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Dancing Across Difference: Transforming Habitual Modes of Being in the World Through Movement

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Women's Studies and Feminist Research

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Abstract

Although some important scholarly work has been done on race, and whiteness, in relation to habit, my account addresses the role of movement in habit through dance. Dance is well-suited for exploring habit since dancers cultivate an intimate knowledge of their bodies as habitual dancing bodies. I argue that dancing can offer critical insight into how habitual modes of being in the world may be shifted and changed. Dancers' mastery of movement not only consists in sedimenting habits within the body, but also involves actively exploring how one's own bodily movement can be altered (Ravn 2017; Damkjaer, 2015; Ingerslev, 2013; Legrand and Ravn, 2009). The specialized ability that dancers' have to register, disrupt, and confront their own habitual dancing body is unique. Given this, I turn specifically to the experience of learning a new style of dance for an in-depth exploration of how habitual modes of being in the world can be changed through movement. Drawing on my own lived experience of learning Bharatanatyam, a classical style of Indian dance, I show that the phenomena of disorientation (Ahmed 2006) and hesitation (Al-Saji, 2009) revealed through learning a new style of dance create the conditions for double consciousness by disrupting the latent habitual structures within the body and subsequently allowing for the resedimentation of habits. By disrupting one's sense of bodily spatiality, experiences of disorientation disrupt the *ease*, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement. The feeling of *delay* that arises in moments of hesitation disturbs one's habitual sense of temporality and enables one to register residual habitual structures in the body as over-determining intentional action. This opens an interval of indetermination that enables bodily receptivity, and makes felt the contingency of habit (the possibility of becoming otherwise). Experiences of disorientation and hesitation are significant because they can open the possibility for double consciousness, which can ground critical reflection. I argue that this same process of resedimentation revealed through learning a new dance, can be applied to racializing perception as well, and can provide an opportunity to understand how to live whiteness differently.

Lay Summary

Although some important scholarly work has been done on race, and whiteness, in relation to habit, my account addresses the role of movement in habit through dance. Dancers cultivate an intimate knowledge of their bodies as habitual dancing bodies. I argue that dancing can offer critical insight into how habitual modes of being in the world may be shifted and changed. Dancers have a specialized ability to register, disrupt, and confront their own habitual dancing body. Given this, I turn specifically to the experience of learning a new style of dance for an in-depth exploration of how habitual modes of being in the world can be changed through movement. Drawing on my own lived experience of learning Bharatanatyam, a classical style of Indian dance, I show that the phenomena of disorientation (Ahmed 2006) and hesitation (Al-Saji, 2009) revealed through learning a new style of dance create the conditions for double consciousness by disrupting the latent habitual structures within the body and subsequently allowing for the resedimentation of habits. This enables bodily receptivity, and makes felt the contingency of habit (the possibility of becoming otherwise). Experiences of disorientation and hesitation can open the possibility for double consciousness, which can ground critical reflection. I argue that this same process of resedimentation revealed through learning a new dance, can be applied to racializing perception as well, and can provide an opportunity to understand how to live whiteness differently.

Keywords

Embodiment; Feminist Phenomenology; Feminism; Phenomenology; Merleau-Ponty; Habit; Body; Corporeality; Movement; Race; Whiteness; Art; Dance; Arts Based Research

Acknowledgements

There have been so many people who have contributed to the successful completion of this project. First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude my supervisor, Helen Fielding, for all her support. Helen, you have taught me so much. Thank you for introducing me to feminist phenomenology and, of course, the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I appreciate all your kindness as I found my way. Your guidance has been invaluable, and I am so grateful for how you have helped me to grow as a thinker and a writer. Thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone and encouraging me to be creative.

A special thanks to my committee members, Kim Verwaayen and Srividya Natarajan, for all your thoughtful feedback. Your comments have helped improve my work and advanced my thinking. Kim, you were my first introduction to feminist theory and I have never looked back! Thank you for teaching me to think critically, and read closely. Vidya, you have given me the most beautiful gift. Thank you for welcoming me into your dance class and introducing me to Bharatanatyam. You have helped me to see/feel/think movement in new ways, and changed me as a dancer. I would also like to thank my examining committee, Erica Lawson, Jonathan De Souza, and Mary Woehrel. I appreciate you taking the time to thoughtfully engage with my dissertation. Your insights have given me so much to think about as I move forward.

Thank you to the Department of Women's Studies, the faculty, staff and fellow graduate students, as well as WSFR grad student collective. I am so grateful for the wonderful community of friends and colleagues who have made my experience as a Ph.D. student fun. Especially, Rachel Pack, Andie Shabbar, and Mayme Lefurgey. A special thanks to Miranda Niittynen for your friendship and kindness. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the members of the Merleau-Ponty reading group. Thank you for providing me with a space to work through my ideas and deepen my understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Appreciation is due to the members of my Bharatanatyam class as well, especially Vidya Natarajan and Nandita Mellaphy.

Warmest thanks to the Annesley girls, David Belfon and Alex Logue. Alex, I am so grateful for your friendship, and the part you have played in fueling my queer feminist spirit! David, I would not have been able to finish this without my writing buddy. You have kept me accountable and helped me get to the end of this tunnel. Many thanks for all your encouragement.

Jacqueline Potvin, thank you for being a friend, a kindred spirit, and partner in crime. You have supported me through difficult times and laughed with me when laughing felt impossible. Thank you for making me feel safe to be silly and helping me grow as a feminist. I am so grateful for your friendship, and thankful to have you to get lost with.

Thank you to my family: my parents, Don Dority and Carol Dority, and my sister Alyssa Dority. I could not have done this without your love and support. Mom, thank you for teaching me to dream big, for nurturing my imagination, and reminding me to be kind to

myself. Dad, thank you for all your encouragement. You have taught me to be a good listener, and to approach others with sensitivity and compassion. Alyssa, you are always my biggest cheerleader. Your endless confidence in me has kept me going, and I am so grateful for all your enthusiasm. Thank you for making me laugh and keeping me grounded. A heartfelt thanks to Derek and Jessica Jenkinson who have also been there through this whole process, and have been so supportive.

My animal companions have also been a source of tremendous support throughout this process. Jake, your love is so pure. You take care of me and make me smile. Thank you for making me get up in the morning and put on real pants. Ms. Molly Hopper, you are a diva and it is inspiring. Lucy Spoons, you are forever in my heart.

Finally, thank you John Jenkinson, my squeegee and ultimate babe. We began this journey together many years ago, and your tirelessness, love, and companionship have seen me to the end. The tenacity with which you live your philosophy has always inspired me. You have taught me to be steadfast in my politics, to speak up, and stand up for the change I want to see in the world. John, you have always believed in me and never let me give up. Thank you for seeing the magic inside of me, and helping me to believe in myself. I am eternally grateful.

My research has been supported by a doctoral fellowship from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Counsel (SSHRC), and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS).

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Abbreviations of Texts by Maurice Merleau-Ponty

AD *Adventures of the Dialectic*

EM “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception*

IP *Institution and Passivity*

PhP *Phenomenology of Perception*

PrP *Primacy of Perception*

SB *The Structure of Behavior*

VI *The Visible and the Invisible*

Setting the Stage

In July 2005, *Zero Degrees*, a dance theater piece created and performed by Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, premiered at Sadler's Wells Theater in London England. Based on Khan's own lived experience, the piece recounts the events of a journey across the border between Bangladesh and India, and provocatively negotiates the liminal spaces produced by borders, particularly when one occupies "dual identities." Watching *Zero Degrees* for the first time in 2015, I was struck by my own corporeal response to the tension underlying the complex rhythmic structure of its choreography.¹ The qualitative dynamics of the choreography would shift dramatically throughout the piece, with sequences of sophisticated synchronicity suddenly interrupted and becoming disjointed. Seamless smoothness would return to Khan and Cherkaoui's stylized gestures, only to once again become serrated and scattered. These unexpected oscillations in the dynamic flow and direction of the dancers' movements brought my attention to the connection between movement and freedom. The piece made felt the momentum of bodies that can move freely in the world, while juxtaposing this with others that cannot. My body responded to the oscillation between constrictive and expansive dynamics within the choreography with my own posture echoing this juxtaposition. This experience of watching the film served as a starting point from which I began to meditate on the complexities that enable motility of some bodies, while heavily regulating the motility of others.

¹ Although members of an audience watching a dance may not be not kinaesthetically engaged in dancing the dance, they are nevertheless attuned the qualitative dynamics of movement that are experienced and constitute the dance they are witnessing through their own kinesthetic sense. In other words, ideally, when watching dance an individual responds kinaesthetically, "experiencing the dance through his or her on sense of movement and postural change" (Reason & Reynolds 2010, 53). In other words, one feels the movements of the other through their own body. This has been supported by the substantial research on mirror neurons, which are located in the premotor cortex and controls motor activities. Mirror neurons register visually the movements of others (C.f Lohmar 2006; Gallese 2006). In other words, witnessing the movement of another arouses the same pattern of neurological activity in one's own premotor cortex!

For me, *Zero Degrees* made explicit the fact that in a time of global fear, freedom of movement is not granted to all as it grappled with the tensions restricting the motility of marginalized individuals socially marked as “Other” – those named as foreigner, stranger, criminal, queer, who are followed, monitored, policed, counted, and questioned.² Evidently, some bodies can move into spaces with *ease*, but others cannot. This disproportionality affects people of colour, who are habitually deemed “suspect,” are “randomly selected” and “stopped.”³ This is palpable in the opening sequence of the piece. Khan and Cherkaoui are seated cross-legged next to each other at the edge of the stage. Each is a mirror of the other, poised with their eyes downturned and legs crossed. Moments stretch uncomfortably. Our focus is drawn to their hands, which hold the shape of a passport. Together their gestures trace the path of the passport as it passes from one guard’s hands to another, and another. In unison, they speak: “I watched my passport pass through the hands of all the guards and I didn’t let it out of my sight, because although it’s just a piece of paper, without it you have no identity.” Hypothetically, a passport is a document that is meant to extend the motility of individuals by allowing them to cross borders. However, we know that passports do not work this way for everyone. A passport has the power to turn the gaze onto its owner, marking them as suspicious, out of place, a stranger. Watching as their intricately choreographed gestures traced the movement of the passport changing hands repeatedly, I felt tension rising in

² Scholarly engagement with *Zero Degrees* has centered primarily on identity, and the piece has received enormous praise as a performative embodiment of diasporic identity (Cf Mitra 2009; Kattrak 2014). Outside of the focus on identity, the piece is often used as an example of cultural “fusion” (C.f. Smith, 2008). These discussions situate *Zero Degrees* in relation to debates surrounding diversity and multiculturalism. Although terms such as “diversity” and “multiculturalism” have become commonplace in our current political and cultural world, they have been widely criticized for being primarily descriptive, and “signaling heterogeneity without implied power relations” (Banerji, 35). When multiculturalism and diversity are presented in this context as value free, impartial indicators of difference it can allow for relations of power and privilege to drop out of sight. Much of the scholarly literature addressing *Zero Degrees* offers a largely de-politicized reading of the piece. For me, these analyses overlooked how the piece registers and critiques relations of power and privilege, and compels questions about ethical encounter.

³ White bodies, on the other hand, are significantly less likely to be delayed, or surveyed to the same degree (C.f. Helleiner 2012; Puwar 2004; Saulnier 2015).

my shoulders, and like Khan and Cherkaoui, suddenly “I realise how vulnerable I am.” Knowing that vulnerability is not equally distributed, and that some bodies are rendered more vulnerable than others (C.f. Butler 2009), this sequence left me asking how to confront the expansive mobility afforded to *my own* white body, simply because of its whiteness. This example shows ways that dance can be valuable for posing and addressing more direct and pointed questions about the lived dynamics of contemporary life, and specifically by bringing to light questions concerning the ways that race is taken up in the lived gestures of the body.

Watching *Zero Degrees* enriched my understanding of the painful contradictions that shape and constrain lived experiences of racialized individuals. It also brought *my own* whiteness to the fore and called my attention to the *ease* with which I move in the world. In this project, I bring the living, dancing body together with existential phenomenology in order to build on these insights, and explore how habitual modes of being in the world may be transformed *through movement*. This project begins from the assumption that contemporary art and philosophy are intertwined. Phenomenologically, artworks bring into appearance what recedes to the background in everyday experience and ordinary life (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Mallin 1996). Dance specifically articulates the embodied dynamics that allow one to encounter the world and shows up how ‘embodied subjects understand, inhabit, and interpret our worlds in and through movement (C.f. Sheets-Johnstone 2015; Parviainen 1998). However, turning to dancing bodies can be difficult. Dance is an ephemeral art form that, unlike most other artistic practices, has an ambiguous object status. In other words, dance does not leave an object in its wake that can be straightforwardly taken up for analysis.⁴ Dancing bodies are always exceeding one’s grasp, becoming and becoming undone through movement. This characteristic can pose problems for integrating dancing within the cognitive-linguistic traditions that define/confine thinking and knowledge in academic institutions. Indeed, the methods and discourses of the academy do not easily lend themselves to expressing the depth of lived embodied experiences. Nevertheless, because of its focus on lived experience and

⁴ You cannot point to a dance the way you can point to a painting and say “there it is”!

embodied perception, existential phenomenology provides a preliminary framework through which the living, dancing body can be understood.

My interest in embodied transformation led me to phenomenology and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on the pre-reflective level of habit and its relation to motor intentionality. There are other scholars who discuss habit, but I find that Merleau-Ponty offers the most compelling account of the way habits are taken up through bodily movement, which, of course, makes it particularly well-suited for an examination of the habitual structures of the living, dancing body. For Merleau-Ponty, the capacity for habit expresses an intelligence that belongs specifically to our bodies: the knowledge *in* my hands that allows me to type, dance, or play an instrument (PhP, 145). Habit is a *bodily understanding*, rather than either a thetic form of knowledge or an automatic reflex, which allows for a cohesion between the subject and their world. Colloquially, habits are seen as fixed ways of doing things. However, this reading of habit overlooks precisely what habits capacitate people to do: adjust our actions to adapt to or modify our situated contexts. For instance, when I hear the hauntingly beautiful drone of the bagpipes at the beginning of the tune *Ghillie Callum*, my body responds by comporting itself towards the style of Highland dance. I pre-reflectively feel my bodily intentionality reaching upwards as I ready myself to rise on the balls of my feet. By contrast, when I hear the droning tone that accompanies Indian music my body reaches down toward the earth⁵. These different situations characterized by their different musical contexts call forth different habitual structures because my body is habituated to these specific situations. Despite the similar tonal quality of these musical cues, my body is so specifically habituated to these different contexts that I respond in accordance to the situation evoked by the sound. Habitual behaviors arise in *response to a situation* that might either be routine and expected or unusual and unforeseen. For Merleau-Ponty, habit "expresses the power we have of dilating our being in the world, or of altering our existence" (PhP, 145). Certainly, habits predispose one to certain modes of responding to the world by anticipating one's intentional action. However, on Merleau-Ponty's account, habit is not

⁵ The drone sound is typically produced by tanpura and describes a continuous harmonic or monophonic tone that plays in the background of the music/performance.

antithetical to innovation. Rather, there is an improvisational generativity at the of heart of our habitual ways of being in the world. One is not, therefore, condemned by the ways that (bad) habits of white privilege, for instance, have been sedimented in the body. Because habits are a kind of *doing* rather than a kind of *being*, there is potential for them to be taken up differently.

Although some important scholarly work has been done on race, and whiteness, in relation to habit, my account addresses the role of movement in habit through dance. I demonstrate that dance is particularly well-suited for exploring habit since dancers cultivate an intimate knowledge of their bodies as habitual dancing bodies. Dancers' mastery of movement not only consists in sedimenting habits within the body, but also includes an active involvement in embodied exploration of what might be changed in the way they move (Ravn 2017; Damkjaer, 2015; Ingerslev, 2013; Legrand and Ravn, 2009). Dancers' possession of a specialized ability to register, disrupt, and confront their own habitual dancing body is distinct. Given this, I turn specifically to the experience of learning a new style of dance for an in-depth exploration of how habitual modes of being in the world can be changed through movement. I argue that the phenomena of disorientation and hesitation revealed through learning a new style of dance create the conditions for double consciousness by disrupting the latent habitual structures within the body and subsequently allowing for the resedimentation of habits. This same process of resedimentation revealed through learning a new dance, I argue, can be applied to racializing perception as well, and can provide an opportunity to understand how to live whiteness differently.

Dissertation Outline

My first chapter lays the groundwork for the project by outlining the tenets of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework and exploring how it has been taken up to address dance. Dance is a slippery subject, specifically because of its ephemerality. Unlike other art forms, there is no "object" left behind after a dance performance. This characteristic poses unique problems for scholarship on dance, because "fixing" dance through documentation contradicts its ephemerality. Given this, research in Critical Dance Studies

tends to frame dance as either a perpetual disappearance or a text to be read. While these approaches have lent insight into social and cultural politics of dance, they nevertheless abstract dance from the dancing body itself. A phenomenological approach to dance, on the other hand, focuses on dance as an embodied practice that is *lived* and gives priority to articulating self-movement. I explicate Merleau-Ponty's account of habit, detailing how habits are sedimented in the body schema and enable intentional action. Drawing on the sensation of "flow" in dance, which refers to the sensation of being "caught up" or "at the service of" the dance itself, I discuss how habit enables pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility in and towards the world to occur seamlessly.

Chapters two and three both concern embodied transformation occurring at the perceptual, and bodily level, and at the pre-reflective level of habit. My analysis in chapter two is grounded in my own lived experience of learning Bharatanatyam, a classical⁶ style of Indian dance. When learning a new style of dance, one is challenged to undo the ways they are accustomed to moving into the world. This venture makes felt the pre-reflective styles of comportment, position, posture, gesture that are *already* reside in the dancer's body. Sedimenting a new style of comportment demands a dancer to actively resist the inclinations toward familiar patterns of movement that occur automatically and with *ease*. In this process, one's body becomes unfamiliar and strange. While this process causes discomfort, it also opens new possibilities for movement. Relying on the insights revealed through my own experience of learning Bharatanatyam, chapter two teases out experiential phenomena I contend are crucial to processes for shifting habitual movement: disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness. This phenomenological account of resedimenting habit specifically sets up my investigation of the habitual movement in the context of white privilege in chapter three.

Building on the account of resedimenting habit developed in chapter two, I argue in chapter three that within a context of racial inequality, white privilege becomes embedded within the corporeal structures of the body as perceptual habit(s). I began to

⁶ This designation will be called into question in chapter four.

work though Merleau-Ponty's account of habit early in 2015 when I audited Helen Fielding's course on Phenomenology of Perception at the University of Western Ontario. This culminated in a conference presentation at the 2015 International Merleau-Ponty Circle where I discussed habit, racism, and whiteness. Since then, I have found Helen Ngo's (2017) work on the habitual dynamics of racism exceedingly helpful. Her insights have had an important influence on my work, and have meaningfully contributed to my interpretation of whiteness as a habitual mode of being in the world (2016; 2017). I build on extant work on whiteness as habit, drawing on dance to articulate white privilege through a pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility. I demonstrate that the movement of white bodies in and towards the world is underlined by an expansiveness characterized by *momentum*. I use momentum to refer to the *ease* of movement that white privilege affords to white bodies as they move into traditionally white spaces. Momentum is *felt* as a style of comportment and motility that is unencumbered and uninhibited. This feeling of momentum captures the sense in which white bodies tend not to hesitate as they engage in intentional action. My goal in investigating the ways this momentum takes hold in white bodies as a habit of perception is to explore how we might replace this bad habit with a better one by slowing the momentum of habitual whiteness, which I argue can be accomplished through disorientation, hesitation, and cultivating white double consciousness.⁷

As Iris Marion Young (2005) aptly puts it, "every human experience is defined by its situation" (29). Given this, I recognize that I can only write from where I am, and that the particularities of my situation as a white, middle-class, femme, queer, mad, able-bodied, Canadian, cis-gendered feminist undoubtedly colors my perspective and motivations for

⁷ Double consciousness is first described by W.E.B Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. This concept captures a contradiction in self-perception at the heart of the experiences of African Americans living in a fundamentally racist society. This contradiction is experienced as one views themselves through their own eyes as well as the eyes of their oppressors. This creates sensation of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 9). Given that double consciousness invokes the idea of seeing one's self through conflicting meaning systems, Linda Alcoff has argued that white identity ought to establish a form of double consciousness (C.f Alcoff 1998; 2015). I explore this concept further in chapter two and three.

writing around whiteness. This self-assessment is not meant to be a tokenistic gesture towards intersectionality, but instead serves as reminder of the fact that I do not leave these dimensions of myself behind when I write. Because I draw on my own experiences of inhabiting a white world in and through a white body in order to articulate the habitual momentum that comes to animate white bodies within this context, I think it is important to disclose the ways in which the perspective I am presenting here is limited by my own context.⁸ How I experience my whiteness is dependent upon how I am situated specifically within a given field of racial positions and must be negotiated within relation to a multiplicity of racial logics that are context-dependent. As a result of this positioning, the perspective on whiteness and white privilege given in chapter three is specific to a North American context.

In chapter four, I critically situate my own participation in Bharatanatyam in light of critical race and post-colonial feminist scholarship and question how these histories of domination are implicated in my own engagement with this dance form as a cultural outsider. The contemporary practice of dancing Bharatanatyam reflects a long and complicated history of entanglements. It is a history marked by British colonialism, Indian nationalism, post-colonial migration, and is further mediated by questions of gender, sexuality, race, caste, class, and other dimensions of identity. The *weight* of these histories give rise to complex meanings when they coalesce in living bodies in the present. I frame this analysis as an exercise in double consciousness, that takes stock of my own complicity in the perpetuation of systemic racial inequality. I come into a world where the figure of the female Indian dancer already exists and continues to be consumed and appropriated by Western subjects. In this chapter, I consider: 1) the role that habit plays in the perception and perpetuation of cultural stereotypes, and 2) the pre-

⁸ The way that I take up Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is also informed by these factors. It is no secret that historically phenomenology has been committed to a fundamentally white, male, heterosexual, transcendental subject. In spite of this, I believe the insights that have come out of this school of thought may be imbued with new meaning and relevance in our contemporary moment, particularly when they are put into conversation with feminist phenomenology and critical race studies (C.f. Alcoff 2006, 2015; Al-saji 2014; Ngo 2017).

reflective orientation to the world that underlies and compels culturally appropriative acts. Drawing on historical literature, I will first show that habit plays an important role in linking what is perceived as a racialized exotic other (here the figure of the female Indian dancer) by the dominant (white Western) subject to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body. Next, I explore the operation of cultural appropriation as a distinctive *style* of pre-reflective movement. As I will show, the sense of mastery that defines acts of cultural appropriation is made manifest in and through uninhibited movement in and towards the world.

As with all projects, this one has established its own momentum, carrying forward its own questions. Given this, I conclude by summarizing the overall project and reflecting on areas for further research. I find myself returning to concerns that this project has raised surrounding intersubjectivity, double consciousness, and responsibility. The spirit of this project has been to find a way of *moving forward* and as such I frame these avenues for future research around that goal.

Chapter 1

1 A Phenomenology of Dance

Dance stretches across the ocean. It hides out in basements, in kitchens, and bedrooms. It is practiced defiantly and wildly; on sticky floors, in seedy bars, and under neon lights. A sensuous knowing passed between; a gift of comportment that is HERE in this body I call mine. Dance does not disappear. It nestles. Woven in with jingle bells⁹.

Dance is a slippery subject, specifically because of its ephemerality. Unlike other art forms, dance does not leave an object behind after its performance. This poses distinctive problems for scholarship on dance, because “fixing” dance through documentation contradicts its ephemerality. Given this, critical research on dance tends to frame dance as either a text to be read or a perpetual disappearance. It is without question that scholarly work within critical dance studies has meaningfully contributed to an understanding of the ways that dance practices are caught up in cultural politics and relations of power and privilege. However, understanding dancing bodies in this way reflects historical contours of disciplinary development within the academy. Specifically, the growing scholarly interest in postmodernism and post-structuralism (and within them deconstruction, feminist and gender studies, postcolonial, philosophical and psychoanalytic criticisms and so forth) has had a significant influence on reshaping the field¹⁰ of dance studies (C.f. Franko & Nordera, 2016; Foster 1996). Although I certainly do not challenge the importance that such studies have, both for the field of critical dance

⁹ Long after my grandmother had forgotten my name and my birthday she could still sing all the words to jingle bells.

¹⁰ Feminist approaches have been influential within this context. As Ann Daly (1991) notes, “the inquiries that feminist analysis makes into the way that the body is shaped and comes to have meaning are directly and immediately applicable to the study of dance, which is, after all, a kind of living laboratory of the study of the body – its training, its stories its way of being and being seen in the world” (2).

studies and for discussions of how identity is conferred through dance, these studies do not come very close to capturing the phenomenon of dance itself and how it is *experienced*. On these accounts dance is not framed as an embodied knowledge in its own right – rather, it is reduced to examples and illustrations that are taken up by scholars to confirm or demonstrate “the power of a theory through its consumption under its explanatory or interpretive framework” (Mallin, 1996, 417). While discursive approaches have lent insight into social and cultural politics of dance, they nevertheless abstract dance from the dancing body itself. In this chapter, I argue that a phenomenological approach to dance offers a valuable embodied alternative for understanding how dancing is a uniquely embodied art form. The phenomenological account of dance I outline will demonstrate that dance does not disappear, but for dancers dwells in their very corporeality.

I begin by contextualizing the phenomenological approach that I take up in relation to contemporary critical research on dance. First, I critique the understanding of dance as a bodily text. When dance becomes a bodily text, what happens to bodily knowledge? Drawing on phenomenological accounts of dance, I contend that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the lived body is better able to capture the experiential and expressive nature of dance. Next I explore how the ephemeral nature of dance has been taken up. I argue that discursive accounts which present dance as an art form defined by disappearance (Lepecki, 1996, 72; Phelan 1993; Franko 2011) also limit our understanding of what dance *is* and how it is *experienced* by abstracting dance from the dancing body. This is followed by an in-depth exegesis of Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit. This account will explain the role that habit and intentionality play in embodied subjectivity. This provides the foundation for the arguments I make in the chapters to follow. I conclude by drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of habit, the body schema, and sedimentation to articulate the dancing experience of “flow.” This term is often used in music and sport to describe “a state in which the athlete feels fully immersed and ‘in the zone’ in their activity” (Hardes, 2016, 283). I will show that the experiential phenomenon of flow results from a dancer’s bodily expertise and is related to pre-reflective bodily movement. My examination of embodiment not only highlights the potential of bodily beings to learn

new manners of moving, but demonstrates the ways in which movements itself has epistemological value. In other words, dance has the potential to reveal how new knowledge arises in and through movement.

1.1 Dance as “Bodily Text”

Dance invites ambiguity. It will take on different meanings depending on the angle of your approach. Until the mid-1980s, the majority of dance scholarship was made up of “historical narratives, aesthetic valuations, or auteur studies of great dancers or choreographers” (Desmond, 1997, 1). While the importance of these works must not be dismissed, particularly in the field of dance history, their main objectives were to delineate aesthetic categories, describe the characteristics of a style and technique, or to establish a more comprehensive picture of the historical context in which certain forms of dance developed, leaving the operation of social and cultural ideologies within dance practices largely unexamined (Desmond, 1997, 13). More recent scholarly research, however, has brought more rigorous theoretical perspectives to bear on the social and cultural politics of dance by bringing theoretical concepts and methods from different disciplinary contexts to bear on “the subject of dance”. By introducing more complex questions about ideology, subjectivity, representation, social construction, and regulation, scholars engaged in critical theory established new frameworks for studying dance. What was once a discipline dominated by aesthetic and historical analysis has subsequently given way to studies that examine the ways in which dance works as a social practice.

Neither the body nor bodily practices such as dance are neutral. The meaning of dance, who dances, or how they dance, is situated in a context of other socially meaningful ways of moving. Dance practices, like other embodied social-cultural practices, are responsive to the world they are embedded in. Like everyday codes of movement, dance is always mediated by social and cultural ideologies, and the parameters of what is deemed acceptable movement within specific contexts is highly regulated. From this perspective, dance, like all social practices, is always embedded within dominant social structures and ideologies. Given this, scholars maintain that by examining who dances, with whom,

what ways or why, one can gain significant insight into how changing ideologies of gender, race, class, or sexuality are negotiated (C.f. Desmond 1997; Wolff 1997; Foster 1996, 2011; Franko 1993, 2011). One might consider, for instance, why some dance practices are prohibited for some members of a social group and not others. The introduction of the tango in Europe and North America at the beginning of the nineteenth century exemplifies this well. As Savigliano (1995) has shown, before tango became integrated into ballroom dance it incited moral panic. The style, which originated in working-class port districts of Buenos Aires, was considered too sexually dangerous for “respectable” (white upper-class) women to participate in and was framed as a variable pipeline to sex work.

Critical approaches to dance highlight the role that dance practices play in both the preservation and disruption of dominant social norms. Close examination of the display of female bodies in classical ballet, for instance, has been widely critiqued for perpetuating normative gender roles and reinforcing traditional heterosexist constructions of femininity by presenting the female dancer solely as the “bearer and object of male desire” (Daly 1991). Dance practices may be a site where social ideologies can be reified or re-imagined, re-inscribed or resisted. Drawing on insights from critical race and postcolonial theory, dance scholars have also addressed questions concerning belonging, national identity, and race alongside the performance of gender and sexuality in dance. By examining the transnational movement of salsa, for example, scholars such as Lisa Gonzalez (1999) have demonstrated the important role dance plays in the construction of identity within diasporic communities. Stavros Karayanni’s (2004) study of Middle Eastern dance (often referred to as belly dance) as an object of cultural appropriation is another excellent example. Through an examination of “Oriental dancers” and their encounters with Western colonialism, Karayanni argues that Middle Eastern dance has been taken up to support the interests of Orientalism.

It is without question that scholarly work within critical dance studies has meaningfully contributed to an understanding of the ways that dance practices are caught up in cultural politics and relations of power and privilege. Although I certainly do not challenge the

importance that such studies have, both for the field of critical dance studies and for discussions of how identity is conferred through dance, these studies do not come very close to capturing the phenomenon of dance itself and how it is experienced. Rather, they tend to posit both the body and dance as objects, specifically *texts* to be deciphered rather than a *bodily knowledge* taken up and lived by embodied subjects (C.f. Kozel 1997; Grosz 1994).

As Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) explains, the metaphor of the "textualized body" presents the body as a surface "ready to receive, bear, and transmit meanings, messages or signs, much like a system of writing" (117). There is a problem with understanding the body as a text. Bodies are not texts. To treat a body like a text is to objectify, and abstract it from its fundamental agency. And so, even though much of this literature claims to take an interest in "the body", dancing bodies are not described in these accounts; there is no pain, no tears or sweat, no injuries, not stiffness, no movement that extends beyond the keyboard. What is lost in these accounts is what dance *is*, and how it is lived. For instance, in *Corporealities* (1996) Susan Foster describes dancing as "a representational practice that explores rigorously strategies for cultivating bodily signification" (xii). In this description, she assumes here that the syntax of dance seamlessly maps onto the syntax of language. When dance becomes the body of theory, what happens to bodily knowledge? When we think about the dance this way, the body becomes a residue, a remnant of something left over when a dance ends. Too often, the body is made to conform to the theory at hand, or else left out altogether. As will be shown, a phenomenological approach overcomes this problem by beginning from a *living body*¹¹, rather than a text.

¹¹ For Merleau-Ponty, body is neither a biological object or a vessel for subjectivity. Rather "I am my body" (PhP 150). This means that my body is not an objective body, but a *lived body* that is situated within and practically engaged with a world.

1.1.1 Dance and the *Lived* Body

Phenomenologically, lived experience always relates to an embodied subject, as opposed to a disembodied object of investigation. Dance scholars, notably many who are themselves dancers, have found Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology well-suited to the study of dance. His insight into embodiment, perception, intentionality, and spatiotemporally have had a significant impact on the field. Dance literature includes several phenomenological studies of the experience of dancing. I give a brief overview of some of the most prominent of these studies: Sondra Farleigh's *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987) and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *The Phenomenology of Dance* (2015).¹² Drawn to the richness of Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment, these scholars appeal specifically to his phenomenology. What unites these analyses of dance is a shared interest in the lived body. After articulating this concept, I will give a brief overview of these texts. This serves as a general introduction to phenomenological conceptions of dance, as an embodied art form, and how dance relates to embodied dancing subjects.¹³ Rather than a text, this understands dances as tied to the lived body and lived experience.

The body beats at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. He maintains that one's body is the very possibility for one's engagement in the world. Although I can experience my body as an object, it is my living phenomenal body that directs me towards my world. This is to say that the body is *lived*. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the *lived body* (*Lieb*) describes the body as the seat of subjective experience. Although this is contrasted with the material, biological, physical body (*Körper*), the two are not distinct aspects of

¹² Parviainen (1998), like Farleigh and Sheets-Johnstone, is concerned with the lived body; however, unlike the two listed before her, she emphasizes the intersubjective aspects of the lived body. The lived body, she explains is necessarily socially, culturally, and historically formed. She situates dance within a social field "constituted by the network of the relations of artists, art works, critics, art specialists, theorists, art schools, buildings for art, art journals etc." (1998, 91).

¹³ As an overview, my discussion does not exhaust all concepts found in these studies; instead I sketch out their basic themes. Later, I gather together these works alongside Merleau-Ponty to give an account of dancing embodiment with attention to the role of habit.

one's embodied experience.¹⁴ In her text, *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987), Sondra Fraleigh draws on phenomenology to develop a descriptive aesthetics of modern concert dance. She turns to the concept of the lived body with the specific goal of rejecting the mind-body dualism of the Cartesian subject. As she points out, dualistic language pervades much of the literature on dance. This language, of course, reinforces the view that the body is “simply material substance and mechanical physiological process, moved by something other than itself; and that ‘mind as pure thought escapes the material body’”(Fraleigh, 1987, 9). Dance is frequently described as an art form that uses the body as an instrument. This attributes agency to “the mind”, understood as be fundamentally distinct from, and in command of, the body. For Fraleigh, the lived body offers a way of overcoming this dualism because it allows for a richer understanding of the ways the body, movement, self, and agency are intertwined. The lived body, she explains, is better able to capture the expressive nature of dance.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's text, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, has also been very influential. She provides a phenomenological description of dance, focusing on dance as a kinetic phenomenon; she gives a detailed account of the lived qualitative dynamics of movement. In a dramatic departure from objective and empirical studies of movement, where movement is often reduced to discrete spatial and temporal categories, Sheets-Johnstone's detailed analysis demonstrates that as a lived body caught in the act of forming and performing dance, a dancer's movement creates its own spatiality and temporality.¹⁵ As she points out, “neither dance nor the lived experience of dance exists apart from the creation and presentation of the concrete thing itself” (2). Dancers take

¹⁴ The differentiation that Merleau-Ponty draws between the material sensible body (*Körper*) and the living body (*Lieb*) is not absolute. These dimensions of embodied experience intertwine. As I will explain later in the chapter, the sensible body and living body are “not two different kinds of being,” but rather “two divergent ways in which being is” (Morris, 2010, 145).

¹⁵ It should be noted that much of this literature focuses exclusively on “concert dance”, or dance that is performed in a theatrical setting for an audience. Although she grounds her discussion in concert dance, she does explicitly state this in her text. This reveals an implicit assumption of what dance is – as something that involves choreographers, dancers', and audiences in a presentational context.

their bodies with them. Bodies that sweat and sway, step and stretch. Their bodies are part and parcel of the dance that is created in the moment. In other words, dancing is something that living bodies do.

1.1.2 Dance as Disappearance

The ephemeral nature of dance is part of what makes it so enigmatic. In performance, dance is effervescent and incessantly escapes one's grasp. Unlike other art forms, no tangible object remains in the wake of a dance performance. As Marc Franko (2011) points out, unlike theater, which commonly works from a script, or music, which often has a score that offers some stability to counter its fleeting nature, dance is not accompanied by a form of textual notation that can function as "a universally legible form of textual record" (329).¹⁶ In this sense, dance is understood to be unique in its ephemerality and effervescence. However, these characteristics also make dance a particularly slippery art form, one that poses unique challenges to scholarly analysis because "fixing" dance through documentation contradicts its ephemerality. Questions surrounding the ephemerality of dance tend to present dance as perishable, existing only briefly before dissolving before our eyes. From this perspective, dance is figured as incessantly disappearing. In this section I trouble discursive accounts of dance as an art form that "vanishes" (Lepecki, 1996; Phelan 1993). I do not dispute that ephemerality is an important and unique feature of dance. Dance is lived ephemerally. Rather, I question the way that disappearance is privileged within scholarly discourses on performance, and asks how this limits our understanding of what dance *is* and how it is *experienced*. Obscuring this experience means that we cannot learn from it. I will show that positioning dance as disappearance (an art of erasure) bifurcates the dancer and the dance and in so doing I expose limits of the theoretical assumptions guiding this understanding of the body and subsequently ephemerality.

¹⁶ I do not intend to neglect movement notation systems altogether (Laban for example has been very influential), but arguably this is not a system that is regularly used by most dancers.

The growth of performance studies in the 1990s has also had a significant impact on scholarly work on dance, with “performance” serving as a broad term under which dance falls. Here, “performance” not only captures the live spatiotemporal event of executing choreography, it also gestures to the diversity and indeterminacy of the medium itself. The affinity between dance and performance theory is established through the similarities in their ephemerality, which has now become a cornerstone of performance studies (C.f. Schneider 2001). Beyond simply being transient, momentary, or lacking permanence, ephemerality captures how performances “cease to be at the same moment as it becomes” (Macmillian, 2006, 1). This is especially true for dance, since dance appears in the liveliness of the present moment, unfolding in and through a dancer’s body as an expressive event. In this context, the ephemerality is framed in terms of transience and impermanence – as an ephemeral art form dance exists only temporarily. Maricia Siegel (1972) for instance, famously describes dance as existing “at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone” (1). From this perspective, dance belongs only to the present, but a present specifically framed as brief and fleeting. Dance is presented as having no physical durability or permanence. Consequently, dance is figured as a perpetual disappearance.

The most influential articulation of what has been dubbed the “disappearance thesis” can be found in Peggy Phelan’s seminal work *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993). Here, Phelan forwards an ontology of performance that gives primacy to ephemerality and maintains that performance “becomes itself through disappearance” (146). Both dance and performance theory are conceptualized according to a central ontological claim that performance disappears. This perspective, frames performance as an fleeting event of momentary presence, one that is defined through its inevitable absence (Phelan 1993, 148-152). This is reflected in Merce Cunningham’s (1979) description of dance performance: “... it gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to be stored away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but a single fleeting moment when you feel alive” (90). The theoretical emphasis on disappearance positions dance as “an art of self-erasure”,

presenting dance as being in perpetual tension with presence (Lepecki, 125). On these accounts, dance is always doomed to disappear.

Understanding ephemerality as disappearance has sparked debate regarding the im/possibilities of documenting performance. Since performance is bound to the present, questions surrounding what is lost, gained or changed in the process of “fixing” dance through documentation have been given considerable attention. The relationship between the document and the original is complex and tenuous. Phelan maintains that:

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology (1993, 146).

In other words, she posits that performance is erased through documentation.

