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The Choreopolitics of Liberation and Decolonization

Harrison M. Goodall III
Pomona College

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Harrison Goodall

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Advisor: Giovanni Ortega

Readers:
Giovanni Ortega
Anthony Shay
Joyce Lu

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For those who lost their lives to AIDS
For anyone who has ever been deemed a social pariah
For all those who got made fun of at recess because they put their hands on their hips a little differently than the other boys

Introduction

Throughout history, dance has been used a vehicle for unification, control and revolution. The power of the moving body transcends ideological differences, allowing dancers to tap into the humanity of their audience members. The ability of dance to address universal themes of loss, hatred, oppression, longing and identity make it a powerful social and political tool, as it is capable of changing a observers' viewpoint and opinions through speaking to their heart, rather than their mind.

Many governments have realized the power of dance as an art form, which has led to laws banning dancing in some countries and led others to use dance as a tool of social repression or a means of ideological indoctrination. During his presidency, Mobutu See Seko of the Democratic Republic of the Congo instituted a mandatory dance form called *Animation Politique.*[1] This dance form embodied Zairian culture, and was comprised of an amalgamation of dance moves from various traditional dance styles across the country. Completion of the dance was required at every public event, as well as each morning when the flag was raised in different cities across the country. Refusing to dance resulted in harsh punishment, and most citizens were scared into compliance. The goal of this dance form was to forge a national identity and animate Mobutu's political vision of the country.[2] Much like *Animation Politique*, the *Minzu Wudao* in Taiwan was used to control and unify Taiwanese citizens.[3] The *Minzu Wudao* is a traditional Chinese ethnic dance that was turned into a tool of political propaganda and political warfare by the Chinese Nationalist Government. The government used the dance as a way to spread the anti-communist agenda through the country of Taiwan, while also introducing

elements of Chinese Nationalism to the island.[4] Both of these dance forms controlled the citizens of these countries in a very effective manner, yet despite their efficacy in gaining control, they were not successful in forging a unified national identity.

As we will see throughout the following discussion, despite these two examples two the contrary, dance can be used as a very powerful tool of unification. A topic featured in the following thesis is how dance was used as a community-building tool for the gay community during the late 1970s and 80s and HIV/AIDS epidemic within the U.S. The necessary component in the use of dance to bring people together as a community or nation in a liberating way is that people must willfully choose to engage with the dance form. When this choice arises out a necessity to change current social or political circumstances, dance can lead to profound sociopolitical change, as seen in the case of Irish Step Dancing. Step dancing within Irish communities served as means to establish an Irish national identity, breaking away from their British colonizers artistically and socially.[5]

As in the case of Irish Step dancing and dance in the Disco era, dancing that establishes a sense of community is often innately revolutionary in nature. Both of these dance movements were revolutionary in that they created new social and political groups that broke with hegemonic culture. As with most revolutionary mediums, there is frequently a cost in participating in revolutionary dance movements. This risk of dance can be seen clearly in Iran and other Islamic countries that have moral laws against dancing, specifically with the opposite sex. In Iran, the simple act of moving one's body can constitute an act of rebellion. The *Komiteh*, or moral police use strict punishment to discipline dancing citizens, yet

despite the risk, many citizens have rebelled against the Islamic political regime by exercising their right to use their own bodies in whatever way they chose.[6] Many revolutions that use dance as a medium for change involve fighting for the basic human right to move one's body in whichever way one wants, a principle that will surface in the following discussion of the male dancing body. Before delving into discussions of dance revolutions in 20th century America, it is imperative to understand that the topic of dance as revolutionary medium is a global conversation that stems back hundreds of years. Various communities around the world have successfully utilized dance to highlight human rights issues and revolt against the government or social structures in place within their society. From Zulu youth using dancing as way to build community to resist apartheid law to the *Barra Rojo* Dance Company using their bodies to shine a light at the harsh reality of war and destruction throughout Latin America, it becomes clear that dance is a universal practice.[7]

The following discussion of masculinity and effeminacy in dance, as well as dance during the AIDS epidemic, focus on issues that are extremely relevant to American Culture today. It is important to note that dance has served a social and community centered role in many societies for thousands of years, and many community based danced forms can still be seen across Africa and Asia today. While there is a rich history of dance and revolutionary dance throughout the course of history, I chose to focuses on the topic of effeminacy as effeminate tendencies have been stigmatized in many cultures for thousands of years in many cultures from the ancient Greeks to modern U.S. society, resulting in fascinating social constructions

and trends governing masculinity. These trends subtly dictate the way men, especially queer men interact with society. In my own artistic journey I have seen first hand the ways in which society colonizes our bodies as citizens, activists and artists. Through this exploration I intend to show that in order to create impactful decolonizng work, it is necessary to understand the power and social structures governing our actions. As an artist I have begun to realize the ways in which concepts of masculinity and the stigma of effeminacy dictate my own art creation. The following discussion is an attempt to deconstruct the stigma of effeminacy, and study past artists who have broken the mold of "proper" masculinity, revolutionizing the dance world as well as American culture. Through the study of these artists, I hope to give readers the knowledge to successfully identify systems of oppression that affect the way they live, move and create, so that they can actively work against the systems and in time destroy them.

Dance during the AIDS epidemic serves as an interesting case study showing the ways in which dance can be effectively used as a catalytic force for revolution. Dance during the AIDS epidemic used themes of effeminacy and queerness, concepts that forged a unified queer community during this time and constituted the backbone for the revolt that followed. The AIDS epidemic is a remarkable example of dance being used as a revolutionary medium as ample documentation allows us to link specific dances and artistic events to subsequent social and political change, reinforcing the idea that dance is powerful and catalytic medium.

Before delving into specific instances of revolutionary dance during the Disco era and AIDS epidemic, it is necessary to introduce the term choreopoltics,

which will be the corner stone of dance during this era. This term was first used by Andre Lepecki, inspired by Hannah Arendt's quotation "we have arrived in a situation where we do not know- at least not yet- how to move politically."[8] Lepecki states that choreopolticis consist of "choreography as a planned, dissensual, and nonpoliced disposition of motions and bodies becomes the condition of possibility for the political to emerge."[9] Thus this concept introduces the idea that choreography and dance can not only be political in nature, but also create new social and political frontiers. In his examination of choreopolice and choreopolitics Lepecki cites riots and police brutality as forms of choreopolitics, pushing the boundaries of what constitutes dance and choreography. This term blurs the line between art and activism, making it the perfect term to apply to dance during this tumultuous time of American history.

Chapter 1 – The Stigma and Strength of Effeminacy

"Male Dominance in dance has not led to an increase in male dancers, possibly because it conforms to, rather than challenges the very structures that brought about the scarcity in the first place"

–John Crawford, 1994[10]

The Male Dancer

Gender is a complex issue that has inexorably shaped the development of every artistic and academic field. Patriarchal structures have given rise to gendered expectations and archetypes enforcing an ideal standard of masculinity, which is especially prevalent within Western society. When examining the role of gender and gender expression within the dance world it soon becomes clear that shifts in public opinion on gender throughout the past five hundred years have clearly been expressed onstage. The history of the male dancer serves as a litmus test of societal views and the ways in which different social movements involving gender equality, sexuality and freedom of expression were both supported and rebuked in performance.

For thousands of years dancing mostly took place in small-scale social settings, where males and females would participate to celebrate, mourn, entertain or build community. Rome and Greece sponsored many different dance forms, most notably the Pantomime Dancers of Ancient Rome.[11] These dancers performed controversial dance solos that were sexually ambiguous in style. The performers were subject to an immense amount of criticism and had no legal rights, although they had large amounts of clout as they slept with some of the most powerful figures in Roman society.[12] They were extremely controversial in their time, and the principles they embody are still controversial today as they embody masculinity's other half. It is this effeminate "other side" to masculinity that led male dancers to be forced off Western stages in subsequent years. However, up until the Seventeenth century, dance was considered to be a '"manly art" by European society.

During Louis XIV's reign he starred in many ballets, along with other male members of his court, reinforcing the idea that dance was akin to sport.[13] By the Eighteenth century, male dancers had largely disappeared from the stage. This disappearance was linked to the idea that it was the woman's job to look appealing on stage in order to entertain the male patrons, as well as the notion that men of proper masculine dispositions should not be openly expressive.[14]

Interestingly, the rise of the middle class led to the decline of male dancers, as the middle class associated aristocracy with effeminacy and thus the concept of the male dancer became an embarrassment to middle class society.[15] Thus the male gaze of these middle class patrons dictated what was put onstage and who performed it. It is in this time period that we start to see the rise of a rigid notion of what it means to be "properly masculine." While masculinity was, and still is only a social norm, notions of proper masculinity began to hold exceedingly large amounts of power in society. The court of public opinion reinforced ideas of what it means to be a "proper" man, which resulted in an ever-narrowing definition of masculinity that has shaped the behavior of men from the Middle Ages to today, and caused the relationship between men and dance to become unnecessarily tumultuous.

With the rise of the European middle class, and more stringent classifications on masculine behavior, the lack of male dancers on stage persisted into the Nineteenth century, a time when the Western world was racked with fears of degeneracy. The spread of colonization and discovery of new cultures in sub-Saharan Africa by Western powers pushed many Europeans to prove their moral superiority over these newly discovered "savages." Enslavement of many Africans

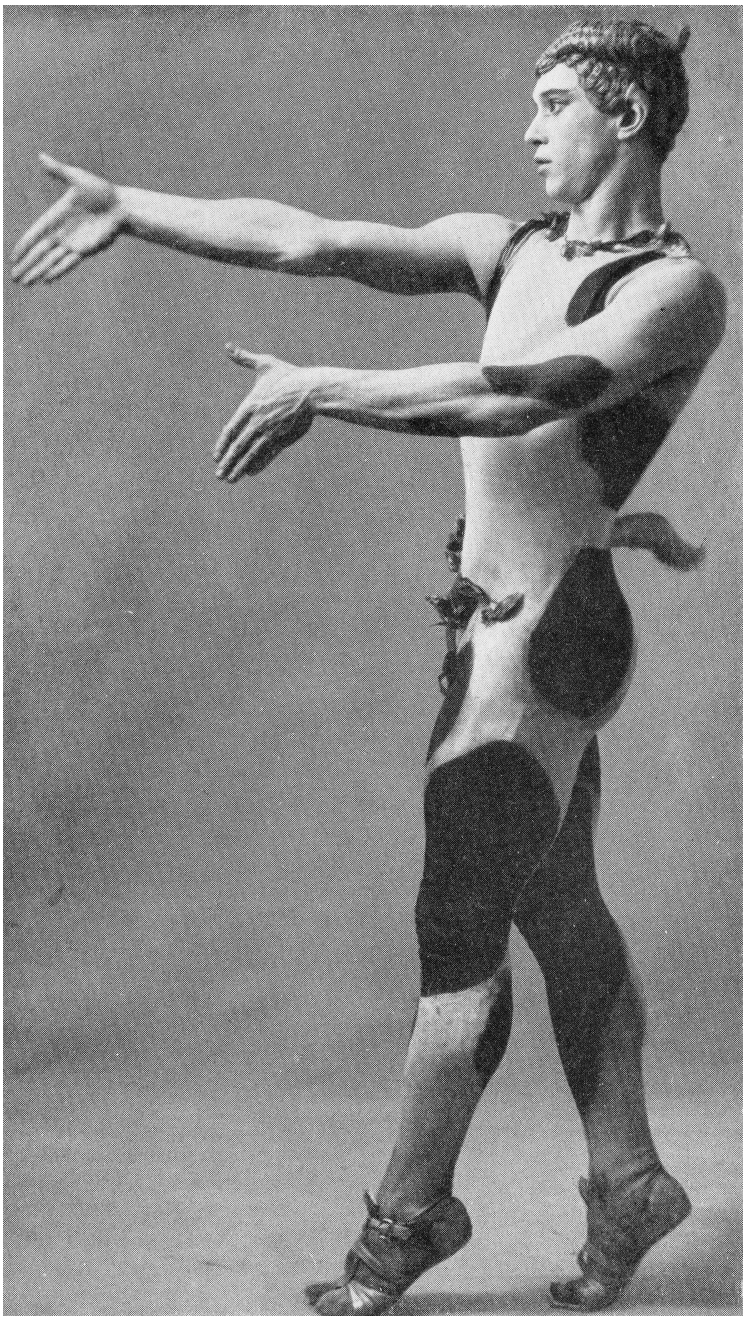
from western and central African tribes was one mechanism that the Europeans used to prove their superiority. Westerners also took the self proclaimed moral high-ground clinging to cultured and "civilized" norms in order to differentiate themselves from other native peoples by painting them as uncivilized and barbaric.[16]

This fear of moral degeneracy was compounded in Victorian England as homosexual behavior was drawn into the public spotlight, leading to increased fears of homosexuality. With the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 for homosexual offenses, the public was on high alert against any homosexual behaviors, which were viewed as unnatural and contrary to civilized norms.[17] Homosexuality was viewed as a disease, leading men to feel pressure to prove that they were still in touch with their "essential masculinity." Within a small period of time, "new" cultures were introduced to European society through colonization, and "new" sexual orientations were brought to the forefront of public consciousness through the behavior of famous public figures, like Wilde. Thus all of these changes within European society led to an identity crisis, leading Europeans to try and stay in touch with and cling to essential elements of their "civilized" culture. Thus foreign "savages" were used to prove the morality of western society, as aversion to homosexuality was used as a way to cement heterosexual identity and its link to masculinity within society.

When trying to parse why male dancers could not exist during this time it is imperative to take into account the power and social ramifications of the male gaze, a term coined and explored film scholar Laura Mulvey. Through the development of dance as an art form, the voyeuristic gaze of men supported many forms of dance. In

the words of the Art Historian John Berger "the ideal spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of woman is designed to flatter him."[18] The expectation of male flattery limited the content that could be put on stage, because it could not be directed at other men without compromising the male observer's masculinity and heterosexual identity. Thus men became afraid to watch other men on stage due to the public shaming of homosexuality by public figures such as President Teddy Roosevelt, who implored men within the U.S. to cling to their natural and instinctive masculine tendencies. In this climate male dancers almost entirely disappeared.[19]

While ballet was considered a place for idealized feminine images on Western stages during the Nineteenth century, men slowly started to break back into the world or ballet, and dance during the early part of the Twentieth century. The reintroduction of male dancer was largely due to *Les Ballets Russes,* a travelling ballet company based in Paris, which relied on the athleticism of male dancers in their pieces.[20] With the rise of dancers like Nijinsky, as well as the rise of a new Western middle class that led to increased artistic patronage of women and gay men, male dancers started to reappear in dance companies.[21]



Vaslav Nijinsky in the premier of *The Afternoon of the Faun*, Paris, 1912- *Courtesy of National Public Radio*

Vaslav Nijinsky was one of the first modernist choreographers, as he broke with ballet tradition opening the door to a new era of male dancers including Ted Shawn.[22] Shawn was one of the pioneers of this male dance movement within the U.S., and in many ways he set the stage for future of males in dance. Within his

dances he propagated the image of Victorian masculinity, showing of the hard muscular physique of his hand-selected dancers. The strength of Nijinsky's dancing opened the door to other notable male dancers and choreographers, most notably George Balanchine and Anton Dolin, who also played major roles in continuing to open up the dance field to men. While many of these male dancers were believed to have homosexual tendencies, they were able to stay in the public spotlight due to their extremely masculine appearance and the virility they exhibited in their dancing.

