal cueing is carefully constructed to bypass what a movement is supposed to look like and instead access how it is supposed to feel. As an example, some typical cues from *Gaga* include: imagine your joints are filled with warm butter; feel the wind in your sails; your body is covered in feathers—move with

them and let them drift and resettle on your body. When imagery-based cues like this are presented, roughly forty dancers ages ranging from approximately eighteen to sixty-years-old experiment with these ideas in their bodies. As a central focus of The Sweat Spot culture, the instructors encourage dancers to inspire each other and the dancers, although their movement is individual, acknowledge each other, and connect through the shared encounter, manifesting the technique as both pedagogical and embodied.

Technique: Together Dancing at The Sweat Spot

A mob of dancers crowds to one side of the studio and morphs into pairs that “runway walking” together across the floor. Prince (“Baby I’m a Star”) blasts out of the speakers, the bass vibrations pulsing through the floor, a sensory reverberation that ripples up the bodies and seems to drive them on as if they are emerging from the ground, out of the music. Mimicking platform heels, the dancers strut facing each other high on the balls of their feet. *I’m a star*. A bold spray of energetic limbs accented by an occasional chassé, pivot turn—dance party meets Jazzercise meets Afro-Caribbean meets voguing—each dancer seems unique in that no one moves exactly alike and yet they feed off of each other’s movement, reproducing stylistic choices through the lenses of their own bodies. *I don’t want to stop til I reach the top*. The old candelabra reflecting off a disco ball hanging from the ceiling sends a shimmering pattern on the otherwise dimly lit floor, the walls, and the dancers. *Sing it, we all are a star*.

Dancers describe the experience at The Sweat Spot as being shaped by the other dancers, how they see and sense people in the space—moving bodies sharing space cannot help but influence each other. Adina describes, “One time I was standing in line getting coffee and started stretching, doing a little quad stretch. There was a girl standing next to me and sure enough two minutes later I look over and she's stretching her body and she looked over and started laughing and said, once you started doing it then I needed to do it.” Essa, a musician who has been dancing on and off for years, talks about improvising, stating, “I have to stop myself from thinking what it is I should do. There’s

no ‘should’ in this game. But if I do get stuck, I try to just feel what’s going on around me. Sometimes in *Gaga* when we do like a really fast shaking movement you can just get a sense of the chaos. Your body almost wants to play along. And if you really have no ideas you can just look around and pick up on other people’s stuff.”

In Essa’s example, other bodies in the studio influence her, primarily through her visual account of them; the other dancers are not contained by their own frame but extend to meet Essa’s visual, spatial, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic sense. From a phenomenological perspective, there are interrelational occurrences between and amongst bodies (Moran 2016); animate beings sharing space sense each other. This mutual “intercorporeal” awareness or “dynamic encounter of one lived body with another” (Moran 2017, 38) is based in perception, which includes vision and other tangible sensory information. In this construct, the body exceeds itself through its ability to send perceptual information beyond its fleshy border. Merleau-Ponty clarifies intercorporeity as he states, an intercorporeal being is, “a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present” (1968, 143). This interconnection between bodies is elucidated in both Adina’s and Essa’s examples above—they participate in a cycle of influence, describing responses between bodies that were activated by what was seen (as in Adina’s example and partially Essa’s) or sensed (as in Essa’s feeling the chaos and kinesthetic response) in others.

Engaging with the premise that bodies sharing space influence each other, philosopher Scott L. Marratto clearly articulates between the concepts of intercorporeity

and intersubjectivity and in so doing illustrates a further distinction between the individual and collective experience:

The concept of intercorporeity must be distinguished from the concept of intersubjectivity, which would concern a relation between (conscious) *subjects*. The point here is that my body is already bound up with the other's body before there can be any relation between conscious subjects. But this mutual involvement of bodies does not overcome the *difference* between *conscious* subjects. It simply asserts that this difference must be watched over; it is a matter of responsibilities and decisions, decisions that did not begin as conscious decisions, but that must be assumed by a consciousness. (2012, 144)

As Marratto suggests, there is a conscious component to how dancers at The Sweat Spot distinguish themselves or, in some cases choose not to, by dancing in unison, or appropriating movement from someone else in the class. Part of the construct of individuality is that it relies on a group from which to be offset. The merging of these two aspects of The Sweat Spot experience, individuality and community, which might otherwise be thought to be in conflict, here become contingent on one another, reflexively instantiating each other's presence. Further, in the classes the participants are invited to be conscious of other dancers by directing their attention to them, watching each other dance. Through this invitation to consciousness, The Sweat Spot experience specifically draws out intersubjectivity. To return to Essa's explanation, the difference between participants is a given, as is connection, and The Sweat Spot technique advocates for the ability to choose who we are within that construct, how we dance ourselves into being (together).

The Sweat Spot technique relies on the dancers coming to the space with the shared intention of moving together. Tara recounts to me as we finish up an interview

how she “can’t get the same thing on her own.” I press her to describe what she means and she clarifies, “If I could just dance around on my own that would be cool, but I get something else.” I probe again and she pauses before stating, “I want to do this with other people. I want to dance with them. I feel like I belong even though sometimes I’m a total kook, but it’s not even because of who I am, it’s just because I’m willing to show up and at least try to check my judgment at the door.” This statement supports Moran’s assertion: “Human beings not only have a sense of the individual identity and continuity of the flow of consciousness but also have a sense of being involved with one another. Human beings unite in many forms of social and collective intentionality” (2017, 26). Essa stands at the back of the studio drinking from a steel water bottle as she explains, “We’re all dancing together. I mean we’re not always in unison, but we are united. That’s that thing I don’t totally understand. It’s just not the same as dancing by myself or even going out dancing. Sometimes I feel so alone on the dance floor at a club. Here we want to feel together, even though we’re all totally different and different levels or whatever.” The Sweat Spot capitalizes on this human tendency to connect while still maintaining personal identity that both Moran and Essa describe, by establishing the location—both physical and conceptual—wherein dancers can move together in an integrated community of individuals who are sensitive to sensing each other, intertwined at different levels of conscious engagement. This is cultivated at The Sweat Spot through the process of participants practicing awareness of each other as an instructed component of the classes, which heightens sensorial aspects of the experience in tandem with specific types of cueing and cultivated affect, which I discuss in the following sections.

Technique: Imagery and Metaphor in/and the Body

Imagery and metaphor-based cueing is an integral aspect of The Sweat Spot technique and the culture of dancing the individual. Participants mentioned the instructors' use of image-based language to describe movement and help dancers integrate experiential sensations in/through the body. Although verbal descriptions differ between instructors, they observe an underlying studio commitment—to create accessible, inherently musical movement drawing on gesture and correlating to a specific aesthetic typified through the varied contemporary class styles. Instructors utilize imagery and metaphor to guide dancers to feel unrestricted yet supported, allowing them freedom to perform both choreographed phrases and improvisations as personal explorations. Sven, a self-proclaimed total beginner asserts, “the instructors pretty much all teach from a place where they are encouraging stuff to come out of people, and they seem pretty excited when it’s different.” Danae confirms, “I see these non-dancers moving. Instead of looking like everybody else...you see the different people. I love watching my class. I love when I tell them to just improv [improvise] because you see how different we all are and how beautiful we all are.”

The use of imagery and metaphor in dance is common practice to communicate qualities more easily transmitted through a representational cue than a strict anatomical or visual description. This is particularly evident in the *Gaga* class as instructors do not provide a visual/movement example; students access the kinesthetic concepts, which are verbally communicated through varied movement patterns. Tara, a regular in the classes

Get Me Bodied and *Sweaty Sundays* affirms as we sit on the floor after class with our legs stretched out in front of us:

Sometimes it's the improv, but sometimes also just the choreography that the teacher describes, that makes me focus on the tips of my fingers—*she lightly strokes her thumbs over her finger pads*—or some area of my body I hardly think about. Then I totally imagine all the different things it could do or even just how it feels. *Both hands rest on her solar plexus*. I'm totally sensitized to it. *She sighs and her hands drop down to her sides*. Then I think, whoa—*shoulders up by her ears and hands splayed by the sides of her head in astonishment*—we hardly pay very close attention to all the details of our body in most of our normal lives.

Tara's description emphasizes how these types of cues are processed through the imagination and heightened sensorial awareness.

Imagery and metaphor-based cues also function to make movement intelligible without naming particular steps; imagery can allow dancers of varied levels to execute a movement without being sidelined for lack of experience. In the case of Western contemporary dance, the steps are often generated by the choreographer and do not have specific lexical identifiers; therefore, a metaphoric cue is useful for both understanding the movement and remembering it. In *Sweaty Sunday-Slow Jams* and *Contemporary Modern and Jazz*, the combinations, a mix of codified and contemporary dance steps are often demonstrated with integrated symbolic verbal language or metaphor. For example, one of the instructors taught a parallel passé by naming it and also suggesting the dancers conjure up the image of a stork balancing in shallow lake. Three of the more novice dancers that I interviewed remarked that they appreciate the image-based descriptors for the steps as it helps them recall the movement (in addition to observing more advanced dancers).

A few participants mentioned a particular video that features Heffington's imagery-based language played over his choreography for the "Chandelier" video by musical artist Sia as emblematic of the type of evocative language used at The Sweat Spot in that it allows for a more open translation than would a technical term for the step (if there was one). Sven, memorized the entire video and during an interview performed an abbreviated version of the movement from his seat in a café while reciting a perfect rendition of the first part of the text:

Morse code Morse code
You're getting higher
Hunger pains
Eyes...mouths
You're a dog in one of those wheelchairs
A familiar tear, a repetitive tear
Ice-skater
Don't attempt this at home²²

Sven, left arm bent overhead, and right jazz hand cramped by his face to avoid the wall, would likely have continued but became aware that he was attracting attention and laughed it off. I muse momentarily on how committed he must have been to learn this text/movement from the video. I ask him what prompted it and he responds that he just loved the idea that anything could be dance and also that the movement could be so abstract when the thing it referenced was really specific. He states, "It could look like it means something really important, but it could be referencing something as basic as brushing your teeth."