Documentation of performance, she maintains, is impossible. Once a performance is recorded, documented, or is disseminated as a representation it becomes something altogether distinct from the performance in its “original” form. She claims that consequently “the document of a performance is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (147). Ironically, the perception of transience and impermanence seems to motivate a strong desire to document live performance. Because one cannot capture a performance and contain it in the present, it must be “translated” into something that endures in spite of the passage of time. Active steps must be taken to “save” the performance from oblivion through documentation or notation. Even those who fight fiercely to document performances approach performance in terms of impermanence. However, since documentation is thought to compromise the existence of performance¹⁷ in the here and now, it is believed that such documentation

¹⁷ Not having a system of notation and documentation has implications for dance history, since “failure to document leads directly to the erasure of dance itself” (Reason, 2006, 23). Allegra Fuller Snyder also touches on this. As she explains, “video made it easier to capture movement in time and through space, the ephemeral aspect of dance was

erodes the very nature of dance's being. Given this, Phelan frames the reproduction of performance as a "betrayal" (Phelan, 1993, 146). Discussions that revolve around loss, lack, and absence underscore the relation. From this perspective, any record of performance is thus only ever an *inadequate* resemblance.¹⁸

Dance does pose problems for documentation and writing. In the process of writing, dance is changed, fixed on a page, converted into something it is not. Dancing and writing are paired in a vexed relationship. However, that something is lost in the translation between embodied experience and writing is the case for all lived experiences. As soon as you describe the body you are producing it. This problem is not unique to dance. In other words, I think critical dance scholars are perhaps overzealous in bemoaning dance's disappearance and the inability to truly capture dance in writing. I will address this more fully when discussing the phenomenology, but descriptions of embodied experience can also open different lines of thought.

Establishing new directions in dance studies coincided with widespread scholarly interest in "the body", specifically the cross-disciplinary fascination with "the body as discourse"

becoming less and less of an issue" (Johnson and Snyder, 1999, 7-8). By enabling documentation, video allows us to "save" dance from disappearance.

¹⁸ It is perhaps not surprising that an art form that so resists reproduction is largely ignored in capitalist society. Focusing on disappearance, ephemerality and self-erasure has opened up new avenues for scholars to reflect on performance as undermining neoliberal consumption and commodification. This is because performance compromises mechanisms of reproductive representation that enable the continued flow of capital. As an ephemeral art form grounded in disappearance, performance cannot be sold because it is gone before it is over, and consequently resists traditional lines of commodification and capital. Only "a limited number of people in a specific time and place can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace" (Phelan, 1993, 149). Lepecki (2012) argues, for instance, that dance's ephemerality "demonstrates the possibility of creating alternative economies of objecthood in the arts, by showing that it is possible to create artworks away from regimes of commodification and the fetishization of tangible objects" (15). This also flies in the face of normative functioning of archives, galleries and museums, as structures of capital (C.f. Phelan 1993; Lepecki 2004; Wakefield 2015). Again, I want to stress that I am not suggesting that these approaches to dance do not have value or have not meaningfully contributed to our understanding of dance. Rather, I maintain that phenomenological approaches to dance offer an alternative to these discursive approaches that can speak to dance as an embodied art form.

or as a “cultural object” (Foster, 1996, xii). However, Kozel (1997) notes that “despite having bodies and dance in their titles” many contemporary scholarly analyses of dance within the arts and humanities are “concerned only tangentially with bodies and dance performance” (95). When discourse takes center stage and bodies are framed as texts to be read or condemned to perpetual disappearance, the materiality of dancing bodies is lost. In effect, this ontology abstracts “dance” from the material bodies of the dancers and indirectly imposes a dualism severing the relation between the subject and object.¹⁹ One can observe this dualism in the very questions that frames these analyses of dance. For instance, when guided by questions such as “where are the sites for dance to rest once it is over? Where does the dance go to?” dance scholars suggest that the dance was at some point somewhere else, as if dance has a life independent of the dancer’s body (Lepecki, 1996, 74). The focus on discourse has distanced these analyses of dance from the living dancing body which brings dance into appearance.

Whether performance disappears or remains after it ends, it must first appear (Wakefield, 2015, 173). How does dance appear? In and through the body of the dancer, i.e. an embodied subject caught up in movement, who labours to form/create and perform a dance in the present. How does disappearance account for the vital *presence* of dance in a dancer’s body? What of the materiality and affectivity of dance? Positing dance as disappearance completely disregards the materiality of the dancer who is bodily-engaged in the unfolding of the dance itself. As Grant notes, performance studies was born within a scholarly environment where the concept of *presence* was being heavily critiqued and deemed highly suspect. Distrust in the “metaphysics of presence” lead to a fixation on absence (C.f. Phelan; Lepecki; Franko). However, as Fraleigh writes, “I cannot be my dance until I do my dance” and “I am concretely in it and all there can be of it” (Fraleigh, 1987, 32, 34). From an embodied perspective, dance cannot be understood apart from the dancer to which it corresponds. To approach dance phenomenologically is first and foremost to understand dance as a lived experience, as it is directly apprehended in the immediacy of its *appearance*. In the next section I draw on Merleau-Ponty’s account of

¹⁹ The binary relation between subject and object that is also imposed between presence and absence.

expressivity alongside dance to explore how dancer and dance overlap while dancing.

1.1.3 Expressivity: Dance as a Mode of Being

Dance is largely unaddressed by Merleau-Ponty. He briefly touches on it in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, but his reflections on art are mostly confined to music and visual arts. Despite this, his thoughts on the role of the body in aesthetic expression are useful for clarifying the reversible relation between the dance and the (body of the) dancer described by Fraleigh and Sheets-Johnstone. This begins from an understanding of the body as expressive, or “a living knot of significations” (PP 152, 153). The body does not cause expression; it is itself an “expressive space”; or “the very movement of expression” (Pp, 147). In this way, “the expressed does not exist apart from the expression” (PP, 169). Whether considering musical notes, paint and canvas or the actor’s body, Merleau-Ponty maintains that the body does not signify or translate meaning. Bodily expression accomplishes meaning, bringing it into existence by installing this meaning in the body itself. “The operation of expression”, he writes:

does not simply leave to the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification *exist as a thing* at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs signification *in* the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension of our experience (PP, 188).

In keeping with this reading of the expressivity of the body, the dancer actualizes a dance. Donald Landes (2013), who has worked extensively on Merleau-Ponty’s account of expressivity, explains that “the body does not signify a mode of existence, it brings sense into existence by becoming that sense, just as a sleeper only expresses sleep by becoming that which she is imitating, calling forth the visitation of sleep in an active passivity” (89). Just because you are asleep does not mean that consciousness is not there; rather, sleep discloses another way that consciousness *is* (C.f. IP). In performance, then, we might think of dancing as a mode of being of the dancer, since dancers live through the event of dancing. The dance cannot be detached from its sensible appearance.

The *dance* is held by the body of the dancer. Dancers bring a dance into appearance. The dancer does not translate brute movements into dance; dancers actualize and accomplish the dance. Dance “grasps my body, and its hold upon my body circumscribes the zone of signification to which it refers” (PhP, 244). In other words, as an embodied art form dance is inextricably linked to the body of the dancer. As Sondra Fraleigh describes:

The body and the dance are inseparable. The body is the dance, and the dancer is the dance; the body is concretely there in the dance. The body is not an instrument of dance; it is the subject of dance. The body cannot be an instrument, because it is not an object as other instruments are (Fraleigh, 1987, 31-32).

Sheets-Johnstone (2015) echoes this sentiment explaining that “a dance [as it is formed and performed] is experienced by the dancer as a perpetually moving form, a unity of succession” (16). It is clearly stressed by both Sheets-Johnstone and Fraleigh that in performance the dance that is being performed cannot be considered an object apart from the dancer. Instead, dancers become one with the dance as it is formed and performed – that is, they live through the movement of dancing.

In the event of performance, the dance and the dancer “complete and unified phenomenon, an illusion of force, whose meaning suffuses the whole and derives from the uniqueness of the whole” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, 30). This way of understanding dance as lived does not do away with the notion that when performed a dance is fleeting, ephemeral, and effervescent; always “in the process of becoming the dance which it is, yet it is never the dance at any moment” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, 16). Instead, it offers an understanding of dance as intertwined with the dancing body in the thickness of the present. In the following section I explicate Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit, detailing how habits are sedimented in the body schema and enable intentional action. Drawing on the sensation of “flow” in dance, which refers to the sensation of being “caught up” or “at the service of” the dance itself, I discuss how habit enables pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility in and towards the world to occur seamlessly.

1.2 Phenomenological Framework

Phenomenology is the study of the phenomenon of experience. The task of phenomenology is not so much to depict “experience, but rather to catch experience in the act of making the world available”, or how it comes in to appearance (Noë, 2004, 176). Or, to grasp experience as it is *lived* by an embodied subject in the world²⁰. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) explains, “the world is not what I think but what I live” (PP, xxx). This approach sets out to capture a moment of experience as it is rooted in the “soil of the sensible,” or the concrete and sensuous materiality of the world “such as it is in our lives and for our bodies,” and to articulate it as such (EM, 122).²¹ A phenomenological approach is decidedly focused on first-person subjective experience, and suspicious of the claims of objectivity which have come to define contemporary scientific approaches to experience.²² Unlike other approaches to experience, phenomenology is premised on the understanding that experience cannot be reduced to the study of objective phenomena. Merleau-Ponty is critical of the operational and mechanistic style of thinking that underlies positivist approaches to understanding. Such an approach posits a view from above (no-where); a pure spectre who “manipulates things and gives up living in them” (EM 121). In so doing, positivist approaches see and represent themselves as autonomous, mistakenly assuming the world can be made transparent.

To the contrary, phenomenology maintains the impossibility of apprehending phenomena in their totality. Phenomena are not “out there” as abstract things separate from our experience. Rather they exist at a deeply corporeal level, forming part of an existential

²⁰ In this context, ‘world’ encapsulates the natural, social, cultural, historical, and geographical environment. The individual subject is understood to be deeply intertwined with the world in which they find themselves situated (VI, 60). From a phenomenological perspective, there is no “pure being.” Rather, meaning is arises as “the sense that shines for at the intersection of my experiences and at the intersection of my experiences with those of others that a sort of gearing into each other” (PhP, xxxiv).

²¹ Lived experience is structured in relation to spatial and temporal horizons. This means that experience is always embedded within a social, cultural, historical context.

²² Here I am not suggesting that we discard objective science research. Rather, I am gesturing to the problems that arise when objectivist science research is viewed as the *only* viable research, and when it fails to take context and rationality into account.

unity with the subject of experience. One perceives the world from within it. This not only means that the subjective perspectival dimensions of experience cannot be abstracted out, but also that one can only ever have a partial view of the world. There is always something that exceeds our grasp, an invisible that supports and sustains what is visible. For example, Merleau-Ponty shows in “Eye and Mind” that a painting can present its viewer intuitively with the structures that enable one to see the visible world in the first place. To see a mountain, for instance, it is necessary “*not* to see the play of shadows and light around it” (EM, 128). To make the mountain visible a painter must learn to see the dynamics of light and shadows which remain invisible in everyday vision. The aim of phenomenology is not simply to expose the invisible, stripping it of its obscurity and rendering it visible. As Merleau-Ponty notes, “if coincidence is lost, this is no accident; if Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of being, and no disclosure will make us comprehend it” (VI, 122). There is always a slippage, a gap, a difference which prevents a complete fusion. What phenomenology attempts to understand is the interrelation between the subject and the world as it is given in experience, and the conditions of possibility that enable experience to take shape as such. Because Merleau-Ponty maintains that there is never full disclosure of the invisible, this undertaking always gestures beyond itself. In this way, phenomenology does not forward an abstracted or finite notion of “Truth”.

1.2.1 Embodiment

For Merleau-Ponty, embodied subjectivity unfolds in and through the extraordinary overlapping of the subject and their world. From this perspective, a subject and their world mutually encroach upon each other. This encroachment is such that embodied subject and world cannot be specified independently. For example, *what* I perceive in the world is directly related to my history and situation as a subject and so the subject encroaches upon world, but also what I *can* perceive is directly related to the natural, social, etc., environment in which I am embedded and in which I develop as a sensing subject, and so world encroaches upon subject. Embodied subject and world are thus understood as co-constituting and interdependent and the intimacy of this bond means

that the world shapes and constrains subjectivity and our ways of being in the world (VI, 138).

Lived experience is always understood in relation to the embodied subject to which it corresponds. One's body is both visible/tangible and that which sees and touches. His account aims specifically to undermine the dominant Cartesian framework that severs the relation between body and mind in a way that is dualistic and absolute (C.f. VI). And so, his phenomenology challenges one to think about what might proceed, or move beyond this subject/object divide. Far from an inert mass, on his account the body is understood as a porous and receptive "pivot of the world," which is caught up in the movement of orienting itself in accordance with its surroundings (PhP, 84). Merleau-Ponty understands the body as being the locus of one's experience of the world. My body is visible and mobile, sensible and tactile. And yet, with the continual instillation of my body in the world of things, I find that my body is not a thing among things, but instead the very possibility for my active engagement with world. Although I can experience my body as a thing, it is my living phenomenal body that takes me towards my tasks. As explained in section 1.1.1, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the *lived body* (*Lieb*) describes the body as the seat of subjective experience. Although Merleau-Ponty does make a distinction between the lived body (*Lieb*) and the material sensible body (*Körper*), he does not posit these dimensions of embodied experience as in opposition with each other. Sentient and sensible "are not two different kinds of being, but two divergent ways in which being is" (Morris, 2010, 145). In embodied experience, we witness the reversible interrelation between sensible and the sentient as incongruent counterparts that intertwine but never fully coincide. This is how I am able to experience my body as simultaneously the body I touch, and also the body that touches. It is the overlap and interplay of these dimension of existence that define embodiment²³. From this perspective, one's body is not "an object among objects," nor is it merely a vessel for subjectivity. Rather one's body is "that by

²³ In other words, "there is an ontological distinction between the 'I' and the body as one lives it" (Morris, 2004, 111). The lived body and the physical body are understood as co-constituting. While the materiality of one's body may set the parameters for one's possibilities, for instance, one is never wholly determined by their physical being.

which there are objects” (PhP, 92). The body is not separate from intelligence. It has its own intelligence—a bodily logos that is expressed in the very ways that one takes up and moves into the world. From this perspective, we do not *have* bodies. We *are* bodies. Merleau-Ponty writes: “I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body” (PhP, 151).

1.2.2 Intentionality

Intentionality is considered a central concept within the phenomenological tradition. It captures a sense of directedness of embodied perception. The body is the locus of intentionality, and is inherently tied to the bodily capacity for motility and the “directedness” of our intentions. According to Merleau-Ponty, the motor experience of the body is “not a particular case of knowledge; rather it offers us a manner of reaching the world” (PhP, 141). Intentionality is not a mental representation. Rather it is “a skillful bodily responsiveness and spontaneity in direct engagement with the world” (Carman in PhP, x). In such occasions, “my movement is not a decision made by a mind, an absolute doing which would decree, from the depth of a subjective retreat, some change in place miraculously executed in extended space” (PhP, 124). He subsequently argues that bodily intentionality is best understood as a bodily sense of “I can,” rather than an “I think” (PhP, 139). The “I can” of the body is precisely the experience of harmony between intention and action, which projects “the aim to be accomplished and connects the body’s motion towards that end in an unbroken directedness” (Young, 2005, 146).²⁴

²⁴ The possibilities that are opened up in the world are dependent upon the limits imposed one’s bodily sense of “I can.” For Merleau-Ponty, the “I can” expresses a relationality between self and world and reflects the conditions of the world as imposing limits on one’s sense of intentional action. This point is significant because of the way that social norms govern how one perceives their own possibilities of engagement in the world. Iris Marion Young, for example, famously identifies feminine bodily existence as being overlaid by an “I cannot,” which occurs as a result of gendered inequality. This “I cannot” severs the otherwise “mutually conditioning relation between aim and enactment”, because it “simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an ‘I can’ and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end” (Young, 2005, 36). As will be expanded on in later chapters, the expansiveness that animates white bodies is expressly

Bodily intentionality thus establishes harmony between intention and action, allowing one to take up and move into their world in a purposeful directed fashion *without* the need of one's explicit attention (PhP, 146). In other words, the capacity for motricity, which, as an original intentionality, allows one's lived body to meet the solicitation of the world, is not solely a function of reflective thought. Rather, Merleau-Ponty characterizes intentionality as pre-reflective. He explains, "my body has its world, or understands its world without having to go through representations, or without being subordinated to a symbolic or objectifying function" (PhP, 141). When one is caught up in their world, their sense of their own bodily motion remains at the margins of experience. We tend not to focus on our own movement itself; rather we are attentive to accomplishing something. I apply lipstick, I tie my shoe, I light a candle, I lock the door behind me. I do not have to think of how, where, when—I am already reaching for my coffee. When engaged in actions such as these my movements are smooth, and continuous; the flow uninterrupted by a need to calculate where my body is, or how to execute my own movement.²⁵

Bodily intentionality is not a movement in thought, but rather is at work prior to explicit thought, and resides below the level of one's reflective engagement with, or thoughts about, the world. Recall that for Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is specifically *not* an "I think" (PhP, 139). Instead, the intentionality that characterizes the lived body and embodied subjectivity is pre-reflective. Phenomenological accounts of subjectivity stress that there are two ways in which one can be aware of ourselves: "through observational

contrary to the sense of hesitancy described here, and rather encapsulates a style of being in and towards the world that is unencumbered and reflects a sense of *ease*.

²⁵ Bodily intentionality cannot be reduced to motility alone. As Merleau-Ponty explains, our bodily intentionality is underlined by an intentional arc which unites motility with perception, cognition, sense, and affect (PhP, 137). Breaking from the colloquial understanding of the senses as having distinct and defined boundaries, Merleau-Ponty maintains that our senses are synesthetic. And so, I hear the hardness of my pen as it falls to the floor, and I see the softness and warmth of my sister's scarf in the folds of its fabric. Our bodily intentionality not only reflects this entwining, but also is the means of their unification through the body's lived orientation in and toward the world (PhP, 141). Further, the intentional arc "projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation" (PhP, 137).

reflective self-consciousness (self-as-object) and through non-reflective forms of consciousness (self-as-subject)” (Jenkinson, 2017, 33). The term pre-reflective, then, captures an implicit awareness that precedes higher order forms of self-consciousness. This captures the agentive and affective dimensions of the body and “corresponds to the bodily mode of givenness of intentional objects of consciousness” (Legrand, 2007, 505).

1.2.3 Habit and Bodily Being in the World

I am particularly drawn to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of habit as a kind of “knowledge in our hands”, one that relieves us of the task of consciously interpreting our perceptual experience as it unfolds (PhP, 145). Colloquially, habit often gets a bad rap. Seen as a fixed way of doing things, habits are thought to doom individuals to endless cycles of repetition. As many scholars, have indicated, habitual actions occur absent one’s explicit attention. For instance, I am usually oblivious to the fact that I touch my face. When my attention is focused on a good book, or sitting watching a movie, my fingertips make their way to my mouth, my eyes, my nose, my forehead, and my hair. I am only awakened to the fact that I touch my face so much by being asked not to touch my face! My propensity for touching my face exemplifies the common understanding of habit as a “lack of control or conscious intention” (Ngo, 2016, 848). However, Merleau-Ponty’s account presents habit as having existential significance, since it enables a “primordial attachment to the world” (PhP, 341). As Ngo (2017) explains, Merleau-Ponty describes habit as “a certain mode of moving in and responding to the world that is marked with ease, familiarity, and confidence” (3). When caught up in habitual actions one’s movements are smooth, and continuous; they flow uninterrupted by explicit thought. This allows for a sense of cohesion between the subject and their world. For instance, since I am able-bodied, I approach and walk up the stairs, reach for my keys, and unlock the door, with a sense of ease. I do not need to pause to calculate the precise heights of the steps, and I am not encumbered by the worry that I might not make it to the top (again, a privilege based on my own able-bodiedness). When one can rely on habit there is no need to imagine the positions of our body or calculate the trajectory of our movement in and towards the world in order to enact our intentions. Habit, on this

account, is presented as a bodily understanding, rather than athetic or thematized form of knowledge that is reflective or conceptual, or an automatic reflex. In other words, habits operate pre-reflectively. This account of habit is grounded in two central phenomenological concepts: the body schema and habit.

1.2.4 The Body Schema

The *hold* that one has upon their body, as a power for action in and towards the world, is made possible by a body schema, which sketches out within the structure of one's body a field of past, current, and possible positions, orientations, and actions. The postures, positions and movements are knotted together as a meaningful core that makes up the body schema. As Merleau-Ponty explains: "I know the position of each of my limbs through a body schema" (PhP, 100 - 101). What does it mean to say that the body bears a schema? For Merleau-Ponty this schema is not simply a copy or a global awareness of the body, but rather a "manner of expressing that my body is in and towards the world" (PhP, 103). The positions, orientations, and actions that are sedimented within the corporeal schema make up a dynamic and open system of equivalences. Understood as an open and flexible structure that binds intention with action, the body schema is best characterized as dynamic and responsive. Unsurprisingly, this schema is not a geometric plan of fixed positions and postures. The body schema is not a rigid model that represents the body as an assemblage of parts or a collection of points. It serves as a reservoir for our acquired understanding of, and manners of relating to, our world, and expresses the dynamic organisation of one's body as an open system of current positions, postures, movements, and "an infinity of equivalent positions" which envelope each other and rise up to meet the solicitation of the world (PhP, 139; 142). This not only captures the situated spatiality of bodily existence, but also highlights the intuitive understanding of one's own body as well as the tacit ways in which one inhabits the world. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema is "not merely an experience of my body, but rather an experience of my body in the world" (PhP, 142).

One might think of the body schema as a hollow of non-thetic knowledge that holds the orientations and powers of one's body that renders the body capable of performing physical tasks pre-reflectively. It is important to note that the kind of embodied poise or readiness that is made possible by workings of the corporeal schema is not a function of reflective thought. As Merleau-Ponty explains, "my body has its world, or understands its world without having to go through 'representations,' or without being subordinated to a 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'" (PhP, 141). In other words, the operation of the corporeal schema does not occur at the level of explicit consciousness. I do not, for example, stop to formulate a specific plan for action if I find myself thirsty as I am writing. Instead, I simply reach for my glass. Rather, this concept speaks to bodily means of knowing and understanding the world. As Merleau-Ponty explains, the body schema acts as "an immediately given invariant by which different motor tasks are instantly transposable" and enables one's intentional action in the world to unfold absent of conscious intervention, attention, or judgement. (PhP, 142).²⁶ As will be shown, residual structures accumulate over time within the body schema. The structures that make up the body schema are "acquired and developed through our perpetual movement in and toward the world" (Jenkinson, 2017, 70) (C.f PhP). Recall that these structures are open and contingent. Not only does this mean that they are able to be changed, but it also illustrates that they can be taken up in a different set of contexts. In this way, the body schema is a "system of equivalences" (PhP, 142); a skilled ballet dancer, for example, is more likely to be proficient (than a non-dancer) at dancing the waltz as well. And yet, as Ngo (2017) observes, "a trained ballet dancer, for example, will take to breakdancing differently than a street dancer, because each have come to move to music and inhabit their bodies in different ways" (4). As we will see, when one acquires a skill, the body

²⁶ It should be noted here that there is some stickiness around the use of the term "corporeal schema", specifically with regards to its relationship to the notion of a "body image." In his writings, Merleau-Ponty sometimes exchanges the term "body schema" for "body image" and uses the terms interchangeably. Although he does not draw a specific distinction between the two terms, as Wiess (1999) explain, he maintains that "consciously focusing on one's body already presupposes a more primary, pre-reflective way of experiencing the body" (2). As such, during experience, the body schema it is "not available to consciousness *in experience* as an explicit *object* of experience" (Jenkinson, 2016, 936).

schema is reworked to incorporate a new dynamic of position, posture and movement (C.f. Merleau-Ponty, *PhP*, 143). As these structures are called upon more and more to facilitate one's engagement with their world, they become habitual. It is only once patterns of gesture and response have become habitual that they can then be called upon pre-reflectively to facilitate the meeting of our intentions with action.

1.2.5 Habits and Inhabiting

The capacity for habit expresses an intelligence belonging specifically to our bodies; the "knowledge in my hands" that allows me to type, dance, or play an instrument (*PhP*, 145). Habit enables us to inhabit the world. The spatial orientation that habits provide offer embodied subjects ways of taking up and moving in and towards the world. More precisely, it extends the reach of our intentions and gestures within a "motor space" that is sketched out before us (*PhP*, 141) (C.f. Wiess 2008; Ahmed 2006). However, habits also come to inhabit us, becoming incorporated within the spatiality of the body itself. As Merleau-Ponty explains: "to habituate oneself to a hat, an automobile, or a cane is to take up residence in them, or inversely to make them participate within the voluminosity of one's own body" (*PhP*, 145). Typing on a keyboard exemplifies this well. Once the movements involved in typing on the keyboard become habitual they are guided by intention and do not require one to know the objective positions of letters and keys in order to type. Instead, the keyboard is given to the proficient typist as a power of expression rather than rows of keys. This occurs because the space of the keyboard has been integrated into their bodily space.

One might also examine the relationship between a dancer and their shoes to demonstrate this phenomenon. Particularly in the case of percussive dance forms, which are highly rhythmic and rely on the precise execution of foot-based dance patterns (such as tap dance, step dance, clogging, or highland dance), the relationship between the dancer and their shoes is very important. The shoe helps to accentuate the interchange between a dancer's feet and the floor. Just as the typist's movements are guided by intention rather than a knowledge of the objective locations of the letters and keys on a keyboard, I do not

know what the distance is between my shoes and the floor. Instead, I sense the kind of sounds that can emerge through the exchange between my feet and the floor.²⁷ I settle into my shoes by taking them up and dancing with them. Once the space of my shoes is integrated into my bodily space, my shoes are given to me as a power of expression rather than as protective covering for my feet.

1.2.6 The Living Present: The Temporal Structure of Habit

Instead of framing temporality as an abstract “object” of investigation, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology forwards an understanding of temporality as a facet of our being.

Temporality is inherent to subjectivity. This interpretation of temporality focuses on grasping time as it is lived. The living present encompasses “the whole past, everything foreign, and the whole of the thinkable future are reanimated” (PrP, 90). This is not to say that the past and future are simultaneous. Temporality prevails by “piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment, by promiscuity” (VI, 115). This reflects the Husserlian movement of temporal protention, retention, and primal impression, wherein the subject remains anchored in the past while simultaneously extending themselves toward the horizon of the future. From this perspective, time is understood as being structured by virtual envelopment or coexistence, rather than succession. The co-existence of the past and present is not a fusion of the two, however; rather, “past and present are *Ineinander*, each enveloping-enveloped” (VI, 268). In a passage from the *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), Merleau-Ponty writes:

“The present still holds in hand the immediate past, but without positing it as an object, and since this immediate past likewise retains the past that immediately preceded it, time gone by is entirely taken up and grasped in the present. The same goes for the imminent future, which will itself have its own horizon of imminence. But along with my immediate past, I also have the horizon of the future that surrounded it; that is, I have my actual

²⁷ I expand on this relationship in chapter two.

present seen as the future of that past. Along with the imminent future, I also have the horizon of the past that will surround it; that is, I have my actual present as a part of that future (PhP, 71-71).

This quotation captures the thickness of the present. The present is gathered around the “anticipation of some unknown (but perhaps expected) future” as well as “in retention of the imminent (or even distant) past” (Jenkinson, 2016, 948) (C.f. VI, 267-8). Experience, then, is held together by gearing into the horizons of the past and future. We are at once “oriented by the past” and “pulled toward an anticipated future” (Jenkinson, 2016, 948).

1.2.7 Open Temporality of Habit

Habitual actions occur within in the ‘living present’. This means they are enacted in a field of presence that envelops the horizons of both the past and future. Habitual movement initiates a link between this moment and a future moment, while also enveloping the instants that precede it (PhP, 141). As Ngo (2017) explains, “habits look at once to the past and the future, while being instantiated in the present. That is, the phenomena of habit functions outside a chronological scheme of time held together through a linear chain of the past-present-future” (4). In other words, the temporality of habit is synchronic and characterized by ambiguity. On one hand, habit reflects an accumulated past. On the other hand, each new (present) enactment holds a projected future. This temporal ambiguity is central to habit and can be observed in the double movement of sedimentation, which at once looks to the horizons of both the past and the future, while also being instantiated in the present.

1.2.8 The Double Movement of Sedimentation

As Ngo (2017) observes, Merleau-Ponty often evokes the motif of sedimentation to describe the process through which habits are laid down in the body. Following this metaphor, habitual patterns of movement are describes as being “deposited” in the living

body. There they coalesce as a series of latent structures. The capacities gathered here in turn serve as a ground or base for being in the world. As a metaphor, sedimentation helps to capture how habits accumulate over time in the body schema, and “attests to the weightiness of the past in the present lived body” (Ngo, 2017, 4). As Ngo (2017) reiterates, “the sedimentation analogy is useful insofar as it allows us to tell a story of the past as it comes to be grounded and remain immanent in the present” (4). Indeed, in the enactment of habitual movement we witness the body as it carries forward its past. In other words, the sedimented past bears upon the present, structuring perception in the present by affording certain ways of moving in and towards it. This points specifically to the ways that sedimented structures provide the background for experience and engagement in the world. Although Ngo (2017) is critical of how this metaphor is taken up, it is still helpful for revealing sedimentation as a process through which structures of behavior come to be integrated in the body.

Sedimentation occurs over time. As behaviors or experiences are repeated, they eventually form flexible corporeal structures which themselves endure, but not simply as a remnant of the past. As Merleau-Ponty explains: “sedimentation is: a trace of the forgotten and thereby a call to thought which depends on itself to go farther” (IP, 58-59). Through sedimentation “sense is deposited... but not as an object left behind, as a simple reminder or as something that survives as a residue. [It is deposited] as something to continue” (IP, 9). In other words, sedimentation implies a future orientation. The past enlivens the present while also influencing that which is to come. By instituting a familiar pathway for our movement, habit sketches out in advance how we might relate to the world. The more habits are called upon, the deeper they burrow into the body. The paths traced by habit lend a certain shape, direction, and sequence to our movements. Because of this, habit predisposes us to particular lines of action, or movement in and towards the world. Habit takes up “the intentions that proceed it, and it creates an intention out of it which survives it and will go farther, and by which there is forgetfulness of its origins” (IP, 51). We can think of habit then as instituting a tendency, or as projecting a line of potential action. Through habit, Merleau-Ponty explains, one’s experiences are endowed “with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will

make sense, will form a thinkable sequel, a history” (IP, 77). Habits, he continues, “deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future” (IP, 77). In this way, the capacity for habit reflects the complex temporal intertwining that is central to embodied subjectivity.

1.2.9 Beyond Repetition: Temporal Openness and the Generativity of Habit

In habit, we witness an opening up of a new enactment of a motor task. This is significant because it points to the generativity of habit; a quality which is often overshadowed by the dynamics of sedimentation and repetition. Habits are commonly seen as predetermined ways of doing things; habitual actions are viewed as “fixed” and subsequently doom individuals to endless cycles of repetition. However, this can lead one to overlook what habit capacitates people to do: adjust our actions to adapt to or modify to our situated contexts. As an able-bodied woman, I can walk up stairs even when the stairs are different heights! I can use someone else’s keyboard with only minor typos! No matter the vessel, I can and I will drink my coffee (with only minimal spillage)! Habitual behavior arises in *response to a situation* which might either be routine and expected, or unusual and unforeseen. For Merleau-Ponty, “habit expresses the power we have of dilating our being in the world, or of altering our existence” (PhP, 145). One is not, therefore, condemned by the ways that habits have been sedimented into my corporeal schema. Because habits are *a kind of doing rather than a kind of being*, there is potential for them to be taken up differently. Although habit certainly predisposes us to a mode of responding to the world, it does not, however, institute a bare recurrence of specific acts. Framing habit solely in terms of rigid repetition however, makes them appear antithetical to innovation, and obscures the improvisational generativity of habit.

I turn to Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit rather than Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus because I find habitus, is overly deterministic. Habitus, like habit, indicates an orientation in the world. This is grounded in a theory of embodiment that is consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the active interchange unfolding between self and world.

However, Bourdieu's habitus is specifically focused on the incorporation of the social world into the body. For Bourdieu, habitus encapsulates a set of learned patterns of meaning, beliefs, behaviors, and tastes that are historically constituted and acquired through socialization. Bourdieu defines habitus as:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions or existence produce the habitual, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practice and representation (Bourdieu, 1990, 53).

Certainly, Bourdieu's work on the social dimensions of habit helps to make sense of the connections between one's own habits and the habits of others; however his account has little to say about movement and is less focused on articulating the bodily experience of habit. The all-encompassing role that Bourdieu attributes to habitus leaves little room for the expressivity and changeful dynamics of habit to shine. For Bourdieu, our embeddedness within a particular class (and its associated habitus) limits her ability to apprehend it as such. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's account of habit speaks to the process of habit formation itself as a dynamic and creative bodily process. He shows that embodied subjects can be expanded through the acquisition of new bodily habits. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty maintains that examining our habitual responses to the world can also enable new interpretations of these responses. Merleau-Ponty (2012) asserts,

by renouncing a part of his spontaneity, by engaging in the world through stable organs and preestablished circuits, man can acquire the mental and practical space that will free him, in principle, from his milieu and thereby allow him to *see* it (89).

For Bourdieu, all other social factors (gender, race, age, sexuality etc.) work through class-based habitus (C.f. Bourdieu, 1990). He seems to say that socioeconomic status alone determines habitus. He arrives at this conclusion in part because he assumes that those within the same social class share a common experience of the world. This tendency towards universalism can be seen in his claim that:

The practices of members of the same group, or, in a differentiated society, the same class, are always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish, because, as Leibniz again says, “following only (his) own laws,” each nevertheless “agrees with the other”. The habitus is precisely this immanent law, *lex insita*, inscribed in bodies as identical histories, which is the precondition not only for the coordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination (Bourdieu, 1990, 59).

The argument that those who belong to the same social class attribute the same meanings to various different cultural practices because of their shared habitus is persuasive. However, I am suspicious of Bourdieu’s claim that this collective perspective is “inscribed in bodies as identical histories” (59). This universalizing conception of the subject dismisses ambiguities and dissonances that inflect one’s being in the world. The concept on its own lacks the explanatory potential for an account of embodied subjectivity where the subject is multiply constituted, fragmented, and intersectional. Although this shortcoming might be remedied by applying habitus alongside a multi-dimensional logic of intersectionality (C.f. Crenshaw, 1991; Silva 2016), I find Merleau-Ponty’s view of habit as “dilating our being in the world” can account for the more generative aspects of habit, including the unique ways marginalized subjects inhabit a habitus.

1.2.10 Habits as *Held*: Rethinking Sedimentation as Activity-Passivity

In addition to Merleau-Ponty’s work on habit and sedimentation, in this section I also draw on the recent work of Helen Ngo (2017), who has expanded on the notion of habit as *held* by the body. Ngo (2017) observes that the imagery of sedimentation evokes a sense of passivity and fixity (38). In the field of geology, sedimentation refers to “the process in which materials get *deposited* on a surface (passivity), and once sedimented the materials solidify and remain fixed in their layers and order (inertia)” (Ngo, 2017,

38). However, on Merleau-Ponty's account, the sedimented structures that ground habit do not form "an inert mass at the foundation of our consciousness" (PhP, 131). Rather, they are understood to have "an open sense, which develops by means of proliferation, by curves, decentering and re-centering, zigzag, ambiguous passage, with a sort of identity between whole parts, the beginnings and end" (IP, 48-49). Recall that for Merleau-Ponty, the body schema that habit draws on is itself flexible and contingent. The body schema is continually reworked, caught up in a persistent process of renewal. As a consequence, acquisitions made through habit are never fixed, permanent, or absolute. Indeed, habits "feed off my present" to engender an orientation in and towards the world (PhP, 132). This account does not align well with the view of sedimentation as a primarily passive process. In fact, understanding sedimented structures of the body schema as such obscures the creative innovation at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's account of habit (PhP, 131-132). Habits are not simply deposited in our bodies as inert unchanging structures, "but rather extend and fill out *existing* bodily orientations and dispositions" (Ngo, 2016, 863).

Ngo's (2016; 2017) discussion of habit introduces a greater sense of activity into the process of sedimentation outlined by Merleau-Ponty. Ngo (2017) shows that sedimentation is not wholly passive, as the colloquial use of the word might imply. A closer examination of sedimentation reveals that habits are *held by* the body rather than *deposited in* the body. This suggests that habit is continuous and requires corporeal receptivity. The sedimented structures that enable our active engagement in the world are not static or. Consequently, "the stability of our sedimented structures of behaviour is relative; sedimented structures provide stability but this stability can be undone over time (or intentionally) unless the structures are maintained" (Jenkinson, 2017, 79). This flexibility is important because opens up the possibility of freedom and spontaneity and presents behavior as mutable and subject to change. As Jenkinson (2017) explains, "if our sedimented structures were fixed like cement, this would preclude the kinds of learning that involve the modification or change of specific behaviors relative to contexts" (79). This means that on Merleau-Ponty's account, the acquisition of habits is never complete. Habits are constantly evolving shaping and constraining our being in the world.

Expanding on the geological metaphor of sedimentation, Ngo (2017) makes the astute observation that sedimentation depends on the *receptivity* of the surface onto which new materials are deposited. As she explains, in geological sedimentation, “the depositing of materials is passive insofar as surfaces do not solicit them;” however, “they do *receive* them” (Ngo, 2017, 38). This reception however, depends on some level of compatibility between the new material and the surface in question. She explains: “the surface contains a receptivity to the material, with its own edges and formations codetermining which new materials get deposited, and how” (Ngo, 2017, 39; Ngo 2016, 863). Receptivity forwards a livelier interpretation of sedimentation and points to the active way that our bodies take up and enact habits. Implied is that sedimentation of habits also depends upon an openness or readiness to take them up.

Ngo (2017) observes that the Latin root of sedimentation (*sedere*) has a double meaning: it gestures to “settling” but also of “sitting”. She argues, this expanded definition allows a new and more active sense of sedimentation to emerge., since “sitting entails an active moment; it involves a *holding* of the body” (Ngo, 2017, 39). Although one remains in one place and might appear still when sitting, one must actively sustain this posture. One might appear inactive, but sitting takes effort. One’s body must work to maintain a sitting position over time. Infants are not born with, but *develop* the ability to sit up by themselves. It takes months for an infant to develop the necessary muscular strength in their neck, upper and lower back, that will allow them to balance and stabilize their torso so that they can hold a “sitting” position. Speaking of the body’s familiar and habitual motility within a home-space, Merleau-Ponty writes: “this word ‘sedimentation’ must not trick us: this contracted knowledge is not an inert mass at the foundation of our consciousness” (PhP, 131). He continues, describing the way his body continues to “hold” the dimensions of his home, explaining: “I still hold ‘in my hands’ or ‘in my legs’ its principal distances and directions and only if a multitude of intentional threads run out towards it from my body” (PhP, 131). Another salient example can be drawn from my previous account of the typist (mentioned in section 1.2.5.). Recall that the typist does not “know” the locations of the letters on the keyboard explicitly, but instead the keyboard

itself is integrated into the typist's bodily schema. Here, we can think of the typists' knowledge as being held in their hands. In either case, the reference to holding demonstrates that habits are also active and continually activated.

As we have seen, habit relies on the capacity for motricity, which, as an original intentionality, allows the body to meet the solicitation of the world, as well as the flexible structures of the body schema. The enactment of habitual movement is not a simple repetition of that which has come before it. Even in routine habitual behaviors we witness an opening up of a *new* enactment of a motor task. This is important because it means that I am not, therefore, condemned by my habits. There is always potential for habits to be taken up differently, and to introduce new habits. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "the resumption of the past in the present leaves it in its originality, does not truly surpass it, does not flatter itself to contain it all [in its entirety], plus something else" (IP, 59). The past "creates a question, puts it in reserve, makes a situation that is indefinitely open" (IP, 22). Although they are anchored in the past, habits are not static entities, but instead are held in our bodily horizons.

1.3 Being Thrown: A Phenomenology of Flow in Dance

Back stage.

We would huddle.

Hop-one, hop-two, up to the corner round-and turn, pas-du-bas, pas-du-bas, and, high-cut, high-cut, high-cut, high-cut.

Speaking in rhythms, breathing in beats. Using our hands as feet and arms as legs.

Marking movement, sealing sequences in skin.

Only to step on stage and realise I have forgotten everything I know of this dance.