Before delving further into the development of the male dancer, it is important to define what I mean by "masculinity." While a full discussion of masculinity is beyond the scope of this thesis (see notes for additional resources[23],[24],[25],[26]), it is imperative to settle on a tentative definition for the following discussion. For this exploration I will primarily be referring to Western notions of masculinity (a comparison between Eastern and Western Masculinity appears in the last section of this chapter). Among many other things, masculinity entails maintaining and projecting a sense of control over one's appetites and desires, whether they are sexual, financial or social. This sense of control is at the heart of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.[27]

From a physical perspective, the use of the term masculinity can be roughly summarized in the Greek tradition by imagining Greek statues such as *Discobolus* in motion. Classical Western forms of masculinity such as this Greek sculpture encapsulate modern constraints of masculinity that many dancers have to work within or rebel against. I picked this sculpture as my physical manifestation of

masculinity as it encapsulates many properties of masculinity that were rebelled against by the dance community. Among many other things, masculinity can be fragile, rigid, narrowly defined, controlled, unexpressive, predominately physical and overwhelmingly idealized. This idealized masculine form creates a small window of opportunity for artists to reconfigure and re-conceptualize what it means to be a male in modern Western society.

Discobolus – *Courtsey of the British Museum*

These early male dancers opened the door to more modern male dancers such as Alvin Ailey, Bill T. Jones, Robert Joffery and Merce Cunningham. While these pioneers created space for more males within the dancing arena, they did very little

to expand the range of roles that men could play, and offered no challenges to typical conventions of masculinity. Despite the fact that many of these early male dancers exhibited homosexual behavior, they made sure not to let their sexual identities inform their dancing. Interestingly, through the course of trying to conceal their identities many of these dancers were driven to project hypermasculine versions of themselves to the public. Thus their gay identity pushed them to act in ways that served to propagate homophobia, and made it harder for male dancers in the future to express themselves in ways that deviated from traditional views of masculinity.

Rage Against the Machine

In the bold words of the performance and feminist scholar Peggy Phelan "visibility is a trap leading to fetishism and colonial possession."[28] While this assertion seems bizarre on the surface, its truth cannot be denied. While dancers like Shawn and Balanchine helped pave the way for male dancers, this exhibition of male dancing bodies worked to narrow the scope of masculinity. In order to continue in the tradition they established, each new male dancer had to be stronger and more athletic than the next. This image of the male dancer began to be reflected in society, establishing a circle of influence, or colonization, where the dancers on stage mirrored what they saw in society, which led to society mirroring what they saw onstage. In addition, with each progressive turn of this cycle, masculinity in performance became more idealized, and it became even harder for people of marginalized identities to find a place within the dance world. The model

established in the early Twentieth century only allowed for masculine white men to take the stage. The projected masculinity necessary to be a part of these performances arose from physical prowess, as well as the ability to project an air of detachment and emotional control.

It took male members of the dance community until the mid 20th century to start to challenge these notions of male athleticism and emotional detachment that infected the dance community. Specifically, it was during the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s that these notions began to be publically challenged across the country. The job of rebuking common misconceptions about masculinity has fallen on members of the queer community, even though all men working within artistic disciplines are forced to conform to the confines of masculinity. Luckily, there are many dancers and choreographers who have taken it upon themselves to challenge sexual and gender binary. Steve Paxton's subversive solos undermined traditional masculine displays, and his exploration of contact improvisation opened up the door for a wider variety of artistic expression for male dancers. In 1982 Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane pushed the boundaries of what men could do together on stage and in society in *Rotary Action,* by performing in a way that allowed their connection as romantic partners to be seen.[29] In 1986 Joe Goode debuted his landmark piece *29 Effeminate Gestures,* which called into question the link between masculinity and sexuality.[30] In his piece *Hetrospective* (1989), Michael Clark presented classical ballet with a twist, dancing on high heels to mimic dancing on point.[31] Mark Morris' 1993 piece *Dogtown* used overt references to anal sex to create a parody of gay men, portraying them as infected

dogs to make a staunch statement about homophobia in the U.S.[32] Throughout the late 1980s through early 2000s, the group Dv8 founded by Lloyd Newson produced subversive works that challenged the role of the masculinity in performance, most notably *My Sex, Our Dance* in 1986.[33] In 1995 Matthew Bourne debuted his version of *Swan Lake* in the West End. He cast the role of swans as men, which led to the creation of a gay relationship between the swan and prince, a controversial and completely new perspective on a well-known classical work. Work by Lea Anderson, Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker and John Jasperse along with many others continue to push the boundaries of the male dancer, by challenging perceptions of masculinity.

Rotary Action, Featuring Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Courtesy of New York Live Arts

Joe Goode, a San Francisco based choreographer, has a personal and professional story that epitomizes the plight of many male dancers during the late

Twentieth century. His work, especially his solo *29 Effeminate Gestures* has broadened the horizons for male expression on stage, and revolutionized modern dance and theatre. Goode started his professional dance career in NYC in the 1970s.[34] During this time most major dance companies were focused on modern, sculptural and athletic work. He described most of the dance pieces he participated in during this time as "all about time and place… very abstract."[35] While these abstract pieces were the pinnacle of modern dance during this era, Goode longed to be a part of something more substantial. By this point in his life he had come to terms with his identity as a gay male, and while he knew many of his colleagues in the New York dance scene were a part of the queer community, none of them were "out" or using their own identities or struggles in their own work. Instead most dances employed the archetypal roles of the male supporting the female, which irked Goode as he felt that he could not express himself honestly in these pieces. Goode graduated from college with a degree in Theatre, and while he loved dancing, his early professional work as a dancer left him wanting more ways to tell a story, which is how he started to develop his characteristic dance theatre style.[36]

His desire to be true to himself, and use different mediums besides dance to share experiences led him to break away from the New York dance scene and establish the Joe Goode Performance group in 1986. The next year he debuted the piece *29 Effeminate Gestures*, which remains one of his most well-known and influential pieces. By the time this piece debuted it had been drifting around in Goode's head for many years. In creating this piece he started with principle of "felt performance," which he defines as using movement that dancers can feel

responsible for, but also take risks with. In this piece and many of his early pieces he pushed himself and his dances to "find the risk."[37] Goode knew that there was a mounting stigma against anything "gay," but in his inaugural piece he showed the dance community the risks he was willing to take to liberate his own body and personal expression, which inspired many other dancers and choreographers to do the same.

Before delving into an in-depth analysis of the ways the Goode's *29 Effeminate Gestures* challenged the heteronormative standards of the dance community, it is necessary to analyze the way that Goode crafted and performed this piece. In my interview with Goode I asked him about his creative process, He said that he simply started with a few gestures that came naturally to him and that when he looked at himself in the mirror he was scared to realize how effeminate his "natural" gestures appeared.[38] While he was completely comfortable being a gay man, being effeminate was a troublesome label that he had never applied to himself. Like many dancers he actively repressed any effeminate tendencies in his dancing in order to be a part of elite companies and to conform with the sensibilities of his times. Thus the effeminacy he found within himself initially frightened him. However, it was in this formative time that he learned how to go into these scary places within himself and society, which set the course of his career.

In his dance theatre piece *29 Effeminate Gestures*, Joe Goode questions the construct of masculinity by revealing the contrasts and connections between strength and effeminacy. This dance was debuted by Joe Goode in 1987, and has recently been revived and is now performed by members of his dance company

across the United States. While this piece was created in the middle of the AIDS epidemic as revolt against the homophobic climate of popular culture, it still serves as a startling reminder of the ways in which society colonizes our bodies with codes of acceptable behavior and action.

The piece *29 Effeminate Gestures* begins with the lights fading up on a cheap wooden chair with a chainsaw resting on top of it. On the other side of the stage a male performer in blue work overalls addresses the audience with the words "He's a good guy." He repeats these words with increasing intensity and strength as he approaches the chair and the chainsaw. By the time he reaches the chainsaw and turns it on, he is yelling at the top of his lungs and his body undulates under the weight of his words. He pauses, turns to the chair, and then saws it in half. He leaves the chainsaw on the ground and peels off the upper half of his overalls. The performer proceeds to produce 29 effeminate gestures in a row, over the sound of the chainsaw. To adopt these gestures the dancer puts a sumptuous curve into his body and flutters his fingers, using his hands to accentuate his chest and butt. He seductively reaches towards the audience, putting a break in his wrist, and a mischievous twinkle in his eye. The second time he performs these gestures he addresses the audience, with unfinished sentences:

"If you talk too much…" "If you think too much…" "If you feel too much…"

Joe Goode performs in 29 Effeminate Gestures, 1987. Photo by Bill Pack

After many derivations of these unfinished statements, he repeats the gestures one more time, with elaborate sound effects that serve to enlarge his movements. As the sound of drums enters the theatre, he takes off his shirt and ties it around his head, as the original gestures turn into a modern dance performance capitalizing on the dancer's strength and muscular physique. The music stops. His panting is audible as he reaches for a drill that is being lowered from the ceiling. He starts to sing a song beginning with the lyrics "is this the little boy I carry?" as he turns on the drill and points it at the audience. With its sharp drill bit spinning furiously, the performer points it back at himself, and then slowly puts his head to

the side of the drill, dangerously close to the spinning end. The sound of his singing fades as the lights dim to black, and only the sound of the drill remains.

The most apparent theme of this piece is the battle between masculinity and effeminacy. The stark contrast between these qualities becomes apparent when the performer starts his effeminate gestures over the sound of the chainsaw. It appears that the effeminate gestures largely signify queer culture and identity, while the chainsaw represents traditional masculinity and aggression. The theme of masculine strength comes into play through the entire piece, as the dancer utilizes movements that are traditionally used in dance settings to exhibit the virility and strength of male dancers. However in this context both the movements and text used by the performer suggest he is revolting against the convention of masculinity. With his gestures, he is escaping the masculine molds presupposed upon him by society, represented by the blue work overalls and the chainsaw. However through the use of traditionally masculine movements in his dance solo, it becomes apparent that he is not only subverting traditional gender roles, but also blurring the lines of gendered movement. Through this piece Goode is refuting the common notion that effeminacy is a sign of weakness, and instead shows the natural link between effeminacy and strength. This piece effectively attacks the stigma of effeminacy by utilizing a diverse array of gendered movement on one body, which reveals the ways in which our bodies and motions are heavily socialized and colonized by popular opinion.

It would be false, however, to claim that the effeminate gestures featured in this piece represent the entire queer community. Some members of the male queer community in 1987 and today actively fight effeminate stereotypes and the notion that sexuality is linked to "masculine" expression, leading to some anti-effeminacy attitudes within the gay community. A study published by the American Psychological Association in 2001 investigated these anti-effeminacy attitudes present in some facets of the gay community. This study showed that significant numbers of gay men have interests that would be stereotypically defined as effeminate, however most of these men "defeminize" during their adolescent years.[39] Most men develop erotic preferences for masculine traits and behavior and thus alienate the men who held on to their effeminate tendencies. The authors hypothesize that these anti-effeminacy ideologies stem from both the "hegemonic masculine ideology" and "the saliency of masculinity in one's self-monitoring, public self-consciousness and self-concept."[40] In this way, queer men are enforcing social norms within their own community, adding to the pressure and fear of rejection placed upon individuals with effeminate tendencies. As the anthropologist Marta Savigliano aptly stated, "the circle of colonization is not complete until subjects colonize themselves." In this piece Goode is revealing the strength in effeminacy in order to rebuke prevailing opinion within queer culture as well as popular culture.

While it is my hope that these anti-effeminacy attitudes have decreased since this study was published in 2001 it would be interesting to determine the ways in which these reported masculine preferences are shaped by society, and the fact that these men were choosing to report their own sexual preferences. As we

have seen, society does have a tendency to alienate those with more effeminate tendencies, so this study may be affected by the fact that more men with traditionally masculine tendencies or romantic preferences chose to respond to the study, as they knew they were less likely to be rebuked. Regardless, it is important not to apply these masculine norms and preferences to the gay community as a whole, as they do not accurately reflect all members of the community. A quick examination of gay culture will show that effeminate trends are celebrated in many facets of the gay community, thus while there may be anti-effeminacy attitudes within some subsets of the community, there are aspects of gender-fluidity and effeminacy that are held in high esteem in other subjects of the community.

Anything that goes against social convention must either be assimilated or erased. The very use of the word "effeminate" to describe someone clearly reveals the prejudice of society and linguistic convention, as effeminate does not mean feminine, rather it is used to distinguish something that is not masculine. Thus when someone is described as effeminate, they drift into an unknown category that challenges gender convention. In order to preserve what little credibility they had, some members of the gay community during the 80s, much like the gay community today, tried to erase these qualities within themselves and others around them, in order to assimilate. In his revolutionary piece, Goode was fighting against the erasure of these qualities that came so naturally to him and many others within the queer community. While this dance sought to end the stigma against so called effeminate expression, it also reveals the inner turmoil that accompanies trying to hide parts of yourself to blend in with your environment. While this piece was

debuted during the AIDS epidemic, its message holds true today, especially when considering violence against the transgender community and the fight for marriage equality across the globe. Many members of the transgender community are familiar with the turmoil that Goode portrays in his piece. His dance provides the means to understand the plight of members of marginalized communities that have to hide parts of themselves in order to fit into society. With states such as Mississippi passing laws allowing business to refuse service based on sexual orientation and mandating that gender corresponds with anatomical sex at birth, understanding the messages of Goode's piece becomes more important than ever. Whether applying the theme from this dance to policies discriminating against transgender citizens in North Carolina, or policies prohibiting same sex-marriages in 30 countries promoting violence against the LGBTQ+ communities as seen recently in Bangladesh, Goode's piece shows the tragedy in being forced to hide parts of oneself, and the danger in forced conformity.

The Effeminacy/Sexuality Connection

Goode's work leaves us at the perfect intersection to delve into the connection between effeminacy and sexuality, and how this connection has shaped the trajectory of male performance on the stage and masculinity in popular culture. At this point it is logical to ask two questions. The first being why is this interplay between sexuality and effeminacy important? The second question is how do these principles, which tie heavily into queer and feminist theory, relate to the broader topic of this thesis discussion of dance as a revolutionary medium? Simply stated,

the topics of effeminacy and sexuality must be approached in a critical light in order to both illuminate issues plaguing the history and future of the dance world while simultaneously trying to solve them. Subverting the common forms and themes of expression is always revolutionary, thus effeminacy and its accompanying stigma have been an integral part of many dance revolutions that helped us arrive where we are today, and will profoundly affect the future of dance and society.

In his landmark work *The History of Sexuality,* Michel Foucault discusses the interplay between effeminacy and homosexuality in ancient Greek culture. In this work he states-

> The Dividing line between a virile man and an effeminate man did not coincide with our oppositions between hetero- and homosexuality: nor was it confined to the opposition between active and passive homosexuality. It marked the difference in people's attitudes toward the pleasure.[41]

Thus in Greek society, homosexuality was not automatically linked with effeminacy; rather it was used to describe men of either sexual orientation that failed to master their desires and live up to the code of masculinity established by society. Rather strikingly the Greek word to describe men with effeminate tendencies, *Akolasia*[42], translates to "self-indulgent" and describes a person who had not mastered the art of mastering himself morally. Thus it becomes clear that even in a society that allowed for considerable sexual flexibility, effeminate behaviors were stigmatized.