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=21&v=AUjHYpJNCzw

Imagery-based cueing increases the possibilities for divergent discovery in bodily translation for the dancers. Hamera addresses the potential gap that exists when converting language to movement as she asserts, “relationships between corporeality and language are sometimes represented as especially, even uniquely fraught, with dance serving as a special limit case” (2007, 5). At The Sweat Spot, the instructors capitalize on Hamera’s implication of slippage between language and movement and complicate physical outcomes with imagery that grounds the intention as playful and often outlandish to purposefully evoke multiple translations in the body. For instance, in the example given above from the *Gaga* class, as dancers billow their chests open feeling the “wind in their sails” they float around the space as if motivated by a gust of air swooping through them. They settle momentarily before another rippling sweep takes hold. As I observe this during the class, the movement of the dancers *does* contain intrinsic similarities, primarily in the motivation of swelling of the body initiating some rapid steps that subside and slightly deflate before the next gust. However, the dimensions of how this is expressed range from dancers clearly feeling the sensations primarily in their chests to those who seem to attempt to feel their “sails” in their knees or in their arms as they reach above their heads. They take steps in all different directions—front, side, back, diagonal—and some fall to the floor rolling in the force of the wind. The cueing shifts to accommodate these explorations as the teacher asks, “Can you feel the sails in your ribcage, in your neck, in your pelvis?” Dancers seem to integrate these possibilities exploring different ways of interpreting the cues but maintaining an underlying sameness or connectivity in the sea of varied translations.

Existing scholarship on metaphor enhances an understanding of this process by which dancers at The Sweat Spot assimilate ideas into the body. Experimental psycholinguist and cognitive scientist Raymond Gibbs (2005) posits that abstract concepts are inherently tied to the body and metaphors are bodily-based. Gibbs examines cognitive linguistic studies and asserts that metaphor is integral to how people conceptualize and discuss thinking (96). Gibbs traces metaphors of thinking from physicality to movement and then to dance. He explores how dance improvisation can shed light on how we think, primarily using conceptual metaphor that is rooted in embodied experience (186–87). He states that improvisational dance is of value because it “directly explores the boundaries of the body/mind interface” (186). Gibbs asserts that dancers and audience members experience a shared sense of meaning making through embodied metaphors, whether or not the intended communication is what one perceives or is abstract, referring back to my field notes about the “wind in the sails” cue. Gibbs recognizes metaphor as “not merely a linguistic device to facilitate communication, but a specific mental mapping in which we attempt to better understand one, usually vague, abstract aspect of knowledge in terms of more concrete knowledge from a different domain” (2003, 186). Importantly, Gibbs’s more theoretical analysis aligns with Sven’s observation that metaphoric language translated through the body conveys meaning even if it is abstract. Further, although Gibbs’s account includes contact improvisation as the focus, he seems to be referring to a one-to-one correspondence wherein a dance sequence (improvised) activates a shared mental mapping between dancer(s) and audience, possibly a seated observer (as he positions himself). However, as the data suggest,

something different occurs when there are multiple dance sequences or choreographies happening at the same time and the shared mental mapping is not just between dancer(s) and audience, but also between the dancers themselves. Specifically, the multimodal experience of dancing/viewing/sensing/responding at The Sweat Spot suggests that the shared mental mapping structure is operating between (both to and from) moving dancers with the input of the instructors. The translation and expression of imagery and metaphor happening at the same time destabilizes a fixed (stationary) first-person perspective as The Sweat Spot dancers challenge themselves to exist in a system of embodied knowledge that is simultaneously or alternately representational and/or non-propositional.

Embodying Imagery and Metaphor: Shifting Dynamic Quality

In addition to using metaphor to prioritize the individual in the community, imagery and metaphor also shape movement quality or the dynamism with which the movement is performed, which is closely connected to emotion. According to dance therapist and researcher Rosemarie Samaritter, “Movement metaphors and movement symbols are used to communicate the quality of the dance experience” (2009, 34). At The Sweat Spot the quality of the movement is linked to emotion felt in the body and also indicates a range of expression that any one movement might reference based on how it is performed. For example, an instructor in a class I attended gave the cue: “clean sticky tree sap off your hands...and it’s poison!” This was substantiated through the class of about twenty dancers wringing their hands in twisted, frenzied movements brimming with anxiety and panic. The movement itself did not conform to specifics but the intention was clearly illustrated in the language and transferred through the dynamic

qualities of bodily interpretations. Participants discuss the qualitative dynamics of movement in the data primarily through phrasing such as “emotional quality of movement” or “expressivity of movement” that reflect their understanding of how the subtext or the underlying content can shape the movement and how it is interpreted by both the performer and viewer, if applicable.

Sheets-Johnstone discusses kinetic dynamics as a link to emotional experience/expression and theorizes the qualitative dynamics of movement in relation to how they shape our animate selves and how they connect groups through movement/gesture that contains particular recognizable emotional characteristics (like hand-wringing) (2018, 7). Jewel mentions that the difference between dance and other types of exercise is the potential for emotional expression and that otherwise, movement is methodical. She states, “I definitely feel like dance does feel more expressive to who I am as a person which then makes it more of an emotional experience for me.” Lani elaborates, “You can lift your hand in a bunch of different ways. It’s the same movement but what’s behind it changes it totally. The intention, the emotion, makes it either gentle and comforting or aggressive or whatever’s in between. And I think that the dancer feels it while they’re doing it, but also the audience or anyone watching can tell the difference between the ways it’s performed.” The link here between emotion and movement is key to understanding how/why participants describe The Sweat Spot experience as expressive. Sheets-Johnstone asserts, “we move in ways qualitatively congruent with the way(s) in which we are moved to move; spatial, temporal, and energetic qualities of our movement carry us forward in an ongoing kinetic form that is dynamically congruent

with the form of our ongoing feelings” (1999, 270). This connection demonstrates the relationship between how imagery and metaphor-based cueing taps into movement and its inherent emotional potential—the metaphor activates movement quality, interpreted by the dancers as/through emotion, which centralizes individual experience, reinforcing subjecthood.

This technique of teaching through imagery and metaphor leverages aspects of human cognitive and emotional systems, as described by Gibbs, Samaritter, and Sheets-Johnstone, to synchronize quality with energy in space and time to affect an accordance between emotion and its correlative expression. Although the pedagogical methods at The Sweat Spot prioritize individual exploration, the metaphor once expressed connects the community through shared implication or meaning. Consistent with existing theory, this technique of utilizing metaphor centralizes the class around ideas that happen in language—they wring their hands—and they are united by spatial and temporal organization and a basic set of instructions, but the movement experience is their own within the structure of togetherness in a culture that values the idea of a dancing community.

Technique: Affect and Affective Practice

The studio lights are off; the sun streams in from the propped-open side door creating a funnel pattern across the front part of the room. Arcade Fire’s “Put Your Money on Me” starts mid-song; a sense of anticipation hangs in the air as the class of about thirty dancers wait for the instructor to count in the combination. Eight dancers improvise in the center of the studio, spatially and kinesthetically aware of each other as they fluidly dance within their group of moving bodies without touching. Five, six...from the instructor and the counts drop off...On “one” the dancers collectively pique right the left leg dangling in assorted interpretations of a surreal arabesque, a movement that starts with

assertion, buckles into a gnarled assemblage of limbs in crippled outreach. The dancers focus with their whole bodies as an up-tempo shift bounds them side-to-side sending arms in all directions, adapting to individual balance, the movement varies but the spatial trajectory unifies the dancers as moving together even amongst the varied interpretations of the choreography. Dancers on the side cheer and the energy builds to a crescendo as a follow-the-yellow-brick-road triplet careens the movement to the right corner; a series of multi-directional jumps flings the dancers back to the left.

Up to this point I have described The Sweat Spot as a place where experiences shape and are shaped by interrelational occurrences, such as intercorporeity and intersubjectivity. Imagery and metaphor are utilized as a tactic to create a shared intention that manifests in myriad ways through the filters of individual bodies, proclivities, and abilities. One outcome, which I now discuss is the energy, the *affect* that this dancing process generates. At The Sweat Spot, participants regularly discuss the energy or vibe of the studio. As Danae describes, “You walk in that room and you can vibe off of everyone and you feel alive, you feel connected, you feel safe. ... Dance is a really social thing and this place sets you up for that.” Sven also recognizes a shift:

I feel some sort of thing happen when I walk into the studio and I’m not sure if it’s me or the place or the people or just everything together. But it’s kind of like something inside me relaxes. It’s like I tap into some deeper force and I can just be me. I think that’s how the people that run the place made it—maybe it’s who they are or how they decided they wanted it but whatever it is, it totally works, and the energy is amazing from when you walk in to when you leave.

Tara, who describes herself as sensitive to energy, affirms, “At The Sweat Spot I pretty much think everyone brings their best selves. Yeah of course someone may be having a hard time, a bad day or whatever, but you just decide to join in on this other energy that happens at the studio. And usually, it carries you and makes you feel better.”

