



*Storying the Dance: Transforming Genealogy,
Ethnochoreology and Autoethnography into Dance-
Theatre and Film through Arts Practice Research*

By

Miriam S. Phillips

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Irish World Academy of Music and Dance

University of Limerick

Supervisors: Dr. Jenny Roche, Dr. Colin Quigley

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I stand on the shoulders of my grandmothers ...and my great grandmothers across the lineages...and lands at the crossroads of possibility that I transmit. The ancestors, of my maternal lines, with all their stories of exile, pain and abuse, and those of survivance, protection, desire and resilience anchor me into this practise of re-mything and enfleshing a politics of knowledge of the racialised and feminised flesh; a methodology otherwise.

(Sara C. Motta, 2023)

Abstract

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This arts-practice PhD explores applying the concept of the *dance event*, a research perspective derived from ethnochoreology, to contemporary dance creative practice and performance. I propose a choreographic approach that offers new possibilities for excavation of personal, generational, and collective histories.

The research produced two choreographic projects, one storied on film, the other through live dance-theatre. Both investigate my erased Jewish family lineage and the embodiment of that research through a process I devised, called *performed auto-ethno-genealogy*. Each artistic creation reflects different facets of a journey that searched for meaning within family stories, memories, photographs, and genealogical tracings. They explored themes of persecuted and marginalized races, displaced immigrants, desires to be *other*, and family lore that perpetuates a sense of loss and lost identity through the generations.

The Film: *The Shluva Project: The Journey to Find My Grandmother's Grandmother* takes viewers through two parallel journeys: one, the genealogical excursions to track unknown ancestors via a quest to find a woman named Shluva; two, a personal journey exploring my identity as a Jewish American woman disconnected from lineage but with a sense that associated feelings are connected to ancestors' experiences of trauma. Integrating dance, storytelling, music, genealogical and ethnographic documentation, and viewer participatory activities, this film traces these journeys through twelve scenes which traverses sites ranging from forest to ocean, kitchen to cemetery.

Live Performance: *The Shluva Project: Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother* was a dance-theatre event performed on 15 April 2022 at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick in Ireland. Consisting of nine dance scenes with three interludes, the work interwove dance, gesture, spoken-word, live and recorded music, onstage drawing, projections and audience participation. The choreography utilized research and artefacts that went into developing the film and, along with storytelling through imaginary ethnography, embodied the research into a more contemporary danced story. Shining light on the dark immigrant shadows lurking within familial cracks, the work considers how experiences of ancestors could affect future generations.

Braiding autoethnography, ethnography, genealogy, and narrative inquiry with practices of choreography, creative writing, and filmmaking, the research also engaged with theories of somaesthetics, sensory anthropology, ethnochoreology, ritual and performance studies, and intergenerational trauma and its intersection with social justice.

The ethnochoreology-to-choreography method served as the structure to develop the *performed auto-ethno-genealogy* that this thesis describes. With its capacity to map the complexity of lived experience, *performed auto-ethno-genealogy* highlights how individual stories relate to universal themes, how the personal is political, and how people can resist historically oppressive structures or liberate internal pain by telling their stories.

The findings from this research contribute to contemporary dance choreography and ethnochoreological practice and pedagogy by advancing new insights and approaches to disrupt hierarchical structures and decenter Western aesthetics often prioritized in dance and its study. Furthermore, the research demonstrates tools to create more inclusive environments to a wider range of learners and practitioners coming from diverse backgrounds or culturally-specific movement forms. On a personal level, this research offers a creative process for individuals to investigate, develop and perform stories about their histories in order to re-root and restore self-identity or give voice to historically silenced voices.

Dedication

For Edouard

Who manned the fort with steadfast love through all my
comings and goings to Ireland.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is original material by the author. None of the material has been used before or published at the time of submission. Permission to conduct this research has been approved by the University of Limerick Ethics Committee and informants gave their permission to use their words and images within the research.



Miriam S. Phillips

November 4, 2024

Date

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

ABR	Arts-based Research
AP	Arts Practice
App.	Appendix
CaR	Choreography as Research
Ch.	Chapter
DMT	Dance-Movement Therapy
EC	Ethnochoreology
Fig.	Figure
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
TTT	Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma
IWAMD	Irish World Academy of Music and Dance
LMA	Laban Movement Analysis
LBMS	Laban/Bartenieff Movement System
PaR	Practice as Research
Perf.	Performance
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UL	University of Limerick
UMD	University of Maryland
WaR	Writing as Research

Prologue: Setting the Scene

This prologue sets the scene and explains some of the backstory behind the artistic projects described in this dissertation. Starting at a different time and in a different writing style than the rest of the thesis, this prelude offers insights into some important contextual information and occurrences that happened so that you, the reader, become privy to the tale that is to come – a tale of the creation stories, disruptions, theories, research modalities, and artistic processes that led to the dance film and live dance-theatre performance discussed forthwith.

Imagining a Dance Event

Dear Reader,

Imagine yourself walking towards a theatre in the late afternoon. You are expecting to go in, find a seat, and watch what you hope to be an entertaining or at least interesting, hopefully thought-provoking dance performance. When you get to the theatre entrance, instead of entering, you are shepherded out a fire escape on the side of the building and into another side door inside a shadowy cramped space. It is dark, cavernous, cold, otherworldly. Cement, metal, smoky. Musty smelling like an old cathedral. Other bodies entering warm the air a bit. You are jam packed with people side-by-side. You hear odd sounds: banging, clanging, scraping, flits of rhythms. You feel odd. You don't know what is going on, what the rules are. Awkward. Estranged from the situation. You hear the clanging-banging-pounding-odd-sounding coming from above. A few whispers and questions from other 'beholders' of this experience. Some lights emerge-ever so faintly. You can see you are at the bottom of a spiral staircase. Orange metal. A dark blob-like figure, you notice, in a dark crevice under the stairwell. Moving, wriggling, twisting, squirming. You hear low humming ebbing and flowing – possibly a female voice – an exotic Eastern sounding melody with words in another language. Possibly Hebrew. You make out: Henay ma tov..... a phrase that repeats in various odd elongated or punctuated ways. It goes off track – atonal at times.

People start to walk up the stairs – you follow. Holding onto the banister, still dim, crowded, uneven treads, you cautiously walk up. Sounds become louder, clearer – it seems a layering of two distinctly-toned asymmetrical rhythms. One deep, hollow, resonant, patterned; the other, blunt, clangy, erratic, metallic. You still don't know what's going on. You feel out of place. You start to wonder why you even came to this in

the first place. This 'event' – whatever it is – continues onto the next floor up. You are at a landing. Lights come on abruptly. You can now see others, clearly. You are instructed by a guard-like figure to enter a hallway. Another guard sits at a desk asking you to answer questions on an index card. 'Do you know who your great-great-grandmother was? If Yes, print her name. If no, write no.' Indicate 'place of birth,' if you know. Another guard reads your card and directs you to another room down the corridor. You notice people are being directed to different rooms depending on what their answer is. The room is small but has windows overlooking a drab seemingly abandoned cement patio. Seagulls fly by. Other audience members comment on the strangeness of it all. Then, someone says, 'oh, look'. There is a dancer. You view her through the window.

Dressed in a long black skirt, black boots, with a dark scarf around her head. She sways, releases her upper body in resignation towards the ground, reaches her arms out long, claps her hands together defiantly, and like a thread weaving through a warp, her right arm slides up her left, circling clockwise around her head as if tracking or tracing something, then dissipates. This is a gesture you see repeated several times throughout the next few minutes. You hear a violin playing from another room. A somber, melancholic tune filled with a far-off longing. You wonder what other audience members in other rooms are hearing, seeing, experiencing. Just then, a raspy old male voice starts to sound over room speakers. He tells stories about his thick-accented grandmother, cold winters, poverty, ghettos, the religiosity of his grandfather, Jewish rituals, fleeing the Czar of Russia, brutality, a long boat passage, leavings, arriving, hope. You listen, you watch. There are items strewn around the outdoor patio space where the dancer continues to dance. An old suitcase, a beat-up table with objects on it, dark cloth draped on the cement wall like a line of laundry. The dancer alternates between doing domestic type actions: opening the suitcase, taking her apron off, putting it into the suitcase, to walking patterns that seem to ebb and flow, rise and fall, circle and encircle. You feel as if the dancer has done this before. There is a monotony. Like a never-ending cycle of packing and unpacking. You notice her face. Its mature. Stark, yet round. Pink cheeks. Round eyes, a subtly humped-nose. A deep wrinkle between the brows. You think, 'she has lived something.' She continues putting objects into her suitcase: candlesticks, a shawl, laundry, a book, a vine. She tugs at the hanging cloth. Pulling it down. You spot graffiti chalked on the wall, in a foreign language. "Еврею не допускаются." She folds the cloth as she stares at the words. There is more of it you had not noticed before. "No Jews allowed." You have a feeling of sadness, wonder,

compassion. You recall some awful stories you heard about Jews. You realize, this is a window into the world of a woman, back in the old country. Getting ready to leave her home – forever – a life as she once knew it – not to return. Now drawn in, the story continues unfolding through a patchwork of your own internal and external experiences. You think about loss, identity, estrangement, othering.

You are beckoned, directed, rather briskly, by the guards, to gather, exit room, walk down corridor, down some stairs. The violinist, a short dark-skinned fellow with almond-shaped eyes, serenades. As you walk, other audience participants recount what they could see and not see and the stories they heard: fur traders in Siberia, fleeing the Czar, coming to America, the garment district, being spit on as a child, being told Jews killed Jesus. One knowledgeable man named Yanky, a leader in Dublin's Jewish community, starts to sing the song that you heard in the beginning, Hineh mah tov umah na'im shevet achim gam yachad. He translates its meaning as we descend the stairs: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity! He explains how it is from Psalm 133 and that it is sung this week of Passover.

The crowd walks through the lobby winding around in serpentine pattern to behind a thick cement spiral staircase. There is a long table. A pitcher of water, a big bowl, a towel, and some unknown food items. Following those in front, when you get to the edge of the table you hold your hands out over the bowl. The person before you pours water over your hands. Then, gives you the towel to dry off. You turn around. You pour water on the hands of the person behind you, hand them the towel then, progress down the table. Reading the small placards about Jewish food and ritual is not as important as the experience of the flavors. You put a dollop of relish on a piece of cracker. Together, its crunchy and soft, dry but sweet. You recognize flavors of apple, cinnamon, red wine. Described as matzoh and charoet. Eaten during Passover. You note a few other Jewish symbols on the table and a long grapevine.

Now directed to enter the theatre. You find a seat. The performance starts..... or..... rather, continues.

Practice, Disruption, and a Global Pandemic

Dear Reader:

Welcome to the beginning of my Performance 1.

Well, the one that did not happen!

The Spiral Staircase, the Identification Cards, the Viewing Rooms, The Passageway Handwashing Ritual, Eating the Passover Foods, beholding the rest of my dance in the theatre, ending with you coming down onto the stage floor to join a community social dance. Yes, that one. So close to being realized on the last night of Passover, 15 April 2020. Until – a global pandemic broke out March 2020, closed the world down, rocked the globe. And... derailed *The Shluva Project: My Grandmother's Grandmother* – an interactive, multisensory, immersive dance event traversing different sonically and visually textured spaces that included participatory and presentational dance and action [Fig. 1, IWAMD events publicity booklet].



Figure 1: From: *Comhaimseartha, IWAMD – 2020 Spring*.

Like everyone who had performances scheduled shortly after 12 March 2020, my PhD Perf. 1 was 'postponed' for some indefinite period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I held out waiting. Until... it didn't look like things would be opening up anytime soon. So, I pondered options: 1) dance in an empty theatre to no audience (but even that was not permitted until more than a year later) or, 2) turn the whole thing into a film.

I held out. How could I ‘perform’ what was intended as a multisensory immersive dance event for an itinerant audience traversing through four spaces (some quite tight) and participating in various activities along the way including a final participatory dance, in an empty theatre to no audience? Supervisor discussions ensued. Do it here, do it there. But every theatre and studio space in both countries were still closed. Significant props I had bought the day before the lockdown were sitting in Ireland, and I was now in Washington, DC.

I held out further. Worked on other aspects of the research and creative process. The option of film dangled out there.

But how could I turn a three-dimensional multisensory interactive dance event into the two-dimensionality of film, particularly when I had limited experience in this media? I complained, I resisted, I waited, and... I walked my neighborhood streets and parks pondering how a specific section might be transposed to a different space. I workshopped the ‘Shluva packing’ scene (what was supposed to occur in the Viewing Rooms section) through the Fieldwork program held Autumn 2020 at Dance Place.¹ I had this filmed in an enclosed space in front of the shed in my backyard. I presented an on-line work-in-progress on 28 October 2020. This is the work that eventually became *Known/Unknowns*. Still, I held out for the live performance.

We rescheduled for 2021 April back in Limerick. The pandemic surged on. By March 2021 it became clear. Now in year two of the pandemic. Cancelled again.

The Perf. 1 project that was percolating in the wings of the pandemic, now completely derailed. It had to be re-visioned. I could no longer delay the completion of my first PhD performance due the inconvenience of a global plague. I acquiesced. I turned to film. Like many, I found settings in nature, outdoor public parks, my backyard, my kitchen, even my bedroom, and solicited friends and colleagues to help me. I had to make this thing manageable, given the unmanageability of the situation.

I tell this story, and the one before, the fictionalized ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of a performance that never happened because, a) it so colored the creative process of my artistic research for this Arts Practice (AP) doctorate, and b) knowing the intent of

¹ Dance Place is a leading center for dance and other creative arts serving the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Fieldwork, a program of community artistic peers developed by The Field (www.thefield.org), offers eight-week workshop formats for artists to create new work and reflect on it as it is developing through peer artist feedback.

the original performance design helps contextualize for you what is to come, oh, and c) I just needed to get the COVID-19 pandemic out of the way so that we can move on!

What Actually Transpired

Thanks to the twists and turns of the pandemic, which gave me more time to delve into what I discovered was a rich history of my family lineage, here is what actually transpired in the end.

The Shluva Project became a two part dance-theatre work that reflected different facets of my excavation into the stories, memories, images, and genealogical tracings of my erased Jewish family lineage and my search for meaning within them. Through dance-theatre and film, I explored themes of persecuted and marginalized races, displaced immigrants, *otherness*, and family lore that perpetuated a sense of lost identity through the generations. Furthermore, how heritage lives on within our bodies even if the memories have faded.

Part A became a film, *The Journey to Find My Grandmother's Grandmother*, which focused on the genealogical, ethnographic, and autoethnographic research to 'find' my great-great grandmother 'Shluva' in any way that I could. Part B mined that research with additional investigations into the history and trajectory of Eastern European Jews immigrating to America in the late 19th century and culminated in the live performance, *Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother*. With this research, I surmised what my ancestors likely experienced, and through artistic musings I considered how aspects of my lineage became embodied in my psyche.

While the creative process utilized several interconnected methods to devise the works, the core foundation applied the ethnochoreological perspective of *the dance event* to structure the works. Long trails of grapevines manipulated in various ways wove in and out of both works as a rhizomic symbol signifying ties to the past that can entrap us, as well as provide a foundation to our sense of identity. Using the theatrical technique of alternating characters (myself and Shluva), I layered dance, spoken-word, music, sound, costumes, props, visual projections of archival artifacts, and ritual actions to create multisensory tapestries of embodied knowledge about my personal heritage, simultaneously tapping into larger collective themes shared by humanity.

The notion of identity erasure underpinned the works, yet the process of excavating personal, generational, and collective history caused me to consider larger societal issues of social injustice, racial discrimination, marginalization, feminism, intergenerational trauma, and political *othering*. In the last chapter I reflect upon how the type of layered research I did and the novel way I applied ethnochoreology to choreography coalesced into what I call *performed auto-ethno-genealogy*. Furthermore, how this can be used to decode, dismantle, and decolonize tacit power structures that exist or may have become embedded unconsciously within us. I suggest how embodied storytelling through dance, which integrates personal movement vocabulary with historical context, can be an effective artistic means to empower historically silenced voices and disenfranchised communities.

Presentation Method of this Thesis

Dear Reader,

By now you've noticed my use of a narrative storytelling style. This will be interwoven throughout this text. Perhaps a bit unusual for a PhD thesis, but after publishing more 'normalized' social science articles, I wanted my writing process, and hopefully your reading process, to be less agonizing and more playful.

Part description of arts-based research methodologies employed in this project, part exploration of theoretical frameworks contextualizing and substantiating my approaches, and part reflection on artistic process and performance data (the products), this thesis interweaves different kinds of writing 'voices.' Since the artistic mediums I developed during my research were a lot about listening to stories, reading stories, remembering stories, and storying different kinds of research for the stage, I include a lot of storytelling here. Using a braiding technique, I alternate between more personal autoethnographic storytelling, with more conventional academic writing – descriptive and analytical prose. The integration of embodied experience through personal narrative has been a technique I have employed since the beginning of my academic writing career (Phillips 1991) and continued in subsequent peer-reviewed published works (Phillips 2013, 2016). Not only is it a way to bring the reader into my subject and

enliven research reporting, but there is knowledge inherent in sensorially rich descriptions of experience and meaning to be had from the ways people tell stories.²

Making a Case for My Narrative Style

Anthropologists have advocated for more humanistic styles of writing since at least the mid-1970s.³ Some social scientists within the disciplines of ethnography, sociology, communications, and performance studies have long challenged the subjective-objective dichotomy of qualitative research, arguing for the inclusion of the researcher's voice, which had previously been silenced for the sake of an illusory objectivity. Arts-based researchers echo these sentiments even trumpeting numerous kinds of creative writing styles within their academic research and peer-reviewed publications.

Since the 1980s, Bochner and Ellis have advocated alternative writing styles in their publications and as series editors for AltaMira's *Ethnographic Alternatives*. This series

emphasizes experimental forms of qualitative writing that blur the boundaries between social sciences and humanities. The editors encourage submissions that experiment with novel forms of expressing lived experience, including literary, poetic, autobiographical, multi-voiced, conversational, critical, visual, performative, co-constructed representations.... We are interested in ethnographic alternatives that promote narration of local stories; literary modes of descriptive scene setting, dialogue, and unfolding action; and inclusion of the author's subjective reactions, involvement in the research process.

(Rowan & Littlefield n.d.)

The goals of the editors of *Ethnographic Alternatives*, were to:

bring the written product of social research closer to the richness and complexity of lived experience... to bridge the gaps between author and reader, between fact and truth, between cool reason and hot passion, between the personal and the collective, and between the drama of social life and the legitimized modes for representing it.

² Embodied and sensory-rich writings have become more common occurrences in dance ethnographic works since the 1990s. See Ness 1992, Sklar 2005, 2008, Hahn 2007, and my own work.

³ Founded in 1974, the Society for Humanistic Anthropology's purpose was to "open a dialogue on the means by which anthropologists might evoke, represent, or give account of the human subject visually and in writing. Humanistic anthropology involves the recognition that professional inquiry takes place in a context of human value" (<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/15481409/about/society-information> [accessed 18 January 2023]). The Society sponsors the peer-reviewed journal *Anthropology and Humanism*, which publishes essays of ethnographic fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and photographs and had annual writing competitions "to encourage scholars to use diverse literary genres" [sha.americananthro.org].

(Bochner and Ellis 1998, cited in Leavy 2013, p.34)

Social science researcher and award-winning novelist Patricia Leavy promotes including storytelling to connect meaning to what has been learned through research which will allow readers to engage more deeply. The development of autoethnography and narrative inquiry has impelled the qualitative research community to reconsider writing style. “The expression of research is what brings it to life... Good stories resonate. Whereas traditional social science writing often lacks the qualities that would characterize good and engaging writing” (Leavy 2013, p.33).

Anthropologist Russell Sharman suggests writing up fieldwork analysis in the same richly textured ways we experienced it, inclusive of intimacy and vulnerability, otherwise we won’t build rapport with readers. Instead, “we drain life out of our research through our prose [and] become the brutish colonizer, demanding our readers to learn our language, to conform to an intransigent academic style that privileges intellectual over emotional commitment” (Sharman 2007, p.119).

Blurring Genres

Anthropologist, poet, memoirist, and writer of literary fiction, Ruth Behar asks, “In a time of blurred genres—when fiction bleeds into memoir and vice versa—does it make sense to seek out a unique identity for ethnography, a genre which partakes of both memoir and fiction and yet is neither?” (Behar 2007, pp 145-146).

Similarly, I ask: In a discipline that blurs practice and theory, creativity and social science, embodied action and analysis – within an artistic academy that is part of a research university – does it make sense to remove my artistic voice, my embodied memory and those of my collaborators, in order to author a doctoral dissertation? Does it make sense to eradicate creativity and imagination from a project that was inherently birthed out of those realms in order to produce a PhD writeup to fit into normative tenets of academia? In the subsequent pages, I believe you will experience my answer.

Dear Reader,

Please join me in the unfolding of:

*Storying The Dance: Transforming Genealogy, Ethnochoreology and
Autoethnography into Dance-Theatre and Film through
Arts Practice Research*

– A journey of becoming...

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This introductory chapter focuses on the experiences, guiding principles and practices that brought me to the inception of this doctoral project. I explain how I came to the topic of applying ethnochoreology to contemporary dance choreography and performance through my teaching practice. I later outline key research questions that guided the creative process of my artistic endeavors and describe the two-tiered paradigm that served as the conceptual framework for this research. I conclude with commentary about writing styles used in this thesis and provide an overview of upcoming chapters.

The Inception of This Doctoral Project

The aim of this arts practice (AP) doctoral project was to apply a particular ethnochoreological method to contemporary dance creative process and performance. I wanted to experiment with a process I developed in previous teaching practices that had profoundly altered the way my students conceptualized dance and created performance. I initially proposed that for the first of two required PhD performance projects, I would apply this evolving pedagogy to my own choreography by creating a new work to be performed live in Ireland. The content would be based on my erased Jewish family lineage and how that erasure came to be. It would require genealogical, ethnographic and autoethnographic research. Having spent so decades studying other people's dance forms and researching their artistic lineages, I wanted the opportunity to dive into my own lineage of which I knew little.

Taking insights gleaned from working on Perf. 1, I would then develop a new more streamlined ethnochoreology-to-choreography pedagogy to workshop with a fresh group of students. Perf. 2 would be to facilitate a showing of the students' work who had undergone this process. However, due to the various lockdowns resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, Perf. 1 ended up being turned into a film. Since the pandemic persisted for so long, at the same time I found the family material I was researching so rich, Perf. 2 resulted in my own theatrical performance (not my students), eventually shared live in Ireland in 2022. For various reasons the new Perf. 1 (the film) took a long time to complete. Although I started it before Perf. 2 (the live), the process of creating it ended up running alongside the choreographic process of the live performance. The film was finally completed one year later in 2023.

Consequently, my AP PhD trajectory did not follow a typical structure. That is, research leading to the presentation of Perf. 1, reflect on it, then use the insights to create Perf. 2. Then, write up this iterative process. Instead, aspects of Perf. 1 and 2 summersaulted and cascaded over each other. Similar kinds of research went into each performance project, and each project fed the other. The content of the outcomes created were different facets of my family story and the means of communicating that story was in two very different media – film and live performance grounded in dance.

Guiding Fields

As a dancer trained in culturally specific traditional forms (from India and Spain) as well as American modern and postmodern dance technique and choreography, I later studied dance ethnology (ethnochoreology)⁴ at the MA level while continuing those dance practices. I found the dance ethnology perspective personally and professionally transformative for how it caused me to see the world and understand dance. As someone who crossed barriers between traditional and contemporary dance in an era when that was rarely done, I found the dance ethnology ‘way of seeing’ to be life-affirming, or rather, dance-affirming. Previously, I had felt like an outcast within modern dance departments in the United States. After technique class I would go off to practice those *other* dance forms, stomping my feet wearing ankle bells or hard-soled shoes in the less desirable dance studios. But as I continued to dance, choreograph, research, and write, I regularly applied methods from dance ethnology to the study of other cultures’ dances, such as the kathak and flamenco I was deeply immersed in. I presented this research through writing, teaching, and lecture-demonstrations over many years.

When I completed my MA in Dance at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA 1991), it was during a time when great schisms existed within the fields of dance. This included, what was deemed ‘practice’ – Western concert dance idioms and choreography, and what was deemed ‘research’ – dance ethnology, dance history, etc. There was a hierarchy of dance styles and a valued order to the kinds of practices around, in, and of dance that people engaged with. This also translated to hierarchies of

⁴ The term ‘ethnochoreology’ is more widely used in Ireland and Europe, whereas ‘dance ethnology’ is more often used in the United States where I received my training. While the lineages are distinct, the underlying research principles are the same. I use these terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation. For information on the intertwining history of European and American ethnochoreology, see Dunin 2014.

space, modern dance and choreography studios upstairs, dance ethnology seminars and *other* dance techniques downstairs. The ethos of the dance ethnology I was drawn to emphasized cultural equity. The field recognized that embedded within every dance style are deeply embodied cultural values, aesthetic priorities, and worldviews. I knew this to be true from my experience having lived and studied dance in India, the Middle East, and Spain even before starting my MA. Dance ethnology gave me concepts to understand my experience and words to describe it. Long before the term *decolonize* came into the mainstream, the dance ethnology at UCLA was surely decolonizing dance by interrogating meaning systems and dismantling hierarchies.

Ethnochoreology and Choreography - an unlikely match

I came to this doctoral project thinking I would explore the application of ethnochoreology (aka dance ethnology) to choreographic practice. First, to my own choreographic process and performance, and second, in mentoring a new batch of students to devise their own work employing a further development of this method from previous teaching.⁵ How did I come to this notion since ethnochoreology and choreography seem to be diametrically opposed practices with contrasting outcomes?

Ethnochoreology, simply speaking, involves applying specific ethnographic methods, such as participant-observation, within a fieldwork situation to understand the meaning of dance in diverse cultural communities often not one's own. Usually, the end result of an ethnochoreological study is to communicate these understandings through written publications.⁶ Choreography, specifically applied to dance, refers to bodies and the movements they employ being structured in a sequence. It "can involve using a set dance vocabulary like in ballet or inventing the actions to be performed (improvising) followed by the sequencing and progressions of that movement into a legible, communicable form... it's about what movements and phrases [choreographers] choose and how [they] put them together" (Roche and Burrige 2022, p.1). The outcome of a choreography is to communicate ideas, emotions, or present visual images through live performance or film-dance contexts. Different dance lineages have distinct conventions.

In some sense the ethnochoreology researcher looks to movement and bodies (of other people) from the outside to discover significance, whereas choreographer

⁵ As previously mentioned, due to disruptions caused by the multiple pandemic lockdowns, the pedagogical element conceived in my original research design had to be eliminated.

⁶ There are evolving subdisciplines of 'performance ethnography' and 'ethno-drama' which I address later, but the conventional modality of ethnographic research dissemination is text-based.

practitioners explore bodies and movement from the inside (their own or their dancers) in order to create visual and kinetic structural forms. Each practice involves research, creativity, analysis/reflection, and meaning-making and have ‘receivers’ – one, a reader, the other an audience member. While they involve research and practice in different ways, they tend to be thought of as distinct disciplines with one having a text-based outcome, the other, a performance one. But what if the practices and framework of ethnochoreology were applied to the creation of choreographic work within a contemporary dance context? Could ethnochoreology offer insights about dance-making and performance style to contemporary dance choreographers? How would the end result look and feel? Further, why might this be meaningful at this time in history? This thesis addresses these questions and other ones that surfaced during my artistic research. First, I address how this inquiry arose.

Braiding Two Practices Through Teaching

After many years as a performer, community dance teacher, academic professor, and dance ethnology field-researcher and writer, in 2009, I returned to fulltime teaching as a dance faculty member at the University of Maryland (UMD). Here I was charged with bringing a more globally inclusive pedagogy to a dance department predominantly centered in Western concert dance (modern, postmodern and ballet). I designed a new course for the newly redesigned MFA curriculum called, *Dance in a Global Context*. I did not want to engage this topic through a world dance survey approach as I had done so previously,⁷ although I saw the usefulness of such classes. Nor was I training students to become dance ethnologists. Because I was working with MFA postmodern dance teaching artists primarily, and some PhD performance studies postgrads, I wanted this course to offer a window into a way of perceiving dance and performance in a broader world context of commonalities and meaning-making.

I had also hoped learners in this course could bring the dance ethnological way of perception and understanding to their own teaching and creative practice. Our MFA dance students at UMD were required to devise one evening-length work and written thesis as part of their three-year program, as well as teach undergraduate studio and seminar courses in various dance styles and creative process. Several of the students came from culturally-specific dance forms but wanted to learn and create contemporary

⁷ These included, *Survey of World Dance*, *Dance in World Cultures*, *Cross-cultural Interactions of World Dance*.

dance works that could place their traditions in new choreographic contexts telling different kinds of stories with more expansive voices.

Over the years of teaching and developing *Dance in a Global Context*, I kept asking myself, ‘how can I make the dance ethnology perspective that was so transformative in my own life, more relevant to performance-oriented contemporary dance choreographers?’⁸ ‘How can I help students make sense of this process and find ways to *apply* it to their respective creative contemporary dance works?’ I called on my own dance training and practice of modern/postmodern dance and choreography and experimented with ways to integrate dance ethnology perspectives into this performance-oriented space.

Through practical activities and deep readings of dance ethnographies, I taught students different ways to understand dance cross-culturally and experimented with ways they could situate their own choreographic work within a broader cultural context. A core part of the course was guiding students through a six-week dance ethnographic fieldwork process at a social ‘dance event’ of their choosing that was unfamiliar to them. This required they conduct participant-observation, a methodology widely used in cultural anthropology.⁹ In addition to observing different themes at these events, dancing was also a critical part of the research method as it offered an embodied form of cultural data inherent in the kinesthetic experience.¹⁰ For highly skilled dance students, going into a completely unknown situation and dancing the ‘unfamiliar’ allowed them, through my guidance, to see interconnections between different layers within the dance event. These consequently highlighted significant cultural values intrinsic in the dance movement and social scene they were partaking in. They could then relate to how their own practice and creative process also held cultural values and significance. One MFA student, Robin, wrote in her thesis:

⁸ The term ‘contemporary dance’ in Euro-American contexts has come to describe a wide range of divergent choreographic practices and presentational formats inclusive of modern and postmodern dance (Jürgens 2018). Furthermore, it does not mean the same thing across all cultures and communities (Kwan 2017). I taught in departments that embraced modern/postmodern dance ideologies and whose faculty came out of that era (including myself), however, due to the embrative nature of the term ‘contemporary dance,’ I tend to use this term over others throughout this thesis, unless referencing specific historical periods or dance lineages.

⁹ I consider participant-observation a practice-as-research (PaR) method, particularly when applied to dance, because one is simultaneously practicing dance while observing and making adjustments as the embodied cultural knowledge reveals itself. Like PaR, participant-observation is an iterative process.

¹⁰ This particular method of dance ethnographic participant-observation was adapted from what I learned from Elsie Ivancich Dunin, one of my primary dance ethnology mentors, at UCLA where I did my MA specializing in choreography and dance ethnology.

In the beginning of my time in Miriam's *Dance in a Global Context* class, I saw myself as culture-less. I felt like a plain, white, European-descended American with little connection to my heritage. Over the course of the semester, my understanding and definition of culture began to expand. This is because I was able to recognize that I was already a part of weaving the connective tissue of values within the field of dance, a culture in its own right. At the risk of seeming too bold or presumptuous, I began to see my potential to act as a bearer of dance culture, rather than choosing to fade into the background, an anonymous fish in the vast sea. I left the course feeling empowered to make my dance values what I want them to be. Within the context of a performance work, these included the vital role of process and collaboration in shared meaning-making through the vehicle of sensory-rich, participatory, immersive theatre.

(Brown 2015, pp.59-60)

Thesis as Dance Event vs. Performance

In our seminar discussions we explored words, meaning systems, and bias. We considered the word 'performance,' which tends to exclude a lot of dance situations and explored the notion of 'the dance event.'¹¹ I suggested they consider the dance thesis works they were creating as 'dance events' rather than 'performances.' This opened up a whole new way of working and crafting choreography for many of them. As I experimented with different ways of implementing this course, some more successful than others, I began to witness a transformation in the way my students thought about dance, taught dance, created dance and wrote about dance. More impressively, how they designed and crafted multisensory, artful, immersive experiences where performance spaces were altered, divisions between audience and performers diffused, and typically presentational dance also included portions of participatory dance in a seamless fashion. As I continued to guide them through their theses, the content of their dance works seemed to develop a depth of social significance.

One former MFA student who I supervised, MK Abadoo, currently a professional choreographer and professor,¹² commented in their written thesis.

¹¹ The term 'dance event' became a way for ethnochoreologists to consider all different levels of dance phenomenon that may occur in various contexts and what their cultural significance is using more open-ended terminology that could be less laden with cultural judgement or bias. That is, not limited to culturally-defined meaning systems, such as 'performance,' which tends to define dance through a Western concert dance lens.

¹² See: <https://www.mkabadoo.com/>.

Professor Miriam Phillips introduces the “dance event” framework in my “*Dance in a Global Context*” class. This learning significantly affects how I conceptualize my thesis choreography (2016, p.72).

I utilized the dance event framework to specifically address my research questions: How could I build a public dance experience that is also an intentionally safe space for Black women’s dancing bodies? What are the key elements of a dance event where a radical vulnerability is shared between the performers and the witnesses? To generate the physical and cultural safety of the performers alongside a shared vulnerability with the audience I made deliberate decisions when crafting movement content and within my composition methods, including repositioning performer-audience relationships.

(Abadoo 2016, p.49)

Teaching-artist Robin Neveu Brown¹³ (2015) worked with the theme of memory, sensory experience, and nature as a way to reconnect with the earth and to feel reclaimed by the earth. She intended to have her thesis concert be “a nontraditional experience for the audience” and to create “an immersive performance environment, in which the audience might feel transported... to feel that they had gone on a literal, physical journey, not just sitting in seats, ...for the audience to be physically involved with building the work and by extension to build a sense of community around the performance event” (p.27). In order to express her theme, Robin wanted to include different experiential elements that engaged the audience’s senses to give them a sense of agency. She felt that participation would afford:

the audience ownership over their individual experience of the performance just like one’s viewing of a painting. It seemed the best way to do so would be to create an event that was akin to an installation in a museum or gallery, allowing the audience to choose their own adventure. I began to lightheartedly think of my thesis project as a sort of social experiment. How would an audience direct their own attention if I did not do it for them?

(Brown 2015, pp.32-33)

In their fieldwork experiences, I asked students to consider all aspects of the dance event they were conducting participant-observation in. I suggested everything at the event had some cultural significance – the choice of venue, marketing colors and text, announced start time versus actual start time, how the event ended, clothes people wore, scents, proximity, all the different personnel involved, how people got on and off the dance floor, refreshments served – even down to the red, white, and blue popsicles at

¹³ See: <https://www.artsforlearningmd.org/artist/robin-neveu-brown/>.

the Lindy Hop dance events. I had not anticipated that this mini-fieldwork experience would translate so profoundly to how these learners went about their whole creative process and the way they collaborated with other support personnel. Sarah, artistic director of Heart Stück Bernie,¹⁴ writes in her thesis:

Back in Fall 2016, I was trying to conceive of a project that would synthesize my graduate research: subversive art approaches, a deconstructivist lens, the possibilities and potential of meaning making in an extended dance event, and a long-term assignment that would challenge my choreographic patterns and abilities. I proposed the largest dance event I could imagine executing - a durational, immersive, constantly shifting, all-inclusive package that included: long-form reveal of the final product with ongoing dispatches, layered concept, marketing plan, collaboration with designers and audience members, pedagogy-in-practice, and attention to every detail of reveal, reception, set-up, and punch-line. These project components are elements I identified in Professor Miriam Phillips' second year grad seminar Dance in the Global Context where we learned about the dance event framework.

(Oppenheim 2017, p.2)

Although I cannot take sole credit for the transformation of my students' choreographic works because I was working with an extraordinary group of forward-thinking dance colleagues at the time, many reported how the dance ethnology perspective and practice learned in this course radically shifted the way they perceived and created their thesis concerts and subsequent choreographic, written, and film-dance work. Several students also noted how the course helped them to develop a more culturally-sensitive teaching approach, which had significant impact on how they saw their students, how they set up classroom space, and the choices of words they used to communicate with them. (Excerpts of interviews conducted in 2019 with some of these students as part of this doctoral research are included in subsequent chapters).

Research Questions

The intent of this PhD in AP was to explore how applying a dance ethnology lens to contemporary dance choreography might offer new perspectives into creative process and how it might affect choreographic outcomes. Using my individual choreographic practice as a laboratory, I wanted to apply an ethnochoreological model to create a

¹⁴ See: <https://sarahbethoppenheim.com/about-sarah/> and <https://sarahbethoppenheim.com/about-2/>.

dance event centered on my erased Jewish family lineage and personal identity. The overarching research questions to my project were:

- What insights about dance-making and performance might ethnochoreology offer to contemporary dance choreographers?
- What happens when I consider my contemporary dance choreography as a ‘dance event’ rather than a performance – particularly, during the creative process as I am designing and crafting it? How does this change my process, design, and intentions for an audience experience? What effect does this have on the dance product? And actual audience experience?
- How might utilizing the dance event model to create work offer new insights into the process in which choreographic work is developed and how might it influence its form and content?
- Could including dance ethnological pedagogy to the study of choreography create a more inclusive environment for dancers coming from culturally-specific forms?

In asking these questions, I did not wish to imply that something was lacking in current contemporary dance choreographic practice and artwork. Simply, I wanted to explore how utilizing ethnochoreology in choreographic practice might contribute to the expansion of perspectives and performance approaches including uses of time, space, ritual, and the senses, and to potentially diminish hegemonic creative process methods and decolonize dance practices. This will be discussed more fully in the last chapter.

Reflecting on My Dance Event – Version 1

When envisioning the performance event described in the Preface, I had been reflecting on various fieldwork trips during which I learned about the cultures I was immersed in precisely because of a disorientation of my sensory accustomedness. I have often thought that attending a performance can be a type of fieldwork due to the sensorial stimulation present – whether conscious or not. In writing about the knowledge that is transmitted through the senses, or ‘sensual orientations,’ dance and music scholar Tomie Hahn asserts that,

fieldwork can be a dance of disorientation. In the field ethnographers immerse themselves in another culture's world as an attempt to comprehend how that culture constructs and makes sense of what's "out there." Fieldwork experiences often

directly reveal contrasting constructs of reality that challenge our core sensibilities, changing the way we orient ourselves in the world.

(Hahn 2007 p.5)

My dance event as originally conceived was meant to be disorienting. I specifically wanted to break away from the normative. It was to be distinct from more typical performances in a theatre where clear spatial delineations exist between audience and performer, who, as onlookers through the comfort of their individual seats, gaze forward, focusing on visual aspects of dancers dancing. Here, expectations are clear, there is a comfort, a focus, a relaxation in abiding by the tacit rules inherent in this kind of theatrical space.

The immersive experience of my originally-conceived dance event was intentionally meant to be intriguing yet simultaneously disquieting. Beholders¹⁵ would be asked to crowd in closely with other beholders or to traverse through some of the same spaces as performers. At times, there would be little spatial separation between performance participants, even a limited ability to see giving rise to apprehension and more auditory awareness. Other times, there would be much spatial separation as viewers would be placed in different rooms and look through layers of glass to outdoor space. Overall, I wanted to create an intimacy with more senses engaged than in a conventional dance performance (which typically emphasizes the visual and the auditory). Beholders of my event were to be asked to take part in specific sensorial activities: listening, watching, touching, tasting, dancing together. An awareness of simultaneously participating in and yet observing the dance. At times, being *othered*, when participants became trapped in a smoky spiral staircase hearing otherworldly sounds and not knowing the rules (see App. I, slide 4-6). Or being *othered* through exclusion – guided to separate themselves out using an identification labeling system that evoked a sense of isolation. At other times, beholders would become the ones doing the *othering*, as they watch in the distance through Viewing Rooms (see App. I, slide 8 and 9), separated by glass – a

¹⁵ I use the term ‘beholder’ rather than ‘audience member’ because I find it more three-dimensional with a sense that those attending the event are more immersed or involved in it, whereas ‘audience member’ suggests a separation between those performing and those watching. I resonate with vocabulary.com’s definition: “A beholder is someone who gains awareness of things through the senses, especially sight. A beholder has to pay more attention. Different beholders might take in different aspects of the same event” (<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/beholder>, accessed 18 February 2023). Adrienne Kaeppler used the term to emphasize what the beholder brings to a performance and how they decode it as ritual, theatre, or spectacle (Kaeppler 2010). How different elements are received and/or interpreted by different kinds of beholders depending on their knowledge base.

remote dancer from another time and place – a woman, whose heritage, history, and stories, distinct from their own, they try to make sense of. A provocation of discomfort, a vulnerability – that was part of the plan. To feel something, to wonder, to learn something through a more active role of embodiment, to engage their senses in order to know the culture I was representing. Then, to ponder questions post-performance.

The design of this work took the layers of the dance event (described in Ch. 4) and applied them to contemporary dance-theatre works for which the research, ethnographic and autoethnographic, was based on my own Jewish genealogy. In other words, I saw the dance event model (described in Ch. 3 and 4) applied to my choreographic practice as the *meta level*, and the ‘story’ I was performing as the *content level* of the performance projects themselves (Fig. 2). And while this original immersive, site-sensitive, multi-sensory performance design did not happen, the meta level of applying a dance event model to performance, and the content based on themes of identity and family lineage did not change.

The meta level – applying ethnochoreology to contemporary dance choreography and performance was where the big research questions came into play. The choreographic practice utilized an ethnochoreological scaffolding, which, along with various theoretical frameworks and AP methods employed, were as an umbrella that encompassed the performance creation. This meta level guided the creative process of my performance endeavors – the content level being the exploration of my erased Jewish family lineage. *The Shluva Project* material served as the content of my artistic research, which in the end culminated into a dance-on-film (Perf. 1) and a live dance-theatre production (Perf. 2).



Figure 2: Macro level: EC applied to choreography; Micro level: creative projects using this application.

Emergent Research Questions

The process of doing the contextual research exploring family stories, genealogy, and mining memories, so that I could craft the content of *The Shluva Project* became so rich, in addition to the materials themselves, further additional inquiry was called for. New questions arose. Stories and storying became a major theme. This unexpected layer of genealogical autoethnographic practice through stories required me to look into narrative inquiry and to some degree into intergenerational trauma. I wondered how to create and present genealogical and autoethnographic research in a theatrical performative context that highlighted my lived experience through a kind of ‘imaginary ethnography.’ I pondered how best to embody this research using crafting techniques from contemporary dance. I worried that I was creating something too personal. Questions that arose during the process were:

- How does (my own) personal lineage become part of the creative process?
- How can genealogy, typically written about or documented in archives, be performed? How does one transpose this knowledge to embodied practice?
- What role can art play in interrogating personal histories, family stories, lineage and intergenerational memory?