Fast-forward hundreds of years to the Twenty-First century; the western world still harshly disproves of effeminate behavior and most cultures have a considerably narrower view of sexuality than their Greek predecessors. The fact that the views of sexuality have changed so markedly over time but views of effeminacy have not leads poses the question of what qualities of effeminate behavior threaten society in such a ubiquitous manner? To understand the stigma against effeminacy, it is crucial to understand the word. The Miriam Webster definitions of effeminate are: "having feminine qualities untypical of a man: not manly in appearance or manner. Marked by an unbecoming delicacy or over refinement." While this definition dances around using terms like feminine, the inherit sexism in this definition and our lexical use of the word effeminate is glaring. Instead of using the words such as feminine in the definition, words such as delicate are used, creating a link between femininity, effeminacy and weakness. Beyond this definition, using the word effeminacy when describing someone carries two important assumptions: the first is that the man in question is gay or queer in some aspect, the second is that the man is weaker than masculine counterparts (as the label of effeminate implies a man has feminine qualities, and qualities associated with women are unfortunately often associated with weakness, whether that weakness is physical or emotional).

In order to discover why effeminacy is linked to sexuality in modern Western culture we must look back to the trial of Oscar Wilde. Scholars focusing on the Victorian era have noticed a shift in attitudes towards effeminate

behavior centering around this well publicized trial.[43] With Wilde's conviction for "acts of gross indecency" the connection between effeminate behavior and homosexuality was indelibly forged in the Western code of conduct. This trial led to the wide spread belief that effeminacy threatened society, as it represented immoral behavior that went against the teaching of the church. It is also interesting to note that effeminacy was first criminalized in the artistic realm by those not directly involved in it. Thus the trial of Oscar Wilde established a precedent linking effeminacy to homosexual behavior while simultaneously linking effeminacy to the artistic community.[44]

BOTH ARE GUILTY

Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor Convicted

OF UNNATURAL CHARGES AND BOTH

Sentenced Each to Two Years in Prison.

LONDON, May 25.---The cases of Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor which have stirred up entire England, were settled today when the jury in Wilde's case, after having been out two hours, returned a verdict of guilty. In his charge to the jury the judge was decidedly favorable towards Wilde. Both men will be sentenced to prison at hard labor for two years.

Newspaper Headline from May 23, 1895 - *Lowell Daily Sun*

Once this connection was established, Western cultural norms imposed stringent limits of masculinity upon the male body. In this way the male body was colonized, and the broad reaching effects of idealized masculine behavior were rarely questioned. This trial set the stage for the rampant homophobia that developed in the Twentieth century. The stigma against effeminate behaviors become so strong that even the members of the queer community, which was not yet an organized movement or social group, started to ostracize each other for exhibiting effeminate behaviors. As discussed in the analysis of Joe Goode's *29 Effeminate Gestures*, the gay community stigmatizes effeminate behavior just as much as popular culture. This stigma within queer communities, present to this day, arose out of a necessity to survive and assimilate into society. Thus the queer community started to police and colonize their own behavior.

As mentioned before, this cycle of colonization and enforcement of traditional masculine behavior is still at play within the gay community in the U.S. today, as many men only publically express interest in other men who display masculine traits and characteristics. The gay community and broader general public often reject association with effeminacy because it goes against the traditional view of masculinity and can undermine one's public image or sense of self. Reflecting upon this topic, the most glaring take away is that masculinity is incredibly fragile, and is not built upon any substantial premises or doctrine, instead it is built upon fear. It is built upon the fear of becoming like a group of people that have been dehumanized over the course of history

instead of being understood. When examining the dances mentioned above that broke the mold of male expression and broadened the horizons of what it means to be man and a performer, the weight of this considerable stigma must be accounted for. The history of the Western male dancer is filled with small acts of revolution and discontent with the status quo. Each dancer and choreographer that dared to broach the subjects of sexuality and effeminacy from Paul Timothy Diaz to Rick Darnell helped chip away at the fragile chains of masculinity that bind society. These artists paved the way for our culture to slowly start accepting a wider variety of people and behaviors and widened the definition of masculinity. While we have yet to arrive at a destination of equality, we are much closer than we were at the turn of the Twentieth century.

It is interesting to note how culture affects what behaviors are socially acceptable. For example, a study examining homosexual Latino men showed that compared to their white counterparts Latino men placed more emphasis on their partners not being noticeably gay and they were more concerned about keeping their sexual orientations private as a way to increase chances of being accepted by others within their community.[45]For a more complete discussion of masculinity in the Latino community please see this additional resource.[46] Due to the long history of repression of black males within the United States, it appears to be much more difficult for black males to accept their gay identity as constructs of black manhood are perhaps the most limiting and stringent masculine constructs of any community in the U.S. Researchers have found that heterosexism and homophobia are so divisive within black communities that

many black males do not identify on the queer spectrum even though their sexual choices appear queer in nature.[47]

Interestingly, in a direct contrast to the masculine guidelines of American society, some Asian cultures harbor less stigma against traits labeled as effeminate from a western lens, showing that the link between sexuality and effeminacy is not ubiquitous. The missing link between sexuality and effeminacy in these cultures could be due to the fact that the effect of the Oscar Wilde trial did not extend to Asia. Asian American masculinity takes a different form than “traditional” white masculinity, as Asian Americans are sexually Orientalized, resulting in an unique projection of Asian American masculinity in popular culture. In a discussion on the “Epistemological Limits of 'Oriental' Sexuality" Min Song states the following:

> If Orientalism is partly the imaginative typification of the East and its subjects as a highly exoticized and subtly treacherous woman [. . .] the East's male subjects must also appear effeminate, their representations carrying connotations of both allure and danger. This opens up a whole constellation of sexual possibilities that depend upon the powerful connections between effemination, repulsion, desire, and a same-sex longing. This is true not only for male subjects who live in the East but also for "oriental" male subjects and their children who live in the United States. These subjects can sometimes occupy an erotically charged cultural zone, where the notion of masculinity curves backward upon

> itself, confusing desire with identification, representation with ideology, and leading to a form of epistemological collapse.[48]

Song claims that ideas of gender are intertwined with history of racialization and immigration. Thus Asian-American masculinity has been realized through the colonial lens of hegemonic white culture leading to convoluted gender conventions and portraying Asian American citizens as "oriental" outsiders. The combination of Asian ideas of gender and masculinity with American norms leads to increasingly complex expectations and classifications of American men of Asian decent. The myth of the model minority in conjunction with asexual representations of many Asian-American men in the media has led to these men being portrayed as overly feminized, and even emasculated[49]. Like other men of color they must negotiate how to bridge the positions of being a part of the dominant gender group while simultaneously being a part of a racial minority.

In order to bridge these contradictory social positions East Asian-American men have constructed a more flexible view of masculinity. It is important to note that it is impossible to generalize about masculine constructs across all Asian cultures, as the concept of masculinity vary across Asia based on colonial ideologies and cultural expectations. In East Asian society, unlike white hegemonic society, men do not view femininity as an oppositional force to masculinity.[50] The combination of Eastern and Western influences on Asian-American men (distinctly East Asian men) has led to the emergence of a distinct

form of masculinity that allows men to complete domestic chores, and be emotionally expressive without compromising their male identity.

Thus men from different racial and ethnic backgrounds operate under distinct gender constructs enforced by white hegemonic society. Historically society has liberally doled out effeminate labels in order to oppress anyone with effeminate tendencies, especially people of color. Thus labeling others as "effeminate" is used as a mechanism of repression that stems beyond sexuality, as it has been used as a tool to inhibit social advancement of men of color within American society. While individuals have been marginalized by effeminate tendencies, it is important to note the different ways this label affects different groups within the U.S., and the ways in which masculinity may manifest differently in different communities.

Methodically Breaking the Rules: *Camp*, Disco and Gay Ethnicity

While there were many specific dancers and groups that challenged traditional conceptions of masculinity and sexuality over the past two hundred years, most fall under larger aesthetic styles that were the product of these individual acts of rebellion. *Camp* style is a defining characteristic of queer art and activism. Most, if not all, of the pieces discussed thus far in this thesis have elements of *Camp.* According the Oxford dictionary, *Camp* is a slang word that originated in 1909 that is defined as "ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical: effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to or characteristic of

homosexuals."[51] However this definition does not come close to encapsulating the full meaning of *Camp*.

What is now known as *Camp* style started to develop during the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth century when artists began intentionally blurring gender lines in performative ways.[52] These early *Camp* performances led into the Art Noveau style that developed in the late Nineteenth century throughout Europe and the United States. While *Camp* exclusively characterized gay and lesbian performances in the Seventeenth through Nineteenth centuries, during the 1950s *Camp* culture began to be commodified and started to appear on stages across the United States.[53] This widespread commodification of *Camp* culture is what spurred Susan Sontag to write "Notes on Camp," which has served as the leading source on *Camp* style.[54] In this essay Sontag describes *Camp* as a style of exaggeration and "the off."[55] A common motif of *Camp* performance is that gender roles are loosened and blurred, which leads to the creation of what Sontag called the "androgyne," which she defined as someone who falls in between traditional conceptions of gender roles. There is a certain lighthearted mockery present in many *Camp* performances, which is why Sontag states "camp sees everything in quotation marks."[56] The beauty and subversive nature of *Camp* performance lies in the performance of the unexpected, whether that take the from of feminine gestures on a man, creating androgynous forms or tapping into an alternate person by using drag. Often these unexpected forms offered a critique of society and the status quo, especially social conventions of gender and sexuality.[57]

While Sontag offers a compelling description of what *Camp* is, she fails to capture its political underpinnings and its inexorable connection to the queer community. In a rebuke of Sontag's descriptions of *Camp*, Moe Meyer states "Camp is political; camp is solely queer; and *Camp* embodies a specifically queer cultural critique."[58] While Sontag dealt with *Camp* as only a performance style, Meyer and many other queer theorists have shown that *Camp* was not merely a style, but a necessity for survival of the queer community. *Camp* developed due to a need to defy the masculine molds defined above, and thus it was not meant to be a form of entertainment, but rather a necessary means of expression. *Camp* also served as political tool for the queer community to congregate and defy social and political norms that discriminated against them.[59] Thus the work created during the AIDS epidemic, discussed in the next chapter did not occur in a cultural vacuum. Rather the performers and choreographers working in the 1980s were steeped in this *Camp* culture performance style and were thus able to use and manipulate conventional *Camp* styles while subverting traditional forms of expression.

Around the time of the AIDS epidemic there was a divergence of *Camp* performance. While it remained popular in queer communities, it also began to appear more frequently on stages and in movies, as transvestites and drag became a more mainstream cultural phenomenon. While elements of *Camp* can be taken and adapted to different medium of performance, they do not lose their political edge. David Roman contends that this appropriation of *Camp* culture by the mainstream theatre scene led to a Brechtian Alienation or

Distancing effect. Gay audiences were distanced from many characters that used camp style, as these camp characters became projections of American popular culture, and thus were once removed from the gay community, despite the familiarity of their *Camp* characteristics.[60] The inclusion of these elements led to performances that could be interpreted very differently depending on whether the audience members were familiar with queer culture or not. Thus even though their style was stolen from them, the queer community was still able to convey subversive messages through performances via elements of *Camp* style that would not be readily rejected by mainstream theatre audiences.

The development of *Camp* shows the ways in which the queer community was able to rebel against societal norms. While individual works of art did propagate change, those pieces represent hundred of years of oppressed finally coming to light. The inclusion of elements of *Camp* within popular culture does not mean that we have become a more accepting society, however it has slowly shifted the American Psyche and started to lead people inside and outside the queer community to start to question what rules govern our actions.

While *Camp* style influenced many forms of expression and works of art inside and outside of the gay community, it was not until the Disco movement of the 1970s that the community banded together in solidarity against the heteronormative climate of popular culture. It was not a surprise that dance was the medium through which gay community and solidarity was formed, as gay men had been subverting stigma and interacting through dancing for the

past 300 years. In the 18th century, gay men interacted via dancing in "Molly Houses".[61] The Nineteenth century saw the rise of social dancing, which led to the creation of numerous dance halls across New York City, where gay people flocked, despite stringent rules on gay congregations[62]. These dance halls thrived into the Twentieth century, which led to the creation of "drag balls" and the "Pansy Crazy" of the 1920s.[63] Despite rising stigma, gay men, both black and white continued to dance together. For instance, Fire Island, a small island off the coast of Long Island, became the hub of these illicit dance parties, which served to create the first circuit culture that would soon spread across the country (Circuit Parties were dance events created by the LGBT+ community that would last all night into the following day).[64]

For most of the Twentieth century it was extremely difficult for members of the queer community to congregate, as gay bars were not legalized until the 1960s and many establishments were not friendly towards gay or lesbian clients.[65] The legal system became increasingly averse to the queer community in the 1950s and 60s, which led to the enactment of policies to keep queer citizens from publically congregating.[66] During this time it was common for the police to raid predominately queer establishments. In 1969, the NYPD raided the Stonewall Inn, a predominately queer establishment in Greenwich Village. The queer community vociferously opposed this raid, which led to riots and protests throughout Manhattan.[67] These riots, led by Jackie Hormona, Zazu Nova, Marsha P. Johnson and Birdie Rivera were unique in that it was the street kids, mostly teenaged boys cast out of their home due to their effeminate or

queer tendencies along with trans women of color that led the resistance.[68] These riots, fueled by the transvestite, transgender and queer homeless teenage patrons of the inn, mobilized the queer community within New York and served as a rallying cry through the gay liberation movement. These riots helped give birth to Disco, as the gay community began to create spaces where they could express themselves without fear of arrest or judgment.

Sylvia Rivera (holding the banner) and Marsha P. Johnson (with cooler) of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.) at the Christopher Street Liberation Day, Gay Pride Parade, NYC (24 June 1973). Photographer Leonard Fink.
Reprinted, by permission, from National History Archives of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center.

Protests after the Raid of the Stonewall Inn- *Courtesy of CBS News and Leonard Fink*

Thus the Disco movement was born in the early 1970s in order to create safe spaces for members of the queer community, predominately white males, as well as to provide a social space where the rules of heterosexist society, most notably heterosexual partner dancing, would not longer have to be followed. The style that many Disco clubs would adopt was directly appropriated from African-American culture, music and dance. The social scene in Harlem during the time inspired many Disco dancers and entrepreneurs.[69] In Manhattan, Seymour and Shelley created the *Sanctuary*, which became one of the first disco establishments.[70] When it opened, this establishment attracted a wide array of patrons who did not fit into the conventional New York social scene. This early Disco space set a precedent of inclusivity that started to build inroads between marginalized groups within New York City. However, at the advent of the Disco movement male-male dancing was still illegal, and each club was required to have 1 woman present for every 3 men.[71] These stringent laws on conduct

encouraged individualized styles of dancing on the dance floor, as the focus was placed on "single" dancing instead of partner dancing. This shift in social dancing had largely impacted the styles that would arise after the disco movement ended, such as hip-hop and many current social dancing trends. There was a sexual component of many of these Disco clubs, as some had balconies or separate spaces reserved for men to engage in sexual acts, however the primary focus of this movement was community building, not sex.