The participants here seem to be describing a phenomenon similar to what scholars from a variety of disciplines consider as affect, although the dancers do not specifically utilize the term. Throughout a range of interdisciplinary discourses on affect the definitions vary; many theorists dealing with affect seem to struggle to find ways of describing what can seem both elusive and complex.²³ Although it is difficult to describe, I argue here that affect is a central component of The Sweat Spot; it is the life and practice of the community, which emerges out of a focus on interrelationality and heightened though the techniques of imagery and metaphor. The participants are talking about it, wanting to discuss it and yet, they do not have the specific language—they understand it as similar to how we sense, or what we pick up from each other (vibes) on an energetic or emotional level. For the purpose of integrating the data with the theory I utilize specific perspectives on affect that clarify what it is and how it functions in relation to The Sweat Spot. Gregg and Seigworth theorize a conception that draws from a range of interdisciplinary scholarship and considers affect as a “force or forces of an encounter,” (2010, 2), which denotes waves of intensities that pass between bodies, not bound by skin, or other surfaces but rather, by their potential to participate in the

²³ For example, Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* 2003, Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), Clare Hemmings’s *Invoking Affect: Cultural theory and the Ontological Turn.*” (2006), Patricia Clough’s *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2008), Lisa Blackman’s *The Body: The Key Concepts* (2008), Giovanni Colombetti’s *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (2014)

circulation of affect (2). This aligns with Danae's mention of "vibe" as well as Tara's notion of the circulating energy that one can tap. However, with limited language for this occurrence (mainly energy and vibe) this intensity is difficult to articulate and Massumi suggests that the challenge of describing affect evolves from an effort to make the concept static, when it is inherently in motion (2002, 4). Sheets-Johnstone confirms, "There is a dynamic congruency of affectivity and movement in the everyday lives of animate forms" (2011, 454). Ricky, a participant who "loves to sweat it out" and frequently goes to the gym notes that at The Sweat Spot, "you're moving to make something, rather than just get into shape." I ask how that comes about and he responds, "everyone is, let's say, feeling this joy and it's infectious, it's a contagion." So then, dancing at The Sweat Spot is not a rote activity, like repetitively lifting a weight but rather, is something that the participants co-generate through moving together, referencing the relationship that Sheets-Johnstone proffered.

This aspect of affect is compelling for this research as movement is the lens through which the affective experience is not only realized, but I consider dance a discursive element that contributes to understanding how affect circulates. Affect shares similarities with intercorporeity and intersubjectivity in that all three are conceptualized as relational and "in-between" bodies. However, I synthesize existing conceptualizations and my own interpretation to clarify their distinctions: intercorporeity is a condition of bodies sharing space, a reciprocity of perception, or a means by which bodies sense each other; intersubjectivity addresses the conscious awareness of relation or meaning that

bodies produce together; and, affect focuses on potential, on vital intensity that can prompt response, action, movement.

Aligning with the theorization proposed by Gregg and Seigworth, Adina states, “I immediately start thinking of the possibility of both inside and outside. We can generate our own energy and can also be influenced by the energy around us and so I think there's both possibilities, that we can have that inspiration and that reaction to something, but we can also be the genesis of something.” In Adina’s description and in Gregg and Seigworth’s construct, the body can affect and be affected; thus, its potential is multidirectional, or interaffective. As perhaps a more explicit example, when we enter a room we might perceive that people are angry, happy, or sad, and in turn, we can also generate sentiment that can be picked up on. A key component here however, is that once we understand the feeling as an emotion and name it as such, it becomes grounded within a social construct (emotions); whereas, affect in many of these conceptions is happening prior to this manifestation and our translation of it as something recognizable like an emotion (though I address the link between energy, emotion, and affect in the next section); it is understood as an energy that shapes an experience. Gregg and Seigworth further posit that through an encounter affect is instantiated (2–3) and Jewel similarly describes, “I think that in *Sweaty Sundays* there is already, for the most part, a big group of people who already know the class, who already have this open supported energy going into the class, so it's already laid out. So even if you're new you can jump in and feel it somehow.” This “somehow” that Jewel refers to is the intensity of affect, the

energetic transmission that productively cultivates the shared experience as dancers tap into it, feed into it, and co-generate it.

Dynamic Quality + Emotion + Energy + Affect

As mentioned previously, metaphoric language at The Sweat Spot shapes the dynamic quality of movement and this can engender an emotion-based response. The metaphors or images provided by the instructor cue a particular movement exploration and the combination of the movement and the subjectively translated imagery (in an already affect-laden space) lead to an emotional state, which shifts the energy both in the individual dancers and between the dancers. For instance, a movement with aggressive stamping can generate a particular type of energy (based on the quality of movement) and this energy then can translate for the participants to an emotion, such as frustration, or vice versa, according to the data. Tara and I chat as we walk up the side street to our cars after class. I record her musings on emotion and energy:

I don't *always* feel emotional when I'm dancing. I mean sometimes if we're doing a movement and it has a certain attack to it I'll notice that I'm tapping into anger or something like that. If I do notice that, then it's usually also something that I can feel energy-wise in the room. Like other people are probably having the same experience. That's why sometimes at the end of class we do a cool down and there's usually some gesture like fingers raining down over our heads and our bodies and it's like a blessing. *She demonstrates this gesture with her left hand, juggling a water bottle and car keys in her right.* I don't really know if it's a specific emotion, but I think all the dancers feel something in those moments. It gets really quiet and it almost feels still. Hmmm maybe it's just being present and I feel like I'm accepting myself and thanking myself for the work.

The switch in Tara's energy causes her to notice the energy/emotional state of other people in the room, which she does not perceive as being contained within other bodies,

but as a force that can amplify, diminish, or modify her own energetic/emotional/kinesthetic experience.

Emotions, like affect, are considered dynamically congruent with movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 274) and often discussed in relation to theories of affect. Though emotion and affect frequently co-occur, the literature suggests that they can be distinguished, and this is borne out in the participants' language as they discuss experiencing emotions and vibes as two separate but related phenomena. Wetherell elaborates on the distinctions between emotion and affect, focusing on affect and its potential for bodily communication and connection (2012, 2). She considers affect and emotion as closely related, defining affect as, "*embodied meaning-making*" which, "mostly...could be understood as *human emotion*" (4). It seems as though Tara is discussing a shift that registers as something felt inside her own body and also within the other bodies in the space. She may not necessarily know what these energies/feelings/emotions *mean*, but just that they feel *meaningful*. Further, Tara is describing a key aspect of her experience at The Sweat Spot that draws dancers to participate—to engage in the value of shared meaningful experience, to find present moments of presence in the body, which happens through the circulation of affect and the embodied expression of emotion.

Wetherell proposes the term "affective practice" through which to theorize the simultaneity or integration of affect and emotion as a co-occurrence, which is consistent with the way that participants are discussing their experiences. Wetherell defines affective practice as, "a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited

or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations” (19). Alex clarifies how this conception might be applicable in describing what he is feeling in class stating, “I’m feeling emotions. I’m feeling the physical, corporeal body that I have and then I’m feeling energetically what’s going on around me.” It seems as if Alex can locate the emotion as a felt expression of an experience through a certain dynamic quality of movement. The affect then is the byproduct of the others’ similar emotional expressions, transformed to a circulating energy, or “affective practice.” Here Alex notes the affective practice as a part of the experience, as a commodity that grounds the dancers within the experience; it is the draw or a vital part of it, for which they come to The Sweat Spot to dance, express through the body emotionally, and feel connected in the process.

This conception, enhanced by the use of the term practice, which connotes doing, being, becoming, and moving is entrenched in action and clarifies a driving element of why dancers participate at The Sweat Spot; affective practice grounds the produced and re-produced energy or “vibes” that participants describe. Wetherell explains her strategic utilization of the word “practice” as:

a way of conceptualizing social action as constantly in motion while yet recognizing too that the past, and what has been done before constrains the present and the future. Practice is both a noun and a verb. It is an activity and for participants (and social analysts) it is also an established reference point and site of repetition—a practice—the way I, or we, do things, and sometimes cannot help but do so again. Practice is about improvisation, it is about training. (2012, 23)

Through her perspective, social relations, environment and what we derive from the engagement with the experience of affect is vital and pervasive. Further, Wetherell

references recognizing the role of the past in affective practice, which considers movement as contingent on its history and the time and place of its happening.

Recognizing how the past (through repetition) imprints itself within the body/movement and within the site itself informs The Sweat Spot technique both in terms of how the culture of the studio determines the flow of energy in the class and also in how the teachers charge the space prior to and at the beginning of class. Thus, aspects of this generative element of affective practice rely on the choices the instructors make to create a particular experience. Danae affirms:

I think the teacher sets the bar and everyone no matter what rises to it. It's like running on the treadmill with someone. If they're running fast then you run fast. A lot of these people are so special, their energy is really special as a human being and I think that's exciting and then they bring something on top of that. I know if I come in...it's my responsibility. These are people that are paying; these are people that I'm giving an experience to. It's my responsibility to make sure they have a great time and are satisfied. And if I come in in a bad mood, my class suffers. They will feel that.

Although the instructor does play a key role in the generation and transmission of an affective encounter, the participants are encouraged to engage with their own potential to co-create the experience. This active role is perhaps consciously accepted simply by attending the studio, but it is also inextricably linked with the experience of bodies moving together, something that becomes less calculated, less tangible.

Conclusion: *Reverence*

Forty dancers drip with sweat in a room so dense with humidity I imagine we are dancing in a hot summer storm cloud. We follow Danae's lead, approximating her movement, arms overhead like a rock concert swaying back and forth. Sustaining the side-to-side undulations, we slowly arc forward until our arms extend like elephant trunks sweeping across the floor. Our fingernails trace ever-disappearing figure eights on the marley as the skin of our backs and our hamstrings ease into

stretch. She calls us back to standing and we languidly reach our arms out to the side, spreading them like wings, oscillating gently between our feet. We gaze up, our arms stretched to the sky. The tension in our hands softens to rain-like spirit fingers that cascade down over our faces and down over our bodies, a shared self-renewal.

A detailed description of The Sweat Spot reveals a deeper understanding of how it functions, why the dancers participate, and the outcomes. The studio's mission fosters embodied exploration and allows participants to shape the dance experience to their own needs within the culture that celebrates dancing together. These physical explorations contribute to participants' feelings of heightened expressivity, more so in many cases than in their outside lives. Dancers can experiment with movement, feel safe and supported, and check self-judgment or group expectations at the studio door. Further, they access alternate knowledge systems through the body, investigating how to interpret language, ideas, and qualities through movement.

The Sweat Spot provides a framework for the participants to have a range of dance experiences that both reflect and shape the culture, which is constructed through dancing bodies choosing to come together. As they interact, the dancers co-constitute a community, which emphasizes liberated individuality within an expressive group. The self-selecting participants are agentive within the structure; dancers can alter the experience in meaningful ways as they are shaped by it (Durt, Fuchs, and Tewes 2017, 10). The dancers move each other and are themselves are moved by their engagement, producing an intersubjective experience, generating common meaning through embodied interactions that reflect and affirm their values (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 465).