- How can art evoke reflection on beholders' relationship to place and identity?
- How does the personal connect to the political?; the individual to the universal? How can the arts be a bridge to realize this relationship?

What transpired was listening for stories. Stories in my or other people's memories, in history books, in embodied experience. Then, learning to 'tell stories' in different ways. Narrative inquiry or 'storying' became the intersecting point between dance ethnology and choreography. I reflect on these in the conclusory chapter.

Rationale for this Study

Ethnochoreological research is often applied toward gaining knowledge of social dance forms or dances from specific cultural communities. In recent years, dance ethnology has started to be applied to contemporary 'art dance,' including ballet, modern and postmodern dance (Davida 2011). However, like conventional ethnochoreological research, the knowledge gleaned from these contemporary art dance studies are published in journal articles or book chapters, 'the write up.' Ethnochoreology methods in these studies were not necessarily part of a choreographic process. I outline a few examples below that have resonance with my project. I later elaborate on experiences of former students to validate the need for an ethnochoreology-to-choreography application and to contextualize my development of it.

The idea of performing ethnography is not new. Anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner created a pedagogy to help students understand how people in other cultures experienced their lives (Turner 1982). They set up 'playshops' where students tried "to get kinetic understandings of the "other" sociocultural groups... and to relate what they [were] doing to the ethnographic knowledge they [were] increasingly in need of..." (1982, p.34). The Turners' performing ethnography pedagogy was a brilliant teaching tool to aid students to learn anthropological methods and be able to identify features within specific cultures. However, the purpose of studying culture in this manner was to better understand the meaning behind another's cultural practice through an embodied ethnography rather than to create a new contemporary work of art.

In my efforts to find alternative modes of re-presentation of ethnographic research for my students, particularly into an artistic form, I came across a few interesting projects. One such project that deeply interwove ethnographic research methods into its creative process was, *Secrets Under the Skin*, a "collaborative, trans-disciplinary art

installation created by several artists-scholars that premiered December 2010, in Havana, Cuba, and continued to be presented through 2014. The installation, comprised of media, visual art, photographs, storytelling, and live improvisational performance, [was] based on extensive years of fieldwork in Ghana and Cuba by Dr. Jill Flanders Crosby” (Flanders Crosby n.d.).¹⁶

In a subsequent article, ‘Art as Ethnography,’ Flanders et. al. (2015) recognizes the project’s “multiple entanglements, porous and blurred boundaries [as] it offers alternative/new directions at the edges and frontiers [...] of ethnography, performance, arts-based research, material culture, and material religion; all methodologies and theoretical lenses that invite a focus on the embodiment of lived experience” (p.105). The research team considered the artistic outputs as the “write-up” which were

realized through a multimedia, multitemporal, multilingual, and transgenerational, contemporary art installation. Conceptualized as a space to evoke, through artistic creative imagination and interpretation, the actual dances, music, stories, practices, images, and objects we encountered in the field, the installation is a merging of art and anthropology/ethnography where the art-making process is carefully and firmly grounded in ethnographic research and inquiry.

(Flanders et. al. 2015 pp.105-106)

Another group, *Ethnographic Terminalia* (ET), first created by cultural anthropologists working in a variety of artistic mediums is described as, “a curatorial collective grounded in a commitment to pushing the boundaries of anthropological scholarship and contemporary art through interdisciplinary exhibitions.” Their goals were “to develop generative ethnographies that do not subordinate the sensorium to the expository and theoretical text or monograph” (Ethnographic Terminalia n.d.). Working at the intersection of art and anthropology, the collective was in existence from 2009 to 2019 and usually coincided with the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association. They were looking to do creative forms of scholarship in anthropology, such as multimedia exhibitions and installations, not simply the typical 20-minute paper presentation at a conference.

I feel a great affinity with these ideas; however, it is not clear to me from perusing their website where the anthropological scholarship was or how it was applied to art and I did not have an opportunity to attend one of their installations. Unlike *Secrets Under*

¹⁶ See also: <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/research/secrets-under-the-skin/about-the-project.cshhtml>

the Skin's website, there is not much described on ET's website about the process moving from anthropological study to artmaking.

A dance artist whose work I greatly admire and whose process comes closest to what I have envisioned, is Allison Orr and her company, *Forklift Danceworks*. She uses a methodology that she calls 'ethnographic choreography.' Indeed, she uses a lot of ethnographic methods, such as participant-observation and interviewing, to study the culture and movement patterns of public service workers who sustain our everyday lives but who remain in the shadows of our consciousness. These have included, sanitation workers, firefighters, power linemen, city maintenance teams, school lunchroom workers, and gondoliers. Orr's bio describes,

Inspired by the beauty and virtuosity in the movement of labor, and building on her background in anthropology and social work, Allison has honed a methodology of ethnographic choreography that engages community members as co-authors and performers in the creation of large-scale civic spectacles.

(Forklift Danceworks n.d.).

One prominent performance project was *Trash Dance*, based on the everyday movements and 'choreography' of the people who pick up our trash; it was later turned into an award-winning film. The beauty of the film is that viewers see the research in process as Allison "rides along with Austin sanitation workers on their daily routes" (Trash Dance 2012) to learn the social structure, cultural norms and movement actions from this community of workers. Viewers also see snippets of Allison's choreographic process and the final performance of two dozen trash collectors and their trucks, which 'dance' on an abandoned airport runway in front of an audience of thousands.

Distinct from Orr, I am not creating ethnographic choreography in that I am not studying the culture of others, and then transforming that research into performance art with the very same community of workers studied. I am using general ethnographic and autoethnographic methods to study my own lineage and create essentially solo dances. Most importantly however, distinct from studies named above, I utilize a method specific to dance ethnographic research in my artmaking process. The layers of the dance event model (see Fig. 4) provided the scaffolding to my creative practice and are embedded within each of the contemporary dance-theatre performance works.

Why is this important?

Despite great efforts to diversify curriculum on the part of dance artist-researchers, there still tends to exist, at least in the United States, a hierarchy of dance styles. Divisions between what is deemed as ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ dance is often pitted against the core aesthetic priorities of ballet or modern dance (a large subject outside the scope of this thesis). Although classes in non-Western traditional dance (particularly African) and newer urban social forms are rapidly being accepted into North American university dance curriculum that had previously centered ballet, modern, and contemporary dance, there still remains little to bring the worlds together equally and equitably in a choreographic context.

Emily Oleson,¹⁷ whose MFA thesis I supervised, practiced traditional Irish stepdance, North American vernacular and social dance forms, as well as urban styles such as hip-hop encountered “themes of elitism and socioeconomic and artistic hierarchies” (Oleson 2012, p.14) in her research. Her evening-length work titled, *VAUDEVIVAL: Old is the new New* utilized design features and themes from the Vaudeville era as “a palate to create a statement about culture as seen through American vernacular dance” (p.10). In her written thesis, which is an account of her performance she describes,

the individual who found authenticity within him/herself held more artistic collateral than the tradition-bearer trying to preserve or recreate. The ideas of tradition and innovation suddenly morphed into de facto categories, dance forms espoused either one or the other, but not both, erasing the understanding of intertextuality as foundational to artworks.

(Oleson 2012, p.15)

During her creative collaborative process she was testing how different communities she was a part of (inclusive of postmodern dance), might inform each other. “Could these forms coexist, not just in my own life and body, but actively help and learn from one another outside myself in the field? Part of this process seemed to be dismantling cultural ideas about what constitutes “art” and “choreography” (p.3).

More and more dance artists around the globe who come from culturally-specific performance forms are reaching out for ways to integrate or expand their traditional

¹⁷ See: <https://emilyoleson.wixsite.com/emilyoleson/bio>

movement practices into contemporary contexts in order to have deeper relevance to their current life. However, based on interactions with my international students and those steeped in social dance or traditional styles, they often find themselves having to compromise certain values or ideologies intrinsic to their forms in order to fit into a Euro-American concert dance choreographic structure. Or, they don't know how to bring two (or more) worlds together as Emily describes above and Colette below.

Because culturally-specific dance forms (e.g. African, Asian, Native American, Latino, Pacific Island, etc.) are often deemed 'traditional' and Western concert dance as 'contemporary,' we forget that other dance genres also have contemporary counterparts. South Asian dance choreographer-activist Ananya Chatterjea deplores, "what seems to be increasingly popular in the sphere of Asian 'contemporary' dance is a kind of ventriloquism, where contemporary Asia finds its voice through the signifiers of the Euro-American modern/postmodern, the latter passing once again as the neutral universal, which is able to contain all difference" (2013, p.11).

Chandralekha, a pioneer of contemporary Indian dance, described the need to contemporize dance through an Eastern rather than a Western lens. "The East in order to be 'contemporary' would need to understand and express the East in its own terms; ... to explore [and] extend the frontiers of the loaded cultural language on our soil" (Chandralekha 2003, pp.73-74). Echoing this sentiment some years later, Astad Deboo asserts, "I believe that to be a contemporary Indian dancer, one must be 'Indian contemporary' and not simply imitative of the West, and evolve the contemporary idiom out of India's rich traditions along with being open to intercultural and cross-disciplinary interactions in the globalized world today" (Deboo cited in BurrIDGE and Munsri 2011, p.ix).

But how does one do that?

I turned to the written theses of former students, as well as interviews conducted with some of them in 2019 (see App. II, ethics forms and interview questions).

In a conversation with professional contemporary dance choreographers and former MFA advisees, Colette Krogel and Matt Reeves (artistic directors of Orange Grove Dance),¹⁸ we discussed the impact that my course *Dance in a Global Context* had on

¹⁸ See: <http://www.orangegrovedance.com/>

their choreography and teaching practice. Colette, who is Cuban-American, did not explore her Cuban side until engaging with it through a series of my courses.¹⁹ She describes:

I didn't even think to what my identity was because I was just living it so deeply. It took me the three years to dig deep enough and you were the one actually who kept asking me, 'where's the dance.' And I could only first find it in like verbal and written language, which was really interesting because I still didn't know how to connect it to my movement because my movement felt so estranged, or separated in terms of like, my history with dance. In a studio it was so different than my cultural history with dance with my family, which we did dance, in celebrations with like salsa, merengue. And you know that I didn't know how to bring those together. And if they needed to come together, and what was the truth and honesty?

(Colette Krogel, interview 19 October 2019)

Colette's research into her identity, memories, and family stories that she initially did through coursework, evolved into a dance cinema installation, *More than 90 Miles from Home*.²⁰ As we continued our discussion, some of the layers of the dance event model I had worked with them on came up.

These courses opened my eyes to perceiving space, and people in a different way....and about the way we perceive time. There's like, structurally, the way we understand time as humans, there's different waysthat was something that also has stayed with me in terms of when working with other people the way that they perceive time, or the structure of that. And then I would say with these observations was the way that I learned to take in a space, the ways that the space is already set up gives a lot of context and information in terms of things that I had never thought of.

(Colette Krogel, interview 19 October 2019)

Matt chimed in how the course helped him develop observational skills that are useful as a teacher as well as in creating new work and working professionally with others.

Having those observational skills to see how other communities and forms of dance are working their culture and what the outcomes are, you get a taste, what works for me, and you can see what works for other people. Then you can start to

¹⁹ As part of the postgraduate curriculum at UMD, MFA students were required to take a series of three courses with me, *Research and Writing for Dance*, *Dance in a Global Context*, and *Movement Observation and Analysis*. Some of the concepts and experiences from these courses bled into each other, and certainly bled into discussant's memories when recounting experiences during these conversations.

²⁰ This was first presented at UMD in 2015, <https://theclarice.umd.edu/events/2015/second-season-more-than-90-miles-from-home-and-snake-telegram>, then an updated version in 2022, <https://www.orangegrovedance.com/morethan90milesfromhome>.

use some of that information to create a successful environment hopefully, for your students or your company that you're working with, ... or the work itself.

(Matt Reeves, interview 19 October 2019)

Nigerian contemporary dance choreographer, Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene,²¹ also a former MFA student, found the experientials in the course I taught helped him better understand his traditional dance back home and also be able to language the artistic visions that he was working with in the U.S. He states,

Dance in a Global Context gave me that [realization] that what I had back home would have been called events. And I would have been a performer, a participant, and at some point an observer. But when I got here, that [fieldwork] project [from the course] gave me that new insight and language to talk about it and naming. So it wasn't just going to do salsa on Saturdays, it was now going there to understand the space. The temporal time of the country, which was a new country, for me, the US, and also the people, the bodies, the [body] extensions. And that model just helped clarify some things that I didn't know that I started knowing.

I got a residency at Joe's movement Emporium to organize an event, which was easy to jump on. Because from what I've studied, right from that class, and bringing it directly into practice, now I'm creating an event with an Irish dancer²² and Brazilian musician. We're creating a street based performance festival [like] Carnival and mask dancing, and also another form of performance inside the theater, which wouldn't have happened if I didn't have the knowledge coming from observing dance events in DC, which was also culturally based, Rueda de Casino, Salsa in the round. And having that skill has helped me so far in thinking and framing my work in that area of performance, which is what we would refer to as unconventional and, and that's something I love. That's who I am as an artist – making unconventional works, in unconventional spaces. That fieldwork really was a jumpstart to community engagement for me. I've been involved in works that would normally not be possible if I didn't have that knowledge of what I got from the Dance in a Global Context.

(Sinclair Ogaga Emoghene, interview 27 July 2019)

Guiding contemporary dancers through ethnochoreological fieldwork proved to offer them a way to perceive and understand what is essential. That is, what aesthetic priorities are intrinsic within the dance style or culture from which they are rooted in, or in the 'cultural environment' they wish to create in new work. I believe the outcome of this arts-based doctorate can contribute to contemporary dance choreography practice

²¹ See: <https://www.sinclair.dance/about>

²² This dancer was Kate Spanos who received her MA in Irish Dance Studies at UL and who took my *Dance in a Global Context* course during her PhD studies at UMD.

and training as it advances new insights into creative process and output. This research has the capacity to provide tools for dance professionals to create more inclusive environments for a wider range of learners and practitioners coming from diverse backgrounds or culturally-specific movement forms.

Questioning the Premise

In thinking about applying ethnochoreological pedagogy within the study of choreography, I wish to point out that it is not simply a conceptual undertaking. When I taught this before, it was very experiential; it was the way I guided students through an embodied learning set of activities that caused a switch to happen. But one question that has haunted me from the beginning of this research has been: How much were my students' innovative approaches to choreographic representation a product of the work we did applying dance ethnology to choreographic practice and how much of it was a product of the changing times?

The dance world changes very fast. Whether in academia, in studios, or in performance spaces, dance, like any art, responds to changing societal structures, politics, and stories in the news. Between 2018 when I started this PhD to 2024 when I finished it, I witnessed so many rapid changes in the ways dance was being presented that further burgeoned during the Covid-19 pandemic, I started to question the validity of my research questions. These questions have only amplified over time because I observe an increase of interest in 'immersive performance' and alternative ways of sharing art dance. This will be discussed further in the last chapter; however, Matt and Colette offered interesting perspectives as we discussed the rising popularity of immersive events and their *One Mile Radius Project* (2017-2018).²³ They describe how the dance event framework gave them a language to help in the creation process and to talk to producers and production collaborators. Excerpts from our conversation from 19 October 2019 are below:

Matt: *I think the attempt [of immersive theatre] is trying to put the audience inside the performance rather than creating that proscenium boundary. It's certainly a hot thing in the zeitgeist, probably for a lot of reasons, and reflects the way our lives are being led now – we don't always want to be separated from it, and the artists don't always want to be separated from the audiences. We're all I think striving for different kinds of intimacy that we may not be feeling through*

²³ See: <https://www.1mileradiusproject.com/>. The fieldwork for this project occurred in 2017 with the public event in 2018. This led to the creation of The Barrier Project: <https://www.orangegrovedance.com/thebarrierproject> that was part of the local Mapping Racism Initiative: <https://www.joesmovement.org/mapping-racism>.

other forms of media, as those have grown like television. You know, we can watch something through a proscenium all the time now. So when you go to the theater, what's something different that you're accessing? How are you getting close to the performance and the performers? So I do think this class in particular gives a lot of confidence to the people who are pursuing those kinds of ideas, even if they already had them, because of the simple framing of it as a dance event, rather than saying it's a performance in how it has standardly been defined. In that class, we're breaking down what is the dance of, and we're really asking the questions, and we're making our own notes of what the essentials are that would need to be present. And I think everyone will define that differently. But that's where the beauty of it starts to come out and I think that gives people confidence when they are... or greater curiosity when they start building. They say I'm making an event, it's going to be something you are going to come to and it's going to flow like this... and they can start answering those gaps.

Colette: *We're creating an experience. Like even with One Mile Radius Project, [the producers] kept wondering about the language [to describe it]: 'Oh, what is it, a performance?' And we're like, there were so many layers to it outside of the event that is occurring at Joe's Movement Emporium. You're gonna witness an experience that was led from all of these other things, or it's an event ...*

Matt: *that is going to travel. It will be in and out of the theater, it won't be with normal stuff. So it wasn't easily defined by performance terminology that we already had.*

Miriam: *Because 'performance' doesn't do it. Sounds like 'event' didn't do it either.*

Matt: *Yeah, we're learning what that means to different people in different communities.*

Colette: *'Experience' is what we used....*

Matt: *What really is the content too that we are capturing even more than just what the audience would come to? I mean, it's okay, if the audience comes in confused sometimes. Hopefully in a good way. But even just in terms of building it and like how do you get your collaborators on the same page of what you're doing, because we're not just going to do it perhaps in a conventional theatre format of how we need to tech this, how we need to build the material over, we're looking to splash and throw this material all around the environments inside the door, outside the door, performers will be traveling up and down the streets, we're collecting information from literally a one mile radius of an area as best we can and trying to push that into something that could be an event. So we didn't know what that would look like, but because we had considered 'what is a dance event' and can consider that it doesn't need to be something hard and defined.*

So it seems that although immersive performance, community dance, and site-specific dance are all a part of the ‘zeitgeist’ now, the framework of the dance event offers choreographers and performance creators critical tools to see the spaces they will work in more fully, and better understand the communities they will engage with. Additionally, to have a language to communicate their artistic visions more clearly with their cast, collaborators and producers.

Chapters Overview

This thesis recounts the background history and research methodologies employed in my arts practice journey to create *The Shluva Project*. I look to various strands of experience and the sources of these ideas. I visit their theoretical underpinnings and define the distinct methodologies that interweave through this arts-based research. I then reflect on the artistic process describing the development of each output produced, concluding with how this research may advance new knowledge and practices.

The Prologue sets the stage.

Chapter 1 – Introduction provides the background of how I came to develop this ‘ethnochoreology-to-choreography’ practice. Explaining the origins of the overarching inquiry and primary research questions, I recount my own practice as a teaching-artist to get to this place. I situate my work within the context of others that apply ethnography to artistic or performative mediums. I then outline the significance of this study as evidenced by former students’ perspectives derived from their written theses and subsequent interviews.

Chapter 2 – Situating Self/Situating Practice is an autoethnography detailing several affinities and proclivities and how they manifested in my lived experiences. I describe recurring themes in my life that led up to this current creative research.

Chapter 3 – Arts Practice Research: Intersecting Pathways reviews arts-based research, its thorny history, and the rationale for using it. Positioning my doctoral project within this field, I also delve into theoretical keystones that guided my practice.

Chapter 4 – Embracing Multimodality: AP Methodologies focuses on the methodological strands utilized within the different layers of my scholarship and creative process.

Chapter 5 – Storying The Shluva Project introduces *The Shluva Project* – the two-part choreographic work developed within this AP research. This includes, the project’s inception, common features to both the film and live performance, and specific creative practices that guided their development. Through journal entries and fieldnotes, I include summaries of various excursions I undertook to gain the knowledge and skill to create *The Shluva Project* contents.

Chapter 6 – Crafting the Stories within the Story provides synopses of the film and the live performance. Interweaving descriptive and performative writing, I explain key characteristics and inspirations behind each scene, as well as any creative challenges or opportunities that arose as the choreography evolved. I contrast representing stories through film versus live performance and revisit how the conceptualization of these works as ‘dance events’ shifted my performance and the audience’s engagement. Film viewer and audience responses are interspersed.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion: The Telling and the Told considers contributions to knowledge this methodological layering might add to the field by exposing specific societal themes this research evoked. In revisiting select theories underlying my research, I demonstrate what the creative outputs revealed that could contribute to expanding practice. I discuss affined practices that came to my attention toward the culmination of my research and conclude by looking toward future directions.

Appendices: Although photographs of creative process research and performance images are interspersed within the text, the appendices present longer pieces of documentation that are referenced within the body of the thesis, such as a sample storyboard and poetry that served as part of the narration. Ethics forms for interviews and sample questions are also included.

Chapter 2 – Situating Self/Situating Practice

As part of our coursework in the first year of the structured PhD program in AP, we were asked to undertake an autoethnography that situated our self within our practice. Little did I know that returning to school after many years working professionally as a dancer, performer, independent researcher, and community and university educator, that by the time I arrived at the University of Limerick (UL), I didn't really know what my practice was anymore. This chapter provides an overview of what I discovered when I completed the autoethnography.

Finding Meaning in the Quagmire of Stories

During this process of reflecting on my life history and elements that had long been important to me, a flood of memories surfaced. I wrote reams of stories and fragmented memories producing an 8,000-word document that my poor supervisor had to sift through. Even I was overwhelmed. How do I make sense of all of this?

In *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang (2008) recognizes this overwhelm when trying to uncover a complex, multifaceted life in its entirety. Describing an 'inventorying self' process to collect lots of information bits, some seemingly disconnected leading to a sense of randomness, Chang suggests making a list of categories, "then, rummage[ing] through the storehouse of memory to elucidate themes" (p.76).

I didn't realize at the time that the reams of stories that I wrote, were in fact the autoethnographic data! But I could not find the themes until I wrote out the stories. Once I understood that, I could start to parse them out. Themes in my life's journey were so intertwined with various dance practices that I could not see them. I mind-mapped, drew diagrams, created timelines. Chang describes, "what you search for in the mass of data is indicators that can explain how your life experiences are culturally, not just personally, meaningful... In this process you zoom in on the details of your life and zoom out to the broad context.... a process [of balancing] two opposing activities of fracturing data and connecting fragments to create a coherent story and cultural explanation" (2008, p. 137). It was not until taking on a thematic approach that I started to find meaning in the quagmire of my stories. I present these themes exemplifying them with life examples and many footnotes acknowledging teachers and places of learning. The conclusion of this chapter discusses how I framed my practice

by the end of this artistic autoethnography, while the theoretical underpinnings that connect the themes to broader cultural knowledge systems will be discussed in Ch. 3.

But first, a story.....

A Lecture Demonstration

I walk into the dreary subterranean carpeted classroom of no windows and odd-shaped angles. The wafting smell of pungent incense enlivens the stale air while a sensual musical drone reverberates, transporting us to far-off lands. Swaths of colorful cloth are displayed around the room. There are exotic looking snacks on a table; a map, a girl, – rather, a young lady – with pinkish lightly freckled skin. She is dressed in intriguing wraps. Jeweled ornaments surround her face, some resting in the part of her long brown hair. When other students settle into the classroom, she greets us with a silent coming together of her bare feet wrapped with ankle bells, a narrowing of her body, a pressing of the palms of her hands together below her sternum. Tilting her upper torso forward, she whispers a foreign word. This is a photo I am recalling. A photo - slipped into some folder somewhere within the 30-boxes in my basement that comprise the annals of my professional life from across 37 years.

The girl tells us how the dance came from the gods. Balanced on her bent right leg with a deflection of the hip, her left leg hovers in a curve-shape in front of her body. Connected at the wrists, her arms float forward middle in a circular shape echoing the spherical shape of her curved leg below. She has a calmness yet strength. The girl portrays Lord Shiva with her body. She explains how he is part of a central pillar within the complex Hindu pantheon -- a trinity symbolic of life cycles. Brahma as Creator, Vishnu as Preserver, Shiva as destroyer. But in this form as Nataraja, Shiva is known as Lord of the Dance, the one who ‘danced the world into existence.’

That young woman doing the lecture-demonstration on Indian Classical dance was in her second year of college getting a B.A. in dance and minoring in music. She was giving her final research project in a course with the unfortunate name, Anthropological Basis of Dance. It wasn't so much the name but how the narrative of dance history was storied in that course where world dance traditions that did not fit into the white western colonial theatrical dance schema were thrown together in a developmental kind of progression – as if they preceded the Euro-American ballet and modern styles highlighted in the remaining years of dance history courses at Mills College in Oakland, California in the late 1970s.

The research notes for that lecture-demonstration, the cassette tape of music, even the index cards used to tell that story of Indian classical dance in that classroom over three decades ago, are still in those 30 boxes in my basement. But the kinesthetic memory of getting into and out of that Shiva pose remains deep within my body – the symbol encoded in my musculature to retrieve at any time. Because, that young lady, was me.

This memory vignette highlights several themes braided throughout my career and contained within my current practice as artist-researcher-teacher. It illustrates early strands being developed as a young dancer on her way to becoming a dance-maker, performer, dance ethnologist, movement analyst, and educator whose work and perspective has embraced a variety of dance cultures and disciplines. It shows my early proclivity towards learning culture through dance and immersive multisensory embodied experiences. It highlights my roots in championing cultural equity and inclusion within dance practice. Ultimately, this vignette illuminates the manner by which I began to teach others to recognize cultural knowledge embodied in practice, sensory awareness, research, and art-making processes.

The Journey to a PhD in Arts Practice

My current doctoral project in AP looks very little like the lecture-demonstration I gave as an undergraduate dance major, but it has everything to do with it. That class is a snapshot containing the seeds of a journey, with a before and after and many sub-journeys in-between the longer wandering winding voyage of my life that has gotten me to where I am today. I outline this journey below, starting backwards moving forward, and then forwards moving backwards, temporally meeting on a bridge over River Shannon in Ireland.

Being Othered and Othering, Sensorial Knowledge and Immersive Journeys

By the time I got to college I had already lived for two years with my family in Paris and later endured being bullied at home in the U.S. as I entered first grade with a French accent. I felt like an outsider on both continents – these were my earliest experiences of being *othered*. By the time I got to college, I had long survived the divorce of my parents and being different in primary school, as few kids came from broken homes at that time. I learned how to code switch adapting to the tacit rules of each household. Often coming and going, from rural upstate New York to suburban

Philadelphia, into and out of each of my parents' colorful artistic spaces. I couldn't always figure things out, but I certainly tried to bridge the two worlds.

By the time I got to college I had already found Hatha Yoga,²⁴ cut many history classes to examine world maps and read about Native American ways of life sitting in the school library. I had taken long journeys using my body as the means of transport; I was fascinated by the interconnection of geographical terrains and cultural sites. There was the 1,000-mile canoe trip in the Canadian wilderness at age 13. 'By living so closely with nature ...I began to feel an opening ... sensing the sacredness and beauty of the world around me, put me in touch with a deeper quality of life. This sense is what led me to dance' (Phillips 1980, pp.8-9). There was the 600-kilometer bicycle trip from Montreal to Boston at age 14. Then there was living in teepees and yurts in the woods of Woodstock, New York; with older hippies and by a campfire – I discovered dancing.

I attended an experimental high school where learning through real world experiences was valued.²⁵ I worked at a living historical farm in rural Pennsylvania for one project.²⁶ Wearing period attire, I told stories to visitors while churning butter by the hearth, all which illustrated the way of life of pioneers of the late 1700s. I loved multisensorial immersive environments; I didn't know then how much I was learning through my 'lived experience' (Fraleigh 1996).²⁷

A course on Eastern religion sparked my interest in East Indian philosophy, music and dance. I had taken many 'creative dance' and yoga classes, but my first formal

²⁴ Long before yoga became mainstream, I followed my first yoga teacher, Theresa, to all her classes. She changed my life, but I never found her again to tell her because I could not recall her last name. By the time I found it, I learned she had passed away only six weeks earlier: <https://www.philly.com/obituaries/needlework-quilts-therese-schireson-teacher-haverford-friends-school-vw-bus-20190130.html> (accessed 4 March 2019).

²⁵ Called Alternative West. See Goldsborough 2010, 'The Alternative School', <http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/texts/schools.html> [accessed 1 March 2019]. 'Project-based Learning' curriculum now thought of as innovative in US higher learning institutions was the norm in our biyearly required self-selected school projects in the late-1970s!

²⁶ Ridley Creek State Park, Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation, http://www.colonialplantation.org/show_page.php?pid=29 [accessed 27 February 2019].

²⁷ Although Sandra Fraleigh published *Dance and the Lived Body* in 1996, the term 'lived experience' can be traced to feminist Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1949). The term and accompanying methodology are used in the field of qualitative phenomenological research and refers to the representation of experiences and choices a person has, and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices. *Oxford's Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines it as "Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people" (Chandler, D., and Munday, R. (2020) "lived experience." Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/view/10.1093/acref/9780198841838.001.0001/acref-9780198841838-e-1552> [accessed 16 June 2023]).

dance training was in the classical Indian form *bharatanatyam*. In fact, several of the ideas, music and choreography I presented in that afternoon lecture-demonstration at Mills College (previously described) came from my first Indian dance teacher.²⁸ Through this course, I discovered Sufism.

By the time I got to college, I had already worked at a Sufi camp in Woodstock, New York for another high school project. This community was very connected to Afghanistan through an importing business. I recall red Afghani rug-filled rooms with decorative Indian musical instruments, bronze statues of Hindu gods and boldly-colored Buddhist *thangka* paintings around the peripheries. Thick smells of exotic incense wafted through the air as long-haired ladies in tapestried flowing dresses did house chores amidst mesmerizing Islamic and Hindu chants. As uncomfortable as it all was at age 15, I slowly became enculturated into this way of being through my dress and hair style, my body language, my changing beliefs and ideologies, and my ability to recite by heart the long list of multisyllabic Muslim names of the spiritual lineage, or *silsilah*, that comprised our American Sufi ‘cultural cohort’ (Turino 2008) of which I was becoming a part. I was drawn to the exotic and the spiritual; I *othered* while I was in the process of becoming the *other*. Cooking scrambled eggs for 300 devotees and holding hands in a circle singing grace on a mountain top. These were my summers in upstate New York. During the school year, I moved into a Sufi communal house in Philadelphia in my last year of high school. I recall singing Hindu *bhajans* (devotional songs) for hours in my room alone. Clearly, my life was not that of a typical middle class white American teenager, nor the teenage years of other American social groups.

By the time I got to college, I had journeyed, I had traversed geographical and cultural spaces with my body, gestures, and voice. I had lived in and crisscrossed different multisensorial worlds negotiating distinct worldviews. I *Othered*, had been *Othered*, and become the *Other*.

That early lecture-demonstration on Indian Classical dance in the dingy room of Mills College’s dance department reflected my leanings toward creating multisensory environments where participants learn about another culture through its dance and from having all their senses engaged. Where they can experience for a moment in time, something other than the familiar – other customs, values, beliefs, movement patterns.

²⁸ My first teacher was Dorothy Krauss (Eisenpress), an American who had studied in India <https://www.meltmethod.com/profile/1350/> [accessed 4 March 2019].

And perhaps in the process, learn something about themselves and the world which they are a part of.

Migrations – Somatics and Song

I move to California to attend college. In fact, you might say, I ‘immigrated’ there.²⁹ I was drawn to what I had heard of California’s more flowing open environment close to the Pacific Ocean. College posed an opportunity to gain a foundation of dance in my own culture – at least as I had understood that to mean back then. Mills College had a reputable modern dance department³⁰ and a strong music department.³¹ Throughout the day I gallivanted from the dance building, taking modern dance, ballet, choreography, history and labanotation classes, to the music building across the street, studying music theory, composition, and North Indian classical singing. The San Francisco Bay Area offered inspiring opportunities. I trained with kathak master, Chitresh Das,³² and attended many somatics workshops with visiting teachers of Kinetic Awareness, Sensory Awareness, and Ideokinesis.³³

My practices deepened. I recall this being an amazing creative time filled with dancing and singing, choreographing and composing, practicing yoga, meditation, kathak. I continued attending Sufi summer camps, including one in the French Alps where, with the prompting of my guru, I started dancing solo publicly for the first time. I improvised and followed the inspiration of my heart and the beautiful live choir music. I was still a teenager.

About to cross the border into my second decade of life, I started to feel a restlessness. Certain life experiences angered me. I began feeling constrained by the submissive demeanor of women within the cultural cohorts I had adopted. Including, how India and Sufism had manifested in my life in the United States at the waning of the hippie and dawning of the yuppie generations. I felt a need to break free.

Then... I found flamenco.

²⁹ Northern California is where I call *home* although I do not currently reside there.

³⁰ ‘Founded in 1941, the Mills Dance Department [is] one of the oldest ongoing dance programs in the country’ <https://www.mills.edu/academics/graduate-programs/dance/index.php> (accessed 20 April 2019).

³¹ I studied music composition with composer and Sufi choir director, W.A. Mathieu, and with Terry Riley (famed pioneer of the minimalist school of contemporary music) and his Indian vocal guru, Pandit Pran Nath, I trained in North Indian classical singing.

³² See: <https://www.chitreshdasinstitute.org/pandit-chitresh-das> (accessed 4 March 2019).

³³ I studied Kinetic Awareness with Elaine Summers; Sensory Awareness with Charlotte Selver, and Ideokinesis with André Bernard.

Bridging Cultures Through Dance – Embodied Knowledge

I first heard the soulful song of Isa Mura, who later became my teacher.³⁴ I was captivated by percussive rhythms interwoven through the melancholic songs found inside the musty smelling, junk-covered walls of La Bodega, a San Francisco flamenco club I spent every weekend night at for the next two years.³⁵ Women were commanding; I broke my vegetarianism to get through private lessons with this powerhouse of an artist.

While flamenco was very different than kathak, there was something also similar.

The proud, upright body stance in flamenco seemed like a much more exaggerated version of the regal one that I practiced in kathak. ...While the manner of getting [to different positions] was quite different, many [poses had similar shapes]. ...The fluid arabesque-styled arm movements riding over the strong stomps of the feet—the lower body doing one spatial pattern while the upper body does another – were binding together through the rhythm. The shared rhythms, the sudden stops—kathak more contained and refined, flamenco more explosive and raw. ... Kinesthesia—it was here, in my own body, that I experienced rhythmic and movement similarities between the two forms of dance.

(Phillips 2013, 396-397)

At Mills, I tried integrating movement ideas from kathak and flamenco into modern dance choreography. While it may be commonplace now to blend world dance forms into contemporary, it was not received well back then. I was an outsider in a modern dance department. I pounded my feet with more ferocity. Navigating three dance forms, American modern, north Indian kathak, Spanish flamenco – each with their own body attitude, choreographic typography and cultural codes – my practice gave me knowledge. I loved the spiritual reverence and stories in kathak, and the unabashed expression of emotion in flamenco. I relished the feel of the powerful sound I could make as dancer-musician interweaving rhythms through foot stomps and hand claps, and the multilayered ornamentations of smaller body parts I could articulate. In modern dance, I loved the sense of expansiveness and freedom, the full use of the body and space. I did best dancing it at the beach.

³⁴ Isa Mura - Soleá with Keni "El Lebrijano", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g3iE-p-WHY> (accessed 4 March 2019).

³⁵ La Bodega was a flamenco club within the former Old Spaghetti Factory in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco. See: Dumas, T. '(Re)Locating Flamenco: A Northern California Case Study' <https://www.ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/15/piece/474> and *Los Flamencos De La Bodega (trailer)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgvoDoLCI-c> (accessed 4 March 2019).

Third year in college I started an application for the Watson Fellowship for study abroad after I graduated.³⁶ I wanted to travel to three countries. India was a no-brainer. Israel, simply because I was Jewish and wanted to know about my heritage. Afghanistan was too dangerous. So when I saw flamenco live for the first time, I decided right then Spain was it. But how would I rationalize going to these three seemingly unrelated countries? Working on the research for the application, I was amazed at the cultural links I found between them. My body of embodied and historical research became the focus of three choreographic works for my BA concert, and later the core subject of my MA thesis in dance ethnology published a decade later (1991).

In 1981 I won the Watson Fellowship and began my year-long *wanderjar* that actually lasted nearly three years. A life transforming journey where I learned culture by participating in the native spaces and dance communities where the dances originated. I dabbled in Yemenite, Kurdish, and modern Israeli folk dance and studied more somatics at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.³⁷ In Delhi, I had an unexpected connection with Pandit Birju Maharaj, the inheritor of a long lineage of kathak masters who founded the Lucknow *gharana* (lineage resulting in a stylistic school) and danced in the Mughal courts.³⁸ Three days a week I had private lessons in the bedroom with his closest disciple, Saswati Sen, and on weekends received coaching from Maharaji at the Kathak Kendra.³⁹ In Spain I studied with a variety of teachers in Seville but later settled in Madrid where I took daily class with Ciro at the original Estudio Amor de Dios⁴⁰ and went to flamenco jam sessions in the nighttime. I did not ‘think’ much about what I was doing or considered it as ‘research.’ I followed my passion; I was just living these experiences, learning, developing dance skills, gaining cultural and self knowledge.

³⁶ The Thomas J. Watson Fellowship ‘is a rare window after college and pre-career to engage your deepest interest on a global scale. Fellows ... decide where to go, who to meet and when to change course. The program produces a year of personal insight, perspective and confidence that shapes the arc of fellows' lives’ <https://watson.foundation/fellowships/tj> ‘ [accessed 1 March 2019].

³⁷ At the Jerusalem Academy I studied with Amos Hetz whose movement classes incorporated principles from his lineage. He had studied with Elsa Gindler a peer of Mabel Elsworth Todd (founder of Ideokinesis), expressive dance in the lineage of Mary Wigman, notation with Noa Eshkol (founder of Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation), and Moshé Feldenkrais. <http://www.amoshetz.com/> (accessed 21 April 2019). Also see film, *Dance On with Billie Mahoney*, Amos Hetz, produced by Billie Mahoney, 1927-; interview by Billie Mahoney, 1927-, in *Dance On with Billie Mahoney* (Kansas City, MO: Dance On Video, 1993), 30 mins, available at Alexandar Street Press, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/preview/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C2657497.

³⁸ See: <http://www.birjumaharaj-kalashram.com/>

³⁹ Kathak Kendra, a national institute of kathak dance was founded in New Delhi in 1963, <http://kathakkendra.in/about-kathak-kendra/about/> (accessed 21 April 2019).

⁴⁰ See: <http://www.amordedios.com/webad/Estudios/estudios.htm>

Interweaving Modalities

By the end of 1983 I returned home to San Francisco. I began performing and offering lecture-demonstrations at local colleges interspersing these with miscellaneous jobs outside of dance. After about two years, the next step was in order. I moved to Los Angeles to start my M.A. in choreography at the University of California (UCLA) – one of the only universities offering world dance classes at the time and something called, ‘dance ethnology’. Taking courses in both, I became dismayed by the conservative choreography program yet exhilarated by the cutting-edge ethnology one. I discovered names for what I had been doing for years: dance ethnography, participant-observation, reflexive anthropology (closely akin to what is now called embodied experience, or even phenomenology). And while the hierarchical attitude of modern dancers toward ‘ethnic’ dancers remained, I at least found a cultural cohort of other world dance dancer-researchers; we were the ‘black sheep’ of the dance department.

UCLA was life transforming. Here I worked with some pioneers of the American lineage of dance ethnology, including Elsie Ivancich Dunin⁴¹ who guided me through my first conscientiously applied dance fieldwork experience and whose multimodal pedagogy greatly influenced my own. She foregrounded the importance of participating in the dance event and dancing, not just thinking about or observing it. She guided us through a fieldwork process by having us focus on specific domains during each participant-observational session. I later developed these domains through my teaching and created a visual model to express the interrelationship of these domains within the dance event (see dance event model, Fig. 4).⁴² I also created and circulated to students written Field Guides and an extensive series of questions based on these domains which I called ‘The Dance Event Pages’ (Phillips 2012). Later I discovered these were not dissimilar to Grimes’ (2014) ritual mapping guides found in *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (see Fig. 6).

Another important mentor, Allegra Fuller Snyder had similar visionary thinking as her inventor/philosopher father, Buckminster Fuller, only applied to dance.⁴³ She also emphasized the value of fieldwork and ‘initiated’ us into it through yearly trips to the

⁴¹ See https://sfdh.us/encyclopedia/dunin_e.html

⁴² Throughout this thesis I refer to ‘the dance event model,’ but the reader should keep in mind that while scholars over the years have made various kinds of checklists for dance fieldwork practice, there is no visual ‘model’ universally accepted by all ethnochoreologists. The visual diagram that I present is one I created based on dance ethnology domains I first learned from Professor Elsie Dunin. I expanded her ideas through my own teaching and developed the sensorial aspects of the dance event as a unit of study.

⁴³ See: <https://www.bfi.org/about-fuller/biography/introduction-to-buckminster-fuller/>

Yaqui Easter ceremonies in Arizona.⁴⁴ Joann Keali'inohomoku,⁴⁵ a protege of Gertrude Kurath, who coined the term 'dance ethnology' would visit and teach us often.

Through the dance ethnology lens, I felt that the whole world around me changed – or at least the way I looked at it. I considered cultural patterns standing in line at the bank, I reflected upon how people moved about the city and occupied space, what type of cologne different communities tended to wear, or when people showed up to appointments and how they structured time. I could see patterns of dress codes in certain communities, body types in different arenas, and tacit rules in places that were thought to have none. Things that I noted through my younger developing sensorial sensitivity, now took on cultural meaning.

At UCLA I also discovered Laban Movement Analysis (LMA),⁴⁶ another multilayered framework that highlights practice as the means of learning. I resonated with the idea that we all have a 'movement signature' and that characteristics of dance styles can be recognized through their crystallization of uses of the body, spatial patterns, quality and shape. This method helped me synthesize ideas from my various movement practices into choreographic form. A process that involved creatively selecting essential characteristics, rather than randomly fusing movement steps. I became a Certified Movement Analyst (CMA) in 1990 while finishing my MA thesis.