All of it.

All but gone until it isn't.

Dancers, as skillful movers, possess dance as practical bodily knowledge - what Merleau-

Ponty would describe as knowledge “in the hands” (PhP, 131). In this section I will show that dance relies on and articulates the embodied dynamics that allow us to encounter the world, revealing how embodied subjects understand, inhabit, and interpret our worlds in and through movement. By closely examining the sedimentation of habitual movement that allows for flow in dance to be achieved, one can describe in more concrete terms how habits become familiar ways of using the body, instituting corporeal tendencies and orientations in the world. I argue that interpreting dance through Merleau-Ponty’s articulation of the habit body provides a better characterization of the embodied nature of dance and better captures the dancing experience of “flow”. I draw on the concepts of habit, body schema, sedimentation and intentionality to articulate this experience. The experiencing phenomenon of flow is shown to be the result of the dancer’s bodily expertise and related to pre-reflective bodily movement. Although flow is a significant phenomenological component of dance that is valuable in and of itself, since I take up this concept in a subsequent chapter to describe and explain pre-reflective bodily intentionality in racialized embodiment, my discussion of flow here is meant to provide a foundation for further investigation of how to transform pre-reflective bodily movement in subsequent chapters.

I wish more people knew what it felt like to actually dance. I’m not referring to the difficulty of learning technique or combination. I mean the part that comes after everything clicks. When your most focused mind, your most mouldable body, and your truest spirit all intertwine at the highest level. That point will look different for everyone, of course, but I wish everyone could attempt to reach it at least once. It can literally feel like flying.

– Fana Tesfagiorgis, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

In the above excerpt Fana Tesfagiorgis articulates a beautiful moment “after everything clicks”. She gestures to her own skillful body, the body that already “knows” a sequence of movement. In dance, the term ‘choreography’ is used to refer to the organization of bodily movement. Broadly, it provides a guideline, or plan, which sets down in advance

the kind of actions performed as well as their sequence or progression (C.f Foster, 2010). The term was first used in the early Eighteenth Century to describe the practice of notating dances. The word ‘choreography’ derives from two Greek words: “*choreia*, the synthesis of dance, rhythm, and vocal harmony manifest in the Greek chorus; and graph, the act of writing” (Foster, 2010, 69). Although this term was originally meant to capture the patterning of movement observed in dance, it is also applied in a number of different contexts where the structuring, arranging, and regulation of movement are important. For instance, when framed as arranging or organizing bodies in motion choreography may describe the movement of cars, the flight of birds, or the coordination of traffic lights for commuter flow. This being said, I use the term choreography to refer to the specific combinations of movements and steps that come together to form a sequence. But what does it mean for the body to know a piece of choreography? Tesfagiorgis’ description does not include a rundown of the choreography that has been deposited in her body. She does not go through steps mechanistically. Instead, her cohesion with them imparts a “feeling of flying”. This is the moment when dance comes alive for her, not as changes in positions, but as a dynamic interplay of forces which recoil and expand, rise and fall, and suddenly shift direction.

I associate the “feeling of flying” described by Tesfagiorgis with what some dancers or musicians describe as “flow”. Flow is a term often used in music and sport. In the context of sport, the term is typically used to describe “a state in which the athlete feels fully immersed and ‘in the zone’ in their activity” (Hardes, 2016, 283). One is operating in an intuitive state. By closely examining the sedimentation of habitual movements that allow for flow in dance to be achieved, one is able to describe in more concrete terms how habits become familiar ways of using the body, instituting particular corporeal tendencies and orientations in the world that unfold pre-reflectively. In this section, I draw on phenomenological descriptions of my own lived experiences of dancing and situate them alongside other accounts from professional contemporary dancers engaged in the expert performance of skilled movement.

When caught up in dancing there is a sense that it is being called forth, rising up from beneath my feet. Sometimes it feels like my body is dancing on its own, that the dance is dancing me. As is the case in everyday movement in and towards the world, I do not *think of* movement when I dance. Rather, I am possessed by movement, and fully immersed in its unfolding. When dancing, I do not think of choreography and execute a series of specified movements mechanically. In other words, I do not go through the motions step-by-step.²⁸ Instead I feel the movements brought forth as a dynamic whole. Choreography flows forth from my body on its own and I feel myself to be at the service of the dance itself. My body seems to react through dance before I explicitly know what I am doing. This produces an interesting sensation: one in which there is both a greater sense of “control” of the body alongside a decrease in self-consciousness. Merleau-Ponty reflects on this idea, drawing on Proust. When performing, “the performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him” (VI, 151). There is cohesion between the musician and the music such that the musician does not possess music; the music possesses them.

Knowledge of dance is pre-reflective. First, dancers do not have time to think about choreography when performing: “some parts of it are very fast and unless it’s in the body – once you start having to think about the next step – you’re going to be behind” (Parviainen, 2011, 640). Through repetition, practice, and rehearsal, sequences of movement are sedimented as habit. Interestingly, Purser (2017) notes that dancers often describe the process of learning, remembering and performing choreography (i.e. sedimenting) as a way of “getting” a sequence of movement “in/into the body” (322). Getting movement into the body requires the execution of choreography to occur without a dancer’s explicit attention. For instance, patterns of movement - hop-brush-beat-beat, Pas-de-Basque, Tai-tai ta-ta, Tai-tai thom - have nestled deep in the structures of my corporeal schema that they flow without needing to explicitly remember them. One dancer explains, “to really know a choreography you don’t have to think about it”

²⁸ Here I use ‘mechanically’ to encapsulate the reduction of a sequence movement to disparate parts and positions.

(Purser, 2018, 323). It is only once a sequence of movements becomes habitual that it transpires instantaneously and unconsciously. Often thinking about what movements are supposed to come next actually impedes movement. As Merleau-Ponty notes, “thinking about movement destroys movement” (PhP, 280). For instance, if I am focused on thinking ahead to what movements are coming up in a sequence of choreography, my movements in the present suffer. I might, for example, add an extra beat, initiate a sequence with the wrong foot, or lose the rhythm of my steps completely.

Second, dance is pre-reflective in in so far as dancers usually do not “know” the steps involved in a piece of choreography in an explicit or reflective way. Knowing choreography is “characterized by the movements being available to the dancer at a pre-reflective level as he or she performs a sequence, without the need for conscious reflective thought” (Parviainen, 2011, 262). Once a dancer is habituated to a piece of choreography it becomes integrated into their bodily space. As with the typist who does not know the objective positions of the keys on their keyboard, neither does a dancer know the precise or exact locations of her arms or legs in an objective sense. Describing how an organist perceives an organ, Merleau-Ponty maintains, “he does not learn the objective positions for each stop, and each pedal, nor does he entrust such positions to ‘memory’. During the rehearsal – just as during the performance – the stops, the pedals, and the keyboards are only presented to him as powers of such and such emotional or musical value, and their position as those places through which this value appears in the world” (PhP, 146-147). For the skilled organist, because they have already sedimented habits for playing an organ, the organ is an expressive space where they feel at home. This enables the various keys and pedals to appear as open musical possibilities through which a melody may be grasped. Similarly, I do not know the specific distances or directions my body travels when I am dancing a specific sequence of movement. I don’t move my foot 30 cm to the right to a specific location in objective space. Rather, my body is a power for dancing. As one dancer explains, once habituated to a piece of choreography, “I just remember the point as in I remember the leg going there and then that will link with what’s coming next which wouldn’t directly mean the next step but just something in the next phrase” (Purser, 2018 323). As Sheets-Johnstone (2015) notes,

neither the dancer nor the dance exist “totally at any one point in space or at any single instant in time”, but express a becoming towards a future (29). Importantly, this is not meant imply that dancers are automatons. Not a complete withdrawal: “for when I am dancing, the rhythmic movements are released from my body without a need to make them deliberately – and yet I am guiding my movements according to the gesture and rhythm I feel” (Fuchs, 2003, 2).

What we also learn from this description is that the “feeling of flying” *feels good*. So good she wishes others could feel it too. This shows up an important qualitative aspect of habitual movement: this intertwining is sensed as ease and comfort. Being in your body, for a dancer, is a sense of being comfortable, and feeling grounded, of being situated, and able to gear into the world. Dancers have diverse relationships to their bodies. Given this, I do not wish to overgeneralize how dancers feel their own bodies in motion or suggest that their dancing experiences are defined solely through a sense of comfort. For instance, when examining dancers’ perception of pain and injury, Helen Thomas and Jennifer Tarr (2009) found that dancers frequently distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ pain. These findings suggest that sensations of ‘good’ pain might also occur while caught up in movement. I am also aware of how my focus on comfort could elide the experiences of aging dancers and how they enact their embodied aging in and through dance (C.f. Coupland 2013). The sense of being comfortable that I evoke here is meant to capture the felt sense of ease that arises through the unity of aim and enactment that is characteristic of pre-reflective movement. For example, one dancer captures the experience of being in the body she has when dancing: “So that’s kind of to be in your body – how it sits – that I’m comfortable here and that I’m correct within my presence there. [Louisa]” (Purser, 2018, 45). This sentiment is echoed in another participant’s description of being in harmony with the body: “It’s peaceful, its comfortable, you know, it’s pleasurable so it’s like a, mmm, its really difficult to explain, it’s just there, it’s in your body and you know it’s good and everything’s working, you know?... em, it’s quite hard to explain. [Marco]” (Purser, 2018, 45). When dance is sedimented as habit it enables one’s movement to flow with ease and lends an overall sense of comfort. This is

significant since it is precisely these felt experiences of comfort and ease that are uprooted in the resedimentation of habit.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has laid the groundwork for the rest of my project by outlining the tenets of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework, paying specific attention to his account of habit. For Merleau-Ponty, habit is an essential feature of embodied being and an integral component of what it means to exist as a lived body in a world. The capacity for habit expresses an intelligence that belongs specifically to our bodies. Although habits are often thought to be a fixed way of doing things, habit, in fact, enables us to inhabit the world, providing an orientation that allows embodied subjects to move in and towards the world. Bringing this account to bear on dance has helped to demonstrate the way that habits enable pre-reflective bodily movement. As I have shown, when dance is sedimented as habit, it is able to flow forth with ease. In chapter two I take up dance to explore how habit may be transformed. As I will demonstrate, the disruption of habit creates discomfort through profound sensations of disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness.

Chapter 2

2 Dancing Bharatanatyam: Resedimenting Habit Through Movement

In this chapter, I take up dance as a method for inquiring into embodied transformation – transformations occurring at the affective, perceptual level of the lived body, and particularly at the pre-reflective level of habit. I begin with a question: How does one access the generativity of habit and shift our habitual modes of being in the world? I contend that dancing can offer critical insight into how habitual modes of being in the world may be shifted and changed. Specifically, I examine how the phenomena of habit is brought to light while learning a new style of dance – here Bharatanatyam, a “classical”²⁹ style of Indian dance. Learning a new style of dance disrupts the habitual ways a dancer has learned to move into the world. As the body schema is enriched with new and unfamiliar dynamics of comportment, the pre-reflective styles of comportment that *already* reside in a dancer’s body are brought to the forefront of their awareness. These are those familiar movements that occur automatically and with ease. Learning a new style of dance involves actively registering and resisting one’s inclinations towards these habitual patterns of movement. Through this process, one’s dancing body becomes unfamiliar and strange. While this causes discomfort, it also opens new possibilities for movement. This phenomenological analysis sets up my investigation of the habitual movement in the context of white privilege in chapter three.

Taking my own dancing body itself as a “site of discovery”, I traced a number of changes in my own sensory-motor experiences as I transitioned from a beginner to novice Bharatanatyam dancer over a three-year period. Relying on the insights revealed through this experience, I tease out two experiential phenomena I contend are crucial to processes for shifting habitual movement: disorientation, and hesitation. First I show that, by

²⁹ As will be elaborated on in chapter four, “classical” is a fraught term that in this context is laden with the weight of colonial encounters. Despite the contention that Bharatanatyam has its roots in antiquity, there is agreement among dance scholars that it is, in fact, of “contemporary” origins.

disrupting one's sense of bodily spatiality, experiences of disorientation disrupt the ease, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement. Next, I demonstrate that the feeling of *delay* that arises in moments of hesitation disturbs one's habitual sense of temporality. This allows one to register the residual habitual structures in the body as over-determining intentional action, and opens an interval of indetermination that enables bodily receptivity, and makes felt the contingency of habit (the possibility of becoming otherwise). Experiences of disorientation and hesitation are significant because they can open the possibility for double consciousness, which can ground critical reflection.

Taking up the mirror as metaphor for reflection, I conclude with a discussion of double consciousness where I examine how learning a dance form that is culturally removed from my own experience has impacted the way that I feel/move/think in general. The image of my white body reflected in the mirror in my Bharatanatyam class provided a visual reminder of my difference and position as a cultural outsider. Although mirrors gesture to questions surrounding oppression, objectification, self-surveillance, by considering the ways that dancers engage with the mirror as both a means for self-awareness, self-correction, I explore how the mirror offers a dancer's a way to perceive their own bodily movement from the "outside". This outside perspective is necessary for adjusting one's own movement in accordance to others.

I begin this chapter with a short introduction to the dance history embedded in my own habitual dancing body and tracing some preliminary observations about the shifts in my sensory experience. Next I briefly outline some distinctive features of Bharatanatyam and describe some unique aspects of its movement vocabulary. The purpose of this section is to familiarize readers with some vocabulary that I will draw on throughout the chapter. This is followed by a methodological section explaining *how* I have taken up dance as *part of* my research process. I do not use dance as a tool, a resource to be mined, an example, or illustration. Rather I situate dancing itself as my method of inquiry, and appeal to sensuous knowledge delivered through my dancing body. This required me to become more attuned to my own bodily sensations while dancing by "listening-to" my body. I conclude this section by negotiating the tenuous relationship between dance and

writing. This methodological section is followed by a phenomenological analysis that teases out how experiences of disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness arose in the context of learning Bharatanatyam.

2.1 Expanding the Habitual Dancing Body

Dance is particularly well-suited for exploring habit, since dancers have an intimate knowledge of their bodies as habitual dancing bodies. When performing, a dancer does not simply move through choreography, but choreography moves through her.³⁰ This intertwining arises specifically because the dynamic patterns of movement that make up a given sequence of choreography are held by the dancer's body, sedimented as habits within the body schema. Dancers' habitual dancing bodies are oriented by their past, i.e. the dynamic patterns of movement that are held by their bodies and anticipate future movement; they are pulled towards a possible future. However, dancers' mastery of movement does not only consist in sedimenting habits. Their expertise also entails an active involvement in embodied exploration of what might be optimised, modified, and changed in the way they move (Ravn 2017; Damkjaer, 2015; Ingerslev, 2013; Legrand and Ravn, 2009). This is necessary not only for optimizing one's performance, but also to be able to "change their way of moving according to the different aesthetic and expressive demands characterizing the performances of which they are part" (Ravn, 2017, 59). A dancer's ability to register, disrupt and confront their own habitual dancing body is unique. Given this, dancing can offer critical insight into how habitual modes of being in the world may be changed.

Bharatanatyam is a classical style of Indian dance that originated in Southern India in the state of Tamil Nadu. For the purposes of this chapter, I will not yet explain the larger social cultural context within which Bharatanatyam is embedded.³¹ Instead I focus on the embodied experience of dance training itself. When I began Bharatanatyam, my

³⁰ Reviewed in chapter one.

³¹ This will be addressed in chapter four.

movements were tentative. I was not sure of myself. My arms felt awkward and my wrists would ache for days after class. I was always thinking of what movement came next and rushing my body to get there on time. *Adavus* remained series of positions and postures set in place one after another and felt as separable sequences. When learning a new style of dance, one is challenged to undo the ways they are accustomed to moving into the world. Through this experience I found myself confronted with the pre-reflective habitual structures already sedimented within my dancing body, and the way these habits overdetermined my intentional movement. In other words, this venture makes felt the pre-reflective styles of comportment, position, posture, gesture *already* residing in my habitual dancing body.

At this point, it is relevant to outline some of my own dance history, since this history grounds the habitual ways I embody dancing. I arrive at the dance studio already laden with techniques of comportment, posture, and position, familiar ways of taking up space and time through movement. Comportment, as it is used within phenomenology, encompasses a multitude of capacities and dimensions of being (habit, intersubjectivity etc.) For Merleau-Ponty, ‘comportment’ arises in and through one’s embodied, and affective (and cognitive) engagement with the world. From this perspective, comportment gestures to the wholistic engagement of an individual with the world. The phrase “dance technique” refers to “movement vocabulary, skill, style and method” associated with a dance form (Parviainen, 2003b, 160). Dance positions are also an essential part of dance technique. Here, ‘position’ refers to the precise placement or arrangement of a dancer’s body while dancing. Posture, on the other hand, refers to the alignment of a dancer’s body as a whole. Movement vocabulary produces an overall aesthetic, which is comprised of a set of dynamic postures, positions held together as a system of movement. Dance technique provides a framework which enables and constrains kinaesthetic potentials.

With consistent practice the dance techniques associated with a style are sedimented within a dancer’s body, becoming habitual. As habitual, dance technique traces out in advance familiar patterns of movement which then guide both dancer and dance. My

habitual dancing body has been shaped by the techniques of “Western” theatrical dance traditions, ballet, modern and contemporary dance. My embodiment is also informed by my background as a Highland dancer, a solo percussive form of step dancing developed in the Scottish Highlands. Each of these dance styles are distinct, having their own techniques and desired aesthetic outcomes. Each lends specific ways of being/dancing in the world and inhabiting space and time through movement. Although I was conceptually aware of the corporeal impact these styles had on my embodiment, the process of sedimenting a very different technique allowed me to hear, to see, to feel the existence of these structures within my body. Taking up Bharatanatyam made me aware of the force of my habitual dancing body, particularly my habitual dancing body as shaped by my training in Highland dance.

I sensed many similarities and differences between Highland dance and Bharatanatyam. For example, I felt a familiarity when holding the proud upright stance of *arimundi*. I felt echoes of Highland dance in this posture, standing with my knees turned out, back straight and shoulders back. Given that I am already accustomed to holding this posture, I assume it with ease. However, I also immediately sensed a significant difference from within this same posture: the leg positions. To stand in *arumindi* one’s hips are open like a book from the center of the body and both legs are bent at the knee. This aspect of the stance sharply contrasts with the basic starting positions of all the forms of dance that I previously had experience with. This difference in position made itself known corporeally not only as a sense of discomfort in the moment, but also in the days after in my thighs, shins, and Achilles tendons. Over time, however, assuming this posture (re)shaped my body. By repeatedly taking up the stance itself I gained the strength and flexibility in the hips to deepen the stretch and create what is considered a more impressive and aesthetically pleasing shape. It took deliberate effort and persistence for me to become habituated to *arimundi*. It became more comfortable for me to hold this position because, if you recall, I was being taught three hours a week, practicing at home, and doing specific exercises and stretches to increase the strength of my thighs and the

flexibility in my hips. Now *arimundi* has receded to the background, supporting the becoming of my movement.³²

Learning a new style of movement not only involves sedimenting unfamiliar dynamics of comportment made up of new manners of posture and positions, but also involves actively registering and resisting the habitual structures already held by the body schema. Learning Bharatanatyam demanded that I actively resist my inclinations toward familiar patterns of movement I am accustomed to through my training in Highland dance. This is easier said than done. My habitual Highland dancing body, informed by my background in Highland dance, seemed to intrude. Specially, I noticed how the habitual positions and postures held in my dancing body would over-determine and anticipate my movements. However, over time I found that instead of being determined by the dance techniques sedimented in my body in advance, my habitual dancing body became more receptive, and open to change.

Dancing Bharatanatyam over a prolonged period, I identified a number of changes in my own expression and perception of the dance form. Bharatanatyam is statuesque, exacting, and precise. These qualities are felt in the movement of the dance form itself. As a beginner, I felt and expressed the above qualities by engendering my movements with a sense of sharpness; my arm gestures cut through the air, slicing it like a knife. Swoosh, like an arrow shooting out from my center. Primed toward a desired position, I aimed my arm movements with the intent of a marksman. As the form began to settle deeper in my body, as I learn how to hold it, and let myself be held by it, I noticed the sense of sharpness within certain gestures began to soften. My movements still felt swift and crisp, but I became aware of a gliding sensation, as though I was sailing across the studio floor. My movement was more balanced and controlled but also more relaxed, which helped me to feel more confident. As one becomes a more proficient dancer within a given style learn “an overall sense of what the movement feels like” (Hansen, & Ravn, 2013, 209; C.f. Ravn, 2017). Instead of sensing *adavus* (steps) as independent pieces

³² This example also demonstrates that one often senses both complimentary and contradictory dynamics of comportment, posture, and position simultaneously.

brought together to form a sequence of choreography, as one would when they are learning for instance, I became to sense movements holistically. I no longer associated specific movements with specific qualities, but with an overall *style* of poise. When movement begins to flow like this it opens new possibilities of expression and again proves that one's sense of mastery is never totalizing.

2.2 In the Beginning...

I did not start Bharatanatyam with the self-conscious intention of taking it up as a method of inquiry. Rather, I found myself suddenly caught up by its gestures and rhythms in a way that was totally unexpected.³³ I was initially drawn to Indian Classical dance after watching *Zero Degrees* (2005) by choreographer Akram Khan. His choreography integrates contemporary dance with Kathak (a “classical” style of Indian dance originating on Northern India).³⁴ After watching the piece, I felt a strong desire to *feel* the dance in my body. I had a sense that holding the movements was important for understating the dance. This makes sense phenomenologically. As Merleau-Ponty explains “I have no other way of knowing the human body than by living it, that is, by taking it up for myself the drama that moves through it and by merging with it” (PP,

³³ I was hooked immediately. It was as though had been bitten by a Bharatanatyam bug. I was stamping in the grocery store, at the checkout line, while waiting to catch the bus. I would watch youtube videos of Bharatanatyam while I ate lunch. Over Christmas my sister watched politely as I danced in the kitchen. I showed her all of the *adavus* (steps) I had learned and whined about my lack of thumb flexibility. I danced on the beach and stretched while I watched television with my partner (Game of Thrones; West World; Stranger Things). Suffice it to say, this project is not impartial. It is embedded in social relations and affected by my own emotions, desires, and choices. I was drawn back to Vidya Natarajan's classes because I liked her and she is a beautiful dancer. I feel good about myself when I dance. Dance class instills me with a felt bodily, aural, and kinesthetic sense of pleasure.

³⁴ Like Bharatanatyam, Kathak is classified as one of the major forms of Indian classical dance. Unlike Bharatanatyam, which originated in Southern India, the emergence of Kathak is traced to Northern India. While both dance forms are highly rhythmic and incorporate elaborate gestures and complex footwork, they differ in their stylistic qualities. For instance, Bharatanatyam is danced in what is call a “half-seat” position (*aramandi*) where both the dancer's legs are bent at the knee, while Kathak is danced in a standing position. Additionally, the two forms are accompanied by different music.

205). What might I learn by taking up a style of “classical” Indian dance and learning to feel the unique contours of its qualitative dynamics with my body? And so, when I came upon a beginner’s class in Bharatanatyam being taught in the city I lived³⁵, I thought to myself, why not try?³⁶

As a feminist researcher, I am cognisant of my ethical responsibility in regards to representing someone’s lived experience. Although I was not planning to conduct interviews with other participants in my dance class, as a feminist researcher I am keenly aware of the importance of transparency in research. Because of this I made sure to inform my teacher, Vidya Natarajan, as well as the other dancers in the class, of my project and made sure they understood that I would be addressing my own dance practice and lived experience of learning Bharatanatyam. I found myself a part of a supportive community of dancers. As my research progressed, I felt it was important to have someone on my committee with both a practical and historical understanding of Bharatanatyam, someone who could evaluate the accuracy of my descriptions of various positions, postures, or steps. As a cultural outsider, it is my ethical responsibility to turn to someone from within the community with deeper understanding of Bharatanatyam to ensure correct representation of the dance form. Fortunately, Vidya Natarajan was happy to join my committee to read and provide feedback on my descriptions of Bharatanatyam as well as the historical analysis I develop in chapter four.

From the outset, I should say that I am still new to Bharatanatyam and my learning is far from finished. Over the first year of my introduction to the form I made steady progress with the basic steps (*adavus*) that make up the foundation of Bharatanatyam technique. Throughout this time, I attended a one and a half hour beginners dance classes once a week. After my beginner class was finished, I would stay and observe the advanced class that followed. Gradually I joined in the advanced class as well. Initially I timidly

³⁵ London Ontario, Canada, November 2015.

³⁶ Although I did not have a practical understanding of Bharatanatyam, I did come to the class with what is probably an inordinate amount of knowledge about Hindu religious traditions. Through my studies in pursuit of a master’s degrees in religious studies I already had an essential foundational knowledge of Hindu traditions and mythology.

followed along in the back of the studio, stumbling through steps I was not yet ready for. Of course, I was not as skilled as the more advanced dancers, but in time I could keep up. I lost my apprehension about my inexperience getting in the way. I was dancing about three hours a week in the classroom environment and practicing at home daily. During this time, I also had the privilege of participating in several live performances. I cannot convey how incredibly generous it was for my teacher to incorporate me in these performances whenever possible. Including me meant that she had to make a specific effort to structure the choreography in such a way as to allow for several dancers at different levels of experience and proficiency to come together smoothly. The role that the pressure of performing plays in motivating the drive to grasp the intricacies of movement is a factor that is not to be underestimated. When there is more at stake, you practice with more determination.

In what follows, I sketch a description of Bharatanatyam by gathering together some of the formal characteristics and fundamental principles most obvious to dancers and viewers. Conducting a phenomenological analysis of Bharatanatyam requires, first and foremost, a description of Bharatanatyam – that is, a description of Bharatanatyam as it is danced. Whether you privilege the perspective the dancer, choreographer, critic, researcher, or the audience, dance is grounded in the immediate experience of movement. By detailing the internal logics upon which the dance is grounded, I will highlight the qualitatively felt dynamics of its movement as it is created, formed, and performed. I will begin with a description of Bharatanatyam technique. Without fixing it in place, I capture a glimmer, a momentary crystallization of Bharatanatyam as it lives and breathes in the body.

2.2.1 Distinctive Features of the Form

Bharatanatyam is made up of three elements: *natya* (drama), *nritta* (abstract dance), and *nriya* (expressive dance). Performances incorporate each of these elements in varying degrees depending on the context. *Natya*, refers to the dramatic aspect of stage performance revolving around the enactment of a given narrative (Khokar, 1979).

Traditionally, Bharatanatyam draws its narrative content from Indian epic stories and

mythology. The dancer depicts many different characters, from goddesses, gods, and demons, to the heroes and heroines of Indian drama. Dancing in this context cannot be understood in isolation and must be understood as intertwined with drama and music. *Nritta* involves dynamic movements that unfold complex rhythmic patterns. This aspect of Bharatanatyam is decidedly abstract. The movements that make up *nritta* are not intended to convey specific meaning. Instead, the aim is to create an array of rhythmic patterns and shapes in coordination with music (Khokar, 1979). This involves a combination of footwork, synchronized with eye, head, neck, hand, torso, and arm movements. The knee, hip and shoulder joints constitute the key points from which these movements originate in both the lower and the upper body.

While *nritta* is concerned solely with rhythmic articulation and complex rhythmic patterns of movement in dance, the object of *nriya*, on the other hand, is to convey specific moods, or sentiments, and generate emotional experience. *Nriya* is closely tied to the concept of *abhinaya*, which refers specifically to the expression of emotion. Emotional expression in Bharatanatyam occurs through: 1) bodily gesture, including the use of *mudras*, head, body, limbs and feet, 2) facial expression, making full use of the eyes, eyebrows and lips, 3) dress, or costuming, jewelry and makeup, and 4) song (usually a vocalist who accompanies a dancer in performance) (C.f. O’Shea 2007; Jeyasingh 2010; Vatsyayan 1977; Khokar, 1979). *Abhinaya* is unique because instead of conveying an abstract aesthetic experience, or narrating a particular story, it seeks to express the inner experience of the dancer (or the character portrayed by the dancer) such that it might also be evoked *in* the audience.³⁷ This aim is premised on a specific understanding of the audience-performer dynamic, which is grounded in an important theoretical concept within Indian philosophy and aesthetics known as *rasa*. *Rasa* theory, remarks Priyadarshi Patnaik, (1997), “deals with the various kinds of emotion and how they are depicted, inferred, and transmitted through a work of art” (3). *Rasa* is a *felt*

³⁷ Personally, I find *abhinaya* is the hardest, because it requires you to let yourself truly inhabit an emotional state. To do so with authenticity means making yourself vulnerable and present in the given moment to express emotion in this way. This is not easy to do. For those who have learned to shut down their emotions, or fear the effects of holding difficult emotions present in the body, *abhinaya* can be daunting.

quality “that functions on different levels – as in emotion, aesthetic pleasure, or a taste in the mouth (sweet or salty)” (Katrak, 2014, 17). As Kapla Vatsyayan explains, *rasa* describes “aesthetic experience from the point of view of the artist, the aesthetic/artist object, and the evocation of a similar, if not identical experience in the aesthete/receptor or audience” (Katrak 2014, 17). This is possible because of the porosity that defines that audience-performer dynamic.

2.2.2 Dance Vocabulary

For the sake of clarity, before I proceed I must first lay out some vocabulary specific to Bharatanatyam.

Mudra

It is late January, 2008. I sit in my usual spot. There, on the cold linoleum floor of my “Introduction to Hinduism” class, the invited dancer brings to life dry “test words”. I am held at the end of her gaze. She brings together her thumb with her index and middle finger, stretching and separating her other two fingers: katakaamukha. Drawing her hand back towards her chest, she pulls tight the string of Shiva’s bow, and lets her arrow fly.

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Mudras are another defining feature of Bharatanatyam and are a vital aspect of the expressive and emotive dynamics of the dance form. The *mudra*, *katakaamukha*, mentioned above is now familiar to me. It is an example of one-handed mudras, but there are also many mudras that are formed using two hands. As with all the mudras, *katakaamukha* can be taken up in a myriad of ways, to convey many different meanings. One might use them to describe things and objects, or to depict different actions, such as picking flowers, holding or putting on a necklace or garland, or, as in the above example, pulling the string of a bow. Sometimes *mudras* are deployed to capture a sense of place, bringing into focus the setting in which the events of a given narrative occur. They can also be used to describe abstract concepts, such as truth, beauty, or the passage of time.

By forming *katakaamuka* in my right hand, holding by my temple and rotating my wrist in a circle, for instance, I can convey knowledge or wisdom. Mudras carry their meaning within the context of dance as a whole; they mean nothing “without the emotions of the dance and the bodily gestures to give [them] texture and context” (Srinivasan 2012, 34). Although *mudras* appear often in the *adavus* and in *nritya*, in this context they are considered purely decorative. When used in *nritya*, however, *mudras* carry specific meanings and symbolic significance, which gives *mudras* a central role in *abhinaya*.

Mudras are not static entities. Although they are connected to specific meanings, it is understood that these meanings are not fixed. The dancer explores the elasticity of the *mudras*, in the service of expression (C.f. Khokar, 1979). The *mudras* form a kaleidoscope of variation from one to another that shows the richness of the dancer’s imagination. Like the *adavus*, the *mudras* provide the dancer with a flexible and dynamic structure that is used to creatively explore. This allows for improvisation and novel interpretations. Srinivassan (2012) captures the multiple meanings generated through the creative use of *mudras* in her description of *allapadma*, the open-handed *mudra* of the lotus flower. *Alapadma*, she explains, “can be an elegant lotus flower one minute and the next it can be the bright sun, the roundness of a face, a beautiful body, the ripples on a river; it can describe birth, ecstasy, and even show enlightenment” (Srinivasan, 2012, 34). As Srinivassan illustrates in this quotation, virtuosity is found as the dancer learns to explore the use of the *mudras* in a nuanced way. However, within the context of their expressive use, *mudras* are not used in isolation.

Adavu

I stand in the basic “half-sitting” posture, arimundi; upper body erect, legs bent with my knees turned out, shoulders down and back straight, my weight is centered, wrists bent at the waist, palms facing out. The old wood floor creaks under my feet. My teacher’s feet slap against the floor as she demonstrates an adavu. Her feet are so loud, it is amazing. I wonder that the floor does not crack open under her and

Training in Bharatanatyam begins with the *adavus*. An *adavu* is a *rhythmic* coordination of leg, foot, arm, hand, eye, head, and neck movements. As the basic units of dance, *adavus* provide the foundational structures from which dance compositions are built. There is a whole lexicon of *adavus*. Each *adavu* is made of stance (vertical with feet in parallel, *arimund*/half-sit/demi plie, *mundi*/full-sit/grande plie), foot positions, arm lines and patterns for the hands (C.f. Khokar, 1979). The eyes are used to give focus to the lines created by the arms by following them; turning one's head to direct the gaze. The corpus of *adavus* are often compared to an alphabet, grammar, or syntax. As mentioned earlier, *adavus* can be taken apart, rearranged, and put together endlessly, providing a flexible structure for the style. I think that what Arnold Haskell says about the pirouette³⁸ and fouetté³⁹ in Ballet could also be applied to the *adavus* in Bharatanatyam: "These... are the musical notes, limited in number, in themselves nothing. The effect depends on how they are combined and executed. It is this classicism that is helping the dancer to express herself, that leaves her so gloriously free, if only she is big enough" (Jeyasingh, 2010, 185). Each *adavu* is bound to a temporal structure, called a *tala*.⁴⁰ A *tala* has a fixed length made up of a certain number of "beats" (isochronous unites of time) ranging from three to nine. *Adavus* articulate a specific rhythmic pattern, by accentuating certain beats within a given *tala* cycle to create a sequence, or rhythmic pattern (C.f. Nelson, 2008). With these definitions in mind, I will now articulate dance as phenomenological method.

2.3 Dance as Inquiry: Phenomenological Method

Learning Bharatanatyam is first and foremost a sensuous experience grounded in the body, and dancing has been an important part of my research process. I position my own dancing body itself as a "site of discovery" and take dancing as an embodied method of

³⁸ A movement common in ballet where the dancer spins on one foot.

³⁹ A pirouette performed with one leg raised to the side.

⁴⁰ I expand on this concept later in the chapter.

research (C.f. Kozel, 2008; Cancienne & Snowber, 2003; Snowber, 2012). This is premised on a phenomenological understanding of the body as a site of knowledge, where thought and practice, thinking and doing, mind and body are entwined (Kozel, 2008, 29). From this perspective, the body is both the object of knowing, and the *vehicle for acquiring knowledge* through tactile kinetic sense (Parviainen, 2011, 641). For Merleau-Ponty, reflection is not only shaped by embodied experience, but the body itself has its own logos. In other words, one's body has its own distinctive means of understanding and interpreting the world. This "living thought" exists beneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body (Kozel, 2008, 55).

The phenomenological method seeks to down the stream of everyday engagement in the world to create a descriptive attitude. Description is a central part of the phenomenological method. Description is not understood as a blind or uncritical practice, but in fact helps to reveal the conceptual assumptions that underlie theories and practices, and in so doing open up new manners in which to comprehend or interpret what is being researched. This (ideally) drives one not only to question what we know of the way things are, but to try and understand the way something is made to appear: *why* and *how* something is perceived as such. This approach "reveals the depth and complexity of phenomena which are usually covered over in our habitual, unreflective attitude of perceiving and judging what we experience" (Simms & Swarska, 2013, 9). Bringing together dance and phenomenology begins from the presumption that contemporary art and philosophy are not mutually exclusive enterprises. In *Art Line Thought*, Sam Mallin (1996) develops a phenomenological methodology for engaging with art that is grounded in both lived experience and reflection. Artworks, like philosophy, provide ways of reflecting on questions concerning existence.

Phenomenologically, art works bring into appearance what recedes to the background in everyday and ordinary experience (VI; Mallin, 1996; Fielding, 2015). Artworks "present us intuitively with the structures that we use normally to intuit the perceptual world" (Mallin, 1996, 282). By reflecting on the phenomena that such works of art hold present

one can bring into appearance dynamics of the worlds in which they are embedded. Dance does this through movement (C.f. Sheets-Johnstone, 2015; Parviainen, 1998).

Merleau-Ponty maintains that when encountering an artwork we perceive “according to” it. This posits that artworks are not something passive that we simply “looking at”. Rather they participate “in the material, signifiatory, sensible, and affective texture of the real” (Fielding, 2015, 283). Rather they can inflect perception and creatively contribute to deepening our understanding of the world in which we find ourselves. Along with academic disciplines, research methods themselves proceed us, speak us. Research methods frame the kinds of questions we ask, setting out in advance the forms our questions can take. Within this context, as Loveless (2015) suggests, “it becomes crucial to ask, when examining our research practices: which stories animate us, and why?” (54). What alternative ways of thinking about knowledge production are foreclosed by our current methods of research? Each time I return to the dance studio I find myself more astonished by not only what I find there, but also by what being there leads me to find in my own body. As I demonstrated in chapter one, dance offers significant insight into the role of movement in perception, understanding, and expressing embodied existence.⁴¹ And yet, dance is too often rendered illegible by the structures of disciplinary value at the university.⁴²

Practice-based types of research do not just offer an alternative to more traditional research methodologies, but rather, and more importantly, allow for “access of different forms of knowledge” (Reason, 2010, 197). As a form of inquiry, dance offers new routes

⁴¹ I do not want to disregard the way that this primacy I am lending to movement might perpetuate a latent ableism. The scope of this project has not allowed me to dive further into this issue, however, I think it would be a fruitful area for further research.

⁴² “Part and parcel of questioning the stranglehold of disciplinary legibility on our practices in the university, as teachers, as researchers, as colleagues, today, we must attend to the ways that the disciplined university, with its merit boards and granting agencies, are structured to assess faculty outputs on the basis of contribution not to ‘new knowledge’ *in general* but to new knowledge within a *discipline*. This often renders those who would work *practicetheoretically* both illegible and, in the most hostile of assessments, suspect” [emphasis added] (Loveless, 2015, 53).

to acquiring knowledge, and moving new/illegible ways of knowing into being. This approach echoes recent developments in the emerging field of “arts based research” (ABR). ABR is grounded in an understanding of artistic practices as ways of knowing. Subsequently, the process of actually doing an artistic practice can provide access to embodied knowledge. To clarify, Shaun McNiff (2008) describes ABR as “a process of inquiry whereby the researcher, alone or with others, engages in the making of art as a *primary mode of inquiry*” [emphasis added] (24). In other words, research happens through the very practice of artistic expression itself.

Dance articulates meaning through the sensuous and non-cognitive regions of the lived body, which are underlined by movement⁴³. Dancing can open a space for renewed questioning, generating new possibilities for knowing, expression, and imagination, but only if you teach yourself how to listen to your body. How does a researcher approach the task of awakening themselves to the sensuous experience of dancing and learning dance to describe the myriad textures of this process? Taking up dance as a means of phenomenological inquiry required me to become more attuned to my own bodily sensations while dancing. Drawing on the insights of Parviainen (1998) and Irigaray (2008), in the following section I outline the steps I took to listen to my dancing body to attune myself to my own bodily sensations while dancing.

2.3.1 Listening-to the Dancing Body

I do not seek or presume to “grasp” Bharatanatyam in its totality. I have touched only a glimmer of its inexhaustible depths. My goal when approaching Bharatanatyam alongside phenomenology has been to let myself be guided by dance itself, to lend epistemic privilege to the living, breathing, dancing body, and take seriously the sensations and reflections that bubbled up in the midst of movement. This is not an “add dance and stir” approach where the inclusion of Bharatanatyam is little more than symbolic. Instead, my goal has been to allow my experience with dancing Bhartanatyam to “change the logics

⁴³ Of course, the lived body is not separate from cognitive-linguistic aspects of existence.

that structured its inclusion in the first place” (Lovelace, 2015, 53). Each time I return to the dance studio I find myself more astonished by not only what I find there, but also by what being there leads me to find in my own body. I have tried my best throughout this project to let these surprises guide my thoughts to different places.