The specific technique through which participants co-create the experience and imbue it with meaning at The Sweat Spot is an organic example of Hamera's theory of "dancing communities." The imagery and metaphor-based language functions in multiple ways: making movement accessible; shaping an aesthetic aspect of the studio; and instituting diversity as a means through which the community connects by designing singular opportunities for participants to investigate their own bodily movement, which, as it is done within the community that instantiates it, scaffolds a shared experience. The value of the imagery and metaphor is not only that it unites a dancer and a viewer through a shared abstract reference, but that the metaphor activates a community and become the platform in which that community establishes and re-establishes itself. Lastly, the studio cultivates an affective practice, grounding Wetherell's theory through a lived example, in which the material elements of the studio and the participating bodies transmit energy and vitality that informs and enhances the potential for what the dancers can do both individually and together.

CHAPTER VI

DANCING INTIMACY, KINESTHETIC BELONGING, AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE MOVEMENT

Introduction

The two sites of this phenomenology-based ethnography, Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot, reveal cultures built on embodied interactions comprised of individuals who actively seek a community experience of dance as a pathway for greater expressive potential, deeper connections (to one's own body and the other dancers), and shared meaning. The descriptive chapters of these two sites provide in-depth explorations into these cultures and their values, detailing the factors that motivate engagement, such as connection and energy, and reflecting on accounts of participants' felt sensations while dancing. Although both sites are centered on different styles and function in varied formats, they both curate and sustain their cultures through explicit attention to the nature of bodies dancing together.

In the previous chapters, I argued for specific themes that emerged from the data in the respective communities. At Oxygen Tango, these themes centered on connection and the prioritization of corporeal conversations developed through techniques and tactics. The particular approach to technique teaches the vocabulary of Argentine Tango, and also enhances perceptual awareness extending from one's own body to one's partner and into the broader dance space, promoting shared intention and collective meaning. At The Sweat Spot the themes focused on individuality as a vibrant community construct

built around a technique which generates positive energy, reproduced through affective practice (routine energetic transmissions between bodies), as a means to support personal exploration, which unites dancers who are seen as both contributive to and influenced by the energetic potential. Additionally, at The Sweat Spot, the use of imagery and metaphor platforms diverse interpretations grounded in shared understanding of the prompt, cultivating resonant commonality, while also accessing a pathway to alternate knowledge systems of the body through the non-propositional danced responses. The findings at both sites center on interrelational happenings between and amongst participants, such as, incorporeity, intersubjectivity, and interaffectivity. These concepts have long been included in philosophical and psychological discourse and part of the aim of this study is to animate them by noting how they manifest within the given cultures, how they are described through first-person accounts of dancing experiences, and how they are supported through the community constructs and values. In both locations, I utilized aspects of Hamera's conception of technique as a means of creating communities (2007, xi) and considered it as a strategy for building the cultures and a tactic for generating interrelational experience. In this chapter, I synthesize these analyses from the data chapters into a discussion that pulls at the threads of the interwoven findings at the two sites, comparing and contrasting themes, and pursuing connections and contradictions.

I divide this chapter into three themes that correspond to ideas that emerged from the data chapters and that I explore in relation to existing theory. The first theme, *Individuality, Intimacy, and Loss: Subjecthood and Culture in a Post-Kinetic World* discusses how the findings at both sites point to a key aspect of participants' self-

selection into these communities—they provide a means to connect to their bodies in expressive ways, through emotion, identity, and ideas. This section then explores how the terminology for the human developmental phase prior to the emergence of verbal language, “pre-linguistic,” seems to reify the body/mind duality effectively diffusing the importance of the tactile-kinesthetic experience in our everyday lives, one possible result of which encourages participants to seek out supplemental meaningful experiences that connect them to their bodies with others interested in similar embodied practices. The second theme, *Strategies of (Kinesthetic) Belonging: Together Dancing, Mutual Incorporation, and Participatory Sense-Making*, correlates to the initial research intention of discovering the parameters for belonging to the constructed environments at both sites, theorizing belonging itself as an interrelational body-based happening, a kinesthetic belonging, enhanced by extensions of scholarship on intersubjectivity. The third theme, *Thinking and the Body: Kinesthesia, Communication, and Language*, contemplates the sensory experience of movement and embodied communication and ruminates on the challenge of language to fulfill the experience of movement and the alternate knowledge of the body as described at both sites. After discussing each of the first two themes I include a brief reflection to imagine the concepts as integrated in my own embodied experience and in the final section, I introduce a pilot study developed in response to ideas that emerged from the research data collection, analysis, and findings.

Individuality, Intimacy, and Loss: Subjecthood and Culture in a Post-Kinetic World

Our bodies cannot be separated from their intimate connection with our individuality. In fact, “the body may be regarded as the most individual and intimate

aspect of human existence” (Larsen 2013, 1). Drawing attention to individuality and intimacy, I first clarify how they are conceptualized at both sites and in relation to each other, noting what they mean in the context of this research, and exploring their mutual exclusivity and the ways in which they intersect. I contend that both individuality and intimacy provide pathways to subjecthood and culture based on an underlying sense of loss. This loss could be seen to result from a developmental shift in early childhood away from a tactile-kinesthetic and towards a symbolic or linguistic understanding of the world (Rosenbaum 2005, Iverson 2010), leaving aside the body and movement, as they are/were considered less integral to our connection with and comprehension of the environment (Stern 1990, 114). This shift represents how foundational thinking based on the Cartesian dualism of mind/body prioritizes the propositional “mind” based developmental stage of linguistic comprehension. The premise for this argument is based on the work of Sheets-Johnstone, who proposes a re-conceptualization of the idea of “pre-linguistic,” a term used to describe one aspect of human development during which we connect to our bodies as a means of understanding the world prior to learning verbal language. Sheets-Johnstone submits that, “language is post-kinetic,” ([1999] 2011, 438); we shift away from our bodies as we learn to speak. I utilize Sheets-Johnstone’s theory to argue that the majority of people who self-select to participate at these sites do so for a variety of reasons, one of which is a response to a sense of loss of connection to their bodies, which is described by participants at both sites. These dancing practices restore something vital and that plays a key role in why participants choose these cultures; they desire a return to their bodies and a way to connect through movement. The underlying

notion of loss permeates this section, infiltrating the porous spaces that open up even as we consider what is lost here in translating these ideas from the body to the page.

However, there is also something found, the re-connection through which bodies reclaim their focus as tango partners feel each other's weight, as limbs in Gaga sail on a breeze, and as the *Sweaty-Sundays-Slow Jams* dancers devour the space with their spirited runway walk across the floor.

Individuals in Collective Systems: Dancing Communities into Being

At both sites, participants reflect on how they, as individuals, relate to the structures of the respective communities. At Oxygen Tango, the dancers identify with their uniqueness in service of the dancing couple and to distinguish themselves as agreeable partners. The training does not seek to shape dancers in a particular image but rather, to give them tools to develop skills to then effectively improvise in the moment and respond to the dance, the partnership, and the other dancers on the dance floor. This is evident in the instructors' recommendations that students not memorize figures but instead, learn the techniques that underlie them so as with a verbal language, they can string together their own patterns. A number of participants mentioned that this approach opens up the possibilities for both one's own awareness and that of their partners as well—they feel themselves and each other and each other feeling themselves as indicated by the phenomenological concept of reflexivity (Husserl [1931] 2003, 31). Risa, one of the participants, articulates this as she states, "Every time I practice, I add to what I notice, it's me that's aware but I'm also highly aware of my partner. They become part of my field of awareness and we are in it together, but still ourselves." I discussed this in

detail in Chapter IV noting that the dancers in both roles, leaders and followers, are agentive in structuring the dance and the broader experience, as well as responsible for their own skills, which ultimately enhance the possibilities for what the tango encounter might be.

At The Sweat Spot, the culture promotes individuality in a supportive environment and through the majority of dancers participating in this construct they create a safe place for distinctiveness as a means to connect to the community. As I illustrated in Chapter V, one of the strategies for encouraging individuality grounded in commonality is the use of imagery and metaphor. For example, as the dancers in a *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* class are given the prompt, “swing your purse, fling it on the floor, walk, walk, walk around and...Pick. It. Up,” I witnessed a range of imagined purse sizes as indicated by the intensity and dimension of the swinging circles; the movement was adjusted to how each dancer experienced the cue, but they seemed connected through the shared imagery or similarity of the underlying motivation. Thus, a certain type of individuality, a freedom of personal exploration through the body is prioritized but not at the expense of the community, rather as a possibility for shaping it—creative individuals moving together in support of each other and the process of dancing themselves into being, together.

Scaffolding the Social Architecture of Intimacy: Dancing Bodies in Contact

At both sites, participants referred to intimacy explicitly to describe aspects of the experience and implicitly in the depictions of the dance practices. At Oxygen Tango, dancers discussed the connection between bodies as intimate, encompassing the felt-

sensations of physical contact, the embodied communication, and the closeness itself of coupled bodies together within the larger organism of the dance floor. More specifically, dancers noted intimacy as what it feels like to touch the fabric of their partners' clothing, smell their cologne, feel the smoothness or coarseness of their hands, *cabeceo* (or look into another's eyes from across the room to initiate a dance), hear and interpret the music together, and move as a couple and a group without speaking. Esther describes that in the incredibly human, incredibly intimate embrace she can "feel someone's life. I can feel their life when I dance with them. I can feel their heart when I embrace them. I'm not here to analyze them; that's not my objective. But I can feel their life— their joy, their sadness." In Esther's example, the intimacy is an implicit closeness, a sensing of someone at a level of depth uncommon in more mundane interaction. At The Sweat Spot, intimacy was utilized to describe the setting, how the dim lighting created a space that felt private and therefore freed dancers up to explore ideas without scrutiny. More implicitly, dancers at The Sweat Spot engage in a discovery process that reveals details about their bodies, highlighting intimate knowing or familiarity through in-depth awareness and focus. Lani mentions that as she dances, "there's a heightened experience of how I feel my body, like the air is caressing my skin and I'm very in tune with subtle stuff I wouldn't normally be aware of." In both cases, the data pointed to the connection to one's own body as intimate.