I did several periods of dance study and fieldwork including, traveling with my kathak guru, Birju Maharaj, and family members on his U.S. tours. Later I met and spent quite a bit of time 'hanging out' doing 'fieldwork' with the Spanish Gypsy families touring with *Flamenco Puro* including the legendary Farruco family⁴⁷ who impressed me greatly. I received another fellowship and moved to Seville, Spain to study with them. This all, eventually, culminated into a 240-page M.A. thesis that incorporated two dance styles, two movement systems (LMA and Labanotation) and several years of fieldwork.⁴⁸ Because 'I first came to understand links between the two dance forms through an experiential dimension,' *Both Sides of the Veil: A Comparative*

⁴⁴ For more information see: <https://www.rimjournal.com/arizyson/easter.htm> and <https://www.pascuayaqui-nsn.gov/>

⁴⁵ See <https://ccdrcollections.omeka.net/joann-w-kealiinohomoku>

⁴⁶ Also known as the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS). See: <https://labaninstitute.org/about/labani-movement-analysis/>

⁴⁷ See <https://tablaocordobes.es/various/farruco-flamenco-bailaor-performed-tablao-flamenco-cordobes-barcelona> and <https://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/Flamenco-a-way-of-life-for-Los-Farruco-3881381.php>

⁴⁸ Academic officials commented that my thesis was on par with doctoral work, however, because no doctoral program in dance existed then at UCLA, I had to settle for the M.A.

Analysis of Kathak and Flamenco Dance drew ‘heavily from the cultural knowledge inherent in the practice of dance as a methodological tactic for gaining analytical insight. These kinesthetic orientations, or felt experiences, [were] substantiated and further elaborated upon through more objective modes of analysis [dance ethnography and Laban]’ (Phillips 2013, p.399).

All the above-named experiences, trainings, journeys, seemingly tangential pathways, built the foundation of my professional career as artist-researcher-teacher. I now fast forward and pick up pace!

Fast Forward -- Going Backwards

September 2018. Standing on a bridge overlooking bubbling River Shannon in Ireland, I sigh a breath of gratitude that I can take a break from teaching, publishing, performing, serving on panels, running a dance company, taking care of dying family members and their earthly affairs. Inhaling the fresh moist Irish air, I am thankful for the opportunity to wholeheartedly dive into my practice – body, mind, spirit. I know this learning will offer another willow reed to weave into my basket of a/r/tography – the practice of artist-researcher-teacher (Irwin and de Cosson 2004).

Prior to coming to Ireland to start my PhD in AP, I was a full-time professor at the University of Maryland’s (UMD) School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. As previously mentioned, I had been hired in 2009 and charged with bridging theory and practice while bringing a more globally comprehensive perspective to the teaching of dance history/theory, and in the mentoring of choreographic and scholarly projects. I developed studio and seminar courses based on many years of experience teaching in the community and academic institutions, working as a professional dancer and an independent dance ethnology researcher consultant. For eight years I taught and mentored BA and MFA Dance, and PhD performance studies and ethnomusicology students in their creative and scholarly projects. I also did what academic professors do; I researched, wrote, published scholarly articles, presented at international conferences, and choreographed for faculty and community concerts. I served on departmental, university, and professional committees focusing on ones related to culture and international education. In retrospect, I believe that all along the way I had been using ‘arts practice’ methods in teaching, choreographing, researching, writing and performing, I just didn’t use that term to define what I was doing.

The year prior to moving to Washington DC for the UMD position, I was wrapping up life in the San Francisco Bay Area where I had lived most of my adult life except when called to live in other countries or U.S. towns for my work. Closing up shop on *AZAFRÁN Flamenco*, a community-based flamenco dance school and performance company I founded and ran for 14 years, I was also turning the page on the teaching I was doing at California colleges. I terminated a long consultancy with the *San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival* and other institutions. The bridge to this transition from independent dancer-scholar to full time dance professor, from West to East coast of America, was Africa.

During 2008-2009 before driving cross country, I was also organizing massive amounts of field data from recent fieldwork in Guinea, West Africa, while negotiating American life with my Guinean partner (now husband) as he made his way to a new life in the West.

When the call to join an interdisciplinary team came in a few years earlier, I made it clear that I was not an Africanist. The then curator of Yale University Art Gallery, Dr. Frederick J. Lamp, wanted someone with my skill as dancer, ethnologist, and Laban movement analyst to be part of his research team to study the multisensory performance events surrounding a highly valued mask in the African art world – D'mba of the Baga people of coastal Guinea.⁴⁹ In contrast to the sterile museum environment that displays these relics as modern art objects, this curator wanted to bring the rich social history and performance context back to the mask through a multisensory exhibition and publication. So, from this unexpected call I went on a three-month life transforming fieldwork expedition to rural Guinea where our team lived in villages surrounded by rice fields with no running water or electricity. We observed and participated in the life and performance events of a deeply rich culture with a drastically different way of life than my own. Rough and tumbled by the encounter, I was pushed up against the limitations of my Western mentality even more than I ever had been when living in India, Spain, and Middle Eastern countries.

Discerning Themes

Returning to school 28 years after my UCLA graduation, I started to inventory my rich and varied life. The memories mapped above highlight three primary themes. 1).

⁴⁹ See: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/312189>

Immersive journeys using the body as a means to traverse terrains and glean sensorial knowledge, 2). bridging cultures through dance and learning to respect diverse worldviews by experiencing the unfamiliar and 3). interweaving modalities to understand complex cultural and artistic phenomenon.

I had long been bothered that after so much experience I did not have a PhD. However, I could not see a way to do one until 2018. The AP program at the University of Limerick seemed a good fit as it reflected values and practices I had long supported. I arrived at a place inside myself where, as previously mentioned, I was less interested in studying other peoples' cultures, other dances, other lineages – and more interested in studying my own. So as an academic institution promoting reflective yet rigorous AP research, I crossed another ocean to begin another journey, here at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, at the end of a bridge over River Shannon.⁵⁰

Circling the Practice – A/R/Tography

First year in Limerick, I spent months reflecting on what my practice WAS while trying to determine what my practice IS. I can now confidently say that I consider myself an 'a/r/tographer' (Irwin and de Cosson 2004).⁵¹

A/r/tography is a form of practice-based research within the arts and education... Drawing upon the professional practices of educators, artists, and researchers, it entangles and performs ...as a rhizome, an assemblage of objects, ideas, and structures that move in dynamic motion performing waves of intensities that create new understandings. A/r/tography transforms the traditional relationship between theory and practice by recognizing the movement found within a rhizome. Theorizing rather than theory, and practicing rather than practice, transforms the intention of theory and practice from stable abstract systems to spaces of exchange, reflexivity, and relationality found in a continuous state of movement. Thus, theorizing and practicing become something other than what they were and exist in constant movement toward becoming.

(Irwin 2013, p.199)

My current practice is as: dancer and writer, choreographer of performed art dances and dance material for classes, dance researcher for academic publications, conferences, and creative writing, and teacher of dance practice, history, and theory. Barbara Bickel notes how the beauty of the notion of a/r/tography is that there is no 'and'; it is an in-between space "represented by the slashes in the word a/r/tography" (Bickel 2006,

⁵⁰ See: <https://www.irishworldacademy.ie/about/>

⁵¹ For an interesting website on A/R/Tography resources, see: <https://artography.edcp.educ.ubc.ca/>

p.118). A/r/tography “moves beyond dialogic opposition through opening a third space for meaning-making; not favoring any one category or discipline, yet existing between and amongst them all” (Irwin cited in Bickel 2006, p.118). It was not until this autoethnographic undertaking that I considered how much my practice lives in this in-between space. Further, how much of my early experiences, proclivities, and activities I gravitated toward were all about a flow between knowing, doing, and making. I have worn a number of dance shoes throughout my career, but this synergetic cycle of artmaking-researching- teaching is what I have come to understand my practice to be.

How to use this ‘in-between-space’ practice as a form of research requires knowing what arts practice research is. The next chapter provides a background to AP history, theory and the theoretical underpinnings I see as most relevant to my work.



Figure 3: Miriam Phillips as artist, researcher, teacher.

Chapter 3 –Intersecting Pathways: AP History/Theory

AP research acknowledges the creative, cultural, and intellectual inquiries undertaken by artists as a legitimate form of research. It situates artistic practice as a significant research methodology valuing the data that is generated during creative process and the results into artistic form. Rigorously and reflexively conducted, AP integrates qualitative methods such as, ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative inquiry in order to obtain new knowledge, elicit new insights, or produce novel methodologies. With a unique historical lineage that draws on diverse philosophical roots, it interfaces yet also interrogates traditional forms of research within academic settings. AP poses its own challenges as well as offers exciting opportunities. I summarize the historical and contextual landscape of this emergent field, pointing to key authors within the discipline, and later, situate my practice for this doctoral project within this milieu. Following, is a discussion of the roots and theoretical underpinnings associated with AP research, highlighting arenas most influential to my overall research project (the meta level). Research methods specific to the creative process of my performance projects are detailed in Ch. 4.

History and Background: A Rocky Road to PaR in the Academy

AP research, as in more traditional scholarship, is about addressing a problem or establishing new knowledge. However, AP researchers develop new insights through exploratory processes within their creative practice where making becomes the central role in the creation of new knowledge (Sullivan 2009, Nelson 2013).

Arts PaR in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) developed in the 1980s in Finland, the UK, and Australia when educational ideologies were changing as more artists entered academia. Artist-academics pushed boundaries challenging existing schisms between those who make art (practice) versus those who study it (history/theory) and argued that more three-dimensional perspectives could be discovered through practice than simply writing about art (Piccini 2004, Nelson 2013). By the 1990s, HEIs were recognizing the validity of PaR by offering doctoral degrees, however, its development in academia has not been an easy road. Questions arose about similarities and differences between conventional PhDs, practice doctorates such as DMus, and PaR PhDs (Andrews & Nelson n.d., UKCGE 1997). Epistemological debates ensued about what constituted new knowledge, how academic rigor could be regulated, how artistic

products could be assessed as a valid research outcome, and generally, what was deemed ‘doctoratable’.

Academics pushing for PaR understood that practical knowledge (e.g., knowing how to dance, paint, write music) does not necessarily imply that there is research inquiry. In order for practice to be used as research there needs to be a systematic methodology and critical reflection of the artmaking process, which should lead to new knowledge or methods that could then be utilized by others.

As interest in PaR degrees increased, academic educators and administrators grappled with more questions about how to define, structure, supervise, evaluate, and even what to call arts-based degrees. Efforts to find common ground regarding principles, pedagogies and procedures for PaR and PaRIP (practice as research in the performing arts) degrees led to professional symposia, formations of advisory groups, and research boards that created position papers, educational reports, and quality assurance or best practices guidelines (see: Andrews & Nelson (n.d.), UK Council for Graduate Education [UKCGE] (1997), National College of Art and Design (2005), Higher Education and Training Awards Council (2010), Royal Irish Academy (2011)). These reports also served as guideposts for other HEIs starting PaR programs, and for university administrators, faculty supervisors, and postgraduate students to better comprehend the principles and expectations for awarding degrees.

The UKCGE 1997 report concluded that AP PhDs should include, “a systematic application of a process and level of self-reflection, critical analysis and synthesis, evaluation, conceptual frame-building, acquisition and application of contextual knowledge and an understanding of the ways the practice is related to theory, in relation to the specific work being undertaken” (p.16). AP doctoral candidates should demonstrate competence in various research methods within their discipline, know when to apply them, and create an original creative work as part of the doctoral submission. Distinct from professional artist output, artist-researchers need to produce the artwork and contextualize the route they took to get there through documentation.

Slippery Issues within AP Research

As AP continued to develop in the academy, so did terminological and epistemological debates. Freeman (2011) describes how “the emergence of ‘practice as research’ [became] a catch-all term for many methodologies and outcomes that sit outside text-

based research” (p.101). Yet several authors make distinctions between terms, such as practice-as-research, practice-based-research, and practice-through-research, and consider the importance of understanding each. They suggest that each term characterizes a different way that practice can result in insight (Andrews and Nelson n.d., Kershaw 2002, Piccini 2004, Smith and Dean 2012). Regardless of the name, what is most highlighted is the bi-directional reciprocal relationship between research and creative practice illustrating an “iterative cyclic web” (Smith and Dean 2012, p.2).

Among other slippery issues about AP doctorates are deliberations around different kinds of criteria and on what level they should be evaluated. Questions about hierarchical ways of conceiving and producing knowledge and interrogations into HEIs historically prevalent logocentrism have festered the discipline. These questions relate to the role of writing and creative or technical ability of the candidate. Since the expectations of a practicing artist and an academic scholar demand divergent competencies, should written theses be required and if so, should they be at the same proficiency as conventional PhD students? Should technical ability be expected using the same artistic criteria developed in the artform? Where does theoretical investigation take place – through the artistic practice or the accompanying text (Candlin 2000, Nimkulrat 2007, Freeman 2011, Leavy 2000, 2015)? Because PaR PhDs cross disciplinary boundaries, how should the scholarly worthiness of artwork be judged and what is the place of intuition (which plays heavily into creative practice) within the academic environment (Candlin 2000, Melrose 2003, Bannerman 2006)?

Issues of excessive subjectivity or self-indulgence have also floated around the peripheries of AP in academic settings. To overcome this dilemma the National College of Art and Design in Dublin suggest that the work should be purposive - based on identification of an issue or problem worthy and capable of investigation; inquisitive – seeking to acquire new knowledge; informed – conducted from an awareness of previous related research; methodical – planned and carried out in a disciplined manner; and communicable – generating and reporting results which are testable and accessible by others (2005, p.7).

New Paradigms and Opportunities

Despite ongoing debates and struggles to define its place and methodological validity within academia, AP research nonetheless offers new opportunities to break free of long held schisms and integrate, or at least intersect, disciplinary silos within and outside the

academy. It promotes diverse kinds of knowledge based on relational rather than hierarchical positionality and represents a new paradigm in transdisciplinary research where artistic passion and academic rigor can freely intersect (Bannerman 2006, Leavy 2015). Despite its ambivalent presence in HEIs, Patricia Leavy, a proponent of Arts-based research (ABR) affirms:

ABR offers ways to tap into what would otherwise be inaccessible, make connections and interconnections that are otherwise out of reach, ask and answer new research questions, explore old research questions in new ways, and represent research differently, often more effectively with respect to reaching broad audiences and nonacademic stakeholders. The research experience or exposure to the final research representations have the potential to jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently, feeling or deeply, learning something new, or building empathetic understandings.

(Leavy 2015, p.21)

AP research can cast a wider reach in terms of its usefulness to society rather than circulate amongst an elite few as is common in traditional research. With its ability to cultivate critical awareness, it can offer ways to decentralize positions of power (e.g., academic experts), confront dominant ideologies, and democratize meaning-making by including marginalized voices and perspectives (Leavy 2015). Consequently it is useful in studies involving diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Positioning my PhD into an Arts Practice Paradigm

I deeply resonate with AP approaches to research because my professional work these many years has centered cultural equity and inclusion in dance. My teaching probed positionality of power, interrogated dominant aesthetics, and excavated multiple meaning systems within various dance events. My doctoral performance projects take this a step further by invoking ‘identity research’ – that is, research into one’s own identity. Furthermore, AP allowed me to develop an embodied auto-ethno-genealogy praxis by weaving together a diverse range of methods to create a rich tapestry of meanings inclusive of performing stories highlighting the marginalized voices of my ancestors who fled Eastern Europe – a history lived inside my body.

Additionally, since starting my PhD in AP, I realized that what I had been implementing and teaching all along had been practice-as-research, as well as guiding research-led-practice. My professional work utilized dance practice to inform my scholarly research (and vice-versa). I wrote my body into my papers, my lived

experience poured onto the pages. “My body was my field research site; my kinesthetic memory, my informant” (Phillips 2013, p.399). I danced during my conference presentations. All was backed up with more typical research including literature surveys, ethnographic investigation and movement analysis. I articulated what I was doing in scholarly writings. “It is the process of making knowledge from embodied experience, and the progression of understanding that can reveal ...” (399). However, I had not known then that there existed an academic discipline that so thoroughly and thoughtfully intertwined artistic practice as the primary form ‘research’. As an evolving discipline with a unique lineage, AP research intersects epistemological, theoretical and methodological strands from the related disciplines of philosophy, phenomenology, ethnography, performance studies, educational theories, and theories of somatics and embodiment, to name a few.

Since my doctoral project originally revolved around further developing a system integrating dance ethnographic practice into choreographic practice, it was essential that the research be done using an AP approach. This included applying a similar methodology I taught to my students to my own choreographic practice, which in the end I did through film and live performance. Before discussing specific methods utilized for these artistic projects, it is important to consider the theoretical underpinnings that support the choice of methods used.

Theoretical Underpinnings – Practice into Theory

I admit. I have trouble with theory – what it is and how it relates to my practice. And I can’t always parse out the distinction between theory and methodology or practice. Like many people, I developed particular interests as a youngster that propelled me to naturally gravitate to certain experiences that then became part of my practice. In resisting writing a section on theory (which doctoral dissertations require), but in digging deeper (which doctoral research allows us to do), I see that in fact underlying these practices, are theories!

Definitions of ‘theory’ abound depending on the disciplinary strand from which the definition comes. Some consider theory as the conceptual core of an area of study and explicitly contrast it to practice (Oxford’s English Dictionary 2023). Yet other definitions acknowledge their interdependence, such as, “a set of principles on which

the practice of an activity is based” (Google, accessed 5 June 2023). New Oxford American Dictionary (2015) describes theory as “a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained (e.g., Darwin's theory of evolution).” Practice nursing researcher Usama Saleh helped me understand it best as she describes theory and practice as “cornerstones [that] are reciprocal and cyclical” (2018 p.18). Theories guide practice and in turn, practice creates new theories. Being a visual and kinesthetic learner, I could not see the theories without the experience of doing the practices. So, what were the theoretical underpinnings foundational to the methodologies and practices engaged with in my research?

The theories discussed below include primary concepts and reference points to broader areas of knowledge which served as guideposts to better understand my research aims. They often provided rationale for the methodological choices outlined in the next chapter. I have organized this section around several highly influential AP research theories pinpointing key pillars most relevant to my work. I present them as separate subsections; however, it is important to keep mind that although these theories originated from distinctive epistemological discourses, many ideas contained within them overlap or blur. The subsections include: theories related to somatics; dance as embodied cultural knowledge; Laban movement; ethnochoreology, performance and ritual studies; and theories of practice and creativity. Because the content of my creative projects touched upon intergenerational trauma, I describe key theoretical points and its' intersection with social justice.

Theories Related to Somatics: Somaesthetics, Sensory Anthropology, Embodied Cognition

A lot of my early interests in what used to be called ‘body-mind practices’ are now contained within the discipline referred to as, *somatics*, a concept coined by movement theorist/educator Thomas Hanna in the 1970s that became more popularly known as *somatic education* by the 1990s (Eddy 2009). A wide variety of somatic education systems have propagated since; however the general principal considers the body’s interrelationship with the mind and emotions. Often used to ameliorate physical or emotional pain or develop more efficient ways of moving, somatic practices embrace cultivating body awareness as a way to know self better. While the below named scholars do not identify their research as a part of the body of knowledge referred to as *somatics*, I include them here because I see their underlying principles about bodily

experience in relationship to mental constructs and modes of learning resonant with those considered in somatics. That is, that somatic awareness provides access to knowledge and connectedness such as within the self, between others, and with one's environment, not readily available through other means of knowledge acquisition (Eddy 2016, Shusterman 2008).

My awareness of learning about culture through body movement and the senses is well explained in Shusterman's theory of *somaesthetics* or 'body consciousness' (2008), Stoller's 'anthropology of the senses' (a.k.a. 'sensory anthropology; 1989, 1997), Gallagher's 'embodied cognition' (2005), and Johnson and Lakoff's 'conceptual metaphors' (2003). These scholars come from distinct disciplines yet their theories overlap. While each may highlight one element over others (body, senses, movement, mind, metaphor), their conclusions about how bodily experience is a vehicle for cognitive experience and organization and cultural meaning-making have similar resonances. Like early dance ethnology pioneer Allegra Fuller Snyder's recognition of a "mind-body gestalt" in 1974, these later theories on the relationship between bodily experience and perception, between the sensorium and knowledge, and how the body and senses can synthesize and transmit cultural values, contain solid justifications to ameliorate the problematic Cartesian dualism of a mind/body split. Moreover, these theories substantiate why it was important to me to get audience members to participate in a wider range of sensory activities beyond sight and sound. These theories supported the type of awareness of self and other, and consciousness of the surrounding world that I was attempting to create.

Philosopher Richard Shusterman describes *somaesthetics* as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning" (2008, p.1). Since the body contains the sense organs which allow us to smell, taste, touch, hear, see, and feel, anthropologist Paul Stoller considers sensory awareness as "central to the metaphoric organization of experience" (1997, p. xvi). Because perception can come through different senses and distinct cultures prioritize different senses over others (not only Western society's predominance of sight), Stoller advocates for including a more holistic integration of sensory experience in the practice and writeup of ethnographic research. Shaun Gallagher, pioneer of the field of embodied cognition, considers the role of movement and proprioception in developing cognitive organization. He posits, "If throughout conscious experience there is a constant reference to one's own body,

even if this is a ... marginal awareness, then that reference constitutes a structural feature of the phenomenal field of consciousness, part of a framework that is likely to determine or influence all other aspects of experience” (2006, p.2).

These scholars validate how through the body we come to comprehend and organize our engagement with the world. By developing body consciousness we not only come to know ourselves better, but also expand our appreciation of the environment and the experiences of others. Shusterman, Stoller, and Gallagher’s theories were helpful in articulating the efficacy of the sensory rich choreographic practices I first envisioned for Perf. 1 and tried to carry through its transformation to film.

Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, known for their contributions to embodied philosophy and cognitive linguistics add to the conversation on meaning-making rooted in bodily somatic experience. Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (1987), and Johnson and Lakoff’s *Metaphors we Live By* (2003), highlight how metaphors are derived from our bodily experience and enable us to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. As a way to organize our experience, Johnson (1987) describes ‘image schemata’ (body-referenced images) which we metaphorically project onto other (non-body oriented) domains to create meaning (e.g. feeling on top of the world or calling someone ‘spineless’). Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that direct physical experience does not need interpretation, and that cultural knowledge is present in experience itself.

This idea is akin to ethnochoreologists recognizing that cultural knowledge is embedded in dance style, and to Laban movement analysts who often promote the concept, “the meaning is in the movement” (source attributed to Rudolf Laban). Choreographers often utilize movement as metaphor to express abstract concepts such as time, memory, thoughts feelings. Lakoff and Johnson’s perspectives are relevant to AP choreographers as we work with researched concepts or themes, then strive to integrate them into bodily form via dance phrases, spatial pathways, and dynamic movement expressions. The concepts of movement metaphors or dance symbols become highlighted in this process.

Somaesthetics, sensory anthropology, and embodied cognition also intersect with phenomenology, which explores how people perceive and experience the world and communicate about experience. Arts-based researchers Cancienne and Snowber describe how phenomenology has sought “to describe closely the ways in which we

immediately experience an intimacy with the living world, attending to its myriad textures, sounds, flavors, and gestures. ... the lived experience of the body [is] central to learning, being, knowing, and teaching” (2003, p.238).

In undertaking my autoethnography (described in Ch. 2), I was struck by how central bodily experience as a pathway to knowledge has been present in my work for some time. However, I could not understand what the relationship was between my years of interest in somatic practices and the use of the senses that plays so heavily in my dancing, writing and teaching. I pondered how the senses related to how I learned about culture through my body. I kept wondering how dance ethnology related to somatic bodily experience for me. Encountering the conceptual frameworks of the above-named theories helped me understand these connections. I realized how the ‘dance event, the basic unit of study in ethnochoreology, is inherently an immersive multisensory experience. By paying attention, with our bodies and through our senses, we come to know. Sensorial engagement was one bridge connecting ethnochoreology to choreographic practice.

Dance as Embodied Cultural Knowledge

Situated in dance and cultural studies, dance ethnology/ethnochoreology is more directly related to my work than other AP theories introduced during my first year at UL. Providing the groundwork for my current research, their interdisciplinary genealogies intersect with AP in significant ways. Because the locus of investigation is on dance, which is situated in the body, the theories imparted by dancer-scholars Snyder (1974), Sklar (2005, 2008), Hahn (2007), Ness (1992), and Novack (1990) have much overlap with those related to somatics outlined above. Although each expresses the notion of dance as ‘embodied cultural knowledge’ differently, their ideas interconnect in the recognition that a culture can be understood through dance. Embodied cultural knowledge – the notion that cultural worldviews, values, and aesthetics are manifested through the dance styles of a given culture, is paramount to their work as it was to my master’s thesis comparing kathak and flamenco dance (Phillips 1991).

Allegra Fuller Snyder’s first described her idea of a “mind-body gestalt” within a dancer – a “conceptual-kinesthetic” phenomenon where ordinary gestures and actions become transformed in dance – “the transformational experience experientially builds a bridge between physical reality and conceptual reality” (Snyder 1974, p.4). Dance

ethnology/performance studies scholar Deidre Sklar (a student of Snyder's) recognizes kinesthesia (awareness of motion) as a critical sense to understand cultural patterns. She suggests that because kinesthesia has no outward reference point (it can only be understood from within the body), it is often left out of sensorium studies (Sklar 2008). Like Sklar and Stoller, dancer-ethnomusicologist Tomie Hahn considers the sensorium as a way to "know with the body" (2007, p.8). She recognizes that processes engaging the sense organ do not occur in isolation (e.g. sensing sound involves the ears but also activation of movement of the eyes and body), and therefore suggests sensory integration as a way to orient and understand culturally specific experiences. Similarly Sklar acknowledges the interrelationship of sensory modalities but in terms of how they translate between one another. She notes how dance is both kinesthetic and visual even though the felt experience is more dominant for the dancer and seeing movement and gesture more central to the observer.

I too believe that cultural or artistic meaning making can be derived from experiencing the senses when engaged in watching or participating in a dance. In both versions of Perf. 1, I wanted to explore what it would be like if the audience could experience dance performance that was also auditory, gustatory, tactile and kinesthetic, and how this might engage different levels of meaning and understanding.

The same way movement scholars or sensory anthropologists have criticized the disembodiment of fieldwork practice, I associate a similar disembodiment occurring with how audiences view dance – that is, passively and often with emphasis on the visual sense (visualism) at the expense of taking in meaning through other senses that could be engaged with during a dance performance.⁵² The late dancer- anthropologist, Cynthia Novack (aka Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull) describes how different cultures prioritize different senses within dance. In her phenomenological account of dancing, she states:

When I dance, I experience kinesthetic, visual, tactile, and auditory sensations, and my *sensible* dance experience includes and implies *intelligible* choreographic and social meanings. As I dance I feel the shifting of my weight and the changing shapes of my body. I see my surroundings and sense the rush of air past my skin; I hear, and feel, the percussive rhythms of my footfalls. All these physical, sensible

⁵² Visualism in dance performance particularly pertains to certain Western concert dance audiences, whereas in Indian kathak or many West African dances, the auditory can be even more important than the visual. And, how much the olfactory sense provides 'cultural information' when attending an Indian dance event (e.g., smells of incense and curries).

experiences combine to create, for me (and perhaps, in performance, for my audience) a particular atmosphere and feeling; the physical act of dancing creates a kind of cultural meaning.

(Bull 1997, p.269)

Adding another layer to the body-senses-dance discussion, anthropologist and Laban movement analyst Sally Ness considers how to know a culture through “choreographic phenomena” (1992, p.3). She describes various choreographic ways of knowing that arose while conducting fieldwork. For example, feeling the slanted inclinations and seeing views of the sea while walking city hills related to the subtle wave-like motions of the ritual dancers she was studying. Or, how during a dance class in the Philippines, the confluence of her culture juxtaposed against others helped her understand the culture she was studying.

In her book chapter, *Ethnography and Choreography* (1992), Ness recounts her ‘ethnographic interactions’ with the inhabitants of Cebu City:

I was initiating, responding, and interpreting information as would a performing student of choreographic phenomena. As a student of such movement experiences I came to know and to “bear” my own culture, [but] I also came to appreciate the culture bearers of Cebu City. My process of physical, subjective, and dynamic attunement to choreographic phenomena is what I seek to expose and illustrate, toward the end of creating a shared voice for readers who may wish to discover in the rest of this text something new both about an “other” culture and about their own. In Paul Stoller’s words, I invite the reader here to “dwell within” me as I walk along my solitary path in a foreign cultural field – a field of dances, both familiar and strange.

(Ness 1992, p.57)

These scholars offered concepts critical to the efficacy of my study and its application to creative process. In both versions of *Perf. 1*, (the live cancelled version and the film), I wanted my audience to glean from sensorial experiences by ‘dwelling within me.’ As they walked alongside and inside my dance event, they could experience what it was like to feel *othered* as well as to *other*. Further, through the senses, they could learn about the Eastern European Jewish immigrant *other* that had been erased within me and parts of the world. My dance event would not only be me dancing, but also my audience experiencing “sensuous ways of knowing” (Stoller 1997, p.135) through their participation.

Choreographers, through creative process, strive to discern the ‘culture’ (the sentiment, quality, movement vocabulary) of the dance they are creating. Ethnochoreologists, through fieldwork, endeavor to understand the culture of the communities they study. I argue that both do this through direct participatory and observed experience – an embodied practice. Let me now turn briefly to how my students integrated ethnochoreological and sensorial perspectives into their choreographic works as a way to further situate my AP research.

Teaching and Learning Culture Through the Senses and Dancing

When my dance students undertook the six-week participant-observation fieldwork practice, they like Ness, experienced the confluence of another culture juxtaposed against theirs. They could experience distinct cultural features embedded within dance movement and choreographic patterns previously unknown to them and noticed a new space-time dynamic. These perceptions of an other’s dance allowed them to see cultural features intrinsic to their chosen dance style and choreographic practice. This in turn expanded their scope of creative possibilities as they were devising and choreographing their thesis concerts. Recall Robin’s statement above describing how she moved from perceiving herself as culture-less to being able to recognize herself as *weaving the connective tissue of values within the field of dance, a culture in its own right* (Brown 2015, p.59).

Somatics has profoundly informed the framework I developed and taught applying dance ethnology to choreographic creation. The value of bringing this perspective into dialogue with creative dance practice (choreography), is evidenced by the ways in which my students started producing immersive multisensory work as a result. I often utilize the sensorium in my teaching, particularly when guiding students through experiential levels of the dance event process. It is for this reason I believe that some of my students’ work came out to be extremely multisensory. Robin hoped to “incite the wondrous associative power of the senses.” She writes in her MFA thesis:

The notion of a sensory-rich *event* quickly became an obsession of mine. Both [Irmgard] Bartenieff’s and [Howard] Gardner’s research was based on the belief that the senses are the interface between body and world, between the body and meaning. I learned in Miriam’s class, that this connection between sensation and meaning is a vehicle for culture.

(Brown 2015, p.58-59)

The inclusion of sensory experience in performance was not about putting it in for the sake of difference. My students integrated the sensorium into the themes they were presenting choreographically because they recognized how they are a powerful way to communicate meaning. For example, backed by feminist and queer theory, Lynne created a kitchen-like space and included cooking (engaging smell) and audience eating (taste) in their performance to interrogate gender identity. Robin divided the performance space into zones each filled with different objects of nature or old trinkets. The audience was directed to move through various evocative ‘chambers’ to experience sights, sounds, textures, and scents, including experiences like, picking up sticks and soil (smell and touch), watching blind-folded dancers who might touch a viewer (sight and touch) as a way to explore memories and reconnect with the earth. MK incorporated different ambient sounds while the audience walked through the performance space close to the heat of Black female dancing bodies (hearing and touch) to “explore race, otherness, ownership and story-telling from the perspective of Black women’s dancing bodies and histories” (Abadoo 2016, abstract).

Somatic theoretical perspectives allowed me to understand why what I intended to do in the dance events I was creating were significant. In developing the first version of *The Shluva Project* (described in the prologue), it was important to me to integrate various sensorial activities for the audience so that they might have the feeling of being *othered* and *othering* (which can be achieved by playing with sensory stimuli). Also, as a way to experience the Jewish culture I was embodying through a sensorial participatory experience. I believe that ‘cultural shock’ is about an onslaught of sensory stimuli so different than one is used to that it takes time for the senses to ‘calm down’ and integrate into the new culture. In *The Shluva Project*, I wanted to create an experience akin to how I have felt attending multisensory immersive dance events in different cultures I visited. For example, at a Hindu temple in India, a Gypsy baptism in Spain, a rural village in Guinea-West Africa, a pub in Ireland, or a Yaqui Easter ceremony on a Native American reservation in the United States. When I traveled to other countries (or distinct communities within the US), I didn’t just want to know how a dance looked, I also wanted to know how it tasted, how it sounded, how it smelled and felt. And when I imparted the knowledge gleaned from these experiences to others, whether through performances, lecture-demonstrations, or writing, I always want to give beholders of my work a “taste of ethnographic things” (Stoller 1989). [Recall the story, A Lecture Demonstration, Ch. 2].

Laban Movement Theory

Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) or, the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS),⁵³ offers another theoretical framework particularly relevant to investigating bodily ways of knowing. It feeds into theories of somaesthetics and embodied knowledge. LBMS is taught through practice, such that one cannot understand the theory behind Laban concepts unless one experiences them through movement.

Known as “a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement”⁵⁴ LBMS has wide application to choreography, the teaching and learning of movement, ethnochoreology, psychotherapy, drama, sports science, leadership studies, and neuroscience, among other professional disciplines. While Labanotation uses graphic symbols to document the linear structure of movement (which body parts are moving where in space and when), LMA considers the whole gestalt of movement. It looks for How a mover moves by identifying patterns in terms of broad categories: Body, Effort, Space, and Shape and their relationship to each other. In any given movement LMA considers elements such as, what body parts are most active (or inactive) and how they sequence in relationship to other body parts; how dynamic qualities are expressed and indicative of inner intentions; what kinetic architecture or spatial trace-forms movers process through; and how the body changes shape through movement which reflects a mover’s relationship with self and the environment.

Like dance ethnographic methods (described below), LMA provides a framework for discerning recurring patterns within individual ‘movement signatures’ and within culturally-patterned structured movement systems. LBMS recognizes the symbiotic relationship between function and expression, and the complex phenomenon of human movement as revealing of the ways we cope with our environment (Bartenieff 1980).

During the creative process, I occasionally utilized specific Laban concepts as I was choreographing to determine the quality or shape of movement that best could express a certain theme, or when refining already created movement vocabulary. For example, in

⁵³ Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is distinct from the dance notation system called, Labanotation. LMA is taught through a rigorous certification program as an integrative approach inclusive of the movement principles of Irmgard Bartenieff, one of Laban’s protégés who further developed the body level of the system. To recognize Irmgard’s contribution to the system, it is now referred to in the U.S. as the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System or LBMS.

⁵⁴ <https://labaninstitute.org/about/lab-an-movement-analysis/> (accessed 20 April 2019).

the dance ‘Grapevine’ (Perf. 2), there was a section where I wanted to create dynamic intertwining curvilinear movement phrases symbolic of grapevines (before I picked up the actual ones). I was stuck on how to express this until I remembered the Laban B-scale with its highly mobile use of three-dimensional transverse movement. I used this scale as a choreographic structure moving it through different body parts and spatial and floor pathways. These movements echoed the trace-forms I created when I manipulated the actual grapevines later in the dance. Other times while in the studio, even when I did not conscientiously consider LMA, it was always a part of my choreographic ecosystem.

Theories Underlying Ethnochoreology and Performance Studies

There is much commonality between the disciplines of dance ethnology and performance studies, and I would argue that they influenced each other (at least in the US). While dance ethnology appeared as an academic discipline earlier than performance studies, the later has had a wider reach in HEIs.⁵⁵

The field of dance ethnology/ethnochoreology evolved from various strands of history across two continents that embraced theories and methods of other disciplines in the social sciences (see Giurchescu and Torp 1991, Kaeppler 1991, Frosch 1998, Foley 2012, Dunin 2014). Ethnochoreology aims to extend knowledge of diverse cultures through an understanding of dance and the meaning that it has in human lives.

To discern common characteristics between styles, ethnochoreologists strive for more inclusive languaging when describing dance cross-culturally and caution superimposing one culture’s terminology and aesthetics onto another.^{56, 57} If words signify concepts, then denoting dance as ‘performance,’ an inherently Western theatrical concert dance concept often hierarchical and racially biased, excludes many

⁵⁵ While it is out of the scope of this thesis to review the history between the two disciplines, I can point out a few factoids that could explain their influence on one another. The term ‘dance ethnology,’ first coined by Gertrude Kurath in 1960, was followed by the creation of UCLA’s dance ethnology MA program around 1967, cofounded by Allegra Fuller Snyder and Elsie Ivancich Dunin. The performance studies program at New York University was cofounded by Richard Schechner in 1979. Allegra was a visiting professor in this department 1982-83. As part of our dance ethnology training at UCLA, Allegra organized yearly field trips to the multi-layered Yaqui Easter ceremonies in Arizona. My first trip to Yaqui, Richard Schechner was there with his students too. Although I cannot verify, I had the impression that Allegra had possibly introduced Schechner to these events.

⁵⁶ See Keali’i Inohomoku’s ground-breaking article, ‘An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance’ (1969).

⁵⁷ Although some even question what components allow for different movement systems to be classified as ‘dance,’ arguing that the word is fraught with Western connotations and in many traditional societies there is not a comparable category (Frosch 1999, Kaeppler 2003). Kaeppler prefers to use the phrase, ‘structured movement systems’ (2000).

kinds of dance styles and the functions they serve for those communities involved (e.g., village dances done for social reasons or dances enacted in a temple for ritual purposes). Consequently, the concept of ‘the dance event,’ a term coined by dance anthropologist Joann Keali’inohomoku in 1976, has become widely adopted as a more encompassing and equitable term to describe dance-centred happenings. It considers “dance phenomenon in any context, not constrained by culturally-defined constructions of meaning” (Vissicaro 2004, 114). Thus, ethnochoreologists endeavour to use broader terminology when referring to elements within an event (such as ‘body extensions’ instead of ‘costumes’, ‘participants’ instead of ‘performers’). Of course, when describing concepts within specific dance cultures, embracing indigenous or local terminology would be most culturally relevant.

Recognizing that dance cannot be meaningfully studied in isolation, ‘the dance event’ framework offers a way to observe the total environment and the many aspects simultaneously present within the ‘complex cultural phenomenon’ that dance exists (see ICTM 1989).⁵⁸ These features include numerous layers of spatial and temporal aspects, soundscape and other sensory phenomenon, bodies and movement, body extensions (e.g., attire, hand-held objects), participants, codes of conduct and tacit rules (Fig. 4). It also acknowledges the interdependent relationship of dance to its community by noting the various personnel involved in creating the event not just dancers (Vissicaro 2004).

⁵⁸ ICTM = International Council for Traditional Music recently renamed International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) “is a scholarly organization which aims to further the study, practice, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of music and dance of all countries.” It is also considered an NGO with formal consultative relations with UNESCO. See: <https://ictmusic.org>.

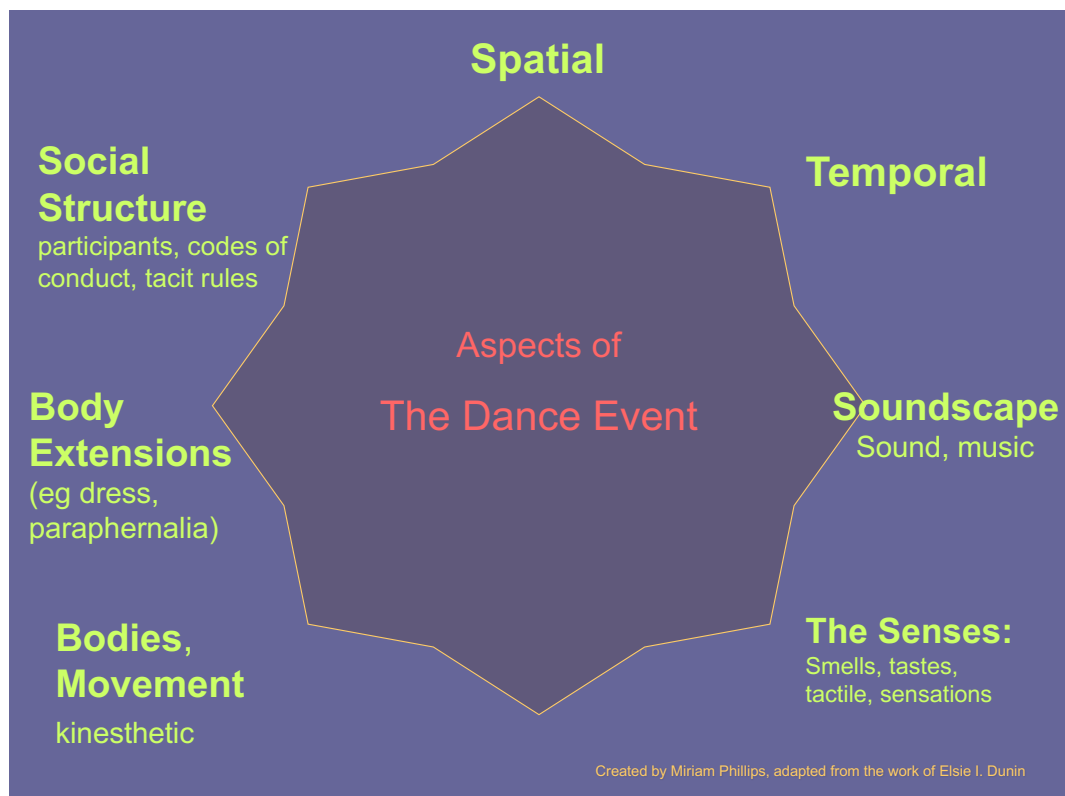


Figure 4: Dance event model created by Miriam Phillips.

With attention to the arrangement and interconnection of activities that happen before, during, and after the actual dancing, Keali'inohomoku identified two types of events. 'Contained' events have an identifiable beginning and conclusion, occur within a specific timeframe, can be portable (e.g., theatrical events or an Irish dance *feis* (competition)), often utilize skilled practitioners, and are more easily understood by outsiders. In contrast, extended dance events are not bound by an identifiable time frame and are not portable (e.g., dance at Burning Man in the U.S. or Carnival in Brazil). Time is extended and there is emphasis on repetition thus can be challenging for outsiders to understand the implicit knowledge system within the event.

Similar concepts are found in the ways performance studies scholars view performative phenomenon. The field grew out of the confluence of boundary-breaking ideologies that were being explored since the 1960's postmodern era of theatre and dance, which expanded how artists and scholars practiced and viewed performance events. Developed in the late 1970s, the discipline examined the structure and function of cultural and social phenomenon through the lens of performance. Pioneering performance studies scholar Richard Schechner considered a 'broad-spectrum approach' (1980) – that any phenomenon could be examined AS 'performance' (e.g., even sports events or legal trials). There are some correlations between Schechner's

categorizations and those considered by ethnochoreologists, however, ethnochoreologists maintain that a phenomenon is ‘performance’ if the people doing it consider it so. Diana Taylor, a colleague of Schechner’s seems more allied with the dance ethnology perspective that, “what one society considers a performance might be a nonevent elsewhere” (2003, pp.3).