Parviainen (1998) uses the phrase “listening to the body” to describe a practice of becoming sensitive to one’s embodiment (130). Following Irigaray’s (2008) understanding of listening-to, not as a way of “grasping something” but as an opening for cultivating relationality, I position “listening-to the body” as an exercise in developing a capacity for attentiveness. Rather than understanding listening as a way of integrating something into one’s own worldview, I am interested in the way that listening-to the body can open one’s own world to something different. As Irigaray (2008) explains, “listening-to” is “a way of opening ourselves to the other and of welcoming this other, its truth and its world as different from us, from ours” (232). When listening to the dancing body, one must develop an attentiveness to differences in movement qualities, alterations within one’s body, as well as an attunement to phenomenal sensation. As Snowber (2016) suggests, listening to the body “might not make sense in the moment, but it is rooted in the senses” (56). In the following section I outline some strategies I took to become more attuned to the knowledge embedded in my body and surface through sensation.

2.3.2 Attuning to Sensation

Learning in dance occurs at the level of the body through sedimentation and results in material transformation of one’s own body and ways of being in the world through movement. When acquiring skill and knowledge, a dancer must become deeply attuned to how they sense movement. Dancers are not just skillful movers. Their skill and training relies on cultivating a sensory awareness of their own bodies in motion and compels them to explore and methodically examine movement qualities in fine detail (Parviainen, 2011, 641). It has been shown that dancers, through the acquisition and performance of dance, develop a heightened sense of bodily awareness and a kinaesthetic sensitivity to flow of

their own movement, “its amplitudes, its shifts in direction, its modulated intentions, and its singular manners of projection” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2012, 49). To get at the sensations that arose while learning Bharatanatyam I developed a strategy for deepening my bodily awareness and becoming more sensitive to sensuous experience grounded in an open questioning. Cultivating an open sense of questioning “lets the perceived world be rather than posits it” (IV, 101-102).⁴⁴ This (ideally) drives one not only to question what we know of the way things are, but to try and understand the way something is made to appear: *why* and *how* something is perceived as such.

I put together a series of perceptually oriented questions to heighten my awareness of my own bodily sensations. I did not seek specific answers for these questions. Rather, they were designed to help bring my attention to the present moment and ground myself within here and now of my body. Some example questions include:

Where are your feet? What does the floor feel like?

What do you hear? Are you breathing?

Are you in pain? Where do you feel tension? Do your limbs feel heavy/light?

Where is your weight? What are you thinking about?

As intended, these questions offer a starting point from which to suspend one’s reflective thought and attend to the phenomenal experience of one’s body. I posed these questions to myself before and after dancing.⁴⁵ This not only helped me to turn off the treadmill of the day’s anxious thoughts and attune myself to my own bodily sensations, it also alerted me to specific bodily changes that unfolded over time. I have come to think of it as a fluid set of practices aimed at helping me cultivate new ways of listening-to my body

⁴⁴ This open sense of questioning, however, has lost its footing in academic contexts where hermeneutics of suspicion prevails as, what Eve Sedgwick (2003) has called, a “mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among possibilities” (125).

⁴⁵ I have since realised that this pattern mirrors the structure of a class in Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam classes always begin and end the same way: with the *namaskar*. It is a ritual that sets a class in motion and brings it to a close. It is a specific phrase of movement (varying regionally) signals that begin and the end of dancing. More significantly, however, it enacts a prayer of thanksgiving and reverence; apologizing to the earth for stomping on her so hard, thanking the gods, teachers and peers.

(C.f. Snowber, 1997; Snowber, 2012; Parvianinen & Aromaa, 2017). Soon my whole body was an ear listening for the subtleties of my own movement. This process or open-questioning generated a lot of sensuous material, which was documented in rough descriptive notes taken before, during and after dance class.⁴⁶ These notes were invaluable for identifying movement qualities and bodily sensations, registering the changes to my body, and modifying my own movements. These bodily findings became the basis for further exploration and reflection.

To solidify the embodied method for listening-to my body, I highlight some concrete examples of the shifts in sensual experience I encountered while learning Bharatanatyam. These examples show the way sensuous information about one's moving body is used to form new bodily knowledge. Attending to bodily sensations, such as the burning tension in my thighs, the ache in my wrists, or the stiffness of my thumbs, I learned how to prepare for, recover from, and become better at Bharatanatyam. Based on this sensuous information, I discovered specific places within my body where I needed to increase my strength or flexibility: hips, shins, wrists, fingers, ankles, neck, shoulders, Achilles tendons. I explored stretching my physical limits by increasing and decreasing speed, and observed how a proper warm up and stretching routine helped stabilize my stance when dancing at different speeds. I found that my body was affected by differences in temperature. The cold and the heat have their advantages and disadvantages for the dancing body. During the winter, the cold makes my feet stiff. I am more sensitive to the hardness of floor. On the other hand, the warmth of the summer helps to increase the flexibility of my joints. But the heat also makes me tire faster. I noted differences in my body and mood before and after dancing. If too much time past between dance classes I could feel this affecting my body. Like a bicycle left outside over winter, after longer breaks from dancing I could feel my body become rusty. Being out of regular practice impacted my stamina and procession. I observed a greater range of motion in my wrists as they became looser and easier to twist in different directions. My fingers had become

⁴⁶ I unpack the process through which I understood this note-taking further in an upcoming section.

more limber, agile and dexterous as I became more comfortable forming *mudras*. I became less breathless as my legs grew stronger.

Performing Bharatanatyam also presented new challenges and initiated a new set of bodily skills. For example, I learned how best to pace myself between the fast and lactic acid-building rhythmic *jatis* and the more leisurely pace of the *abhinaya* portions of a piece. I became adept at anticipating quick rhythmic shifts and crisp changes in bodily position and learned to stretch out the intervals between beats. I learned to quiet my body's urge to anticipate the next step and elongate moments of stillness. Repeated practice helped me observe the movements of other dancers in fine detail and adjust the character of my own movements accordingly. My participation in dance class also gave me access to other dancers' ways of conceptualizing their own dance practices and their ways of holding their bodies. In this setting dancers learn/practice technique and choreography together.⁴⁷ Although dance classes were structured around one teacher, learning is often collaborative and my bodily knowledge of Bharatanatyam was developed in dialogue with others. Other dancers played a crucial role in encouraging me to build bodily knowledge. I modified my own ways of executing *adavus* as I discerned the intricacies of others' techniques; the diagonal angle at which one retracts their heel from the floor while stomping, the temporal nuances expressed in the neck, eyes, eyebrows, or the soft grace of a hand as it grazes the shoulder. Not only would we work as a group or partners to explore or build choreography, but through my observations of others' movements, and their observations of mine, I "corrected" my mistakes and refined my execution of certain movements.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This research took place in a supportive community of learners who were made aware of my project.

⁴⁸ I think an obvious next direction to take with my research would be to incorporate the voices and perspectives other dancers more directly. Insights gained from formal and informal semi-structured interviews with dancers, for example, might allow me to strengthen and expand my analysis in different directions. Although interviews can provide a rich source for understanding embodied experience I chose to limit the scope of this project to focus on self-movement. As I have indicated, this project became clearer little by little over time and from within my own engagement with the dance style itself.

2.4 Dancing with Writing

Academic institutions are founded on a tradition of thought and knowledge that is grounded in written language. Given this, it is not surprising that an embodied kinesthetic art form grounded in movement dance is not as intuitively integrated within the cognitive-linguistic demands of the academic context. As I established in chapter one, with discursive approaches there is a tenuous relationship between dancing and documentation, which understands dancing and writing as being fundamentally at odds. To write *about* dance you must turn it into something else, fix it in amber, render it still by transforming bodily movement into written language. Not only does this perspective turn dance into an passive object of investigation that abstracts agency and movement from the *living* dancing body, but it also removes agentive movement from the writing body as well (not to mention the reading body). Of course, writing dance is not the same as dancing dance. However, we often also take for granted that writing and thinking are themselves *practices*; “thought is a practice, movement is a practice, writing is a practice, making art is a practice” (Kozel, 2008, 73). These are corporeal experiences grounded in embodied action, they are things that one *does*.

Conventional understandings of research elide the impact of researchers’ bodily affective dispositions on their research and writing practices. One often forgets that their body is actively involved in writing, reading, and thinking. Like dance, writing involves movement; writing is a different kind of movement from dancing, but it is movement nonetheless. Jana Milloy (2005) beautifully captures the movement of writing: “The whole body is poised in between and resonates with movements, spilling towards words that mark out their journey along the markings of the page. Running between blue lines” (547). Here, Milroy vividly depicts the liveliness of handwriting as a dynamic movement. Although the movements one embodies when typing on a keyboard might initially appear subtler, when one is more attentive to their movement they are easy to spot:

bending forward;
leaning back
bending forward;
leaning back

tracking, glancing, fingers prancing

twist and turn
and
crack
my
neck

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I concede that something of dance always exceeds writing. Indeed, there will always be a leap that occurs from movement to written language. And yet, dance and writing are both accomplished by lived bodies. Ideally, when I am writing, my own body remains in the background of my experience and my fingers chase words across the keyboard. But writing can involve a lot of sitting. I do not recall when my shoulders started to slouch or my back begin to bend; my body comes into my awareness when it becomes sore from sitting. While attending to my body and its movement while writing, I began to wonder: does sitting shape how we apprehend dance? How might getting up out of my chair lend itself to different insights into dance? Rather than assume that dance and writing are mutually exclusive objects, throughout my research process I have found dancing and writing have intertwined and reciprocally influenced each other. In what follows, I outline the distinct ways that I have explored this intertwining: dancing while writing and writing while dancing.

2.4.1 Getting out of the Chair: Dancing While Writing

It has been *while dancing* that I have discovered new possibilities of thought and movement. During the more formal writing process, my chair became constraining. It

became a constrictive space that I resisted. Words can be slippery when wet; they can be hard to hold on to. I have had problems pinning them to the page. In the beginning I found myself dancing instead of writing... dancing to avoid writing. When feeling overwhelmed, dancing has become an escape, a refuge, a hollow to hide in. It is challenging to use written language to describe the multisensory enactments of a dancer's knowledge. The sensations of dance, as they are felt from the "inside" are difficult to remake into a text. The prospect of transforming my kinesthetic understanding of dance into prose made my body tense up and my fingers freeze. During the more formal writing process I struggled to find joy in inhabiting language through the keyboard. I did not yet trust or properly value the knowledge embedded in my body and materialized through movement. Words seemed to slide off the page and pool at my feet. I was confronted by my own paralysis. Gloria Anzaldua (1987) also captures the way that writing can express itself in the body in a sense of discomfort.

Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer – a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: not being defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen (94).

I relate viscerally to these words. Why does writing cause such discomfort and anxiety? There are many ways to answer this question, and I do not have space to expand on them here, but I found great comfort in learning I was not alone in this feeling. And so, I kept on dancing. I have found the best way to get unstuck is to MOVE! Now when words won't come, sometimes I can dance them out. I have found it helpful to improvise movement when I am lost for words. Sometimes I dance to let what has no words, those things that exceed language, be given a voice within my body. As Snowber (2012) writes, "dancing opens us to our breath, the tongue of language that is rooted in our bodies" when we write from our sweat, our words uncover knowing that we did not know (58).

Getting up from my chair when I get stuck on an idea, a knot of thoughts too twisted and tangled, very helpful for working through ideas. I might take a break from writing to move and stretch or jump around. Movement moves my ideas to the surface. I have tried to be attentive to the ideas that come up unexpectedly and intermittently in the midst of dancing. After all, “ideas do not come after the experience, they do not come before, they permeate it like tendrils” (Kozel, 2008, 29). Pausing to stretch has stretched my thoughts in different directions. What might the experience of feeling one’s own movement “vocabulary” stretching, disclose about the potential for habitual modes of comportment, posture and gesture to shift and change? What new perspectives might be prompted by experiencing such shifts? How might movement deepen my grasp of a concept or work through an idea? I needed a method for writing Bharatanatyam that would allow me to get up out my chair. Ann Cvetkovich’s (2012) words on working through problems encountered while writing in the pool resonated with me. She describes seeing “the twists and turns of an intellectual problem” at the bottom of the pool (51). She continues:

the black lines against aqua blue are a path to inspiration. The rhythm of breathing and the ease of the strokes keep my body flowing, and, with it, my mind. When the breathing panic subsides somewhat and it’s possible to think again. By the end of the swim, I usually have some glimmer of an idea about how to tackle whatever writing problem I arrived with (Cvetkovich, 2012, 51).

Cvetkovich’s description of how, for her, swimming helps with thinking and writing captures the way that our bodies are not only actively involved in writing, reading, and thinking, but how these practices overlap.

I established a practice of oscillation between writing and dancing. This approach helped me to discover and develop my ideas from within my encounters with Bharatanatyam. Dancing while writing also fosters rich and textured descriptions of dance as it is lived and experienced. When one is closer to the actual concrete lived experience of dance, if it is held by your body, it can be revisited. Stepping away from my chair I might return to a sequence of movement to recall details of its tone and texture. I repeat a gesture several

times, attending to how it feels to execute it. Is it jagged or smooth? Does it feel angry? Back and forth from my chair: stomping, counting, writing, sweeping, jumping, typing, pausing, thinking, checking, turning. Writing becomes not just a recording of details but a process by which we are awakened to the details of experience (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003).

2.5 Following Bread Crumbs: Writing While Dancing

Apart from dancing while writing, I have also integrated writing into dancing. As has been explained, the phenomenological method places great importance on what is given in the immediacy of experience, but recognises there is no pure, unmediated experience. Lived experience, as explained in chapter one, brings with it the past body, past experiences, and a world with it in anticipation of a (possible) future. One must encounter something to gain an understanding of that something. Whether one is considering arts or phenomenology, one must endlessly return to the moment of encounter. After all, “without it we would ask no questions” (VI, 159). The next step involves a lot of writing, the goal of which is to describe rather than explain a given phenomenon. Here, writing makes its way into dancing in a form of rough documentation: “notes”. I wrote descriptive notes during dance class. In this case, writing while dancing is more frantic: I scramble over to my journal at the end of a sequence of movement and scribble something down. One might call this a kind of data retrieval, which preserves “raw sensory data received immediately from the senses, as well as memories and imaginative constructs” (Kozel, 2008, 52). My notes were not eloquently composed. At first they were purely to help me practice. For example, I had many beat sequences written down so that I could practice them at home. Here are some examples:

7 beat – takita ta-ka di-mi

(Alarippu)

Thisram = 3x2, 6 beats per cycle

tha, thai tham, kitathaka, thai, tha thai, kitathaka.

di, da, da di da, da-di! (tai, tai-tai-tai)⁴⁹

In this case, notes helped with the process of corporeal sedimentation, since they aid in one's ability to take up the steps outside the studio.⁵⁰ In other words, notes aid in "getting [choreography/technique] in the body". The goal is to sediment a given sequence properly. Once you "get it in your body" and your body understands, it can once again hold/be held by the dynamic flow of the movement. As was mentioned in chapter one, there is not a specific universal system of notation for dance. From my experience, dancers develop their own forms of notation for describing steps, and choreography. These might include short hand names for sequences of steps and their order of execution. It is common to find stick figures with arrows, or tactile descriptions such as: "big", "quick", "start right", and "to the side". These are not disembodied observations, they begin with one's lived body oriented in space, and oriented in relation to other bodies in space.

Writing while dancing resulted in a lot of material. I have maintained records detailing my engagement with Bharatanatyam in dance class, performance, and practice for a period of three years (and still ongoing). Over this time, I amassed a large collection of detailed notes. My notes included observations, descriptions, reminders, insights, bodily sensations. Although fragments of my notes can be found scattered throughout this dissertation, most of them are not included here. Rather, these notes became anchorage points, providing a basis or foundation for more formal writing and reflecting. I worked to extrapolate and extend the insights captured in these fragments alongside the sensory structures deposited in my body through dancing Bharatanatyam. As I allowed myself to be open to the richness and complexity of Bharatanatyam, my descriptions became more concrete. I took many notes at the edge of the studio floor. These scribbles became like

⁴⁹ This sequence was particularly difficult for me to get. I stumbled on the space between "da," and "da-di" and ended up arriving at the final beat too late and losing the rhythm along with it the (tai, tai-tai-tai). I danced this phrase in the living room, I spoke it to myself in the shower, I stomped it out while I did the dishes, and I squealed when finally got it!

⁵⁰ This was also the purpose of the many phonetic interpretations of Tamil and Urdu words, names of dancers, or things to google later.

bread crumbs; a trail of words that would lead me back to the moment, to a felt sense of *something*. Later, after class (on the bus, in my bed, on my chair) I would return to these short hand observations, using them as a touchstone and site for further reflection and investigation. In time, observations found in my notes began to expand my thinking and writing in different directions. These notes did not lead me to specific “answers”, but helped me to make connections that later became the grounds for further questioning. In time, I shaped this material into something that is acceptable in a text-based world.

2.6 Resedimenting Habits through Disorientation and Hesitation

It is common across many styles of dance to begin by learning the leg and arm aspects of a movement sequence separately. As in other forms, learning *adavus* begins with the feet and the legs. Tai-tai-ta-ta, Tai-tai-thom. Heel-stomp, heel-stomp. 1-2, 3-4. The leg patterns are practiced extensively on their own, such that the pattern can become habitual. Learning the *adavus* is accomplished through rigorous training involving arduous acts of repetition. For example, *adavus* are practiced on both sides of the body and in three speeds, with the pace doubling and then tripling in succession. This is because the patterns of foot and leg movements must become habitual so that they can flow on *their own*. Only once you “get” the leg and foot work of an *adavu* can the arm gestures then be added. This way your attention can be focused on accomplishing the correct arm movements with the assurance that your legs will be doing what they are supposed to “on their own”. Through this layering one begins to sense an *adavu* holistically.

It is not enough to “get”⁵¹ an *adavu*, to sediment it within the corporeal schema. One must also expand the possibilities of that *adavu*, stretching one’s bodily spatially while dancing such that the possibilities it offers to expression are able to broaden. While I had gained a bodily grasp of basic steps and sequences so that they sprung up with ease in practice, my bodily spatiality felt confined or constricted when dancing. Although I felt

⁵¹ I am using “get” to evoke the sense of “getting in” evoked in chapter one. Dancers describe the process of choreography getting sedimented into the body as habit as “getting it in” the body (C.f. Purser, 2018).

comfortable with the steps, I could not take them up to “travel” within the space of the studio. Traveling explicitly involves taking up space in a different way: you are trying to make your movements expand, so they take up more room and extend the pathway of your movement into different directions. My sense of comfort when inhabiting a dance sequence was linked to executing that movement in one spot. I felt most comfortable dancing in place, executing movement in one spot while facing the “front” of the classroom. I marveled at the more advanced dancers, whose movements extended out into the space of the class. How could their legs reach so far? I watched them in the mirror, or from the front of the classroom. More advanced dancers could easily change the orientation of their movement to find new routes across the floor. In contrast, I felt suddenly uncertain with the possibilities afforded to me by the *adavus* to inhabit space and “inaugurate the link between a here and a there” (PhP, 141). I lost the sense of ease within my habitual dancing body as I found the world as an obstacle; I could not extend my habitual dancing body to move towards the world.

The space between here and there suddenly transformed my body once again into something unfamiliar. My legs felt heavy and became mysteriously slow. The feeling of stability and alignment I had cultivated suddenly disappeared as I struggled to redistribute the weight of my body. While movements flowed when they stayed in one place, when I tried to venture out in other directions my feet would falter and throw me off balance. Uncertainty pervaded my legs, making them suddenly unsteady. I could see my own hesitancy in my body reflected in the mirror: a wavering. My execution became “messy”: my upper body tipped forward, arms slackened and my gestures and stomps less precise (both spatially and temporally). The passages between my movements’ phrases became stunted and discontinuous. I did not sense the space around me as open to, or available for my movement to unfold. Rather, I felt constricted, enclosed and positioned by the surrounding. I didn’t accomplish much distance, remaining close to my original spot. I became preoccupied with thinking about my passage from one place to another, as if I were the spectator of this passage rather than accomplishing it. I consciously focused on arriving at my next position “on time”. I traveled from one location in the studio to another disjointedly. I fell out of sync with the other dancers. I arrived late to the next

beat. This difficulty expresses a discontinuity between an aim and the one's ability to achieve that aim, which is subsequently felt corporeally as a tentativeness. As I became more familiar with the technique and choreography, the space of the floor began to stretch, and the intervals between beats elongated.

Learning Bharatanatyam has been a challenge and a joy. The experience has not only demonstrated to me just how powerful is the force of habit, but also illustrated how engagement in creative embodied practices can register habits and also open bodily responsiveness through experiences of disorientation and hesitation. In what follows, I explore the concrete ways that experiences of disorientation and hesitation revealed the strength of the hold of the habitual structures within my body schema, and yet also their potential for change. By disrupting one's sense of bodily spatiality, experiences of disorientation disrupt the ease, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement. Hesitation disturbs one's habitual sense of temporality. This allows one to register the residual habitual structures in the body as over-determining intentional action, and opens an interval of indetermination that enables bodily receptivity, and makes felt the contingency of habit (the possibility of becoming otherwise).

2.6.1 Disorientation

Disorientation is a bodily feeling. It is felt in the moment when the world you inhabit becomes strange. One of the biggest obstacles I experienced when learning Bharatanatyam was adjusting to a new manner of using my feet. Taking up foot positions dramatically different from those habitual ways I hold my feet as I take them to dance disrupted the relation between my feet and the floor. I found the space of the floor no longer comfortably extended my movement. Adjusting to this new way of relating to the floor with my feet upset my sense of bodily spatiality, and disrupted the ease, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement towards the floor. This experience of disorientation is a profound disruption to habitual perception. The floor felt strange and my feet lost their sense of direction.

As I have shown, habits rely on the residual structures of the corporeal schema to sketch out a potential line of action, making use of the sedimented past in order to anticipate a possible future. This is what allows me to step in time with my world, to conform to its rhythms. In moments of disorientation, however, I find myself suddenly offbeat; late, early, out of sync. This is a profound disruption of perceptual habit. What would otherwise recede into the background in ordinary experience suddenly makes itself present. The disruption of habit means that the body cannot grasp its world. To explain disorientation properly, I must first review what it means to be “oriented” in space. Starting from the position that human subjects are engaged in an open and reciprocal relationship with the world, Merleau-Ponty argues that through one’s body, spatiality is experienced in terms of situation, orientation, and movement (PhP, 260-262). Orientation is a spatial term that captures the habitual bodily spatiality. As explained in chapter one, embodied subjects are *situated* in and towards the world; they have a particular perspective and orientation within space. Approaches to spatial perception have traditionally characterized space as separate from the actions and interests of living bodies. From this perspective, space is conceived as a container for action and is defined by a clearly established and objective structure (Morris, 2004). Viewed as such, the relation between space and bodies is assumed to be one-directional, since, as David Morris points out, it begins “with a space already understood in terms of a geometrical or objective model and looks into it to see how the body interacts with it” (2004, 5).⁵² This reduces bodies to objects *in* space. However, Merleau-Ponty explains, this view is not consistent with the perceptual experience of the living body. A phenomenological account of the perceptual experience of spatiality, posits bodies as *inhabiting* space, rather than residing within it. To assert that space is dependent on bodily inhabitation is to maintain that space is not given, nor is it independent of the bodies that occupy and move into it (C.f. PhP).

⁵² This way of understanding space is increasingly being challenged across disciplines by exploring the relational and dynamic aspects of spatial perception. Philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) and Brian Massumi (2002, 2010), and Henri Lefebvre (1994) and geographers such as Doreen Massey (2005) have all meaningfully contributed to a new appreciation of space as *produced* through relational activity.

Phenomenal space is thus presented as being shaped by the purposefulness of the body; space takes shape as a field of action. Merleau-Ponty clarifies this point when he asserts that “what counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body, such as it in fact exists, as a thing in objective space, but rather my body as a system of possible actions, a virtual body whose phenomenal ‘place’ is defined by its task and by its situation. My body is wherever it has something to do” (PhP, 260). Bodies and space are understood as co-constituting. Consequently, space both marks and is marked by bodies.⁵³ We feel most oriented when there is a sense of cohesion between oneself and the world. In fact, by orientating oneself in the world one works to habituate themselves to their environment. Indeed, as Edward Casey (1987) explains: “the main function of orienting is to effect familiarization with one’s surroundings” (151). Merleau-Ponty refers to this as being “geared into the world.” As he explains: “My body is geared into the world when my perception provides me with the most varied and the most clearly articulated spectacle possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they anticipate in the world” (PhP, 261). To be oriented, then, is to be met with what one anticipated. To feel “at home” in the world in this way lends a sense of comfort. As Sara Ahmed (2006) characterizes it, “the word ‘comfort’ suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and an easiness” (134). As we will see, experiences of disorientation undermine one’s habituated grasp on their world and disrupt the seamlessness that animates one’s intentional action. Feelings of comfort and ease are subsequently replaced with discomfort and uncertainty. As Edward Casey (1987) puts it, “to be disoriented, or even simply unoriented, is to find the same surroundings unfamiliar, *unheimlich*” (151).

When one is unanchored from their habitual modes of relating to the world, the world itself becomes unfamiliar. I am not met with what I had anticipated.⁵⁴ The familiar ways

⁵³ This being said, it is important to bring feminist analysis of alterity to bear on this understanding of space, since spatial regulation has been identified by a number of scholars as an important technique through which bodies come to be marked by difference (Alcoff (2005); Ahmed (2000); Puwar (2004)). This point will be expanded upon shortly.

⁵⁴ Perhaps I expect a step, but my foot never meets the stair. Instead, I slip on empty air.

that one has of moving into and taking up their world unravel. As a result, the world no longer extends one's reach. This is exemplified in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of George M. Stratton's pivotal experiments on vision. When an experience of disorientation is produced through retinal inversion, where retinal images in the eye are turned upright through the use of special goggles such that the perceiving subjects' sense of up and down is disturbed, subjects describe the world as "unreal" and uninhabitable (PhP, 255). A similar effect arises if an individual perceives "the room they are in through the intermediary of a mirror reflecting the room at a 45-degree angle" (PhP, 259). In this example, the subject feels as if they are leaning to the side as they navigate the room. As Merleau-Ponty describes it, in these circumstances the subject "first sees the room as oblique" (PhP, 259).

Charles Taylor offers a beautiful description of disorientation. He writes:

"In those rare moments when we lose orientation, we don't know where we are, and we don't know where or what things are either; we lose the thread of the world, and our perceptual field is no longer our access to the world, but rather the confused debris into which our normal grasp on things crumbles" (Taylor, 1989, 4).

When experiencing a moment of disorientation, all of a sudden one feels out of place; unmoored. In such experiences, the cohesion and orientation of one's intentional movement towards one's tasks is interrupted, and as a result there is no longer a union between one's intentions and their realization. One's first intentions towards a movement becomes apparent through their disruption, allowing one to take notice of movements that occur automatically, and frequently feel comfortable easy or familiar. This not only breaks a pattern of behavior but brings attention and charge to a moment that would have otherwise passed without remark. Such moments ask us to consider how we move into the world and to actively question our perceptual experience. Moments that once were easily and automatically filled by my movement in and towards the world, through disorientation, have the potential to become uneasily and consciously unfilled. This feeling of unsettlement is unsettling. It is uncomfortable to be disoriented.

2.6.2 Sounding Feet

As mentioned, Bharatanatyam is a percussive style of dance. The sound of dance is a key component of percussive dance forms. In this context, one's feet hold importance for articulating audible rhythms. However, it would be wrong to confine the beat absolutely to one's feet. Rather, rhythm unfolds *in between* foot and floor. Certainly, sound arises through the contact of the foot and the floor, but rhythm occurs as a relationship of exchange and differentiation between the foot and the floor. The foot must pull back from and return to the floor to create a rhythmic pattern. As Jessica Wiskus (2013) explains, rhythm is instituted retrospectively: "it turns back from the second note to the first in order to recover the interval of silence between the two" (9). Although rhythm is commonly thought of as "a series of definite articulated sounds", the intervals of silence between articulated sounds are what creates a pattern (Wiskus, 2013, 9). In other words, it is the non-coincidence of each articulate beat that holds a rhythm together. Read through this lens, one might think of the sounding of movement in percussive styles of dance as arising through *a relation* between foot and floor. It is by meeting with and deviating from the floor that one's feet hold open differing intervals of time between articulated beats. Dancers play with those intervals, folding the sound of their own movement within the fabric of accompanying music.

As a dancer trained in a percussive style, one develops a kind of "closeness" to the floor. I do not become the floor or coincide with it completely. Instead the relationship between my feet and the floor is one defined by proximity through distance (spatial and temporal). The distance, or "thickness", that separates my foot from the floor, simultaneously brings the two together, allowing for an exchange. Intervals separate the beats created through the contact between my feet and floor, and hold together a rhythmic pattern. Differences in foot positions change the way the foot relates to the floor and the qualities of the sound generated through this interaction. In this way, differences between various styles of dance can be *heard*. For instance, one can hear a difference between the brushing action of the toe in its soft contact with the floor that makes a sweeping sound, and the hard, strong, singular, resounding, beat created as one plants the heel on the floor. Bharatanatyam sounds different than Highland dance, for instance.

One of the first, and biggest hurdles I faced while learning Bharatanatyam was determining how to settle into a new manner of relating to the floor through my feet. I was introduced to foot positions dramatically different from those habitual ways I hold my feet as I take them to dance. With these new positions came new ways of creating rhythms. Adopting the basic stance, *arimundi*, one raises and strikes the foot flat on the floor. The underside of the foot remains parallel to the ground as the foot is lifted and the sole brought down on the floor in a heavy stamping step. This stomp creates a loud slap. In Bharatanatyam, this stamping movement is a *recoil*. The sole of one's foot connects with the surface of the floor only to withdraw with swift precision. When your body is familiar with this way of stamping you learn that you do not actually need to stomp hard to make a loud sound. The desired sound created by striking one's foot is to be generated from the space created between the arch of your foot and the floor.⁵⁵ Stomping in this way might be a basic step, but it is also a fundamental aspect of the form itself. I found learning to stomp correctly difficult. The angle of my ankles felt uncomfortable. A tightness extended up my shins. My heels felt tired and sore. These sensations are illuminating. They make felt the past of my body, the residual habitual structures that ordinarily guide my dancing body. The taken-for-granted habitual ways of holding my body and relating to the world through movement are suddenly perceivable in the act of taking up a different set of dynamic postures, positions, and ways of extending through space. This flat foot did not seem to accommodate an easy flow of movement. It felt strange to initiate movement and articulate rhythm by stomping my foot flat on the floor.

2.6.3 Reshaping My Feet

The relation between my feet and the floor had previously been defined through the *balls* of my feet and my *pointed* toes. My first forays into Bharatanatyam made suddenly clear how my history as a Highland dancer was a specific influence on what positions my feet

⁵⁵ The heels can also contribute to rhythm: the leg extends and the heels planted on the floor with the foot inclined at a 45-degree angle to articulate the beat.

feel most comfortable in (what feels comfortable). Highland dance is done on the balls of the feet. Here, the “ball of the foot” describes a foot position where:

The pads of the toes and ball of the foot are in contact with the ground, with the instep arched.

The ball of the foot is used to strike the floor, creating a strong down-beat. My pointed feet also aim towards audible rhythms: shuffles, springs, brushes, and hops. Foot positions are often first things taught when one is learning to dance. As a Highland dancer, one of the first things I (must have) learned was how to shape one’s foot into a “point”.⁵⁶ As frequently as the phrase “point your toes” is used in the classroom, it is misleading since it is not simply one’s toes at work in shaping one’s foot into a “point”. In fact, pointing the foot requires the full engagement of all muscles of the foot:

Bend your ankle towards the floor. Push the ball of your foot into the floor and away from you. This creates opposition so the foot springs up from the floor. Elongate the muscles in your leg extending the stretch through the top of your foot to lengthening the toes. Contract muscles of the instep/arch of your foot and extending the toes down towards the floor. Do not crunch your toes in an effort to make your foot curve.

I do not really remember learning to take up these foot positions. These acquired ways of positioning my feet feel intuitive because they have been sedimented in my body schema and become habitual ways of taking up my body and dancing in and toward the world. The habits held by my body have accustomed me to a certain ease of movement. The positions and movements that belong to these feet of mine spring up automatically. Taking up my feet in this way seemed to violate something fundamental to the way I extend my body in space. Unlike my pointed feet, which recede to the background of my experience and afford a smooth flow of movement when I am Highland dancing, Bharatanatyam brought my feet into sharp focus. Stomping, my foot flat against the floor

⁵⁶ “Point yer toes lassies” was one of the most frequent corrections/directions called out from the front of the classroom, second only to “knees back”, which was sometimes accompanied by a smack to the thigh.

felt wrong.⁵⁷ I had to consciously pay attention to my heels, balls, and soles of my feet to coordinate them properly. My flat foot presents a floor that feels different, my foot is not geared into the floor, I do not inhabit the dance through the floor.

When Highland dancing, various rhythms arise as the strong beats generated from the ball of my foot mingle with the softer quicker beats from my pointed toes. Although the instep is not used to coax sound from one's feet directly, it is essential for differentiating one's foot from the floor. Like an elastic spring board, one's arch absorbs the weight and energy of the body and sends it back up. Consequently, in Highland dance, the beat is articulated *vertically*. The feet rebound off the floor, giving Highland dance its characteristic *springiness* and explaining why an esteemed Highland dancer seeks rhythm through elevation. In contrast with the bouncy steps that send the Highland dancer up, Bharatanatyam steps pushes down into the floor. Unlike Highland dance where the dancing body appears as free from the influence of gravity, Bharatanatyam explores the movement of the body in its direct relation to the pull of gravity. The dancer's work to sustain a vertical median, which represents "the unchanging pull of gravity", exemplifies this (Vatsyayan, 1977, 28).⁵⁸ Of course, one's feet leave the floor to create rhythm, but this way of relating to the ground does not deliberately solicit elevation. Generally, a dancer's movements flow with clarity along a level *horizontal* plane, sustaining a central vertical line as they unfold (Vatsyayan, 1977, 29). The thrust the Bharatanatyam dancer's feet down into the floor imparts a grounded quality to the movement overall.

As I learned, stomping the floor was strange, unfamiliar and difficult to move into. I felt the anticipatory force of my habitual dancing body in the moment I reshape my foot towards the floor. In the act of stomping, I registered the limitations of the habitual dancing structures of my body schema. I found myself confronted by a sense of my

⁵⁷ Please recall the direction to "point ye toes lassie"!

⁵⁸ While Bharatanatyam might not be particularly "bouncy," vertical movements do feature in its technique. Choreography incorporates beautiful leaps and jumps, however, they tend to be less expansive. What Bharatanatyam shares with Western dance styles is the desire to hide the labor of the dancing body in performance, creating the illusion that the dance is effortless (Srinivasan, 2012, xi).

movement as being stunted; my foot was tentative, hesitant, hovering. To dance Bharatanatyam, I had to change the way I relate to the floor through my feet. It took a year to become fully comfortable stomping my foot fully flat. The ball of my foot seemed strangely insistent on connecting with the floor first, ever-so-slightly before the rest of my foot. The profound sensation of hesitating in my feet was disorienting. Instead of carrying me towards the world, I felt my feet permeated by contradiction. This disorienting contradiction illustrates my dependence on the balls of my feet and my pointed toes for articulating the beat and creating rhythmic patterns. Not only does the hesitancy of my feet show up how accustomed I was to articulating rhythms vertically, but it also opened for me the possibilities of my feet, demonstrating that there are many ways of creating rhythm by responding differently to the floor.

2.6.4 Hesitation

Learning to dance Bharatanatyam not only involved adjusting to a new bodily spatiality, but also adapting to new temporal structures. Bharatanatyam is sonorous; a dancer's movements articulate an audible rhythm. Given this, a dancer must execute movements with precision. It is very important to be dancing in time with the beat. I have been told that audiences are listening to the dance just as much as they are watching it. An incorrect stomp stands out like a sore thumb (even more when wearing bells). Learning to dance Bharatanatyam not only involved adjusting to a new bodily spatiality, but also adapting to new temporal structures. The complex rhythmic patterns created in Bharatanatyam are bound to a cyclical temporal structure called *tala*. Within the context of Indian thought on performance, dance and music are inextricably linked and *tala* is one of many points where we see this overlap (C.f. Rosewell, 2015). While a detailed introduction to this concept is not needed here, a brief one is necessary for articulating the shifts in my habitual sense of temporality occurring in the process of learning Bharatanatyam. *Tala* is a cyclical temporal structure, one that defines the timing of a composition of a

performance.⁵⁹ It is understood as being responsible for “coordinating, integrating, and maintaining control over all aspects of performance” (Rosewell, 2015, 188). A *tala* unfolds as a temporal duration made up of a certain number of counts ranging from 3 -9. The temporal structure of *tala* resembles the Western musical concept of ‘meter’. In this context, meter refers to a specific number of beats that are grouped together as a coherent unit. As is the case for meter, a *tala* provides the wider structure for the repetition of musical phrases, motifs and improvisations. Rosewell (2015) explains that Indian experiences of meter are “based on a different way of thinking” (202).

Dancing Bharatanatyam required learning to inhabit *tala* cycles governed by time signatures unfamiliar to my body, such as 5/4 (5 beat cycle) or 7/4 (7 beat cycle). I struggled with this. The experience of struggling to inhabit new time signatures also stirred up a sense of disorientation. My temporal awareness became disjointed. I struggled to properly inhabit the temporal flow of the dance. I fell out of sync with the *tala* and failed to inhabit the intervals between beats in their fullness. I felt in my body the call to dance, yet at once I felt myself to be concretely incapable of moving. I was struck by the hesitancy that pervaded my body.

Hesitancy, or a feeling of delay, arose as I sensed the discontinuity between my intentions and the capacity to realise them. Consequently, my movements became inhibited as the “I can” of the habitual dancing body was supplanted by an “I cannot” of a dancing body caught up in the task of re-sedimenting habits. Hesitation is a temporal concept. To hesitate is first and foremost to slow down. This opens a temporal interval which is *felt* as delay. This sense of delay is felt when the body waveres during habitual action. When one hesitates, one experiences the momentum established by the force of habit decelerate. The immediacy of habit is stunted. Moments of hesitation, undermine the “I can” of one’s body: and the flow of immediate intentional action is deferred, impeding the seamless way that one’s movement in and towards the world typically unfolds.

⁵⁹ Cyclical insofar as the beginning of each cycle is regarded as the culmination of the previous one.

Alia Al-Saji (2014) distinguishes two forms of hesitation: a paralyzing hesitation arising from interiorized objectification, and a productive hesitation that makes habits visible, and enables them to become responsive to transformation. With regards to the former, she gestures to the way that “hesitancy in bodily movement and action tends to characterize the lived experience of systematic oppression” (151).⁶⁰ As Iris Marion Young (2005) has shown, hesitation is a common learned dynamic of “feminine” bodily comportment in Western culture. Building off Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of intentionality as an “I can”, Young describes “feminine bodily existence” as being underlined by an inhibited intentionality. She shows that women sense contradiction throughout the course of intentional action. This springs from the imposition of a socially constituted and self-referred “I cannot” on the seemingly value-neutral “I can”(C.f. Young, 2005; Weiss, 1999; Al-Saji, 2014). Young describes the imposed “I cannot” as an *inhibited intentionality*. Inhibited intentionality creates a lived tension where one is called to act but also feels themselves incapable of such action. Rather than being characterized by indeterminacy, this kind of hesitation is linked to the over-determination of “feminine” body schemas and habits, and expresses an inherent ambivalence that is key to this kind of hesitancy. In contrast, the second responsive form of hesitation that Al-Saji identifies inserts indeterminacy into habit. This indeterminacy manifests the generativity of habit, its unpredictability, and its openness to change. As she explains, hesitation makes the body wait before acting, holding open a temporal interval that interrupts the immediacy of habitual action.