While the Disco movement revolutionized social dancing within the U.S., it also allowed for the development of new types of music. DJs started to increase the tempo of their songs to match the energy on the dance floor, and there was a vibrant discourse between the DJ and dancers.[72] Disco music was officially introduced in 1973, which included many tracks sung by African-American "Divas." Black female voices, such as Thelma Houston and Cheryl Lynn became the unofficial anthem of the Disco revolution[73]. This "new" genre (at least new to the white community) provided dancers with more freedom of movement due to its polyrhythmic structure. The music, in conjunction with the formation of predominately queer spaces, led to an increase of effeminate dancing in social settings, allowing gay men to experiment with drag or to embody feminine characteristics they had not tapped into before. Sadly as the movement progressed, the white gay community started to take control of many disco clubs, creating spaces that were no longer as inclusive of people of color and lesbians.

While there are many critiques to be made of the Disco movement, for the purpose of this examination it is most important to extrapolate the ways in which the gay community used Disco as a revolutionary medium. The movement was quite literally born out of a revolt against the norms of society, and it's founding served to signal the gay community's discontent with the state of American politics and society. While many dance styles were appropriated from other communities, they were used in ways that enabled the dancers to express parts of their identities that were forbidden or stigmatized. In this way Disco served to fuel the gay liberation movement, by providing a space where gay community members could express themselves freely. Disco resulted from the subversion of the mainstream dance in the U.S. in order to create spaces that were identifiably queer, which is a small act of revolution within itself. Disco was revolutionary in that it unified and strengthened the gay community in American culture. Dance was the perfect language of this rebellion as it could express nuances of effeminacy and shades of sexuality, expressions and issues that society was not ready to fully grapple with**.** Through the development of Disco the tenants of Camp style can be seen throughout the dancing and aesthetic of 1970s, thus the gay community was once again able to use Camp as a tactic for attracting likeminded individuals and building community and solidary.

The Disco movement cemented the presence of the gay community on the national consciousness while also allowing the gay community to formulate ideas of what it meant to be gay in Twentieth century America. It was within

these Disco settings that many aesthetics of the gay community were developed. The dance floors were filled with men in tight, "501" jeans, accentuating their V shaped physiques.[74] During this time gay men were exposed to a variety of other gay men without the pressure of public scrutiny, thus there able to experiment and build stronger networks of lovers and friends. These connections allowed activist groups to form and mobilize, increasing the political and social clout of the gay community as they become more effectively equipped to deal with change.

With the release of *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977, Disco culture was appropriated by mainstream American culture, effectively ending the era where Disco was a solely queer phenomenon.[75] By the end of the 1970s the homophobic climate of society led to increased animosity against Disco clubs and music. This tension culminated in the 1979 with the "Disco Sucks" campaign at a Chicago White Sox game where fans were encouraged to bring their old Disco records and burn them.[76] This backlash against Disco supports the notion that it was in fact a revolution, as no revolution that leads to social change can occur without some backlash from those who do not understand or identify with the movement.

The backlash against Disco was intensified at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. The confusion and fear of the epidemic led many members of the queer community to distance themselves from their involvement in the Disco

revolution due to fear of being stigmatized during a time where stigma could keep patients from receiving proper treatment[77].

Scholarship within the last decade has suggested the unifying powers of Disco led to lasting changes in the ways in which the gay community related to one another. In a recent article, Daren Blaney contends that Disco served to cement the gay ethnic group within U.S. society. In this article he contends that "the influence of disco in gay culture has at least as much relevance for LGBTQ+ people as traditional Irish step dancing, klezmer, salsa, or tarantella do for their cultures of origin."[78]

The concept of gay individuals forming an ethnic group becomes feasible if we considered a constructionist view of ethnicity, a view support by Max Weber. In *Economy and Society*, Weber contends that ethnicity is a socially-constructed "presumed identity." [79] Thus ethnicity does not necessarily entail blood relations, rather it can extend to groups who forge a close sense of community and adopt a common identity. The idea that ethnicity can be constructed through social interactions is known as the constructionist view of ethnic group formation. This theory is opposed by the essentialist view, which contends that ethnic groups have a biological component, and shared common ancestry is necessary in order for a true ethnic group to be formed. While the following discussion uses constructionist logic following Weber's view of ethnicity as a socially constructed identity, it is interesting to note that the essentialist view does not necessarily discredit assertions of a gay ethnic group.

Recent scholarship shows that it is likely that there are genetic, neuroendocrinological or various other inherited biological traits that link gay people to each other.[80] These findings show that the formation of a gay ethnic group could very well have occurred in genetic and social ways supporting essentialist and constructionist arguments.

However, the key to understanding the formation of a gay ethnic group is to understand the gay identity. For the purposes of this discussion we will use Stuart Hall's definition of identity:

> "Cultural Identity […], is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from begin eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."[81]

Thus gay identity originated out of persecution and oppression, as well as shared values and love for one another, it has constantly transformed over the past centuries. The Disco movement served as one the most dramatic transformation of the gay identity in American history, allowing the history of gay oppression to fuel a unified identity. This unified identity served as the impetus for the formation of a gay ethnic group during this time.This gay identity was fully realized during the 1970s as queer communities chose to

congregate in “gay-borhoods” and dance floors and social clubs allowed for spaces for them to socialize and organize.

As has been the case with many ethnic groups across the world, dance was a primary means of creating a social understanding of what constitutes “gay ethnicity.” Blaney states “for gays and lesbians in the early 1970s, the disco movement was revolutionary because it simultaneously celebrated somatic, psychic and sexual freedom as well as lionized the collectivity of mass gay congregation after decades of physical persecution and enforced alienation.”[82] It was through this collective rebellion and newly gained freedom that gay culture moved from a subculture, to an ethnic group, as members of the community were able to connect, organize and share traits and facets of their identities. The disco clubs took the place of church and family for many members of the gay community during this time, as they were not accepted in many places where communities are built and maintained. Thus gays started to create social structures among themselves that resembled kinships structures and were largely based around rituals and value systems realized and celebrated on the dance floor.[83]

The idea of sexual minorities forming kinship structures has been investigated both scientifically and artistically. Psychological literature has shown that most members of the LGBTQ+ community do not have functional working relationships with their family, and thus are forced to form new relationships to function in place of lost familial relationships. The processes of

being ostracized by family members and home communities results in the formation extremely close relationships between members of the gay community. The formation of these new family groups was exceedingly common in the "gay-borhoods" of the 1970s and 80s. These family units often served as the backbone of support for those infected with AIDS, as different friends would take turns watching over their dying loved ones. The touching dance theatre composition *Deeply There* by Joe Goode, touches on these themes and pays homage to the loss of close "family" members, boyfriends and satellite friends due to AIDS, while highlighting the strong sense of community and solidarity that pervaded the gay community during that time.

The 1970s helped create the boundaries of gay identity, as gays experienced the love and community formed by ritualistic dance experiences in disco clubs, and they started to create shared values systems. I contend that the delineation of the gay ethnic group was truly forged at the onset of the AIDS epidemic, as these value systems and support networks were pushed to their limits, and the gay community was forced to create tight knit groups in order to survive.

While the AIDs epidemic ended 20 years ago, elements of Disco and the social and ethnic groups formed during that time live on today. Urban cultures such as LA, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans and San Francisco are filled with establishments aimed at attracting queer patrons. Often these establishments serve as a litmus test of the social climate in the country. These

bars, clubs and dance floors still serve as a place for members of the queer community to congregate and build community. In fact, a quick survey of the gay social scene will reveal that the only part of Disco that has died is its name. The underlying culture of the Disco movement is still as vibrant and active today as it was during the early 1970s. Many gays still flock to clubs across the country in order to take part in the ritualistic solidarity of dancing within a sea of other people just like them, and the social scene today is not that far removed from the original social dancing that took place on the Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit. While the Disco tenets of gay culture are still thriving today, they are more commercialized than the original disco social scene. Many gay clubs have become popular destinations for bachelorette parties, or places where groups of straight friends will choose to go to dance because the music is better. As queerness has become less taboo within popular culture there has been a distinct increase in the eroticization of these gay dancing spots. What originally functioned as a place of social congregation has become somewhat of a sexual safari for members of the straight community to pass through to experience something “different” for a night.

While I firmly believe that the traces of Disco will continue to live on within U.S. society, I believe the gay ethnic group may start to slowly fade. While society is not 100% accepting of queer life styles, laws dealing with citizens of marginalized sexual orientations have become more humane. In addition, the social climate has become more accepting and many young adults coming to

terms with their queer identities do not have to fear being completely cut off from their support networks.

The “gay ethnicity” was created as a response to being repressed and marginalized for hundreds of years. Now that much of that blatant oppression has faded it would not be surprising if the new generation of gay and queer Americans simply assimilate into mainstream culture, instead of carrying on the tradition of “gay-borhoods” and makeshift family groups. The subversive and revolutionary aspects of Disco dancing are no longer present in modern clubs, as the fight surrounding sexual and gender politics is switching fronts. The assimilation of gay and queer young adults into mainstream society will not destroy the progress that has been made over the past fifty years. However, it is important that young members of the queer community maintain some semblance of solidarity and continue to dismantle systems of oppression that stigmatize their identities, even if that means fighting societal norms from inside mainstream society.

How to Break the Modern Cycle of Dance and Gender

As this exploration has shown, the world of the male dancer has transformed many times over the past two hundred years. As of 2016, dance has diversified and become incorporated in a variety of different settings, from local studios to gyms to nightclubs. While balletic technique often serves as the

first dance form taught to young students, there are now a variety of styles at their fingertips that allow them to be expressive and creative through movement, including improv, contact improv and Gaga. In many ways dance studios have become spaces where men with effeminate tendencies seek shelter from the outside world. While dance during the AIDS epidemic served many social and political causes in a positive way, it cemented the link between gayness and dance in public perception. Dance companies and studios today, much like during the 1990s, actively fight this connection between dance and sexuality, often to the detriment of their gay dancers.

Recent surveys show that approximately 50% of men in studio dance classes identify as gay, however the culture within the dance arena adheres to policies that largely resemble "don't ask don't tell."[84] Men also hold most powerful positions as dance directors or choreographers, thus as previously discussed; many gay males perpetuate a climate within the dance world that is not hospitable to a variety of different sexual orientations. One of the main tactics used by dance companies and studios to fight the idea that dance is dominated by gay men is to appeal to more traditionally masculine males by painting dance as more of an athletic event than form of expression.[85]

I must admit that I was drawn into dance in order to help other athletic aspects of my life. By portraying dance as a sport in order to attract more male participants, the dance world prioritizes strength over expression and often marginalizes the male students who are drawn to the studio to express

themselves. Thus those with masculine characteristics are celebrated and lauded for choosing to take a dance class, while the male students with effeminate characteristics are largely marginalized. This results in a cycle perpetuating negative stereotypes of male dancers, as the traits fitting most men in dance classes are ignored and largely hidden by the dance community in order to make dance more appealing for the "average" male.

It is also worth mentioning that the idealized standards held by the dance community that discriminate against effeminate men, also discriminate against different races, genders, body types and abilities. The dance world celebrates perfect technique on lean bodies white bodies. For anyone who does not fit this precise mold, it is exceedingly difficult to gain entrance into the dance community at both community and professional levels, and can still be seen in dance throughout popular culture in shows like *So You Think You Can* Dance, where two male ballroom dancers who chose to dance with each other were not put through to the next round because it would have "alienated a lot of the viewers" to see two men in each others arms, according to one of the judges. For anyone who does not fit a certain height to weight ratio, gaining entrance into the world of ballet is virtually impossible largely due to the unhealthy standards put in place by choreographer like George Balanchine and large companies like the Bolshoi Ballet. The Bolshoi has a height to weight ratio chart on their website that determines what classes women are eligible to take. For example, if a woman weighs over 110 pounds, she is not eligible to take the paus de deux class, but rather must attend as an observer, and girls who are 5'7"

should weigh 109 pounds. Thus while this discussion focuses on the stigma of effeminacy within the dance community, it is important to not that these thoughts are apart of a much larger discussion involving the exclusive, elitist and idealized nature of the dance community as a whole.

The negative stereotypes involving gay and effeminate male dancers leads to more dangerous behavior than simply dancers feeling like they do not belong. A study conducted in the late nineties showed that male dancers are three times more likely to experience sexual harassment in dance class than their female counterparts. They are also three times more likely to be propositioned for sex; 70% of the time male directors, choreographers or students are behind the propositions.[86] Thus it appears that the dance studio may not be the safest place for gay males to develop and comes to terms with themselves, as the surrounding environment may contain increased risk of nonconsensual sexual encounters. Interviews with gay male dancers have shown the unhealthy attitudes that arise about other gay men within dance classes.[87] One self-identified gay dancer stated, " I really don't like gay people that often. And the ones I do like really get on my nerves… I mean, who wants to talk to a bitchy male dancer."[88] Thus it appears that the negative conceptions of male dancer held by many members of the dance community are internalized by many gay male dancers.

Despite this less than ideal atmosphere, many gay men report that time in the dance studio provides them with a space where they can truly be

themselves. The same interviews cited above also asked dancers if they felt their dance studio was a supporting atmosphere for gay dancers, and most of them said yes. One dancer reported, " There's no harassment from the other dancers and that feels extremely supportive."[89] Paradoxically, the studio may be home to high levels of sexual harassment for gay men, but it appears that the threat of harassment in the studio is less than in the outside world. While the dance community is far from perfect, there must be something about the essential nature of dance that makes it worthwhile for these students to deal with the negative stereotypes and harassment in order to keep dancing.

At this point the question becomes, how do we take the current system and make it better and more supportive for all of those involved to maximize positive output? Recent scholarship has suggested that dance education can equip students to explore societal norms and expectations, instead of just blindly obeying them.[90] The first step in overhauling the current cycle enforcing a specific view of masculinity is to encourage the exploration of different styles of expression and techniques. During this exploratory stage it is imperative that nothing is off-limits for any dancer regardless of gender, orientation, ethnicity, body type or disability. While teaching technique is crucial for studio dance classes, the content can be made richer by incorporating parts of the movements produced from the exploration of the students. It is also imperative that figures of authority within the dance community celebrate every dancer in the studio. While this celebration does not need to be manifested in continuous verbal accolades, it should result in a

respect that affects the way that other dancers are recruited. In recruiting other dancers, especially male dancers, effeminate forms of expression should be held in equally high esteem with the strength and virility of men that choreographers or directors may be trying to target. Thus men with more "masculine" traits can still be actively recruited, but they should be recruited to augment the existing male talent, not to replace it.

Ultimately dance has always been a way to celebrate the body and life. If the dance community can change their mentality from one of exclusivity to one of inclusive expression then there is no limit on the content that studios could produce. Within the "professional" dance world, there must be technical limits a dancer must surpass in order to enter certain companies. While the criteria used by dance companies to pick dancers may be problematic, the first step in improving the culture of acceptance within the dance community is to change the mentality and culture of community dance studios. When local and regional dance studios are able to celebrate effeminacy, disability and "non-traditional" forms of expression in the studio, then the face of dance within this country will be profoundly altered for the better.

The Future

In a recent interview with Anthony Rapp I was able to gain insight into what it means to be a theatre artist and activist in this modern age. Anthony's career occupies an interesting time in recent history, and serves as the perfect segue to bridge the Disco Revolution and AIDS epidemic to Twenty-First

century America. Rapp participated in several Broadway productions during his childhood and teenage years in the 1980s.[91] During this time he was never directly confronted with the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic due to his youth, although he did notice the physical deterioration of many people he was working with in the New York theatre scene.[92] After moving to New York to pursue theatre full time, he slowly grew an awareness of the vast impact that the AIDS epidemic had on the queer culture of the city. When he was cast in *RENT* in 1994, his future both as an artist and activist changed forever. After being rocketed to fame through the success of *RENT* the play and the movie, Rapp continues to work as an actor and singer in New York City, while also speaking out about the current devastation being caused by AIDS both domestically and abroad.