Like the dance event framework, Schechner identified broad categories to examine common features unifying performative events. These included how performance is structured temporally: ‘set time’ – arbitrary starting and ending as in clock time, ‘event time’ – sequences of activities that must be completed regardless of clock time, and ‘symbolic time’ – the representation of another activity in another time (e.g., traditional theatre). He considers space and the ‘non-ordinary places’ that performance occurs in, objects and the values placed on them, ‘non-productivity of goods’ that stand outside of ordinary life, and rules governing performances (Schechner 1988, pp.8-15).

Another overlap between ethnochoreology and performance studies is the recognition that culture can be understood through performative events; they reflect the values, beliefs, and aesthetics of a community, re-enact memory, and consequently perpetuate or reinforce these cultural elements (Keali’inohomoku 1972, Taylor 2003). Taylor eloquently describes how performance is a non-archival “vital act of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or... ‘twice-behaved’ behaviour” (Taylor 2003, 2-3). Challenging the Western epistemic system which places writing as the apex of knowledge, along with collections of material culture (“the archive”), Taylor appeals for an examination of the relationship between embodied performance (“the repertoire”) and the production of knowledge (2003). She emphasizes how embodied practices preserve cultural knowledge in a way that archival material (written documents, historical records, other material artefacts) cannot.

Yet, to make a comprehensive cultural study of dance (or performance events), intertwining methodologies are needed (Sklar 2001, Taylor 2003). These include methods to gain knowledge of emic perspectives, or meaning systems from within the culture (e.g., how locals think), and etic viewpoints, or observable characteristics outside of the culture (e.g., LMA). Thus, in addition to text-based research, such as in archives, ethnochoreologists also practice participant-observation in a fieldwork setting to understand dance in its cultural context (see Fig. 5, a diagram I originally created for

my postgraduate students enrolled in *Dance in a Global Context*). This study should also include dancing (or doing that which is being studied) because as described above, embodied practice offers a way of knowing.

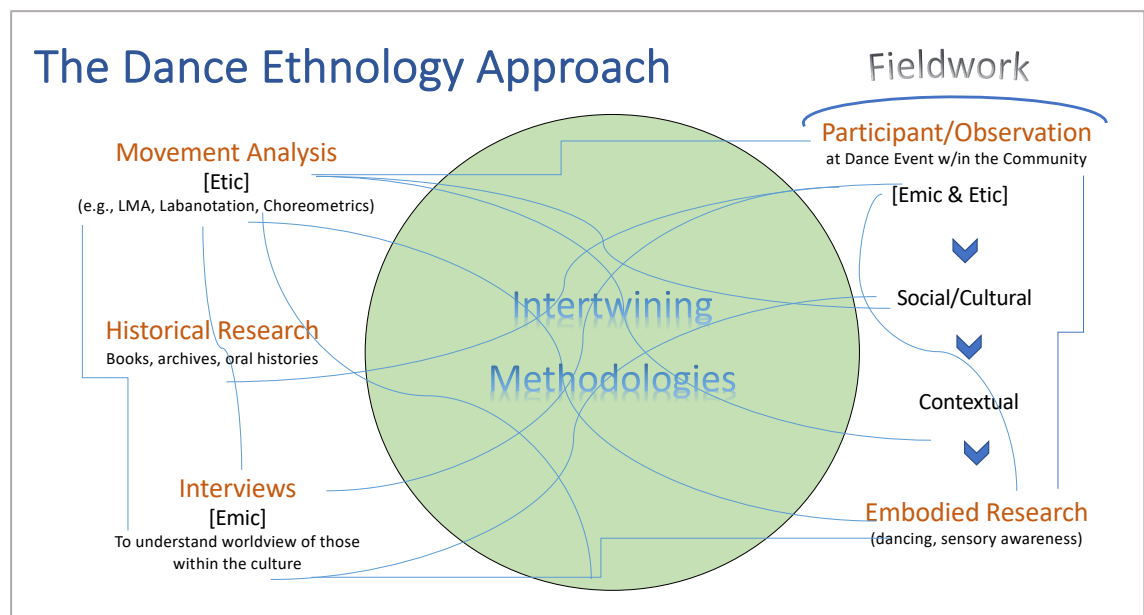


Figure 5: Intertwining methods needed to conduct comprehensive study of dance in cultural context.
Source: Miriam Phillips

The dance event perspective provides a method for gathering and organizing the various layers of data contained within and provides a tool to discover meaning by revealing cultural patterns. As I was teaching the dance event model to contemporary dance choreographers, I believed that if they experienced another's culture through ethnochoreological fieldwork, they could see their own better. Furthermore, if they understood their thesis performance as creating a 'dance event,' that could open new ways of working and potentially provide insights into deeper meanings that their artistic work might hold for beholders. I thought this way of conceiving and creating 'performance' could create a richer experience and potentially be more inclusive. Certainly, that is what I had hoped for in creating my own performances. In the next chapter, I describe how I applied the dance event domains to the creation of my performances.

Ritual Studies Theory

I was introduced to ritual studies late in my creative process. While I was generally aware of it, I did not know about specific theories and methods separate from performance studies. After attending Professor Helen Phelan's ritual studies courses at UL, I came to see its many affinities to ethnochoreology and performance inquiry.

Ritual studies is highly interdisciplinary and cross-cultural in nature so it can be challenging to find one definition of ritual that can encompass many variables. Is ritual a noun, a verb, an adjective, a feeling; is it a concept, praxis, or process? (Schechner 1993, Grimes 2014). The pioneers came from diverse disciplines which influenced their very definitions of ritual, as well as their approaches to analyze ritual's structure and function. On one hand, sociologist Émile Durkheim (1912) emphasized ritual's capacity to transmit and conserve social values and customs of a community, whereas cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1969), accentuates the importance of ritual to promote transformation and change. This is not unlike how dance ethnologists viewed dance and the dance event, as a means to express, reinforce, and perpetuate cultural values and to promote transformation (Snyder 1974).

Notwithstanding differences, Durkheim and Turner emphasize ritual's capacity to create a deep sense of belonging amongst participants. Durkheim's "collective effervescence" and Turner's *communitas* are similar concepts that describe the heightened sense of shared identity and connection that arises when people participate in collective rituals – connections that transcend customary social hierarchies (Olaveson 2001).

With its myriad of meanings, ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes asks how the term 'ritual' should be used (2014). He formulated a succinct highly flexible definition that could encompass many ideologies and cultures and be applied to a wide range of events inclusive of religious rituals and artistic performances: "Ritual is embodied, condensed and prescribed enactment" (2014, p.196).

To study the multidimensional facets of rituals, their form, structures, and functions, Grimes lays out a taxonomy of elements to be considered when studying ritual. He identifies various ritual elements in his Ritual Mapping, which he describes as "abstractions momentarily isolated for the sake of analysis" (2014, p.284). These include eight categories, or what he calls 'layers': ritual actions, actors, place, time, objects, language, groups. When learning about these ritual layers I was struck by how similar they were to aspects of the dance event model described above (Fig. 6 is a diagram I created overlaying the two models). Like any classification system, boundaries between what connotes a particular layer may blur or cross into another. For example, ritual objects may be used as part of ritual actions (e.g., my dancing with grapevines), or ritual language can overlap into ritual time. Ritual mapping provides a

way to “mine a rite” however, careful consideration and interrogation are needed when applying it (Grimes 2014, p.207).

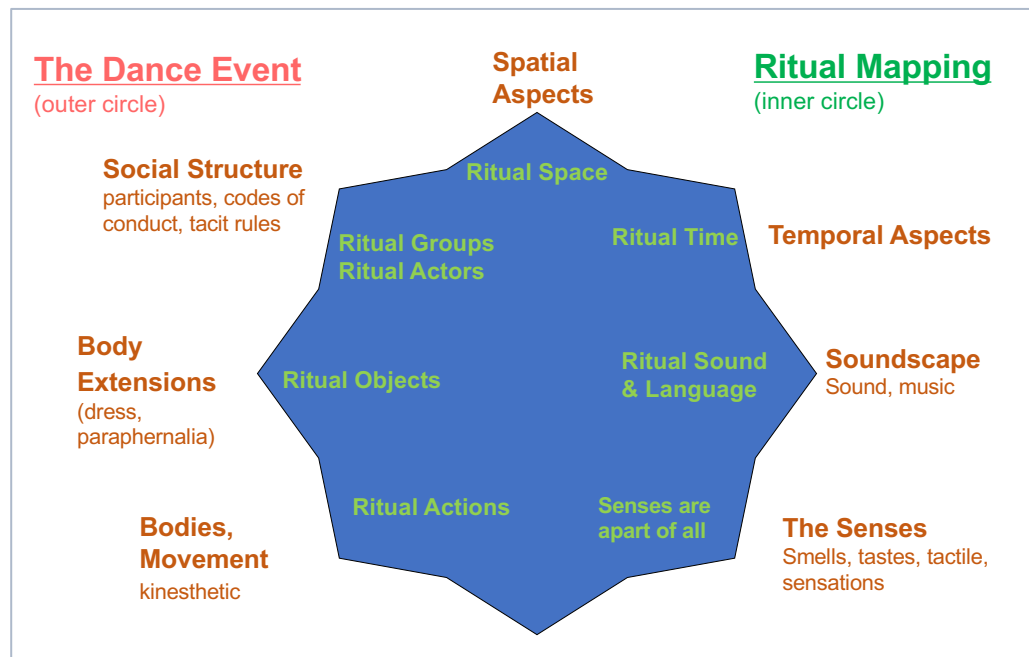


Figure 6: Comparing the dance event model to ritual mapping created by Miriam Phillips.

Interestingly, the senses factor strongly in ritual studies with an acknowledgement of their importance when analyzing ritual. Like ideas expressed in sensory anthropology and embodied knowledge, Grimes states,

A thorough study of ritual actors would include their senses, just as a full study of ritual action would treat the actions of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. ... rituals mobilize and perform the senses. All human experience is mediated by the senses, even though there are debates about how many there are; proprioception, your kinesthetic sense, is a recent addition to the conventional five. Powerful ritual experiences heighten the senses' interactions with one another, sometimes resulting in synesthesia, a cross-tabulating of the senses that can be either integrative or disorienting.

(Grimes 2014, p.247)

The overlap between ritual, theatre, and dance events are many. Considering ritual as a type of performance, and performance as a type of ritual has been acknowledged by numerous scholars over the years (Turner 1969, Schechner 1993, Phelan 2017). Rituals, like performances, contain prominent symbols that appear and reappear in multiple ways throughout an event. When working on my performance projects, I came to see how very ‘ritualistic’ they were. They included conspicuous symbols used as ritual objects that reemerged in multiple ways throughout (e.g., the grapevines), and actions that echoed those in the Jewish tradition. Each project was like a ritual ode to finding

and interacting with my ancestors. In the original Perf. 1, I also asked the audience to engage in ritual-like activities which involved their senses – to partake in a type of Turnerian transformational journey.

A Thirdspace – Where Theories Collide

The theories described above are placed into discreet sections as a way to organize and recognize the disciplines from which they come. However, my experience is that in the arena of performance – not as theory, but as practice – is where these theories collide. In a ‘thirdspace’ where, as Soja (1996)⁵⁹ describes, “the spatiality of our lives, our human geography, has the same scope and significance as the social and historical dimensions. ...A trialectic of space where space is spatiality, sociality and history [...] where everything comes together” (‘Soja’ n.d.). This affords an understanding of how the theories described above amalgamate — at least within my own AP research space. But there is a theory that stands outside this space that is important to my research and must be addressed. The theory of trauma that gets passed down through generations.

Theories Behind Intergenerational Trauma

The Shluva Project asks the question, ‘how do our ancestors’ experiences affect our own sense of identity?’ In both Perf. 1 and 2, I reference historical Jewish trauma that my ancestors likely encountered. I admit that my life experiences have been far removed from the religious persecution, displacement and marginalization that my ancestors probably experienced, however, I questioned the source of certain persistent internal challenges I have coped with over the years despite consciously working to alleviate them. While I experienced direct trauma as a child that affected me through adulthood, I often suspected there was something more. I wondered what my great grandparents’ experiences were like, and their parents and grandparents. I used to love to hear stories about them, but my maternal grandmother’s stories were cloaked in a shroud of silence. When asked, she never wanted to talk about her ‘vegetable peddler’ parents and despite tremendous talent as an artist, seamstress, and furniture guildler, she was filled with heaps of shame and subterranean levels of low self-esteem. This trickled down to my

⁵⁹ Note: Third Space Theory is attributed to the postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha (2004) which he characterizes as an in-between state between self and other or individuals with several cultural identities who live in a hybrid state. Soja’s conceptualization of the term is applied in the context of social science research and has distinctions from Bhabha’s. In both cases however, Third spaces recognize that something new and different results from the confluence of ideas, cultures, or identities.

very talented artist mother, and traces seemed to wrap their tendrils around me too. Why was this so? More importantly, how was this so?

Additionally, although I am not aware of any direct descendants who were Holocaust survivors or who died in the Nazi death camps, certainly hearing stories about this collective trauma while growing up lingered in my consciousness. In fact, these wonderings about possible inherited intergenerational trauma, and my actual grief of losing family members within a short period of time prior to moving to Ireland, became a big impetus for this project. Because the content of my creative outputs was in part based on what I thought of as possible ‘intergenerational trauma’ that I carried, it became important to look briefly into the theory behind it.

Many consider that trauma lingers in our bodies as ‘wordless stories’ interpreting what is safe or dangerous (Menakem 2017). Consequently, trauma can hijack ones sense of self-worth and identity, and cause people to have dramatic or disproportionate reactions to present events. These then can be passed from person to person or from one generation to another. Kent (2011) states, “The stories of your ancestors are not lost; you will find them humming in your bones” (p. 258).

Intergenerational trauma, often referred to in scientific literature as transgenerational transmission of trauma (TTT), was first identified in the 1960s when psychiatrists found “severe psychiatric symptomatology” in the offspring of Holocaust survivors (Yehuda 2018). The theory behind ITT is that traumatic events experienced by one generation (and consequent traits, characteristics, or behaviors that result from this trauma), can be transmitted to subsequent generations as a kind of ‘biological memory’ (Kellermann 2013, Yehuda 2018, Firestone 2019, King 2022), or what Menakem (2017) calls *soul wounds*. More specifically, psychologist Mark Wolynn describes:

inherited family patterns — the fears, feeling, and behavior we’ve unknowingly adopted that keep the cycle of suffering alive from generation to generation... many of these patterns don’t belong to us; they’ve merely been borrowed from others in our family history. Why is this? I strongly believe that it is because a story that needs to be told can finally be brought to light. ...Even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died, even if his or her story lies submerged in years of silence, fragments of life experience, memory, and body sensation can live on, as if reaching out from the past to find resolution in the minds and bodies of those living in the present.

(Wolynn 2016, pp.1-2)

Rabbi and psychotherapist Tirzah Firestone (2019), who writes specifically on intergenerational Jewish trauma, touches on the science of epigenetics which demonstrates how a person can carry signs of even their great-grandparents' histories. The science of epigenetics investigates how the environment (inclusive of trauma) affects genes, not by altering DNA sequencing, but how DNA is read and utilized. In other words, how factors outside ('epi') can affect how genes ('genetics') are expressed or behave in the body. A chemical mark (from experienced trauma) left on a person's genes can change the way a gene is expressed. Epigenetics demonstrates the mechanism through which the effects of trauma can be inherited. Trauma does not alter genetics, but epigenetics.⁶⁰ Firestone gives the example of if "a person's grandparents lived through starvation, deportation, or ethnic persecution, their descendants may show propensities to similar stress responses, both physical and psychological" (2019, p.47).

While epigenetics offers explanations of how trauma can be passed down the generations, it also offers insights into new potentials toward healing. Wolynn's, *It Didn't Start With You: how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle* (2016), and Firestone's *Wounds into Wisdom: healing intergenerational Jewish trauma* (2019) propose methods to overcome, transform and heal inherited trauma. However, since inherited trauma not only affects individuals but entire social groups, healing approaches should include collective methods too.

Implications to Social Justice

Systemic oppression, denial of rights and resources, and persistent marginalization towards identity-specific groups, such as African Americans or Native Americans, is a form of racialized trauma (Menakem 2017, King 2022). In *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (2015), psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk asserts that traumatic experiences "do leave traces, whether on a large scale (on our histories and cultures) or close to home, on our families, with dark secrets being imperceptibly passed down through generations. They all leave traces on our minds and emotions, on our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even on our biology and immune systems" (p.1). Others acknowledge that perpetrators also have scars of trauma from the harm they inflicted on others (Harris 2010, Menakem 2017, Wilkerson 2020).

⁶⁰ A very accessible newspaper article describing how epigenetics relates to inherited trauma is: Johnson's 2023, 'Understanding epigenetics: how trauma is passed on through our family members' and Erdelyi's 2022 'Can Trauma Be Passed Down From One Generation to the Next?'

Since systemic oppression, the perpetual subordination and dominance over certain social groups deemed ‘lower in position’ by socially constructed higher position oppressing groups gives rise to racialized trauma and its transgenerational transmission (Wilkerson 2020, Liedauer 2021), then movements towards social justice ought to include ways of healing it. Fortunately, restorative methods arising from the intersection of neuroscience, anthropology, psychology, critical race theory, art, and somatics are on the rise (Menakem 2017, King 2022).

Sará King (2022) acknowledges the existence of a collective nervous system in addition to individual ones. She considers social justice and well-being as one and the same, and questions what social justice might feel like when somatically experienced individually and with a collective of people. She suggests,

in order to lovingly-disrupt cycles of unmediated social and emotional pain and violence that stem from institutionalized racism, discrimination, and othering of all forms, there is a lot we can learn from science about what it means to develop a different relationship with pain and the trauma which is stored in our bodies—a relationship which allows us the tools and the safe spaces we need to feel seen, heard, and to cultivate a sense of belonging.

(King 2022, p.217)

Through his pioneering work on racialized trauma and body-centered activism, Resmaa Menakem (2017) offers many methods to begin mending Black, White, and police hearts and bodies. Dance-movement therapist David Allen Harris (2010) guided child soldiers in Sierra Leone through innovative DMT techniques inclusive of storytelling and theater to renew empathy and bring restorative justice to a war-torn community of victim-perpetrators.

Conclusion

Earlier in this chapter I highlight AP research as a process that can counter power structures and how related disciplines such as, ethnochoreology and somatics can support the dismantling of hierarchies. Later, I address transgenerational trauma which comes from myriad forms of disempowerment, many of them violent. I cite Van der Kolk (2015), Menakem (2017), King (2022) and others, all of whom understand that the way to heal from trauma is through embodied approaches that may include somatic practice, storytelling, or collective ritual. Furthermore, that an engagement with community and sharing of experience can diminish the isolation often accompanying trauma and nurture a sense of belonging.

The Shluva Project performances invite viewers to reflect on these ideas through the channel of art. The responses and stories shared by beholders of these works are presented in the next two chapters. In the last chapter, I propose that artmaking inclusive of dance, storytelling, and performance can help to restore justice because they are a means to resist and to empower.

Chapter 4 – Embracing Multimodality: AP Methodologies

Whereas the previous section discussed theoretical underpinnings of various AP research that supported my project, this chapter delves into the methodologies applied. The primary method of inquiry in AP research IS the practice, but it is interwoven with additional approaches, which become part of the practice. Ethnography, autoethnography, genealogy, and narrative inquiry helped me dig into the content layer of the artistic works. Implementing creative process techniques of mind-mapping, storyboarding, dance improvisation and phrase crafting, various styles of writing, and filmmaking, I brought the content into form (Fig. 7). The architectural scaffolding of my creations, however, was the ethnochoreological dance event model applied to choreography detailed below.

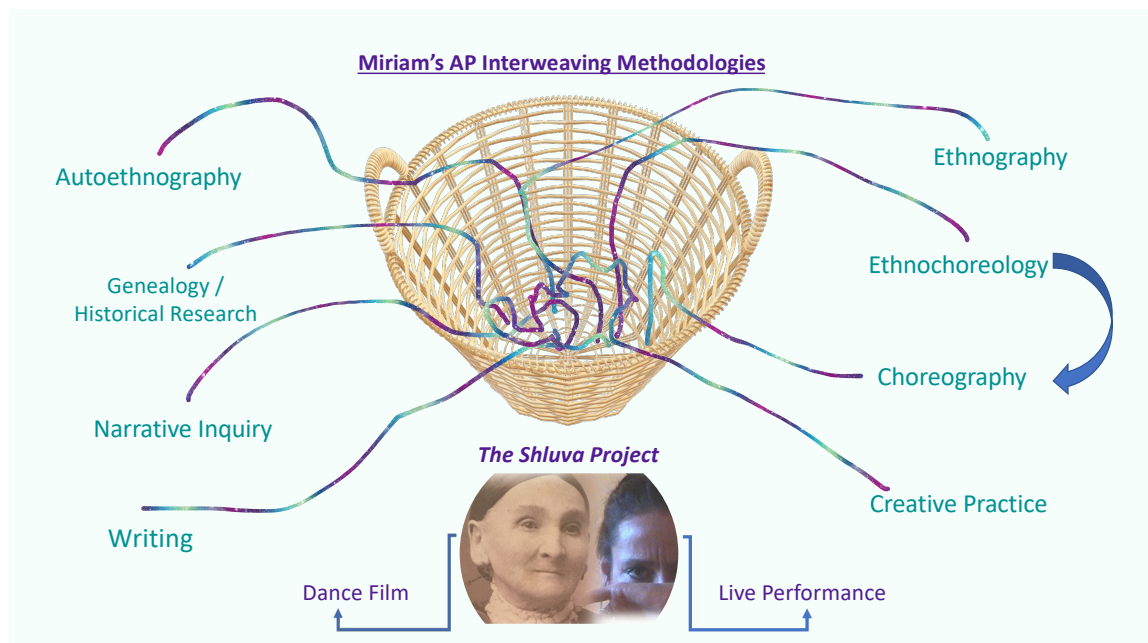


Figure 7: Intertwining methodologies used to create *The Shluva Project*.

As I was researching, practicing, documenting, writing, and creating dance choreography, sound scores, and film, I noticed that storytelling became woven into all stages. The iterative cycle that is often noted in AP research became apparent. As I crafted, I flipped from research-led-practice to practice-led-research in what eventually became a seamless cycle.

Below I summarize the background and praxis of methods utilized during *The Shluva Project* process, from conception to performance, citing key scholars whose ideas my work engaged with. I note the role each played in my overall research and how I interacted with the findings during my creative processes. These methods

allowed me to express the dance-theatre-film repertoire in distinctive ways. They also informed the type of documentation recycled throughout the research process that has become part of my doctoral archive.

Ethnography – Autoethnography: Two Sides of a Coin

Ethnography, autoethnography and ethnochoreology wove deeply through the various iterations and layers of my projects – the meta-level and the performance content level. Later I discovered *imaginary ethnography*, which in many ways seems like what I ended up doing, using dance-theatre as the medium of expression.

Ethnography

Ethnography is an approach to understand culture through the meaning systems (worldviews, values, beliefs) in the lives of social groups – one’s own or another’s. Ethnography is a qualitative, systematic method of data collection, and the graphic or text-based representation of that data which reflects this knowledge. Ethnographic research employs several types of fieldwork strategies to learn cultural phenomenon from a native’s point of view – people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in distinctive ways (Spradley 1980) or those steeped in a level of “disciplinary mastery” (Melrose 2002) perhaps different from us. As noted, participant-observation is one method whereby researchers aim to gain familiarity with a given community’s practices and beliefs by actively participating in their activities, often over an extended period of time, while simultaneously keeping an observational eye open to record observations in fieldnotes or thick descriptive accounts.

Ethnographic interviewing of individuals within a cultural membership is also used to understand an emic perspective – knowledge of what is perceived and valued from the insider’s point of view. Conversely, existing theories or systems of analysis that come from outside the culture can be applied (e.g., LMA) in order to gain so-called ‘culturally neutral’ information. Etically-driven methods recognize that because cultural insiders are so deeply steeped in what they do, it can be challenging for them to offer impartial interpretations. There has been a lot of criticism in the last few decades about the biased nature and hegemonic, colonial lineage of ethnography (Asad 1973, Appadurai 1988, Austin-Broos 1998, Sanjek 1993, (Roller & Lavrakas 2015, Rodseth 2018), nonetheless, the overall aim is to develop a holistic understanding of a people’s meaning systems and their practices. More recent ethnography includes accounts of

those researched as well as the researcher's perspective. Autoethnography became one answer to the call to 'decolonize' the problematic ethnographic practices of the past.

The content of *The Shluva Project* had an ethnographic undertone. Since the performances were based on my Ashkenazi Jewish Eastern European roots for which I knew little, it was as if I was coming to research an *other* culture. However, I did not have a typical or specific fieldwork site and the ethnography centered on ancestors who were long gone. Thus, my way of collecting 'ethnographic data' had to be refashioned. I conducted online searches to learn about Eastern European and American Jewish history, culture and genealogy – anything to find my ancestors – to get a sense of anything about their life. Ethnography dovetailed with historical investigations and consisted of several elements:

- I interviewed family members about their memories of stories heard or actual experiences of family relatives in my lineage, predominantly my father's maternal side (Shluva was the grandmother of my paternal grandmother). I also asked them about their memories and experience growing up Jewish.
- I read historical accounts of the plight of Jews during the 19th century Russian Empire and various reports about Jewish and Ashkenazi history on reputable websites. I read books and watched films about Jewish immigration into the United States, including the justifications for the mass migration from Eastern Europe (see Zahra 2017).
- I conducted participant-observation while walking through neighborhoods or sites my ancestors had been, which I learned about through the genealogical research. I revisited Ellis Island to gain insights about experiences my ancestors might have gone through as they journeyed from their hometowns in Eastern Europe to the port of New York Harbor.
- I visited gravesites, museums, and repositories of city records in Philadelphia, Atlantic City (NJ), and the boroughs of New York City.

Generally, these domains of inquiry helped me weave together an understanding of what my predecessors likely experienced. It was also important for me to examine my own experience. After all, that is how this project began.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an emergent qualitative research method that acknowledges the link between the personal and the cultural. Researchers explore events in their own lives in relationship to societal events to gain an understanding of culture (Pelias 2004, Wall 2006).⁶¹ Autoethnography emerged out of postmodern philosophical thought and critical theory which challenged notions of objectivity, bias-free research, and the scientific method, not to mention the damaging colonial structures of earlier ethnography. Autoethnography rose in the 1990s as a reaction to the dominance of white Western voices within research; its intent was to provide a space for underrepresented or marginalized voices to be heard. Chawla and Atay (2018) consider autoethnography as the ‘postcolonial turn’ of ethnography because the researcher became repositioned as both subject and participant. Other postmodern academic inquiry such as, feminist theory, emancipatory research, and indigenous studies contributed to autoethnography’s development.

Researchers use autobiographical stories as cultural texts to analyse and interpret cultural assumptions, but the self-narratives employed are of the self but not the self alone (Chang 2008, Bartleet 2009). One looks as if through a camera zooming out on social and cultural aspects of personal experience, then focuses inward to expose a vulnerable self that is moved by or resists cultural interpretations (Ellis 2004).

Autoethnography employs chronicling personal narratives and autobiographical timelines but can also engage in interviewing others, collecting visual artefacts and external documents to provide additional perspectives or contextual information to help the researcher examine their own subjectivity (Chang 2008). Like ethnography, data collected is labelled, classified, and evaluated. Eventually the focus shifts “from sifting through the masses of fragmented details to stringing discovered gems together in an intriguing pattern so that the finished product will sound cohesive and interesting” (Chang 2008, p.139).

Because the researcher describes their lived experience to understand social and cultural phenomenon, autoethnographic writers have the agency to write in very

⁶¹ Curiously, when Heider first used the term ‘autoethnography’ in 1975, he used it in a way similar to how emic understandings are described. That is, listening to personal accounts and perceptions of people being studied to connect to larger cultural beliefs and values. Later, autoethnography was used to state the positionality of the researcher, and when researchers began to investigate groups that they were a part of as a cultural insider. For a fuller account of the origins and history of autoethnography, see Bochner and Ellis 2016, *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*, New York: Routledge.

personal ways using a variety of narrative approaches. Autoethnography produces different kinds of products ranging from poetry, short stories, novels, or social science prose, and visual artefacts such as photographic essays and film (Wall 2006). Certainly, this was the case for me as I excavated my life experiences and childhood memories, integrating artefacts and stories gleaned from diverse forms of research. This in turn led to writing poetry and imaginary letters, to creating fragmented layers of film images and a bricolage of choreographed dance-theatre sequences. These became my new autoethnographic artefacts.

Just as participant-observation is the hallmark of ethnography, I believe autoethnography is a distinctive feature of PaR. Because AP uses one's own artmaking process as research, autoethnography became a primary methodology to elicit insight to create meaningful embodied stories. I utilized autoethnography in three primary ways:

1. To create an autobiographical timeline of significant events, experiences and people that contributed to the evolution of my ethnochoreology-to-choreography approach. This included generating memory maps of my early life as a student of dance and culture, then reflecting upon my years as a professional dancer, choreographer, dance ethnologist, and dance educator within culturally-specific and postmodern contemporary dance contexts. I inquired how these strands, over time, have shifted the way I teach, create, and promote different kinds of practice or research-based outcomes, including what led to my current research (detailed in Chapters 1 and 2).
2. To develop the content of *The Shluva Project* works, I mined my own memories of family lore passed down to me and I reflected on stories I heard from relatives. I wrote personal responses and poetry about my reactions to the photos, genealogical, and historical information I was finding out about regarding my family lineage and the predicament of the Eastern European Jewish Diaspora of which I was a result. Some of these responses were documented in journals, emails to friends, or turned into imaginary letters I wrote to Shluva that appeared as spoken-word or voice-over narrations during the film and live performance.
3. Reflexive journaling during ongoing choreographic and filmic explorations allowed me to gain emerging insights about what I was doing and why. Movements became metaphors and objects turned out to be symbols signifying meaningful connections to my heritage. For the original cancelled Perf. 1, I had developed a storyboard for the different spaces it would have taken place in and the themes behind my choice of space. This storyboarding technique proved helpful in the creation of the later

version of Perf. 1 – the film, and the live evenings’ length work (detailed in Storyboards below).

The story I ultimately ‘told’ through the dance-theatre works were in the realm of ‘imagined ethnography’ (a.k.a. ‘imaginary ethnography’ (Schwab 2012, Tan 2023)).

Imaginary Ethnography

I resonated immediately when I discovered ‘imaginary ethnography’ because it gave voice and legitimacy to an approach I was experimenting with. Tan describes it as “ethnography of lived experience that doesn’t exist — it is an attempt to generate insights into patterns and dynamics of a non-existent or not-yet-existent way of life by imagining taken-for-granted details and theorising about the context in which they might become so normalised as to be invisible” (2023). In my case, the lived experience was of my departed ancestors. Piecing together fragments of stories, splintered historical accounts, and hazy memories of my own lived experience, I mined my psyche and used imagination to help me create a coherent ‘ethnography’ of my ancestors – albeit ‘imaginary.’

In a review of a book about literature’s capacity to shape culture (Schwab 2012), Bochow notes the visionary power of prose to create the cultural imaginary by crafting a space where self and *Other* meet in “imagined encounters in far-away places or with complete strangers” (2014, p.401). In my case, the *other* was ‘my people,’ the far-away places were where my ancestors migrated from and immigrated to in another time period. The strangers in my study were my great and great-great grandparents and generations beyond.

Imaginary ethnography appears to be a distant cousin to *ethnofiction*, a term promoted by filmmaker Jean Rouch (1917-2004) who will be discussed later. Ethnofiction, along with *ethnographic fiction* (from anthropology) are genres based on data derived from ethnographic research which is then fictionalized using different film, theatre, or literary techniques to evoke cultural experience; their purpose being, sometimes to shock the audience to awaken from culturally conditioned ways of perceiving. Imaginary ethnography on the other hand, is ethnography of non-existent ways of life, then imagining the context that these lives might become visible. Ethnofiction uses ethnographic data to create fiction, whereas imaginary ethnography creates ethnography from fiction. I think in my case, I did a little bit of both.

Genealogical and Historical Research

Genealogical research took on a whole life of its own. In searching for my ancestors, I followed an intuitive sometimes impulsive path, often getting lost down rabbit holes that I had to pull back from. This research paralleled and fed my creative process as the works were evolving. All along I recognized that the genealogical tracing to find definitive facts about Shluva would take more time to excavate than would creating the performances. The title, *The Shluva Project*, encompassed all this research even into the future.

In addition to previously-mentioned family interviews conducted in several US cities, I made trips to Philadelphia, Atlantic City (NJ), and to the boroughs of New York City to visit gravesites, museums, and repositories of city records.

- I conducted archival research in live and online collections trying to ascertain specific information about my family. I visited the New York City Municipal Archives and the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Lower Manhattan. I researched online databases through Ancestry.com, JewishGen.org, Family Tree and Find A Grave websites. Scouring through census records, naturalization petitions, boat manifests, and birth, marriage and death certificates, I tried to find any traces of Shluva or her other family members that might provide a glimmer of information about her life.
- I took a DNA test through 23andMe hoping it could provide geographic clues about where my ancestry came, but it only ended up verifying my Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.⁶²

I scrolled through rolls of archival microfiche, perused genealogical records on the web, attended museum tours and visited places my ancestors once traversed, lived, or where they were buried (see Fig. 8). Initially, I got as far as finding Shluva's various names: Americanized, maiden and marital names. I often reached dead ends in my searches to learn when she left, when she arrived, where she came from, where she died, and more about her family (my family). Trying to overcome my frustration, I told myself the point was the journey more than the outcome.

⁶² When I first took the test, I came out as 99.6% Ashkenazi, but later 23andMe sent me an update indicating I was 100%.

I walked the neighborhoods and tenement buildings near where she had immigrated to. I continued reading history. I went down more rabbit holes. Eventually I found the online community, *Tracing the Tribe - Jewish Genealogy on Facebook*. Dialoguing with several skilled Jewish genealogy sleuths in this group, more layers of facts were revealed. Because there is so much ambiguity in the genealogical records of Jewish people, I often questioned if those found were truly my family. When potential factoids emerged, I realized I had to surrender the need to have historically accurate and verifiable data. The idea was to go through the process of the search to find my roots through Shluva and to use these experiences as fodder for my interpretative artistic undertaking.

Throughout this research phase, I alternated between virtual trips and physical trips attempting to locate any morsels of evidence about family members that could lead me back to Shluva. Then I would envision and eventually create dance or filmic scenes based on this data. My genealogical investigations became so much a part of my creative process that I devoted an entire scene to representing it in film (see *Track, Trace, Erased*). Genealogical research continued to run alongside the creative process research to the very end with new remnants of information appearing in a surprise unintended last film scene (*Re-membering Me*). Because these trips led to specific creative outcomes in the film and live performance, I detail these ‘trips’ in the section Genealogy as Creative Practice (Ch. 5).

Since my Ashkenazi Jewish roots were essentially a foreign culture to me, yet nonetheless mine, the line between ethnography, autoethnography and genealogy blurred.

Research Organizations Utilized

23andme.com
Ancestry.com
Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration
FamilySearch.org
Find a Grave (findagrave.com)
Jewish Gen – The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy
KlezCalifornia
Mount Zion Cemetery (Queens)
New York City Historical Vital Records
New York City Municipal Archives
Tenement Museum
Tracing the Tribe – Jewish Genealogy on Facebook
Washington Cemetery (Brooklyn)
Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History
YIVO – Institute for Jewish Research

Figure 8: Organizations and websites used to conduct research.

Dance Ethnology/Ethnochoreology

In previous chapters, I identified how dance ethnology has influenced my work as a dancer, choreographer, researcher and educator, and I addressed its theoretical foundation and relationship to performance theory and ritual studies. Here, I summarize how I used (or intended to use) each aspect (or domain) of the dance event model to create the dance-theatre works. Recall the dance event model (Fig. 4) which is a visual representation and shorthand for domains of phenomena to consider when investigating the multisensory ephemeral nature of dance within context. I contemplated these domains while creating my projects in similar ways I had guided my students to in the past. Although I did not apply them in any systematic way, the awareness of them was always in my consciousness as I crafted, designed, moved, and transmuted ideas to film and stage.

Below are informal notes from Spring 2019 that provide an idea of how I set about doing this (for original Perf. 1). While I have updated them since, the prose remains in future tense to exemplify how I began working and the foundational concepts that spread through all three Shluva versions. Ch. 6 describes how specific aspects of the dance event played out in the completed film and live performance.

Crafting A Dance Event – Fashioning the Choreographic ‘Story’

Applying the dance event model, I will create the environment and craft my dance event in the following ways:

Movement Vocabulary - *how does the ‘story’ want to dance? One of the hallmarks of contemporary dance is movement invention. That is, the discovery of new dance gestures and phrases that represent an abstraction of a theme or idea rather than using pre-existing steps from learned dance techniques. This core practice is very intuitive and experimental. The movement vocabulary and choreography will develop as I clarify the themes and sections within the performance. This will require regular studio explorations and playing with and within the following elements:*

Spatial Explorations - *I envision Perf. 1 (the original) occurring in four different spaces where the audience travels through a multisensory immersive environment to a typical theatrical space. Each site has a specific ambience, activity undertaken by the audience (listening without seeing, seeing without hearing, eating, feeling water). I will utilize movement to explore spatial dimensions of these locales and document them through informal mapping and video. I will also ‘choreograph’ how the audience (beholders) moves from one space to another, how they will be guided, and clarify the motivation for them doing so.*

Temporal Mapping - *considers how my dance event will unfold – its linear progression. I will use storyboarding to map out its temporal structure. Additionally, I will explore the quality of time I wish to create in each section of the dance, such as, distinct imagined historical times, present realities, and fictional futures. Overlapping spatial and temporal dimensions, I will consider how long the audience should stay in each space, what activity will be there, and what the sense of time is I’m going for in each space.*

Soundscape and the Senses - *to evoke impressions and create the qualities of the multisensory environment that I envision, I will explore themes discovered through my various research-practice modalities and choose music, sound, and other appropriate symbolic elements that engage the senses. I ask myself, how can my audience be immersed in my dance event by participating in activities that stimulate their senses, but that are authentic or integral to the creative theme?*

Body Extensions/Attire – *reflecting upon themes discovered in research, I will choose costumes and symbols reflective of and culturally appropriate to my artistic*

vision. I will explore ways of moving in and with this attire and paraphernalia. Some will be symbols representing different aspects of my concept, some will evoke a sense of time, some will elicit the awareness of other senses, some I will use as ritual objects.

Social Structure, Codes of Conduct, Tacit Rules – *this is the most challenging dimension to describe at this early stage, however I see that playing around with the above-listed aspects in ways atypical of a proscenium theatrical staged performance can cause effective means to ‘shake up’ normative behavior. This has the potential to engage the audience and myself as performer with the themes of othering and belonging, immigrant identity, displacement, and centering. I envision a place where the audience does not know what the rules are, gets confused and does not know where to go* (Note: this was articulated in the spiral staircase and viewing rooms sections of Version 1 described above).

Phillips, informal notes, Spring 2019.

Throughout the process of crafting research ideas into movement and cinematic form, I kept asking myself: ‘What is ethnochoreological about *The Shluva Project*? Specifically in terms of background research, choreographic curation and design, and the performative event that the audience experiences?’ I knew I wanted the audience, at least in the original version, to move through a multisensory, multi-textured, multi-sited event in a similar way that one might experience at a dance event in a fieldwork context. As for example at the Yaqui Easter ceremony in Tucson, Arizona that I attended several times as part of my dance ethnology training.

Yaqui Easter, so called, is the culminating event of a year-long cycle that interweaves indigenous performance with icons and structures of Catholicism. During Holy Week there are continual activities occurring day and night. Contained within the pueblo boundaries, there can be four distinct movement happenings occurring concurrently. Matachins with their colorful ribbons dancing in the open-air plaza to monotonous violin melodies; a solo Deer dancer adorned and darting as a deer, shaking rattles to haunting chants in an intimate ritual space; *chapayekas* in whimsical masks heckling observers as we process the Stations of the Cross alongside them; and enactments of the Catholic Mass happening inside the village church. The atmosphere is filled with a cacophony of sounds, scents of tortillas cooking on open fires, desert air sweats the skin.

My experience at Yaqui, along with attendance at other dance events (including in proscenium theatre venues) in India, Spain, Israel, Guinea, and in lesser known (to me) community events in the United States, is that they are rich in sensorial data that reveals knowledge (Stoller 1989). They contain dance patterns which express important ideologies and are spatially and temporally structured to reveal particular ethos reflective of the cultural legacy of the people performing and attending.

How the researcher's body negotiates through the various layers of a dance event in order to tap into a given culture's worldview takes insight and an intersectional consciousness to find meaning in the culture being studied. I wondered; can this process be reverse engineered to create art? Can a choreographer, using the dance event model as scaffolding, create performance that expresses a culture or idea and offer new levels of knowledge? If so, how? I continued to experiment.

I wanted to create a 'Jewish world' by giving the audience ('the beholders' of my performance) an opportunity to engage with the material through other senses beyond the typically predominant visual. I wanted the audience to traverse through various feeling states that I imagined Shluba and other ancestors experienced as they negotiated being Jewish in lands that excluded, *othered*, and oppressed them. Then, journey to new lands where they didn't know the rules and had to adapt to new surroundings. Integrating memories and stories from my own childhood and that of my cousins as we were growing up as part of a once outcast minority culture within a dominant majority population helped to convey these ideas. I also wanted the work to reveal the process of my own search to find my absent culture that faded into a fabric of blandness, to seam together the branches of my erased lineage, to connect my identity to my lost heritage as I attempted to anchor it in family names, dates of significant life events, and geographical whereabouts. Loss, lost identity, being *othered*, *othering*, longing to be *other*. Ultimately, to heal what I believed to be intergenerational trauma that I carried in my genes and within the cave of my heart.