Hesitation allows for the temporal gap necessary for what is normally perceived immediately and unreflectively to be called into question. Through the delay that hesitation initiates, one becomes aware of a sense of anticipation in the body. In other words, hesitation not only delays habitual action, but “it also prefigures the delayed habit, making it visible as an anticipated future among others” (Al-Saji, 143). To hesitate is to “feel one’s way tentatively and receptively” (Al-Saji, 143). Hesitation implies a kind of movement where one does not know what kind of future they will find. In this way,

⁶⁰ I return to this point in the following chapter when discussing racialized embodiment.

hesitation staves off habitual bodily responses. By disrupting the seamlessness of the habitual, hesitation can “make felt the historicity, contingency and sedimentation of habitual actions and perceptions” (Al-Saji, 143). In hesitation, in other words, not only is intentional movement delayed, but it also becomes more open to difference.

2.6.5 Being Behind

One perceives rhythm, music, and dance in culturally specific ways (C.f. Downey, 2002; Roholt, 2014). How one is situated socially and culturally plays an important role, not merely in the linguistic or symbolic “interpretation” of music, “but in its very sensual apprehension” (Downey, 2002, 490). One’s capacity to apprehend and engage with musical rhythm is acquired by being assimilated into a given musical culture. As Roholt (2014) explains, “one acquires it by being assimilated into a given musical culture. If you grew up listening to rock grooves, listening to rock records, going to rock shows, you develop a skill, a facility, for hearing the grooves, for grasping them” (71). If you grow up listening to jazz or hip hop, you are similarly able to easily hear and experience the rhythms characteristic of these genres. When I am dancing, my movement is situated according to this temporal structure set by the culturally specific music, and is synchronized with it. I perceive rhythm through a dancing body with trained habits of perceiving and responding to rhythm as it is constructed with a specific dancing/musical culture. Importantly, it has been found “the grooves a person within a musical culture clearly perceives may be lost in theory on the outside of that culture” (Roholt, 2014, 74). This is relevant given that Bharatanatyam is accompanied by Indian Classical music, which is organized according to a different temporal structure than Western Classical music.

There are, indeed, some important differences between *tala* and meter. For instance, a *tala* can be made up of as many as 29 beats. *Tala* is counted differently than meter, and thus “does not correspond to the internal accent structure” that characterizes Western music (Nelson, 2008, 2). To explain, let’s turn to an example. When one counts a $\frac{3}{4}$ meter by clapping, it carries the following accent structure: *Strong* weak weak *strong*

weak weak. In a corresponding three beat *tala* cycle (*thisra*), one does not find the implied accent of clapped first beat (C.f. Nelson, 2008). The phrase is counted with the palm and fingers of one hand against another: *Clap*, pinky finger, ring finger, *clap*, pinky finger, ring finger. This demonstrates a difference in how rhythmic accents are generated; rhythm is “generated by musical phrases and the processes applied to them” (Nelson, 2008, 2). A given *tala* also corresponds with spoken syllables. Consequently, “counting” generally occurs through phrases rather than numbers. To illustrate, let’s return to the 3/4 meter described above which (roughly) corresponds to the three-beat *tala* cycle called “*thisra*”. As opposed to being counted as “1 2 3”, it is spoken as “Ta Ki Ta”. To give another example, a four-beat *tala* cycle (“*chatusra*”), is spoken as “Ta Ka Dhi Mi”. The *tala* provides an internal structure, a sort of frame within which both music and dance unfold. As mentioned, *adavus* are structured in relation to a *tala*, and, of course, any choreographed piece is also bound to a given *tala* structure as well.

Although learning to speak in rhythmic syllables, as is done by Bharatanatyam dancers, was difficult, it only skims the surface of the temporal disorientation produced as I tried to fit my dancing body into unfamiliar temporal structures. As a Highland dancer, 4/4 time easily extends the “I can” of my body. My body gears into this temporal structure; one might say 4/4 time institutes a familiar dynamic of movement. With the two *talas* I illustrated above, *thisra* (3) and *chatusra* (4), I had an easier time taking up and responding to because my habitual dancing body is already familiar with these time signatures. I find that 4/4 time fits me like a comfy sweater; my body snuggles into it, we conform to each other, I do not notice I am wearing it, I just feel warm and cozy. This is because I have sedimented a habitual perception that corresponds to the temporal regularity captured by this time signature. In Highland dance the tempo *always* occurs in 4/4 time. I take up and move into this time signature with ease. As we know, the temporal structure of habit is such that it *anticipates* movement towards the world. My habitual dancing body anticipates the next beat. I take up the depth of the intervals between these beats in their fullness, sensing their duration and the expressive contours enabled by these silences. My habitual dancing body already *understands* 4/4.

Learning to inhabit *tala* cycles governed by time signatures unfamiliar to my body, such as 5/4 (5 beat cycle) or 7/4 (7 beat cycle) was very difficult. By comparison, 7/4 time felt like wearing a pair of boots too small for my feet. Fitting myself into a 5, 7, or 9 beat was, and sometimes still is, disorienting. Initially it was hard for me to even perceive this structure, let alone to move with or gear into it. Dancing in this context felt uncomfortable. Here my habitual dancing body poses a problem, for its residual structures continue to anticipate the next beat. Rather than feeling a sense of inhabiting a temporal flow while dancing, as I would if I were Highland dancing, for instance, while dancing Bharatanatyam my temporal awareness became disjointed. My dancing body could not feel the temporal regularity of the intervals between beats. When a beat is perceived, the body makes predictions about the upcoming beat. I became acutely aware that the residual habitual structures that have accustomed me to 4/4 time would lead me to incorrectly anticipate the coming beat. Not perceiving the beat properly, meant I could not synchronize my own movements with it. Sensing this anticipation, my dancing body would hesitate as I felt the next beat approach. Somehow the next beat seemed to obstruct my movement, stunting it in the moment of its initiation so I could not properly sense the duration of the interval between beats.

In time, my body became responsive to these more complex time structures. I learned to respond to the call of the next beat, how to move towards it, how to anticipate its presence. My initial inability to comfortably inhabit these new time structures is also connected to a different problem that emerged: while dancing I was struck by the persistent sensation of “being behind”. Specifically, I observed a disjunction between the timing of my body and the timing of the choreography. My movements were out-of-sync with the tempo set by the *tala*. I was going slightly too slow, as if my movements were somehow *delayed*.⁶¹ The temporal intervals between beats/movements seemed impossibly short.⁶² I felt a sense of urgency in my body; I felt the need to hurry between

⁶¹ No wonder I felt “behind”!

⁶² How could I possibly make it to the next step in time? Everything is too fast! It feels like there is not enough time within the intervals that separate beat to actually reach the next beat “on time”.

beats. To give an example, I return to the sequence of movement I described in section 2.5 (di, da, da di da, da-di! (tai, tai-tai-tai)). These rhythmic syllables correspond to a short sequence of movements within a piece of choreography (*jati*⁶³). This sequence was particularly difficult for me to grasp. I seemed to stumble on the space between “da,” and “da-di” and ended up arriving at the next beat “tai” too late. As a result, I would find myself scrambling to hit to “tai-tai-tai”, which I would sometimes end up missing all together. In this case, I was executing the rhythmic pattern of the dance sequence correctly, but I was still not keeping time. As my skill level changed, I was able to feel these intervals between beats differently. They seemed to elongate. I no longer felt as though I was “behind” or trying to “catch up” to the tempo. Instead I learned how to take full advantage of these intervals.

Having the privilege of learning Bharatanatyam has had a significant effect on the way I see, think, feel, and move in general. Much of this influence overflows critical analysis, and spills into my life away from the dance studio, and my desk. I have noticed, for instance, that my hand gestures are now often punctuated with *mudras* within the context of my own expressive speech. Outside of a specific dancing content, my hands form the now familiar shapes of *mudras*. *Alapadma* pops-up in my hand when I am speaking, frequently when I am trying to make a point it seems. This presence of Bharatanatyam within my body is likely not distinctly visible to others, but I can see it. Imagine my surprise when *alapadma* showed up in the pictures from my friend’s wedding! This is a subtle way that Bharatanatyam has inflected my perception. However, learning Bharatanatyam demonstrated to me in concrete bodily ways the powerful force of habit. Experiences of disorientation hesitation made me deeply aware of the anticipatory force behind my habitual movement. This helped me to experience what it means to not to easily move into and take up space. And yet, these experiences have helped me imagine

⁶³ There are many different names for the various aspects of a Bharatanatyam performance, the sequence I describe here was part of a *jati*. *Jati* refers to a sequence of choreography that exists within a larger piece of choreography in a Bharatanatyam performance known as a *varnum*. For the sake of brevity and clarity I will not detail all parts that make up a Bharatanatyam performance here.

other ways of moving. Bharatanatyam has shown me that change requires one to be open and receptive, but also that time makes a difference in experience.

2.7 Sensing Contradictions, Dancing Double Consciousness

Double consciousness is first described by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. For Du Bois, this concept captures a central contradiction in self-perception at the heart of the experiences of African Americans living in a fundamentally racist society. This contradiction results from seeing oneself through two sets of eyes: one's own and that of one's oppressors. Recently, Alcoff (2015) has explored how this concept might be applied to whiteness. Double consciousness invokes the idea of seeing one's self through conflicting systems of meaning, both from inside and from outside of one's communities. It also has the potential to open up both structural and self-critique. Turning to the mirror, which is an important pedagogical tool for dancers, I conclude by reflecting on the contradictions between how my movements felt from inside and how they were seen from the outside, and highlight how experiencing this contradiction can ground new ways of thinking about whiteness.

Mirrors are intriguing because they make possible a certain kind of contemplation of the self (PrP, 136). Mirrors make visible the visibility of one's dancing body. As an embodied subject, I am always on "this side" of my body. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, "I observe external objects with my body... But when it comes to my body, I never observe it in itself. I would need a second body to do so" (PhP, 93). I can look down and see my feet, or my hands, but not my body as a whole. Although one can never completely stand outside of one's self, through the mirror the self can be taken as an object of reflection.⁶⁴ In this way, the mirror presents me with, in its own way, "what I will never be present to, what will always be invisible to me, what I will never directly witness", i.e. my body as it is seen from the outside (VI, 82). The experience of seeing oneself reflected in the mirror

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty points out, "the mirror furnishes the child with a perception of [her] own body that [s]he" could never have gotten by [herself]" (PrP, 126).

establishes that one's own actions are visible from elsewhere, even though normally one cannot see themselves seeing. Reflected in the mirror I am able to see my body as a sensible object among objects that I am still able to recognise as ME! The image *over there* in the mirror is also importantly not me, since I am not *in* the mirror—I am *here* where I feel myself. In this way the mirror makes it known for the subject that they *can* be seen from the “outside”. By offering the opportunity to observe oneself “from the outside”, the experience of seeing oneself in mirrors opens the possibility that one's body/movement/behavior might be considered from a different perspective.

In my Bharatanatyam class the mirror made my whiteness visible. This image of myself reflected in the mirror provided visual reminder of my difference and position as a cultural outsider. Indeed, my white body stood out in a class of individuals of South East Asian descent. Before the mirror I was literally faced with my whiteness. After class I found my thoughts returning to this reflection, my double. I was intrigued by how my double (in the mirror) showed up contradictions⁶⁵ between how my own movements *felt* and how they are *seen*.⁶⁶ There were many instances when I was learning where my movements perhaps *felt* correct, but did not *look* correct. In other words, I might feel like I am executing a movement sequence correctly when I am not. For instance, I cannot see my poor turnout, shallow *arimundi*, uneven flexibility, crooked arms or head bopping up and down. I am executing movements that I do not necessarily feel as mistakes. I might think I'm doing a great job. Through the mirror one can see that they are in fact doing a movement incorrectly. There were many times, for instance, when I felt/thought I was

⁶⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, however, the mirror is not just a representation or a symbol, rather it reveals the “possibility of ambiguity”, or potential for the presence of difference, contradiction, and multiplicity (PrP, 129).

⁶⁶ The image of one's dancing body in the mirror offers a dancer a sense of how their dancing body looks from “the outside”. For dancers, the “look” of a certain movement (i.e. how it is perceived kinetically from the “outside”) is intertwined with how a movement feels (i.e. how it is perceived kinaesthetically, from the “inside”) (C.f. Ravn, 2017). To execute an *adavu* correctly it must look a certain way from the outside. This “look” corresponds to a felt sense of certain postures and positions of one's dancing body in space. As explained, I cannot stand outside myself to appraise my movements. The mirror, then, reflects back to me a perspective on my dancing body I cannot otherwise have.

making a nice straight diagonal line with my arms, when both my teacher and the mirror revealed it to be otherwise. I kept returning to this moment, for I found in it an echo of a different disjunction: white cognitive dissonance. Although a white individual might maintain a belief in racial equality, support antiracist work, and *feel* that they are not racist, they nevertheless continue to benefit from white domination (C.f. Sullivan, 2006, 2014; Ahmed, 2007; Alcoff, 2015). As I will show in chapter three, white privilege operates covertly through habit. Although white individuals might be unconscious of these habits, it does not mean they cannot be seen from the outside. As Ahmed rightly observes, “whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it” (Ahmed, 2007, 157).

A mirror offers a dancer a sense “of how a how a different movement pattern look[s] externally and of the correlating internal sensation of the movement” (Purser, 2017, 42).⁶⁷ As a tool, then, what the mirror does is “allow for the back and forth pattern between dancers’ kinaesthetic sensations and visual perceptions” (Ehrenberg, 2010, 175). Although the double that appears in the mirror can have a disorienting effect, it can also be actively engaged with as a tool for self-awareness and self-correction. Accordingly, Ravn (2017) suggests that a dancer’s interaction with a mirror exemplifies how “the sense of seeing can be unfixed from being directly linked to reflexive evaluations of the body” and instead can be related to expanding the potentials of one’s body (Ravn, 2017, 74). In the dance classroom, the mirror image of my dancing body helped to make it possible to contemplate and correct my own movement both in the classroom and outside of it.⁶⁸ I argue in the next chapter that this experience of double consciousness can

⁶⁷ As Legrand and Ravn (2009) report in their ethnographic study exploring embodied perception of dancers, dancers most commonly use the mirror “to supplant their experience of how a quality of movement senses from within the body is visible on the surface, in the changing shape of the body” (404).

⁶⁸ In this context, mirrors are considered useful as a pedagogical tool for self-correction. For instance, one dancer explains that “when a teacher corrects me and she says I am doing something incorrectly and I don’t feel it, and then I look in the mirror and am surprised by what I see... sometimes I need to look in the mirror to feel it” (Ehrenberg, 2010, 174). When learning, the mirror is particularly useful for sustaining basic body alignment. One dancer explains, “With the mirror it is good to see my placement... sometimes I look at the mirror and see I am doing a movement wrong, I need to fix my sway back, or whether my flat back was as it should be” (Ehrenberg, 2010, 174). In these

provide insight into whiteness as a habit of perception, and a means to explore ways of living whiteness differently.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the generativity of habit. Taking up dance as a method of inquiry, and my own dancing body as a site of discovery, I have demonstrated that latent habitual structures within our bodies can be resedimented through movement. I began with a brief introduction sketching the dance history sedimented within my own dancing body. Then, to familiarize readers with the dance vocabulary I would be drawing on throughout the chapter, I outlined some distinct features of Bharatanatyam: *natya*, *nrtta*, *nritya*, *rasa*, *abhinaya*, *mudras*, and *adavus*. This was followed by a section explaining my methodological approach for bringing dance together with phenomenology, and highlighting the strategies I developed for listening-to my body, attuning to sensation, and dancing with writing. In what followed I traced a number of changes in my own sensory-motor experiences as I became a novice Bharatanatyam dancer and identified two experiential phenomena essential for shifting habitual movement: disorientation and hesitation. I argued that disorientation throws the ease, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement into disarray by disrupting one's sense of bodily spatiality. Next I demonstrated that hesitation, which is felt as a *delay*, disturbs one's habitual sense of temporality and allows one to register the residual habitual structures in the body as over-determining intentional action. This enables bodily receptivity and makes felt the contingency of habit (the possibility of becoming otherwise). Experiences of disorientation and hesitation are important because they open the possibility for double consciousness, which can ground critical reflection. The phenomenological analysis I developed in this chapter provides the foundation for my investigation of the habitual movement in the context of white privilege in the next chapter.

examples, we see how dancers combine the sense of sight with the sense of movement in order adjust their own movements so they match up with what they are supposed to look and feel like.

Chapter 3

3 Slowing the Momentum of Habitual Whiteness

“The true force of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.”

– Audre Lorde (1984, 123)

Under such circumstances there is an urgent need for white individuals, especially those who are interested in supporting anti-racist projects, to contend with the fact that in this racialized culture their experiences, perceptions, and economic positions are constituted through being white. Dwelling on the muck and mire of my own whiteness has revealed to me that whiteness is subtended by a corporeal hold; whiteness is not just an idea that only exists “out there” in social structures and institutions, but is “right here” in the folds and flesh of my body guiding my perception and binding my intentions through action.⁶⁹ Although white individuals might be unaware of the racialized dimensions of their experiences, Sara Ahmed (2007) makes the important observation that “whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it” (157). As “an ongoing and unfinished, history, which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they take up space,” Ahmed views whiteness as a “bad habit” (Ahmed, 2007, 150). This chapter explores how this understanding of whiteness (as a bad habit) can breathe new life into the question of what white people can and should do to help support anti-racist projects.

In this chapter I argue that within a context of racial inequality white privilege⁷⁰ becomes embedded within the corporeal structures of the body. I will demonstrate that the

⁶⁹ Of course this is also complicated by other intersectional factors, such as gender, sexual orientation, ability, class.

⁷⁰ I use “privilege” to refer to the unearned benefits that individuals who are perceived as belonging to dominant social groups are afforded within social systems of oppression. Within feminist and social justice literature this term is taken up to highlight the

movement of white bodies in and towards the world is underlined by an expansiveness that is expressed through a pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility characterized by *momentum*. I use momentum to describe the *ease* of movement that white privilege affords to white bodies as they move into traditionally white spaces. Momentum is *felt* as a style of comportment and motility that is unencumbered and uninhibited. This feeling of momentum captures the sense in which white bodies tend not to hesitate as they engage in intentional action. My goal in investigating the ways this momentum takes hold in white bodies as a habit of perception is to explore how we might replace this bad habit with a better one. Framing whiteness in terms of habitual perception positions whiteness as a kind of doing, rather than a kind of being. This means that there is potential for whiteness to be taken up differently and produce different effects. If white individuals are to do this successfully, however, it requires a disruption of the habitual ways in which they live whiteness. As I have shown in chapter one, however, for Merleau-Ponty the capacity for habit expresses a tension between sedimentation and spontaneity. Habits are flexible and always evolving and incorporating new elements. For this reason, there is always the possibility for habitual actions to shift and change. In chapter two I explored *how* habitual patterns of movement can be re-sedimented, highlighting three experiential phenomena: disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness. This chapter builds on and extends these chapters. I argue that experiences of disorientation and hesitation explicitly disrupt the sense of ease that normally animates white bodies as they move in and towards the world, and in so doing bring the pre-reflective dynamics of white privilege into appearance. Such an experience has potential for grounding white double consciousness, defined as a disjunction between how white individuals perceive themselves and the way they are perceived from the outside.

My interest in the ordinary and everyday ways that whiteness is embodied leads me to the phenomena of habit and the realm of habitual action. As I have shown, habits are part of what allows for manners of taking up, moving into and engaging with the world to

dimensions of inequality that arise in everyday and ordinary experience (Case, 2013; Leavy, 2017).

become ordinary and taken for granted: “habits enable one to inhabit a world” (Weiss, 2008, 76). By bringing the phenomena of habit to bear on whiteness I will clarify how whiteness becomes embedded corporeally, and consequently underlies perceptual experience and grounds styles of comportment and intentional action. Although the connection between whiteness and habit has been recently examined by Shannon Sullivan (2006) and Terence Macmillian (2009), these studies draw primarily on the pragmatic account of habit developed by John Dewey. The relationship between habit and whiteness has only just begun to be given attention phenomenologically. Sara Ahmed (2007) has addressed this whiteness as lived, but does so primarily through the concept of orientation. In her recent publication, Ngo (2017) also develops a detailed phenomenology of racism and racialized embodiment that is grounded in a very detailed phenomenological account of habit. In this text she addresses whiteness briefly. Although there are other scholars who discuss habit, I draw on Merleau-Ponty’s account because it allows me to address specifically how it is taken up in the body’s movements. While I see Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, which refers to an acquired set of dispositions that are internalized during childhood and conditioned by one’s position within a given social context, as being closely aligned with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, I find habitus too deterministic. Certainly, Bourdieu’s work on the social dimensions of habit helps to make sense of the connections between a one’s individual habits and the habits of others in one’s community, but his account has little to say about movement and is less focused on articulating the bodily experience of habit. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty’s account not only speaks to the process of habit formation itself as a dynamic and creative bodily process, but also foregrounds the specific role that movement plays in this process.

3.1 Cultivating White Double Consciousness

Within our current context of racial inequality there is an urgent need for white individuals, especially those who are interested in supporting anti-racist projects, to contend with the fact that within this racialized culture, their experiences, perceptions and economic positions are constituted through being white. I have demonstrated that experiences of disorientation and hesitation explicitly disrupt the sense of ease that

normally animates white bodies as they move in and towards the world and this allows for the pre-reflective dynamics of white privilege to be brought into appearance. Linda Alcoff has recently explored how this experience can generate what she describes as “white double consciousness” (C.f. Alcoff, 2015). She argues that white individuals experience a kind of double consciousness as they begin to understand themselves “through both the dominant and non-dominant lens and recognising the latter as a critical corrective truth” (Alcoff, 2015, 140). She likens this to the split in consciousness described by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Double consciousness is first described by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Although it was published in 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk* remains a foundational text for the critical analysis of race because of the significant insights it offers into the lived realities of black folk in the United States. For Du Bois, double consciousness captures a central contradiction in self-perception at the heart of the experiences of African Americans living in a fundamentally racist society. This contradiction arises because oppressed groups come to view themselves through their oppressor eyes as well as their own. This results in a feeling of “two-ness.” He explains: “one ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois, 1994 9). From this perspective, double consciousness is particularly pernicious because it creates the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on it in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1994, 9). Within this context, Du Bois argues, it is impossible to integrate these two conflicting perspectives in to a coherent view of oneself. One’s sense self is fragmented by “two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 1994, 9). For racialized subjects, the vacillation between contradictory senses of oneself results in a painful experience of self-alienation.⁷¹

⁷¹ One must be cognisant of presenting double consciousness as “a universally and trans-historically true analysis of a tragic aspect of African-American self-consciousness” (Zamir, 1995 116). Applying this concept so readily and broadly risks reifying a metanarrative of blackness, obscuring the significance of local conditions and historical specificity. Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness is a historically specific and class-specific psychology, which reflects “the black middle-class elite facing the failure of its

Double consciousness invokes the idea of seeing one's self through conflicting meaning systems. Because double consciousness disrupts one's self-perception, it also has the potential to open up both self and structural critique. Given this, Alcoff (2015) has argued that a dedicated commitment to end racism among white individuals might involve establishing a form of white double consciousness. Alcoff (2015) extends Du Bois' articulation of double consciousness to address a new-found incoherence within white subjective experience. She argues that the current subjectivity of many white individuals "does not correspond to the dominant narrative of whiteness that holds itself ahead of and better than every other culture" (Alcoff, 2015, 171). In many cases, their own lived contexts and experiences hold little in common with the interests and claims of supremacy. Whiteness, she maintains, "is neither as normative nor as positive an identity as it used to be" Alcoff 2015, 172). Subject to a unsympathetic gaze, white individuals are exposed to the reprehensible and unpleasant aspects of their own whiteness (C.f. Alcoff, 2015, 171-172). White double consciousness emerges from within this context.

While Alcoff's understanding of white double consciousness resembles the split in consciousness described by Du Bois, there are some crucial differences. Although white individuals may experience a split consciousness, she observes that they "are not thereby oppressed by the racist gaze from racial others" (170). Alternatively, she continues, they are living the consequences of "white vanguards ideologies" (170). In rearticulating

own progressive ideals in the late nineteenth century, in the aftermath of failed Reconstruction and under the gaze of a white America" (Zamir, 1995, 116). In other worlds, one must be aware of the way that this concept speaks specifically to the "fundamental antimony of diaspora blacks" (Gilroy, 1993, 30). And yet the sense of two-ness at the heart of this concept, and the ambivalence it evokes, continues to resonate across many disciplines. As Gilroy (1993) points out, Du Bois' notion of double consciousness is considered by many "the core dynamic of racial oppression" (30). Because Du Bois does not provide an exacting definition of double consciousness, we are left to gather the vestiges of this concept ourselves. As Mariana Ortega (2017) points out, on Du Bois' account, the "meaning of double-consciousness and the status of the experience of having double-consciousness are not as clear" (122). Double consciousness is viewed by some as a "mythic blessing and social burden" (Bell, 1996, 95), while others have a more cynical outlook and view it as "a lack of racial identity" (Lott, 1995, 100) or "false consciousness" (Gooding-Williams, 2009, 21).

double consciousness Alcoff demonstrates how this concept might be extended to whiteness in order to address the ways in which splits in consciousness can ground critical reflexivity and establish richer understandings of others, as well as what it means to be oneself in others' eyes. In the following section I dig deeper into the way that race operates at the level of perception.

3.2 Race as Lived: Racialization and Habitual Perception

Given the persistence of white privilege despite various legal interventions intended to prohibit deliberate privileging of white individuals, much of the academic literature on whiteness has focused on the ways that the privileging of whiteness is subtly embedded within social/institutional structures and individual unconscious projections.⁷² These approaches to whiteness have meaningfully contributed to our understanding of the ways that whiteness operates discursively, and how it is ideologically represented or manipulated, but tend to obscure the embodied dimensions of white privilege, how whiteness is *lived* in and through the body. Reframing questions about whiteness around embodiment helps demonstrate the more insidious workings of race and racism by demonstrating the ways that they take root in the habitual body. This begins with a discussion of how race works at the level of perception.

Phenomenological accounts of racialized existence address race and racism as modes of *inhabiting*, wherein racial meanings are embedded within the structures of the body and mediate perception and intentional action in the world. Such analyses focus specifically on the *lived*, experiential, and embodied dimensions of racism and racialization.

Racialization “describes the ways in which colonialism and White supremacy divide

⁷² I do not want to sound overly idealistic here. While progressive law has made important advancements and state/local laws and policy are not explicitly designed to impose segregation, there are plenty of formal policy and legal strategies which do not fit into a narrative of “progress” or “advancement”. Certainly, America’s current crap-handler-in-chief Donald Trump’s recent immigration politics which “curb illegal immigration” are also mired by anxieties surrounding securing a white majority population.

bodies politically, economically, spatially, and socially in order to exploit and dominate them” (Al-Saji, 2014, 137). This understanding of racialization encompasses various social, cultural, and historical processes through which races are constructed and lived.

Racialization operates through perception, and largely through the domain of the visible.⁷³ Critical race scholars have shown that framing race as a property of the visible material body is central to the perception of race/racial difference. Race is thus perceived as being based in bodily characteristics, such as skin colour, facial attributes, and bodily styles. In this way, race becomes perceived as “a natural category”, rather than a “social, cultural, and historical construct” (Al-Saji, 2014, 137). This is an important point because, as Alcoff (2005) has argued, “visible difference naturalizes racial meanings” (191). The perception of race as “innate” or “inherent” justifies and reinforces the racist logic that structures this perception in the first place. The naturalization of visible differences of raced attributes over-determines racialized bodies; subsequently they are perceived as “always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an *overdetermination*, or a lack, but never a proper fit” (Hall, 1996, 3). In a world where racism exists, racialized bodies are overdetermined, laden with coded meanings. Yancy elaborates:

My darkness is a signifier of negative values grounded within a racist social and historical matrix that predates my existential emergence. The meaning of my blackness is not intrinsic to my natural pigment, but has become a value laden “given,” an object presumed untouched and unmediated by various contingent discursive practices, history, time and context. My Blackness functions as a stipulatory axiom from which

⁷³ Of course, racialization/race does not just operate through the vision/the domain of the visible, there are other significant social-economic, historical, and structural factors that contribute as well. However, in this context I am emphasize the specific role of visual perception in sustaining the unconscious and invisible operations of racialization. As Al-Saji (2014) explains, “within a Merleau-Pontian frame, the visual naturalization of ‘race’ can be understood to be made possible by the intentional structure of vision and its reliance on habit, but not to be necessitation by them” (138) [C.f. Al-Saji, 2010, 884].

conclusions can be drawn: “Blackness is evil, not to be trusted, and guilty as such (Yancy, 2017, 19).

Here Yancy articulates the generalized racist projection of Blackness on to his own body. This projection *determines in advance* how he will appear to others. Over-determining racialized bodies in this way works to perpetuate systemic inequality by justifying and reifying social ideologies about race. This in turn makes difference into “opposition and hierarchy, so that identities appear to be mutually exclusive” (Al-Saji, 2014, 136).⁷⁴

While race certainly operates through visible markers on the body, race itself is not a natural phenomena or biological category. Although visible differences in bodily being have material presence and effects, the meanings that are associated with these differences are in no way “natural.” Indeed, visible markers of race have been shown to have no biological correlates (C.f. Harding, 1993; Alcoff, 2005, 198). Furthermore, conventional racial categories have no correspondence to genotype, genetic variability, and the phenotypical features used to differentiate races are undetermined by genetic inheritance (Alcoff, 2006; Alcoff, 2015). Given this, the idea that “race” is a natural phenomena or biological category is dubious. Instead, race is better understood as a historically evolving and culturally contextual social construct: an emergent lived experience. To perceive race as a property of certain bodies is precisely not to see the historical, social, political cultural and economic dimensions that contextualize race.

Evidently, seeing is not an indifferent engagement with the visible world. The world, and Others within it, come to be seen in accordance with sedimented habits of seeing. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, one *learns* how to see. For instance, I never really noticed, or gave a second thought to, random bits of food littering the sidewalk. This changed when I got a dog because he will dart to and devour discarded pizza crusts no matter how long they have been out in the rain. I learned to detect them faster than my dog, so as to prevent him eating them and getting sick. Because early detection of pizza crust is important to my dog’s continued well-being, I now see pizza crust everywhere.

⁷⁴ The visibility of the racialized body extends beyond being seen, to also seeing oneself being seen.

Racializing perception, on the other hand, shows that habits of seeing are embedded in a given social, cultural, and historical context, which subsequently “structures in such ways as to motivate, without fully determining, certain forms of perception, certain meaning making schemas” (Al-Saji, 2014: 138). Perception of race is learned and acquired through bodily habit (Alcoff, 2006; Sullivan, 2006; Ngo, 2017). These habits then release us from the need of conscious interpretation. We do not see them but see through them. For instance, in chapter two I demonstrated that one perceives rhythms and music in culturally specific ways. As one who has grown up listening to Classical music, it might initially be harder for you to perceive the groove of Rhythm and Blues. As Ngo (2017) points out, this also lends insight into the impact of implicit racial bias within workplace hiring practices. She notes that, human resource managers are often caught off guard when faced with the data that demonstrates that they have a bias towards “white sounding names (Emily, Greg) over African American sounding names (Lakisha, Jamal)” when evaluating who to hire (Ngo, 2017, 33; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004, 1009). When conducting a study on racial bias and hiring behaviors Bertrand & Mullainathan, (2004) found that those with “white sounding names” received 50% greater call-backs as compared to those with CVs bearing “African American sounding” names (992). These findings are mirrored in Devah Pager’s (2003) study of hiring behavior, where she found that white applicants that were twice as likely to receive an interview than black applicants (957-958). Al-Saji argues that racializing perception circumscribes the receptivity and affectivity of the perceiver; “the openness of vision to other ways of being, which may destabilize or shatter its perceptual schemata, delimited” (2014, 138). Under these conditions, “the dynamic ability of vision to change is partially closed-down” (Al-Saji, 2014, 138). Consequently, “racialized bodies are not only seen as naturally inferior, they cannot be seen otherwise” (Al-Saji, 2010, 885). This reflects the perceptual closure that characterizes racializing perception. Racializing perception is thus defined by rigidity and affective closure, i.e. the ability to be affected by that which is outside the objectifying structures that underlie habitual perception.

Affect plays a significant role in linking what is perceived as a racialized other to its *immediately felt* effects on the racializing body. This immediacy is connected to

phenomena of habit (see chapter one), and is central for the naturalization that sustains racializing habits of perception. The dominant subject's response to the racialized other appears immediate, and this immediacy is part of what justifies the response. In this process of visible racialization, what is seen and felt by the dominant subject in the presence of the racialized individual is naturalized. Importantly, this means that in racializing vision it is not just that racialized bodies are perceived as "naturally inferior", but that they "*cannot be seen otherwise*" (138). Projecting race onto the body is not accidental: "locating race in the visible thus produces the experience that racial identity is immutable" (Alcoff, 2006, 192).⁷⁵

3.2.1 Whiteness and Invisibility

Whiteness is an effect of racialization, meaning that individuals are conferred the status of whiteness through the same processes by which racial meaning and social significance adheres to other racialized bodies. Because of the unique⁷⁶ relationship that whiteness has to most histories of domination, the relation between whiteness and the visible body takes

⁷⁵ This would seem to also relieve the dominant subject, and the larger social sphere, from responsibility for their response.

⁷⁶ Whiteness, has a distinct connection to horrific historical atrocities including colonialism, slavery, and genocide. As Alcoff (2015) points out, this greatly impacts the kind of affective orientation that white individuals have towards these events. Guilt, shame, or denial in response to the relationship that whiteness has to slavery and colonialism for example are affective responses that differentiate white individuals' experience from that of other racialized individuals. Feelings such as shame, guilt, or denial are less common among those racialized groups whose families were and continue to be subjected to systems of oppression. Although domination and privilege certainly guide what it means to live as a white individual, whiteness should not be reduced to these dynamics alone. Just as we ought not to essentialize whiteness by homogenizing white identity, one cannot distill whiteness to domination and privilege definitively. The strong and longstanding connection between whiteness and supremacist ideologies notwithstanding, I echo Alcoff's (2015) assertion that "we need an account of what whiteness can possibly mean apart from white supremacy" (20). This is especially the case if we wish to imagine a future where whiteness might be lived differently and have different effects. This being said, the privileges and social-structural benefits white individuals experience come from a particular history, a history of colonialism, slavery and segregation. Failure to acknowledge/recognize these histories only contributes to the covert fashion in which privilege operates.

shape differently. In this context, whiteness is often described in terms of its *invisibility*. Whiteness “disappears,” (Dyer, 1997), is “unmarked” (Frankenberg, 1993), and thus is “difficult to get a hold of” (Kobayashi and Johnson, 2007). As Richard Dyer (1997) observes, of course white people have a color; however, within a racialized context the color of whiteness has come to signify “the absence of color” (207). This assumption, he argues, grounds a “logic of whiteness” that produces white bodies as neutral, universal, against which all else is measured.⁷⁷ Under this logic, whiteness disappears as a category of racial experience: despite the fact that the visible bodies of white individuals have a color. Under these circumstances, George Lipsitz notes that “whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principal in social and cultural relations” (Lipsitz, 1995, 369). This “silence about itself” is, for Ann Ducille “the primary prerogative of whiteness, at once its grand scheme and deep cover” (Ducille, 1997, 13). Of course, the illusive invisibility of whiteness is directly related to the social privileging of whiteness as a normative standard. As Sara Ahmed observes, “whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it” (2007, 157). In fact, what is rendered invisible about whiteness is the historically, socially and culturally specific structures of oppression that are instituted in and through the process of racialization.⁷⁸ The tendency

⁷⁷ “More often than not universal categories have been clandestinely racialized. Any critical engagement with racism requires us to understand the tyranny of the universal” (Davis, 2016, 87). For most of our history the very category ‘human’ has been constructed through binary relations that position people of colour as not belonging to it. Universal categories are “coloured white and gendered male” (Davis, 2016, 87).

⁷⁸ The ideology of colour-blindness is another distancing strategy within white liberalism that exploits the connection between race and the visual. The liberal myth of colour-blindness revolves around a the disavow of difference and the denial of embodiment. The so-called ‘colour-blind’ claim not to see race and instead ‘just people’. As Puwar (2004) explains this perpetuates the thinking that race does not matter and colour does not make a difference, “that we are all the same – one happy human race” (136). On this account, racism becomes a ‘public secret,’ to be discussed in low voices and hushed tones. This makes discussions of race, racism or racial tensions extremely taboo. Subsequently, racism becomes a “matter that should not be mentioned for fear of opening up the ever-present but often repressed racial fissures that society is infected with” (Puwar, 2004, 137-138). Within this context, differences should not be mentioned and we should consider that we are all the same. One’s supposed colour-blindness is meant to be a marker of a white person’s growth beyond racism, demonstrating that she is so progressive that she is (supposedly) unaware of the racial categories on which racism depends. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that white liberals avoid the

for whiteness to disappear from the experiences of white individuals is not only a mark of privilege, but also works to obscure the systemic nature of racism and thus prevents an interrogation of its presence as part and parcel of a system of oppression that normalizes dominance of one group over another regardless of their intention or desire.⁷⁹

To say that in racialized contexts whiteness operates through invisibility is not to say that white individuals are unaware of their skin color, as was argued by early sociological analyses of whiteness (Cf. Frankenberg, 1993). To the contrary, Alcoff (2015) argues that whiteness is not experienced by white individuals “as a peripheral or contingent characteristic,” but instead is a “cornerstone of their sense of who they are” (86). The idea that whiteness is invisible instead speaks to the tendency for white individuals to greatly underestimate the ways that their experiences, perceptions, and economic position are affected by being constituted as white. Situating whiteness in relation to habit helps to explain this. As I have shown in chapter one, for Merleau-Ponty, once habits have been sedimented into one’s corporeal schema they mitigate one’s need to interpret their perceptual experience; situating whiteness as a habit thus demonstrates how it is that white individuals do not perceive the ways that their whiteness bears upon how they move into and take up space. By providing a system of transposable equivalences, the ways of habitually taking up the world that are associated with one’s whiteness become the background that illuminates my field of action. Accordingly, for a white individual, their actions appear neutral, as if they have nothing to do with my whiteness at all. Here, whiteness remains in the background of experience for white individuals. Understanding whiteness as habitual helps make sense of why “people who benefit from social privileges are generally oblivious to them” (Leavy, 2017, 2).

implications of their whiteness. Avoidance in the face of substantive discussions of their own vested interest in whiteness, as George Yancy explains, “is a key feature of the social ontology of whiteness” (2004, 4).

⁷⁹ Accordingly, analyses of whiteness within phenomenological studies of race and racism are not only part of a larger interest in forwarding anti-racist critiques of existing power relations, but also contend with the tendency for whiteness to disappear.

3.3 Whiteness as a Style of Being in the World

In her work, *The Future of Whiteness*, Linda Alcoff (2015) describes whiteness as “a historically emergent lived experience” (8). This interpretation captures the dynamic nexus of historical, social, and political horizons through which contemporary white identities have emerged and emphasizes the ways that whiteness imparts a particular perspective on the world. Alcoff demonstrates that one’s whiteness significantly impacts one’s being in the world by influencing “how one navigates that world”, as well as “how they are navigated around by others” (9). Framed in this way, whiteness is understood to be constantly becoming and becoming undone. Of course, one’s experience of their world is impacted by different aspects of their social positioning simultaneously. Everyone experiences privilege and oppression in varying degrees (Hill Collins, 2000; Case, 2013). Indeed, one’s own experiences of privilege and oppression shift according to how one is situated at any given time and in any given social, political or historical context. Given that privilege and oppression overlap and mutually influence each other, individuals are not simply oppressed or privileged. One’s experience of white identity is mediated by other factors such as gender, ability, class, and sexuality. For example, one can experience certain social privileges by being white, thin, and cisgender, while also experiencing oppression based on gender, and sexuality. The privileges one experiences as a result of one’s whiteness are not negated by one’s own experiences of oppression. Rather, it demonstrates that one’s experience of white privilege is fundamentally shaped by the dynamics of its intertwining with other factors.