While Anthony's personal journey is illustrious, there are two main facets of his career that separate his experiences from many artists that came before him. The first is that he was one of the first openly queer actors on Broadway, and the second is that his activism is separate from his art. When I questioned him about what it was like being one of the first openly queer actors on Broadway, his answer was relaxed and nonchalant. In one of his off-Broadway productions he thanked his boyfriend in the program, which was later picked up by the mainstream media when he starred in *RENT*.[93] He described his coming out process as something that simply happened, and that he never intended to hide or specifically reveal his sexuality. While he did

acknowledge that he openly identifies as queer, he told me that his queer identity has not largely shaped his artistic trajectory.[94]

The ability that Rapp had to incorporate his sexual identity into his public life as performer without letting it dominate the subject of his performances is a sign that progress has been made within American society. The groundwork that artists laid over the past hundred, years from Oscar Wilde to Joe Goode, now allows for artists of some queer identities to peacefully and publically coexist without their identities inhibiting their freedoms as people and artist. The fact that Rapp and many other openly queer performers can make their sexual identities known and play roles of any orientation is a step in the right direction. As we have seen, if artists thirty years ago publically revealed their queer identity then they would most likely spend the rest of their lives using their art as a platform to fight for equal rights socially, politically and expressively.

I chose to interview Anthony Rapp because of all the work he has done as an activist and artist, however I was struck by the fact that unlike most people I researched for this thesis, he was very easily able to dissociate his art from his activism. This dissociation is representative of what is happening across large portions of the artistic world, as young queer artists not longer are forced to fight for their representation as they once did, thus they are able to be full time performers and some-times activists if they so choose. Many people would observe this trend and be encouraged, as it appears that the stigma of

queerness is no longer a handicap to performers. While this thinking may be correct in certain situations it has the potential to lead to complacency, which could result in social devolution.

This interview with Rapp pushed me to think about the future of queer performers and queer rights within the U.S. Initially I was surprised by how cavalier he was when discussing the intersectionality of his queerness and his art, however after the star appeal wore off I became deeply concerned with his words. This concern stemmed from the fact that I often see the same attitude of artistic creation reflected through my own work and the work of my peers. I realized that despite what Rapp said, the only time sexual identity will not affect professional artistic endeavors is when the artist is a cis-gendered "straight-acting" white male. Equity within the arts today does not extend to artists who do not fit the molds created a hundred years ago. We live in a very dangerous time, as blatant discrimination and hate crimes are not the main tools of oppression used in modern society. Today we use nuanced language and colorblind policies to enforce the same structures that we thought we destroyed years ago. As artists it is our duty to track and pick up on the nuanced and ever changing language that is used to marginalize, and reveal it for what it truly is. As soon as art is divorced from activism, it loses its power and conviction.

The question becomes: where do we go from here? How do we resist the urge to divorce our marginalized identities from our art in order to keep getting work? These are questions I cannot fully answer, but a look through history

reveals that the right choice is rarely comfortable. Artists are the first line of defense against injustice, so we must remain hyper vigilant. Within the context of issues presented within this Thesis, issues of masculinity and expression should continue to be expanded within modern performance settings. It falls on the entire community of performers to fight the stigma associated with effeminate behavior and gender norms. While I did state a few pages ago, that our country, and many parts of the world are becoming more tolerant towards gay and lesbian culture, many areas of the LGBTQ+ community have not reached a point where mainstream culture can celebrate and accept them. A look inside the transgender community reveals the extremely harmful effects of the gender conventions and lack of tolerance propagated by society. Between 2012 and 2015, fifty-three transgender women were murdered within the United States due to their gender identities; not one murder was labeled as a hate crime.[95] Transgender people of color are six times more likely to experience violence interacting with the police than their white cis-gendered counterparts.[96] In addition, 41% of trans people have attempted suicide, 49% reported physical abuse, one in five were homeless at one point in their lives and 80% feel unsafe due to their gender expression.[97]

That last statistic is the reason that this chapter was included in this thesis. The large number of transgender students that feel unsafe because of their gender expression shows just how far we have to go. To change this statistic we must address the deep-seated notions that each of us carry about gender and create art that challenges these norms and conventions. The

revolution that rocketed through the Disco and the AIDS Epidemic has not ended, but it has changed its form. Unlike artists of the past, some artists may now have the option to be lulled into complacency, but it is imperative to recognize that the oppression that was being fought against 30 years ago still exists today; it just operates under a different façade. Through multi-cultural casting, individualized expression and allowing space for unhindered creation we can start to create artistic settings that dismantle these systems and cycles rather than propagate them.

Chapter 2-

Dance as a means of civil revolt during the HIV/AIDS epidemic

"In an Ironic sense, I think that AIDS is good for art. I think it will produce great works that will outlast and transcend the epidemic."

-Richard Goldstein

Introduction

The ways in which the gay community started to congregate and rebel against sexual and gender convention during the early part of the 20th century led to an unprecedented amount of unrest and tension between the gay community and mainstream U.S. culture during the AIDS epidemic. During this time dance and public movements were used to their full potential as means of protest and revolt. I decided to focus on the AIDS epidemic as a study of dance being used in rebellious ways, as the acts of revolution on stage and in the streets during this period are very well documented and well constructed. This revolutionary period was used as a time for members of the gay community to express their rage over the numerous ways they were demonized and dehumanized in U.S. society. The art and dance produced during the AIDS epidemic is so profound because the dancers, choreographers and artists within the gay community were forced into to action by the intense grief and loss they incurred throughout the course of the epidemic, which created a specific intensity, sensuality, and queer quality in their work that makes it distinct and deeply moving. The choreopolitics of the AIDS epidemic offers a prime examine of how choreographers and activists used dance to highlight the lack of political response to HIV/AIDS and humanize the gay community.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic was one of the most transformative times in the history of the United States, yet it remains largely unacknowledged. It was transformational in that it propelled the U.S. into an era where issues such as marriage equality, transgender rights and sexual education can be openly discussed within political and social forums. Yet it remains unacknowledged, as there it is still

recent enough that there is a deep sense of shame that accompanies discussions of the AIDS epidemic, as many Americans chose to turned a blind eye to the plight of those who died due to lack of treatment options and the lack of information and support provided by the U.S. government. While books and movies have been created and famous figures have spoken out about this time, it is still not a part of the U.S. educational curriculum. Teachers do not cover it in schools, public officials shy away from it and pop culture generally erases its existence. Throughout this research I have wondered why this material does not show up in any U.S. history classes throughout middle or high school. It seems as if the educational curriculum, and maybe the U.S. as a whole, actively tries to forget about the epidemic that touched every corner of this country, and has subsequently spread across the globe. When considering why no one has talked to me about this epidemic there are two words that come to mind: shame and homophobia. Shame for all the things that our government and citizens did not do to stop hundreds of thousands of people from dying, and homophobia, which is what kept people from taking a stand in the past, and has limited the conversation around AIDS since, evidenced by the fact that AIDS is still an epidemic worldwide, yet it barely makes national news.

Homophobia is the most pertinent word for a conversation about AIDS, as in many ways the main tension during the epidemic was between the gay community and public opinion. Now, 30 years after the epidemic, there is plenty of scholarship available on the ways in which the AIDS epidemic shaped U.S. history both politically and socially. While there is a wide array of valuable work by historians and scholars, many of these works focus heavily on one side of the story, often

focusing on the ways the AIDS epidemic effect communities that were predominantly composed of white gay males. From this point of view homophobia was the main oppressive force through the epidemic. However, it is a mistake to limit the conversation to only the negative effects of homophobia, as sexism and racism were major catalytic forces during this period, but are often ignored. This examination is not meant to catalogue the effects of the AIDS epidemic on the social and political climate of the United States, but rather to show how communities affected by the epidemic used dance to mourn, celebrate, advocate, and express rage. These creative expressions served as the driving force that led to necessary reforms which ultimately ended the AIDS epidemic (although an examination of these topics shows the work that they started is far from finished). Many brilliant works of art and choreography emerged from the AIDS epidemic from the art of Keith Haring to the fashion of Cole Haan, but in order to understand the full extent of their impact, it's imperative to understand the historical context of each piece and the epidemic as a whole.

In 1981 men in gay communities in New York and California started developing pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) and Karposi's sarcoma, two devastating diseases that are caused by immune system deficiencies.[98] The prevalence of these diseases within gay communities led to the advent of the term GRID (gay related immune-deficiency). By 1981, 121 people were dead.[99] The term AIDS was first used by the CDC in 1982, and in 1983 congress released The Federal Response to AIDS, which criticized the lack of monetary support designated for AIDS research during the initial years of the epidemic.[100] In 1985, men with AIDS were

not admitted to the army and Ryan White, a middle school child, who was exposed to AIDS by a tainted blood sample was prohibited from attending his school.[101]

In September of 1985, President Reagan made his first public address mentioning AIDS; there were 12,529 deaths to date.[102] In 1987 the FDA approved AZT, the first drug proven to help HIV positive individuals; it cost approximately $10,000 for a one-year supply, becoming the most expensive drug in history.[103] By 1989 over 100,000 Americans were infected, 89,394 had died and AIDS had spread to every region of the world. By 1990 AIDS had killed twice as many people as the Vietnam War, yet the U.S. government spent the equivalent of $140 billion dollars fighting in Vietnam but the government only allocated $135 million dollars to ending the AIDS epidemic from 1980-1989.[104][105]

These statistics show government's reluctance to take any action to fight the epidemic, and how homosexual men were quickly linked to the tragedy of the AIDS virus. These numbers show the egregiously large number of Americans that lost their lives in a brief 9-year period, and how our medical system did not prioritize finding a treatment. What these numbers do not express is how the lack of information surrounding this epidemic led to a wall of fear and hatred that surrounded the queer community. No statistic can explain why ambulance drivers wouldn't step inside modern dancer Arnie Zane's parents house to remove his dead body, or how police routinely donned thick rubber gloves when they were required to be in close proximity with any gay man.[106]

Within this tumultuous civil and political climate dance became the vehicle of the gay man's rage, and subsequently the vehicle of social revolution. Dance was not

simply used to fight the system, but to humanize those that were crushed by it. In this way, dance challenged the idea that the gay community was amoral and disease ridden, and instead showed the average American how AIDS was affecting individuals not so different from their own friends and family, and just how much the gay community had lost in a few short years.

Protest: Site-specific dance

A protest according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is "a solemn declaration of opinion and usually of dissent. " The organizers of the AIDS movement realized there was no better way to make a solemn declaration of dissent than through art. The Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was one of the most effective AIDS activist organizations. Playwright Larry Kramer founded ACT UP in 1987 in order to mobilize the gay and lesbian communities to advocate for policy change.[107] Kramer was able to unite a variety of communities by issuing charismatic challenges, but also by effectively utilizing mass communication in unprecedented ways. Kramer founded ACT UP in order to pressure the FDA and CDC to release experimental drugs and to increase the number of resources being given to AIDS research. While ACT UP began to gain momentum through grassroots activism, their well-organized and brilliantly publicized protest at the FDA headquarters in Rockville, Maryland solidified their position on the national radar.

This protest was unique and effective due to its internally controlled nature that was carefully covered with an uncontrolled exterior. In this protest every action was carefully constructed, and coordinated groups created independent cells of quick and varied movement. This demonstration was never meant to be a mere

protest. It was designed to be a performance. Each person who took part in this event knew that their actions would serve as a message not only to those watching through the tinted windows of FDA headquarters, but the whole nation. The element of performativity in conjunction with a steady internal locus of control makes these actions of protest a dance performance. Every dance performance first must start with the dancers being in charge of their bodies, and taking responsibility for their actions. They can give control to others, and lose control of their own actions, but the dancer always maintains core control regardless of what is happening to him/her.

On October 11th, 1988, the FDA headquarters in suburban Maryland was the site of the largest and most effective AIDS demonstration since the onset of the epidemic. The slogan "act up, fight back, fight AIDS" was aggressively chanted by thousands of protestors. This demonstration was a reaction against the FDA inaction and lethargy in testing and approving drugs to fight HIV.[108] At this point in the epidemic, one American died from AIDS every 30 minutes, and a new case of AIDS was diagnosed every 14 minutes.[109] This demonstration was carefully designed to force the FDA to take action. Perhaps the most iconic emblem of this protest was the large banner that read "SILENCE=DEATH," which was posted over the main entrance to the FDA's headquarters. This slogan was bookended with inverted pink triangles, recalling the subjugation and slaughter of homosexual citizens in Nazi Germany. Stylized pictures of Reagan were raised in the audience and pasted on either side of the banner. The chalk outlines of bodies inscribed with the names of lost loved ones filled the street. One of the most prominent features of

this protest was the die-in, where men and women lay on the ground, with tombstones over their heads with inscribed with epithets like "killed by the system." Other protestors donned lab coats with the words "FDA has" written above two bloody handprints (insinuating the FDA had blood on their hands). Protestors linked arms to avoid being picked off by police officers, and they formed chains blocking traffic, increasing exposure.[110] Videos of this event show police hiding behind their rubber gloves, pacing nervously or aggressively arresting protestors. Cameras within the demonstration captured protestors being dragged into police custody. Over the course of that day 176 people were arrested; however, the message was received loud and clear. In the words of the AIDS and dance scholar David Gere, these "protestors were able to transmute (AIDS) into a sign not of gay contagion but of government guilt."[111] This assertion of government guilt was distributed across the country, as the ACT UP organizers captured video of the event and created the perfect sound bites to grab the public's attention. These sound bytes proved incredibly effective, as the FDA and NIH both solicited input from ACT UP within the months following the demonstration. Shortly after, ddI was released as the first alternative to AZT.[112]

Act Up Protestors in Action -Courtesy of Rolling Stone Magazine

Whether staying perfectly still with tombstones positioned above their heads, blocking intersections, chanting while thrusting posters high in the air or refusing to walk on their own when being arrested, the protestors in this movement knew how to use their bodies to create maximum visual and emotional impact. The use of the corpse motif was particularly effective in this protest as well as in many other dances focusing on AIDS. A human body drained of life makes a strong statement regardless of the context. However when human bodies are piled upon each other, marred with blood and marked with statements about the government's role in their death, the human body is able to transcend mere politics and speak directly to the humanity in each observer. The corpse motif is particularly powerful in this context as it foreshadows the fate of many protestors if a cure is not found. While lying completely still seems far from dance, when put in context with the world buzzing around them, and the solemn nature of the occasion, the lines between dance and protest quickly become blurred. These piles of "corpses" allowed the protestors to give voices to their dead friends and lovers, while also serving as a reminder that they soon may be without their voices or vitality. The bloody lab coats and wildly gesticulating arms of the protestors voiced their rage, but also established their presence as a threat to the civil order, due to their disobedience of police commands and the blood on their coats. While police officers could normally easily handle the protestor's anger, the blood on their coats represents a risk of contamination. Thus by playing upon the unfounded fears of HIV transmission the protestors forced the police to take extra (albeit unnecessary) precautions when

taking them into custody.[113]The videos of protestors being dragged by police officers in translucent rubber gloves are striking.