Ethnochoreology Applied to Choreography

When I reflect back on how exactly I integrated ethnochoreology into my choreographic process, it is still somewhat of a mystery. In the beginning I was mapping the dance event domains to the event I was devising. I had a conceptual idea drawn out on paper, scripted on storyboards, and choreographed dances. But because I was unable to realize the actual space-time dynamic in relation to all the other

performative elements that would have taken place in a tech rehearsal or live performance, the method remained untried. When I returned to embodied creative practice dancing in my home or outdoor spaces, it was still such an ambiguous time in the world (due to the pandemic), that I didn't really know what I was creating or who would experience it. I mean I took all the material that I had unearthed and created thus far to start creating the film and later the theatre-based performance, but by then a completely instinctual process took over. I think because I had long been 'enculturated' in the ethnochoreological way of observing the world, much of my application of the dance event model to choreography became intuitive. I am reminded of Bannerman's discussion of in/tuition (2006) where there is a separate yet dynamic interplay between 'tuition' – my rational mind which applied the dance event domains to structure the original Perf. 1, and my intuition – the invisible, uncontrollable force, difficult to describe, which guided the artmaking process implementing my artistic vision through stagecraft and choreography.

Narrative Inquiry: A Method Towards Personal Meaning-making

In its most basic form narrative inquiry is about peoples' lived experience as expressed in storytelling, and the principles of how mining those stories can lead to new understandings. Its tenet is that the way people create meaning in their lives is through stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that "life...is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (p.17). As a qualitative research method, individual or collective stories can be collected and analyzed through written or verbal texts, such as letters, fieldnotes, journals, historical archives, interviews, or conversations. Various approaches to narrative inquiry exist depending on the researcher's temporal focus. For example, the telling of stories of a lived past, or the living of stories as experiences unfold (Clandinin 2006).

Narrative inquiry ultimately played a significant role in the research and development of the context and content for all *Shluva Project* performance versions. I created field texts of the stories and memories I recalled my parents and grandparents telling me about our Jewish family, including stories that represented our once minority status. I interviewed family relatives about the stories they had heard and I listened to their stories recounting memories and experiences growing up Jewish. Many of these stories became part of the narrated text in the performances, as well as provided

inspiration for generating gestures and movement phrases. Complimenting this narrative inquiry approach with the genealogical research then fed into creating new stories expressed through visual images, gestures, dance, words, and scene design.

Narrative inquiry is considered both a process and a product – a narrator telling and the story told (Clandinin 2006). My process included mining the stories I heard, remembered, read about, saw in museum exhibitions, interpreted from archival documents, wrote in poems. Then, creating new stories through dance, spoken word, and film that I as narrator ‘told’ my audience through dance and spoken word. The product of my ‘story told’ were my performances – landscapes that honored multiple voices and aesthetic perspectives (de Mello 2006).

I believe narrative inquiry goes hand-in-hand with contemporary dance choreography because both practices often build the arc of a story or dance (even non-narrative dance) through nonlinear fragmented means. There is a three-dimensionality to storied experience. Temporal, spatial and inward/outward dimensions shift in a person’s story as they travel back and forth in time and place, sometimes recounting intense feelings or conversations with others – fragments seam together in memory (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

I certainly used a ‘travel back and forth in time and place sequencing’ in my ‘tellings’ within the various scenes of *The Shluva Project* works as I alternated back and forth between enacting Shluva and myself. Inward/outward dimensions manifested through the interweaving of evocative narrated poems, dance, gesture, music, and actual audio recorded conversations. Inquiry into and play with stories provided the bridge intersecting my choreographic and ethnochoreological practice.

Narrative inquiry is a close relative to autoethnography because researchers often reveal aspects of their own narrative past in their writeups making secret stories public (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). I resonated with certain arts-based scholars because they created ‘storied work’ from an identity perspective. These included Gatson’s genealogical autoethnography (2003) explores how genealogy searches for facts, firm dates, times and places and biological connections, but within the context of an autoethnographic work that also questions the facts and connections. Whitinui’s indigenous autoethnography (2014) notes that how the self is placed within a story is dependent on how self is seen in the world. Self-reflection on indigenous values and beliefs are critical to the story-telling as is, the researcher’s “connectedness to space,

place, time and culture as a way of (re)claiming, (re)storing, (re)writing, and (re)patriating [their] own lived realities as indigenous people” (2014, p.467). Although Ashkenazi Jews are not thought of as ‘indigenous,’ certainly my process of hearing stories, remembering stories through my own autoethnographic analysis, reading storied histories, and restorying these through dance, theatre, and film was my way of (re)claiming my roots, (re)storing my past, and (re)patriating the knowledge of my identity that had been erased throughout the centuries.

Writing as Research (WaR)

Writing is generally thought of as a way to express something rather than as a form of research itself. Writing is not simply about regurgitating ideas but instead IS part of a learning process to gain or reveal new knowledge. Drawing parallels to dance, I have pointed out to my students that one doesn’t know what a choreography will be like before starting. It is through the process of dancing that one discovers the movement vocabulary, its’ appropriate phrasing, and the most apparent way to structure the dance. Similarly, it is through the struggle to put experience into words, or analysis of data into interpretive prose, that discoveries will be made and ‘ah ha’ moments will occur. Writing has always been a helpful way for me to make sense of experience, and this doctoral project is no exception. Even as I write these words on this page, I am learning something. As I ruminate, squirm with my words, delete, reflect, revise, I am gaining new insights about aspects of my research.

There are of course different kinds of writing processes and styles. To honor the multifaceted dimension of AP research, written texts about the research (such as this dissertation), often weave together diverse styles of writing such as personal narrative, multivocality, or performative writing described below. This allows for shifts in perception from a one-dimensional authoritative voice to a personal one that blends the objective/subjective artifice criticized by postcolonial scholars. Furthermore, writing in different ways allows for multiple meanings to surface and our relationship to our topic becomes revealed (Bartleet 2009). I have noted my use of diverse writing styles in ‘Making a Case for My Narrative Style’ (Ch. 1), however, here, I highlight how the writing served as a form of research in and of itself, in addition to being a mode to document and present research outcomes.

Personal Narrative

Several scholars advocate that researchers express their vulnerabilities within their research instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity (Pelias 2004, Behar 2007, Bartleet 2009, Denzin 2006). Denzin writes, “I seek...a writing form that listens to the heart, knowing that ‘stories are the truths that won’t stand still.’ In writing from the heart, we learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward” (2006, p.423). Pelias (2004) believes that “an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study” (p.1).

Throughout this process, I wrote different kinds of text and performed stories inclusive of very personal ones. In the film, I even invite viewers into my bedroom telling a story about what it was like for me to grow up Jewish as I fold laundry. I have never choreographed and performed such a personal work, nor written such revealing personal material in a text before. In fact, I shared aspects of my life that I rarely make public. I felt, and still do feel, vulnerable. But as audience feedback suggested, these personal performed stories evoked many empathetic responses. In the post-performance discussion held at IWAMD on 15 April 2022, some audience members expressed their feelings:

“Thank you for allowing us to see your vulnerability and giving us as an audience time to share, engage, and just become part of this story.”

“Thank you for your performance, because it was very impactful and heartbreaking.”

Some participants in the film’s focus groups acknowledged:

Well, on one hand, ... because I'm more from a WASP background I didn't relate to it in my personal story of having Jewish ancestors, but I certainly feel a connection on a heart level with that history. ...It made me aware of how you ... in the same way that personal essay and memoir [are], when it works the personal [becomes] universal. Like you were welcoming me as a witness into this space of knowing your story of seeing your transformation, because it really did go through the beginning of the quest and then the fulfillment of that. And, when you lay down on the grass at her grave, that was so powerful. I feel like this could be a wonderful example for people reclaiming their ancestors, that is not just in the Jewish tradition, but anybody. I think any of us in this country are rootless somewhere back, you know, and for me, it's a very vital question, because look at the mess we're in in terms of not connecting with the earth and not connecting with place. And so I feel like there are roots that you're

addressing that are ... it was just so moving to have the dance and the poetry and the different settings, and the chalk and the water and the elements... so very evocative. And I think yes, it's one thing to go and do therapy and talk about it and try to remember, but to be able to witness someone's story through art is just so moving. And it touches the heart, my heart.

(Mary Oak, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

The first scene that really was affective for me was the vines, because I felt the burden of my own trauma, and the burden of your trauma. And I realized the burden that we [carry]. There were a couple places where you ask questions about your own tradition and your own symbology and I felt like I have none.... And I see that there's an emptiness in me because of it. And that's okay. But those places made me weep.

(Atesh Sonneborn, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

I am intrigued by Ruth Behar's famous quote: "that scholarship that "doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (Behar cited in Pelias 2004, p.9). Although I don't totally agree, I suppose I succeeded in that respect. I shared heartbreaking stories through personal narrative family voices where my personal story seemed to evoke broader themes.

Multivocality

Storytelling is a rich part of Jewish tradition too. Because it was so much a part of my upbringing, even as a not very religious Jew, I did not make the connection between my use of storytelling and that of my tradition until I started writing this document. Story writing – the turning into stories the memories I heard, the taking of incongruent historical or genealogical facts and transforming them into poetic stories, then re-storying these through dance, spoken-word and film became central to my research. One technique I worked with was multivocality.

The use of multivocality is a technique associated with writing but can also be applied to performance contexts. It interweaves diverse voices as a way to negotiate multiple meanings or embrace ideologies valued in a culture (Quaye 2007, Leavy 2015). Quaye integrates journal entries, first-person personal memory narratives (his and others), third-person abstract theoretical ideas, stories, and poetry as a way to contravene systematic writing with one detached voice that conceals emotions. He is a proponent of the writer revealing their identity inclusive of race, gender, nationality, economic status, sexual orientation, or role in the research. Noting how cultural values impact writing style, Quaye argues for including writing styles akin to the values of the

culture one researches, for example, using storytelling, which is highly valued in his native Ghana. Quayle suggests that well-told stories can reveal what life is like for others and invite readers into their worldview. Later in this thesis I discuss how contemporary dance choreographers from distinct parts of the globe have endeavored to share their dance from the perspective of their ‘native tongue’ rather than from Western hegemonic aesthetics.

Multivocality typically incorporates different people’s voices and perspectives within a text. The basis is to ensure that narratives are inclusive and more complete than if sourced by one person. Thus, multivocality can destabilize unitary understandings of reality and meanings and give rise to plurality, contradiction, and ambiguity (Buzzanell 2017). Another form of multivocality expresses conversations among various (even contradictory) voices that occur within the researcher. Mizzi argues that “to shed light on these narrative voices means to provoke a deeper understanding of the often silent tensions that lie underneath observable behaviors in the story” (2010 p.2). My explorations of personal narrative and storytelling were one way I incorporated multivocality in my writing and performance style. Closely related is ‘performative writing’ with its body-centered, personally revealing ethos.

Performative Writing

Performative writing is not necessarily writing about performance, rather it is writing that is inclusive of the body’s ‘performance’ of action. It highlights lived experience inclusive of sensory elements; layers of thoughts, emotions, and memories contained in the body can feed directly into written work (Evans 2007, Pelias 2016, Fitzpatrick and Longley 2020). In this way, performative writing as a method of inquiry reveals “iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life” (Pelias 2016 p.12). Evans (2007) describes journaling in a dance workshop where participants were encouraged to write (and draw and speak) what they experienced through their bodies as means to integrate creative process. This echoes Cancienne’s notion of “bodily attending;” performative writing is a way of paying attention to the “nooks and crannies of our experience” (2003, p.248).

A feature of performative writing is that it *shows* instead of *tells*; it offers a more complete view of life and helps people make sense of their fragmented lives (Wall 2006, Denzin 2014). “It hesitates, stutters, enacts what it describes, is evocative, reflexive; writing to embrace, enact, embody, effect” (Denzin 2014, p.21). The often

bricolage style of performative writing seems resonant with principles of fragmentation or juxtapositioning located in modernist art and contemporary dance. Certainly, the patchwork of vignettes I created in my performances were a way I made sense out of the fragments of factoids remembered or discovered about my family.

Personal narrative, multivocality, and performative writing often criss-cross each other within one work. Norman Denzin (2006) reflects on a project that represented the historical presence of Native Americans in two different geographical locations and time periods. He describes using a variety of texts to create a tapestry of contradictory voices and images concerning Native Americans and their place in physical space and in the collective imagination. I was struck by his range of texts which seemed to parallel mine. These included historical advertisements, media stories, maps, photographs, words taken from personal histories, government documents, or scholarly texts, and his own memory mapping expressed through poems. His article, 'Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà vu all Over Again' (2006) spurred thoughts about how I would write and choreograph my Shluva stories. He writes,

In bringing the past into the autobiographical present, I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it. History becomes a montage, moments quoted out of context, "juxtaposed fragments from widely dispersed places and times" ... I move across and between several writing styles, genres, and representational performative forms...

(Denzin 2006, p.423)

After reading this article I wrote the following:

I can see myself braiding these kinds of collaged, fragmented, diverse kinds of data and voices into writing and choreographing. By dismantling distinctions between academic and creative writing we see that production of knowledge can be delivered in many different forms: Creative process writing inclusive of multi-vocalic styles juxtaposed against descriptive and analytic writing. Fragmented, shards of glass, collaged, bricolaged – strands of knowledge employing imagination, engaging my creative and intellectual 'brains' – so that when braided together provide a greater picture of the whole. – May 2019

WaR infiltrated my investigative process and provided insights that ultimately were used to create my performed works, as well as this written dissertation.

Documentation Practices

Documentation is a central part of an AP doctorate. Not only does it stand as submitted evidence of research inquiry, but during the creative process, documentation becomes data for further research. The practitioner-researcher alternates between two roles, one focused more on the practice, the other concentrated on the reflective research of the creative process and final artistic products (Nimkulrat 2007). It is cyclical process giving rise to different kinds of artifacts besides the artwork, such as complimentary writing and audio-visual documentation. These capture experiential practice-research and can be used to disseminate the artefacts to a broader sphere.

Documentation occurred throughout my process. Journal notes, mind-maps, email correspondence, recorded interviews, poems, photos, videos, and remembered dance phrases (body as archive) served as a type of portfolio. Although the elements of this portfolio were not contained in one vessel, but instead in hand-written journals, artist sketchbooks, computer files, my phone and Cloud storage, as a group they nonetheless were materials that I returned to time and again throughout the art-making progression and this write-up. Former UMD dance colleague and choreographer, Sharon Mansur, often shared her ‘Creative Process Book’ (CPB) which she created when working on a new project. She sees the CPB as “a living archive” to hold an artist’s “images, writings, sketches, research notes, rehearsal experiments, conversations, articles, reading notes/quotes, questions, dreams, interviews, answers, inspirations, artistic to-do-lists, drafts, photos, etc.” (Mansur cited in Abadoo 2016, p.58). My creative process ‘portfolio’ included:

- Research notes
- Reflective/reflexive responses about various levels of research in journal writing
- Performative writing from showings of work-in-progress to final events
- Recordings and transcription of interviews and audience/viewer responses
- Video recordings and photographs of site visit explorations and rehearsals
- Photography and video recordings of final performance
- Creating storyboards

My own Creative/Research Process Portfolio, albeit scattered, served as this living archive. In the future, I might consider using a large physical and/or virtual vessel to contain all, and to come up with a systemic way to organize them. Then, again, the

creative process is often messy, so no amount of systematization could clean up the sometimes-shambolic ways the creative muses enter the process.

I have long resonated with Kathleen Vaughan's quote, "...embedded and embodied within a work of art, almost holographically, is a reservoir of knowledge and understanding, the 'research' of the work as conducted by the artist" (2012:169). The analysis and reflection of these various forms of documented data helped me to create the work but also uncover the "embedded and embodied ...reservoir of knowledge" within it that this thesis reflects upon.

Choreographing as Research (CaR)

Dance and choreography are not typically thought of as forms of research, however dance artist-scholars have argued to the contrary in recent years. Susan Foster demonstrates how making a dance IS researching through movement (2009). Noting the pioneering efforts of Margaret H'Doubler, who founded the first B.A. program in Dance in the U.S. in 1926, Foster posits that since its inception into university curriculum, dance was thought of as an activity to experience and create knowledge. H'Doubler taught dance technique through guided improvisation and experiential anatomy, rather than specific movement routines that students had to copy. Choreography was taught by leading movement explorations rather than specific stagecraft and compositional techniques.

Foster shows how innovator modern dance choreographers Martha Graham (1894-1991), Doris Humphrey (1895-1958), and Hanya Holmes (1893-1992) established movement principles underlying their respective dance techniques from reflections on their practices, which led to them to develop choreographic principles. Asserting how the body's movement can produce knowledge, scholars acknowledge how dance reflects a choreographer's research but also is a form of inquiry into that research through reflexive analysis (Cancienne and Snowber 2003, Foster 2009). The choreographic process "is one of sorting, sifting, editing, forming, making, and remaking; It's essentially an act of discovery" (Cancienne and Snowber 2003, p.237).

The process of reflexivity in choreographic research is critical here. I refer to it as 'the participant/observation within my own choreographic process.' Reflecting upon her process to develop a choreography on her Cajun heritage, Cancienne describes how she was able to integrate her past with her present in ways that reading and writing alone

could not. She describes, "... dance is a corporeal way of knowing, a different way of seeing, questioning, and challenging...The body [...] is a living enactment of culture and social beliefs" (2003, pp.243-44).

While I alternated between choreography, ethnography, autoethnography and narrative inquiry throughout my creative process – each method informing the other – I was not always aware of how my past was integrating into my present. Reflecting on my own CaR practice, I took some time to ponder how I learned choreography in the modern/postmodern way; what I embraced, what I pushed against. Certainly, my kathak and flamenco dance studies influenced me too, even though those forms conceive of and practice choreography in a completely different way. In retrospect, I realized that as a learner of contemporary dance choreography, most prominent in my body-mind memory were my experiences with postmodern dance innovators.

Postmodern Dance – A Particular Form of Research

During my BA I studied modern dance technique and composition where rather conventional methods based on dance sequences and choreographic concepts of the original modern dance pioneers were taught (Graham, Horst, Humphrey-Weidman, Limón, Cunningham, Hawkins). Some of my teachers had studied with those pioneers. But what influenced me the most as a choreographer and crafter of interdisciplinary performance, inclusive of this PhD project, was postmodern dance. This section references educational experiences from the past, yet I include them here as part of my CaR process because they shaped my way of working. The impact of these experiences was so deeply embedded in me that I did not necessarily consider their influence on my choreographic method until this reflection.

As the daughter of two artists who were influenced by the Beatnik movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and an American child of the 1970s, I was quite affected by the ethos of the counter-culture movement and the type of experimentation that was swirling around in all the arts during those decades. Later, I had the opportunity to engage with several founding dance members of the infamous Judson Dance Theatre whose experimentation and performances in the 1960s, marked the beginning of postmodern dance. Known as changing the course of American dance, the Judson Church Group was a collective of artists (dancers, choreographers, composers, filmmakers, painters, and sculptors) who experimented in workshops out of a church in Greenwich Village,

New York.⁶³ The founders “redefined what counted as dance” (MOMA 2019). What evolved from these workshops paved a legacy for postmodern dance that continues to inform contemporary dance today. This included,

...the use of so-called ordinary movement, those gestures more common to everyday life than to dance studios, as well as composition strategies thought to favor spontaneity, such as allowing a situation, an environment, or a dancer’s interpretation of a set of instructions to determine a work’s structure and content. ...[and] for the belief in contemporary art and performance that mundane, everyday action and speech are meaningful and that art is made as much at the places where people gather as in the isolated space of a studio.

(Lax 2018a, p.15)

Although I have interacted with many dance artists since my formative years, most significant were several pioneering postmodern artists whom I studied with and/or performed in their works. I list these below with commentary as to how I see their influence on my choreographic process.

Elaine Summers (1925-2014) was an early developer of filmdance and the somatic practice Kinetic Awareness. Her sensory-rich film and dance projects impressed me as a young dancer witnessing and dancing in one of her immersive works, which included walking in and out of a series of vertical panels with ocean waves projected on them. Gloria Sutton describes,

Summers combined strategies of modern dance, art history, and popular culture; analog sources (radio, television, and consumer magazines, as well as photography and film); and emerging networked models of distribution...as well as (later) the internet to generate sensorial environments that hinged on audience engagement – events which she termed intermedia. By *intermedia*, she meant, “experimental events merging the temporal dynamics of mass media... with the intimacy of dance and the embodied experience of public encounters.

(Sutton 2018, p.83)

I studied dance improvisation/composition and Kinetic Awareness with Elaine over several years in New York City. The use of ‘pedestrian movement’ was a welcome respite to the heavily styled ballet-based modern dance I was struggling with at the time. In Kinetic Awareness I was taught to use my own body sensations as a form of

⁶³ While Judson artists are often referred to as ‘a collective,’ it is important to note that it was a fluid group of artists who did not define themselves as a collective nor articulate a definitive statement about a unified aesthetic. Nonetheless, as Lax states, “today the term *Judson* acts as a stand-in for some of the hallmarks of postmodern dance...” (2018a, p.15).

research to learn and free up any movement or alignment limitations. I wondered if Elaine's approaches subconsciously influenced me in the way I integrated my moving body with different kinds of moving media images in the film, or use of walking/dancing in the ocean in the scene *Interlude*. Certainly, her work tapped into my developing proclivity towards sensorial awareness and bodily knowledge.

As an undergraduate, I saw pioneering interdisciplinary performance artist Meredith Monk's piece *Quarry*. It too moved me greatly in its interweaving of movement, gesture, extended vocal technique, sound, images, dialogue, objects, and lighting. Over the years I have taken workshops with Monk and at one point successfully auditioned for one of her works in New York (which I stupidly turned down due to other life circumstances). Monk is also Jewish and created a renowned work, later turned into a film called, *Ellis Island* which centers on American immigrants.⁶⁴

Deborah Hay, whose course I audited when we were summer colleagues at Wesleyan University, devised communal ritual performances for trained and non-trained movers. Using an intertextual format, she documented her unique choreographic process in book publications such as, *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance* (1994) long before others. I experienced how her choreographic research was influenced by Buddhist meditation – an acute attention to movement and consciousness.

During my MA at UCLA, I performed in a work by Phoebe Neville whose pedestrian minimalistic oriented choreography intrigued me. In one dance I recall, she simply walked on a diagonal pathway from upstage left to downstage right holding a long horizontal pole. Curiously, this sometimes-boring dance has stayed in my mind all these years. Its deliberate slowness and minimalism I found refreshing. As a viewer, I could see the whole process of bodily change unfolding. It ignited my kinesthetic empathy, as if I could feel the weight transference from one foot to the other in my body, as well as the subtle shifts in movement required to keep the pole in a state of equilibrium. I wondered if a dance like this subconsciously gave me permission to create a dance that was simply walking down a forest pathway aligned with ancestor photos, or a dance that basically only manipulated long strands of grapevines.

I did not work with Aileen Passloff (1931-2020), another founding Judson dancer, but as a colleague of my fathers' and later fellow flamenco dancer, we had many

⁶⁴ See <https://meredith-monk-website.appspot.com/repertory/ellis-island-1981>.

engaging conversations about dance over the years in New York City cafes and train rides up to Bard College where she and my father taught. Once such conversation stayed with me when as a young dancer, I revealed to her my struggle with choreography. She advised me to “listen to the dance” to know when it is finished. This type of ‘follow the creative muse’ through dance taught me a different form of knowing. Although ‘listening to the dance’ was a rather mysterious process to me during my biggest artistic undertakings yet, creating *The Shluva Project*, there was a way in which her words gave me the confidence to, ‘go with the flow.’ I did not always know where the flow was going and was often overwhelmed when it came to starting a new choreography, but as long as I ‘listened,’ I would be guided.

The Epiphany of Anna Halprin’s Influence

The influence of the late experimental choreographer Anna Halprin (1920-2021) was far-reaching even beyond the dance world. As a Northern California transplant living not far from her, I had many opportunities to engage with her in workshops, performances and other events, and I teach her work in dance history classes.

Anna’s artistic output was tremendous; she worked to the end dying at the age of 100. She mentored several dancers who later became founding collaborators in Judson Church Theater (including Monk) and experimental artists in the minimalism music scene (including Terry Riley who I also studied with). She was one of the earliest exponents of what became known as ‘site dance,’ integrating inter-disciplinary and communal ritual type events in nature that included guiding participants to engage with their senses.⁶⁵ Over the years she danced in the ocean, danced with mud, moved in tree roots crowned with branches around her head. Several of these works are documented in the beautiful film, *Breath Made Visible* by Ruedi Gerber (2009).

Halprin, along with one of her daughters, was the originator of the Life/Art Process, which is described on their website as, “an integrated approach that explores the wisdom of the body as expressed through movement, dance, and imagination. We use artistic processes and media to explore and deepen our relationship to psychological life, to social issues, and to creativity itself” (Tamalpa Institute n.d.).

⁶⁵ See *Experiments in the Environment* <https://californiahistoricalsociety.org/exhibitions/experiments-in-environment-the-halprin-workshops-1966-1971/> and *Sensory Walk* <https://searanch.ced.berkeley.edu/s/sea-ranch/page/sensory-walk>

I took several workshops with Anna that incorporated dancing, drawing, writing, speaking, and performing as a way to gain a deeper connection to and integration of self. I later adapted this type of process into my own teaching and creative practice to use as a choreographic tool to help generate movement ideas and to discover connections to different themes. Therefore, coming across similar AP methods at UL, such as Alys Longley's 'move-draw-write-talk' process (15 April 2019 – IWA), was not unfamiliar to me. I detail how I implemented this process into my choreographic research in the next chapter.

Halprin also produced a yearly *Planetary Dance*,⁶⁶ a community ritual of healing and renewal on the mountain in Marin County, California and conducted her first virtual one in 2015 at the University of Maryland by my invitation. Anna regularly used scores to create performance and ritual events. These were often connected to nature and community. Only upon reflection, can I see how the intersection of dance, ritual, sensory material from the natural environment subconsciously seeped through my way of researching and crafting my dance 'events.' In a couple scenes from the live performance, I used scores to generate choreography.

With a similar lineage as I – an Ashkenazi Jew whose family also escaped the pogroms of the Russian Empire, Anna created several dances based on Jewish themes. Over the years I've heard Anna speak of them in person and in films. *The Grandfather Dance* was inspired by her childhood memories of watching her grandfather exuberantly pray, *The Prophetess* was based on a Jewish Biblical heroine, and *Kadosh*, meaning 'holy' in Hebrew, incorporated Jewish ritual movements in a group dance.⁶⁷

Despite all these encounters with Anna or her work, I never considered how much I was affected by her until the write up of this thesis. In one of the focus groups I conducted with a small group of friends who watched the film, out of the blue one participant said this:

The whole time I was watching it, I was in my fantasy world imagining Anna Halprin looking down at this because I feel that you have really ...this would be very much in the tradition that she brought forth. Okay, use of space beyond the stage. Okay, narrative and spoken word. But here, you've embodied the personal and taking it to the universal level, were opening it up to others. ... You know, she tells the story of watching her grandfather pray. Story is very much in that

⁶⁶ See: <https://planetarydance.org/>

⁶⁷ See: <https://experiments.californiahistoricalsociety.org/anna-halprin-jews-are-a-dancing-people/>

tradition that she takes open to the stage. So in my mind, I was just imagining, and I saw that you really embodied the tradition and [took] it onto film. I mean, you've used all the different modalities that she would embrace.

(Tamara Gilbert, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)



Figure 9: Anna Halprin at age 99 with Miriam, Kentfield, California, Nov. 2020.

In hindsight I see how the artistic rhizomes of these postmodern dance artists infiltrated my psyche during my formative years as a dancer and creator of performance works. Certainly, I could not have done what I did in the making of *The Shluva Project* works if it were not for what Jack Anderson called, “the freewheeling experimentation” of the Judson Church group artists and Anna Halprin. Anderson describes how their influence lingers on “for the Judson choreographers were not merely colorful eccentrics, but esthetic adventurers who made sometimes gleeful, sometimes messy, but always fundamentally serious investigations into the nature and structure of dance movement” (Anderson 1982).

Postmodern Dance Happenings as Dance Events

I have noticed in recent years several novel ways choreographers have presented dance that to me echo ideologies and formats propagated during postmodern dance's early years, particularly by Judson Church Theatre artists. Their eschewing of conventional proscenium staged formats and blurring performer/audience relationships is reminiscent of a resurgence of similar boundary-breaking practices where dance has become more accessible and inclusive. During the years of working on this PhD, I have often mused on parallels that I perceive between the postmodern dance 'Happenings' and ethnochoreology's framework of the 'dance event.' What those choreographers created in their Happenings seems resonant with the dance event perspective. Shunning the idea of dance as 'performance' in favor of Happenings which created alternative contexts where dance occurred. Before terms like, 'site-specific' or 'immersive' or 'community dance' existed, the Judson Church artists were implementing these structures into their work. Happenings were in fact, dance events.

While this is a topic for more in-depth study, I point to some elements I see resonant here. Happenings (among other related art events) were "neo-avant-garde aesthetic experiments that exploded in New York in the 1960s,... and represented a newfound openness toward alternative means of staging works of art" (Sutton 2018, p. 83).

Artist Allan Kaprow coined the term Happenings in 1959, and defines them as:

an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening ... is art but seems closer to life.

(Kaprow cited in Fluxus Museum n.d.)

This definition reminds me of some features I previously described about the Yaqui Easter ceremony which occurs in pueblos situated within the city limits of Tucson. As the culminating event of a ritual time cycle extending across a year, the Yaqui Easter ceremony is an assemblage of four different dance occurrences performed in more than one time and place. Its material environment is constructed of what is available (musical instruments and body extensions made of found objects in the natural world), with commonplace scents and sounds creating part of the atmosphere. The deer dancer

‘chosen’ through a dream, the *chapyekas* movement mimics and mocks those watching, and the matachins’ dance derived from colonial encounters.

The Guggenheim Museum describes Happenings as:

multimedia Performance events [that] radically altered the conventional role of audience members, who, in the tradition of Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty, were assaulted by an array of auditory, visual, and physical phenomena. Composed out of the absurdities and banalities of everyday life and filtered through the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism, these spectacles incorporated junk materials, found and manipulated objects, and live or electronic music, sometimes in elaborate constructed environments intended to break down the boundaries between art and life. They explored the objectification of mundane movements and play-related activities, as well as the depersonalization of their participants.

(Guggenheim Museum n.d.)

When I guided my MFA students through a fieldwork experience using the dance event model, then explored ways to work with it choreographically, many students ended up creating fairly elaborate thesis concerts similar in structure to what is described above as Happenings. I have mentioned Lynne’s piece which transformed the black box theatre into a metaphorical kitchen where dancers cooked and audience members conversed and ate. MK’s use of ambience and having the audience walk through the community of black dancing bodies to feel something of the exclusion that African Americans felt for centuries. Robin constructed an intricate multisensory immersive environment inclusive of tunnel-like pathways, makeshift rooms, different levels of platforms and instructed the audience to journey through, to look, touch, smell, listen. Colette created an autoethnographic multimedia event exploring her family’s traumatic exodus from Cuba to the U.S. where the audience sat on beanbag chairs to experience film projections on multiple walls, old radio broadcast speeches of Castro, poetry recitation in Spanish and English, and pedestrian movement danced through old furniture, junk radios and televisions.

Then there was Sarah, a choreographer highly influenced by postmodern dance and avant-garde art who wanted to synthesize subversive art approaches through a deconstructivist lens (Oppenheim 2017). She included mini-dance events that occurred in the hallways as part of her rehearsal process and other preshow activities leading up to the final performance of *Render Edit*, which she saw as three shows in one.

There were three stages separated by walls, and three audiences with uniquely different sightlines. Two audience groups were separated by walls on the ground level, and the third audience group was seated in a Balcony area for a bird's eye view of all three Stages and Audiences below. There was one soundtrack for each of the halves, divided by a Talking Intermission in which the entire space filled with multiple spoken texts, visual stimuli, and audience engagement activities.

(Oppenheim 2017, pp.19-20)

These student choreographic works surely utilized various features described in the Guggenheim quotation above: *an array of auditory, visual, and physical phenomena, composed out of absurdities and banalities of everyday life-and filtered through a gestural [and stylized dance] vocabulary*. These spectacles *incorporated junk materials, found and manipulated objects, and live or electronic music, sometimes in elaborate constructed environments, which broke down the boundaries between art and life*. I could easily say that the dance events these choreographers created were in fact, Happenings. For the cancelled first edition of *Shluva*, where I designed a multisensory, immersive dance event that altered traditional performance spaces, diffused divisions between audience and performers, and included participatory activities alongside presentational dance, I too without realizing it, was creating a dance Happening. My students were influenced by my approach applying the dance event model to choreography but it also seems that I in turn was influenced by them for this project. So as much as postmodern dance choreographic ideas were a part of my practice, so was the memory of my students' work.

This chapter discussed the general methodologies I engaged with and the rationale for using them. Ch. 5 drills down further to describe the nuts-and-bolts of how specific practices guided me in the creation of *The Shluva Project* live dance-theatre and film, and the stories contained within them.

Chapter 5 – Storying The Shluva Project

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” – Marcus Garvey

“By looking to ancestral maternal stories we locate, embody and embrace displacement, loss, hardship, survival and care across generations as a valid means for ‘new cartographies for research.’ The flesh we have crafted and woven into stories to bring archives to life translates historical evidence offering generative meaning making to reveal lineage and emplace our intergenerational positionality.”

(Phillips & Bunda 2018 p.28)



Figure 10: From L. to R.: Miriam, Pearl, Rose, Shluva.

Inception Story

The Shluva Project refers to two performance projects and the different types of research that went into their creation. At the root of *The Shluva Project* was the journey to find a woman I came to know as ‘Shluva’ who I first ‘met’ through an old tiny, tattered photo I discovered when cleaning out my recently deceased father’s art studio in 2017 (Fig. 10 and 15). As I was rummaging through a box of antique family photos my father clearly inherited from his mother (Pearl), amongst the royally framed photos of other relatives, many I had seen before, I came across a small envelope. Inside was an oval-shaped torn photo of a dark-eyed, stoic-looking woman dressed in black with a

white lace scarf wrapped around her neck, a delicate chain draping down her bodice, hair pulled back tightly. I don't remember ever seeing this photo before. I wondered what her story was and how I might be related to her. When I turned the photo over, I saw in my grandmother Pearl's handwriting: "Shluva Greenfield – Pearl's grandmother, about 1907, 104th St. bet. Madison & 5th Aves." (referring to New York City, see Fig. 15). I thought to myself, "This is my great-great grandmother". "I don't recall hearing anything about her" (but perhaps I had forgotten).

When I first 'met' Shluva, my grandmother's grandmother, it was at a time when I had gone through significant personal and professional losses all within a short period of time. One of my sisters, Liz, also my best friend and Irish twin (we were born 364 days apart) was a primary anchor in my life. My father, a pillar. I lost them, I lost my job, I lost other family members who cutoff relations due to unresolved family misunderstandings. Ultimately, I felt I had lost my identity. Then, I wondered, if I ever really 'had' 'my identity' ...whatever that meant.

Pondering next steps in my life, I thought again, "for years I studied other artists' lineages and I taught my students to probe into their heritages, but I know little about my own lineage." I wondered why this was. Some of the more evocative choreographic events created by my MFA students were ones where they mined their memories, dreams, family stories and recipes, and histories of their heritage, then transmuted them to choreographic form. I gave them permission to do that. They didn't know they could use their own family stories as a valid form of research. I did not call it autoethnography then, but that is essentially what it was because they were making connections between personal experiences and larger societal issues or events.

After a period of mourning while also dealing with my relatives' complex earthly affairs, I pondered doing the PhD I had so longed to acquire. I knew that AP was my kind of style at this stage in my career. Contemplating what my performance projects would be, I heard that voice again: "I'm so tired of studying other people's lineages when I don't even know my own." During an initial talk with my co-supervisor Colin, it became clear to both of us; I would utilize a similar approach I had taught my students – applying ethnochoreology to my own choreographic practice. The content of the material would be on my Jewish lineage that I felt had been erased from my life.

Thus was the inception of *The Shluva Project*, a five-year journey unearthing family photos, perusing genealogical archives, and getting lost on ancestry websites as I tried

to find clues of my family line. In order to trace their geographical locations, timelines, journeys, and connections, I continued my search traveling the coasts of the US to interview family members, visit newly discovered gravesites of never-known departed ones, and exhuming long stored-away memories and family lore passed down. I further researched Eastern European Jewish Diaspora and New York immigration history through readings, museum visits, and walking tours through the tenement houses and neighborhood where Shluva and family once had lived. This type of research continued all during the creative processes while transmuting ideas, knowledge, metaphors, and stories into gesture, dance, auditory sounds and text, visual images, and ultimately into choreographic and filmic form. I outline these processes below.

As Shluva was part of my patrilineal line, I traced her through my father's matrilineal line: his mother (Pearl), her mother and grandmother (Rose and Shluva). This is where I focused my genealogical research. However, in both the film and live performance, I reference memories, stories, and insights about all four lines of my ancestry and the impact I sensed the life experiences of my ancestors had on me. This work has been a personal journey to discover my own past. Further, to claim my identity as a fourth-generation Jewish American woman whose ancestry is part of the late 19th century Eastern European Jewish Diaspora to the United States.

The Shluva Project – Overview

As mentioned previously, *The Shluva Project* encompassed two AP dance-theatre creations: one storied on film, the other through live performance. Each artistic creation reflected different facets of a journey that searched for meaning within the stories, photographs, and genealogical tracings of my erased Jewish family lineage. The project explored themes of persecuted and marginalized races, displaced immigrants, desires to be *other*, and family lore that perpetuated a sense of loss and lost identity through the generations.

Shining light on the dark immigrant shadows lurking within familial cracks, I asked how the experiences of my ancestors affected my own sense of identity. Could aspects of the likely traumas they experienced living in antisemitic 19th century Eastern Europe somehow have been passed to me? How might their experiences of religious persecution and economic oppression affect me? Could the marginalization they likely encountered when arriving as immigrants to the United States possibly have been carried into my epigenomes? Could my recurring feelings of 'being left out', perpetual

lack of confidence no matter how much experience I have, and underlying shame, in part stem from something from my ancestors – intergenerational trauma – albeit three and four generations later? Although I could not prove this, nonetheless, thinking of the Marcus Garvey quote at the opening of this chapter, the search for my identity by going back in time to learn about my ancestors’ history and culture has been a way for me to root my tree into this world.

Thinking of the Phillips and Bunda quote at the opening of this chapter and changing ‘we’ to ‘I’, “...by looking to ancestral maternal stories [I] locate, embody and embrace displacement, loss, hardship, survival and care across generations as a valid means for ‘new cartographies for research.’ The flesh [I] have crafted and woven into stories to bring archives to life translates historical evidence offering generative meaning making to reveal lineage and emplace [my] intergenerational positionality” (2018 p.28).

The Shluva Project is called a ‘project,’ because the genealogical investigation and artistic creations resulting from this research can and will continue beyond the two PhD artistic expressions described below. Both works were conceived, choreographed, written, and performed by me with the exception of some sections in the live performance which included another dancer and live musicians.

In both works, I alternate between playing ‘Shluva,’ my great-great-grandmother (as I imagined her) and playing ‘myself.’ The spoken word heard throughout was predominantly narrated by me either spoken live or prerecorded voiceovers. This text included poetry I wrote based on family stories I remembered as a child, heard during interviews, or developed as I was researching mid-19th to early 20th century Ashkenazi Jewish history. The performances also included recorded excerpts of family relatives telling stories during interviews, as well as live and recorded music. The stories told were highly interpretive and nonlinear. While I wondered how much of these stories were fact versus fiction, I believe what mattered more was the meaning the stories had for those of us who were telling them. Visuals images (photos and videos) appearing in the works were from family or genealogical archives, ethnographic fieldwork trips, or filmed segments created for these works. The use of props was significant. Some props were often used throughout, some were specific to particular dances. While working, I came to understand that these props served as ‘ritual objects’ and much of what I was doing was as much a ritual to honor my ancestors as it was artmaking and performing.

Symbols of Tradition

The Grapevines

Props became part of a language of symbology used across various scenes in the film and live performance. The most prominent of these were the vines, more specifically, grapevines. Some vines were living, but artificial ones were mostly used. In addition to long strands of grapevines, I often noticed images of vines on other paraphernalia, costumes, and gravesites – some not even planned.

While the vines appeared (and reappeared) to me often serendipitously throughout the research and performance-making journey, they became a strong ritual symbol imbued with layers of personal and cultural meaning. Historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, speaks to the enduring nature of symbols and the reoccurrence of certain primary ones across history. Seen as archetypes, symbols can be interpreted differently according to the ritual context. Eliade looks at the relationship between a symbol's structure and its meaning suggesting that "history continually adds new meanings ... but these do not destroy the structure of the symbol" (Eliade, 1991 p.161).

Early on at the inception of this project, I attended the funeral of an elder relative who was my father's oldest childhood friend. Near the burial plot, I noticed a long vine draped over a hedge. It was half dead, half alive. In that moment, I saw the vine as a symbol representing the connection between life and death, past and present, and as an allegorical string tying every generation to the next. Initially, I worked with live ivy vines from my backyard. As the importance of grapevines grew and deeper meaning evolved during the creative process, eventually I purchased several strands of artificial grapevines. I reflected on how intergenerational ties can revitalize one's connection to community thus bolstering identity – the vines that link us to our heritage as invisible connections. Simultaneously, these ties to the past, to tradition, can be a burden, as in 'the ties that bind us' or lead to the remembrance of internalized unconscious trauma.

I recalled how grapes, grapevines and wine are a strong part of Jewish symbolism. They are often depicted in art showing Jewish life. They are used throughout Jewish ritual and ritual objects, for example, engraved on ceremonial plates, cups, candlesticks used in Jewish worship, cloth, or decorum. Goodenough describes, "The ceremonial cup of wine [represents] available divine beneficence... the hope that one could share in the divine nature to the extent that one would come into a larger range of living in this

life, and into immortality after death” (1957, p.74). Romanoff further explains, “The vine and grapes have likewise in early times signified blessing and fertility. 'Israel will grow as the vine,' proclaimed Hosea. 'Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine,' are the words of the Psalmist. In Jewish art the vine and grapes figure on the mosaics and sculptures of the early synagogues, early burial places and tombstones, and on Jewish illuminated manuscripts” (1944, pp.300-301). Wild and cultivated grapevines are mentioned in the Old Testament and are imbued with multiplicities of meaning.

During the creative process while recalling how many cups of wine are drunk during the Passover ceremony, I thought ‘we Jews drink a lot of wine (grapes) during our celebrations!’ The most commonly celebrated ritual meal – Passover – requires drinking four cups of wine and a fifth cup is left at the door for Elijah (or these days, a sixth cup for prophetess Miriam). Jews also have a dance called the ‘hora’ which includes the ‘grapevine step’, a crisscrossing of the feet locomoting in a circle.