It is clear that one’s whiteness is experienced in ways that are complex, contradictory, and constantly shifting, so we cannot think of white identities as homogenous. One’s whiteness is multidimensional and multiply constituted. Nevertheless, there are ways of being in the world that are particular to white individuals. Indeed, the works of W.E.B. Du Bois (1986) and Franz Fanon (1967), as well contemporary scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2007), Shannon Sullivan (2006; 2014), and George Yancy (2014), show that there are particular inclinations, affects, practices, modes of perceptions, manners of comportment which congeal in and through white bodies as they inhabit the world. There

is something recognisable about whiteness, but not generalizable. Indeed, who is, or is not, considered white has changed significantly over time and whiteness is complicated further by intersectional questions surrounding gender, sexuality, ability, and so on. As with all social identities, whiteness is messy and contested. Who is, or is not, considered white, for example, has changed significantly over time.⁸⁰ Thinking about whiteness as a style allows us to explore a common manner of relating to the world through the intertwining of intentionality and habit. This is not to posit an essentialist view of whiteness, but instead to lay bare the substantive specificity of white subjective experience.

For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality and habitual patterns of movement coalesce in the living body. Their overlapping expresses a particular *style* of being in and towards the world that can be observed and kinesthetically experienced. Style is expressive. For Merleau-Ponty it captures “a general attitude towards the world” (SB, 157-158). Style thus constitutes a certain field of action I hold around me. This understanding of style goes beyond its traditional aesthetic context. Style is not about your cool shoes; rather it describes a persistent mode of being in the world that we can perceive others and the world around us, without having to grasp the entirety of their being or manner of inhabiting the world. He describes style as a certain manner of “managing the domain of space and time, over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that

⁸⁰ Although in North America neither Italians nor the Irish were considered white prior to the 19th century, in both cases the public opinions about their racial identities have shifted over time, demonstrating that ethnic groups can *become* white (Garner, 2007). In an era of globalized capitalism and the expansion of neo-liberalism, one also cannot ignore the ways that the boundaries of “race” are impacted by economic status and “proper” consumption. For example, David Goldberg (2002) asserts, “non-whites can be ‘whitened’ by the classed color of money” (222). Global capitalism thus enables some individuals, such as those belonging to the new middle classes in the Global South, who would otherwise be unable to enter into realm of whiteness, to breach the color line (Arat-Koc, 2010). On the other hand, being racialized as white does not always guarantee access to the privileges of whiteness. The white working class, for example, has long held an ambiguous in-between position in the North American social imaginary (Garner, 2007; Sullivan, 2014). It is important to remember that regulating the boundaries of who is, or who is not, considered white is an important way in which the normative and ideological domain of white privilege is sustained.

domain, or radiating about a wholly virtual center” (VI, 115). Style appears as an inalienable internal horizon but is also allusive and elliptical. A style does not posit a finite end, rather we operate *according to* a style (VI, 152).

In the preface to *The Visible and The Invisible*, Claude Lefort clarifies style as “that interior animation of colour,⁸¹ that interior rhythm that assembles the forms and shadows of the rose, that organized fluctuation that makes the thing arise as a relief upon a depth of being” (VI, xlix). According to Merleau-Ponty, “the style of each individual is visible in them just as a heart is felt even at the periphery of the body” (PhP, 87). In this way, style can be observed and kinesthetically experienced. For example, even if my friend is not wearing her glasses and so cannot make out the details of my figure, she still recognises me from afar by the way that I walk. There is something of my style of being in the world that is visible in the sway of my gait. We can also think of places as confirming a certain style. Merleau-Ponty describes for example, the latent sense diffused throughout Paris, which one can feel “in a specific evidentness without having to define it” (PhP, 294). Style manifests in and through the kinaesthetic awareness of our bodies, because kinaesthesia involves “the dynamics of our movement, its expansiveness, its sluggishness, explosiveness, jaggedness, its changes in direction, intensity and range” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, 31). What this notion of style captures then, is something effervescent and transient, that is nonetheless observable and kinaesthetically *felt* as our specific manner of relating to the world.

Thinking about whiteness as a style of being in the world captures whiteness as a momentary crystallization, not an unchanging essence. A style is not any one thing alone, but unfolds in and through the reversible intertwining of a body-in-situation. Here

⁸¹ “...a naked colour, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which would be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and make resound at the distances diverse regions of the coloured visible world, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of the world – less a colour or a things, therefore, than a difference between things and colour, a momentary crystallization of coloured being or of visibility” (VI, 132).

“situation” refers to the concrete ways in which the specific material facts of one’s embodiment, as well as the social, historical, and physical context in which one is positioned, appear in light of one’s goals, interests, and desires. Motor intentionality is called forth from one’s situation. Phenomenologically, situations implicate who we are in all of our depth, showing up the ways that we are intertwined with others. As a style of being in the world, whiteness is relationally lived. As George Yancy (2014) reminds us, this is an important point to dwell on, for if whiteness is relationally lived then it becomes necessary to consider the implications that the privileged status of whiteness has for both the lived experiences of white individuals as well as people of color.

3.4 (Bad) Habits of White Relationality

Ngo (2017) identifies the “ontological violence” of racism as “a violence against our *intersubjectivity*, it is a violence against our embodied being-with” (166). As outlined in chapter one, Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) account of embodied subjectivity is grounded in the notion of the lived body, and positions one’s body, not as “an object among objects”, but instead the very possibility for my active engagement with world (PhP, 92). This is important to mention because racism is primarily understood in terms of objectification, wherein racialized bodies are rendered objects rather than subjects. The experience of racialized embodiment, for people of colour, is often described as “a kind of being-object” (Ngo, 2017, 166). From this perspective, the violence of racism is enacted at the level of the racialized individual’s subjectivity. Although I certainly do not dispute this, it does seem to reiterate a dualistic understand of subject and object. The lived body is relational and is both co-constituted by its world/others and in turn co-constitutes its world/others. Beginning from the lived body, which is relational, leads to new questions about how racialized embodiment and the violence of racism are articulated through intersubjectivity.

Phenomenologically, we are intertwined with others. This points to the importance of understanding whiteness as relationally lived. As has been made clear in the previous sections, the social privileging of whiteness deeply affects how white individuals relate to

their world and others. As a white person, from an early age I have corporeally sedimented ways of being in and towards the world and relating with others that are inextricably linked to my white privilege. Yancy (2014) reminds us of the importance of dwelling on this point, for if whiteness is relationally lived then it becomes necessary to consider the implications that the privileged status of whiteness has on both the lived experiences of white individuals as well as people of color. In the following section I examine habits of white relationality, specifically focusing on responsive gesture and ontological expansiveness. I will show that white privilege is expressed through a pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility characterized by *momentum*. I use momentum to refer to the *ease* of movement that white privilege affords to white bodies as they relate to the world and others. Momentum is *felt* as a style of comportment and motility that is unencumbered and uninhibited and captures the sense in which white bodies tend not to hesitate as they engage in intentional action.

3.4.1 Responsive Gesture

Racist habits often play out in bodily gesture.⁸² On one hand, there are explicitly racist gestures that are enacted with the specific intent of degrading racialized individuals. As Ngo (2017) notes, carrying out a Nazi salute, creating “slanted eyes”, or putting on “blackface” are examples of this kind of explicit gestural racism (14 -15). These gestures “carry clearly intended and precisely executed racist messages” (Ngo, 2017, 14). However, Merleau-Ponty’s work on habit and intentionality offers “a way to bring such unassuming body responses and movements – glances, flinches, and the like – into the purview of our discussion about racism and racist gestures” (Ngo, 2017, 14). This brings attention to instances of racism that are taken up in one’s comportment as a subtler responsive gesture. Ngo (2017) suggests that subtler forms of racist gesture are distinct from the more clearly manifest, and consciously executed, forms of explicit racist gestures mentioned above (i.e. Nazi salute). Recall that one’s habitual ways of engaging

⁸² Gestures are an important part of everyday communication and lend meaning and intention to what is being said. They help to disclose emotions and work at the level of the individual and social by conveying various social meanings pre-reflectively.

in the world are not conscious, but are *held* in the body and reflect an acquired orientation in the world. Habit, as we know, also anticipates action, guiding one's movement in and toward the world. A palpable example can be found in the "click" of car doors locking. Perhaps on the surface, the act of white individuals locking their car doors in the presence of black bodies might seem unremarkable. However, as Yancy (2014) points out, it is in and through this seemingly unremarkable act that black bodies are marked as inherently dangerous (48). The same deafening clicks on family road trips, at gas stations, or in "sketchy neighborhoods," have re-signified my white body as "being in need of protection" (Yancy, 2014, 48).⁸³ A sonorous and sensuous example of white privilege residing "right here" in my everyday embodied actions and perceptions. This example draws attention to the ways in which white privilege is embedded in everyday actions, showing up in the way one responds to the world, and taken up as a style of bodily comportment.

Audre Lorde (1984) captures a powerful example of gestural racism in *Sister Outsider*. Relying on her own lived experiences of living in the United States as a black woman, Lorde powerfully describes a tenuous moment she experienced as a girl while riding the subway in New York. She writes:

My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little sown suited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me...He leather gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snow pants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat close to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible this she is seeing on the seat between us...But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she is looking, so I pull my snow suit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat

⁸³ This example speaks to class privilege as well as racial privilege.

between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch... she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train (1984, 147).

While Lorde does not specify in this example that the woman in the fur hat is white, she discusses this example in the context of experiences of racism. The small gestures she recounts, the swift jerk of the hand, eyes widening, nostrils flaring, express a history of violence that marked Lorde's body as other. However brief, these responsive gestures are not inconsequential. In this example, racism is enacted in and through habitual bodily response. For white individuals, racializing perception grounds a habitual orientation towards the racialized other. When the woman in the fur hat withdraws her hand abruptly, stands, and shudders, she is taking up and enacting the racist social discourses. In fact, this woman never truly encounters Lorde on the subway. The visceral response elicited from the woman in the fur hat indicates that she is responding to a generalized racist trope, rather than a little girl on the subway. In *Habits of Racism: A Phenomenology of Racism and Racialized Embodiment*, Ngo (2017) draws attention to another palpable example of this gestural mode of racism given by Yancy (2008). She specifically cites Yancy (2008) description of what he calls, "the Elevator Effect." Yancy (2008) writes:

Well-dressed, I enter an elevator where a white woman waits to reach her floor. She 'sees' my Black body, though not the same one I have seen reflected back to me from the mirror on any number of occasions. Buying into the myth that one's dress says something about the person, one might think that the markers of my dress (suit and tie) should ease her tension (2008, 4).

He continues:

I walk into the elevator and she feels apprehension. Her body shifts nervously and her heart beats more quickly as she clutches her purse more closely to her. She feels anxiety in the pit of her stomach. Her perception of time in the elevator may feel like eternity. The space within the elevator is surrounded from all

sides with my Black presence. It is as if I have become omnipresent within that space, ready to attack from all sides. Like choking black smoke, my Blackness permeates the enclosed space of the elevator. Her palms become clammy. She feels herself on the precipice of taking flight, the desperation to flee. There is panic, there is difficulty swallowing, and there is a slight trembling of her white torso, dry mouth, nausea (Yancy, 2008, 5).

Ngo (2017) asserts that this example is quite unlike the explicit racist gestures described above (i.e. Nazi salute, “black face”, “slanting eyes”). As with the example from Lorde, rather than perform explicit racist messages, in “the Elevator Effect” racism is enacted in and through her habitual bodily responses. The white woman’s bodily response to Yancy on the elevator – shifting, tensing, swallowing, sweating – is not connected to the actual the person in front of her (Yancy, 2008). In reference to this example, Ngo (2017) observes that “it is not Yancy’s body in its particularity that solicits the response. Rather what she responds to is a generalized racist projection of Blackness” (16). As Ngo indicates, it is important to question whether it is right to call such gestures themselves racist. Are these gestures mere expression of racist ideas or modes of thinking? This returns us to the question of the relationship between an idea and its expression.

For Merleau-Ponty (2012) gestures are expressive. As with the dancer and the dance in chapter one, and thinking and dancing in chapter two, there is not a sharp distinction made between the idea and its enactment. The meaning of a gesture can be “read” in the gesture itself. I do not pause to recall my past experiences to understand a threatening gesture, for instance. As Merleau-Ponty notes, “the gesture does not make me think of anger, it is the anger itself” (190). As Ngo (2017) has also observed, this has significant implications for how one interprets the white women’s tensing body. Although the gesture of tensing itself does not appeal to racist tropes around Blackness explicitly, it nevertheless arises because of racists discourses which render black male bodies as inherently dangerous. As Ngo (2017) reiterates, “it is not that the discursive representation tells women (and in particular white women) that Black men ought to be

feared; bodily responses such as these enact the fear, and the Black man is feared” (17). In this way, the white woman’s bodily responsive gestures (tensing) take up and act out racist discourses in and through her body. With the tensing of her body, she *lives* these racist tropes, enacting them as she takes them up corporeally. As Ngo (2017) notes, enacting this responsive gesture re-sediments it within one’s body schema, thereby sustaining its habitual force. The same is true in the case of the woman in the fur hat. As Lorde (1984) indicates, when this woman jerks her hand away, or shudders, her responsive bodily gesture “communicate[s] her horror” (147). This horror is conveyed so palpably that Lorde herself searches out its source herself. In the act of “shuddering”, the woman in the fur hat brings racist tropes into being and Lorde’s becomes an overdetermined object of contempt.

3.4.2 Ontological Expansiveness

The social privileging of whiteness affects how the world opens for me. I am afforded ways of extending into the world that cannot be disentangled from my whiteness. Shannon Sullivan (2006) has recently taken up habit in order to discuss whiteness. Specifically, Sullivan connects white privilege to what she calls a habit of ontological expansiveness. She defines this as the tendency “of assuming and acting as if any and all spaces – geographical, psychological, cultural, linguistic or whatever – are rightfully available to and open for white people to enter into whenever they like” (Sullivan, 2014, 20). This expresses a distinct “relationship between self and environment, in which the self assumes that it can and should have total mastery over its environment” (Sullivan, 2006, 10). This sense of mastery is made manifest in and through an uninhibited movement in and out of space. Recall that Merleau-Ponty positions intentionality in motility, or the bodily sense of “I can.” The “I can” of the body is precisely the experience of harmony between intention and action, projecting “the aim to be accomplished and connects the body’s motion towards that end in an unbroken directedness” (Young, 2005, 146). Of course, because the “I can” expresses a rationality between self and world, it reflects the conditions of the world as imposed limits on one’s sense of intentional action. This point is significant because of the way that social norms

govern how one perceives their own possibilities of engagement in the world. Iris Marion Young, for example, famously identifies feminine bodily existence as being overlaid by an “I cannot,” which occurs as a result of gendered inequality. This “I cannot” severs the otherwise “mutually conditioning relation between aim and enactment”, because it “simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an ‘I can’ and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end” (Young, 2005, 146). The expansiveness that animates white bodies is expressly contrary to the sense of hesitancy described here, and rather encapsulates a style of being in and towards the world that is unencumbered and reflects a sense of *ease*.

By way of example we can consider how, within traditionally “white spaces,” my intentional action is less restricted and as a result my steps do not bear the weight of hesitation, or uncertainty. One could think of the ways that, for example, as a white woman I might feel more “at home” moving within different institutional spaces such as the university, than a person of color might in the same context. Although the academy arguably still remains a space that most effectively extends the bodies and interests of white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied men, as Malinda Smith points out, white women are the biggest beneficiaries of institutional advancements towards equity (Smith, 2010). Given this observation, the prevalence of white women contributes in extending the space of the academy as white. I might not encounter and move within this space in the same way as a person of color because my body is not made to stand out in this situation. My actions are, for the most part, seamless and immediate. Ahmed (2007), on the other hand, describes the experience of encountering the space of the academy as “walking into a sea of whiteness” (157). She returns to this image in her most recent work, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), where she describes how exhausting it can be inhabiting white spaces. She declares “it is like how you can feel the *weight* of tiredness” ([my emphasis]146). Although I might be conscious of the “sea of whiteness” before me at the university, it does not impress upon my field of action in the same ways that it does for Ahmed. I am not exhausted by the weight of whiteness. This sea of whiteness does not wear me down or deplete my energy. I am able not to be explicitly conscious of my movement in this context in the same way Ahmed is, because the space itself extends the

reach of my intentional actions. Here, I am “at home,” and I am more free to enact my intentions directly with a resounding “I can.”⁸⁴

The ease of movement that characterizes whiteness as a style of being in the world can be clarified further when compared with the regulation of the movement of racialized bodies. In a time of global fear, freedom of movement is not granted to all. Some bodies can move into spaces with ease, but others cannot. This disproportionality affects people of colour, who are too often deemed “suspect,” are “randomly selected” and “stopped.” White bodies on the other hand, “move easily across the lines that divide spaces” (Ahmed, 2007, 162). White bodies are less likely to be delayed or surveilled. White individuals are, for instance, less likely to be “stopped” by police, or “randomly selected” for an airport check. Anecdotally, I have never, for example, had a problem at the border. I once (accidentally) packed a knife in my carry-on luggage and was waved right on through the security gate, without incident. As Trinh T Minh-ha (2011) reminds us, security checks are administered not only to those “whose political background poses a threat to the ruling authorities, but most often those in possession of a ‘Muslim’ name and to those who simply ‘look’ other, queer, or shady to the ‘normal’ eye” (5). Indeed, there is significant evidence that demonstrates that racial profiling in border control and policing disproportionately restrains the mobility of people of color, while facilitating the mobility of white individuals (Helleiner, 2012; Dua et. Al, 2005; Ahmed, 2007). These examples demonstrate the ways that the motility of some racialized bodies is regulated more heavily than others (i.e. white bodies).

The expansive and uninhibited style of being in the world that I have described is habitual for white people. As a result, this way of taking up and moving into the world plays an important role in mediating perception, becoming the background that illuminates one’s field of action and institutes its own momentum. Once habits of white

⁸⁴ The gendered dynamics operating in academic spaces impose very real and frustrating barriers on women, and it is important not to underestimate this. I am purposely overstating the strength of my own sense of agency in these spaces in order to capture the ways that a given situation impresses differently on differently marked bodies.

privilege have been sedimented into one's corporeal schema they mitigate one's need to interpret their perceptual experience. This allows intentional action to *flow* instantaneously and unconsciously through the body and engenders white bodies with a certain momentum. White privilege thus operates covertly in and through the ordinary and everyday manners of behavior. As Sullivan (2006) points out, "as unconscious, habits of white privilege do not merely go unnoticed. They actively thwart the process of conscious reflection, which allows them to seem nonexistent even as they continue to function" (6). This is precisely why the habits of white privilege have been proven so difficult to change, and is why white individuals seem to have such a hard time grasping their own complicity in perpetuating racial inequality. As Linda Alcoff (1998) reminds us, "one's appearance of being white still operate to confer privilege in numerous and significant ways, and to avow treason does not render whites ineligible for these privileges even if they work hard to avoid them" (17). From here the question for white individuals who wish to support anti-racism becomes: how do we slow the momentum that white privilege affords us?⁸⁵

3.5 Breaking Bad Habits

In the remainder of this chapter I explore the potential for habits to shift and change. The previous chapter highlighted three experiential phenomena that arise as part of the experience of the transformation of habit: disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness. I argue that experiences of disorientation and hesitation explicitly disrupt the sense of ease that normally animates white bodies as they move in and towards the world, and in so doing bring the pre-reflective dynamics of white privilege into appearance. Such an experience has potential for grounding white double consciousness, defined as the disjunction between how a "white individual sees themselves and the way they are seen by non-white others" (Alcoff, 2014, 273).⁸⁶ In other words, experiences of

⁸⁵ With the goal of increasing momentum for people of colour.

⁸⁶ Although I am separating these concepts, in the context in which these phenomena are lived they tend to arise in concert. For instance, living with a sense of double

disorientation, hesitation and double consciousness have the potential to slow the momentum of habitual whiteness. To be clear, I am not arguing that hesitation, disorientation and double consciousness are sufficient on their own to overcome racializing habits, but rather that the necessary role of these phenomena should be considered when forming antiracist strategies for overcoming the habitual dynamics that sustain white privilege. However, the promises of disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness are contingent. The potential for disorientation, hesitation, and double consciousness to disrupt the momentum of habitual whiteness depends on what initiates them, and how they are experienced, made sense of, and responded to by the larger community.

In his discussion of habit, Merleau-Ponty reminds us that the knowledge that has been contracted through the process of sedimentation “is not an inert mass at the foundation of our consciousness,” as the word might imply (PhP, 131). Habitual movements are not simply a repetition of that which has come before. On Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit, sedimentation is always accompanied by spontaneity and the structures held by the body schema are flexible and contingent. Consequently, acquisitions made through habit are never fixed, permanent, or absolute because “they feed off my present” (PhP, 132). This gestures to the temporal dimensions of habit. As mentioned in chapter one, habits are enacted in a field of presence that envelopes the horizons of the past and future. Habitual movement is not a simple performative repetition. In habitual movement a motor task is acted out anew. Habitual movement is situated within the present moment, which is understood as temporally open and enveloping both the past and the future (PhP, 141). For Merleau-Ponty, habit discloses our capacity for “dilating our being in the world” or “altering our existence” (PhP, 145). It follows that I am not determined by my habits. This is important because it means that there is always potential for habits to be taken up differently, and allow for introducing new habits. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “the resumption of the past in the present leaves it in its originality, does not truly surpass it, does not flatter itself to contain it all [in its entirety], plus something else” (IP, 59). The

consciousness can be disorientating “because it is a constant reminder of the ways one does not belong” (Harbin, 2016, 70).

past “creates a question, puts it in reserve, makes a situation that is indefinitely open” (IP, 22). Although they are anchored in the past, habits are never permanently fixed because they are held in our bodily horizons. Because habits are a kind of *doing* rather than a kind of being there is potential for them to be taken up differently. I am not condemned by the ways that whiteness has been sedimented into my corporeal schema. To successfully take whiteness up differently, however, requires that we interrupt the momentum of habitual whiteness. It requires us to actively resist our first response, such that we might respond differently.

What should white people do if they are committed to anti-racism? How do we break our bad habits? In asking this very question I risk folding back into my familiar domain of whiteness. Remember, conceived as a habit of perception, my whiteness remains around me as a domain to which I am the most accustomed: “I still hold in my hand and in my legs its principal distances and directions,” because they are embedded within my corporeal schema (PhP, 131). I am keenly aware of how posing the question ‘what should white people do’ could easily dissolve into a kind of white solipsism wherein the white subject is positioned at the center of a discussion of racism. It could also “re-position the white subject as somewhere other than implicated in the critique” (Srivastava, 164-165). This being said, my goal in reframing this question is to generate productive ways of thinking about how whiteness can be inhabited differently and to different effects.

3.6 Slowing the Momentum of Habitual Whiteness

Merleau-Ponty shows us that one feels most orientated when there is a sense of cohesion between oneself and the world. This cohesion is established through the coalescence of habit and intentionality and gives rise to bodily motility that flows with ease. In everyday experience, being white in a racist society is orienting. With the social privilege of whiteness comes a feeling of being “at home” in the world accompanied by and seamless intentional action.⁸⁷ Linda Alcoff (1998) has suggested that the fundamental first step for

⁸⁷ Specifically, in white spaces.

white individuals is to “recognize that they are *white*” (8). For white individuals, this means that we must bring our whiteness and its implications to the forefront of our experience.

On the surface, the task of recognizing one’s own whiteness seems as though it should be easy. However, the emotional and resistant responses that often follow even the most basic and provisional discussions of racism within feminist organizations or classrooms indicates otherwise. I have found that undergraduate students, for example, can be very resistant to learning about white privilege. Sarita Srivastava (2005) asserts “if one’s identity as feminist, as woman, as Canadian, as liberal rests on being tolerant and just, then antiracist challenges profoundly unsettle that foundation” (43). If one’s habitually living whiteness is what anchors white individuals in their world then to disrupt this habit through the recognition of whiteness is to dislodge these individuals from their world. For a white feminist, whose sense of their world is grounded in a moral sense of identity that is bound up in being tolerant and just, facing the realization that they are an agent of oppression complicit in the perpetuation of racial discrimination is disorientating to say the least. I have shown that white privilege has a significant impact on the habitual ways that one relates to the world. As an unconscious habit, white privilege operates covertly in pre-reflective bodily movement, and actively conceals itself.

White individuals are not encouraged to recognise race as a distinct part of their identities. As reviewed in chapter two, disorientation occurs when one’s habitual modes of relating to the world (and others) are disrupted. One’s established habits of moving into the world begin to unravel; the world itself becomes unfamiliar. With one’s habitual grasp on their world unmoored, the seamlessness that animates one’s intentional action is undone. Feelings of comfort and ease are subsequently replaced with discomfort and uncertainty. Recognising one’s white privilege can be disorienting because it challenges one’s perception of the world and one’s place within it. Experiencing oneself as privileged can produce discomfort. However, experiencing the discomfort that disorientation produces is very important for generating awareness of habit. Ideally, this new awareness disrupts “everyday sensuous and affective habits of being embodied,

moving in space, and relating to others. In such cases, how individuals should act, how others will respond, what is appropriate, healthy, or normal becomes uncertain” (Harbin, 2016, xviii). One’s felt certainty about how to act dissolves. The perceiving white subject suddenly finds that their intentions no longer seem to line up with the realization of those intentions. This brings attention to a moment that would likely have otherwise passed without one’s awareness. When such awareness is gained, individuals tread more cautiously, slowing down to wait before acting/speaking.

While I certainly agree that through the experience of disorientation, the movement of white individuals recognition of whiteness is fundamental for beginning to live whiteness differently, when coupled with the inability to disavow one’s whiteness, the feelings of guilt and remorse that tend to accompany the recognition of one’s whiteness can easily lead to a sense of paralysis. This feeling of paralysis has stood out for me in my own experience of contending with my whiteness and the privileges it confers: an odd sensation of desperately wanting to move, but not knowing how, or in which direction to turn. This sense of paralysis is linked to hesitation. As explained in chapter two, hesitation involves slowing down. The anticipatory dynamic of habitual action is interrupted as the “I can” of one’s lived body collapses. Hesitation is felt as a *delay* and the seamless flow of intentional action is stunted. Alia Al-Saji (2014) identifies two forms of hesitation, one that is paralyzing and another that is generative. The white paralysis described above captures the paralyzing sense of hesitation. Evidently, white paralysis is not very useful. How can we help to bring about the necessary structural and political changes if we are afraid to move for fear of making the situation worse? Luckily the promise of hesitation lies in the way that it modulates the temporality of habit. The bodily awareness that hesitation allows can call the immediacy and automaticity of habit into question. By putting off habitual action, hesitating generates a temporal interval that opens the possibility of becoming otherwise.

This moment of delay allows the body more time to perceive, but also to remember. Thus, hesitation “can make felt the historicity, contingency and sedimentation of habitual actions and perceptions as well as their plasticity” (Al-Saji, 2014, 143). By holding open

an interval of hesitation, disorientation allows for the temporal gap necessary for habit to “destabilize itself and transform, to become self-aware and respond” (Al-Saji, 2014, 145). Slowing the momentum of habitual whiteness through hesitation thus permits different possibilities for action to become visible that can create the possibility for one to learn to move differently. To hesitate is to “feel one’s way tentatively and receptively” (Al-Saji, 2014, 143). This implies a kind of movement where one does not know what kind of future they will find. In hesitation, not only is intentional movement delayed, but it also becomes more open to the world in a way that can allow one to move in accordance with others. This parallels George Yancy’s (2015) call for white individuals to *tarry* with the weight of race. Yancy maintains that by “moving too quickly when confronted with the muck and mire of their own whiteness,” white individuals often distance themselves from their complicity in racial inequality (Yancy, 2015, 26). The call to tarry, like hesitation, slows the momentum of habitual whiteness by inviting white individuals “‘to wait,’ ‘to abide’ in the face of new insights” (Yancy, 2015, 31). Moving towards the goal of sedimenting habits of whiteness not only brings whiteness as a category of experience into question, but also allows for whiteness to be embodied in different ways. This is not to say however that we should be finding ways to alleviate feelings of white paralysis completely since the disorienting feeling associated with it is also necessary for self-reflexivity. Rather than moving past white paralysis, we need to learn how to inhabit the ambiguity it creates. These moments of paralysis, by slowing the momentum of habitual practices of whiteness, allow time for one’s actions to be actively reflected upon.

The interplay between disorientation and hesitation is not a straightforward remedy to the habitual, but rather shows what is needed phenomenologically in order to take advantage of the generativity at the heart of habit in order to move away from the bad habits of whiteness. The experiences of disorientation and hesitation are thus powerful tools for thinking about how to live whiteness differently. is interrupted, bringing a temporary cessation to the momentum that characterizes white privilege. This moment of hesitation itself is unnatural to white privilege because white privilege allows one to take up and move into one’s world in an uninhibited manner. This inhibiting that is caused by disorientation can bring the pre-reflectively experience of ease with which white

individuals move into the world up to the level of reflection. While disorientation and hesitation by themselves do not sediment new habits, it forces a question: why have I stopped moving? This forces a double consciousness upon the white individual as they are forced to reckon with the implications of their whiteness.

3.7 Conclusion

For white individuals, experiencing the disjunction between the way they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by non-white others, as a kind of white double consciousness, can be a “potential source for a new and more accurate understanding of social conditions” and their material impacts (Alcoff, 2015, 170). As part of this, white individuals must acknowledge the historical legacy of white privilege *and* the impact it has on the pervasive structures of inequality and exploitation that still exist today. Yancy (2012) writes:

the unfinished present is where I want whites to tarry (though not permanently remain), to listen, to recognize the complexity and weight of the current existence of white racism, to attempt to understand the ways in which they perpetuate racism, and to begin to think about the incredible difficulty involved in undoing it (158).

The impulse to hurry through discussions of the tragedy of racial violence and white privilege spares white individuals and those unaffected by the harms of racism, the discomfort and unease of confronting its reality and their entanglement in it. I frame my engagement with Bharatanatyam in the next chapter in light of this call to tarry, as an exercise in exploring this two-sided sense of its past and how this past continues to motivate relations of domination in the present in which I am implicated. As I will show, I am not the first white Western woman to engage with Bharatanatyam through the lens of transformation. I turn to the past of dance in order to understand the implication of its performance in the present and interrogate my own participation in this practice.

Chapter 4

4 Dancing with History

“Whether it is a question of things or of historical situations, philosophy has no other function than to teach us to see them anew” (PhP, 548).

In this chapter I turn to the past of dance to understand the implication of its performance in the present. The contemporary practice of dancing Bharatanatyam reflects a long and complicated history of entanglements. It is a history marked by British colonialism, Indian nationalism, post-colonial migration, and is further mediated by questions of gender, sexuality, race, caste, and other dimensions of identity. How does the *weight* of these histories produces complex meanings when they coalesce in living bodies in the present? In this chapter, I critically situate my own participation in Bharatanatyam in light of critical race, and post-colonial feminist scholarship. This is framed as an exercise in double consciousness, one that takes stock of my own complicity in the perpetuation of systemic racial inequality. I come into a world where the figure of the female Indian dancer already exists, and continues to be consumed and appropriated by white Western subjects in ways that (re)enact the violence of colonialism, racialization, and orientalism through misrepresentation. I am not the first white Western woman to take up Indian dance practices as a vehicle to explore questions of transformation and it is important to understand how histories of domination are implicated in my own engagement with Bharatanatyam. I turn towards these histories beset by questions concerning the ethics of intercultural encounters, and concerns with how to engage with cultural alterity without reproducing histories of violence.

This chapter is made up of three sections. In the first section, I offer an account of the social, historical cultural context in which Bharatanatyam emerged. This begins with an examination of the *devadasi*, whose dance practices form the foundation for Bharatanatyam, and trace the suppression of dance under colonial rule. I will show the ways that dance in India has been subject to contradictory forces of reform and revival,

each of which manifest the effects of colonial violence. This section provides the necessary historical ground from which to analyze the workings of orientalism and racialization in the proliferation of the figure of the female Indian dancer as a cultural stereotype. The second section of the chapter draw on the figure of the female Indian dancer to explore the role that habit plays in the perception and perpetuation of cultural stereotypes. I begin by outlining how “the Other” is constructed in the colonial imaginary, and examine the proliferation of the figure of the female Indian dancer within various site of colonial cultural production at the turn of the twentieth century. Drawing on this historical literature, I will show that habit plays an important role in grounding a habitual orientation towards the figure of the Indian dancer, and linking what is perceived as a racialized exotic other (here the figure of the female Indian dancer) by the dominant (white Western) subject to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body. In the final section I examine the connections between the appropriation of cultural difference, and ontological expansiveness. I specifically reframe cultural appropriation as a distinctive *style* of pre-reflective movement. As I will show, the sense of mastery that defines acts of cultural appropriation is made manifest in and through uninhibited movement in and towards the world. This is exemplified in the long and largely unquestioned role that the appropriation of Indian dance played within the American modern dance tradition. There is a long history of white Western women incorporating elements of Indian dance into their modern dance performance repertoire without citation in order to advance their own creative interests and positions. While modern dancers challenged gender hierarchies by claiming leadership positions as choreographers on the public stage, they did so while actively reinforcing racial hierarchies.

4.1 Contesting Histories: Classical Indian Dance

During my first year of dance training I found my enthusiasm tempered by a small but specific anxiety... am I pronouncing this correctly? Bhar-ta-natyam? The name swells in my mouth. B-harta-nat-yam? It gets stuck on the tip of my tongue. I feel myself pausing, hesitating, speaking uncertainly,

mumbling. I became overly conscious about clarifying the pronunciation too many times. After all, there are only so many times you can ask the same question without feeling that “I’m embarrassing myself”. This anxiety, of course, gestures to my position as a cultural outsider. However, it also serves as an embodied reminder of the communicative impasses imposed by the colonizing nature of language and emphasizes the privilege of being a dominant speaker (C.f. Spivak, 1999; Mohanty, 1984; Lugones, 2006). To avoid my insecurity, I would refer to Bharatanatyam as “Classical Indian Dance”. At the time, this seemed like a good temporary solution. After all, along with Kathak and Odissi, Bharatanatyam is officially recognized as a form of Indian “classical” dance. However, “classical” is not simply a descriptive term, but a signifier that evokes and masks a range of associations. What project does adopting such a terminology serve?

Although an account of the historical context in which Bharatanatyam emerged is necessary to lay the foundation for critically situating my participation in this practice, it is important to remember the ways in which such histories always fall short. Histories neither exhaust, nor fully encapsulate the complexity of the events of the past. Historical narratives are products of historical beings, and so the perspectives they advance are themselves embedded in a time, place, and culture. Historical narratives rely on the relation between those who interpret and reproduce the telling of events, rather than just the events themselves. Consequently, questioning whose dance practices are remembered, or forgotten, which dances are preserved, and which are erased, and what project dance history serves, is central when approaching dance historically. Ideological frameworks – national, political, social, cultural, gendered or racial – produce certain histories, while ignoring and suppressing others. Social ideologies and power structures have, and continue to, instrumentalize events and practices of the past in the present to support certain interests, or to explain, validate or justify events in the present. Indeed, certain histories may be mobilized and manipulated to produce strategic and material effects. It is through such processes that certain dance practices and practitioners become privileged while others are silenced.

Use of the word “Classical” in reference to Bharatanatyam exemplifies this, since this term is taken up in order to imply a relationship with the past. In the context of Indian dance, the styles subsumed under the label “Classical”, are commonly associated with a specific historical narrative - one that posits them as timeless relics connected with an ancient past. Indian classical dance, so the story goes, can be traced to antiquity.

However, writing on Indian dance styles has grown increasingly suspicious of these grand narratives. Recent post-colonial analyses of classical Indian dance have produced a significant body of scholarship that has demonstrated that within this context “Classical” is a fraught term, one that cannot be disentangled from the various colonial, Orientalist, post-colonial, and Indian nationalist discourses of the late Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.⁸⁸ In fact, Bharatanatyam is a twentieth-century invention, one that has been significantly shaped by relations of power (C.f. Janet O’Shea, 2007; Roy, 2010; Thobani, 2017; Ram, 2000). In this section I explore the emergence of Bharatanatyam, to gain an understanding of the historical and social politics that make its practices possible; that is, “to understand how the meaning attributed to the dance is derived and the relations of power such meaning sustains” (Thobani, 2017, 8). Bharatanatyam “comes to us already interpreted, not as a mere object, but as a tissue of interpretations” that forces one to rethink their current understanding of this dance practice, and “to rearticulate the tradition through which it arrives to us” (Seth, 2008, 222).

History never ceases to confront contingency.⁸⁹ Our hold of the past is always precarious, as its meanings are constantly reworked in the present. While the past informs the present, the present also retrospectively lends new meaning to the past. The meanings ascribed to dance practices, “as historically accumulated constructs of body,

⁸⁸ The problematic and tokenistic use of categories and labels such as “classical”, “folk”, and “modern” in the context of Indian dance has been criticized by several scholars (C.f. Vatsyayan, 1974; Coolawala, 1994; Bose, 2001; Lopez and Royo, 2003; Purkayastha, 2014).

⁸⁹ “[H]istory has meaning, but there is not pure development of ideas. Its meaning arises in contact with contingency, at the moment when human initiative founds a system of life by taking up anew scattered givens. And the historical understanding which reveals an interior to history still leaves us in the presence of empirical history, with its density and its haphazardness, and does not subordinate it to any hidden reason” (AD, 17).

and aesthetics,” for example, are invariably altered as they move across borders, intra-cultural, and geo-cultural divides (Coorlawala, 2004, 59). In what follows I engage in a critical analysis of the socio-cultural, historical and political context in which Bharatanatyam arose, highlighting the gendered dynamics of this situation. I offer a depiction of Indian dance history, one in which questions of heritage, authenticity, and identity are intimately tied to nationalism, race, gender, caste⁹⁰ power and disenfranchisement. In the first section of this chapter I explore the context from which Bharatanatyam emerged, beginning with the practice of *sadir*, a style of dance practiced by *devadasi* (ritual officiates dedicated to temple service). *Devadasi* became the site of significant regulation during British colonial and post-colonial rule in India, during which time *sadir* was subject to the contradictory forces of reform and revival.

4.1.1 Defining the Devadasi as Objects of Knowledge

Bharatanatyam finds its roots in *sadir*, the “solo female dance form” associated with the literary and musical traditions of Southern India (O’Shea, 2007, 29). *Sadir* was performed by *devadasis*, ritual officiates dedicated to temple and court service. Any history of Bharatanatyam ought to begin with the *devadasis*. However, this is easier said than done. There a significant gap in our understanding of the of *devadasis* and their communities because much of what is known about them is mediated by the perspectives of those outside their communities. Indeed, their voices are largely missing from most historical accounts of their ways of life. It is important to keep this in mind when approaching writing about them. As Hubel (2005) asserts, “the problem is that their individual lives and collective ways of living them are impossible to recover in any form that has not already been altered by our own concerns” (121). If, in turning to the

⁹⁰ Caste is a system of social stratification that is hierarchically structured and organized around a polarized conception of purity and pollution (C.f. Flood, 1996). The ways that caste politics are entangled with dance in India are very complex. When *sadir* was “reformed” in the twentieth century (and renamed Bharatanatyam) it became associated with the upper-caste *Brahmanic* tradition. This not only served to homogenize a number of distinct regional dance traditions, but also de-legitimized and obscured the unique dance practices of non-*Brahmin devadasis* (C.f. Soneji, 2012; O’Shea, 2007).

devadasi, we are invariably integrating them into narratives that ultimately belong to us, and are about us, then one must concede that we can never really “know” the “real” *devadasi* (C.f. Hubel, 2005; Spivak 1996). Given this, rather than write “about” *devadasis*, I position myself alongside them; writing “nearby”.