The protesters' choice not to actively resist or comply when being taken into custody is a choreographic decision that reuses the corpse motif in a different orientation. By refusing to move, the protesters force the police to grab them like animals or pieces of meat and drag them through the demonstration. Thus even when being arrested the protesters (or dancers) were able to highlight the hysteric fears of infection that penetrated every sector of society, while also revealing the subhuman treatment of the gay community by civil authorities. Through these choreographed motions, repeated symbols and maintaining an internal sense of control, this ACT UP demonstration created powerful images broadcast through out the U.S. that enhanced the sense of strife and need for action within gay and lesbian communities, while also taking power away from the government authorizes and placing it in the hands of those afflicted with AIDS and most in need of change.

It is worth noting that ACT UP was awarded a "Bessie," a prestigious New York Dance and Performance Award in 1988, the same year as the FDA protest. According to the Dance Theater Workshop, ACT UP was given the award "for meeting the challenges of the AIDS epidemic and its crisis of conscience with vigilant acts of political and cultural provocation, thereby giving a voice to the essential creating will of our humanity."[114] Thus the activism of ACT UP not only functioned in conjunction with artistic elements, but the organization became a part of the artistic community, adding to the tools enraged artists could use to fight the cycle of oppression which stagnated progress during the AIDS epidemic.

Humanizing Through Movement

Dance has the capacity to reveal the humanity and vulnerability of both performers and audience members. During the AIDS epidemic a large rift occurred between the average American citizens and the members of the gay communities that were most affected by the disease. While celebrating queerness and sexuality was a theme of many dance and art pieces during this time, many artists sought to close the gap between these communities. While many members of the gay and lesbian community were quick to point out that the majority of the citizens and politicians had turned their backs on their suffering and loss, others realized that in order for any policy change or social action to occur, average Americans would have to acknowledge their pain and empathize with them. Members of the dance community adopted this idea by creating dances aimed at showing the audience that gayness may be a facet of a relationship, but love and loss are universal emotions, as evidenced by dances such as *Deeply There* by Joe Goode, *Untitled*, a solo by Bill T. Jones, and *Requiem* by Tracy Rhodes. By tapping into these universal emotions members of the gay community would no longer be viewed as amoral, sexualized animals, as they often were, but would instead be viewed as humans in pain.

Tracy Rhoades beautifully taps into the universality of love and loss in his solo *Requiem,* which debuted in 1989. In a short period of 20 minutes, Rhoades is able to subvert the stigma of homosexual relationships by focusing on specific moments that he shared with his lover, creating a ritualistic and holy homage as a final parting gift to his companion. The dance begins as Rhoades enters the stage fully dressed in very pedestrian attire.[115] He stands center stage, stares at the

audience and states “all the clothes I am wearing right now were given to me by Jim when he was alive or they were inherited from him after he died.” He then proceeds to take off each article of clothing he is wearing, carefully laying them down and smoothing them out on stage, while telling stories he associates with each piece of Jim’s clothing. In the ten minutes that follow, Rhoades proceeds to tell mundane stories about exchanges he shared with his lover, Jim. The stories range from buying a new pair of shoes to the way Jim used to lift weights and worry about his body. When Rhoades has finished, he places all the clothing in a body-like shape on the ground, takes a moment to study it, and then commences a short dance solo to Requiem, Op.48: IV. Pie Jesu, sung by a young boy .The solo is simple, repetitious and pure. The intentionality of the movements and the emotional weight he places behind each breath evokes the feeling of a religious ritual, perhaps a ceremony to summon a lost lover. When the piece ends, Rhoades returns to the clothes, rolls them up and walks off stage.

After viewing Rhoades performance, the gravity of his loss becomes palpable. What makes this piece so effective is that Rhoades uses the mundane moments of his relationship to show how normal their relationship was. He picked moments that resonate with each audience member, forcing them to think of how they would cope with their partner being taken away from them. Thus Rhoades is able to show how gay love is not different from socially acceptable heterosexual love, while simultaneously showing the ruthless nature of AIDS. In creating *Requiem*, Rhoades not only created a profoundly touching piece, but he created a piece that demands reflection. He demands each audience member to ask, “what if that happened to me?”

While many members of the American public believed that those who died of AIDS deserved it, Rhoades showed that applying a homosexual label to a relationship does not make it any less human, nor does it make the loss of a partner any easier to bear.

While Rhoades sought to humanize the plight of those affected by the AIDS epidemic one audience member at a time, a fellow AIDS activist in California, Cleve Jones used a different tactic. In 1987, founded the NAMES Project Foundation, and started creating a quilt with names of those lost to AIDS provided to him by fellow activists and protestors.[116] When the quilt was first unveiled on October 11th, 1987, it was meticulously laid out on the lawn of the Washington National Mall during the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The quilt covered a space larger than a football field and included 1,920 panels.[117] As of today the quilt is comprised of 48,000 panels, with over 70,000 names inscribed on it.[118] Volunteer participants dressed in white originally unfolded the quilt. Many of these participants are children, and they struggle under the weight of the fabric, hoisting it to its resting places, and methodically laying it out one fold at a time. The unfolding process is unabashedly pedestrian. There is no added entertainment or emotion from those presenting the quilt, they simply unfold one patch at a time, until the entire quilt covers football fields of territory, and the names each quilt square holds are left vulnerable in the open air. The Project NAMES Memorial Quilt is the largest documented community art project in the world, but it is also a dance[119].

Display of the Project NAMES Memorial Quilt on the National Mall in 1996, Courtesy of USA Today

The most strikingly dance-like facet of the Memorial Quilt are the motions of the volunteers tasked with unfolding it. While their motions are minimal, they are controlled. The internal locus of control is established from the onset of the quilt's "performance," which fits previous definitions of dance. While those laying out the quilt patches set the initial tone for those waiting to view the quilt, it is the quality of fabric, and the hand-stitched names that carry the emotional weight of this performance, and allow the gravity and vastness of the quilt to be felt by anyone who observes it. While observers watch the initial dance of the unfurling process, they become the dancers as they walk between the squares of the quilt, intensely looking for names of loved ones, grieving, or staring in awe at all the names that some members of society tried to erase. These observers become performers in the

ways that they react to the quilt, affecting others around them, making each performance unique.

The quilt was one of the most effective tools created by the gay community to help the general public understand the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic. The sheer size of the quilt shows that AIDS has touched more people's lives than the government or mass media ever acknowledged, and it provides final resting places for those who died without ever being recognized or mourned. The medium of the quilt contributes to its evocative nature. Quilts are signature items of many households in the United States, and are commonly made by mothers or grandmothers to commemorate a birthday or celebration. By taking an item that most Americans are familiar with and using it to convey a political message subverts the medium, but also makes the audience more receptive to the names on the quilt. This quilt is the most effective means of humanizing the AIDS epidemic, as it is not immediately intrusive but it cannot be ignored. Despite the fact that most American citizens did not place much value on the lives of those dying within gay communities during the AIDS epidemic, when presented with the magnitude of the quilt it is hard not to acknowledge the epidemic as a travesty of justice. Thus the Project NAMES Memorial Quilt provides a small window into how AIDS destroyed many relationships, families and communities, and advocates for change by using the names of those who did not have a fair chance at life. It is now common practice for presidents and state officials to read names on the quilt each time it is displayed, which serves as a sign of progress, even though the country's social and political climate still seek to invalidate the rights of various minority groups.

The Confrontational Approach

While many artists and members of the gay and lesbian community sought to bridge the gap between their communities and the American public, others sought to confront citizens and policy makers with the truth about gayness and AIDS. Often outward displays of queerness caused many straight Americans to avoid dialogue and retreat into the comfort of their own heteronormative lives and knowledge. Thus in order to force change within the system, LGBTQ+ activists began to confront people with the realities of the AIDS epidemic whether through protests, face-to-face interactions, or artistic endeavors. While powerful dances continued to be put on stage around the country, many of the most impactful dances occurred on street corners and outside of shop windows, as they were able to force unsuspecting people to come face to face with the reality of AIDS.

In 1990, Paul Timothy Diaz positioned himself in Union Square in a bright pink body suit covering his body and obscuring his face.[120] He performed from within this pink body bag, forming a pink triangle with different parts of his body, the iconic sign of the Gay and Lesbian civil rights movements. The decision to create this shape in a body bag forges an immediately recognizable link between gay activists and death. When confronted with a police officer that instructed him to end his performance and change locations, Diaz remained still, using the “die in” tactic that had proved so effective in previous demonstrations. When presented with a deathly still body, the police officer refused to touch Diaz, despite insisting he stop the performance. Street performers like Diaz served pivotal roles as activists during this revolution.

Theaters and auditoriums can only hold so many people, and too often patrons come ready to experience things on stage without internalizing them. By creating evocative shapes on the street, and staging his own death, Diaz not only reminded bystanders of the civil rights violations happening within their own country, but also served to expose the deep biases and fears that people held towards members of gay and lesbian communities. Sometimes it takes someone blocking a crowded sidewalk to wake the national consciousness and lead to social change.

The confrontational strategies of street performers were also adopted inside many theaters; as choreographers started to create dances that would force the audience to directly interact with disease and death. Diaz was also a major presence in the studio dances created to confront audiences with the reality of AIDS. In the performance *Movement Coalition Presents: Without fear genocide, movement to recognize one AIDS death every 8 minutes*, Diaz presents three distinct dance solos dealing with different facets of the AIDS epidemic. He first performs a series of movement phrases in front of evocative projections of videos of civil rights movement through the gay liberation movement and AIDS epidemic. The montage ends with a discolored view of Reagans face. As the projections fade he states, “this piece is dedicated to causalities in America’s war against AIDS.” The lights fade, as he paints dark circles under his eyes and slides on knee and elbow pads. He looks sickly now, like the life has been sucked out of his bones. He grabs a prop that looks like a magnified version of a pill. He combines powerful modern movement phrases. He tries to push the pill down his throat, as it becomes a phallic object, and a

forbidden fruit, as it is clear this medicine will never be of any use to him. His body continues to move in very smooth ways in direct contrast to the harsh rock and hip-hop sounds that serve as a soundtrack to his movement. At the end of this solo he strips off his clothes until he is completely naked. He holds the pill in one hand and runs and IV from the pill into his chest. He dances with the pill connected to his body like and anchor until he falls to his knees. There is a moment of pain and resignation as he pulls out a needle and stabs it into his arm. He looks at the audience and then falls limp on the stage.

Immediately following that solo he appears in a white body bag, similar to the pink bag he used for his street performance. His body lies serenely on the stage, as the voice playing in the background quotes the president and references the Nazi party, and the KKK. The soundscape changes to something that is very choral and angelic, as he starts to move within the fabric bag. Using his arms and head he stretches it into a triangle. He comes to standing he moves in a series of striking postures that create a sense of ritual within the dance. As he walks the cloth draws tight and stretching around his legs, creating bodily forms that are reminiscent of Martha Grahams *Lamentations.* He presses his face against the fabric, and his open eyes and mouth can be seem, the confined pain radiates from his form. He presses his body against the fabric and it appears that his is suffocating. As suddenly as his face appeared it disappears into the recesses of the fabric. It is as if he death was captured in real time, and what started out as a live body has now become a corpse.

After the piece ended Diaz confronts the audience with three questions to take with them as they go back into the world. “Why isn’t there a free needle exchange

for drug users?" Why do women and people of color die faster?" "Why do they wait for people to get close to death until they have access to the med-tox system?" Both through his movement and direct addresses to the audience Diaz challenges them to question established power structures. After watching small snippets of Diaz's work I was struck with the ways he used his art to call attention to the racial and gender disparities of AIDS advocacy and treatment, issues that were not brought to the forefront of many other performances dealing with the topic of AIDs.

Another group that employed confrontation and shocking talking was the San Francisco based dance company High Risk Group, formed by Rick Darnell, an HIV positive dancer in 1987. When asked about his company in an interview with the LA times in 1991, Darnell stated:

> "I feel ripped off when dancers come on stage and just do technique. It may be great, but technique just enables you to dance. I compare it to a football game. If the guys come out on the field and only do exercises, that's not football. I want the game."[121]

During one performance David Gere described them as "skateboarders from hell," a label that Darnell viewed as a compliment. From the name alone it is becomes evident that the High Risk Group was not afraid of stigma, and sought to subvert the fear associated with HIV positive dancers within dance companies. They also sought to create pieces that forced audience members to confront the harsh reality that many of the company's dancers faced in their everyday lives. In one performance Darnell's dancers lifted up their shirts to spell out the words love and hate across their bodies then they preceded to walk through the audience saying "I love you" or

"I hate you" to various audience members. Other company members spray painted "AIDs" across their chest and approached the audience, asking "What are you gonna do about it?"[122] Many dance pieces had been created with AIDS as a center point, but very few break down the fourth wall in such a rough manner, and ask the audience what they are going to do to help. Under normal circumstances, such a question in a performance would seem rhetorical, however the ways Darnell places his dancers in the audience, blurring the lines between performance and observer, one cannot help but think that he actually wanted to hear a response.

While Darnell's High Risk Group used personal affronts on audience members, both Joe Goode and David Rousseve used less controversial methods to confront audience members with the reality of AIDS. In 1990, Joe Goode debuted a performance entitled *The Reconditioning Room.* This five-hour performance took place in a dark room, where audience members were invited to walk through and stay as long as they desired. A casket was hung from the ceiling, in which Joe Goode writhed, mimicking the ways in which he had seen his friends succumb to AIDS. The Casket was hung over pile of earth containing flickering candles.[123] Other dancers were perched on the walls surrounding the casket and videos of people screaming played in the background. As the audience entered the room they were forced face death, as they watched Goode writhe in the casket.

Through creating a claustrophobic, subterranean environment, Goode sought to directly confront his audience with the inescapable horror of AIDS. Interestingly he allowed the audience members to enter and exit whenever they desired, forcing them to make a conscious effort to stay and face their fears, or run away. Walking

into the light after watching the performance the audience was given the sense of beating death, yet it was clear that not everyone was as lucky as they were. The image of Goode writhing in the casket represented the slow deaths that many had died in the past 10 years, while their friends, lovers and family were forced to stand by and watch.

Goode's "The Recondition Room*", Courtesy of the California College of the Arts Vault*

Goode relied heavily on imagery and symbolism to force a change within his audience members. The symbolism of the casket and his soon-to-be corpse linked the piece to the queer activist movement, as the dead body appeared frequently as a motif in protests and performances. In 1996, a few years after Goode's performance, David Rousseve debuted *Whispers of Angels*, a dance piece about a gay African American man dying before his time. This piece featured "conventional" modern

dances, including group numbers and energetic *pas de deux*.[124] The unique part of this performance was that it featured a script written by Rousseve that told the tale of a young black man, dying of AIDs, who had an abusive father. While the piece may be emotionally charged from beginning to end, it reaches its climax during a solo at the end of the piece, where the protagonist stands naked on stage. He alternates between muttering to himself and making gurgling sounds, reminiscent of the last sounds the body makes, before life passes from it. His body undulates with each breath and he reaches his shaky had up towards the sky, then collapses to the floor, as he mutters "hold my hand."

The Final Moments of "Whispers of Angels"- *Courtesy of David Rousseve*

Thus Rousseve also uses death as a theme to ignite action within his audience members, but instead of summoning the grotesque, he uses vulnerability to confront the audience with the reality of a young vibrant male dying before his time, while also tapping into a universal sense of humanity and loss.