Vines appear and reappear in multiple ways throughout my performances. Sometimes as part of the set lying on the theatre or studio floor or ground, sometimes used as body extensions manipulated during dance and movement scenes. I sometimes walk through pathways of vines, offer them up to the sky, drag them along over my shoulders, wrap myself in them, toss, run, and dance them twirling in the air, sweep them up with a broom, and use them as a link between me and ‘Shluva’. In some of the dances, there was a recurring movement motif where I outlined the windy path of a vine with my hand swiping up my arm, crisscrossing my head, and down my body. Throughout the process, I kept noticing vines or vine leaves. Some of this was serendipity, some intentional. For example, I discovered vine-like patterns woven into the jacquard of both the Miriam and Shluva dresses. I purchased a ritual handwashing cup from Israel choosing the one with grapevines as the two handles of the cup to be used in one of the scenes. Imagine my delight after pulling off the wild vines engulfing Shluva and her husband’s gravesite, only to discover vine leaves engraved on their tombstones!

In the focus groups I had for the few that watched the film, the vines came up quite a bit. Some comments included:

“Vines, symbology, tradition. The vines really were very effective every time they appeared” (Atesh Sonneborn, 10 February 2024).

“I love that you carry this symbology through the entire piece. To me, that was such a wonderful thread of connectivity and a symbol of connectivity. Also of the natural world. There's the long legacy. It's a beautiful symbol in nature. That's the one that really stands out for me” (Tamara Gilbert, 10 February 2024).

“I think I was also so impressed with the universality of so many of the themes. Just like, in particular, I love the way you were expressing the burdens we carry psychologically and emotionally within us [by] starting with carrying those heavy, heavy vines, with such deliberation. I thought you captured what it is really like for people who don't have words to express the feeling of history that's with them all the time, even when they have no words for it. Your body and your movement and the use of the props and the environment around you conveyed that and, you know, the sort of process of reclaiming your own identity” (Linda Kanefield, 17 February 2024).

Another viewer most knowledgeable of Jewish culture shared something I never knew: *“For some groups in the Jewish community, they act out the Passover story, they act out that going out of slavery, and do it where they're actually carrying something like exactly as you did it [with the vines]” (Janet Davis, 10 February 2024).*



Figure 11: Film scene: *Vine Burden*; image: Paul D. Jackson.

Ritual studies scholar Helen Phelan notes how mythology, symbol, and ritual can be constantly evoked to reinforce ethos and core values (2017, p.106), and how performers

can “draw on ritual, symbol, and performance to affirm, contest, and (re)create values” (p.129). Certainly, the interweaving of the grapevine symbol further affirmed my connection to Judaism, my heritage and family, which up until that time felt lost to me. The newly-inspired awareness of this connection then made me realize, that without conscientiously looking at how my cultural and ancestral history has become a part of my being, I could never contest the trauma that accompanied the beauty of connection to that history.

Recurring Costumes, Colors, and other Props

While there were several costumes worn, two dresses reappeared throughout both projects. One was the ‘Shluva dress,’ an upcycled ankle-length billowy flamenco costume designed in the *antigua* style of 19th century that I altered and turned backwards. It is wine-colored with paisley jacquard motifs woven in reminiscent of leaves. While I was not trying to mimic a dress Shluva might have worn (highly unlikely she would have worn that color red), it felt to me like a dress from another time. When I played Shluva, I usually wore this with some form of head scarf or shawl (Fig. 12). One exception was in the piece called *Known/Unknowns*, where during an early pandemic lockdown without access to originally-conceived costumes, I wore a long black skirt with a simple ruffle, a dark-teal colored shirt with appliqué weaving on front, a teal-colored headband, and granny-style black ankle-high booties.



Figure 12: Shluva dress & diaphanous scarf. Photo: Maurice Gunning, 2022.

The predominant ‘Miriam dress’ was a deep burgundy knee-length tunic, with jacquard patterns of vines woven in (Fig. 13). I did not make the connection to vines until long after I had purchased it. I often wore this dress over teal-colored leggings, or loose pleated black or brown calf-length pants. The use of deep red tones was not so conscious. I liked the dresses, the color and its association with wine.



Figure 13: Miriam dress. Image: Paul Jackson, 2022.

I used two diaphanous striped shawls with fringe across the ends in several scenes. Identical in style but not color. One was white and gray-striped (for Shluva – Fig. 12), the other burgundy and teal-striped (for Miriam). The white-gray one was reminiscent of a Jewish prayer shawl or *tallism* which is normally opaque, made of linen or wool with fringe only in the four corners. Apart from a Jewish handwashing ritual cup, a *netilat yadayim*, I did not use any actual Jewish ceremonial objects. I wanted to steer away from appropriating them into a secular setting. However, several props were suggestive of Jewish ritual objects. I describe these below.

There were some other costumes containing greens, sage, eggplant, whites, and black, but the predominant color combinations were wine, teal, green from the vines, and black. Much of the color choosing was intuitive and totally based on personal choice and what I had in my closet. But I was delighted when one film viewer noted the colors: *“Seeing textures, color, themes added so much to the story telling. And I love the coordination of colors of your costume to your scenes. I just want to shout out there. They stood out to me as really integrating and supporting the intimacy of the story”* (Deborah Riley 17 February 2024).

Another prop that appeared in several scenes was a shabby antique suitcase that I purchased in a Limerick antique store similar to the kinds I saw at the Ellis Island Museum in New York. This represented Shluva's travels of packing/leaving/arriving, as well as being a vessel to contain meaningful objects from her past as she traveled to a new world. The live performances were prop-heavy. I name these additional objects and their significance as they appear in specific scenes.

Guiding Creative Practices in the Making of Dance-Theatre and Film

Before diving into the specific performance projects and the storied scenes within them, I discuss the guiding creative practices I turned to in making these works. I comment generally about each one and note where specific outcomes evolved into specific scenes. In the previous chapter, I discussed basic genealogical and historical research methods employed. Here I delve more deeply into particular research trips because they ended up becoming so much a part of my creative process. In fact, they manifested as several stories within different scenes. This next section focuses on those creation stories as well as other creative process approaches I engaged with to turn the research into artistic form. Please note, the linear order that writing on a page imposes, does not indicate the temporal order that these events occurred in. For example, my choreography independent study came before my dramaturgy study, whereas here I reverse the order to better serve the flow of ideas in this academic telling. But ultimately all research processes overlapped and cascaded with one another throughout.

Genealogy as Creative Practice

I did not expect my genealogical investigations to become so integral to my creative practice. In fact, it became a practice unto its own, and a very creative one at that. There were the improvisations about how to discover family factoids, the composition of organizing obscure forms of data, the choreography of traversing different geographical places to search for and sometimes find. All this fed into new choreographic ideas, new movement motifs, new visioning of performance space setup, and new poetic writings. The genealogical research had a life of its own that ebbed and flowed, grew and shrank, and interwove into my stage crafting and choreography. It became a guiding creative practice. It was so important, that I outline the various geographical and virtual 'trips' I took to excavate one lineage within my genealogy – that of Shluva's – my paternal grandmother's grandmother.

Physical Trips #1: Philadelphia, Atlantic City, San Francisco, Seattle

Philadelphia – July 2019, I traveled to Philly at the invitation of one of my father's biggest art collectors who had produced a retrospective of Matt's (my father) work at Drexel University.⁶⁸ This exhibition allowed me to see a wider range of my father's oeuvre and consider the impact that growing up in an artistic household had on me. He also was inspired by the ocean and travels to the Middle East, India, and East Asia. My mother also was an artist (actor, painter, children's book writer and illustrator).

There was not enough time to visit neighborhoods where I spent part of my youth, or visit gravesites of maternal ancestors, but returning to Philadelphia always carries a certain meaning as I have many embodied memories and family roots there.

During this trip I visited The Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History.⁶⁹ The core exhibition was divided into four historical time periods. I spent most of my time in the section: *Dreams of Freedom 1880-1945*, which focused on mass immigration, the Great Depression, immigrant's lives, as well as WWI and II, and the Holocaust. The exhibit

chronicles how millions of Jewish immigrants came to the United States around the turn of the 20th century, drawn by the hope for better lives for themselves and their children—sustained by economic opportunity and political and religious freedom. This exhibit continues with American life after Congress legislated the end of free and open immigration in 1924 through the lenses of the performing arts, political activism, and religious expression. It concludes with World War II.

(Weitzman Museum n.d.)

My first sighting of a pile of old suitcases is what inspired me to use an antique suitcase as one of Shluya's props. This exhibit, along with reading books and Jewish history websites, was so helpful in my understanding of what Shluya and family members of her generation must have gone through.

Atlantic City, New Jersey – early October 2019 I attended the funeral of a family elder, Maxwell Gorson, who had been my father's childhood best friend. I also visited the famous boardwalk I had been to many times as a child. In Atlantic City, I flashbacked to those childhood trips, the stories my grandmother and father had told me about the years they lived there, and I met cousins I had not seen in decades. During the

⁶⁸ Titled *Matt Phillips: Inspired*: drexel.edu/drexel-founding-collection/exhibitions-events/exhibitions/details/?eid=22804&iid=64854.

⁶⁹ <https://theweitzman.org/>

visit to the Gorson cemetery plot, I was struck by how far the gravestones dated back to and how cohesive this family's burial grounds were unlike my own family that was so scattered. I documented the gravesites of my ancestors on the other paternal side of my family noting their names and trying to parse out how they were related to me. I walked all around this small predominantly Jewish cemetery in awe. It was in this first ancestor cemetery visit that I started to vision the use of gravestone images; I think the feeling of moving through the gravesites stayed with me until I eventually ended up using two cemeteries in the film. Also, it was here that I first came across the vine that featured so heavily in both works.

The following week I went into the studio to work on dance phrases related to vines with the thought of the ways they connect us to our ancestors in a chain-linking of history, and inherited memories and genes. Some of these phrases ended up in the dance called *Grapevine*.

The West Coast, USA – Later in October I returned to the San Francisco Bay Area to dig up the original photos I had discovered in my father's art studio after his death, which were in storage. This time with *The Shluva Project* in mind, I documented the photos carefully with my iPhone. I ended up printing many of these photos and including them in the *Ancestor Vines* scene in the film. I also found and took home that tiny, tattered photo of Shluva to have by my side as I worked. During this trip and early November, I interviewed family members and went to Seattle to spend three days with my father's brother, my Uncle Alan. We looked at old photos as he told stories. I audio recorded three interviews with him, excerpts which were heard in the film's dance, *Known/Unknowns*. Stories from cousin interviews got written into my stories, and whole excerpts of one were heard in some of the *Interlude* sections in the live performance.

Some serendipitous encounters happened on this West Coast trip that positively influenced my research. This included pertinent conversations with three elder Jewish performers. One was with my friend, the late actor/director of Jewish theatre, Corey Fisher⁷⁰ who helped me with some music choices and to recognize my heritage more deeply (see film description of *Grapevine*). A second meeting occurred with actor/director Naomi Newman,⁷¹ who had cofounded *A Traveling Jewish Theatre*

⁷⁰ <https://coreyfischer.com/>

⁷¹ <https://lohpdigitalarchive.omeka.net/exhibits/show/lohp/naomi-newman>

(ATJT) with Corey. In existence for 35 seasons, the San Francisco-based ATJT presented “collaboratively created lyrical explorations of Jewish culture” (Hurwitt 2011). The material I was working with was so historically and culturally rich, I felt the need to find someone who could help me with the dramaturgy of *Shluva*. I had seen Naomi’s work with ATJT as well as some of her one-woman shows and thought she would be perfect. I felt very fortunate when Naomi agreed to work with me.

A third encounter was with pioneering dancer nonagenarian Anna Halprin.⁷² I had a brief opportunity to discuss my work with her and she shared a bit about the Jewish-themed dances she had choreographed over the years of which I was not aware.⁷³ I also observed a class she was teaching in her storied mountain home studio. Since I had taken numerous workshops with her over the years, it was refreshing to be an observer of her class this time. As I sat there watching her guide people breathing, sighing, and rolling on the floor, I sensed that I was part of a lineage that led back to her; that my work could only be happening due to her great influence on the dance world. The conversations with Corey, Naomi and Anna led to deeper reflections on what I was envisioning. These were documented in journals and commented on below.

Then, upon returning home my husband, after a lengthy process, succeeded in becoming a United States citizen. Listening to declarations by US immigration officials on the day of his naturalization in a room filled with people from all over the world who were seeking a better life in America caused me to think about what it was like for my own ancestors to go through a similar process some hundred years ago. This really moved me.

Virtual Fieldwork ‘Trip’ #1

One could say that the internet of genealogy websites became a fieldwork site. Early on I started using Ancestry.com. As a complete novice, I did not approach my searches in any methodical way. All was pretty haphazard. What was interesting was that despite my believing I did not know anything about my lineage, I discovered I actually knew something: childhood addresses of my parents, names of my grandmother’s siblings, names of her parents, and because of an heirloom wedding photo, I knew the date they got married. And these tiny somethings were all I needed to start digging through online records. I had already started doing what someone on a Jewish genealogy Facebook

⁷² <https://www.annahalprin.org/>

⁷³ <https://experiments.californiahistoricalsociety.org/anna-halprin-jews-are-a-dancing-people/>

group suggested, “you need to work backwards from yourself and document each generation” (PC on Facebook, 2021), although I started with my grandparent’s generation and can’t say I documented findings in any systematic way.⁷⁴ I started with trying to find my great grandparents Hyman and Rose Levin as I knew their marriage date. Rose was Shluva’s daughter. I also searched census reports. Even then it was challenging. I figured documentation in those days (late 1800s-early 1900s) preferenced males, so I did a lot of searches for my great grandfather, Hyman. But much to my dismay, how many ‘Hyman Levin’s’ there were (and tons of derivations of the name) that immigrated to America in the late 1800s! I tried his wife, Rose Greenfield. But again, how many Rose/Rosie/Rochel Greenfield/Grinfeld, Grunvelt-s there were! My question to myself, or anyone else I enlisted through Facebook who found a tidbit of information was, “how do I know these people are ‘my people?’”

It was all pretty overwhelming and I spent a lot of fascinating late nights running down rabbit holes that often led to nowhere definitive. My various searches over the years became a blur so it is hard to track what led to what and when. But there were a few significant moments that stood out where actual with-certainty findings emerged. I’ll never forget when I came across the 1905 New York State Census. My heart leapt. There, in front of my eyes, was my family! I knew without a doubt. Even though the last name listed was Levine, it was the conglomerate of household member names that were the clue. In addition to Rosie and Herman Levine, there were the kids: Leo, Theodore, Pauline (my grandmother Pearl), and Esther (another sister Julie had not been born yet). I knew because I had remembered my grandmother’s original name, birthyear, and her siblings’ names. I dug deeper to find more censuses (see 1910 example, Fig. 14), and then, there on the 1900 census was an address listed, 1411 Madison Avenue. I looked it up to discover that was not far from the address listed on the back of the Shluva photo – in the Upper East Side of Manhattan (see Fig. 15).

⁷⁴ I since learned there are systematized ways to conduct and document genealogy searches, including software programs and the genealogy websites themselves, but I did not feel I had the time to learn or buy into them.

I invited a couple first cousins, one who I had not seen in 30 years, to accompany me to Washington Cemetery in Brooklyn where I had ascertained a map of Rose and Hyman's burial plots. This Jewish cemetery was packed and enormous taking up what appeared to be five entire city blocks.⁷⁵ Even the office staff who provided some guidance said, 'good luck finding it', meaning, that despite the map, things were not well marked out there. On this frosty, windy winter's day, we traipsed around the burial plots first to find the *landsmanshaft* (burial society)⁷⁶ they rested in, then their specific gravesite. We time traveled as we tripped over fallen tombstones from the early 1800s and grass-covered mounds possibly even earlier. We called out clues to each other as we were dividing and conquering the space. Eventually, after nearly an hour, my cousin Robin found it. There they lay, side by side sharing one headstone. My great grandfather Hyman, having died in 1941, my great grandmother Rose, in 1949. I walked around the *landsmanshaft* and noticed Hyman's parents down the row, known here as Jacob and Etta Annie Levine. I also noticed, Theodore, my grandmother's brother who I recalled her telling us had died young. What I had not known, was that he took his own life jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. That story, for another day. My wanderings and wonderings about other ancestors buried here – a dance project for another time.

Later that day, I interviewed my cousins while snacking at an Italian restaurant. I wanted to hear any knowledge or memories they had about our shared grandmother's side and to listen to their stories of what it was like growing up Jewish. Some of their stories became 'my stories' in a couple of the narrated text within a few scenes.

Next day I set off to Tribeca to visit the New York City Municipal Archives and the Bureau of Vital Statistics (BVS) to see if I could find any more clues. Apart from wanting to ascertain Rose's death certificate, I'm not exactly sure what I was looking for. More clear arrival dates? Where they had lived. What they did for a living?

⁷⁵ Washington Cemetery sits on 100 acres engulfing 200,000 burials plots. For more information on its interesting history see: <https://nycemetery.wordpress.com/2016/04/13/washington-cemetery/>.

⁷⁶ According to the Jewish Genealogical Society, "A *landsmanshaft* is an organization formed by people from the same town, shtetl, or region of Eastern Europe. One of its main purposes was social, to enable immigrants to associate with people they knew in the Old Country and to make them feel more at home in their new environment. ... Many synagogues were created by Jews from one town, e.g. Congregation Anshei ("people of") _____. From the late 19th through most of the 20th centuries, Jews joined *landsmanshaftn* and *anshei* synagogues also because these societies provided burial benefits at one or more cemetery plots. This was an alternative to purchasing expensive individual plots. Each *landsmanshaft* would have a *chevra kadisha* (burial society) whose responsibility was to purchase and maintain these grave sites" (<https://jgsny.org/searchable-databases/burial-society-databases/burial-society-faq#landsmanshaft> Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Ultimately, anything that would point me in the direction of Shluva. At the BVS, I came armed to prove my lineage with my collection of three generations of birth and death certificates. At the Municipal Archives, my journal notes reveal:

Spent hours scanning through reels of microfiche. Searching for family whereabouts on rickety old squeaky microfilm machines. The marble swathed building with tiles and ceiling murals is exquisite, Even the bathrooms amazing, built by that corrupt NYC mayor who had ties to the mafia (so I was told by a passing attorney going into the surrogate circuit court).

Most exciting was locating the original marriage certificate of my great grandmother (1895) which led me to learn that Shluva's real name was Sarah Glazier. ... Other interesting findings but still trying to connect the dots. So much clouded in erased, lost, inconsistent, impossible-to-read handwritten records.... Not to mention, do you know how many Jacobs, Hymans, Roses and Sarah's there were? Levins and Greenfields and and Was it Greenfield, Greenfeld, Grunveld, Levine, Levin... then....And this is only dealing with my paternal grandmothers maternal line!!! Still so many fragments, but I can say that I am a 3rd generation New Yorker even if I myself only lived there briefly and migrated West (journal 18 January 2020).

My final day, I took the ferry to revisit the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration. As we glided past Lady Liberty, I thought to myself, 'how did they feel, what were their thoughts as they entered New York Harbor and first saw her after what must have been a grueling journey?'⁷⁷

I went through the museum exhibition halls studying the photos and displayed paraphernalia. I read the informative placards stopping to think at the topics posed: 'All journeys begin by leaving one place to venture to another,' 'Why People Left,' 'Arriving at Port,' 'What was the Moment of Arrival Like?' 'Connecting Threads,' 'How Did People Adapt to a New Land – And to Each Other?' (New York, Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration, n.d.). I ate the Immigrant Menu at the café pondering my family's trajectory, imagining their experiences. I spent a bit of time trying to find boat manifests of anyone; I purchased books and genealogical mapping tools in the gift shop. This visit gave me a more rounded picture of what Shluva's journey might have

⁷⁷ I later learned that it would have been unlikely that either Shluva or Rose saw the Statue of Liberty since to my understanding they entered before the statue arrived in New York Harbor (1885).

been like. It confirmed why she left and what likely happened when she arrived. The visit boosted already percolating idea of props, costumes and stories I could interweave into what I had started creating. Many of the photos I took on this three-day New York trip, along with videos and audio-recordings appeared in the film dance *Track, Trace, Erased*. The insights gained illuminated other stories I told in the live performance.

Tracing my family history was giving me an opening into the world – at least a different part of it that I had not known before. Before getting back on the train home, I knew I HAD to eat some Jewish food. There was something about eating the food Shluva likely ate, or some of the food of my childhood felt important to me. In my journal, I wrote:

Then after all of this I needed some good (unhealthy) Jewish food!! so ended up at Ben's Kosher Deli for matzoh ball soup, corned beef on rye w sour pickles and coleslaw. Took a knish for the road. I easily could have spent another week here. Just scratched the surface. Still many mysteries but certainly much fodder to transpose into choreographic form. After all, it's more about my journey of trying to find their (erased) journey than anything (journal 18 January 2020).

I go into this detail because it demonstrates the twisty paths of detective work that one must pursue to find out 'where they came from' and 'who my people are.' I'm sure, no doubt, I could have been more efficient had I received some genealogy training.

Virtual Fieldwork 'Trip' #2

Speaking of genealogy training...there are some real genealogy nurds out there! As the pandemic railed on, it gave me more time to experiment creatively but also to do additional genealogy research. But I felt at an impasse. My ultimate goal was to 'find' Shluva – whatever that meant, and I had found a few factoids, but it still did not satisfy me. There was a gnawing desire to want to know the exact town she came from but I didn't know how. Somewhere along the way, I discovered a Facebook group devoted to Jewish genealogy (in fact several). People were posting photos and questions. So, late at night on the 9th of June (2022), I posted the original Shluva photo with some questions on the *Tracing the Tribe Jewish Genealogy Facebook Group*.⁷⁸ Then I went to bed:

⁷⁸ *Tracing the Tribe - Jewish Genealogy on Facebook*. [Facebook] 10 June. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tracingthetribel/permalink/10159355758540747> (accessed: 15 June 2021).



Figure 15: Shluva photo front and back.

I'm at a dead end trying to find my grandmother's grandmother "Shluva Greenfield". This is her with my grandmother's handwriting on the backside. I've been able to trace info about her daughter, Rose (Rosie Greenfield) Levin, and even visited Rose's (my g-grandmother) grave in Brooklyn. I found Rose's death certificate indicating her mother's name was Sarah ("Shluva" being a nickname?). I got Rose's marriage certificate at the NYC municipal archives where I learned Shluva's maiden name was Glazier and confirming her first name as Sarah. Although looking at online records the name is sometimes listed as Dajrah Glazier (which may be a misreading of the handwriting on the marriage certificate). Based on my grandmother's photo we know that Shluva was in NYC in 1907 but I can't find any more information about her. When did she come over from Russia? With her daughter Rose or after? Did she come for a visit or to immigrate? Did she come from Russia or a part of Russian Empire that might be now considered a distinct country? Rose and her husband Hyman Levin are buried in a section of the cemetery indicating Congregation Agudath Bnei Koidesh Anshe Krohz, which I learned was associated with a Lithuanian Landsmanshaft. Does that mean they came from Lithuania or were they just allied with this congregation once immigrating to NYC? So many unanswered questions? Where would you go from here? Thank you.

By the time I woke up, it's as if I hit the jackpot. I had a treasure trove of information about Shluva and her family posted by highly-skilled genealogy researchers! During our three-day back and forth communications as I asked more

questions to posted answers, information poured in. When a new document was posted, I would often ask: “how do you know this was really her?” Or, “how do I know these people are ‘my people?’” They would respond with comments like:

This is the only one with Glazer parents. Is she the right age from the information you have? (PC on Facebook).

My head was spinning as more info and advise was posted:

Follow people to their death, then look for obituaries and headstones...both provide valuable information. Make liberal use of wildcards in your searches, especially for the earlier period. You're being cautious about assuming a matching name = the right person, that's good practice. But it has to be tempered by the fact that people frequently 'tried on' a variety of given and surnames until they settled on one. Birth dates weren't important to our ancestors so you'll find those vary a good deal...so much so that when you have two documents separated by time but with the same birthdate, it's a good bet it's the same person even if the name is a bit different. Know that there was no correct spelling, names and places were spelled phonetically by the person doing the writing...who was impacted by their own linguistic background. If you get stuck or find a record you're not sure of, put up a new post with details and links (SV on Facebook).

In questioning the boat manifest they found, one respondent said:

The process of Genealogy is using one piece of information as a key to unlock the next piece of information within a context. Everything we've posted is linked back to the notation on the photo. The only record that we can't be certain of is the manifest for Schlowe [Shluva] and Wulf [her son], that is where context comes in...that being the 100% (phonetic, there was no “correct” spelling) match of Shluva's somewhat unusual name, the total fit of the European name associated with William (which is linked back to the photo address), and the correct year. Furthermore, this manifest doesn't contain any additional information that may lead us down the wrong path so in my mind I view it as extremely likely though not proven. The other records and censuses are supported by other documents, there's no question in my mind (SV on Facebook).

Indeed, the information they were finding included the address “21 E. 104th St. borough of Manhattan,” and looking that up on Google maps, I had another heart-leaping moment when I saw that IS between Madison and Fifth Avenue, like my grandmother's handwriting indicated.

After this cascade of information, much of it recited in the film scene *Finding Shluva*, I eventually set out for another trip to New York. This time, with tripod in tow. I was on a mission to visit places Shluva had been and to dance at her gravesite. But first, a detour into film ... rather, my acceptance of using it as the media for my dance vision.

The Acceptance of Film

By June 2021, we were still deep into the pandemic. After a one-semester leave of absence from UL, I started to reconsider my reluctance to turn Perf. 1 into film. My previous film experiment Autumn 2020, creating a draft of *Known/Unknowns*, gave me insights and creative impetus to reimagine the ‘performance.’ Always running in the back of my mind had been, ‘how do I turn a 3-dimensional multisensory immersive dance event, into a 2-dimensional format?’ But once I began to surrender to film, I started to see physical spaces in a whole new way and consider possibilities for everyday movement and stylized dance phrases to be interlayered with visual image to tell my stories in ways I had not previously imagined. I discovered I could incorporate my ethnographic and genealogy documentation into the narratives in ways I could not do in live performance.

Physical Trip #3: Lower East Side, Queens, New York

18-21 August 2021

Another Amtrak train ride from Washington D.C. to New York. I went back to visit the NY Municipal Archives. As there was no one else there due to pandemic restrictions, I had the whole place to myself, and a kind, very skilled librarian who helped me. She showed me the original blueprints of the building that Shluva lived in. Later, she snuck me a copy of Shluva’s death certificate that contained more information, including her last address: 21 E. 104th Street, which is exactly between Madison and 5th Avenues as my grandmother’s handwriting indicated on the back of the Shluva photo (Fig. 15). Many of the genealogy documents and photos from my trip appeared in the film scene, *Track, Trace, Erased* (Fig. 16 shows some of these).



Figure 16: Genealogical artefacts discovered:
From top left clockwise: Shluva's death certificate, tenement building of Lower East Side NY, great-grandparents Hyman & Rose, a census report.

Next day was devoted to ‘finding’ Shluva. Subway to Queens, Uber to Mt. Zion Cemetery, another enormous historic Jewish Cemetery. The receptionist dug out original blueprints of the burial plots, noting that Sara was also known as ‘Sadie’. She gave me directions. I set out to follow. It took time.

Another awe-inspiring moment when I finally found them – my great-great grandparents Julius and Sara. I spent the afternoon filming, walking, dancing, pulling vines under the sun-peaking-through-clouds summer day. Sometimes I sat and pondered my ancestor’s presence. Needless to say, it was a deeply meaningful experience. It’s all documented in the next to the last film scene, *Finding Shluva*.

Next day (20 August), I went to the Lower East Side. I wanted to walk the neighborhood where, based on found evidence, Shluva and her daughter Rose walked. I wanted to know the type of lifestyle they as new immigrants might have lived. I took a few informative tours run by the Tenement Museum⁷⁹ on Orchard Street not far from the addresses on my documents. I walked the streets and photo documented (many of these photos appear in *Track, Trace, Erased*. Of course, I had to end the day with a visit to the famous Jewish eatery, Katz's Delicatessen,⁸⁰ a place that quite possibly my relatives ate at. “Coming to Katz’s is a throwback. It’s a snapshot in time. It’s being

⁷⁹ <https://www.tenement.org/about-us/>

⁸⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katz%27s_Delicatessen

connected to your parents, to your grandparents, to your great grandparents, to your great-great grandparents, cause they all came here” (Katz’s Delicatessen, n.d.).

Next day, I returned home with tons of photos and videos that took many months to process through. While I ask in that Shluva cemetery scene an unanswerable question, ‘what does it mean to find someone?,’ somehow knowing where my ancestors are buried is comforting.

I intended *Finding Shluva* to be the last film scene where I recite all the factoids I learned about her. But that gnawing feeling perpetuated. I did not feel ‘done,’ although I recognized, I probably never would feel done. Perf. 2 had long been finished. I kept beating up on myself ‘this really ought to be done by now!’ ...And then, a dream.

I was in a white dress, in a white room, gesturing and reciting the names of my lineage. But I still didn’t have the information. So back to Facebook I went.

Virtual Fieldwork ‘Trip’ #3

18 April 2023, a year after Perf. 2 was completed, I posted again on Facebook a photo (Fig. 17) and the following text:

I’m trying to find the town my great-great-grandmother ‘Slava’ came from for a final scene in an art film I’m finishing for my doctoral project. I had luck finding naturalization records for the other side of my family that pointed me to their towns (thanks to folks on this FB group), but I’m at a dead-end with this family member. Every time I look her or someone in her family up, i end up in circles because so many with same names and similar data but not quite....

This photo was taken in 1907. Her name in US was Sarah/Sadie Greenfield, died Aug 7, 1912. Arrived probably 1893 - Ellis Island. Her name on other documents appeared as Slowey, Slave, Dajrah, tombstone says ‘Slava’. Maiden name Glazer (Glaser, Glasser). Parents Benjamin and Pauline Glaser. Husband Julius Greenfield (Yehuda, Judda (tombstone: Yehuda Bar Levi) died 1903; they are buried together at Mt. Zion Cemetery in Queens in the landsmanshaft People of Zagar (which I understand does not necessarily mean that Sara/Slava came from Lithuania). They definitely had a daughter Rose (Rosie) Greenfield (Greenfelt, Grunfeld) who married Hyman Levin (i’ve looked him up too but how many Hyman/Herman Levin-s were there back then?!). Slava/Sara may also have had 2 sons William (Wulf) and Louis and possibly 2 other children in addition to Rose. How can I find her town? Even her

husband's town? Or daughter Rose's town. I'm lost in a genealogical rabbit hole if anyone has the brain/time/interest to help guide me. I would be grateful!⁸¹



Figure 17: Shluva photo (left); me dancing at her grave (right).

More information flooded in, including photos and links to a whole other layer of documents. These included additional boat manifests, the family relative that purchased the tickets for specific family members and the bank where they purchased it, passenger logs, naturalization cards, etc. While it was way too much for me to absorb at the time, I at least found what I was looking for. The last film scene, *Re-membering Me*, will speak for itself.

Music and Soundscape

As music played a big part in the works, I did a lot of research on Jewish music traditions including consulting with experts and taking a workshop on Klezmer music.⁸² I did not always use Jewish music from the time of Shluva's life, but each piece was

⁸¹ Some months later I posted the naturalization record of my maternal great grandfather to ascertain my other grandmother's lineage. This had town names listed on it too. Facebook proved helpful again.

⁸² Klezmer is the music of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. It is a syncretic music that synthesizes elements of musical styles from Ottoman, Balkan, Roma (Gypsy) and other European musical traditions, as well as religious Jewish music. It comes from the Yiddish words meaning vessel or instrument (*klei*) and song (*zimmer*). The highly ornamented rhythmic melodies played by the various instruments in a klezmer band (violin, clarinet, accordion, etc.) often overlap and echo each other. The music is often played at weddings and festivities and is quite upbeat, but there is also has more somber repertoire too. During a workshop with KlezCalifornia, Klezmer was described as Yiddish music. It "has a lot of directionality; [the melodies] slide and mesh into each other; it is architectural music, connecting rivers to our own heritage" (online workshop KlezCalifornia, 13 February 2022). For more information see: <https://yivo.org/Klezmer-Music-History-Memory>, <https://www.jmi.org.uk/about-us/music-genres/klezmer/>, <https://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/klezmer-music/>.

carefully chosen and many songs had some link to the culture or history of Jewish people in either melody or lyrics. Some music was based on traditional melodies, some songs were quite contemporary. One Jewish focus group attendee noted, “*I loved the music! Especially that it was so familiar, and so reimagined as well.*”

Sometimes, I was clear about a certain piece of music that I wanted to use because I fell in love it, such as *Oseh Shalom* in Scene 11 of the film, or *Shofar* in Scene 2 of the live. In listening to the music, in tandem with knowing the theme of the scene, I had to find the movement. Other times, I created the movement, or at least movement motifs ahead of time, and which then gave me a sense of the type of music I wanted. I describe the songs and my rationale for using each as they appear within the specific scenes described in Ch. 6.

The film also utilized a lot of environmental sounds, flowing rivers, whooshing winds, cawing and chirping birds, or the collective buzzing and clicking of cicadas. In dance ethnology we refer to this as ‘inconsequential sounds’ – sounds that provide ambience to a dance event. Contrasted to ‘consequential sounds,’ ones that directly impact a choreographic moment (such as a musical cue) or that direct a change of action in a dance or event.

Sometimes I was very aware of the inconsequential sounds, particularly in the film which was mostly recorded outdoors. Then I played with them in my movement. Other times in looking at raw video footage, I heard sounds that I had not been aware were there. Many times, rather than being a distraction, I chose not to cut out those sounds as they provided another layer of the telling of the story. For example, the strong sound of wind as I struggled to find the old graves of my ancestors.

Mind-mapping

Mind-mapping was a core creative tool. A mind map is a nonlinear visual way to capture various ideas related to a central theme and to see the connections between them. It is a way to chart knowledge, ideas, and a creative tool I often used to eventually generate movement from. Putting ideas onto paper in a loose visual map helped me to understand core ideas that lived elusively within an intuitive realm. Words on the map became poems, poetic phrases became movement. My mind maps provided a way for me to visually see ideas and their potential relationships, before shaping them into kinetic, aural, and visual form. I created mind-maps of the project’s core ideas and

I would often start a new choreography or scene with a mind-map, particularly when feeling stuck. I used large pieces of paper and colored pencils or crayons to create these. (Fig. 18). For me, the mind-mapping process was a “separate yet dynamic interplay between [my] ‘tuition’ or rational mind ... and intuition [...the] invisible, difficult to communicate about, sometimes present, other times absent yet vital to guiding [my] creative process” (Bannerman 2006, p.14).

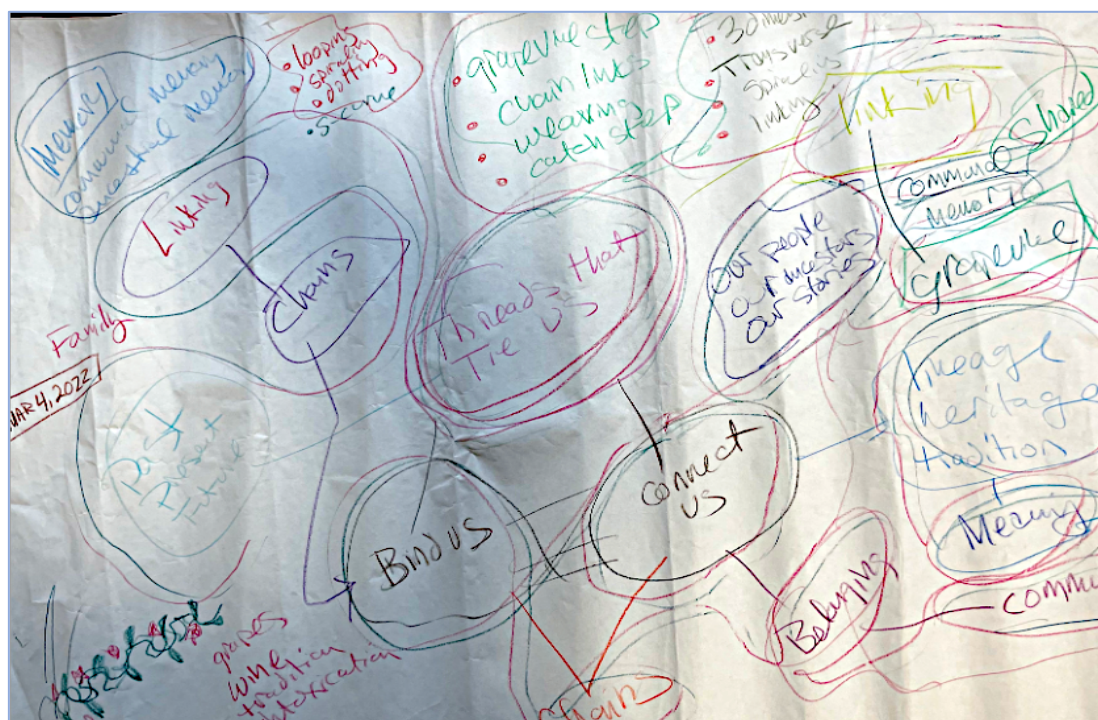


Figure 18: Mind-map sample, 4 March 2022.

Poetry, Letter Writing and Scripts

Although I do not think of myself as a poet, writing poems proved to be an important part of my conceptual and creative process. These poems sometimes came from mind-maps, free-writing, or out of sessions using the kinds of ‘Move-Write-Talk-Draw’ processes akin to what interdisciplinary artist Alys Longley shared in workshops at the Irish World Academy in 2019.⁸³ In my own teaching, I often employed alternating between writing, drawing, moving and talking (in different orders each time depending on the task). Being reintroduced to these ideas in guest artist workshops, I began to embrace them into my choreographic practice.

⁸³ Some examples of Longley’s work on studio-initiated writing are: <https://www.mappingporousborders.com/the-foreign-language-of-motion>, <https://www.mappingporousborders.com/mistranslation-laboratory>, or <https://online.flipbuilder.com/qmiq/fsdu/>

Several scenes included imaginary poetic letters I wrote and read aloud to Shluva asking about what her life was like. One of the first ‘Dear Shluva’ letters evolved out of a workshop with Alys (Fig. 19). Another event that inspired me to develop this letter writing sharing in performance, was a show I attended September 2019. *A Letter to My Ex - The Musical* by Be Steadwell was described as “a collage of music, movement and film, narrating one character’s journey through the ups and downs of love.”⁸⁴ The primary performer, Be, sat in a desk or moved through the stage space reading a series of letters to an ex-lover. Each letter was coupled with a song written by Be and sung by her or with other performers who also danced changing formations throughout the stage space. This performance stimulated a lot of ideas and I believe was the impetus behind the structure of interweaving sitting at a desk letter reading, poems, dance and music.

These poems and letters kept evolving. One was published within an article I wrote about my project for the Fall 2019 issue of *AJS Perspectives*, titled, *Ode to Shluva*.⁸⁵ This was an extension of the one started in my journal (Fig. 19) and later served as the basis for the script in the live dance *Letters to My Great-great Grandmother*. Others, such as those narrated in the live dances *Marked* and *Erased*, were derived from my ethnographic and autoethnographic research (see App. IV).

I created several other scripts for the voiceover narration I recorded for the film. Some were poems, others were simply lists of facts I discovered during my research. Making these scripts was a bit challenging as I had to determine which of the many genealogical facts I wanted to include in a particular scene and how to order them in an artistic way. I wrote these out and recorded myself many times to find the right inflection and structure. Examples of these more matter-of-fact scripts appear in the film scenes: *Finding Shluva* and *Re-membering Me*.

Then there were the stories. Most of the ones I told were written scripts I recited whereas stories told by family relatives were impromptu answers to recorded interviews.

⁸⁴ Performed at Joe’s Movement Emporium in Maryland, September 2019 www.joesmovement.org/listofevents/2019/2/14/a-letter-to-my-ex-the-musical (accessed 14 October 2022).

⁸⁵ See Association for Jewish Studies, *AJS Perspectives*: https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/docs/default-source/ajs-perspectives/body/ajs-perspectives-body-phillips.pdf?sfvrsn=69739606_2

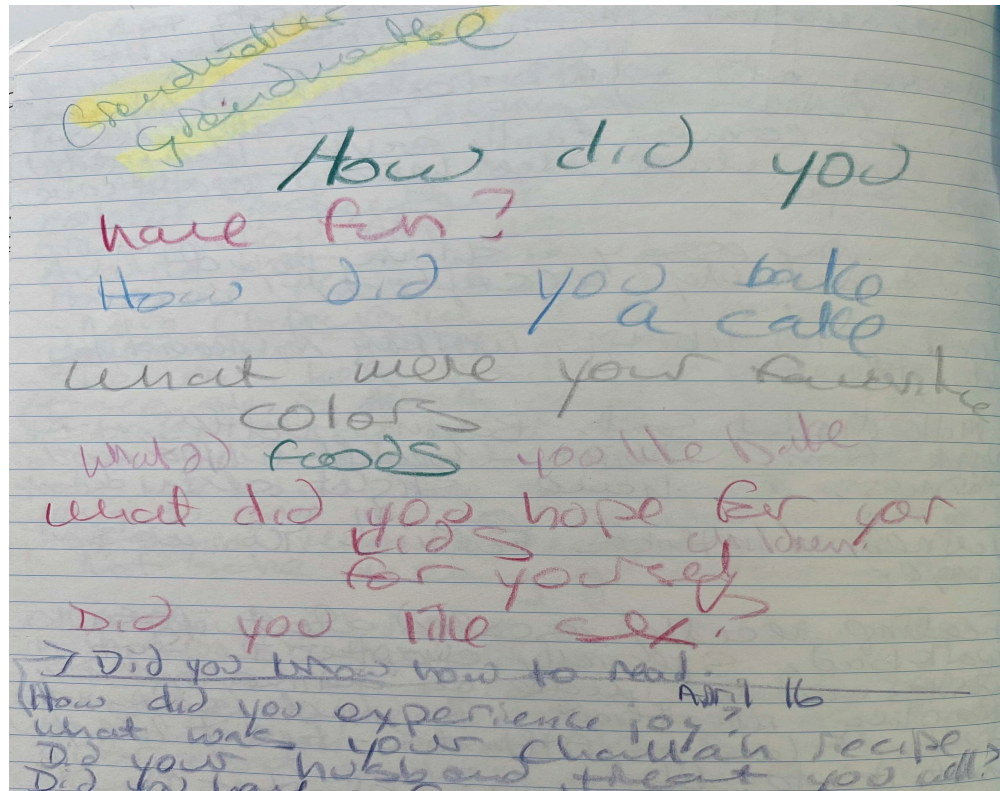


Figure 19: First 'Dear Shluva' letter; journal 15-16 April 2019.