Unfortunately, I do not have enough space here for an extensive outline of the intricacies of the social institutions which supported *devadasis*. For the purposes of a sustained focus, in what follows I offer a brief overview of salient aspects of their community and lifestyle. Although other studies provide greater detail on the *devadasi* institution and its historical and cultural specificities (C.f. Purkayastha 2017; Soneji, 2012; Sreenivas 2011; Hubel 2005; Natarajan 1997), I touch upon the dance practices of the *devadasi* because they are the foundation for technique in Bharatanatyam. As will be shown, the *devadasi* became the locus of intense debate both within and outside India during the colonial and post-colonial period. Several scholars have approached *devadasi* communities from a feminist standpoint. Some locate in these communities precolonial models for female autonomy (C.f. Oldenberg, 1995; Srinivasan, 1987). Indeed, the *devadasi* institution afforded these women a number of freedoms. They were educated, they received an autonomous salary from the temple or court, could travel freely, owned land, and in some cases were able to amass considerable wealth - all things that were denied to many middle-class Indian women, or even English women in the Victorian era. While acknowledging these relative freedoms experienced by *devadasi*, they were still embedded in a patriarchal social system, and remained socially and economically dependent on men through systems of patronage (C.f. Coorlawala, 2004; O’Shea, 2007; Purkayastha, 2014). Although patriarchal controls operated differently among *devadasi* and non-*devadasi* women, both existed within the same socio-cultural framework for regulating women’s sexuality, economic activity, and social status. Adding to this, Spivak (1996) contends that there is a tendency to overlook the operations of class in the agency of the *devadasi*. She warns against blindly accepting that the *devadasi* represents a “free woman”, reminding us that “it is often class-jumping that gives women ‘freedom’ in patriarchy” (Spivak, 1996, 251).

4.1.2 Dance in India: Colonial Legacies of Reform

Prior to the colonial period in India, dance had a prestigious role in Indian society. “Historically, Indian dance never occurs as an isolated, separate practice, but has been integrated into a much larger framework that encompasses... narrative and ritual” (Ram, 2000, 6). Dance in India is rooted in religious and ritual traditions “as a metaphor for Lord Shiva’s perpetuation of the cosmos” (Mitra, 2006, 66). Dance was thus framed as an integral part the ritual devotion, with performances being framed as an active offering to the divine.⁹¹ *Sadir* was a regionally specific practice connected to the Madras State of Southern India. Following a ritual akin to an upper-caste Hindu wedding ceremony, *devadasi* would be dedicated to the governing deity of their temple. Within this context, they played an important role in temple life, lending ritual and artistic services.

Not only was *sadir* performed as a part of temple worship in South India, but were also paid performers who participated in a secular performance economy (C.f. Soneji, 2012).⁹² *Devadasi* also figured prominently in the royal courts. By the 17th and 18th centuries *devadasis* had become a crucial link between Hindu temples and south Indian ruling households. As Sreenivas (2011) explains, “through their patronage of temples, rulers demonstrated their political and moral role as protectors of the social order”, while the *devadasis* “helped to cement the association between the king and the temple deity” (66). However, as British colonial rule gained more power in southern India in the nineteenth century, the ritual and economic role that the *devadasi* institution had previously played became suspect. Because *devadasis* were a central link between the temple and the rulers, under the new colonial regime their position was called into question, as it buttressed the old regime. As a consequence of the process of stripping kings of their ruling authority, *devadasis* gradually lost opportunities for royal patronage.

⁹¹ *Sadir* is connected to the bhakti movement, which developed in southern India and reached the height of popularity between the 15th and 17th centuries. Bhakti locates spiritual attainment in a personal allegiance to and affection for a god(dess).

⁹² Scholarship has tended to focus on the temple-based religious lives of *some devadasis*. As Soneji (2012) argues however, this framework has limited how the *devadasi* are interpreted and fails to address one of the most common sites for their performances: salons in the homes of elite patrons, i.e. secular rather than religious contexts.

By the turn of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the British Empire's reach and domination had pervaded much of Indian life, from infrastructure to governance, education and cultural practices. Within this context, the *devadasi* institution had become the subject of intense debate, much of which hinged on their sexuality. *Devadasis* were not expected to remain sexually abstinent and frequently entered sexual relationship with the men who became their patrons. These relationships were non-monogamous and nondomestic; *devadasi* did not live with their patrons, nor did they perform any household tasks for them. Rather, *devadasis* lived in robust female-headed households with grandmothers, mothers and children residing together. This meant that *devadasi* communities did not follow the patterns of patrilineal descent and inheritance that were characteristic of upper-caste non-*devadasi* families. Amrit Srinivasan (1985) has argued that the economic relationship that these women had with Hindu temples encouraged a "matrifocal household" because their ritual and artistic services provided the primary source of income. Any children conceived through these relationships would live with the *devadasis* and be trained in dance and music.

It should come as no surprise that sexuality and conjugal relations of the *devadasi* did not fly with the British. As Prarthana Purkayastha (2017) asserts, in the eyes of British colonial rulers, the *devadasis* subverted normative codes of gender and sexuality. Consequently, the sexuality of the *devadasi* became the focus of intense debate. As non-marrying women who were sexually active, *devadasis* represented an ambiguous category of woman in the colonialist imagination. Victorian morality was constructed around the pure domestic woman and her antithesis was the promiscuous public women, and the *devadasi* rested in between these two dichotomies. This ambiguity is manifest in colonial literature that wavers between referring to them as "wives" (of a deity) and "prostitutes".⁹³ The connection between the *devadasi* and prostitution would come to be

⁹³ Under colonial criminal law, "prostitution" is vaguely defined as "a vast residual category...of sexual activity 'outside of marriage'" (Sreenivas, 2011, 68). This meant that the sexual activities and conjugal relationships of the *devadasi* were considered prostitution. However, as Sreenivas (2011) points out, colonial civil law simultaneously defined the *devadasi* as a "separate class [of women] having a legal status" that was

a central mechanism in the suppression of their culture and way of life. For example, the anti-*nautch* (anti-dance) reform movement, which began in 1892, specifically targeted the *devadasi* by denouncing their nondomestic ways of life as prostitution, and describing the practice of *sadir* as lustful and lascivious.

Through a series of campaigns, social reformists recast the *devadasi* as innocent, helpless, victims of “unhealthy pernicious customs” (Hubel, 129). Though the regulation of *devadasi* sexuality with an eye towards “reform”, *devadasis* were to be “made into good, pure, respectable women” (Soneji, 2012, 20). In this way, *devadasi* reform was framed as an altruistic act. As Srividya Natarajan (1997) has pointed out, this positions *devadasi* as mere “objects of their altruism”, an attitude as “invariably patronizing or censorious” (131). Determining how the *devadasis* saw themselves in this context is not straight forward. However, in her doctoral dissertation entitled “Another Stage in the Life of the Nation: *Sadir*, Bharatanatyam, Feminist Theory”, Srividya Natarajan (1997) quotes a series of memorials and testimonials submitted to the government of Madras by communities of *devadasis* in an attempt to retain control of their profession and the meanings that could be ascribed to it. One such example is found in a 1927 self-description offered by the South Indian *Devadasi* Association, where it states that the name *devadasi* “is not unfortunately mingled up with and associated with an immoral life. It would, we submit, be easily conceded by everyone that the institution of dedicating one’s life to a temple has nothing to do with prostitution” (quoted in Natarajan, 1997, 124). Clearly, *devadasis* were aware that their culture and practices were coming under scrutiny by the new moral order. Although they continued to collectively oppose anti-dedication legislation, by the early twentieth century the efforts of the anti-*nautch* campaign had succeeded in eroding public support for the *devadasi*. By the time the Madras Devadasi Prevention of Dedication Act, (which outlawed the practice of dedicating women as *devadasi* in temples) was passed in 1947, the practice of dancing *sadir* had been impelled into obscurity.

distinct from other Hindu women (Sreenivas, 2011, 68).

4.1.3 Reviving Dance: Bharatanatyam and Indian Nationalism

Theorists of anti-colonial nationalism have observed that many newly independent nations actively sought to produce a cohesive and unified culture to rally the sentiments of national unity, often in (unintentional) ironic alignment with colonial discourse (c.f. Thobani, 2017; Fannon, 2004 [1961]; Chatterjee, 1999; Ludden, 1993). While many post-colonial studies have drawn from literary studies to trace the reproduction of colonial discourse within post-independence nationalist movements (c.f. Said, 1993; Spivak, 1999), recent scholarship has drawn attention to dance as a potent a medium through which these dynamics have been negotiated. Dance scholars have identified a common trend across many different dance traditions emerging within colonial contexts. In fact, similar patterns of suppression, and revival can be found in tango (c.f. Savigliano, 1995) and bellydance (C.f. Karayanni, 2004).

Rather than simply dissolving, elements of *devadasi* dance traditions were preserved through the vehicle of what has been called a “revival” or “reconstruction” movement. Through this movement, *sadir* was reconfigured and renamed *Bharatanatyam*. Post-colonial critique of classical Indian dance has produced a significant body of scholarship that has focused on the (re)construction of Bharatanatyam in the twentieth century (c.f. Royo, 2003; Ram, 2011; Sreenivas, 2011; Purkayatha, 2014). As Royo (2003) explains, the reworking of *sadir* into Bharatanatyam was part of a wider project aimed at reimagining Indian culture in the interest of establishing a pan-Indian sense of collective cultural and national identity post-independence (157). The binary logic of colonialism, which positioned itself as a “civilizing mission”, depended on perpetuating the view that the colonized were “culturally deficit” for its moral justification. Indian nationalists sought to undermine this premise by supplying evidence of indigenous accomplishment, which they argued resided in the traditions of arts (O’Shea, 2007, 32). In this context, dance became a site “for the expression of an unaltered Indian culture that predated colonisation” (Royo, 2003). Accordingly, dance revivalists such as Rukmini Devi, Krishna Iyer, Madame Menaka, went in search of cultural authenticity and cultural roots in the dance traditions of the past.

Within this context, Bharatanatyam became material evidence, and heir to the notion of a longstanding and glorified Indian tradition. This had immense political significance because it bolstered nationalist claims to an enduring cultural heritage. The sweeping success of the anti-nautch movement, however, had devastated public opinion about dance. If only, the revivalists maintained, the dance form could be “purified”, its essence rescued and redeemed from its “degenerate” practitioners. To this end, revivalists sought out to distance dance from its association with *devadasis* and the devadasi institution. The name “Bharatanatyam” itself was central in this effort. Bharatanatyam alludes to a canonical Sanskrit text on aesthetic theory the *Natyasastra*, and its author Bharata. This etymological association is strategic. By invoking the *Natyasastra*, revivalists successfully shifted the dance form’s point of reference from the *devadasis*, towards “ancient”, “pan-Indian” traditions, which in turn helped to validate the form’s “authenticity” and affirm its respectability (O’Shea, 2007, 37).⁹⁴ Within this context, Bharatanatyam became material evidence and heir to the notion of a longstanding and glorified Indian tradition. As “an emblem” of Indian-ness designed to display modern India’s ties to its ancient past, Bharatanatyam helped bolster nationalist claims to an enduring cultural heritage.

However, the successes of the revival movement depended on more than establishing Bharatanatyam’s roots in antiquity. Before *sadir* could become “respectable”, it was necessary to bring it in line with the newly constructed ideals of Indian womanhood. Nationalist ideology placed enormous significance on motherhood, deemphasizing female erotic sexuality (C.f. Hubel, 2005; Sreenivas, 2011).⁹⁵ Within this context, the erotic elements of *sadir* also posed a problem. Here I gesture to the notion of “*sringara*

⁹⁴ Of course, this relied on emphasizing only particular aspects of the past in dance, and highlighted specific histories as the source of these legitimate dance traditions, which invariably homogenizes and essentializes cultural diversity.

⁹⁵ Hubel (2005) points out that although “the wife” and “the dancer” were often depicted in opposition to one another, “these two kinds of women were nonetheless both conspicuous figures within the various historical Hindu patriarchies of South India that preceded the nationalist era” (133). It was only in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that the one female group consumed the other.

bhakti”, or devotion through eroticism, which was an important feature of the practice and performance of *sadir*, rather than the social scrutiny of the sexuality of the *devadasi*. “Cleansing” *sadir* primarily involved removing the erotic dimensions of the dance form itself. Placing emphasis on technique, rather than devotion, helped temper the sensuality associated with the solo dancer and devotional repertoire. The development of group choreography also deflected attention away from the display of the individual dancer. Choreography also began to be more focused around action-oriented plots enacted by the dancer(s), “dramatic elements of performance thus rested less on the cultivation of emotional states, including romantic love and sexual desire, than on the progression of a story from exposition through conflict to resolution” (O’Shea, 2007, 46).

Both the historical narrative tracing an unbroken line between Bharatanatyam and the traditions of Indian antiquity, and the accompanying associations with notions of ideal Indian womanhood, not only continue to accompany contemporary training in Bharatanatyam technique, but remain prevalent in the dominant social imaginary within India and beyond (Vena Ramphal, 2003; Royo, 2004; Thobani, 2017; O’Shea, 2007). As O’Shea (2007) observes, the dance form both “transcends national and cultural boundaries” while still remaining “resolutely tied to them” (4). Presently, Bharatanatyam is one of the most popular and widely known of the dance forms performed in India and the diaspora. Within South Asian communities in Europe and North America, Bharatanatyam provides a means through which individuals maintain their cultural identity in the diaspora. In this new context, Bharatanatyam helps to sustain a continued connection to a homeland, and is called upon to confirm an “authentic” Indian identity. Of course, such claims to authenticity arouse suspicion, since they reify the normative boundaries which define cultural insiders, and perpetuate a view of cultures as “homogenous, static, and monolithic” (Narayan, 2000, 88). As Narayan (2000) explains, essentialist generalizations such as these “depict as homogenous groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent” (Narayan, 2000, 88). The connection between Bharatanatyam and authenticity continues to conflate a myriad of regional variations of dance practices (and practitioners) in India together.

4.2 Dancing Otherness: Habit Orientation, and the Figure of the Female Dancer

In 1881, a group of Indian dancers traveled from India to North America to perform in Augustin Daly's production of *Zanina* in New York. Although the comedic opera included an "Indian dancing girl" as a central character, this part was played by a white actress. The actual Indian performers were to be featured between acts. Their arrival was highly anticipated and caused much excitement and anticipation in New York's press. This curiosity is reflected in a *New York Clipper* article detailing these Indian women and their dance practices:

It has been written of the "Nautch Maidens" that their dancers do not resemble what we are accustomed to calling dance, but consists of light graceful whirling, most marvelous quickness and sometimes frenzy, and also in mystic weaving, and of subtle, pantomimic contortions, explained by their songs, and in time and theme with the spirit of their music. They have warm olive skin, and many of them are even almost fair. Many of them have a figure of great beauty and natural elegance of movement, which their drapery and rich clothing well become... ("The Nautch Dancers," *New York Clipper*, January 22, 1881, 345 [cited in Srinivasan, 2012, 55].)

Of course, this description is steeped in Orientalist language of desire for the mysterious and exotic wonders of "the East," but it also captures the excitement that preceded their arrival. One reviewer describes the interest in the "*nautch* girls" among the public as having been "excited to fever heat" (Locke, 1920, 31) (Srinivasan, 2012, 56). After the dancer's first few performances however, the critical and public response changed drastically. Audiences left the theater thoroughly dissatisfied with the performance. The female "*nautch*" dancers failed to woo their audiences. One reviewer remarks: "I think the *Nautch* girls were a disappointment to most people. I don't even know exactly what most people expected of them, but I am sure they did not come up to the general anticipation" (*Courier des États-Unis*, February 7 1881). According to another reviewer,

“the public fled the theater with words of scorn and smiles of derision” (Locke, 1920, 31) (Srinivasan 56). These reviews reveal an interesting incongruity between what audiences *anticipated*, the “figure of the female Indian dancer”, and the material bodies dancing on stage—actual female Indian dancing women. This disjunction illustrates the weight of the cultural stereotypes carried in and through embodied perception of the figure of the female Indian Dancer.

The figure of the female Indian dancer was an important site of European and North American cultural production through the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, and was widely consumed as an Orientalist fantasy. One cannot overestimate the immense power of stereotypes such as this in their normalizing capacity. Stereotypes are not benign forms of representation. Rather, they “are capable of a visceral impact on judgment, which allows them to condition our judgment without our awareness” (Fricker, 2007, 37). Cultural stereotypes play an important role in guiding the perception of the other, dehumanizing, exploiting, and justifying the continued oppression of marginalized populations. In this section, I will utilize these discussions surrounding the figure of the female Indian dancer to open a site for phenomenological questioning. What role does habit play in the perception and perpetuation of cultural stereotypes such as this? I draw on the figure the female Indian dancer to explore this question. I will return to the above example to explore the role habit plays in connecting what is perceived as a racialized exotic other (here the figure of the female Indian dancer) by the dominant (white Western) subject, to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body.

4.2.1 Defining the Other in the Colonial Imaginary

Before offering an analysis of the colonial roots of the figure of the female Indian dancer, and outlining a brief history of its development and highlighting the context through which she became an object of colonial gaze, I outline the oppositional logic underlining processes of Othering. Scholars have shown the mechanics of Othering to be central to the interrelated processes of racialization, and orientalism. For Said, orientalism produces a “vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference

between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (1978, 43). Like racialization, orientalism impacts how the Other is perceived. As Al-Saji (2014) explains, “Othering involves a projective mechanism... by which what is undesirable in the self [here the Western subject] is projected onto the Other; the result is a negative mirroring whereby the Other is constituted as that which the self is not, or does not take itself to be” (136). Here, the dominant subject functions as a point of reference, a designator, and foundation of the world. The dominant subject imposes their own voice, tone, and meanings on to the Other. This reduces the Other to that which is projected upon them by the dominant subject. This returns us again to the image of the mirror, since within this framework the Other becomes the double of the subject, bouncing back like a mirror whatever meaning is projected upon them. In this movement, the alterity of the other is elided, and difference is collapsed, absorbed, and subsumed by the dominant subject, rendered invisible and unintelligible. The subject sees only their reflection, and there is no reciprocal gesture of recognition.

This oppositional logic grounds the hierarchical relationship between the “Orient” and the “Occident”. Here, the East is conceived as that which Western identity disavows. Under these conditions, cultural differences are understood in terms of opposition and hierarchy, rendering them mutually exclusive. This is consistent with Said’s contention that Western orientalism reveals more about how the West wishes to imagine itself than the realities of those who come to represent the Other. For example, maintaining a construction of the colonized Other as “exotic,” “barbaric,” and “uncivilized” allowed the West to constitute its own identity as civilized and enlightened. This in turn reinforces imperialist attitudes of Western superiority, ultimately confirming for Western subjects the legitimacy of the colonial project. In other words, the misrepresentation of the Other serves the interests of the dominant.

Feminist theories maintain that Othering of this kind enacts violence through objectifying misrepresentations, which furnish the creation of cultural stereotypes. Cultures, like identities, are dynamic, open, and multiplicitious, always exceeding our grasp on them. Indeed, as Spivak (1999) notes, “culture is alive and always on the run,

always changeful” (375). Stereotypes, however, belie this reality. As an arrested and fixed form of representation - a reified object - stereotypes reduce individuals and cultures to bits and pieces that are made to stand in for the whole. In this process, the internal nuances of a given culture are lost. Difference is homogenized and fixed. As Stuart Hall writes “stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference” (2003, 258). Under these conditions, differences calcify and become overdetermined. This is not simply a matter of the crudity of the stereotype as juxtaposed with the complexity of the actual peoples being characterized. Rather, “the colonial stereotype is complex, ambivalent.” (Bhabha, 1994, 100). Because stereotypes effectively serve to transform the Other into someone who is already known, Bhabha (1994) explains, stereotypes ambivalently signify that which is other, and yet “entirely knowable and visible” (101). This presents a deep sense of ambivalence within the dominant perceiver, since the stereotype serves to (partially, but not really) recognise difference while also disavowing difference through the insistence of already knowing the other (C.f. Bhabha, 1994). Processes of decontextualization not only negate significance of the Other’s history, but functions to sustain rather than problematize the imaginary boundaries between “us” and “them.”

Much analysis following Said has concentrated on orientalism as system of knowledge production. This focus limits scope of one’s analysis to the operations of institutions, discourses and texts. Analysis of embodied and sensuous dimensions of this phenomenon however, have been less prominent in the discussion. The phenomenological analysis that I give here builds off the insights of the work of feminist and critical race scholars who bring the insights of the phenomenological tradition to bear on questions concerning the role perception plays in racialization. Specifically, I draw on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of habit and affect, to explore the consumption and appropriation of the figure of the female Indian dancer and the complex temporality of cultural stereotypes, which not only bear the weight of the past, but encroach upon a future as they are taken up in the present.

4.2.2 Situating the Figure of the Female Indian Dancer

Phenomenologically, accounts of the past are understood as being bound to the present. Merleau-Ponty often describes the past, or history, as having *weight*. As he explains, the “past has a specific weight, that is not a sum of events, over there, far away from me, but rather the atmosphere of my present” (PhP 467). Understanding history as having weight, does not fix the past in an objective point of time, but rather as “a domain, which it dominates, where it reigns, where it is everywhere present without ever being about to say: it’s here” (VI working notes, 205). Donald Landes (2013) has reflected on “weight” in his work on Merleau-Ponty’s work on expression. In physics, he recalls, “weight” “refers to that which causes bodies to move along certain dimensions” (33). The meanings generated through colonial violence survive not as an object left behind - a remainder of something - or something that survives as a residue. Rather, their sense is deposited “as something to continue” (IP, 9). I come into a world where the figure of the female Indian dancer is already laden with meanings that have been carried forward from the colonial past to the living present. The attributed meanings of cultural difference carry forward in cultural stereotypes condensed into the figure of the Indian dancer.

The figure of the female Indian dancer is informed by colonial encounters with *devadasi*. Despite this, however, I am cautious about drawing a direct connection between the two, because the terminologies used to refer to Indian dancers and dance practices during the colonial and post-colonial period is very messy. The phrase “Oriental dance” was adopted indiscriminately, encompassing all of Asian, Middle Eastern and South East Asian styles of dance. This problematically conflates the dance practices of different cultures and traditions. In British colonial literature of the nineteenth century, Indian dance practices were also often referred to as “*nautch*,” an anglicized word deriving from the Hindi/Urdu word *nautch*, meaning dance. This term was “applied generally to characterize all types of dance forms and dancing women from India” (Coorlawala, 1992, 123). The phrase “*nautch* girls” became British shorthand for various forms of entertainment that colonial men and women witnessed during their travels to India (Coorlawala, 1992, 123–52). These phrases are limiting not only because they present

dance practices as ahistorical, but also because they fail to capture the complexity of the lifestyle and function of these performances within their respective cultures. “*Nautch*” obscures the plurality of Indian dance practices. For example, this term collapses together *devadasi* communities, who resided in Southern India and practiced *sadir*, with communities of *tawaifs*, who lived in Northern India and practiced *kathak*. The indiscriminate use of the term “nautch” by both British colonizers and the colonized alike makes it impossible to determine where the performers of so called “*nautch*” were from, and consequently we lose the specificity of their traditions. In light of this, and for the sake of clarity, in this section I use the more general terms “Indian dance” and “female Indian dancer”, rather than *devadasi*.⁹⁶

A stereotype cannot be reduced to the figure alone. Rather, the figure is always experienced with its background; a horizon that is always already charged with a sense. To see the stereotype as such, is to overlook the social, historical, cultural, and economic dimensions that contextualize the notion of the other that the stereotype perpetuates. As such, I aspire to do precisely the opposite, and bring to the forefront the context which continues to motivate the perception of the figure of the female Indian dancer. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, “India was one of the Orient’s most popular products, created, marketed and consumed largely by a Western imagination” (Desmond, 1991). Dance became a popular archetype in stereotyping India and was widely consumed as an Orientalist fantasy. Within this context, the figure of the female Indian dancer provided a provocative symbol of the “Oriental Other.” The Indian dancer embodied cultural difference, confirming for European and North American audiences their established perceptions of the Orient, (mis)understood as “exotic,” “barbaric,” and “uncivilized”.

⁹⁶ I occasionally use the word “nautch” because it is very prevalent within colonial literature, and is hard to avoid using it completely. My own use of the word threatens to sustain this colonial legacy by continuing to conceal the distinctions between a wide-range of Indian cultural practice. Although I continue to use this term, I do so sparingly, while acknowledging its complex and diverse meaning, and history.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the figure of the Indian dancer proliferated, appearing within multiple sites of European cultural production. For example, Indian dancers, often referred to as “nautch girls”, were “displayed” at large-scale exhibitions and world fairs. The practice of publically displaying dance as a cultural artifact from the colonies was a central mechanism for affirming Orientalist ideologies, and was bound up in the dynamic of Othering.⁹⁷ Along with other dance styles from the “New World”, such as tango (c.f. Savigliano, 1995) and belly dance (c.f. Karayanni, 2004), Indian⁹⁸ dance styles were featured at large-scale exhibitions and world fairs, and soon were being displayed at side-shows and traveling circuses in Europe and North America.⁹⁹ As Dirks (2000) notes, World Exhibitions were inseparable from the colonial project that was simultaneously premised on conquest and acquisition of knowledge. He asserts that while, “brute torture on the body of the

⁹⁷ During the nineteenth century, colonialists considered the art and artifacts of Other cultures were for the taking. As Deborah Root (1996) explains, “precisely because of Westerners supposed greater, scientific perspective entitled them to bring the arts of all cultures under their purview” (Root, 1996, 22). As we will see, such acts of appropriation express the general attitude of ontological expansiveness underlining white Western subjectivity.

⁹⁸ Before India gained independence from the British in 1947 and the country was partitioned in to the distinct countries of India and Pakistan, differentiation between these countries was more fluid. For this reason here I am using the term “Indian” to refer to individuals from South Asia.

⁹⁹ Indian dancers in New York found ways to earn money by exhibiting their skilled performances in P.T. Barnum’s circus shows, at dime museums, and world fairs. On one hand, in these contexts individuals of South Asian decent were presented as examples of the “strange” and “exotic,”. However, John Tchen (2001) suggests that we ought not to deny the agency of *nautch* dancers as historical actors. While circuses, museums, and theaters did take advantage of *nautch* dancers, dancers also sometimes exploited exoticism in order to meet their own needs. Other Asian performers I the mid-to-late nineteenth century eroticized themselves in order to make a living. Some examples include Miss Prawn, Qumibo Appo, Chand and Eng (Tchen, 2001), and even those in Tong Hook Tong Chinese Theater Company (Lei, 2006). It is possible that *nautch* dancers may have chosen to exploit North American orientalist desires. Although Western tastes for orientalism drove the consumption of *nautch* dance the “authentic” performers were eventually driven out and white individuals began taking up their performance practices for themselves. However, as Debora Root (1996) has shown, the dynamics of displaying otherness still remains tied to the exhibition of colonial imperial power and constitutes an endeavor to extend and underline its authority by objectifying and dehumanizing the Other.

colonized was not the same as the public exhibition of a colonized body”, these two conventions of colonial power nevertheless “shared in more than they differed” (5). Appropriating and displaying the dance and performing it in a context where it is meant to represent Indian cultures not only demonstrates the authority of the West but also speaks for the silent Orient (c.f. Mohanty, 1986). Indian dance(rs) were a curiosity and exotic commodity in this landscape.¹⁰⁰

Spanning the artistic, philosophical, and political realms of cultural life in Europe and North America, the figure of the Indian dancer seemed to pop up everywhere. At the turn of the twentieth century, Indian dancing girls figured prominently in works of fiction, travel, and missionary literature. These aesthetic representations in this period are informed by the alliances between Christian evangelism, colonial anthropology, and imperial medicine, which revolve around moral amelioration and are directed towards “reform” of *devadasi* communities. Much of these works focus specially on the morality engendered by dance practices of the *devadasi*.

As Soneji (2012) points out, representations of the dance practices of *devadasi*, as with representations of *sati*, were often ubiquitously identified “with the civilizational depravity of ‘the oft-conquered people’ of India” (74). Dance scholars agree that within these literary contexts, depictions of Indian dancers are steeped in orientalist fear/desire for the “exotic” that *devadasi* embodied through their movement. Imagined as a *sylph* or a *bayadere*, Indian dancers were highly romanticized:

“the very word *bayadere* evokes even in the most prosaic and bourgeois minds an idea of sunshine, perfume, and beauty. Imaginations are stirred and dreams take shape. There is a

¹⁰⁰ Ruth St. Denis first encountered Indian dancers at the World Fair at Coney Island in 1904: “during these days someone took me to Coney Island... my who attention was not captured until I came to an East Indian Village which had been brought over in its entirety by the owners of the Hippodrome. Here, for the first time, I saw snake charmers and holy men and Nautch dancers, and something of the remarkable fascination of India caught hold of me” (St. Denis, 1939, 55). I should point out that her seminal work, *Radha: The Mystic Dance of the Five Senses* premiered in 1906... two years after this encounter at the World Fair.

sensation of dazzling light and through the pale smoke of burning incense appear the unfamiliar silhouettes of the East. Until now [the 1838 European tour of Indian devadasi] *bayaderes* had remained a poetic mystery like the houris of Muhammad's paradise. They were more splendid, fairylike, fascinating. This scented poetry that – like all poetry – existed only in our dreams, has now been brought to us” (Gautier, 1886: 39), [Cited in Thobani, 2017, 29].

This account was given by French poet, art, and literary critique Theophile Gautier and exemplifies the sensual image of Indian dance circulating at the time. Gautier evokes seedy exotics in the mysterious imagery of perfume, smoke, and silhouettes. These flourishes tantalize the senses and evoke exotic splendor, all while conflating India with the Middle East.

Ballets produced by and for Western dancers also integrated Indian dancers in their narratives as tragic characters and sought to imitate the “look” of Indian dancers. However, in these ballets orientalist sentiments appeared primarily through subject matter; dress, and décor, rather than movement style. As was the case in literary fiction, the figure of the Indian dancer was also frequently incorporated as a tragic heroine. More often than not, she was presented as a seductive victim usually dominated by a man whose rule is malign. As Jowitt (1988) aptly puts it, these ballets “doled out exoticism in judicious doses...”, evoking in audiences “a frisson of horrified delight” (53, 55). An aura of glamour hung around the figure of the Indian dancer, while the intimations of promiscuity simultaneously associated her with scandal. The descriptions of these performances reveal habitual exoticism through which this figure was perceived. For example, when describing the ballerina Vergina Zucchi's performance as Padmana in the Ballet *Brahma*, created by *Hippolyte Monplaisir* in 1868, one critic is captivated by her “fierce, expressive eyes that shine like rubies in the dark, the sculptured pose of the body, the imperiously regal gestures transport the Spector into the azure regions of the ideal, into a fairyland among the passionate sultananas of the Thousand and One Nights” (cited in Jowitt, 1988, 55). Yet, again we encounter imagery of an exotic fantasy. Like

Gautier, this critic presents an image of India as a “fairyland”, which, interestingly, this critic also associates with Scheherazade’s Arabia. Like Gautier’s comparison between the *bayadere* and the *houris* of Muhammad’s paradise, this critic collapses a whole series of disparate cultural groups together. This is obviously ridiculous. These examples demonstrate the reach of this stereotype.¹⁰¹

4.2.3 Habitual Orientation Towards the Figure of the Female Indian Dancer

Perception is grounded in practice, on the very actions of looking, listening, and touching, as they are lived in and through our bodies. Perception is not an inner representation of an outside world, but rather is practical bodily involvement.

Phenomenology helps us to understand how cultural differences enter in to the field of sensual experience and concern the whole sensing body. As explained in Haldrup et al. (2016), “One does not just perceive another body as a physical object; rather one is affected by the meaning of its appearance” (178). Against the complex ground

¹⁰¹ Through the figure of the female Indian dancer, one can also observe how meanings generated through colonial violence extend beyond the events of the imperial past. The figure of the female Indian dancer bears the weight of the past, which continues to be rearticulated in the present. This legacy continues to speak through the bodies of Western women who continue to take up fragmentary aspects of Indian culture, via dance and dress, in order to “spice up” their performances. Pop artists have capitalized on the continued depiction of India as exotic and mysterious to produce intrigue. From Madonna to Selena Gomez, Coldplay, and Beyoncé - all have incorporated aspects of Indian dance in music videos and performances in ways that reinforce and rearticulate orientalist logics, evoking the exotic imagery of India via the female Indian dancer. Iggy Azalea’s controversial 2013 music video for the song “Bounce” is a particularly jarring example. In the video, shots of a raucous party and a ritual of devotion called a *puja* are spliced between the faces of Indian men and children. Azalea, dressed in a sari, is surrounded by dancing Indian women who serve as little more than props or fashion accessories. Just when you think you have reached the pinnacle of myopic homogenized representations of cultural difference, Azalea shows up on an elephant in a gold crown. These representations are conceived through a white, Western lens reinforcing the racial and colonial logics that underlie how India and Indian women are perceived, and perpetuating predictable stereotypes of India as an exotic playground for rich white people to explore and exploit for cultural capital and economic gain.

articulated above, the Indian dancer became an overdetermined figure – her visibility moves beyond simply belonging to a different culture and she is rendered a hyper-visible representation of the exotic other. As Al-Saji notes, racializing perception is marked by seeing “less”. Racializing perception, she argues, circumscribes the receptivity and affectivity of the perceiver; “the openness of vision to other ways of being, which may destabilize or shatter its perceptual schemata, delimited” (Al-Saji, 2010, 885). This defies what I established in Chapter One; that perception is a dynamic chiasmatic intertwining, and necessarily open to change. This is because Al-Saji (2010; 2014) frames racializing perception as delimiting the liveliness that normally defines perception. In other words, in this context, the capacity for vision to shift and change is stunted. Consequently, racialized bodies are not only seen as naturally inferior, they cannot be seen otherwise” (Al-Saji, 2010, 885; Al-Saji 2014). In this way, the figure of the female Indian dancer is invisible even as she is hyper-visible, with invisibility standing for the inability to perceive female Indian dancers as they are to themselves or to others. To see the figure of the female Indian dancer is precisely to not see the working of colonial power, orientalism, and racialization that institute the perception of this figure as such. The material effects of this can be seen in the ways that *devadasi*, as shown in the previous section, were repeatedly denied a self-originating voice in public debate about them, let alone political life more generally.

However, it is not enough to say that the misrepresentations that weigh down the figure of the female Indian dancer straightforwardly repeat the misrepresentations of the past within the context of the future. Stereotypes sustain themselves through the very perceptions, representations, and affects they produce. This weight generates momentum, which propels misrepresentations towards a future. This folds back into my earlier discussions of habit in chapters one. First, it gestures to the notion of habit as habitual, whereby the perception of the figure of the female Indian dancer as exotic is routinized through repetition. And second, it gestures towards the way habit grounds orientation. Being habituated in this second sense refers “specifically to situations of being oriented in a general situation by having become familiar with its particular structure” (Casey, 2013, 212-213).

The figure of the Indian dancer is a signifier grounded in the racialized, gendered, social, and historical horizons that have given rise to the existential emergence of female Indian dancers in the present, as well as Western subjects. The meaning of the figure of the female Indian dancer is not intrinsic to the embodied being of a dancer in the present, but, following Yancy (2008), “has become a value-laden given, an object presumed untouched, and unmediated by various contingent discursive practices, history, time, and context” (3). Consequently, the figure of the Indian dancer imposes upon the viewer certain conclusions: she is exotic, desirable, horrific, a voiceless object as such. This construction forms the horizon for the embodied responses of Western audiences to this figure. The figure of the Indian dancer is already familiar. This familiarity marks the material bodies of Indian dancers in the present as “other” such that *each time* she appears she is seen in this way. In other words, the representation of female Indian dancers as exotic positions female Indian dancers as scripted in advance; their movements already come loaded with meaning.

As Alcoff reminds us, we do not see our habits, we see *through* them (c.f. Alcoff, 2004). Colonialism, Orientalism, and Exoticism impose habitual modes of perceiving on to female Indian dancers.¹⁰² This does not operate by a rigid and linear causality, but instead motivates perception. Here, “a motive is not the cause of a resulting action, since its meaning cannot be defined apart from the action; on the other hand, the action is not a totally free response to the motive” (Lee, 2014, 242). Motivational relations arise within a situation, and depend upon the overlapping of the individual subject and the context. In other words, a perceiving subject responds to a situation that is already laden with meanings. As an over-determined and hyper-visible symbol of the exotic Other, the figure of the female Indian dancer sets out *in advance* how female Indian dancers will be perceived and motivates her continued perception as such. Furthermore, not only is the figure of the female Indian dancer over-determined, but it is also predetermined: they

¹⁰² Of course, these habitual perceptions are also interlaced with gendered dimensions, which, if sometimes underemphasized, ought not to be forgotten, to say nothing of the heteronormative framework that organizes these gendered and racialized relations.

are presumed to be known *before* they actually are, and determined ahead of “what any genuine encounter with them may reveal, and ahead of how they may wish to present themselves” (67). In other words, female Indian dancers are weighed down in advance by the tropes established through racialization and orientalist othering, which institutes a tendency, or a habitual orientation, towards them.¹⁰³ To illustrate this, I return to the Augustin Daly’s 1881 production of *Zanina*, and the negative response it received from North America audiences.

Although the inclusion of Indian dancers in Augustin Daly’s 1881 production of *Zanina* sparked deep curiosity and interest among North American audiences, public response to their performance was unfavorable. The performance received poor reviews. The language used in these reviews is telling. One review complains that “the famous Nautch... turned out to be even more monotonous than the singing” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 1881) [Cited in Srinivasan 2010, 57]. Another describes them as “grotesque” and “ugly”. Recall the reviewer who remarks: “I think the *Nautch* girls were a disappointment to most people” (Courier des Etas-Unis, February 7 1881) and the other who describes the audience as fleeing the theater with “words of scorn and smiles of derision” (Locke, 1920, 31) [Cited in Srinivasan, 2010, 56]. The sense of “disappointment” and “derision” observed here is telling. These descriptions capture the affective embodied responses experienced by Western audiences when faced with the tangible bodies of female Indian dancers. Although these are discursive traces, that the appearance of the female Indian dancer solicits such responses is precisely because it is already supported by the long history of constructing both female Indian dancers more generally, and the *devadasi* specifically, as exotic. Here we see how *familiar* the figure of the female Indian dancer was to Western audiences. Indeed, so familiar was this figure, that it became the standard by which these real Indian dancers were measured,

¹⁰³ Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit highlights generativity and demonstrates that habits are not fixed or permanent, but flexible and subject to change. Although habits of perception inherited from colonial encounters still have an impact on the perception of Indian dancers today, I do not want to suggest that this inherited past forecloses the possibility for perception of Indian dance/dancers to be rearticulated, or that they have not already been reworked through resistance and self-critique.

both in India and in Europe. Little more than a month had passed since the *nautch* dancers left the New York stage before white women began mimicking their performances (Srinivasan, 2012; 2007). Evidently, Western audiences found the productions of white performers, such as “The Naughty *Nautch* Girls”, more titillating than those of actual Indian women (c.f. Odell, 1939).

Srinivasan (2012) maintains that audiences’ sense of disappointment upon witnessing these performances reveal a palpable “disjunction between the discourse of the Oriental dancing girl that had been circulating and the racialized and gendered materiality of brown women’s dancing bodies on US stages” (Srinivasan, 2012, 53). Evidently, female Indian dancers were accepted or rejected based on how successfully they aligned themselves with the figure of the female Indian dancer and whetted European and North American appetites for the exotic. That the *nautch* dancers did not live up to the terms of Oriental Otherness expected also reflects the perceptual closure that characterizes racializing perception. As Al-Saji argues, racializing perception is defined by rigidity and affective closure. What is closed-down in racializing perception is its receptivity, or “its ability to be affected, to be touched, by that which lies beyond or beneath its habitual objectifying schemas” (Al-Saji, 2014). This places an important role in linking what is perceived as a racialized exotic other to its *immediately felt* effects on the racializing body. This immediacy is connected to phenomena of habit (see chapter one), and is central for the naturalization that sustains racializing habits of perception. The responses to the real material bodies of female Indian dancers given in the above reviews of their performances demonstrate that the presence of these dancers was at once seen and felt as intolerable. Here we see the way in which “racializing perception *inscribes its cause* in the racialized body” of the other [emphasis added] (Al-Saji, 2014, 140). In other words, the stereotypical figure is understood as the cause or catalysis of what is perceived. The result is that the audience’s repulsion towards the Indian dancer appears as if it has arisen from the dancer’s very presence as such.