I am compelled to point out that intimacy at both sites is not referring to interactions of a sexual nature as might be a generic interpretation of the term. One might argue that Argentine Tango is a sensual dance (even the word *sensual* might imply a

sexual undertone), and it is possible some dancers seek out sexual relationships through the social dance scene; however, participants in this study stressed their separation of that type of encounter from the Oxygen Tango community in order to preserve and protect the safety and comfort of the other dancers and themselves.

Because it came up multiple times, I examined how existing theory might enhance an understanding of intimacy and how it serves these communities. Therefore, prior to delving into intimacy and its manifestations at both sites, I provide a brief overview that frames it as a social concept, theorized by social psychologist Jessica Mjoberg. Mjoberg clarifies the use of the term intimacy through the phenomenological lens of intersubjectivity. As a brief reminder, I discussed intersubjectivity in the data chapters as “the sharing of experiential content (e.g. feelings, perceptions, thoughts, meanings) among a plurality of subjects” (Zlatev et al. 2008, 1). Mjoberg identifies this joint world as the location of intimacy (2018, 15); there is a *we-ness* to intimacy. Further in Mjoberg’s conceptualization there is a mutuality and inclusion, a belonging (17). This construct is utilized to understand certain Argentine Tango practices by dance researcher Maria Törnqvist, who discusses intimacy in the tango setting as transitory as it is “shared by many” (2018, 357) or “a specific mode of interaction and a particular experience of closeness and connection that emerges in different relational forms” (359). These constructions are applicable here to understand the intersubjective closeness created through the dancing experiences wherein strong emotional responses, affective practice, and an intense interrelationality constituted through selective participation and

heightened body awareness developed at both sites, all contribute to intimacy as a grounding connective possibility.

Intimacy then is a relevant construction for imagining aspects of embodied connection that participants at both sites describe. Although talking can be intimate, here we understand intimacy as experienced through the moving body. As a result of the closeness in contact (either physical or occurring through interrelational non-physical transmissions), the spaces of the communities are at times described as intimate, made so by the proximal dancers intently investigating embodied experiences, as well as the ambience, particularly the lighting. Intimacy however, is not a requirement of engagement but a byproduct of the practices at both locations, a means to fluidly connect the individuals to themselves, to partners and/or the larger groups.

The way in which dancers sense each other is by its nature at times an intimate arrangement. Through this conception, intimacy at both sites becomes a strategy to feel and be felt, to see and be seen, and to be perceived. The participants connect intimately to their bodies and in doing so connect to the broader community. As with intersubjectivity and interaffectivity, intimacy is relational and it exists within bodies as potential. Through participation, dancers form an intimate collective, integrating the individuals (involved in sense-based investigations of their own bodies moving) through intersubjective encounters, which ground the culture through repetition. Intimacy connects us to the body, links us to who we are, the us-ness of our bodies, always present but rarely explored.

Loss of Movement-Meaning: Dancing the Body Back from Language

Understanding the world through this pre-linguistic construct, or basing a conceptualization of development primarily on language as the privileged mark of before/after, preserves the body/mind duality negating the tactile-kinesthetic experience which figures so prominently in the totality of how we interact with the world.²⁴ Sheets-Johnstone's intervention here, rethinking human development after learning to speak as post-kinetic, points to the need for the body to be re-integrated. As we age, we move away from moving. We lose something, a connection that we try to regain through particular practices. The data show that the participants in both sites feel as though something (a difficult to describe feeling), a need, is satisfied through their dancing experiences in these two respective communities that otherwise goes un-acknowledged. The sense of loss then stems from the negation of our bodies as we mature, and these practices offer a possibility to reconnect.

As a result of this consideration of post-kinetic loss, the need for individual embodied validation through the collaboration of a community of moving bodies becomes vital—to be received, understood, and reflected back, to communicate and connect through non-propositional dance accesses something more innate than constructed language, which can feel limiting in expressing what our moving bodies know. The dancers at Oxygen Tango and The Sweat spot experience intimacy (through their moving bodies sensing moving bodies) with a group of like-minded dancers all

²⁴ David A. Rosenbaum theorizes the absence of motor control research in development as resultant from several factors including the challenge of studying it (2005, 308).

wanting to share the same meaningful experience of reintegrating the body and reifying the value of their own individual embodied experience through dancing together.

These dance practices, by their nature, suffer loss even as they happen, which serves as a function of bringing dancers back to the space. The dancers at both sites co-create the culture; there is potential in the experience. Whether from the *cabeceo* at Oxygen Tango that initiates two dancers into the embrace or the first bars of music blaring from the speaker calling the class to warm-up in *Contemporary Modern and Jazz*, the dance brings a moment-to-moment shared experience of embodied consciousness into being; it actualizes the possibilities of bodies. However, just as it comes into being it vanishes, only to be again and again re-danced into existence through communities of committed participants who recognize the value of re-instantiating a loss through a finding of the body moving, dancing together, feeling sensations that connect to oneself, through oneself, to the multiplicities of movement.

Reflexively Reflecting #1

I wonder now in light of this research why, as a lifelong dancer, I often describe standing at the ballet barre for a class or the first stretch in a contemporary modern class as feeling like “home.” Perhaps it is this return to a conscious awareness of my body, to my kinesthetic nature through these dancing experiences that leads me to this place or state of “home.” Otherwise, I am somewhat adrift—moving is not conscious movement—denying the individuality (the me) that comes through my body and its dancing presence, disconnecting from some elemental part of myself. I intimately return (to this me) through consciously moving myself, as I stand in first position and the first

notes of the music count me in to a plié. Perhaps you are there too and maybe intimacy is me being recognized by you through our bodies. As we sense each other, we come to know one another in different ways, not as our speaking selves, the selves we describe and are described as through words that rarely capture just who we are, in many ways limiting how we are perceived or known, but rather, as our kinesthetic selves. As I move through the world choosing these dancing communities within which to find “home,” I seek to regain that lost sense, my pre-kinetic identity that is fleetingly enacted as I dance and is known to me through an intimate awareness of self and through you as an animate being, sensing me as I move.

Strategies of (Kinesthetic) Belonging: Together Dancing, Mutual Incorporation, and Participatory Sense-Making

At Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot, the dancers acknowledge one another through body-based engagement, generating “we-ness,” highlighting that they are part of the same culture. Moran affirms that exercising awareness of others “is this world-consciousness that allows each conscious subject to feel a belonging with other subjects in a shared world” (2017, 27). I look closely here at belonging, specifically, what it means *to belong* in these two cultures, Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot, that prioritize movement, that connect through tactile-kinesthetic encounters. I contemplate belonging as social, as theorized through the body, or more specifically, as a movement-based interrelational occurrence, for which I propose the term *kinesthetic belonging*. Returning to the findings and supplementary theory to support this thread of inquiry, I contend that understanding belonging as a function of continuity at these two sites enhances an

understanding of what existing theoretical constructs of interrelational body-based happenings at both sites, namely, intercorporeity and intersubjectivity, do for the dancers by reflecting theoretical developments of these ideas. I discuss two particular extensions of these concepts, mutual incorporation, or “a process in which the lived bodies of both participants extend and form a common intercorporeality” (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 465) and participatory sense-making, or “the process of generating and transforming meaning in the interplay between interacting individuals and the interaction process itself” (466), to help conceptualize participants’ descriptions of belonging, situated within the cultures as a strategy for both enhancing the experiences and sustaining engagement.

In our conversations, dancers in both communities discuss the value of their embodied experiences. They frame their comments as a reclaiming of their bodies through the dance practices or a revitalization of their sense of belonging in their own bodies, which is necessarily offset by belonging to the communities themselves—the embodied experiences that participants describe are reliant on the group dynamics at the respective sites. Therefore, belonging is conceived of here as a factor of an intercorporeal encounter. The (body) belonging in these cultures can only be understood within the social context of other embodied dancers or, “the lived body can be understood only given other embodied subjects” (Fuchs 2017, 338).

Social psychologists Matt Easterbrook and Vivian L. Vignoles cite intimacy, interdependence, frequency of interactions as precursors to feelings of belonging (2013, 5) and further state, “feelings of group belonging arise from perceived intragroup similarity” (2). A bridge then from the previous section discussing intimacy can be made

here to belonging, as intimacy made manifest. The dancers perceive other participants through their bodies, connecting through the movement-forward structure. Belonging at Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot is established through the recurrent dancing experiences and the familiarity within the constructs of the communities (checking in for classes, the direct physical contact at Oxygen Tango, the encouraged interactions at The Sweat Spot—to watch other dancers, cheer one another on, or dance together in improvisational moments) and the totality of their techniques.

Tactical Inclusion: Belonging as a Strategy of Technique

At both Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot, I consider technique as a construct of the communities that shapes how the dance is instructed, how the experiences are cultivated, and how the movement and cultural values are instantiated through the body. As discussed in Chapters IV and V, Hamera theorizes technique within dancing communities as a means through which people connect and belong to a culture (2007) by providing “social bedrock for imagining new ways of being together and being oneself” (13) and her detailed analysis of the function and outcomes of techniques within dancing communities served as a lens for how I evaluated the data at both sites. The dancers at both locations utilize the techniques to connect to multiple aspects of the experience: physical contact and sensibility to one’s partner (at Oxygen Tango), musicality, conveyance of intention or physical communication, spatial relations, and culture. As mentioned, a number of participants described these dance practices a way to reconnect to/belong *in* their bodies (as evidenced through participants noting a holistic sense of expressivity when dancing that incorporates both emotional content and ideas). They also

belong to both cultures *through* their bodies—dancing together cultivates a sense of belonging within the communities. The participants experience something in these dancing cultures that they cannot do alone, not just because of the necessity of, for instance, a tango partner, but because dancers share in the interactive components of the tango experience and at The Sweat Spot, participate in the co-creation of an affective experience that draws them repeatedly to the culture.