Storyboarding

From the outset, making storyboards became a useful method of documentation. Moreover, the process of making them became a significant part of my creative practice. As a visual learner with neurodivergent challenges, the storyboards helped me process and structure the multi-layers of ideas floating through my head. Sometimes I drew storyboards in colored pencils on big sheets of paper, but my go-to method ended up being PowerPoint. The PowerPoints provided a visual scaffolding for the many converging ideas cycling through me as I worked to turn the genealogical, autoethnographic, and ethnographic research into choreographic, textual, and filmic form. Initially, each slide correlated to a site and included text related to the essence of what I envisioned in that site (see App. I).

The storyboards also became a way to include various levels of structure. PowerPoint's capacity to layer text, visual image, even sound and video allowed me to include different kinds of arts practice data. I did not realize at the time of making the PowerPoints that I was developing skills which would later prove useful in the filmmaking process. Along with journal and poetry writing, drawing, mind-mapping, photographing, and videorecording, the storyboards were part of my creative process archive. Like choreographer Sharon Mansur's Creative Process Books (CPB) described

in the documentation practices section above,⁸⁶ the storyboards were a part of my ‘living archive’ to hold my images, writings, sketches, research notes, rehearsal clips, conversation excerpts, readings, quotes, questions, dreams, answers, inspirations, etcetera. While I did not contain them in one book or portfolio, they nonetheless comprise my Shluva Project oeuvre.

I had most of the structure mapped for the first version of Shluva when the pandemic hit. Then, when I had to transmute the ideas into new forms – filmic and stage-based, the storyboards proved immensely helpful in that process. They also were a way for me to communicate with tutors and collaborators who I worked with when developing the material. The visual aspect supported the verbal description of my ideas when speaking to my dramaturgy coach, choreography tutors and video editor collaborator.

Dramaturgy

I began working with Naomi Newman on the dramaturgy of *Shlvua* January 2020. I believed Naomi could help me clarify various themes and parse out the structure I was developing. I thought she might also help me consider appropriate choices for text, music, and props. As an actively working octogenarian actor engrossed in Jewish-themed theatre, Naomi had a wealth of knowledge and experience.

The goal of our work together was to develop the dramaturgical arc (of the original *Shluva* version). The objective was to have a series of engagements to hone emerging themes. I wanted to gain better understandings of the sections within the work, at least conceptually, so that I could have an anchor when working in the studio as I continued discovering the movement vocabulary and devising choreographic structures. While I never got to perform the originally conceived multi-sited immersive version of *Shluva*, the material I generated through our tutoring sessions ended up extending into the final versions of the film and theatre performance.

Since my doctoral work interweaves ethnochoreological methods with contemporary dance choreographic practice, I wanted to draw from the historical and contextual data I had been researching to create an artistic work rather than an ethnographic depiction of performed culture. I was striving to craft a narrative arc through gesture, sound, dance, text, imagery, and audience activities. I wanted to create a nonlinear ‘storyline’ using the kind of fragmentation in the way family stories are passed down, or how memories

⁸⁶ See <https://www.mansurdance.com/>

may be forgotten then portions remembered, or old family photos lost then found. Fragmentation is also technique used in much modern art, including dance. It is a way to depict something from multiple points of view or to magnify certain areas.

Learning Sessions and Documentation

The learning sessions with Naomi happened through a series of online video conferences – her in California, me in Ireland – and in-between email conversations passing documents back and forth. Sometimes Naomi would give me homework that I would send back to her often accompanied by storyboards for her to see the spaces I described, hear musical ideas, and get a sense of overall concepts. She would then return comments and questions, which, after additional practice and research, I would use to update the storyboards, and return back to her [see storyboard sample, App. I]. I documented these encounters through notetaking during our online meetings, archiving email conversations, journaling, and more storyboarding.

The sequencing of sessions went from wide-angle overviews to focusing on specific parts, sometimes having to refocus in between, then widening out again. I outline this sequencing process, illustrating it with select session notes or email communications.

Early Steps

Initially Naomi asked me to provide her four kinds of information. These are listed below with my answers:

1. NAOMI: “Whatever texts you’ve written, played with, or imagined.”
ANSWER: *See attached storyboard. Also see AJS Perspectives article with poem [published in 2019]: <https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/ajs-perspectives/the-body-issue/the-shluva-project-my-grandmother-s-grandmother-the-embodiment-of-a-new-work-of-choreographic-research>*
2. NAOMI: “Descriptions of spaces you’ll be working in and what you imagine happening or exploring in each.” [Answer presented in Storyboard, see App. 1.]
3. NAOMI: “A paragraph about what you’re aching to express in *The Shluva Project*?”
ANSWER: *I am wanting to express some of my journey to understand parts of myself that have long felt othered, shamed, at odds, on the outside. Feeling like I was ‘carrying’ something that was a part of me, but not me. A kind of intergenerational trauma (or pain) of being othered, trauma of being erased, trauma of trying to be someone else to fit in. I felt that I needed to return to my lineage that I knew so little about to understand this. Maybe Shluva is a metaphor*

for me. Or, my search to find her is. Through the symbol of her, I am trying to understand my shame. Then I can transform it.

4. NAOMI: “A paragraph about how this exploration connects to our current world challenges.”

ANSWER: The overall theme relates to discrimination, being exiled, loss of identity and rights taken away. How certain populations were ‘othered’ or objectified or even erased by dominant groups (out of fear). This is more commonly recognized about Black, First Nation, or Colonized people but it is often forgotten about Jewish (and Irish) people. We (those othered) can lose our identity by covering up and trying/needing to fit in to a dominant group in order to survive. But we in turn also do the othering. We distance ourselves from people who are different or have different beliefs than us. We divide humanity. I’m using my own life and my search to find my (lost) identity as part of the Eastern European Jewish Diaspora as the example. And question what it is that I carry from my ancestors having been exiled, discriminated against, or erased. The stories I heard which symbolized anti-Semitism; the feelings of shame or fear I felt. These themes are very much alive in our world challenges, include how we treat Mother Earth. The discrimination, divisiveness, loss of rights (and human dignity) seem to be picking up steam again.

Email communications, 19-20 February 2020

When we ‘met’ online we initially focused on the overall picture of the work, along with logistical considerations. Naomi asked where each section was happening, length I anticipated in each space, size, and how I envisioned the audience moving from space to space. We then delved into specific sections. Early sessions focused on the pre-theatre spaces, Space 1 (spiral staircase), Space 2 (viewing rooms onto patio), Space 3 (passage through hallways to just outside Theatre 1 door). We worked to clarify what each space was thematically about, the type of content in each, and what I wanted the audience to experience. We also explored how they connected to each other and ‘set the stage’ for what was to come – the core of the work that was to take place inside the theatre. Although I never performed in those spaces due to the lockdown, getting that clarity allowed me to transpose the ideas more easily to new spaces. Excerpted from my meeting notes are captured below:

“Space 1, 2 and 3 should be where there are hints very brief of what may unfold later. ...like introducing what the piece may be about. It shouldn’t just be a no place

world. Shorten time in the spaces. By the time I've schlepped⁸⁷ people around through the different spaces, they need to have a hint of the world they are going to enter. The three spaces are very important in creating the world that I'm going to, so that when I'm in the theatre it will be much easier to choose what I want to do there. I'm focusing on othering, but [right now] it's very unspecific" (28 February 2020).

Sometimes Naomi made profound statements that directly affected the work but that also had deep personal meaning. She picked up on archetypal family stories I shared relating them to larger historical or social themes. For example, she connected the story of my great-great-grandfather Meyer Fival (who became Maxwell Phillips) walking from Poland to England and later sailing to America, to the Passover story of the Jews exodus from Egypt. Although this story never made it into any of the final versions, it nonetheless highlighted for me an archetypal journey from bondage to freedom that many individuals and communities have experienced. This concept was included in the film scene, *Passover Story*. Naomi also reminded me of enslaved African American Spirituals, particularly Go Down Moses, which I started working with in the studio and ultimately ended up using in the film scene, *Ancestor Vines*.

Naomi and I share the same cultural heritage but of different immigrant generations.⁸⁸ Oftentimes her wise insights helped me make connections to ideas I had been grappling with, while simultaneously propelling me to understand why I responded the way I did to my Jewish heritage. Once when working on the Spiral staircase section, I described to her how I conceived this as a place where the audience would step into an *other* world and not know what the rules were. Naomi shot back, "Yes, but it is critical that the audience knows that they are entering into a Jewish world. It might be a generic Jewish world, but they need to know this" (personal communication 28 February 2020). I had already been thinking about a shift in sensory experience as I believe that culture shock is really about the senses being bombarded with unfamiliar sights, scents, sounds, tastes and tactility. I intended to create a strange world in which Shluva would be heard but not seen. I wanted to create percussive sounds with my body banging on the fixed features of the spiral staircase and vocalizing a deconstructed Jewish chant, but I had not put the notion of a 'Jewish world' together.

⁸⁷ From the Yiddish word *schlep* meaning 'to haul, carry, move', used in common parlance amongst Jews.

⁸⁸ Naomi is first generation Eastern European Jewish American. Her mother, from Lithuania, arrived in the U.S. in 1924. I am third generation, my family came from what is current day Lithuania, Ukraine, and I believe Poland, but arrived in the late 1800s.

When transposing these concepts to the film, I tried to create a sense of otherworldliness by enacting Shluva scurrying through a dark forest while viewers hear the hum of a *niggun* – a Jewish religious tune often sung using mnemonic sounds instead of formal lyrics.^{89, 90} This ended up being the opening of the film’s first scene, *Dusk Forest*.

Middle Steps

Later Naomi and I focused on what would happen in the theatre – the core of the original performance. We talked through a lot of ideas, she guided me by asking questions, making insightful comments, and sharing knowledge about her professional work and her own Jewish family history. During one poignant conversation I talked to her about the theme of ‘erased family lineage.’ I also described my idea of using chalk to draw my family tree on the stage floor that would then become erased as I continued to dance over it. She asked, ‘what are all the ways this erasure happened?’ I answered spontaneously, and later did a free-write that I put onto a storyboard noted below:

- Towns abandoned.
- Villages destroyed.And along with it, public records.
- Names changed to fit in.
- Data skewed because immigration officers or census takers wrote vaguely.
- Left off. Forgotten.
- Hiding identity.
- My own Lack of interest.
- Wanted nothing to do with family. Running the other way.
- Relatives forgetting.
- Death, divorce, remarriage.
- Lack of continuity from one generation to next.
- People not talking to each other.

This inquiry eventually turned into a poem that I narrated during the piece, *Erased*.

I questioned whether to include any kathak or flamenco dance passages in the performance as these in some ways represented my erasing of my own culture by journeying into cultures of others. I had long reflected on what motivated me to go into

⁸⁹ *Niggun* are catchy tunes easy to sing. I already grew up hearing them but never knew the name of the genre. Furthermore, Shluva would have heard or sung these too.

⁹⁰ I learned about *niggun* from IWAMD Tower and Logos seminars on *Jewish Cantillation* given by speaker/cantor Yanky Flachler, 11-12 March 2020, Irish World Academy.

Indian and Spanish cultures in the first place via their dance and music forms. There were many reasons, but it wasn't until a conversation with Naomi that I understood something deeper related to my heritage. I recount her words from my session notes:

I don't have my ancestry. It was taken from us, we don't have it, we long for it. I'm working with chalk. Trying to make a line and it goes nowhere. I'm trying to make the line, and I give up...and then I look through the papers....

Erasing.

Beats: India, flamenco, the beat of my running away from the unknown and darkness [that I experienced], a beat of Indian dancing, followed by the flamenco, worlds/cultures I've tried on. Very important.

How the Jewish artist's psyche journeyed through other cultures because we were cut off from our ancestry. Many Jews went into Black culture, American folk, Buddhism, I (Miriam) first went into American Indian [later Hinduism, Sufism, East Indian dance and Gypsy flamenco.] The archetypal artist psyche wanting to go back. I was not satisfied with the bland roots that I inherited from my parents/ immediate family. I'm wanting to go back to my ancestral roots. That is part of my journey. That is part of what I want to tell. It can so beautifully be told through dance (10 April 2020).

The mining of my 'Jewish artist psyche' eventually ended up manifesting in the film scene titled, *I Went East*, where I interwove stories with dances in kathak-like, flamenco, and contemporary dance styles.

As Naomi and I continued to work, we passed back and forth different scenarios of what would happen in the theatre. These could be in the form of fragments of phrases that then became titles for subsections; the storyboards and subsection titles were revised, reprocessed. This is how things evolved ... until the pandemic, and then, months later, they became repurposed.

***Body as Archive*⁹¹**

In addition to being a visual learner, I am also a kinaesthetic learner. While I created some choreography and structural mapping before my sessions with Naomi began, I

⁹¹ The perception of performance, including dance, being an archive conveying a repertoire of embodied memory was introduced by Diana Taylor in *The archive and the repertoire performing cultural memory in the Americas* (2003). André Lepecki elaborates on notions of 'the body as archive' where history is inscribed in dancers' bodies, or how a "body becomes the living archive of what, one day, will come back around—as it passes away. Dance" (Lepecki 2010 p.34).

knew that additional movement material would evolve in tandem with our work. Our sessions often ended with questions where the answers would come through movement investigation. It was a beautiful way to be reminded of the importance of movement research – what can only come from embodied kinaesthetic explorations. Our sessions got derailed at a critical juncture in the creative process. Despite that, just as a hard drive holds the backup data for a broken computer, the repertoire of movement material I had generated up to that point was stored in the archive of my body. The concepts, images and texts were stored in the storyboards. They contained additional valuable information pertaining to what I was intending to explore further in movement as soon as the world opened up again.

Choreographic Research – Pre-Pandemic

As a precursor to developing the choreography for *Shluva*, I did an elective in contemporary dance Spring 2019 under the direction of my supervisor Dr. Jenny Roche. Here I engaged in regular contemporary dance classes and guest artist workshops on creative process at the Irish World Academy. This series of encounters supported me in re-membering moving my body in various other ways as contrasted with the structured, predominately vertical practices of flamenco and yoga I had been focused on just prior. The creative process sessions expanded my repertoire of ways of working.

When I began to focus directly on choreography for *The Shluva Project*, I did it initially through a tutorial with choreographers Colette Krogel and Matt Reeves, co-directors of *Orange Grove Dance* near my home in Maryland. I chose them because of their choreographic acumen and skill in creating high level multi-sited and multi-layered dance performance events. Also, because they were former MFA students who took my *Dance in a Global Context* course at the University of Maryland where I started developing the dance ethnology methods applied to choreographic process that my doctoral practice focuses on. I also had worked closely with them individually and collectively over three years on their various research and choreographic projects, which often mined personal experience or movement research to dance performance. I had also attended their many innovative productions outside of the university. It was important to me to be able to reference these experiences, to speak a common language when it came to recalling aspects of the dance fieldwork experience that I led them through, and in referencing choreographic strategies from their prior works.

The aim of these tutorial sessions was to dialogue on creative process for the development of choreography, receive feedback on movement vocabulary I was creating, and develop performance strategies particularly in relation to space, mobilizing audiences, and use of projections.

In addition to my work with Colette and Matt (C & M), I also had weekly studio sessions to work on choreographic tasks that we had discussed, develop movement ideas and to begin forming a structure. Select elements from these engagements are provided below, along with journal excerpts.

Curiously, I began the first ‘official’ tutorial session on Yom Kippur, considered the holiest day of the Jewish ritual cycle:

First Movement Rehearsal: Joe’s Movement Emporium, Mt Rainier, Maryland

Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement – Fasting Day

Noting how I’m starting the movement part of this process on the Holiest day of the Jewish ritual cycle. Just after our Jewish New Year – Rosh Hashana ten days ago. And I hope to perform this on the last day of Passover 16 April. These are two key pillar holidays and the ones, if I am going to celebrate anything Jewish, it is these, along with the minor holiday Hanukah. The beginning and end of the ritual cycle.

Was a bit confused with how to start but ended finding some music I liked, Ma Navu; played around with grapevine type steps and movements. Also thinking of words “track, trace, lineage.” Later, the words “family, broken, links” came to me.

(journal 9 October 2019)

During our first session, I gave C & M an overview of the choreographic concept. I shared a storyboard showing them ideas about the three spaces (which later became four) I planned to use and their meaning to me. We then worked with one choreographic task free-associating words and improvising movements as symbols of those words. The lists included words and poetic phrases. We broke them down into categories, which I worked with in subsequent studio sessions on my own.

Creation Lists

List 1:

track
trace
lineage
family
broken
links

List 2:

Lineage
Family Trees
Broken Family Trees
Brokenness
Searching
Hoping
Losing
Lost
Confused
Hope
Hoping
Leaving
Arriving
The unknown
Longing
Longing for home
Longing for those I left behind
Longing for a better life
Longing for a better future
Hoping to see people who left me
Erased
Displaced

List 3:

Lithuania
Poland
Russia
NY
Manhattan
Brooklyn
Philly
Atlantic City

List 4:

excluded
erased
being a stranger
jewish
being a jew
customs
being
being excluded
excluded, over there but included in family
story, stories

Sometime when I showed C & M phrases I had been exploring, they gave me feedback about ways to consider reshaping them. They served as choreographic sounding boards or mirrors. One example of this interchange is in the following phrase that eventually ended up being the core movement sequence in the dance called *Shofar - The Call* that appeared in the eventual live performance. Below are journal notes from this meeting:

Miriam Phrase 1 - (see Fig. 20)

- *Track, trace, lineage*

- *family, broken, link*

Order: 'track, trace, lineage' (taking time to expand into it) >> 'family' (standing w homolateral arm/leg)>>2nd thump leads into 'broken' (1-2-3) to floor. Melt into sitting 4th legs on left side, focus left.

Now 'family' sitting (contralateral arm/leg)>>'lineage' (sitting - expanding)>>'broken' (but more internal like a flower wilting to floor), >> 'link' (linking index fingers, legs/knees, several 'breaks' or rotations through spine).

- *Maybe broken is its own 10min exploration.*

- *Repeat family - Up High, 3 breaks to floor, A MOMENT TO SEE, gather family on floor.*

- *Use lineage family tree to get to broken (Internal Break, LIKE FLOWER WILTING)*

(journal 2 December 2019)



Figure 20: Sharing first rendition of track, trace, erase phrase with Colette, December 2019.

In another session we did some creative processes with space and props. As we moved, we tuned into surfaces and textures, sensations of sound and touch, then created movement phrases to and from each of the four spaces. While I have taught similar types of explorations, Colette's unique way helped me further sensitize to seeing and moving in spaces that became useful when working in different spaces as I crafted my performance.

For the prop exploration we each brought four objects. I initially thought I would use some old wooden-metal cooking utensils from my maternal grandmother in my piece, so I bought those along with a handful of colored pencils from my mother. We placed our objects in different types of formations within a 'frame' (the frames we used that day were yoga mats). Then we went around the room, as museum goers, looking at each person's 'architecture' and discussed what we saw and the thoughts, feelings, or metaphors they evoked in us. We repeated this exercise four different times with the same objects. The next phase was to bring this into movement. Although I did not end up using those props, the way of framing objects in an architectural design informed my way of framing the grapevines in various spaces and in utilizing other props.

In subsequent studio sessions, I continued to work on embodying the dance phrases of "track, trace, lineage, family, broken, link." I also played around with other ideas coming to me. Sometimes words would precede movement, other times it was the movement itself that guided me. In one of my individual sessions, it was as if my body, through movement, found the words, rather than what I had done previously, of words inspiring movement. Playing again with the song *Ma Navu*, I found my movements articulating a chain linking phrase within my body; I also noticed a lot of movements taking my hands to the womb. Some of this material ended up appearing in the dances *Shofar* and *Grapevine* from the live performance.

Because I was continuing the genealogical research alongside my movement research, during one studio session in California, I began working with names of geographical locations I believed my family came from or that I had known they once lived in: "Lithuania, Poland, Russia, NY, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Philly, Atlantic City."

In California I continued to map out storyboards, draw diagrams, and write about what these spaces meant to me or to the work. Although I did not get to perform in these spaces, getting this clarity helped me to transpose some of the ideas to other spaces I worked in for the film, or in how to structure space in the live theatre production. In subsequent studio sessions, I continued to write, draw, map, storyboard, dance, and listen. I felt that the first five-minute solo was starting to be born. Very raw and rough, but a structure was there – even if partly improvised. I shared this in-process solo with Matt and Colette when I returned home to Maryland. They made suggestions for areas to expand on, modify, or manipulate. These dance phrases stayed with me

over the years evolving into *Shofar – The Call*, that I was eventually able to perform in the new live version.

We also brainstormed about space number two, the outdoor patio where audience members watched through four different viewing rooms. We explored strategies to integrate audio recordings of family relatives telling their memories or music so that audience members would have different aural experiences while watching the same dance. I liked this idea of fragmentation, magnification, and different points of views. Although this idea was never realized, it exposed me to seeing different spatial angles and sounds in new ways that affected future creative work.

I returned to Ireland January 2020 to have the semester to finish choreographing individual dances and building the work, including crafting movement logistics to get the audience from one space to another. Working in the beautiful studios of the Irish World Academy offered me a place for consistent practice and uninterrupted focus. Little did I know a big interruption was on its way!

Choreographic Research Continues and the Importance of Space

Admitting defeat amidst the pandemic, I eventually returned home summer 2020. A year and a half later (now 2022), once I accepted using film and stopped trying to recreate what I had already created but in other spaces, a whole new story and structure began to emerge. In fact, the necessity to use different spaces and places promoted a new freedom. I continued to walk my neighborhood and look around; I gazed in my backyard and various spaces in and around my home. The world was still very much in lockdown but I knew I had to push on. I needed to have things be accessible and manageable. Available places, accessible costumes and props, dance movement that would be attainable given that I did not have spacious dance studios to prance and roll around in.

Since the inception of this project, I had already been thinking about the similarities between the Happenings of the 1960s postmodern dance movement and the dance event model considered in ethnochoreology (discussed in Ch. 4). I thought about how any space was up for grabs for the postmodern dance innovators, how pedestrian or everyday life movements were used in dances, as well as ordinary clothes. I thought of Yvonne Rainer's famous *No Manifesto* (1965), which included many *No-s*. Among them, "No to spectacle. No to virtuosity. No to transformations and magic and make-

believe. No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer” (Rainer 1965, p.178).

I also recalled once hearing the Zimbabwean Brooklyn-based choreographer, Nora Chipaumire,⁹² describing her choreographic process as one where she had to know the space she was dancing in before the movement could come. She often designed the space as part of her rehearsal process. In performances I have attended, she created very textured environments with layers of architectural structures and props. I resonated with Nora’s comment because I learned that I work in that way too. I noted that once I knew the space, the dance vocabulary and sequencing of choreography became clear.

The idea of the dance event model used in ethnochoreology is one where the whole context inclusive of the spatial environment and its structuring are considered as crucial to understanding cultural meaning. Using the dance event model as a choreographic tool, which I had already been doing in other ways, now enabled me to recontextualize my original ideas into new spaces. This affected how the overarching story of the film and the vignettes within would be told. Also, how they would be designed with multimedia and choreographed with movement vocabulary generated and structured within the spaces. Although some original ideas were transposed to new spaces (e.g., the Forrest replaced the Spiral Staircase), the movement vocabulary in the film became quite different than originally conceived. It became more ‘pedestrian’ with the exception of the kathak-inspired and flamenco dances depicted in *“I Went East”* that I was eventually able to do at the first openings of dance studios.

I improvised ideas in my tiny guest room, I filmed movement experiments in my basement with string lights covering underneath stairwells, using a tripod and recording on my phone, I tried out dancing with the vines at various times of day outside. I ran, I walked, I rolled, I tossed. Walking became a practice. As I walked, I started to see the environments I had often strolled through with new eyes and ears. All was now ‘up for grabs’ for me. One of my initial tenets in working on a dance film during a pandemic was, everything had to be accessible. That even meant using a different Shlupa suitcase and dress and props as most of mine were stuck in Ireland.

With the film, sometimes I collected a lot of video footage of spatial environments and of my moving or dancing within them. Then, through the editing process, crafted

⁹² See www.companychipaumire.com/.

the scene. Later when working on the live performance in the studio, I noted that I usually needed to decide on the spatial structure, where I was coming from and going to or the floor pathway before dance phrases became defined.

As the world started opening up, I was able return to Ireland⁹³ and access formal dance spaces so that I could now dive into the creative research of what became Perf. 2 (live). I continued utilizing various write-draw-move choreographic tools including, mind-mapping to clarify themes, subthemes and their relationships, creating movement metaphors from key words and dance phrases that symbolized ideas. I often video documented myself improvising or drafting a dance phrase, then made choices after reviewing the footage. Sometimes I recorded dance sequences I liked to help me remember them for the next rehearsal as they were still in the process of being formed. Prior pre-pandemic recordings helped me re-member dances that had been near done that I still wanted to use. What became my video archives coupled with my body archive (kinesthetic memory) helped me re-map, rechoreograph and develop new scenes.

⁹³ This was with the support of the Government of Ireland International Education Scholarship I received for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Chapter 6 – Crafting the Stories within the Story

This chapter provides synopses behind each performance project, followed by descriptions of movement, key characteristics, and the aim or motivation behind different scenes. Each scene has a significance within the larger story. Yet, each scene is its own story, is filled with stories, and had a story in its creation. Through descriptive and performative writing, I recount specialized aspects of the creative process that guided me as the scene evolved, including any challenges and opportunities I encountered when working to transmute research to embodied form. Concluding descriptions of each project is commentary from viewer/audience reactions taken from recorded post-performance discussions.

Since the conception of the original performance version was so well formed before the pandemic, the disruption gave me the opportunity to do a deeper dive into my family history and cull through my personal autobiography related to Jewishness. It also propelled me to vision different ways of telling stories with the mediums of film and dance-theatre. Because the progression of creating the various versions of *Shluva* was so disjointed, and because I continued the genealogical research in tandem, I was not really aware how much all these processes wove together. As mentioned, most of the scenes in the film were finished before the live performance but the film as a whole, was not completed until a year later. Furthermore, as new genealogical information was surfacing, I grappled with how to give it expression even while ‘the train had pulled out of the station’ so-to-speak. It was as if the works and the stories contained within them had lives of their own, a sacred timing of their own, a story to reveal their own stories.

The Film: The Journey to Find My Grandmother’s Grandmother

The Shluva Project: Part 1 – The Journey to Find My Grandmother’s Grandmother takes viewers through the autoethnographic and ethnographic journey I took to ‘find’ Shluva. Filmed in several different locations (listed in Fig. 26), the ‘journey’ in the title referred to two parallel journeys I was taking to create this work. One, the genealogical excursions to trace my ancestors via my quest to find Shluva. Two, my personal journey exploring my identity as a Jewish American woman disconnected from my lineage but having a sense that certain emotional attributes or challenges within me mapped to my ancestors’ experiences of persecution and marginalization.

The focus of the film is on the journey to ‘find’ Shluva through any hard evidence or shadowy traces of her life. The film is also an excursion through my imaginings of Shluva’s life scenes before she left the old country, to stories and questions related to my own identity, as well as fragments of memories of traditions I grew up with. I alternate between playing ‘Shluva’ in some scenes to ‘playing’ myself as I journey, question, remember. I include scenes depicting when I first ‘met’ Shluva in the photograph, to when I ‘found’ her by visiting her gravesite where I expound on the many factoids I learned about her during this research process. I was trying to map the cartography of her life with very fragmented data coming in. My own life stories as a Jewish American woman interrogating her sense of identity are interwoven throughout.

The Creative Process of Film and Film Editing

I had done so much work on the original multi-sited, multisensory, interactive live performance before the pandemic, that during the initial stages of devising the film, I asked myself many questions. How could I transpose one space to another that didn’t even resemble the original space? How could I turn what was intended as a three-dimensional multisensory experience into the two-dimensionality of film which utilizes only two senses? How might I be able to get a similar affect that I was intending in the original version using this whole new media that I was not accustomed to? Some scenes could loosely transfer to other spaces. Conversely, new spaces instigated new creative possibilities that I never could have dreamed of. Because of the richness of the resources I was discovering, the film ended up containing twelve scenes and being over an hour long.

The film is comprised of dance, gesture, music, sounds of the environment, narration, photographs and videos filmed in distinct physical spaces. Using the media of film editing allowed me to visually layer several elements together. Physical activity could be layered with archival photos or genealogical findings. I could collage images around filmed sequences alternating between foregrounding or backgrounding them in relationship to movement. I could use three tracks of sound: recorded interview, a song, and nature sounds of the environment to create ambience. The editing became a kind of choreography unto its own.

I did not have strong video editing skills when I started. Additionally, I felt I needed someone skilled in filming dance using a quality camera. I turned to my former colleague, Paul Jackson, to be my collaborator. Paul was our production director at

UMD specializing in lighting, sound, and videography. He also happened to be a neighbor and newly retired so had time to work with me. As Paul was also a dancer-choreographer-performer, he ended up not only being my ‘tech guy,’ but someone who I could share many creative conversations with. He has an acute sensitivity to sound, which mapped onto the visual and kinetic brilliantly. Collaborating with Paul allowed me to start seeing the unique possibilities that video editing had to offer; the power of film to tell stories.

Paul and I worked in a back-and-forth flow moving from conversations around scene conception to logistical considerations. We often started a new scene by me giving him my ideas about its meaning. Before filming on location, we had discussions about the movement, props, and often would make site visits ahead to scope out camera placement and picture framing. Then, he would film me, often in several takes or from different angles and later drop the raw footage into a shared cloud storage for me to peruse through. I added other media elements that I wanted to use in the scene.

Our shared cloud storage held all media that could potentially be used for each scene. This included Paul’s raw film footage, my fieldwork photographs and phone camera-shot videos, pdfs of genealogical records, and music or sound files, including my self-made audio recorded voice. I created a visual structure in our cloud space using folders where I could see the linear progression of the scenes. As I became clearer about what the scenes would be, I would update the order and names of the folders as they evolved and changed (Fig. 21). As media was coming in, I would dump it all into the appropriate folder. Then, I would go back and choose from the array. Sometimes there was so much material per scene, I became quite overwhelmed. So much so that in the end, I don’t exactly know how I made the choices I did. Sometimes it was trial and error, sometimes intuition, sometimes serendipity, oftentimes it was Paul’s keen eye, ear, and technical abilities. He has a deep understanding of the interface between dance, sound, light and the meaning that could change with the alteration of any of those elements. I didn’t always know where I was going, but as one scene was ending, two or three scenes away became clearer.

All Files > *Shluva Project			...	
Name ^	Updated	Size		
** FINAL CUTS	Oct 26, 2021 by Miriam Phillips	5 Files		
0. Opening Title Shots	Sep 27, 2021 by Miriam Phillips	12 Files		
1. Shluva Forest Scurry	Oct 6, 2021 by Paul Jackson	14 Files		
2. Vine Burden: rolling, pulling, tussling	Oct 12, 2021 by Miriam Phillips	44 Files		
3. Ancestor Vines	Oct 20, 2021 by Paul Jackson	22 Files		
4-Interlude	Oct 30, 2021 by Paul Jackson	16 Files		
5. Shluva Packing - to Leave	Oct 29, 2021 by Miriam Phillips	7 Files		
6. Water Ritual	Oct 26, 2021 by Paul Jackson	24 Files		
7. Bedroom Scene by Miriam	Oct 26, 2021 by Miriam Phillips	6 Files		
8. Studio Shoot 8.4.21	Oct 30, 2021 by Paul Jackson	31 Files		
9 & 10 Home Shoot-2 8.25.21	Today by Miriam Phillips	11 Files		
9-11. New York trips	Today by Miriam Phillips	231 Files		

Figure 21: Folder list of evolving film scenes shared with collaborator.

I made Excel spreadsheets per scene as a way to provide Paul my video segment and photo choices while showing how I saw them connected to the music, text or sound. The spreadsheets were also a way for me to align video to sound as I could include timestamps. Since each scene evolved in a different way, I did not have one consistent way of making these Excel spreadsheets. Many however, included column headings indicating:

Audio Story Name / Audio Story Length / NOTES / Name of Video File / Shot Time Code / Video Segment Time

Paul would then assemble a rough cut of the scene. Sometimes there were cumbersome trial and errors between us. Eventually we found a way of working that became more efficient. Because Paul taught me how to use Audacity⁹⁴ for sound editing and boost my iMovie editing skills, by the end, I could make specific video clips or sound edits myself and drop them in our shared folder. This would free Paul from having to decipher my notes to determine which section of a video or sound file to use. I would then look at Paul's rough cuts and note areas that I wanted to change. We would text or discuss adjustments. Paul often gave helpful artistic and practical

⁹⁴ Audacity is an open-source software used for recording and editing audio. It is available for free from: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>.

feedback about how the media could ‘read’ or any technical limitations. We went back and forth like this making several rough cuts per scene until I deemed it ‘done.’ Then that scene would be dropped into a folder, called Final Cuts (Fig. 21).

Paul and I worked this way for a while whether I was in Ireland (Fig. 22) or in his neighborhood. But the best was when I could come over to his work area and we could sit side by side, looking, listening, tweaking, conversing. The process was more efficient. When every scene was finally placed in the Final Cuts folder, Paul strung them together and we added scene titles. IWAMD videographer Lucy Dawson, also a dancer with a keen editing eye, helped us determine best practices to render the final version. She also created the title credits and rolling end credits over specific footage I had provided her. Lucy then transferred these credit files back to us so Paul could link them into the film using crossfades. I was grateful for the support of such artistically talented and technically skillful collaborators.

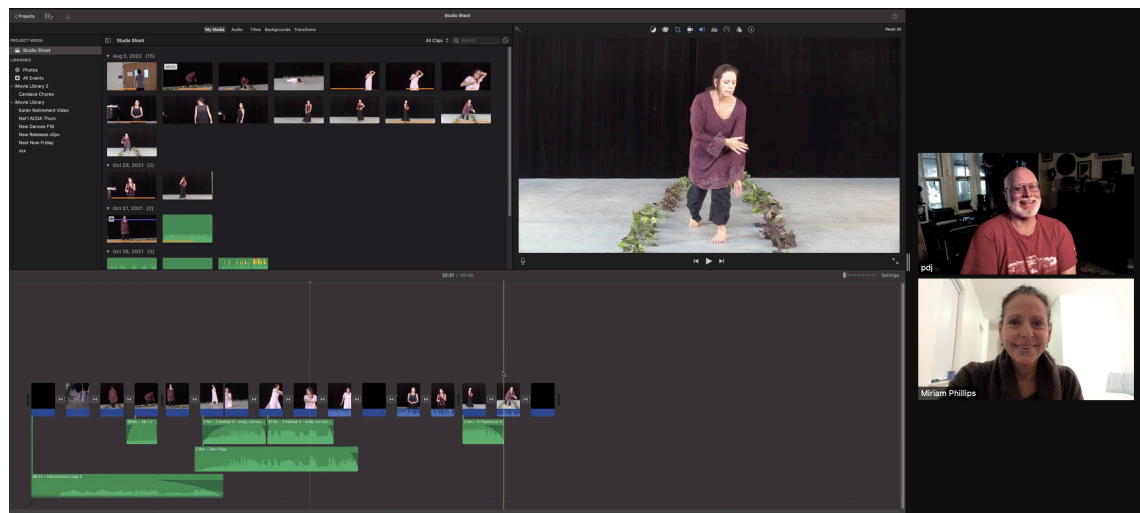


Figure 22: Work session with collaborator Paul Jackson, Ireland/USA, 2022.

While the whole process was lengthy and unwieldy at times, making this film opened up a new channel of my creativity. Filmmaking became a way for me to weave my two learning proclivities together – the visual and the kinesthetic. I found I enjoyed the practice of designing sequences of movement, artefacts, and sound using fades, crosscuts, and overlays. Paul handled the choreography of camera movement; I choreographed the movement within them. Paul implemented the ‘choreography’ of weaving media together while interpreting my words or notes; I further crafted the choreography of elements. Then we worked collaboratively to bring each scene to fruition. It was a choreographic process of, as Paul texted, “a cross-pollination - bouncing next-steps off of each other” (personal communication, Jackson, 26

November 2023). Through this process I have learned that the art of filmmaking is a deeply choreographic practice.

I consider the work I made with him a dance on film (rather than a screendance) that centers dance and other styled movement in a more realistic way to tell a story. Closeup and wide angle shots were used to highlight different body parts or movement but the camera techniques were more straightforward. Much of the footage captured the whole of the dance rather than the fragmentation that often occurs in screendance. I created the choreography less with the camera in mind than I might have had I been making a screendance. The times I danced improvisationally, I did so as if the camera eye was my audience. Camera placement was relatively fixed with most changes occurring in the use of wide angle and narrow shots. There was quite a bit of film editing done after video footage had been collected using fading in and out or splicing of other filmed material objects and sound that came close to screendance techniques. But these were used to create the arc of a story in a more linear fashion than screendance's often nonlinear approach.

Distinct from live performance was the ability to change so many elements about my dance. Like a fashion model who asks the photo editor to skim off a few pounds, or even out skin tone. If I made a mistake or I didn't like how I executed a phrase, I could edit it out, splice in another take of the same phrase, or crossfade it with something else. While it was fun to do and saved me from potential embarrassment, I often felt like I was doing 'fake choreography.' I noted the weight I had gained during the pandemic shown in certain scenes, and I was often critical of my dancing having not been as in shape as I normally would be had public facilities to rehearse or workout been open. But I realized when sharing the film with a few friends, what stood out was not so much good or bad dancing, but the whole gestalt of storytelling which came through by the integration of dance, pedestrian movement, narration, music, and a layering of visual and sonic media. This was a different type of choreography.

Film Scenes: The Journey to Find My Grandmother's Grandmother

The film is sixty-six minutes long including credits. Descriptions of Scenes 1-12 follow, along with notes on creative processes behind the making of them. Although it is not necessary to read the text to understand the film, should the reader wish to follow along, I note the timestamp of where each scene starts and where certain key moments occur.

Opening Credits

In North America it has become customary in recent years to share a land acknowledgement before public events. It is a way to recognize and show respect to Native Americans who were the original stewards of the land before being subjugated to displacement by settler-colonialists. Although this practice is relatively new to us, expressions of gratitude to the land have been a traditional custom amongst Native nations. Similarly, paying respects to ancestors has been an important practice too. The opening credits for me served these two ‘ritualistic’ purposes in addition to practical information displayed. The background image is of the beautiful River Shannon outside the Irish World Academy. It is my expression of gratitude and appreciation for the country and land that hosted me all the years of working on this project.

I also was drawn to a river flowing downstream as a symbol of connection between the past – my ancestors – and their influence on my present. The credits superimposed on the lush Shannon sequence include the obvious practical information, but also a dedication to my father, as it was in his art studio where I first met Shluva; it is his matrilineal lineage. I also remember my uncle, whose voice is featured in *Known/Unknown* as he passed away during the making of the film. Finally, I acknowledge *all the mothers who came before them leading us back to Shluva*.

1. Dusk Forest

(00:01:38) - Dusk Forest became the evolution from the original spiral staircase opening scene. In the original version I chose an eerie spiral staircase on the side of the Irish World Academy building as the first experience because the ambience is dark, echoey, cold. Furthermore, it is a transitional space often not used in the way it was intended, to get from one level to another. I wanted the audience to be packed inside, hearing but not seeing textured percussive and dissonant vocal sounds. I wanted the audience to feel like they had entered a strange, unknown world; to feel confused, perhaps excluded, or to feel like an ‘outsider’ because they did not know what the rules were. They could hear someone humming a distinct tune from another world, something like a deconstructed niggun chant. As odd as I wanted them to feel, I also wanted them to sense like, as Naomi had said to me, that they had walked into a Jewish world.

Although I never got to crowd the audience into the bottom of the dungeon-like staircase, I used a tree-filled forest at dusk to create the mystery I had envisioned. I

played the part of Shluva, shrouded in the billowy dress with shawl as head covering. Hiding, scurrying from tree to tree, I imagined Shluva in mid-1800s Russia, with its harsh laws against Jews, having to sneak through the forest to attend a *Shabbat* service. The idea of Jews having to hide as they moved through the world established one of the film's themes of concealing identity. The scene ends with Shluva mysteriously disappearing into the dark while humming an Eastern European Jewish melody, one that is repeated several times throughout the film.

2. *Vine Burden*

(00:03:14) - Filmed in my backyard, *Vine Burden* introduces viewers to the grapevines for the first time. Here, they represent the vines that bind us; the lineage of family trauma that can stay in families for generations. Particularly, shame which Brené Brown defines as, that “painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection” (Brown, 2013). Over the years I’ve asked myself if the persecution and marginalization experienced by my ancestors led them to feel shame and unworthiness, and could those feelings have also been passed onto me?

Playing myself, I walk out from behind a tree with the vines draped over my shoulders; their long strings trailing behind me seemingly to go on forever (see Fig. 11). I lower down and roll on the grass wrapping myself in them, becoming trapped. I tussle and stumble and push out of them.

Woven into the naturalistic sounds of bird chirps and cicadas amidst my greenery-filled summer backyard, I recite a series of one-to-three-line stories relating to hiding Jewish identity in different ways. The stories were derived from ones my grandmother told me, or from other relative stories that I made into my own. This scene sets up the theme of concealing identity and legacy of shame onto my own being. It ends with my running swirling the vines overhead as I recount, “even my own last name, Phillips, is a lie” - (05:10) this refers to the Meyer Fivel story mentioned above).

3. *Ancestor Vines*

(00:05:24) - *A barefoot female garbed in a flowing burgundy dress with vine jacquard print woven into it and a vine dangling around her neck processes gingerly through two long grapevines laid on a treelined pathway in a forest. Embedded in the vines are a*

series of old black and white and brown-tinted photos of people dressed in long layers of dark clothes, some carrying cloth bags on their shoulders or suitcases. The woman occasionally bows her head and gestures with veneration toward the people in the photos as her steps crisscross the vines. A powerful Negro Spiritual – Go Down Moses – resounds during this reverent procession.

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Honoring ancestors is an important part of Jewish culture as it is in many cultures. With all the work I had been doing researching and ruminating on my ancestors, I felt a deep respect for them; not only my direct descendants, but all Jews who had to flee. Daily walks through the neighborhood forest while visioning the film inspired me. Hence, I lay my long trestles of grapevines on a tree-lined forest trail and placed photos of ancestors glued to small sticks vertically in the vines to create a pathway. The photos were a mixture of relatives known and unknown that I culled from my family's archives with additional ones pulled from YIVO Institute for Jewish Research website that gave a sense of old immigrant Jews traveling. My collaborator and I created a second space laying the vines on the brick patio in my backyard leading up to a small waterfall (00:06:42). The photos here included relatives that I actually had known, except for the last photo. This scene is simply my reverently walking as I watch and interweave through the vines sometimes gesturing to my ancestors. Performing this scene felt like a ritual walking, a way to pay homage to them for what they endured that helped me to get where I am; a way to invoke their presence and ask for their blessings to continue this project.