The audience’s response of disdain, disgust, desire, distrust, when faced with the female Indian dancers, not only casts these women as intolerable, but inscribes the cause of

these affective responses on the dancers themselves. However, the figure is only perceived as the cause of desire and derision because the workings of racializing perception remain tacit or pre-reflective, through sedimentation and habituation. This response appears immediate, and this immediacy is part of what justifies the response. The very appearance of the figure of the female Indian dancer naturalizes what is seen and felt in her presence. Not only does this naturalize the perceived intolerability of the other, but it also relieves the dominant (white Western) subject and the larger social sphere from responsibility for their response.

4.3 White Bodies, Indian Dances: Ontological Expansiveness on the Western Stage

In 1906 Ruth St. Denis premiers *Radha: The Mystic Dance of the Five Senses*. As Radha, St. Denis dramatizes the pleasures of the senses, performing dances of sight, hearing, taste, and touch. As Salley Banes explains,

The dance is primarily a solo for St. Denis, although it begins with a procession of male priests who serve to frame her dancing and to carry symbolic props. St. Denis, as the idol Radha, is seated in lotus position, absolutely immobile, on a pedestal (Banes, 1998, 85).

St. Denis dances barefoot, the contours of her body visible as she dances. She curls her wrists, twisting and turning them around her as she spins in place, letting her skirt billow around her. Jane Desmond offers more detail of St. Denis' performance. Desmond (1991) explains:

When the priests are seated in a semi-circle, framing a space for Radha to enter, she comes to life. Watched by her priests, she enters the sacred space to begin the dance of the five senses (Desmond, 1991, 32).

St. Denis' movements are sensuous and expressive. She twirls in ecstatic rapture, and falls to the floor. Her gestures trace a spectacle of sensuality and eroticism and claim freedom for the (white) female dancing body on stage. At the time of its performance, *Radha* was considered a stroke of genius. Between 1904 and 1915 the piece was performed over a hundred times in both North America and Europe (Scolieri, 2012, 98). The significance of *Radha* in St. Denis' lexicon is further illustrated by its revival for her 1940 "comeback" performance at Carnegie Hall in New York (Scolieri, 2012, 92).

St. Denis was one among a growing community of women in the early twentieth century who were taking up dance to rebel against choreographic traditions and gendered norms (Banes, 1998). Along with dancers such as Anna Pavlova, Loie Fuller, and Isadora Duncan, St. Denis is considered a “mother” of the America modern dance movement in North America. This movement explicitly pushed back against the oppressive demands of classical ballet technique¹⁰⁴ as well as the dominant narrative themes that preoccupied ballet choreographers (i.e. marriage plots). Outside the confines imposed by ballet technique, modern dancers sought to redefine dance in progressive, liberatory, and feminist ways, by taking up new styles of movement to explore subjects that extend beyond marriage (c.f. Desmond, 1991; Daly, 1992; Banes, 1998). Although St. Denis was not a politically active feminist, her choreographies contributed to growing social discourse about women and changing social values surrounding marriage and sexuality.¹⁰⁵ Although modern dancers, such as St. Denis, overturned gender hierarchies and claimed leadership positions as choreographers on the public stage, they also actively reinforced racial hierarchies as they did. Not only did these choreographers take up orientalist themes, but they directly drew from, and claimed ownership over the movement vocabularies and expressive practices of those marked as culturally other. St Denis specifically assumed the right to possess and profit from Indian dance traditions. Given this, one must ask: against whom does modern dancing enact its social/feminist critique?

In the previous section, I discussed the proliferation of the figure of the female Indian dancer across various sites of European cultural production. I cited several examples of this figure’s appearance within literature and philosophy, as well as its integration in ballets and various theatrical productions. In these instances, the cultural practices are represented by those considered cultural outsiders and are examples of appropriation.

¹⁰⁴ Dancers broke many rules of technique and appeared corsetless and barefooted on stage.

¹⁰⁵ In this context, modern dance performances not only reflected changing social values of the time, they also instituted new social relations, in part by “producing a new predominantly female audience” (Banes, 1998, 66).

However, in what follows I focus on the appropriation of a distinctive *style* of movement, i.e. the role that the appropriation of Indian dance played within the American modern dance tradition. Rather than attempting to solve the problem of cultural appropriation (which in any case cannot be conceived of as a singular project, but one that is sensitive to specificities of peoples with unique historical trajectories), I will suggest that we rethink the terms in which we address the questions and the ethical responsibilities entailed in its consideration. By focusing on *intentionality*, rather than intent, I call attention to a pre-reflective orientation to the world that underlies and compels appropriative acts among privileged subjects. Acts of cultural appropriation, I argue, express the uninhibited intentionality of ontological expansiveness, the “I can” that is adopted as the norm of being in the world for dominant privileged (white Western) subjects. I show that the ease with which members of dominant cultural groups exercise their “right” to possess and claim mastery over the expressive practices of cultural groups marked as Other.

I begin by defining cultural appropriation, before highlighting the uninhibited intentionality that underlies it. This is followed by a brief discussion of appropriation in the context of the modern dance movement, followed by an analysis of the efforts of Ruth St. Denis to copyright her seminal work *Radha* (1906). I will demonstrate that Ruth St. Denis’s appropriation of Indian dance is consistent with an orientation towards the world defined by ontological expansiveness; she assumes the right to take up, possess, and occupy Indian dance practices.

4.3.1 Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation is a pervasive and multidirectional phenomenon that is inescapably intertwined with cultural politics. There is a great deal at stake in determining where cultural appropriation begins and ends. It is critical that we ask ourselves how the boundaries of cultural appropriation are determined, by whom these lines are determined, and to what effect. In its most basic definition, cultural appropriation refers to “taking - from a culture that is not one’s own”. What is “taken”

varies, but can include “intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Zaff & Rao, 2008, 1). Such a definition bristles with uncertainty. One might ask, for example, what is meant by “taking”? To consume, to capture, to possess? On some level, taking implies the removal of something from its original place; a de-contextualization. For this reason, appropriation is often likened to theft. As with theft, which operates without the assumption of reciprocity, appropriation occurs without permission or the intent of return.

Within Cultural Studies, interest in cultural appropriation has largely focused on its relation to exploitation and systemic inequality (c.f. Zaff & Rao, 2008; Ahmed, 2000). These studies prioritize the social, economic, and political contexts in which acts of appropriation occur and focus specifically on evaluating the impact and implications of such actions. Examining relations of power and privilege that underlie acts of appropriation thus form the primary basis for assessing the consequences of such acts. Acts of appropriation are deemed morally suspect when they occur in the context of asymmetrical power relationships, i.e. when someone from a dominant cultural group takes from a someone from a marginalized cultural group (c.f. Hart 1997; hooks, 1992). This has been shown to be particularly relevant for understanding the operation of colonial and post-colonial relations of power, since aspects of colonized cultures have long been extracted and exploited by the dominant colonizing culture in ways that serve the interests of the dominant. Critiques of cultural appropriation are premised on the understanding that such acts do harm to both the integrity and identities of marginalized cultural groups as well to the cultural objects caught in the fray. Harm is generated through erroneous depictions of the heritage from which a practice or object emerged, which can lead to distorted and deceptive depictions of a given culture (Ziff &Roa, 1997; hooks, 1992; Ahmed, 2000). We have already seen this through the figure of the female Indian dancer among Western audiences.

Misrepresentation, however, is not a necessary condition for harms to be generated through the appropriation. The elevated social status that individuals of dominant cultural groups lends what Fricker calls “credibility excess,” where in their credibility is

wildly overemphasized (2007, 17). This concept is grounded in the understanding that one's social identity has a meaningful and substantive impact on how one's claims are evaluated. When members of a dominant cultural group speak, their voices are perceived as being more authoritative, and consequently carry greater weight. Alcoff (1991) raises this issue when she asserts that one's social location "can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech" (7). Even if the content of one's speech is accurate, when a member of the dominant culture speaks on behalf of members of a marginalized group their perceived credibility excess contributes to the conclusion that individuals belonging to marginalized groups have no special credibility with respect to their own experiences. Under these conditions, marginalized communities are deprived of what Uma Narayan (1988) has called "the epistemic privilege of the oppressed" (35).¹⁰⁶ Loretta Todd (1990) touches on this issue when she says that "appropriation also occurs when someone else becomes the expert on your experience and is deemed more knowledgeable about who you are than yourself" (25). Fricker's account of credibility deficits and excesses is significant because it demonstrates that even acts of cultural appropriation which are executed with accuracy harmful consequences (c.f. Matthes, 2017).

This way of understanding cultural appropriation is not without its problems. The concept is itself predicated on the distinction between cultural insiders and outsiders. A distinction such as this requires a set of criteria through which to distinguish cultural membership. However, constructing such boundaries poses a risk, since they have the propensity to falsely represent cultures as homogenous, static and monolithic. In other words, the practice of categorizing cultural insiders/outsideers itself is premised on essentialist assumptions about cultural identity and belonging that themselves can be damaging. As Narayan (2000) explains, essentialist generalizations "depict as homogenous groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent" (Narayan, 2000,

¹⁰⁶ Narayan explains that "members of an oppressed group have more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group" (1988, 35).

88). In other words, reifying the boundaries that define cultural membership tends to perpetuate a normative view of “authentic” group members. This works to further disenfranchise those who either exist at the margins, or simply do not meet all the relevant criteria for group membership, or insider status. This reveals a tremendous overlap between the harms of cultural appropriation and those of cultural essentialism.

4.3.2 Appropriation and the Uninhibited Intentionality of Ontological Expansiveness

When evaluating acts of cultural appropriation, scholars focus primarily on power relations, and are less interested in explicit *intent* or awareness of those engaged in cultural appropriation. The intent of an artist, for example, is largely irrelevant when scholarly emphasis is placed on structures of power within which artists are situated, and the larger implications appropriation has for the perpetuation of existing relations of power (c.f. Hart, 1997; Zaff & Rao, 2008; hooks, 1992). Rather than centering my analysis on intent, I concentrate on *intentionality*. With this focus, I call attention to a pre-reflective orientation to the world that underlies and compels appropriative acts among privileged subjects. When members of a dominant cultural group assume the right to use, to take, or possess the expressive practices of those marked as culturally other, they are guided by habitual perception of the other as described above. As we have seen in chapter three, these habitual perceptions ground an orientation in and towards the world that is “ontologically expansive”. Acts of cultural appropriation, I argue, express the uninhibited intentionality of ontological expansiveness, the “I can” that is adopted as the norm of being in the world for dominant privileged (white Western) subjects. I show the ease with which members of dominant cultural groups exercise their “right” to possess and claim mastery over the expressive practices of cultural groups marked as Other.

Johnathan Hart (1997) argues that cultural appropriation occurs “when a member of one [Subject/dominant/colonizing] culture takes a cultural practice or theory of a member of another culture [Other/colonized] *as if it were his or her own or as if the right of*

possession should not be questioned or contested” [emphasis added] (138). This description is revealing.¹⁰⁷ First, it indicates that appropriation is not simply a matter of being “influenced” by one’s experience of cultural difference. Rather, it involves an active making of one’s own. Hart’s description gestures to an important facet of what occurs in this process, namely that the dominant subject proceeds without hesitation. As Hart describes it, the action of appropriation occurs “as if it were his or her own”. The style of “taking” then, is characterized by the fact that it occurs with *ease*. This suggests an uninhibited manner of approach; one that is not burdened by doubt and does not shrink behind insecurity or uncertainty; an uninhibited movement that unwaveringly unites intention with action.

Shannon Sullivan’s concept of ontological expansiveness can be used to explore the dynamics of white embodiment in the context of cultural appropriation. As ontologically expansive, “white people tend to act and think as if all spaces – whether geographical, psychological, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily, or otherwise [i.e. artistic] – are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish” (Sullivan, 2006, 10). Here, Sullivan outlines a sense of bodily freedom, autonomy and entitlement. She describes a particular orientation towards the world where one is emboldened by the belief that they are inherently and unquestioningly free to move confidently through a variety of different spaces. One’s own actions are uninhibited, unobstructed, and able to unfold fluidly. This speaks to the very manner of one’s engagement in the world; it

¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that possession forms the basis for property ownership in Western contexts (C.f Rose, 1985). This is significant because, as Harris (1993) argues, there is an intimate connection between conceptions of racial identity and property. Indeed, Harris (1993) contends that rights in property are “contingent on, intertwined with, and conflated with race” (1714). Although Harris is speaking specifically to the conditions of chattel slavery and the occupation of Native land, her observations are relevant for a broader understanding of appropriation. As Harris (1993) explains, “possession – the act necessary to lay the basis for rights and property – was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness – that which whites alone possess- is valuable and is property” (1721). The racialized dynamics of property inform the way that the law recognises and enforces rights to property, and also works to justify the seizure, possession and occupation of labour, land, as well as cultural objects.

captures the mode of one's embodied being and the expansive constitution of one's world. Recall, that Sullivan defines ontological expansiveness as the tendency "of assuming and acting as if any and all spaces – geographical, psychological, cultural, linguistic or whatever – are rightfully available to and open for white people to enter into whenever they like" (Sullivan, 2014, 20). This expresses "a particular co-constitutive relationship between self and environment, in which the self assumes that it can and should have total mastery over its environment" (Sullivan, 2006, 10). As I have shown, this sense of mastery is made manifest in and through an uninhibited movement, or a sense of ease. Merleau-Ponty positions intentionality in motility, or the bodily sense of "I can." The "I can" of the body is precisely the experience of harmony between intention and action, projecting "the aim to be accomplished and connects the body's motion towards that end in an unbroken directedness" (Young, 2005, 146). Of course, because the "I can" expresses a rationality between self and world, it reflects the conditions of the world as imposed limits on one's sense of intentional action. This point is significant because of the way that social norms govern how one perceives their own possibilities of engagement in the world. The expansiveness that animates white bodies encapsulates a style of being in and towards the world that is unencumbered and reflects a sense of *ease*.

The second part of Hart's description ("as if the right of possession should not be questioned or contested") also emphasizes the sense of ease with which dominant subjects take up the expressive practices of cultural Others (1997, 138). As opposed to the racialized Other, who Ahmed (2017) describes as "being in question," the dominant white Western subject proceeds without question. As Ahmed (2017) explains, to be questioned, to be questionable, is a way of being told you do not belong, are not entitled to move into and take up space in the world (124). Marginalized subjects are rendered questionable, "as someone who can be questioned, as someone who should be willing to receive a question" (Ahmed, 2017, 117). The dominant subject, on the other hand, assumes belongingness, moves without the threat of being in question. This description gestures toward an unencumbered way of being in the world, which aligns appropriation with the uninhibited, or ontologically expansive, intentionality that characterizes

privilege. While I have shown that stereotypes and misrepresentations are grounded in an “I cannot”, here I show that cultural appropriation is also closely tied to the unobstructed and expansive “I can” of white privilege which sees itself as entitled to all spaces and does not hesitate to occupy them.

4.3.3 “The Only Radha”: Ontological Expansiveness in American Modern Dance

Salley Banes (1998) asserts that “modern dance itself was born at the turn of the century, in a crucible of hybridity” (260). The modernist imperative to “make it new,” she continues, was the catalyst for increasing cross-cultural encounters in the performing arts (Banes, 1998, 258). Many modern dancers and choreographers imitated the dance styles of other cultures or combined them with Western expressive styles, while “wrapping their resulting choreography in the discourse of the modern and the artistic” (Kraut, 2016, 62). St. Denis’ choreographic works not only took on orientalist subjects or themes, but also abstracted elements of Indian dance technique. There is agreement among dance scholars that St. Denis was more than “influenced by” Indian dance techniques. St. Denis’ career featured many unequal collaborations with visiting performers from India, whose dances (along with the dancers of many other Asian cultures) she would come to appropriate and reconfigure through her own framework.

The gendered and racial dimensions of modern dance do not operate in tandem. Rather they are inextricably linked, with each being a constituent component of the other. In fact, “differentiating themselves from racialized, sexualized dancing bodies is precisely what enables these women to gain legitimacy for themselves as artists (rather than objects) on the theatrical stage” (Kraut, 2016, 45). The otherness of Indian dance became a resource for these women, invoking culturally available categories of the Other allowed for them to advance their own interests and carve out unique positions for themselves as independent artists. These practices gesture to recent critiques of the ways in which Western women colluded with imperial practices and policies, challenging the view that colonialism was an exclusively masculine enterprise. Renia Lewis explores

this in *Gendering Orientalism*, where she expands Said's understanding of Orientalism to demonstrate the different ways women were complicit in cultural imperialism. Lewis concentrates specifically on women artists who attain greater acclaim through their "involvement in imperial cultural production" (1996, 2). Imperialism, she concludes, "played a role in the very construction of professional and creative opportunities for European Women" (Lewis, 1996, 3). This is exemplified by long and largely unquestioned history of white Western women appropriating elements of Indian dance in their performance repertoire in order to advance their own creative interests and positions. In this way, the ontological expansiveness of whiteness, directly affected how Indian dance circulated, and white Western female dancers became the privileged consumers and interpreters of "Oriental dance".

It is significant that St. Denis sought choreographic copyright for *Radha*. Of course, this required her to declare herself the *sole author* of this piece. In a letter to the editor of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* entitled "The Only Radha", St. Denis proclaims herself the "originator of a series of Hindoo dances" (1906, 8). The letter concludes with St. Denis stating that "mine is the 'real and only' 'Radha'" (St. Denis, 1906, 8). This claim of authorial status is significant because it suggests mastery and ownership, but also marks her distinction from the Indian dancers who remained unnamed and unentitled (c.f. Kraut, 2015). However, her authorial status and copyright claim would come under attack again in 1909, when Mohammed Ismail sued St. Denis alleging that he had originated and taught the material for *Radha* and that she owed him money for services rendered. Unsurprisingly, St. Denis entered a denial in the suit, countering that she "had danced her Oriental dances long before she ever saw him" (Kraut, 2015, 89). Srinivasan proposes that Ismail's legal action against St. Denis be understood as a "performative gesture" that serves to "highlight the labour that otherwise remains unacknowledged by St. Denis" (Srinivasan, 2012, 84). Certainly, St. Denis was not alone in taking advantage of the popularity of Orientalist trends on both side of the Atlantic. But, as Kraut (2015) points out "it was precisely *the ease* with which dances that were of this vogue circulated across different bodies – both brown and white – that made asserts of possessing the "real and only" *Radha*... so meaningful" (87 [emphasis added]).

Evidently, the empowering potential of modern dance is limited to certain bodies, certain classes, and certain subjectivities, since in this context of empowerment can only be understood as such by fixing the identity of the female Indian dancer as the exotic Other. White Western modern dancers relied on essentialized racial distinctions between their own universal artistry and the putatively “primitive” dance practices of non-white subjects, while also *claiming the right to* represent those subjects in their choreography. Consequently, the subversive and empowering nature of their choreographies must be understood alongside the fact that it is only intelligible because of its reference to the “Other”, namely the racialized figure of the female Indian dancer. This not only shows up relations of power, but speaks to a pre-reflective style of comportment animating the lived bodies of those with social privilege (here white western women). Acts of cultural appropriation reflect the unobstructed bodily intentionality that reaches towards cultural difference without hesitation. Investigating the appropriation of Indian dance by white Western modern dancers provides another entry into understanding how ontological expansiveness takes hold in white bodies as a habit of perception.

4.4 Living History

In this chapter, I have turned to the past of dance to understand the implication of its performance in the present and reflect on own participation in Bharatanatyam. Reflecting on Bharatanatyam’s complex history in this way has challenged me to consider how these histories continue to be negotiated through living bodies in the present. I began by examining how British colonialism impacted dance in India. Tracing the suppression of the *devadasis* and their dance practices under colonial rule, I demonstrated that their dance practices became subject to the contradictory forces of reform and revival. In the next two sections of the chapter, I have explored how Merleau-Ponty’s work on habit and intentionality might lend insight into the perception of cultural stereotypes and the sense of mastery that defines acts of cultural appropriation. Drawing on historical literature, I demonstrated that habit plays an important role in grounding a habitual orientation towards the figure of the Indian dancer, by linking what is perceived as a

racialized exotic other (here the figure of the female Indian dancer) by the dominant (white Western) subject, to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body. Next, I explored the relationship between cultural appropriation and ontological expansiveness. I have shown that cultural appropriation expresses distinctive *style* of pre-reflective movement characterized by inhibition and ease.

An important problem for feminist theory and politics is to find ways of understanding each other's differences without assimilating, reducing, or explaining those differences away. These questions are all the more significant in this contemporary moment, where we are negotiating new contexts of cultural and creative exchange. However, if these new contexts are to broaden the possibilities of communication across difference, they must not only prompt one to think differently about the other, but about one's self as well. Phenomenologically, accounts of the past are understood as being bound to the present. One can only approach history from the position of the present. However, the past is not just passively given; we take it up. As Merleau-Ponty explains, "the distant past, of course, also has its temporal order and a temporal position in relation to my present, but only insofar as it itself has been present... insofar as it has been carried forward until now" (PhP, 438). What is significant to me is the ethical imperative that Merleau-Ponty identifies with this way of understanding history. History, he maintains, "adds to my personal obligations the obligation to understand situations other than my own and to create a path between my life and the lives of others" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 86). The contingency of the present ensures that the world need not be as it is, and shows us the importance of our own choices and actions.

It is naive to say that we might will away the forces of violent histories of domination simply by recognising their force. To take account for one's own situation in the broad sense, not simply the situation one creates from themselves through a series of actions, "one must consider the history into which one is born" (Lee, 2014, 248). The past does not exist as an inert weight. Rather, it is determined by the way it is taken up in the present. In other words, what is important is how we *respond* to the past/history. It is my ethical responsibility to reckon with the ways histories of colonial violence have played

out through Bharatanatyam, even though I am not directly complicit in creating these contexts, since these histories of injustice are a central component of creating a contemporary social situation in which my white body confers privilege simply by being white.

Slowing Down, Looking Back

In reflecting on dancing, while sitting and writing, I am aware of how stiff my body is. When there are long stretches between times when I get to dance, I can feel myself become rusty. Like a hinge, I do not move into the dance as easily. This illustrates an important active component of habit; habits, as I stated in chapter one, are *held* not simple passively acquired. Indeed, Casey (2013) suggests that “if sedimentation is to be conceived as a precipitation of the past into the present, it is an active precipitation *actively* maintained” (214) [emphasis added]. I cannot help but reflect on how this more active interpretation of habit as held raises questions concerning responsibility. In many respects, this project has been about taking responsibility for the *situation* I find myself in. Engaging with Bharatanatyam has made me think about the horizons that constitute one’s situation. Attending to these horizons compels an ethical responsibility to change one’s own behavior. However, it would seem that individuals with social privilege are easily persuaded by the argument that they should not be held accountable to, or responsible for, situations not of their making. Typically, ascribing responsibility is framed around establishing guilt or fault for harm (Kruks, 2005). This perspective draws a causal connection between the actions of an individual or collective entity (such as a corporation), and a set of circumstances. Although, this way of understanding responsibility is useful in many contexts, it limits responsibility for a given situation to only those consequences of one’s own immediate personal decisions and acts within one’s own lifetime. This overlooks the multiple horizons that collectively constitute a given situation in the present. As I have shown, social meanings of colonial violence are not only embedded within broader social structural situations (in terms of institutions and laws) conscious, and unconscious beliefs and prejudices, they are also sedimented corporeally into the very ways in which one lives, in bodily movement. In what follows, I conclude by summarizing the project, and then suggest different avenues for further research.

In chapter one, I began by contextualizing the phenomenological approach that I take up in relation to contemporary critical research on dance. Although discursive approaches to

dance have lent important insight into the social and cultural politics of dance, I showed that they tend to abstract dance from the dancing body itself. As I have argued, phenomenology is better suited to the study of dance as an embodied practice that is *lived* and gives priority to articulating self-movement. Given this, I have shown that Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology offers a valuable alternative to discursive approaches to dance. This was followed by a detailed account of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of habit as enabling a pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility in and towards the world. I used Merleau-Ponty's understanding of habit, the body schema, and sedimentation to articulate the experiential phenomenon of flow while dancing, which established the way that habits enable pre-reflective bodily movement. This formed the theoretical foundation for remaining chapters.

In chapter two, I shifted my attention to how we might access the generativity of habit. Taking up dance as a method of inquiry, I show how these habitual structures that are latent in our bodies can be resedimented through movement. Dancers' skills involve cultivating a heightened sense of bodily awareness and a sensitivity to the flow of their own movement. Dancers' are actively involved in embodied explorations of habitual movement and how it "might be optimised, modified, and changed" (Ravn, 2017, 59) (C.f. Ravn, 2017; Damkjaer, 2015; Ingerslev, 2013; Legrand and Ravn, 2009). This ability to register, disrupt and confront their own habitual dancing body is unique. Given this, I explored how learning Bharatanatyam disrupted my habitual movement in the world. Taking up this new dance style brought the pre-reflective styles of comportment *already* residing in my habitual dancing body to the forefront of my awareness. Learning Bharatanatyam required me to actively resist my inclinations towards familiar patterns of comportment. Relying on the insights revealed through this experience, I next identified two experiential phenomena central to the process of resedimenting habitual movement: disorientation and hesitation. I showed that by disrupting one's sense of bodily spatiality, experiences of disorientation disrupt the ease, immediacy, and flow of pre-reflective movement. Next, I demonstrated that the feeling of *delay* arising in moments of hesitation disturbs one's habitual sense of temporality. As I have argued, these experiences are significant because they can open the possibility for double

consciousness, which is a crucial tool for grounding critical reflection. The phenomenological analysis I developed in this chapter set up my investigation of the habitual movement in the context of white privilege in chapter three.

Structural injustice not only creates victims of injustice, but also privileged subjects who benefit as a consequence of these structures. Chapter three extends my findings from chapter two to the context of racial inequality and white privilege. Building off the account of habit given in chapter two, I show that white privilege is lived “right here” in the folds and flesh of my body, guiding my perception and binding my intentions through action. This chapter demonstrated that the movement of white individuals is underlined by an expansiveness that is expressed through a pre-reflective style of bodily comportment and motility characterized by *momentum*, which captures an *ease* of movement. Momentum is *felt* as a style of comportment and motility that is unencumbered and uninhibited. This feeling of momentum captures the sense in which white bodies tend not to hesitate as they engage in intentional action. By framing whiteness in terms of habitual perception whiteness is positioned as a kind of doing, rather than a kind of being. This means that there is potential for whiteness to be taken up differently and produce different effects. My goal when investigating this momentum that takes hold in white bodies as a habit of perception has been to explore how we might replace this bad habit with a better one. Building on the role that disorientation and hesitation play in re-sedimented patterns of movement, I have argued that these experiences explicitly disrupt the sense of ease that normally animates white bodies as they move in and towards the world, and in so doing bring the pre-reflective dynamics of white privilege into appearance. I have shown that these experiences have potential for grounding white double consciousness.

I am not the first white Western woman to take up Indian dance practices as a vehicle to explore questions of transformation and it is important to understand how histories of domination are implicated in my own engagement with Bharatanatyam. The contemporary practice of dancing Bharatanatyam reflects a long and complicated history of entanglements with colonial violence. Framed as an exercise in double consciousness,

in my final chapter I reckoned with these histories. I traced the suppression of the *devadasis* under British colonial rule and demonstrated the way their dance practices became subject to contradictory forces of reform and revival. This provided the needed historical context to analyze the workings of orientalism and racialization in the proliferation of the figure of the female Indian dancer as a cultural stereotype. Drawing on historical literature, I showed that the figure of the female Indian dancer was an important site of European and North American cultural production which was widely consumed as an Orientalist fantasy. Next I explored the role of habit in the perception and perpetuation this cultural stereotype, specifically by connecting what is perceived as a racialized exotic other (here the figure of the female Indian dancer) to the dominant (white Western) subject, to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body. This led into a discussion of cultural appropriation as a distinctive *style* of pre-reflective movement. I examined the role that the appropriation of Indian dance played within the American modern dance tradition and argued that the sense of mastery that defines acts of cultural appropriation is made manifest in and through uninhibited movement in and towards the world. Given this, I argued that acts of cultural appropriation express the uninhibited intentionality of ontological expansiveness, the “I can” that is adopted as the norm of being in the world for dominant privileged (white Western) subjects.

One of the significant implications of this work, and that has sometimes been implicit throughout, is the value of dance as a method of inquiry. I have taken up dance in a unique way, showing the richness of bodily knowledge gathered through creative embodied practice. I took on a corporeal commitment, first by lending epistemic privilege to the living dancing body, trusting in the knowledge beneath my skin and between my toes, and second in a very practical sense, through my own bodily labour: tired muscles, sweating, straining, panting, gasping. Priya Srinivasan (2012) evokes the image of a sweating sari as metonym for the “dancing body as labour” (xi). She describes how the illusion of dance as effortless is undone by the sweat that exposes the exhaustion of performing an *adavu* in three different speeds: “the body oozes our inside juices onto the cotton or silk fabric of the sari, and the sky blue, leafy green, or sunset orange with *ikat* borders darken with our fluids” (xi). Taking up Bharatanatyam revealed to me the depth

of knowledge in sweat, and how to open up and expand this knowledge in my dancing feet. What this also revealed, however, was the disciplinary constraints imposed within and by academia. It is a struggle to make the knowledge in my dancing feet, and the insights into embodied existence they can reveal, legible in this context. I learned this through hesitation, by doubting myself. “I must be wrong, no one else around me is doing this...” But, as I have shown, if we take the phenomenology of embodiment seriously, there is real value in exploring, and attempting to understand, the knowledge within our bodies as we move in and toward the world. This is perhaps exemplified by examining individuals with bodily expertise—dancers, athletes, musicians, bakers, etc.—whose habitual modes of relating to their worlds reveal deep and extensive structures of knowledge that sometimes reach back across generations; knowledge that is not transmitted through text, or documentation, but through intercorporeal relationships expressing different ways of being in the world.

As with all projects, this one has developed its own momentum, bringing forth its own questions. The focus of my project has been on self-movement, and how individuals can slow the momentum of habitual whiteness. As such, I’ve largely explored the subjective dimensions of habit, movement, and racializing perception. While Merleau-Ponty’s work is often characterized in terms of its contributions to an understanding of embodied subjectivity, one of the crucial insights of his later works is the significant chiasmic relations between subjects that constitute subjectivity. This is to say that subjectivity—both in terms of one’s experiences and one’s sense of self is constituted in part by its relation to others. As such, broadening the account I provided of the pre-reflective bodily dimensions of dance by incorporating and explicating the intersubjective dimensions of dance may lend further insights. While it has been beyond the scope of this present project, it would certainly be a valuable avenue for further research. For example, as I mentioned briefly in chapter two, I think one obvious next direction to take would be to incorporate the voices and perspectives of other dancers in my Bharatanatyam class in to my analysis. As indicated, this project has become clearer little by little over time and from within my own engagement with the dance style itself. Although interviews provide a rich source for understanding embodied experience I chose to limit the scope of this

project to focus on self-movement. I feel that insights gained from formal and informal semi-structured interviews with other dancers, for example, might allow me expand my analysis in different directions and explore more in-depth the important intersubjective dimensions of dance and their implications for slowing the momentum of habit and resedimenting new habits.

Perhaps building off these thoughts of intersubjectivity and the individual, it's important to note that feminist analyses of privilege, admittedly including the account that I have given here, tend to extend an individualism that feminist theory has long been suspicious of. Structures of power and privilege are systemic and structural. Many feminist scholars have demonstrated the ways that structural inequalities situate individuals within society differently. Many have shown the multiple ways that power distributes material resources, knowledge, respect, differentially along various axes of oppression (race, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, class). However, it is notable that often when feminists, particularly white feminists, come to reflect on their own privilege, the approach often goes in a different direction. The focus changes to the individual. This reality pulls my thought in two directions. First, given that identity is intersectional, the focus on the individual, especially when discussing phenomenology, can often have the unintended consequence of overshadowing or even erasing the experiences of other individuals living at different intersections of identity. For example, I have focused largely on my own experience learning a new form of dance. Yet, as an able-bodied white woman, my experiences will likely vary in important ways relative to a different intersectional identity. The experiences of people with disabilities may not line up with my own experiences. This is significant both in terms of providing an accurate phenomenology of human experience, and in terms of feminist concerns with social justice and equality. As such, expanding my account beyond the individual to incorporate the experiences of others would serve to bolster and deepen the phenomenology as well as make this work more consistent with the broader feminist projects of which it is a part.

Second, Kruks (2005) observes that in these contexts, privilege generally “ceases to be thought about as structural” and instead is imagined as “the personal passion of an

autonomous self” (181). Given this, I find myself retuning to questions surrounding double consciousness and the efficacy of self-reflexivity. While double consciousness is useful for grounding critical reflexivity, political action is not a guaranteed outcome of self-reflexivity. If we maintain that a proactive position against racism requires political action, and self-reflexivity is not a productive means to this end, then self-reflexivity and double consciousness are only nominally useful for anti-racist projects (Srivastava, 2005, 543). This realization can often result in the so-called “white paralysis” in which white individuals, understanding the impact and cost of their privilege, choose not to speak or act lest they contribute further to the perpetuation of structural oppression. In addressing this problem, it’s first worth noting the unfortunate ableist language used to articulate the otherwise significant issue of the white individual’s either voluntary or implicit withdrawal of agency. Importantly, this perceived cessation of momentum on the part of the white individual is also to a certain extent illusory. This is to say that the structures that support the institutions of white privilege continue to exist and push forward the projects of white individuals in those same trajectories so long as white individuals do not try to move forward and change those trajectories themselves.

Given this, I am left to question what might a more political pursuit of double consciousness look like? I do not think there is a straightforward answer to this question. Yet, I believe that it has been important to implicate myself throughout this project. I have turned to a creative embodied practice in order to explore ways of moving out of so-called white paralysis, since it not productive for anyone. In this way, this project is philosophical, political, and personal. Despite these criticisms, the project I have developed—providing an embodied articulation of dance, exploring complicity and questions of responsibility—have been with the goal of finding creative ways of *moving forward*.

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Young, Iris Marion. (2005). *On Female Embodied Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ziff, Bruce, & Rao, Pratima. (1997). *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

- 2019 **PhD**, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research,
University of Western Ontario (UWO)
Supervisor: Helen Fielding
- 2012 **Master of Arts**, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist
Research, UWO
Supervisor: Kim Verwaayen
- 2010 **Master of Arts**, Department Religious Studies, Queen's University
Supervisor: Siphwe Dube
- 2009 **Honours Bachelor of Arts**, Religious Studies/Social and Cultural
Anthropology, University of Toronto,

HONOURS AND AWARDS

- 2016 *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*
2015 *Ontario Graduate Scholarship*
2012 *UWO Dean's Entrance Scholarship, UWO*
2008 *Regents In-Course Scholarship, University of Toronto*

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Feminist Phenomenology, Embodiment, Feminism, Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty,
Critical Race Studies, Queer Theory, Dance Studies, Arts Based Research

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Jan 2018 – **Teaching Assistant**, *Living a Just Life in an Unjust World*, King's
University.
May 2018
- Sept 2015 – **Course Instructor**, *Dance and Embodiment*, UWO
December 2015 Design course topics, themes, objectives, assignments, and
readings. prepare and deliver weekly lecture materials, facilitate
discussion, grade assignments. Motivate students to develop critical
thinking skills.
- Sept. 2014– **Teaching Assistant**, *Sexual Subjects*, UWO

- Apr. 2015 Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.
- Jan. 2014–
Apr. 2014 **Teaching Assistant**, *Women and Popular Culture: Garbo to Gaga*, UWO
Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.
- Sept. 2013–
Dec. 2013 **Teaching Assistant**, *Feminist Theory*, UWO,
Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.
- Sept. 2012–
Apr. 2013 **Teaching Assistant**, *Introduction to Women's Studies*, UWO
Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.
- Sept. 2011–
Apr. 2012 **Teaching Assistant**, *Introduction to Women's Studies*, UWO
Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.
- Sept. 2009 –
Apr. 2010 **Teaching Assistant**, *Contemporary Problems in Religion and Culture*, Queen's University
Facilitate discussion, answer questions, clarify course material, grade assignments, essays, exams, tests, and motivate students to develop critical thinking skills.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

REFEREED CONTRIBUTIONS

- (R)** June, 2017 “Slowing the Momentum of Habitual Whiteness”
Presented at the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (EPTC), in conjunction with the annual Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Social Sciences and Humanities, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario.
- (R)** October 2015 “Exploring Whiteness as a Habit of Perception”
Presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of *The International Merleau-Ponty Circle*, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Massachusetts.
- (R)** November 2014 “Re-Opening Time Through the Body: An Exploration of Embodied Memory in Katrina McPherson’s *There is a Place*”

Presented at the national conference hosted by the *American Society for Theatre Research*, Baltimore

(R) June 2014 “Re-imagining Female Fissured Flesh: Transgressing Bodily Boundaries through Melody”

Presented at the *Qualitative Analysis Conference: The Social Construction of Boundaries: Creating, Maintaining, Transcending and Re-Constituting Boundaries*, Brescia University College at Western University, Ontario

(R) April 2014 “Queering Space and Time Through Dance: Exploring Queer Moments, Movement and Encounters in Wim Wenders’ *Pina*”

Presented at the national conference hosted by the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, Chicago

(R) September 2013 “Unraveling the Dancing Body: Exploring Rhetorics of Race in Tango”

Presented at the Annual Feminism and Rhetorics Conference: *Links: Rhetorics, Feminisms and Global Communities*, Stanford University, California

(R) January 2011 “Music and Mimesis: Examining Women’s Resistance in Medieval Christian Mysticism”

Presented at the *Guerrilla Grads: Alternative Histories Conference*, University of Guelph

NON-REFEREED CONTRIBUTIONS

(N-R) October 2015 “Breaking Bad Habits: Shifting the Momentum of Habitual Whiteness”

Presented at *Women’s Studies and Feminist Research Graduate Student Symposiums* The University of Western Ontario

(N-R) November 2014 “Rupturing Phenomenal Space in Wim Wender’s *Pina*”

Presented at *Women’s Studies and Feminist Research Graduate Student Symposiums* The University of Western Ontario.

(N-R) April 2013 “Just a Spoonful of Queer: A Reparative Exploration of Queer Temporality in *Mary Poppins*”

Presented at *Queer Research Day*, The University of Western Ontario.

RECENT PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE

March. 2017 London Dance Festival – 2017 Spring Showcase

March. 2017 Caledonia Meets Calcutta – An Evening of Music and Dance, Kings University College

Feb. 2017 “Indo-Celtic Acoustic Music and Dance,” 14th Annual Kings

Cultural Festival, Kings University College

Feb. 2017 “Dance as She is Spoke: East Indian Classical Dance,” 14th Annual Kings Cultural Festival, Kings University College

Oct. 2016 Dance at Eldon House: London Cultural Days

ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

Sept. 2014 – present WSFR peer mentor

Sept. 2014 – present Founding member of the Women’s Studies Graduate Student Collective

Sept. 2014 – Graduate Student Representative on the WSFR Graduate Committee

Apr. 2015

Jan. 2013 – Organization Committee for the "Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology Conference" (SSHRC funded), UWO

May. 2013 Volunteer Coordinator for the "Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology Conference" (SSHRC funded), UWO

Sept. 2009 – Graduate Representative for the General Research Ethics Board (GREB)
Aug. 2010 Religious Studies Department, Queen’s University