The techniques in both locations have some similarities, some crossover, and some variations in focus. However, in both cases, the techniques produce belonging—a means through which the participants can connect to a shared experience. As the platform for the techniques is movement, these cultures cultivate a kinesthetic belonging and I explore key ideas that contribute to how belonging can be theorized as movement-based.

Mutual Incorporation

Intersubjectivity, one of the primary theories I utilize to better understand the data, addresses shared meaning as a result of dynamic interactions between engaged subjects and becomes valuable here in conceptualizing belonging as body-based and interrelational. Froese and Fuchs (2012) introduce a particular conceptualization of intersubjectivity, embodied intersubjectivity, which centers on neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese’s “embodied simulation” (2005) through which mirror neurons, or coactive neural circuits “mediate our capacity to share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings, and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others” (2009, 519). Enaction theorist Tom Froese and philosopher and psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs posit that these simulations affirm the conception of an extended body, or

“an enactive and phenomenological notion that emphasizes the socially mediated nature of embodiment” (Froese and Fuchs 2012, 205). In this construct the body is not limited by the confines of the physical structure, but is entangled in mutual dynamism (Froese and Fuchs 2012, 205), which describes a social contingency that reflects a multi-directional host of possible factors such as “bodily resonance, affect attunement, coordination of gestures, facial and vocal expression and others” (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009, 466). These interrelational occurrences then are considered dynamic ways of not just simulating or decoding social interactions, but of engaging in a system, as Fuchs and philosopher of mind and cognitive science Hanne De Jaegher propose, a “dynamical agentive system” (466).

To bring this back to the notion of belonging, at Oxygen Tango some of the more experienced dancers spoke about their efforts to make newer participants feel welcome by dancing with them and in doing so, actively build the community. At The Sweat Spot, though much different in construction, the instructors and participants stressed that dancing oneself, one’s individuality, is a value of the community—through this experimental expression all the dancers are accepted into the folds of the culture. So belonging is actively valued in both sites. In viewing this through the lenses above—intersubjectivity and the dynamism of enaction—the dancers seem to be mutually incorporating each other, or consciously constructing a common intercorporeality (Fuchs and Jaegher 2009, 465). The structures of the cultures support systems in which the dancers do not experience themselves as separate from the group, but rather they reaffirm

their own belonging and their acceptance of others through continued participation in conscious embodied social engagement that centers on shared resonant movement.

Belonging and Shared Meaning

Dancers at both sites are in on something together—there are protocols (both verbal and physical) that participants come to understand within the cultures, whether the customs of the Oxygen Tango *practica* or the movement across the floor in *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams*. The signification of these guidelines is not fixed but they provide a framework within which the dancers can bring the experiences to life again and again, never exactly the same, each time reliant on the interactions of the present group and their dynamic embodied dialogues. These activities inherently have meaning for the cultures as they are repeated with the shifting environmental factors—different dancers, temperature in the room, volume of music, energy of the participants (Fuchs and Jaegher 2009, 470). Kinesthetic belonging then is not stagnant, but a moving depiction of the cultural unfoldings.

Through these interactions, or social encounters in which the dancers coordinate together, “they can participate in each other’s sense-making” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). Through mutual incorporation, dancers form an “extended body” (Froese and Fuchs 2012) and this system has “an autonomy of its own” (Fuchs 2017, 340). For instance, the participants at Oxygen Tango describe the dance floor as a larger organism—all the dancers function together. Further, there is a modulatory effect to social interactions based on history and the type of interaction (De Jaegher 2015, 125). As dancers at The Sweat Spot prepare for a class warm-up, they have a sense of what the

group dynamic and expectation is, and they modulate accordingly to contribute to the experience. As participants coordinate action together, they fluidly shift between positions of autonomy and integration (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007, 496). Participatory sense-making coordinates “intentional activity in interaction, whereby individual sense-making processes are affected, and new domains of social sense-making can be generated that were not available to each individual on her own” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007, 497). Participants’ intrinsic subjectivity, a necessary component of these cultures, which rely on processes that are co-constituted through interactions, is coordinated with the other dancers within the sociality of the communities to network kinesthetic belonging, to body-belong through these dancing encounters.

Reflexively Reflecting #2

My partner Sammy leads me to step backwards and I retreat, surrendering space with my right leg that he steps forward to fill with his left. I consider how our bodies reflect/simulate each other and the concept of mirror neurons drifts into my field of awareness. I know that Sammy and I affect each other on many levels as we take this first step and throughout the ensuing dance and I wonder what we can offer, consciously choose to contribute to this experience that we are co-shaping; what can we give each other within this dance? I recall dancers at Oxygen Tango describing how the instructors talk about trying to make one’s partner feel loved. Empathy as a practiced embodied interaction and kinesthetic belonging seem as though they too are in an embrace. As I runway walk across the floor in *Sweaty Sundays-Slow Jams* with a young dancer in a shiny peacock blue unitard, I contemplate how in these brief moments together we are

not only bringing something (dance, energy) into being but bringing each other into belonging. We extend through our bodies a common intercorporeity, a mutual incorporation, accepting one another through a shared embodied encounter; we participate together, making sense of this world through our bodies. Dancing together like this we return to a way of understanding ourselves beyond words, the categories and configurations that we allow to shape us, to the bodies that inevitably make us, through movement, strategically enfolding us again and again into each other, revealing the dynamism, the vitality of kinetic community.

Thinking in/and the Body: Kinesthesia, Communication, and Language

Participants describe *knowing* through their bodies, a way of thinking not in the traditional sense, but as being led by movement. At Oxygen Tango, this arose frequently as the dancers discussed how they feel their way into movement—they sense their partners initiating something or identify openings and pathways through the body to which they then respond in such a way that does not seem calculated through thought and planning but rather, through a body-based responsiveness. At The Sweat Spot in many of the improvisational moments the dancers describe turning off their judgmental mind and trying to flow through their bodies, letting the movement be their guide (while also responding to the prompts, the other dancers, and the affective energy). These experiences seem to suggest that participants tap into alternate systems of understanding and engaging with their environments through embodied interactions. I have addressed several interrelational theories that access what is happening between bodies, but to better understand this embodied *knowing*, I look to kinesthesia, or the sense of movement,

which is a challenge to isolate both in the body and through representation in language. However, as a critical component of not only what the participants inherently experience, but also what they find most elusive to define, it seems a necessary undertaking to tackle its complexity here. To do so, I consider an immersive approach into the ways in which movement itself (and not just bodies) can be theorized through the participants' *moving*, and by considering movement as a *participant*, to gain a more profound understanding of how our motility, our kinesthesia, referring here to self-movement while sensing oneself move (Bolens 2012, 2), is a pivotal factor that shapes meaning and culture; through movement we are both subject and agent within a given structure. I look to the research findings at both sites to develop a more in-depth discussion of movement itself, or in this case, dancing as the vitality of the theory, its *raison d'être*. I also address the challenge of language to express the dimensionality of the body in motion.

Kinesthesia: The Understudy of The Senses

Although the intention at Oxygen Tango may be to connect through the social dance of Argentine Tango (and the myriad instructional approaches and activities) and at The Sweat Spot to be expressive and connect through affective practice, participants at both sites inherently, through their repetitive and exploratory practices of movement and sensory awareness, develop the sense of kinesthesia. This is discussed implicitly in the data as the participants describe an increased awareness of their bodies, proprioceptive awareness, and sensitivity to their movement; at both locations kinesthesia is a result of the training and practice of dance, a byproduct of the embodied engagement.

This sub-section considers kinesthesia as the understudy to the senses, as a play on words—the under-studied, or least explored sense (often not even considered as a sense)—as well as the more traditional view of *understudy*, or one waiting in the wings for the chance to take center stage, the replacement sense. Kinesthesia is not typically at the forefront of our perceptive awareness; however, this may be once again a byproduct of Descartes’s influential diminution of the body to the mind or perhaps it is due to the fact that kinesthesia is by nature experiential and difficult to express declaratively, language cannot properly describe its attributes as it reflects a different mode of knowledge. The moving body then is difficult to theorize; we exist primarily in a “language-tethered consciousness” (Sheets-Johnstone 2009, 349). The vast possibilities for what is happening in any given moment are always shifting—interactions, reactions, and perceptions. Documenting these occurrences, dissecting them to singular phenomenon becomes an immense task in such dynamic system. However, the dance experiences at these two sites and the data it produced provide a critical insight into how kinesthesia might be conceptualized.

Kinesthesia is a form of embodied knowledge and this directly references the sense of knowing through the body described at both sites. Noting that kinesthesia, or the sensory-based knowledge of the body’s movement and tactility, the perception of touching and being touched, first develops in utero, Sheets-Johnstone infers that human concepts are generated in movement (30). Through our proprioception, our understanding of where our bodies are in space, and through kinesthesia, our sense of movement, we attune to the shifting environments. Although the language for how these embodied

decisions are made is not clear, as kinesthesia is not common as a term or a sense, they are loosely described in a host of different methods in the data.

Several participants at both sites described how alert their bodies felt when dancing in contrast to how they do not have such keen awareness of their physicality in other aspects of their lives. In a few instances, the term *consciousness* was used in relation to a more body forward awareness. As a specific example that is representative of similar comments at both sites, Adina, one of the dancers at The Sweat Spot, mentioned she noticed a “group consciousness” in the classes, that is, as she described, “of the body,” as differentiated from some other type of more mental construct. This speaks to the difficulty of getting at a specific rendering of what kinesthesia is in terms of a lived, danced experience. Sheets-Johnstone posits that kinesthesia “leads us to the experiential core of constituting consciousness” (2009, 129) and from this introduces the concept of “kinesthetic consciousness,” or a “streaming present...that we experience qualitatively” (131). Through this awareness of our self-movement, we are “*discovering* our bodies, not *controlling* them” (129). Sheets-Johnstone’s work to some degree clarifies Adina’s comment about consciousness; however, I return to interrelational theory to highlight how we might conceive of the kinesthetic experience as offset from a dynamic group interaction and further explicate it as a qualitative perception.