Fear of Contamination

AIDS profoundly affected the course of every artistic sector in the U.S., including the fashion industry, theatre, dance, and visual arts. While the effects of the AIDS epidemic were profoundly felt in all of these areas, each sector dealt with the epidemic in vastly different ways. While the fashion and theatre worlds were rocked with the loss of iconic figures, the dance world stayed largely silent on the issue of AIDS in large metropolitan areas, most notably New York.[125] It seems paradoxical to discuss this silence after examining some of the ways that dancers and choreographers drew attention to the AIDS crisis through their work, but it must be noted that these previous examples were the exception, not the rule. Most of the dance world was petrified by the loss of friends and company members, this intense fear lead to a culture of silence. During the outbreak of the epidemic, dance companies fought to break the association between homosexuality and dance, and minimize the impact of the disease within dance communities.

This policy of silence was put in place by two driving factors, fear (largely due to lack of information about AIDS transmission) and money. It is fairly simple to trace the effect of money on the attitude of the dance community towards AIDS. Many dance companies, back then and today, heavily relied on funding from a variety of city, state, and federal sources. This monetary reliance gives organizations like the National Foundation of the Arts the ability to influence the content produced by dance companies they support. Richard Philip, the editor of *Dance Magazine* during the 1980s stated "one of the reasons AIDS seems to have had a lower profile in dance is that in this era of federal budget cuts in the arts, dance companies want

to project a more conservative image."[126] Not surprisingly, this "conservative image" that many dance companies sought to adhere to did not include content about sexuality or AIDS. Thus the fear of losing funding made it impossible for any of the leading dance companies in major American cities, especially New York, to create any compelling or thought-provoking work, which drew attention to the AIDS crisis. Government funding handicapped many major dance companies which lead many new artists and smaller companies to take on the burden of AIDS activism. This framework helps to explain the rise of artists discussed above, such as Joe Goode or the High Risk Group in San Francisco. While they may have had meager beginnings, the content they were creating broke the silence and gave gay dancers an avenue of more genuine expression. In fact, the very reason that Joe Goode decided to break from the Merce Cunningham dance company in New York, was to create a space where he could freely express his effeminacy, strength, and sexuality without being censored by the mainstream, federally funded dance community.[127]

While funding did have a profound effect on the content created by the dance community, the conservative appearance projected by many dance troupes was fueled by a fear within these troupes as well as from the audience perspective. During the first years of the epidemic there was a severe lack of knowledge about the ways that AIDS affected those infected, and the way the virus was transmitted. Many believed it could be transferred through saliva, sweat, or being in close proximity with someone who was infected.[128] The homophobic climate of the U.S. served as an incubator for rumors and fears about the LGBTQ community that were augmented by the rampant spread of AIDS within these communities. The lack of

knowledge about the disease dealt two major blows to the dance community. The first detrimental effect was the fear of AIDS transmission within dance troupes. Dancers are often in close quarters with each other, and it is not unusual for blood, sweat and tears to be shed in dance studios every once and while. The idea of sweaty bodies rubbing against each other during dance rehearsals was alarming for many members of the dance community as well as the general public. This alarm was compounded when it was taken into account that many dancers were members of the queer community. Thus, many believed that dance studios would be the perfect incubators for this disease, which led many dancers, gay and straight alike to become increasingly concerned about their own safety, as well as the safety of their peers. When recalling what it was like to live during this period, Joe Goode recalls that he felt as if he "was walking around with a death sentence"[129] for over a decade. Through all the research conducted for this Thesis I have come to the conclusion that the omnipresent fear of contracting AIDS pushed most dancers (distinctly those within the queer community) in one of two directions: they either used their bodies as a vehicle for expression of the anger, fear and loss that they felt, or they worked exceedingly hard to try and distance themselves from the disease by distancing themselves from the label of queer, which was often facilitated by showing off their masculinity.

Understandably, these fears of transmission also spread into the general public, as most audiences did not want to spend their night at the theater being confronted with the threat of contracting AIDS, or being forced to look death squarely in the eye. The fears of audience members had a large impact on many of

the largest dance troupes, such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Joffrey Ballet, who's directors both ironically died of AIDS. These companies, along with many others, fought to keep up the façade of youth and vitality in the dance field, which they accomplished by avoiding the topic of AIDS all together. The differences between the mainstream dance companies and grassroots dancers and organizations can clearly be seen in the ways in which these groups fought the epidemic. In New York City, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, there were two notable fundraisers put into motion by members of the dance community. The first benefit, entitled *Dancing for Our Lives!* was conceived by Jason Childers, a choreographer based in New York. The event took place in 1986 at P.S. 122, a small performance space in downtown New York.[130] All proceeds from the event were donated to the Gay Men's Health Crisis, and the evening was full of dances that embraced gayness and used rage to demand action from the government and the audience. While the event was successful, it operated on a small scale and was not backed by any major names within the dance industry, as it was both conceived and received by active members of the gay and lesbian community. In contrast, Lar Lubovitch planned a large-scale AIDS fundraiser entitled *Dancing for Life,* at Lincoln Center's New York State Theatre in 1987.[131] This benefit pulled together some of the biggest names in the dance community. However, there were serious reservations by many companies, most notably the Paul Taylor Dance company, as to how participating in the benefit would affect the reputation of their companies. While the event came to fruition and raised over 200 times as much money as the previous downtown fundraiser, the word AIDS was never spoken during the course of the

entire benefit, and the topic of queerness was never broached.[132] These two benefits perfectly encapsulate the way that fear divided the dance community, leading the renowned dance companies to distance themselves from the epidemic at the cost of their own dancers and choreographers, while openly queer dancers with no reputation to ruin, created compelling works that were often only seen by those who already understood the urgency and tragedy of the situation.

The Ailey Effect

As the AIDS epidemic progressed, and dance companies continued to project conservative images of their dancers to try and escape the stigma of AIDS, members of the dance community rapidly started dying of a variety of rare diseases. As the epidemic progressed an alarming number of mysterious diseases claimed important figures within the dance community, including Robert Joffrey, the renowned choreographer and creator of the Joffrey ballet, who died at the age of 57. The cause of death, as cited by the associated press, was " a liver ailment caused by medication he was receiving for asthma and a muscle condition."[133] In 1989 the dance community suffered another crippling loss with the death of Alvin Ailey at the age of 58. His doctor attributed his death to "terminal blood dyscrasia, a rare disorder that affects the bone marrow and red blood cells."[134]

As dancers continued to die, it became increasingly difficult not to suspect that AIDS played a major role in these losses. However the stigma against AIDS was so strong that dancers asked their friends and doctors to cite other reasons for their death to spare their family members the pain and embarrassment of knowing that their son or brother was engaged in homosexual activity, leading to what I refer to

as the "Ailey Effect." While Alvin Ailey was not the first or last dancer to die of AIDS but chose to publically label it a rare disease instead, his life and death offers an interesting case study to examine the effect that family and race played in confronting sexuality and AIDS.

A few years after the death of Ailey's mother, his close friends revealed that AIDS was the real culprit for his death. Before his death, his friends and doctor had promised to keep his disease a secret, as he did not want his mother or brother to know that he engaged in sexual activity with men throughout his life.[135]Coming to terms with being queer was extremely difficult during this time, as the stigma against homosexuality was compounded and magnified by that of AIDS. Ailey was born in rural Texas in 1931, which further complicated his situation, as he grew up in a time of intense racism, including Jim Crow legislation. The topic of race becomes increasingly important as the topic of this discussion shifts from the AIDS epidemic to discussion of sexual expression and effeminacy in dance.

Ailey was an iconic, extremely well respected figure, which makes his choice to take his AIDS diagnosis to the grave with him all the more fascinating. Ailey was a revolutionary figure in many ways. Out of the civil rights movement he became the father of black modern dance, and created the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which became one of the most popular touring dance companies in the world. Through dances such as *Revelations,* he encapsulated themes and motifs of African American culture, allowing his dancers to celebrate their blackness in ways that would have been impossible 20 years earlier. When comparing his circumstance to that of other notable choreographers, such as Arnie Zane, who used his AIDS

diagnosis to spread awareness, it is important to include social, economic and racial background the discussion in order to place these figures on an even playing field.

As seen in Chapter 1, many racial and ethnic communities have different norms and expectations surrounding the concept of masculinity and queerness. As previously discussed, homophobia and heterosexism appear to be much more divisive forces within the African American community than other communities in the U.S., leading many African American men exhibiting queer behavior to not identify on the queer spectrum at all[136]. The authors of this study believe this is due to the hyper masculinized view of African American males, leading to a staunch standard of masculinity within the African American community (for a better understanding of African American masculinity please see this additional resource[137]). Operating under these rigid and hyper masculinized standards, the reasons why members of the African American community, including Ailey, responded covertly to their AIDS diagnoses becomes clear. Thus when examining the ways that the AIDS epidemic shaped communities within the U.S. it is necessary to factor race into the equation, as many communities were affected by the epidemic in different ways.

While a discussion of race may seem out of place in this examination of queer theory and dance during the AIDS epidemic, it would be both inaccurate and insensitive to say that all queer communities struggled equally with the AIDS epidemic. While white voices were the predominant voices of discontent and rage within the artistic community, the epidemic often hit communities of color the hardest. By 1991, 176,694 African Americans were infected with AIDS. This number

accounted for 23% of the AIDS diagnoses in the U.S., even though African Americans only accounted for 6% of the population.[138] Despite these shockingly high numbers of infection, many members of the black community, such as Alvin Ailey, stayed relatively silent on the issue compared to their white counterparts in the theatre and dance community. The attitude of the black community towards AIDS can be partially explained in the context of the ways in which these communities view masculinity, as was briefly discussed in the pervious chapter. However, a quick survey of the years leading up to the AIDS epidemic reveals a social and political history that placed white and black AIDS activists in very different situations.

Even after the civil rights movement, the African American community had to fight to gain access to social and economic opportunities, especially those in artistic sectors. Gay African American males were not part of the image that would help African Americans be granted equality in mainstream American culture, thus the gay communities were often dislocated from larger African American communities, especially during the 1980s.[139] From this lens it is not difficult to spot the hardship queer black artists, especially dancers, faced during this era, as they were continually looking for work in companies that discriminated against their skin color, while also being cut off from black communities for being queer. One can imagine how the fear of a disease like AIDS would be greatly magnified in this context, placing African Americans in extremely difficult positions. In a culture that preyed off their supposedly hypersexual nature, they become much more threatening if their sexuality was not oriented in the “correct” direction, which led to intense secrecy and silence in African American communities.

The AIDS prevention effort was crippled in these communities and the risks that accompanied speaking out in defense of queer communities and AIDS policy change increased. This is not to say that black men and other men of color did not play pivotal roles in the ending the AIDS epidemic, as there a distinct examples mobilized efforts to fight the AIDS epidemic within these communities. Two of the most prominent examples include Howard Brown Health in Chicago, which was founded in 1974 and has now become one of the nations largest healthcare providers to members of the LGBTQ+ community[140]. Another organization worth note is The Gay and Lesbian Latino AIDS Education Initiative (GALAEI), which was founded in 1989, responding to the lack of resources and support for the Latino community during the AIDS epidemic[141]. This discussion simply serves to widen the horizons of the conversation and to clarify how the far-reaching effects of the AIDS epidemic affected different communities in different ways. Many chose to remain silent, as their silence was warranted, rewarded and/or a necessity for survival.

Fear the Queer- Concluding the Inconclusive

Through the tragedy of AIDS, artistic communities were forced to come together to mourn the loss of friends, colleagues and lovers. Along with loss, these communities expressed their rage via their queerness, forcing the American government and people to take notice of them. Without the money raised through dance fundraisers, the protests against the FDA and federal government, and the ways the dance community put their souls into their art to humanize the gay

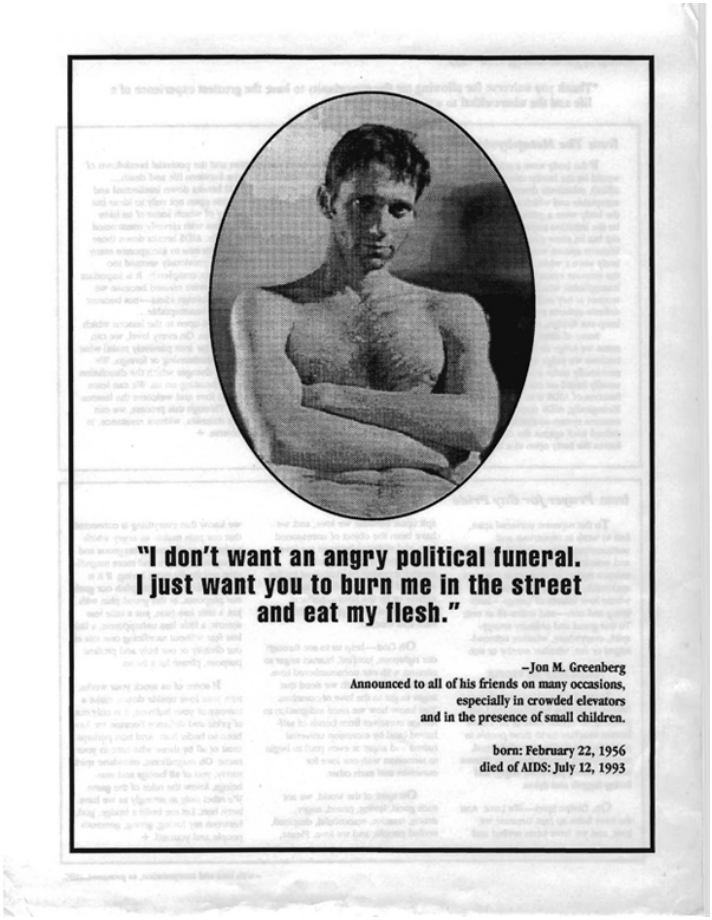
community, the AIDS epidemic would have continued for many more years. The ferocity of the dance community, in conjunction with other theatre and visual artists, made it impossible for the government to ignore the plight of the gay and lesbian communities, and spurred politicians and the American people to action. If not for the bravery of dancers and choreographers across the country, many more people would have lost their lives and the rift between gay communities and the American public would be much wider than it is today.

Being born after the end of the worst part of the epidemic, it is easy for me to look back on these dance performances and see them as cathartic expressions of artists during that time. It is easy to forget the pain, courage and guts that went into creating each piece discussed thus far, as well as many other dances not broached here. As Joe Goode mentioned in a personal interview, he did not choose to create pieces about AIDS and loss, he was forced to, due to the way that AIDS and grief enveloped his entire life. When considering dance and art during this time it is also crucial to remember that creating work about AIDS was not routine, it was revolutionary. Using queer and infected bodies to scare spectators and policemen alike was an act of revolt.

Any performance that included queer elements and proclamation of queer identity was powerfully subversive and shocking for many Americans. This queer expression served to inspire many queer community members and allies of the AIDS revolution. In the words of the feminist scholar Peggy Phelan, song and dance are "quintessentially queer acts,"[142] and the ability of the queer community to claim these acts gave them ammunition to resist pressure from mainstream society to

suffer quietly. Dancers and artists alike continued to rail against the system in the ways that they lived and died. Often elaborately staged funerals served as the final performance for many members of the queer community.

Funeral processions tapped into aesthetics of gay celebration serving to expose others to queer culture, and publicize the travesty of AIDS. Funeral processions featured open caskets, reviving the corpse motif present in many dance pieces centered on AIDS. The processions of the bodies often turned into protests, as caskets were brought to the White House, or paraded around major urban thoroughfares.[143] On his deathbed, the AIDS activist Jon Greenberg told his friends and family his last wish was: "I want you to burn me in the street and eat my flesh."