Structures of Contact

The interrelationality of moving bodies is a primary factor, a given foundational element at both sites. Intercorporeity is the theoretical starting point proffered in both data chapters, which, as based on Merleau-Ponty’s initial conception, presupposes that

bodies sharing space influence each other at levels prior to conscious awareness.

Intercorporeity here is considered, “a radical and coherent conception of the human body as being *constituted* by its corporeal relations and interactions with other human or animate bodies” (Meyer et al. 2017, xviii). Through this phenomenological perspective and from the data at both sites the dancers congregate with the shared intention of moving together. The subtle adjustments that happen to accommodate the other dancers in the space reveal the implications of this intercorporeal communication, that dancers and dances are co-constituted by the joint presence and embodied interactions of the participants.

At Oxygen Tango, the critical element of physical contact between bodies directly transfers information—movement cues, qualitative dynamics, musicality—between partners; whereas, at The Sweat Spot, the data suggest that the dancers exceed their corporeality, or extend beyond their flesh, to utilize Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of the relations between bodies (1968, 145). It seems significant to address the structures of contact at both sites—one inherently relying on physical touch and the other focused more on the expansive range of movement within a dynamic class setting.

Participants engage in both communities to be in body-contact, to have intercorporeal experiences, but the contact varies and so the participants have different perceptions of what it means to be in contact and by extension what dancing bodies do together, how they influence each other, and the intercorporeal implications. At Oxygen Tango, the partners and even the larger dance floor become integrated into the dancer’s body schema (Gallagher 2005, 32). The dancers share fields of awareness through a

combination of physical contact and increased awareness or sensitivity to the other participants. At The Sweat Spot, the dancers move separately, without physical contact, but practice heightened sensitivity to the other dancers in the space by watching them, feeling their presence, and spatially perceiving them, moving together through these awarenesses with an increased receptiveness to the shared experience.

In both cases however, by integrating and expanding upon existing structures, the more obscure intercorporeity can be magnified and perhaps better clarified. In this case, through a return to kinesthesia and a particular conception of it, interkinesthesia, which refers, according to Behnke, to “specifically kinaesthetic modes of interbodily relationality” (2008, 144). Behnke addresses the paradigm of interrelationality, of bodies sharing space and the numerous possibilities of it through her statement, “my body is something I do” and “I do not do it alone” (1997, 198). This “interkinesthetic field” (Behnke 2008) that Behnke describes helps to clarify body-based knowing as an environmental experience, incorporating other bodies and stimuli that shape response and is a useful construction as an underlying platform for kinesthesia and for grounding inter-body influences through these dance practices.

There is a pivotal reshaping in understanding that participants, participate, that the act of engagement is a creative act, and together, a co-creative act. Participating requires moving and being moved—a receptivity to the experience at hand in all its dimensionality—kinesthetic, emotional, affective. To achieve this, both sites train a heightened awareness of somatic sensations, of kinesthesia, and an understanding of how movement transpires—anatomically, qualitatively, dynamically—in order to more

effectively communicate, whether or not the communication is symbolic, representative, or entirely abstract. Moving, or self-moving (kinesthesia) within a culturally determined practice or with purpose necessarily reconstructs the culture from which the practice emerged. Through kinesthesia, which is not only about moving, but also noticing the moving self, the culture is creative, generative, and constructive. It offers the opportunity to transgress existing values; it is progressive; it can both world build and world break.

Speaking Dance

During the data collection process, particularly while conducting interviews, I noted that participants at both sites consistently struggled with describing their dancing experiences verbally, expressing frustration with the lack of words to accurately represent various sensations in the body. They noted a gap between dancing as constituted through the body, through action, through movement, and its translation mediated through verbal language. One of the concerns that arose through the data in both sites is whether language can accurately capture the felt-sensations of movement or if language continues to reduce aspects of the dancing experience, such as kinesthesia, to the position of understudy, forever relegated to the wings. This led me to recognize a limitation of this study: much of the participant observation focused on cultural aspects of the sites. I do include reflections on the movement through field notes (for which I stopped dancing to write), as well as participants' perspectives in conversations and interviews, which privileged, by my own construct, phenomenological descriptions through verbal language (although offset by ethnographic data). However, this seemed to fall short of fully capturing the experience of dancing, the knowledge of the body. From the outset, I audio

recorded the interviews as well as documented video footage to capture any movement responses that might enhance and inform the verbal replies. I did note the frequent use of hand gestures, which I transcribed and analyzed; however, because most of the interviews took place in public venues, mainly coffee shops, other movement was restrained. I wanted to better understand the nature of moving bodies in relationship to meaning making through actual dancing as the primary data source.

Up to this point the sources of information about embodied experiences at both sites translate the dancing, not wholly capturing the discourse of the moving body as a vital component of research data, the ways in which the body might think in movement. As I sat in the café with Danae, she reflected on how she would prefer to dance the interview. A few of the other participants responded to questions by telling me they could “show me” the answers but they were difficult to describe. I mused on what would happen if the interviews took place in the studio at The Sweat Spot and the dancers could have flexibility to move between speaking and dancing or simultaneously do both. I was curious about the contributions of the phenomenological moving body and so I developed an in-studio hybridized verbal/physical interview process involving ten participants at The Sweat Spot. I termed this experience “danced responses.”

I utilized guiding questions for the danced responses centered on the more phenomenological aspects of the primary interviews, such as, “what are you aware of while you’re dancing?” There were sixteen total participants for the verbal interviews from both locations and ten participants from The Sweat Spot who contributed danced responses with two overlapping, or follow-ups from the initial verbal interviews. The

dancers were instructed either to respond with movement alone or to hybridize movement and speech as desired. The most significant difference other than the actual inclusion of movement is that the dancers had the option of responding to questions about how they feel dancing alone or with others in a duet/group.

Although, in the verbal interviews, participants struggled with languaging their experiences, some of the participants who contributed danced responses described the experience as reflecting more precisely what they meant to express. The participants as a whole were excited to get to actually move, to take me to the source of their knowledge. The answers were more complex than a verbal response alone. For example, Adina describes what she is aware of in regards to other dancers in the space: “There's a sense of physical listening...” She crawls out into a plank position. Andrew slides under her plank on his stomach and pauses, extending his left arm and then right forward so his face is flat on the floor. He arches slightly with his chest up in a cobra shape which seems to send them both to roll simultaneously, Adina onto her right arm and Andrew onto his left side still underneath her as she continues, “...trying to see with something that isn't your eyes.” As I observe this integrated response, I notice what seemed a more vivid processing of information through the body than in the more stationary interview. There were more pauses to allow time to integrate the movement, during which there seemed to be a reflection on the question through the body. Dance-as-discourse rendered the responses more intricate and of course, more challenging to analyze.

To code and analyze this data I considered how involving the participant community might be critical in assessing the danced responses. The participants did have

an opportunity to reflect back on their movement responses and add to or translate their experience to verbal language, rendering more body-driven language. I hope to continue the research process and as I do, to gain more insight from the community. This process affirmed that if we continue to privilege one type of knowledge over another, we might miss what else is happening between the words, beyond the page. That said, although there is inevitable slippage between the body and the text, the value in creatively pursuing avenues for rethinking the merging of different modes of discourse seems to be key in shaping the future of understanding the moving body and how knowledge is constructed. The focus in all cases for participants is the act of dancing; these cultures would not exist without it. It is then foundational to conceptualize the dancing body as a primary source of data, to utilize it to animate and develop theory and to interrogate the means by which the body is stilled, through which it soars, and how it can be discussed, but not detained from its inevitable kinesthetic expression.

Improvising on Themes/Pathways to Exploring Alternate Connections

The three themes presented in this chapter reflect distinct windows into these worlds, conceptual windows, or portholes drawn out of experience and theory that shape a deeper understanding of these selected cultures and the broader possibilities for dancing communities. Interrelationality proved a pervasive concept—the structure through which many of the meaningful occurrences conjoined, the edifice in which the windows were drawn. In these communities, the dancers together dancing is the pillar of our structure, of what is happening, how it is happening, and why it is happening. The theme of connection drawn from Chapter IV on Oxygen Tango is our canopy here, an overarching

way of conceptualizing the diverse elements of experience at both sites. Dancers come to connect, or re-connect, to their bodies, reaffirming an enduring sense of what it was to be pre-linguistic, finding this experience in their own bodies within the construct of these communities, through the support of the other dancers. The intersubjectively shared meaning compelled by the differing forms of contact, the circulation of energy through affective practice, the expressivity of the self and the group, provides a glimpse as to what it might be to experience the world prioritizing our kinesthesia. The dancers build these communities through the myriad connections, creating a place to return, to find the home within their bodies, and to continue the cycle of engagement all the while belonging, intimately belonging.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Notes from the Ending

In the introduction, I invited you to notice your placement, taking stock of your legs, feet, how you sit. I invite you to return to that place again, that place we started, but this time I am curious if you notice how reading this dissertation, bringing your attention to interrelationality, shifts your thinking. Or does it? If we had been present together in space and time as animate beings, would the dynamics of my intermittent stretching have activated you to also extend your legs and lean forward? Would the arch of your chest up to the ceiling, inverting the hunched focus of your concentration, prompt me to join in a skyward backbend, feeling my chest open, our breath deepening. I thought that we might meet through these pages and perhaps share, through the mutual awareness of our bodies, some possibility for an otherwise lost connection. And yet, if not with me here and now, then perhaps as you walk with friends, take a class at the gym, dance, sing in a choir, play in a band, attend a concert, perhaps you will notice the other bodies with you and will muse, as I have here, on how we influence each other, that you hold this consciousness in mind as a possibility for building reflective intersubjective shared meaning as we move as bodied beings through our worlds.