Jon Greenberg's funeral flyer- July 16, 1993- Courtesy of Collections of Joy Episalla, Barbara Hughes, James Baggett and Risa Dennenberg.

His funeral, largely facilitated by his younger brother and choreographer, Neil Greenberg, featured a procession along First Avenue into East Village in New York City[144]. The whole affair was broadcast on television and Greenberg's corpse was the star of the show. In the words of historian David Gere "the funeral is a site where insurgency festers and where the tactical resistance of the marginalized other is brought into direct conflict with the strategic response of government power and societal status quo."[145] Thus dancers, artists and activists alike used every medium possible to get their message across. What makes these dances, processions acts revolutionary, however are the ways in which queer culture was intertwined with powerful political messages. This intersection allowed the artists to celebrate their identity while stoking a revolutionary fire that would burn well into the Twenty-First century.

Many of the elements of dances during the AIDS epidemic are specifically related to the horrific sickness of AIDS. The main motifs during this period include the use of corpses or corpse poses, as well as the use of coffins, body fluids (most notably blood, saliva, and spit), elements of queer culture (specifically elements that arose from the queer clubbing subculture) and the uninhibited use of the body to express rage, grief and desire. While these elements were extremely effective during the period they were initially used in, the specific motifs do not entirely translate to developing innovative choreography to fit the sociopolitical climate of the Twenty-First century.

As a budding choreographer the most useful concept I learned from my research thus far, is how to properly and effectively craft socially relevant and

subversive messages using dance. This idea ties into the general concept of choreopolitcs, the foundation on which this Thesis rests. As discussed in the introduction, choreopolitics is simply the relation between movements and politics. Studying dances produced during the AIDS epidemic led me to two major realizations; artists are the fist line of defense protecting the public against social injustice, and that in order to make a strong, compelling and impactful statement, the artists have to be willing to risk their lives in the process.

The AIDS epidemic is unique in that many members of the artistic community were directly affected by the epidemic, thus they were placed on the front lines of the movement, whether they wanted to be there or not. However history shows that artists are often at the forefront of every civil rights movement, from Irish dancing as a means of rebellion against the British, to anti-apartheid dances around the world, artists commonly serve as catalysts for social change.

Moving forward as a choreographer and artist I now see that there is no line between art and activism. True artists bear the responsibility to be vigilant and create work that heals the core of humanity, whether that takes the form of providing comfort or a safe space, or pointing out flaws that must be mended in order for society to progress. Art and activism are not mutually exclusive, but inexorably joined. Thus creating art must not be taken lightly, as truly progressive work, such as that seen during the 1980s, involves lots of risk without the promise of reward. The messages that society needs to hear the most are never the ones that people want to learn about; often the issues that are swept under the rug or secretly felt but never stated are the ones that must be brought to light through art.

The risks of dance are numerous, as each performer's body is scrutinized and their physicality must speak directly to the heart of each audience member. The most necessary pieces are those that require the performers to turn their bodies inside out and leave their guts, brains, heart and shit on the stage and make the audience look at them. These revolutionary pieces require the creators and performers to risk everything, as their reputations, careers and lives could be decimated under the juggernaut of social change that they pushed into motion. These artists may be trampled, ostracized or all together forgotten; but that is the price of revolution.

Making Connections: A Final Touch with the Choreography of Urinetown

When setting out to choreograph portions of *Urinetown*, I had no expectations of what the movement should look like. Through early collaborations I learned what gestures the director Giovanni Ortega wanted to be repeated throughout the entire play, but aside from that we did not overtly establish any larger themes that we would actively incorporate in the choreography. The way that the songs in *Urinetown* are nestled between scenes and filled with different types of music and very overt lyrics allowed us to deal with each song individually in determining what types of movement would best advance the plot and overall aesthetic of the piece. While a full overview of our choreographic processes is too lengthy to include in this discussion, I do wish to highlight a few interesting realizations I had through out the choreographic process.

The first facet of the choreography that surprised me was how much more effeminate I was making the gestures of the rich compared to the movements I gave the poor. I had consciously intended to create distinct movement vocabularies between the two groups to visually enhance the disparity, however I had not meant to specifically place more effeminate gestures on the rich. In reflection on this choice, I realized that I associate wealth with decadence, and decadence with effeminacy. While there is something urgent and grimy about the direct and heavy movement, which was often given to the poor, effeminate movement has an air of aristocracy to

it, especially on the stage. This link between wealth and effeminate movements has been robustly established throughout dance history, but I was surprised to find that my subconscious mind still believed it to be true. The song "Mr. Cladwell" featured a wide array of effeminate gestures that helped establish the status of those on stage. While some of the gestures appeared effeminate in nature when carried out by male actors, most of the motions were meant to be light, lifted and delicate in nature. Thus in deconstructing this process I must now try to decipher the ways that effeminacy and delicacy interact and dissociate, if they do at all.

Mr. Cladwell- Courtesy of Giovanni Ortega

One of the more thought-provoking dance combinations in the piece for me was Officer Lockstock's small solo in "What is Urinetown". In creating this solo I tried to bridge the gap between the light-hearted character of Lockstock the

narrator, and the vicious ferocity of Lockstock the policeman. Through creating this solo with Ortega I had the realization that physical emotions and characteristics, notably effeminacy, are relative. I had this realization when the Director instructed me to dance the solo in a way that highlighted the conflict between the effeminate and masculine sides of the character.

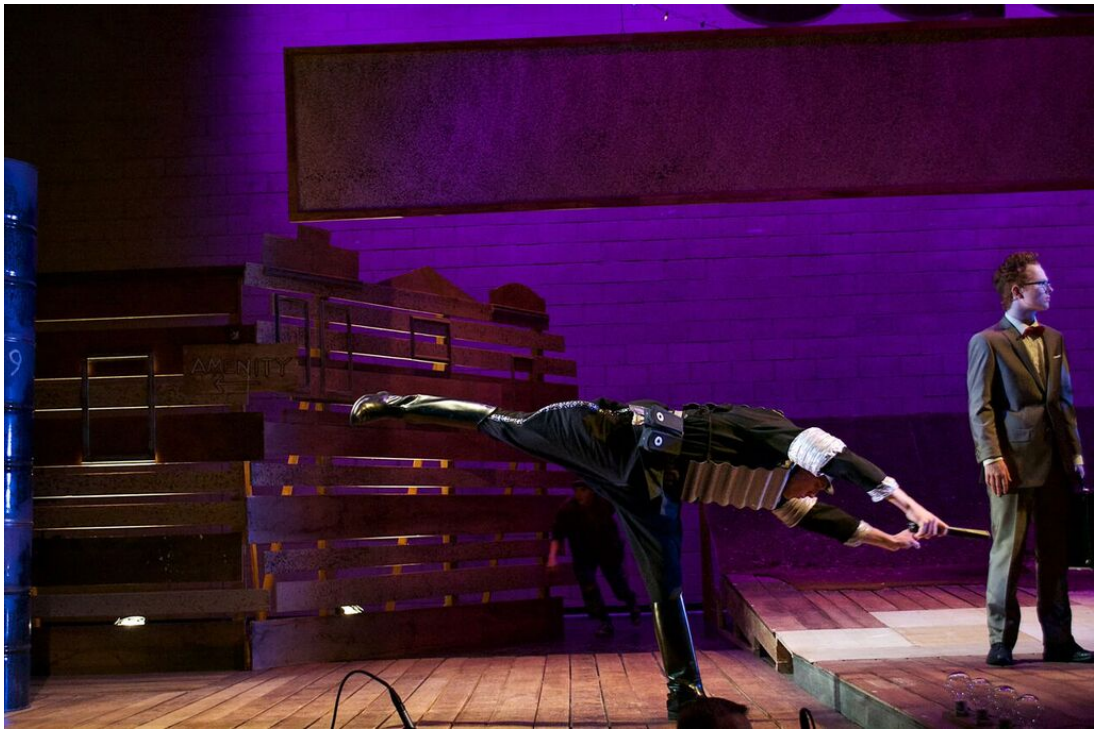
After first creating this solo, I had not placed any effeminate gestures inside of it (as Ortega had not yet revealed his vision for this moment), yet Ortega pointed out several places where I pointed my toes or lifted my hands in a more balletic way, stating that those elements introduced the topic of effeminacy to the piece. In this moment I realized that both in performance and life there are no set standards we must abide by, rather expectations placed upon us determine the way we are categorized. Officer Lockstock is a rather masculine character that displays his virility through the subjugation of others. In the confines of a character like Lockstock it is rather shocking to see a pointed toe or extended leg. The expectations placed upon him make these moments stand out and force the audience to reexamine their notions of a character and the ways in which they categorize others. This experience helped me to realize that as choreographer I must always consider the context of my movements in order to fully examine the impact that they will have. In art, as in life, context is everything.

This moment also made the months of research that went into this project feel much more tangible and real. In the fusion of this character with myself I am reminded of men such as Joe Goode who had to weigh the difference between personal movement style and tendencies with the confines of masculinity in

creating dance pieces. Growing up I was conditioned to avoid any gesture that could be at all construed as effeminate. As a result I have continued to fight all physical effeminate tendencies I have in order to project myself as a strong young man, something I have always strived to be. While this examination of dances delving into the realm of effeminate gestures and behavior has been fascinating, and deeply moving, it felt much more personal and daunting to actually try and apply these thoughts and explorations within the confines of a performance piece, as they are contrary to everything I have been conditioned to perform over the past 21 years.

In the moment of creating this piece, and reflecting on the ways in which I could show conflict between masculine and effeminate tendencies I felt afraid. This fear stemmed from the fact that I was afraid of what my friends and family would say when confronted with me performing gestures that could be categorized as effeminate. After creating this small solo I knew that it fit within the canon of modern dance, and fit within the confines our the world we had created. It did not push boundaries or delve into many of the issues discussed throughout this Thesis. However in creating it, the small moment of fear that I felt helped me to understand the huge risks that many of the artists discussed above were taking when developing and performing work that challenged conceptions of gender and sexuality. It is hard to image the amount of strength and courage it would have taken for artists to face audiences in the 1970s or 80s and perform pieces that would push those watching way beyond their comfort zone. This experience made the fear and strength that these artists had tangible, and gave me a deepened perspective of how these pieces were so pivotal in advancing dance and theatre over

the past 30 years. I was also struck with how I have not been using my full power as an artist, as that fear is a necessary hurdle in creating necessary art. This experience has inspired me to push my own personal boundaries by creating art that scares me. By embracing the fear of the unknown and summoning the fortitude to push through it I hope to create art that is urgent and necessary.



Officer Lockstock's Solo; Courtesy of Janelle Asti

"Cop Song" was perhaps the most enjoyable and rewarding number to perform, as it fit perfectly within my comfort zone of creation and performance. This piece is the epitome of everything dance teachers have praised me for in the past. It uses sharp and strong movement to convey a sense of brut force and fear. Within these sharp elements there are softer stylized movements, which keep the performance from becoming one-dimensional. While the style of this piece was not a challenge for me, I was challenged by the thematic content of the piece, as I had

never created a dance that followed a coherent plot line. In many ways this dance was a manifestation of the words spoken in the song, which has been something I have always tried to avoid to do as dance teachers have often stressed the importance of dance being able to stand alone without relying on the music for emotional content or support. However in this piece I was able to fuse movement with words, which proved to be a worthwhile exploration. While there are times that music and dance should be able to stand alone, I certainly believe that melding the two forms of expression can create something powerful.

Cop Song- Courtesy of Giovanni Ortega

FINE.

The impetus for taking on this project was to analyze the annals of choreographic history in order to determine the ways in which dance has been effectively utilized in revolutionary ways. By understanding past choreographic strategies I hoped to gain insight into how to make more progressive, revolutionary and impactful work in my future endeavors as a choreographer. The last component of this project was to work as a Choreographer on Pomona College's production of *Urinetown; The musical*, which opened April 5th, 2016. I originally planned to conduct just enough research to allow me to pull from a variety of sources when choreographing this musical. However I soon found that issues of revolutionary dance are much more complex as well as socially and politically involved that I previously thought, which led me to delve deeper into the topics of what it means to be revolutionary and what constitutes dance. Through this exploration of dance throughout the AIDS epidemic and the ways that the stigma against effeminacy has shaped the course of dance history, I have reaffirmed the power of dance to propagate cycles of oppression as well as break them. This research has also shown the unique ways in which dance can speak to the humanity in everyone regardless of social or political differences.

Ultimately, as a choreographer and art creator I have learned that it is my responsibility to challenge what is socially acceptable, and create art in a manner that allows every participant to express themselves in a way that is truthful, without imposing preconceived notions of what they should look or act

like. The challenge that I take away from this research is simple: listen. When artists listen, they can clearly hear those hurting around them, and speak directly to the root of injustice and pain without worrying about convention or social acceptability.

In investigating the ways effeminate tendencies have largely been banished from performance, I realized the ways in which I have trained myself to appear more "masculine" on stage. I readily acknowledge that most dances I create use incredible amounts of strength, which is largely due to the fact that dance teachers have always celebrated the strength of my dancing. Being lauded for my physical abilities has led me to realize how vulnerable I feel when I am asked to express genuine emotion on stage. My physical tendencies are not always the epitome of masculinity and strength, but I have noticed the ways in which I sterilize my dance pieces so that they reaffirm my image as a strong male, instead of calling my masculinity into question. This research has shown me that as a choreographer it is imperative to keep my own artistic tendencies in mind and not enforce the norms and expectations that have been placed on me onto others. The opportunity to work on college musical is unique because I am able to work with many people who have never danced before, so I have the gift of being able to help them to develop a vocabulary of expressive motions. Throughout this process I strived to give each performer time to explore their own movement style in order to see what feels good to them before placing my movement on their bodies. I believe that a collaborative approach to choreography will yield the most impactful dancing and result in a

transformative process. While free movement exploration is important, I realize the power in challenging performers to find the ways their bodies and motions have been colonized by society norms.

Through pinpointing the ways that performers incorporate cultural expectations into their movements we are be able to subvert these expectations within our art in order to create pieces that will feel both unexpected and liberating for the performers. The audience may not notice many of the ways in which each performer is rebelling against personal molds that have been created for them, however the liberating effect of these motions within each performer will create a distinct atmosphere that will be palpable anyone in the theater. Thus in every production I am a part of from this point on, I plan to propagate forms of revolutionary dance by giving each performer the confidence to tap into parts of themselves that society has repeatedly shut down. These individual rebellions have the ability to forge a strong ensemble and provide the fuel to maintain the spirit of revolution throughout the rehearsal process and performances.

Examination of dance during the AIDS epidemic revealed the power of necessity, as dance becomes something larger than art when it is created because the artist had no other choice. This pure art formed as an act of desperation shows that artists are the first line of defense against injustice. As the artists during this time showed, there is no line between art and activism. As discussed in chapter 1, we are now in a new era, where art and activism have become separate activities for

many mainstream artists. While steps towards equity in the arts have been made over the past 20 years, there is still a long way to go. While many white queer artists are now capable of seamlessly integrating into artistic society, we owe it to our community and the communities that came before us to continue to rail against systems that limit the mobility of women, people of color and artists of different gender identities. There will always be a new frontier of injustice, and as artists it is our job to be vigilant and use art to combat new and old cycles of oppression, regardless of whether they directly affect us or not. By being open and receptive to the communities around us, and continually listening, we can do precisely that.

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