Ideas Converging

In the previous pages, I described the interrelational practices of two dance cultures with special attention on the dancers' lived experiences of these practices. From these descriptions I claimed that the techniques at Oxygen Tango and The Sweat Spot function to deepen community connection and operate as affective practice; I argued that the use of imagery and metaphor access dynamic qualities of movement and act as a platform for individual expression on the basis of shared understanding; I posited that intimacy and loss support subjecthood and act as driving forces within the cultures; I contended that kinesthetic belonging manifests through the body; I addressed the challenge of languaging the dynamism of the dance experience. I now expand my focus to discuss how I see this work contributing to existing conversations in Dance Studies, Philosophy, and Social Psychology. I will discuss some conceptual and methodological concerns that might limit the credibility of the study, and lastly some questions that I hope will drive this research forward.

Making Tangible the Body

The purpose of this research was, in part, to bring concrete experiences of the moving body to (disembodied) philosophical discourse about embodiment. I hope this work becomes part of a larger trend of situating discussions of interrelationality—intercorporeity, intersubjectivity, and affect—in specific contexts. I would like to focus here on how I think this work contributes to three specific ideas that heavily influenced the understanding of the data and the outcomes and with which I hope my work

starts/continues a conversation: Hamera's conception of technique, Wetherell's theory of affective practice, and Sheets-Johnstone's philosophical research on kinesthesia (although I draw attention to and acknowledge Sheets-Johnstone as having a much greater influence on my work here than solely on the understanding of kinesthesia).

The findings confirmed and expanded Hamera's conceptualization of technique within dancing communities. I utilized her theory extensively to ground this research; technique was conceptualized as a means through which moving bodies develop tactics for building dancing communities (2007, 5). Technique as a shared idiom or a grammar of movement (5) was useful to understand what the dancing in these cultures establishes. Through the data at The Sweat Spot, I extended the complexity of Hamera's work by considering technique as a potential for propagating shared energy through affective practice. In considering further possibilities for how technique might be re-envisioned to incorporate energetic transmissions or affective practice, I wonder about pedagogical training that might effectively incorporate exercises to build, through movement and cueing, specific approaches that would enhance expressive experiences, group dynamics, and enhanced shared connection.

In presenting an in-depth analysis of existing work on affect, I maintained that Wetherell's particular conceptualization of affect as affective practice to be a compelling lens through which to understand how The Sweat Spot community strategizes shared energetic transmissions as part of its technique. In adapting Wetherell's theory, I elucidated affective practice as rendered through the lived experience of a dancing culture. Dance as a discourse can provide a system for exploring the regions of affect that

exist outside linguistic mappings. Through its inherent consideration of the body, dance can create affective environments that result in intercorporeal exchanges. Dance then seems to provide a pathway to experience affect, through a conscious presence in the body offering access to new ways of understanding it, not attempting to talk about it but rather, to know it directly through the body.

This study has also explored alternate knowledge derived from but in excess of the experience of participation, particularly the sense of movement or kinesthesia. Sheets-Johnstone extensively considers kinesthesia and its value. Here I positioned it within the animate structures of these communities. Although it still remains elusive, I clarified what it does, how it can be a basis for interrelationality. Further exploration of kinesthesia may illuminate alternate knowledge of the body, revealing through movement varied ways of connecting to oneself and others.

Tracing the Body: What Gets Left Unsaid

In Chapter III: *Methodology: Phenomenology-Based Ethnography*, I discussed methodological and conceptual considerations that might limit the credibility, believability, confirmability, and comparability of the study and the steps I took to address those limitations. In an effort to be transparent, I disclose here further considerations that came to my attention as I completed the research and in doing so, consider them as an opportunity for me to critically assess this work and also to shape the direction of future projects.

This project began with my own curiosity about interrelational happenings in dance environments and I knew that my attention would be drawn to certain types of

interactions and certain types of answers during the interviews. As a qualitative researcher, it is important for me to be reflexive and closely examine my own subjectivity and I kept this at the forefront of my process during the research. However, it is still possible that I directed the focus to these types of occurrences by asking follow-up questions during interviews about responses that discussed these areas and I may have preferenced interrelationality in my own field notes. One of the key ways that I remediated this potential issue was the inclusion of member checks in which participants read the whole chapters relevant to their participation and shared feedback and responses. They could verify and supplement (or withdraw) their contributions as well as comment on the outcomes. In this way, I was careful to ensure that the voices of the participants were ethically represented and that what they were saying and what they were interested in was ultimately what drove the research forward.

My attempt to complete this Ph.D. might have led to an abbreviated data collection process. Also, in splitting my attention between the two sites, I had to sacrifice a depth in each of them; another three months of data collection would have likely led to even richer description, more diverse participant pool, and deeper analysis. However, I did notice a saturation in the data and so I do not believe that this discounts the validity of the findings.

I recognize the challenge of describing embodied experiences though the modality of language, to study the non-propositional through the propositional. Not only did I try to address this in the data collection process, but I also paid careful attention to it in the writing process, finding ways to keep the body present, as much as possible, in the

written draft. Further, the danced responses provided a potential remedy as they were inclusive of the moving body as a direct source of data in interviews. However, no matter how clever the attempt at capturing movement, there is always slippage between the body and the page. A continued pursuit of ways to integrate the body seems not only critical to this project but a necessary consideration in the future and I am curious about the remedies, the interventions that might manifest themselves as options moving forward.

Moving Forward...

As I consider the future direction for this research, I glance at the numerous questions on colorful paper pinned to the corkboard wall in my hallway as well as the ones I frantically scribbled in my research notebook, trying to set the thoughts on the page before they dissipated. I started this process with questions, which gained traction leading to more and more, not necessarily answerable, but they chart a continued journey and I therefore consider some of these questions as a suitable place to conclude, the conclusion itself just another aspect of the ongoing-ness of the work. The latest round of questions, which will certainly also evolve and increase includes: What does developmental research on kinesthesia look like? How does dance research optimize an approach to alternate knowledge systems? How can we remedy the slippage in translating bodily knowledge? How does empathy as a consideration of interrelational occurrences integrate with the theories I have explored, particularly as a more quantifiable possibility? Can dance technique be a way for us to access a collective body memory that reminds us of our tactile-kinesthetic nature? How might this research be used in teaching dance (and in other disciplines) and could these interrelational occurrences be considered an asset to

learning and a motivation for movement in education? I explain now how I envision a few of these ideas progressing, a few possibilities for how this research might move forward.

When I initially conceived of this project the methodology included elements of practice research. Practice research emphasizes embodied experience as integral to new knowledge formation, which is vital to consider in utilizing dance experiences as the primary source of data. Dance researcher Franziska Schroeder states that “tacit knowledge,” what we know but cannot articulate—as in the knowledge of the body—must be brought into the equation if we are to “conceive of practice not as much driven by theoretical and conceptual concerns, but as the materials and processes which are productive in their own right” (347). I can envision, instead of phenomenology-based ethnography, a study utilizing a practice research design possibly with a focus group, which integrates similar interview techniques as the danced responses, hybridizing dancing and speaking. As philosopher and researcher Jaana Parviainen states, “I do not need to translate movement discoveries in literal form; the body itself is capable of a knowing that is closely related to a ‘corporeal intellect’” (Parviainen 2002, 20). I believe this might access new information about interrelationality and stress the recognition of different knowledge systems as the practice research model seeks to deprioritize one type of knowledge over another. The findings of this project might be best presented in a hybrid performative presentation, with dancing bodies and written theory co-integrated.

Participants in these dancing communities gather information about each other through verbal dialogue and also through the experience of moving together. Gallese

believes that mirror neurons are a key component to how we gain knowledge about each other (2009, 523-524). He defines mirror neurons as “premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else” (2009, 520). He relates these mirror neurons to how we embody empathy, through watching the movement of others and relating it back to our own bodies. Through the lens of dance, Foster understands empathy as “the potential of one body’s kinesthetic organization to infer the experience of another” (2011, 175). I would be interested to study cultures such as these and attempt to understand how empathy not only manifests, but also, if it can be cultivated through a technique, or a means to strategize possibilities for developing meaningful emotional connection.

As my work continues, guided by the pathway of the ever-increasing questions, I consider Haraway’s (1998) call for theory to “build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (580)—theory that changes the way we live and experience the world. My focus then moving forward (and indeed I do mean *move*) is not solely on what happens when we move, but also how can this work move us? What is its function? What can it *do*? The journey of this research then is active as is what I hope are its outcomes, that even as we here have connected through this text borne of our stationary bodies, that we can recognize the movement, the potential, and that it will, like wind in a sail, propel us onward.

Before We Part...

As a tactile-kinesthetic being researching dancing communities, my body was the means through which I came to know these worlds, these cultures of Oxygen Tango and

The Sweat Spot. Situated within my corporeality, I was shaped by and also shaped these environments. I consider now how the process of this research has altered how I feel taking tango classes, or for example, *Gaga*. I notice with more conscious attention the details, almost as if I am still trying to write, to capture all the particulars that shape the experience so that I can convey them, I can somehow make them dance on the page. I realize that these experiences (and much of this dissertation) are centered on communication, dancing bodies connect through a shared (communicated) understanding with each other and the larger group, and then I sit here trying to communicate how they communicate. In mulling this over, the dancers become multiplicities: bodies themselves creating dynamic movement that has the potential to affect other bodies, borderless bodies, with their fleshy exteriors porous, transcending their limitations. These cultures do not just teach a technique that ends at the style, they offer alternate ways of being in the body (as bodies together) and thus alternate ways of being alive. Through these pages, the findings from these communities become possibilities for how we might understand what it can mean to be part of a dancing culture, what it can mean to belong, to feel intimately the connection to other dancing bodies, to sense through the body something more than just the way we present ourselves to the world, our tastes and predilections, our politics, but to feel each other through our movement, to ground each other in our natural-ness, our most vital selves and the many things we have discovered together and of course, the many more that we have yet to discover. And so as I step into the embrace at a *practica*, overhead lights illuminating the smallest features of my partner's face, knowing that she too can see this of my own face, I feel my partner fully, but because of

all this attention to detail, I feel you, the reader, and my work here, knowing that I must be more and more articulate to describe the evasive moments of movement, the potential to move and be moved existing through and beyond our bodies, contained but not restrained from living within these pages.

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