Whereas in the previous scene, the vines were a metaphor for something negative – the vines that bind us to the past, painful heritage, burden; in this scene, the vines became a positive symbol of connection: to tradition, family, community, a connection that can be sustaining (Fig. 23).



Figure 23: Opening of Ancestor Vines.

I used the Negro Spiritual *Go Down Moses* (also known as *Let My People Go*) sung by powerful Blues singer, Willie Mae ‘Big Mama’ Thornton.⁹⁵ I was reluctant to use a song so clearly from the African American culture as there has been so much painful unacknowledged appropriation from that community. Furthermore, race dialogues were at the forefront of conversations in the US as well as the increase in Black Lives Matter protests. However, when I thought about it further, because it is the story of the Jews exodus from Egypt where Moses begs Pharaoh to ‘Let my People Go,’ I felt it was ok to use. Since it is a Biblical story, it is there for anyone. It is an archetype for all who have endured bondage and their path toward emancipation. I was reminded of Naomi’s previous comment relating the journey my great-great grandfather Meyer Fivel took walking from Poland to England, as being an archetype of the Exodus story. After all, it was my ancestors’ exodus from Eastern Europe that made it possible for me to be here. As I walk, I think about the history of the Jewish plights throughout history.

As I stride the ancestor vines, the film footage morphs from canopied forest to exposed open-space, from earth to water, from unknown ancestors of yore to known in

⁹⁵ I use the term ‘white person’ reluctantly as there was a period in the history of the United States when Jewish immigrants were considered ‘ethnic others,’ even ‘black’, along with Irish, Italian, and Native American. ‘Color’ having to do with class and ethnicity, rather than actual skin color. There are many articles detailing the complex nuances of where Jews stand on the black/white continuum. Among them, [When Did Jews Become White?](#) (Slayton 2017), [The “Jewish Blackness” Thesis Revisited](#) (HaCohen 2018), [I’m Jewish and Don’t Identify as White. Why Must I Check That Box?](#) (Appiah 2021).

my lifetime relatives. At times I stop and look forward, downward, or backward. In the middle, I dance a short phrase – hand wiping up other arm then winding around my head leading my torso to turn back – a motif repeated in several dances that signified to me, tracking and tracing lineage that connects me. The scene ends with my climbing to the top of the small waterfall where, for the first time, the photo of Shluva is seen (00:07:40). I kneel down, turn toward the camera with another photo pressed to my heart. I look up at the sky as Big Mama’s bellowing voice descends, ‘Lord, let ‘em go.’

4. Interlude

(00:08:16) - I felt the need to ‘tell the story’ of how I found the Shluva photo to give viewers some sense of context. It probably is the most literal scene as I try, through photo montage, to recreate my father’s art studio in my basement and the moment I found the photo. This is the first scene that starts to have visual and sonic multilayering. Some choices were quite deliberate, and others improvised. Since there had not been that much ‘conventional dance’ in previous scenes, I thought there needed to be. So, one day on vacation in Virginia Beach, I pulled out my phone and asked my husband to film me dancing at the edge of the waves. I played with several dance motifs I had created in rehearsals. Edited versions of this footage created the primary layer of the scene, while overlays of other video and photo images appeared and disappeared as I softly narrated the Shluva photo finding story. The undertone was the ebb and flow of the ocean’s waves.

5. Known/Unknowns

(00:10:28) - *A woman wearing a headscarf and black long skirt sleekly enters from behind a wooden shed holding a vine. A suitcase sits on a nearby bench. Other objects are draped around a grey wooden fence: a scarf, an apron, a skirt, a book, candlesticks. A melancholic song interweaves under sounds of a gruff male voice recounting stories. The woman takes each object one-by-one waltzing with them as if remembering scenes of her life. She holds each up toward the sky before placing them in the suitcase. When the skirt is lifted off the fence, graffiti is revealed. She closes her suitcase, reluctantly walks toward the fence, peers through, and wipes her hands across the graffiti while walking away. A shofar sounds. (A shofar is a ram’s horn blown to mark the beginning and ending of a ritual cycle.)*

7 December 2021 – Ritual Studies Essay

Known/Unknowns was my way of coping with how to turn the original Viewing Rooms section into film. I had intended that the audience be divided into three groups. Each watching from a different vantage point through glass windows inside Academy practice rooms which looked out onto an abandoned soiled patio. I wanted each group to have a different sensory experience as they witnessed this mysterious woman, Shluva, from different angles, while hearing distinctive audio tracks in each room, family interviews or solo violin. As the spiral staircase scene was about the audience being able to Hear but not See and feeling *othered*, I wanted this scene to be about them Seeing but not able to Hear and being the ones doing the *othering*. I had designed the way the audience was to get to the rooms by being asked questions about their lineage and depending on their answer, being separated from the friends they came with. I had been thinking of when immigrants landed in Ellis Island and were asked so many questions and often separated from family members they had traveled with. Despite not being able to do much of this scene in its original format, *Interlude*, described above, served as a passageway from my world back to Shluva's.

I performed this in a small, dingy, enclosed space between my shed and a wooden fence. I had Paul film from different angles to get that sense of vantage points. Chalked onto the facades was antisemitic graffiti ('No Jews Allowed') in different languages to give the sense of enduring antisemitism crossing time and space.⁹⁶ Wearing old-styled teal and black clothes with black booties, I enacted, through dance, Shluva packing to come to America. Many of the objects she packed into the old suitcase were reminiscent of Jewish ritual objects: a vine, candlesticks, a book (symbolizing the *torah*), the black and grey diaphanous fringed striped scarf reminiscent of a Jewish prayer shawl or *tallism*. Some movements echoed Jewish ritual movements: using the shawl, I created a *chuppa* – the canopy under which a bride and groom stand (00:12:01). Another time I wrapped around my arm suggestive of the *tefillin* – the leather phylacteries worn by Jewish Orthodox men (00:12:54). Other movements alluded to prayer, like the *shokeling*, or ritual swaying (00:12:03 and 00:15:44).

The sound-score crow caws pierced the velvety rich female voice singing *Old Jewish Polesye*, recorded by Jewish music artists. It contained the melody I had hummed in the opening scene, *Dusk Forest*. Another layer of sound was excerpts of interviews. My uncle Alan's raspy voice told stories about his grandparents (Shluva's daughter) and

⁹⁶ Signs excluding Jews from public places were often posted in parks, theaters, stores, and restaurants not only throughout Nazi Germany but prior years in Eastern Europe too.

other Jewish historical facts recounted from his aging memory. While I did the edits of the interview stories, I worked with Paul to match certain stories with certain dance phrases. The piece concludes with hearing the sound of a *shofar*, while we see Shluva walking away holding her suitcase in one hand while wiping the other across the graffiti. The scene ends in a new space. The camera points up at Shluva walking up a leaf-covered stairway of a brick house (00:17:00) as my uncle recounts the arrival to America of his grandfather, “he saw the Freedom and he saw the Future.” The ending of this scene to me inferred Shluva arriving to an unknown place that she had known was coming.

6. *Water Ritual*

(00:17:32) - In the original performance, I had wanted the audience, after exiting the Viewing Rooms, to be guided down a stairwell to a hallway outside the theatre. There was to be a long table set up with a pitcher of water to pour on hands, a bowl to catch the water, and a towel to dry hands. Participants in turn would pour water on the hands of their neighbor. Although I meant the invitation to wash hands as a secular act, it very much symbolized the handwashing ritual done at during the Passover celebration.

This felt like an important act to me, so much so that I pondered how I might transform the idea into film. This scene, which asks viewers to participate in handwashing, is my attempt to do that.

The script was too long for me to memorize and because we did not have proper cue cards, the various video takes we did were all very awkward. Paul suggested using a still image. I chose a still frame of me holding a cup of water as my voice is heard explaining how ritual washing takes place in many cultures and describe its symbolic meaning (Fig. 13). I then invite viewers to take out a water pitcher, bowl, and towel and join me.

We switch back to video as I pour water on my hands using an actual *netilat yadayim* cup (with two handles shaped like grapevines) at the top of the waterfall (previously seen in Scene 3, *Ancestor Vines*). The scene is lush with closeup shots of hands and water (Fig. 24). A mesmerizing solo violin is heard playing a highly ornamented, Middle Eastern sounding *doina* melody.⁹⁷ Despite its simplicity of gesture,

⁹⁷ *Doina* is a musical form from Romania that became adopted into Jewish Klezmer music. Believed to have roots in Persia or the Middle East, it is a free-form improvised melody sung or played on a solo instrument. This *doina* is from the renowned klezmer violinist, Daniel Hoffman.

this short segment is visually and sonically textured. To me it marked a turning point in the film. Where previous scenes focused on my imaginings of Shluva and looking back to my ancestors and their stories, subsequent scenes focus on my stories and journey to find Shluva. As the stories became more personal, I invite viewers into my home.



Figure 24: *Water Ritual.*

7. *Bedroom Story*

(00:20:14) - By the spring of 2021 still deep in the pandemic, I had seen many different kinds of Zoom performances, including some very well-staged online productions and others more informal. One that had much resonance to the piece I was developing was Rebecca Wahls, also doing a postgrad performance. Her one-person show "Joe" was filmed in her kitchen. She described the work as “an exploration of primary sources left by my grandfather, [a Holocaust survivor]. It's a conversation with a man I never met, a way to unpack parallel histories” (Wahls 2021).

Seeing this work gave me agency to tell my stories from inside my home, not just outside. I also was sensing the need to tell stories of what it was like for ME growing up Jewish, not just other relatives' stories. *Bedroom Story* is literally that – an intimate scene in my bedroom, reminiscing while folding laundry as my cats slumber on the bed and the 17-year Brood X cicadas chorus outside my window. (Coincidentally, the intense onslaught of cicadas at the time of this filming was ironically reminiscent of the locusts – one of the ten plagues described in the Passover Exodus story in the Old Testament.)

Bedroom Stories was only an experiment. I literally put my phone camera on a tripod in the corner of my bedroom and started talking. The stories' significance related back to my freewriting on the theme of 'erasure.' It revealed how I contributed to that erasure too because I wanted little to do with my Jewish heritage. Conversations with Naomi made me realize why and I used some of my session notes in what I was talking about. How by the time Judaism had gotten to my generation, it had become so watered down and pallid, it lost meaning. Thus, like many Jews I sought spirituality in Eastern religions. This scene tells that story and leads into the next scene. I recount, "So I did what a lot of Jews my generation did..." as I disappear behind the bedroom door then reappear (00:23:10). The scene resolves by my walking past the door as if going somewhere. In a two-dimensional Egyptian-esq type posture, I answer, "I ...went East."

8. "I Went East"

(00:23:24) - My walk from the previous scene continues to the next as I promenade through another pathway of grapevines laid down in a long white hallway. A dim Indian drone sounds. The picture then crossfades into a dance studio as I continue walking through another pathway of grapevines. I turn, repeat the 'tracing lineage' dance phrase seen earlier and continue to walk again.

Like *Bedroom Story*, I had from the beginning intended to 'tell' the stories behind my gravitation toward Eastern cultures, more in dance than in narration. However, with the necessity to use film, and the inability to use public indoor spaces, I included more spoken word than previously envisioned. I mined my experiences and wrote stories. What led me to Sufism, drew me to Hinduism and kathak dance, provoked me to dive into Gypsy flamenco? How did I know so much about 'their' lineages and not my own?

This long scene interweaves spoken-word and different dance vignettes. I chronicle my progression from these *other* cultures back to 'home' answering the questions posed above. I begin with a brief stylized walking sequence amidst the grapevines wearing the vine-jacquard burgundy dress. This crossfades to my wearing a pink Indian tunic and pantaloons as I continue walking, but this time through a pathway created by my kathak dance bells laid out on the floor (00:24:10). I prostrate down to the floor (Fig. 25), roll over my bells, then continue dancing a loosely kathak-inspired dance to a melodic devotional song, *Devi Puja* sung by Krishna Das, that invokes the Hindu Mother Goddess Durga. I loosely enact gestures of various Hindu goddesses but to me this piece was about reverence and paying homage to the lineage of mothers.

At (00:26:40) the scene crossfades to me sitting wearing black and telling stories of my youth and how I knew so much about other people's cultures but didn't know anything of my own. As I continue with another story about my involvement with *Gitanos* (Gypsies) I add some more layers to my costume. Then at (00:29:00), I dance to a majestic, solemn flamenco *Soleá* sung by José Anillo (Fig. 25). While I chose not to include the fast-paced rhythmic crescendo typical of flamenco dance endings, this choreography was occasionally punctuated with strong percussive footwork in typical traditional places. Unfortunately, we did not use an external microphone during the recording so the sound came out echoey from the cavernous studio and footwork muffled. Furthermore, as studio spaces had been closed for so many months, I was not in the best of dance shape.

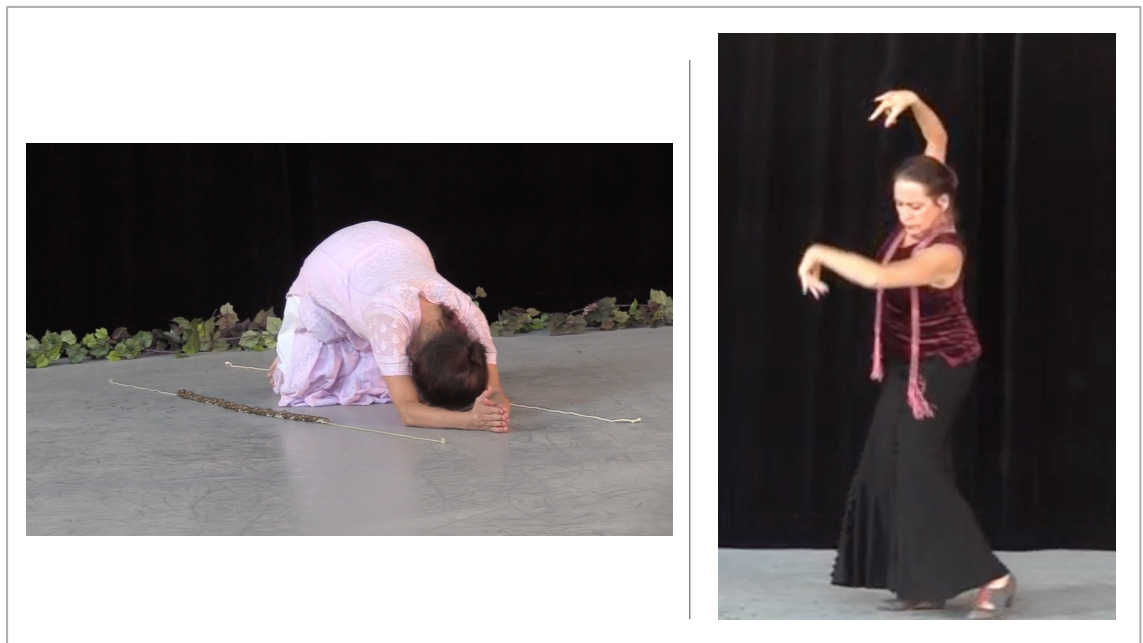


Figure 25: Still shots from scene: "I Went East."

Crossfading into the last segment (00:32:09), the scene ends with me back in the vines with the burgundy dress dancing a retrograde version of the 'tracing lineage' phrase while speaking, "and in some strange circuitous way... all of these journeys outside myself... brought me Home."

9. *Passover Story*

(00:32:48) - The next scene switches to my kitchen. It is a storytelling and cooking scene. With the image of a Passover plate of ritual foods on screen, I proclaim, "Passover is a holiday about freedom." I discuss the meaning of Passover and its more universal symbolism as I gather items to start cooking. In the original performance, I

had wanted the audience to taste one of the typical Passover foods that I would have prepared beforehand. It was part of my intention to have audience participation and activities that would engage different senses. With the switch to film, I attempted to do this by inviting viewers to bring ingredients for a recipe.

For me, eating has always been another way to learn about a culture, as has smelling, touching, dancing, music and language. (Recall ‘A Lecture Demonstration’ in Ch. 2, and the section on Sensorial Knowledge in Ch. 3). As previously mentioned, when teaching about ‘the dance event,’ I always emphasized sensorial knowledge and designed exercises to engage learners’ senses. When crafting this scene and *Water Ritual*, I recalled several of my students’ choreographic works that integrated audience sensory experiences quite dramatically (Lynne, MK, Robin).

Around the time I was contemplating how to fashion my original ideas to film, I attended an online dance symposium during the pandemic that had a social event where attendees cooked the same recipe together synchronously. These recollections inspired me to experiment with asking viewers to cook with me. The idea is they would receive instructions ahead of time of what to prepare for participating with this scene. An apple, cinnamon, honey, red wine, and walnuts were the ingredients needed to make *charo-set*, a coarse applesauce-like mixture that represents the mortar used by the Jews in Egypt when they were in captivity. The sweetness of it symbolizes the transformation of adverse experience to affirmative.

As I chopped apples and give instructions for next steps in the recipe, I tell stories of significant Passover memories. I invite viewers to think about rituals that were passed down in their family. Considering mortar as a metaphor, I ask viewers to think about what holds their life together. Curiously, one of the members of a focus group I had for select film viewers noted another level of metaphor I did not catch. She said, “*When you talked about charo-set being mortar, and then what you did is you reconnected yourself to yourself, to your family and to your people. That was strong*” (J. Sternfeld 10 February 2024).

10. Track, Trace, Erased

(00:41:05) – This scene depicts a synopsis of all the many months of genealogical research up to that time. It is like embodied and visualized genealogy. I had Paul edit in many layers of different kinds of media that I had captured in my searches and travels

(see Fig. 16). It was one of the more challenging scenes to design and edit for me and my collaborator.

The scene starts in the dark. “In order to find Shluva, I had to track my past and trace her future.” A photo of an ivy-covered tree with many branches is seen (it’s actually a tree from Shluva’s cemetery). The primary backdrop in this scene is of me drawing my family tree (from present to past) in chalk on slate stones in my backyard. Superimposed are images of various documents I discovered during my research: birth, marriage, and death certificates, census reports, ancestry registries, boat manifests, and even a video scrolling through Facebook posts. It includes photos I took to document the various sites I visited during my New York trips – the Lower East Side, the Municipal Archives, and Ellis Island. Recited poems and short stories I wrote ebb and flow between the soulful, later upbeat Yiddish Klezmer song, *Arum Dem Fayer*.

This visually and sonically textured scene was one of my favorites because of its poetic content, my resonance with the music and language of my people heard in it, and the way my collaborator edited the various layers. Paul’s visual, kinesthetic and aural acumen make the photos and video footage seemingly dance to the music. Census reports leap through dulcet trills of the violin which interweaves with an impassioned female voice. Train rides glide along the velvety passageways of accordion chords and guttural Yiddish sounds sung. Architecture and monuments ascend and descend accompanied by brassy trumpet sounds and violin arabesques.

(00:45:50) - The scene quiets down with a recitation of the ending poem for which this scene is named. Photos complement the text. The background becomes the foreground as the chalked lineage is erased by spraying water.

11. Finding Shluva

A woman pulls vines off two tombstones in a densely populated Jewish cemetery. After clearing, she dances gleefully around her ancestors. As she moves closer, I can make out Hebrew writing and vines engraved at the top of the headstones. She offers dates and cashews to them. Through my camera lens I see her walk off in slow motion while tossing the vines in the air.

I was sure this was the last scene. I had found Shluva's gravesite! But I had so much material in my journey to get there, I wondered how best to tell the story of my searches. I asked myself, 'where are the beginning and end points of this part of the story? How literal or abstract do I want to go?'

It was a very challenging scene to make because I was overwhelmed by the number of photos and video clips I had collected. But amazingly enough, 95% of the scene I created myself. Learning so much from Paul over the months of working together gave me agency to take over the editing of this scene. I intuitively worked my way through the material by choreographing the various elements as I went along. I created sections of audio and video edits, then came to Paul for feedback and tweaking.

(00:46:26) - Starting in black with only the sound of the New York subway, this scene in some ways is an extension of the prior. The journey to 'find' Shluva continues, but rather than taking viewers through the expedition of excavated documents and external tours, the camera accompanies me as I hunt for and linger at burial sites. This gives the sense of the viewer coming along for the ride. The visuals included more of my New York City fieldwork media.

In dance ethnology, we consider different facets of the soundscape in a dance event. Consequential sounds are ones that directly impact the dance or event. For example, a drum beat that signals a hip movement, or a bird call that denotes the end of an event. Inconsequential sounds are ambient sounds that help to create the atmosphere of the event. Because I wanted viewers to come with me and witness my struggles to find my ancestors, I included a lot of background sounds that were present on location as I videorecorded. Thus, much wind, traffic noises, conversations and self-talking are heard. The rawness of the footage brings a sense of immediacy. Changing qualities of light occurred unexpectedly in serendipitous moments as the sun played hide and seek with the clouds. Trying to follow directions but making foolish mistakes as I talk into my camera mic. Disconnecting from the earth as I fall into Shluva's tomb. Scrambling to pull deeply-rooted vines off tombstones.

There are many parts to this long scene which depicts through sound and sight the transportation methods I took as I moved from Shluva's daughter Rose's cemetery (00:42:42) to Shluva's cemetery (00:48:35). I struggle to find their unfrequented tombstones and, dialoguing with my research, ask myself questions out loud along the way. What elation when I eventually found my Shluva and her husband's tombstones

(00:52:26). I danced, I offered, I sat in front imagining my grandmother once standing there as a little girl. What delight when I notice vine leaves engraved at the top of their headstones. And, until the editing, I had not noticed the monarch butterfly flying over (00:53:30). It was not the first time during this process that I contemplated potential omens from my ancestors.

While at the grave, it seemed only natural to dance (00:53:37). Placing my camera on a rickety tripod, I danced some improvisations using material generated from the various iterations of studio practice. Discovering an exquisite contemporary version of the sung Hebrew prayer, *Oseh Shalom*,⁹⁸ I somehow was able to edit my spur-of-the-moment dance into something that coherently matched this beautiful song about peace. Video editing truly became a choreographic practice. Sometimes my movement phrases magically seemed to coincide with musical cadences. Other times, I would slow-mo my gestures and harmonize them with sustained sung phrases. Similar to live dance choreography, I would work, stand back and look, sense something was missing, then go back and work again sometimes adding another layer, manipulating a video frame or tweaking a sound file. As I was making decisions about cuts and splices, tempos, and spatial placements, I was also thinking about how this song was bestowing peace to all of my ancestors for all that they endured. The pogroms, marginalization, persecution, economic oppression; the Holocaust, and having to change their identity or flee because of who they were. It was a moving experience every time I worked.

The words of the song roughly translate to:

OSEH SHALOM ⁹⁹	HE WHO MAKES PEACE
Oseh shalom bim'romav	May He who makes peace in the heavens
Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu	Grant peace to us
V'al kol yisrael	And to all our people (Israel and everywhere)
V'imru, imru Amen	Let us say, Amen.

(00:56:10) I recite a poem which begins “What does it mean to find someone.”

⁹⁸ Composed and performed by Miriam Margles & the Hadar Ensemble.

⁹⁹ *Oseh Shalom* is a prayer needed now more than ever because as I write these pages (October 2023), Israel was recently attacked by the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Consequently, horrific fighting has broken out once again in the Middle East and war rages on between Russia and Ukraine, and several other nations in the world.

(00:56:39) - Drumbeats introduce the next segment into an upbeat sung prayer, *Adon-Olam*,¹⁰⁰ which serves as the underscore to my having a conversation with Shluva in the form of a long ‘Dear Shluva’ letter. Using voiceover, I recount the many factoids I learned about her life, including her real name. As I recite, I dance-walk in slow motion down the cemetery pathway while lassoing two long vines I pulled from nearby tombstones (see Fig. 27). Tossing, twirling and releasing the vines overhead, the image then returns to a closeup of the writing engraved on Shluva and Julius’ tombstone. Although not evident, I am actually reciting a transliteration into English of the Hebrew words engraved on tombstones with some modifications.

12. Re-membering Me

(01:01:18) - I did not plan this scene; it planned me. I intended for *Finding Shluva*, where I locate her grave, dance to her, and incant the details of her life I discovered to be the last scene. But recall the dream in the white dress mentioned above? That dream indicated to me that the last scene should not end in a gravesite, with the dead, and looking to the past. Instead, with me, the living, at home in the present. After all, if much of the project revolved around my incompleteness of not knowing who my ancestors were or where they came from, then shouldn’t this part of the journey resolve with that found knowledge?

In the dream, I was sitting surrounded by everything white. I saw myself reciting my lineage. The movement was pretty clear. I was tracking and tracing the mothers on my matrilineal and patrilineal lines. One problem was, I did not have a white room or white dress. A bigger challenge was, that after all this time I STILL could not figure out where Shluva and Rose were from.

Although this project centered around my great-great grandmother on my father’s side, my grandmother on my mother’s side was very much in my consciousness. In fact, her memory reverberated silently through me as I was working to transform research to theatrical storied form. I wanted to know where her family came from too. Thus, more weeks went by delaying the completion of the film. I was haunted. I HAD to know where my people were from!

¹⁰⁰ “*Adon Olam* is often recited as the final prayer of the service. *Adon Olam* comes from the Hebrew meaning ruler forever. This prayer is actually a poem and describes God’s greatness. There are countless tunes to use when singing this prayer” (<https://images.shulcloud.com/1239/uploads/Documents/For-Website/Adon-Olam.pdf> [Accessed 9 July 2022]).

I returned to internet searches hopeful that with a bit more genealogical skill under my belt, I could find the answer. However, I continued to reach so many dead ends that I decided once again to enlist the help of the *Tracing the Tribe* Facebook group. I posed a question about Shluva's origins described above in the Virtual Fieldwork 'Trip' #3 section. On my own I had located my maternal grandmother's father's 1890 Petition for Naturalization card from Philadelphia. My heart leapt when I saw actual town names on them, but I could not make out what they were. With a lot of roundabout and back and forth Facebook conversations again, including people who found the name of the bank and family member who purchased the boat ticket for my maternal great-great grandmother who went by a completely different name as she traveled – I found what I was looking for.

Wearing a silk cream and light green variegated dress with burgundy vine-like appliqué, I do a sitting dance reciting this data while holding a bowl of living red grapes. I reach into the back high diagonal reciting each descendant's name, then, with a flip-flop hand gesture glide down the diagonal calling out their hometown. This sequence repeats on each side of my body with an ancestor acknowledgement. The waterfall is heard once again in the distance, as is the melody of the *niggun* hummed in the opening scene. Like water cascading down from past to present to future, so does lineage, and the music and traditions pass on to new generations.

End Credits

(01:03:18) - The end credits roll, as I walk up the cemetery path with the vines over my shoulders while the buoyant joyous song *Adon-Olam* is now foregrounded. Thus concludes this part of the journey to find my grandmother's grandmother. A journey filled with many escapades and lost trails, a rite of passage which took countless hours across many months and some years, all condensed into an hour and six-minute dance story on film.

Filming Locations

- River Shannon, County Clare (Ireland)
- Hyattsville, Maryland (USA) on the ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscatawy People
- Sandbridge Beach, Virginia (USA) on the ancestral lands of the Chesepian and Powhattan People
- Manhattan, Lower East Side (USA) on the ancestral lands of the Lenape People
- Ellis Island, New York on the ancestral lands of the Lenape People
- Washington Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York (Lenapehoking lands)
- Mt Zion Cemetery, Maspeth, NY on the ancestral lands of the Mespeatches People

Figure 26: Geographical locations where filming took place.

Film Sharing Discussion Groups

Since there was no public showing of the film, I solicited volunteers from amongst my community of friends, family, and colleagues asking them to watch/participate in the film and then join an online group discussion. These were held on 10 and 17 February 2024 with seven attendees at each session. Participants were emailed a form ahead of time asking for their permission to record the session and to potentially cite their words in my thesis (see App. III). Before the discussions began, I asked again for permission to record and received verbal confirmations by all attendees. These discussions were strictly voluntary and were approved by the UL Ethics committee. Excerpts from these conversations are listed below, sometimes edited to make the speaker's informal talking style more readable.

Each focus group had seven participants. I prepared eight questions ahead of time to ascertain their experience (see App. III). I wanted to know about what aspects might have been evoked in them as they watched/participated in the film, particularly around the areas of ancestry, place, memory, family stories, their experience of participating in the film's activities (or not). Several themes arose related to, how personal stories speak to universal themes, identity and its relation to place, remembering and forgetting, assimilation, enactments versus embodied memory, and what art can do. These themes cycled through the conversations and did not necessarily correspond to the topic of the question asked.

The first question was more open-ended than the others and was derived from Liz Lerman's Critical Response Method (2020): *"What did you find meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work you witnessed?"*

Some commented on the format and structure of the film, the use of a layering technique and the integration of so much nature, while others commented on the evocative nature of certain elements.

I appreciated that Lily, an astute dance ethnologist, picked up on how much work and how many decisions went into the creation of the film. She noted:

Miriam, I was really struck by how skillful the narration was in this piece, and how many choices you had to make around how much history to include, because everything that you touched upon, could have also been expanded, you know, by history, context, context, context, which is something that I think you'd navigated, really successfully, to create this arc in the story. And I was very much struck by how, at the beginning of the work, there seemed to be two very distinct parts, in watching this for me, and it escalated. I would say, the first part started out in that sensory way, and more storytelling, you know, to the degree that you were Shluva, you had a suitcase, you were on a journey, all of those things were very identifiable to when you got it to the discovery of and heading towards the cemetery, which was literally such a layered story. Then we saw it visually, with the layering of the images. And the narration became, you know, it almost quickened; there was so much more to understand. So I just want to acknowledge, and that the pace in which the words, and the images work together, so beautifully added a complete layer of appreciation to the story, and the entire piece. And I think that was very masterful.

(L. Kharrazi, focus group participant, 17 February 2024)

Gretchen commented:

the old photographs and the whole section in the graveyard at the end? I like graveyards a lot. So I was I was already predisposed, but I've never been to one like that. And so I don't know what it is about the old photographs that have such a resonance with me, but they meant a lot to see them. And your honoring of them.

(G. Dunn, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Bianca Figl stated, *"I love the layering that you used in the film."*

I previously mentioned Atesh, Tamara, and Linda who commented on the evocative nature of the recurring vines and felt the 'burden of trauma' or the 'symbol of connectivity' to tradition that they represented.

Several commented on the use of nature: Tamara said, “*the natural world that most of the spaces that you filmed in were in the outer world. And I think that there's the connectivity, the outer and inner.*” Mary reflected a similar sentiment about nature:

It was so beautiful to be outside. And there was one image of your bare feet in the earth that was really powerful. I also found the scene where you did the chalk of the family tree and then erased it and the poetry that you spoke with was evocative and haunting. I love the way it all combined. I've never seen dance not on a stage besides group dance, so to have you be at the beginning in the woods, and all the different places was incredibly powerful.

(M. Oak, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

A number of people mentioned how my personal stories spoke to universal themes. And it brought up different people’s sense of their own identity and whether they embraced it or shut it out as I had. Karen stated,

We share some history. We both have ancestors who have been through the kinds of things that Shluva has been through and you know, your quest to find her and to figure that lineage out really resonated with me on a very personal level. But you were able to carry it, you were able to transcend it. You really made it universal.

(K. Bradley, focus group participant, 17 Oct 2024).

Lily, who is Iranian-American Mizrahi Jewish expressed,

I think what's so fascinating about this right now is investigations into one's lineage and past. I mean, this is such a universal story. But it is such an important story, right now, as we're also in another time of reckoning and trying to understand it, you know, are Jews not people of color? Well, I have a different history [than you], but the erasure stories and the themes of persecution, are exactly the same. It's not just Jewish people, but it is very unique to Jewish history. And so I think, particularly from the point of view of actually, Ashkenazi Jewish folks, this is such an important conversation.

(L. Kharrazi, focus group participant, 17 Oct 2024)

Identity was a strong theme; having it, or not having it. And in tandem with identity was family shame and purposeful forgetting, too much pain to remember, the impact of assimilation, family members cutting off others, and our own shutting out of our heritage. Curiously, I addressed all of these layers of ‘erasure’ in the poem recited during the live dance *Erased*, which these viewers did not see.

Gretchen said something quite similar to my experience of my maternal grandmother: *"My mother was ashamed of her parents...of where she came from. So there was no real sense of heritage. There's something I don't have [connection to heritage], that I was never taught. In a way, it wasn't a value as I was brought up."*

Atesh: *"My mother and father cut themselves off from remembering I think because of the pain of it."*

Shanna Lim, who has Chinese and Thai ancestry (among others), was struck by my stories of hiddenness (referring to *Vine Burden*) causing family members to not know about their family history. She described *"what happens between being in your country and then being in the US"* and how assimilation and struggles to survive in a new country caused her family to break from the tradition of filial piety – a tradition that became so 'aggressive.' She states, *"I have no idea who they are, and nobody will talk about them."*

Sara Pearson said: *"your story, really the way you are doing it opened up a huge amount of introspection and curiosity, you know, about your family in ways that I had shut out for so long."*

Lily affirmed: *The fact of history and assimilation and the ability to assimilate. It sort of comes back to kick you in the butt, right? I mean, we're living in a time where this is not a luxury, because you cannot... you either own your identity, or you suffer your identity!*

The question about place, *"did this film make you think about your relationship to place, where you live now or grew up and how you got there?,"* conjured a lot of responses. Some related to the relationship of lineage and place and movement from one place to another.

Deborah R. responds: *"The weaving of lineage in place. I've been thinking about that a lot recently because I know some of my ancestry, but I am not clear about place. And it's, as we all know, really important. It's important historically, about why people moved around and where they came from, and where they met and where they went to, you know, so, lineage and place are completely interwoven."*

Linda said:

one of the most powerful things about place that came across was about the movement. It gave me a lot of empathy and compassion, not only for my own family that came here, my father was an immigrant from Poland, my mother's parents from Romania, but also for all the people who are desperate to come to the United States today, many of whom are unable to, even though they too have to deal with persecution in their homelands. And I think that that whole idea of place and really the heartache of having to leave your homeland in the hope of something better, and in your film, the sense of the cost of that, that can be in some families, the erasure of an identity. And then, in your case, the effort to reclaim it. So it gave me so much more feeling of empathy and compassion for that movement.

(L. Kanefield, focus group participant, 17 February 2024)

The question about place ended up resurfacing many times even after I asked other questions. For many in the groups, place was tied to people's identity. Several spoke of having memories of certain sites related to their parents stories, memorabilia, or travels back to family sites. People recalled some poignant memories and told stories.

Atesh, also from a Jewish family that escaped Germany before the war describes:

I grew up with no sense of the importance of place, and in all the places I've lived, place has never been particularly important... However, I went to visit my father's hometown in Germany, he left in 1933, [and] went to his house to photograph the tree behind [the house] that he always talked about. I then walked out on the street and saw these kids and I thought to myself, 'oh, boy, those could have been ... then I realized, no, they could not have been my kids. Because if I had been there, I'd be dead! Gone. That was powerful. Wow!

(A. Sonneborn, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Laurie, whose mother also escaped Germany shares:

One of the most powerful photos that I have is of my mother's [home] where they lived in Hamburg before they were displaced, and her descriptions of their life there and seeing the family and their dog in front of their house. It actually dawned on me... that her attachment to her house where she lived for 50 years in California was extremely important to her because that was security because she had been displaced. Her mother ran a boarding house and she had a very traumatic experience in New York, [so] coming to California and eventually settling in that house meant the world to her. And I'm kind of the same way. I always want my home to be my refuge and [recently] finding a home that I can do that in has meant feeling grounded for the first time really in my life. I think that comes from a history of displacement.

(L. Eisler, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Another aspect of place that struck viewers, particularly the Jewish viewers, were the cemeteries and their relationship to the buried person's identity. Lily talked about:

It actually made me reexamine my relationship to cemeteries. I know they're very rich historical places but personally, I have not found comfort in a cemetery. And my mother just passed away, so I'm saying this with a very fresh perspective, but I've always felt this way. I know very well that area in Queens [where Shluva is buried] having lived right there as well. It really made me rethink cemetery as a site of history and I was super interested in your question, 'Were they buried according to their villages?' Like layers of identity or how overgrown that cemetery was, which made it seem so much more alive [whereas] contemporary cemeteries are very manicured? I think that helped me rethink it as a living place rather than a place of concrete monuments or stone.

Tamara picked up on the notion of *landsmanshaft* that I had mentioned in film scene *Finding Shluva*.

I want to speak to the concept of landsmanschaffen. You mentioned that word once when you're by the graves, and these were organizations, based on where people came from. When you speak of ancestors, this is a care giving organization by the people who came from [the same] shtetl and [then] came to the United States. So one of the things they did was create these places of burial. [So] it's ancestry that's not just by the literal people that you are connected to through your DNA, but it's also these other people that are part of the broader community. And how long have they continued to take care of those graveyards? There's so much history involved in that. But I think the concept of landsmanschaff is very different than in other cultures. You asked earlier about [if the film] connects you to place. This is the connection – Landsmanschaffen is a connection place that's beautiful.

(T. Gilbert, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

For some, the film got them thinking about the dailyness of the lives of their ancestors. Certainly, that was my case too.

Gretchen described the other side of her family, which according to her father's stories, she believed to have come over on the Mayflower and that "*one of the witches was one of [her] ancestors.*" So, I go to Salem [Massachusetts] to see them as living people, as people having had lives. And eating and sleeping and going places and buying things and selling things. Now I'm thinking about the dailyness of their lives."

Atesh was struck by Gretchen's comment and on how the film got him to consider the dailyness of ancestors' lives to:

The daily life-ness that you were willing to look at is also an example that took extraordinary courage, because I have little tiny glimpses of thinking about, for example, my grandmother, who was deaf from juvenile diabetes, and somehow came over in the beginning of the 20th century, and my grandfather, who was a rag picker, I can't really reach out and ask a question of did they have joy? All I know is that they had so much pain I can't think about. I think I lost the losses so far. Although who knows what will be generated from this. It's really interesting. ...I do want to also say, when you did your bedroom story, the insight into self was both amusing and wonderful.

(A. Sonneborn, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Asking people to think about their family history can be a risky question. Janet, also Ashkenazi, recalled a story:

When I was in seventh grade, my teacher asked us to do a family tree. And my father who was a principal got really angry at this assignment. [He said] 'the teacher has no right to ask you that...it wasn't any of her business,' which was really shocking to me, but it's because the family had died. The other thing I wanted to say was what I really love about what you've done here, you bring this very shy looking woman back to life. And I just wondered what SHE felt when you were dancing on her grave? [Imagining Shluva speaking] 'what is this, ... somebody remembered me all these years ago!' I think that's so neat.

(J. Davis, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Although few people took part in the participatory activities for various reasons, some had strong embodied memories of doing the activity previously so that they didn't feel a need to do it. People were more positive about the *Water Ritual* activity than the *Passover Story* one. In speaking about the participatory activity in *Water Ritual* scene, Mary said:

I have my computer here. And I brought the water in and put it on my desk. That part felt really relevant and engaging [because] that's like a Shabbos thing every week. A sacred rite as being participating in what you know, you were there in this by this beautiful, flowing stream. I had my water here. And yeah, I really thought that was effective and beautiful.

(M. Oak, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

Gretchen also chimed in, "I was gonna say that that purification with water is in Christianity and Islam in everywhere."

Judy Gantz stated: *“In watching it, it was very powerful to stay with the film. I didn’t get up. The imagery of the water, that whole section was so beautifully done; I really just loved sitting there and letting myself follow the story. It was very satisfying.”*

Lily also did not participate but described that even watching was a way to participate because of what it brings up.

I just wanted to watch you in the act of your hands with the water in it. And it was almost disruptive to the flow, water flow [to get up and do it]. But the invitation is always there. And I think that came through very clearly. The invitation, I think started at the very beginning because this kind of subject invites you to mine your own personal identity alongside when the viewer is watching, so I think, you know, there's participation and there's participation. It seems like at least these viewers, all of us were busy.

People had different reactions to the *Passover Story* participatory activity (which felt like the most awkward scene to me). A conversation ensued between me and Mary.

Mary commented: *But then I had to take my laptop into the kitchen and do the chopping of the apples, and it wasn't Passover. It felt like out of sync. And so my suggestion would be if you're editing and going on to maybe take that part out.*

I shared with the group,

part of my methodology behind this was engaging the senses; this was really important to me and the original [live version] was supposed to be performed during Passover. But I would take that scene out too; also I didn't have a teleprompter, and I couldn't memorize all the text so it was done really poorly, in my estimation. But the other thing I was thinking about was [in general], recipes that are passed down. So either I take [that scene] out, or I do it in a more open way that is about recipes that are passed down through either tradition or families and the stories that go with them.

(M. Phillips, focus group leader, 10 February 2024)

Mary resonated with that, *“in a way that would be a nice counterpart to the erasure, that it's like, well, what is it that carries on in this recipe? You know, where it originated, but it's something that has a connection to those who stand behind [it].”*

A few Jewish participants mentioned the embodied memory of having performed those acts many times. Linda described:

I did not actually participate during the film and felt a little bit like I wasn't being a good student, or a good girl, because I didn't comply. But I have made charoset

so many, many, many, many, many, many times and the ritual of washing many, many, many times. So Miriam, I've [even] done it with you at your house! So I felt like I could relate to it. But I think what came across to me about it was the sense of, in watching my feelings, so tied in a way that when I'm preparing for Passover, I might not think about, but so tied to the generations of people who, before me have made charoset. That's really what it made me think of. And also, it highlighted for me the connection between the ordinary and the profound. Because in one sense, you were doing something so ordinary – making charoset, and explaining how you make charoset, but it was so connected to these profound issues of identity and history and who we are and what we carry and what came before us. And what will come in the future, after we're no longer here. So I really appreciate even though I didn't participate directly, I appreciated the presence of it in your film for those reasons.

(L. Kanefield, focus group participant, 17 February 2024)

I responded, *“Well, I think you and Karen have the embodied memory of doing those activities so many times and Sarah too because you're from the same type of lineage.”*

Speaking to a question of the role art can play in interrogating personal histories and family stories, there were several evocative responses.

Deborah R., a dance artist, stated, *“You're asking some artists here. So we might [be] bias. Right? As an artist, I do that. That's how I and many artists process life. That's how we navigate our lives. That's how we make sense of our lives. It's how we celebrate our lives, grieve in our life, you know, it's just so.”*

Sara P.: *“Like Deborah, yes, using art to try to figure out grief and loss and love and confusion. And yeah, everything!”*

Judy G. noted how seeing the images and actions in the film brought up the theme of the personal to the universal again,

Your whole film evoked the sense of what it is when human beings erase their lineage. You know when the water washes away the chalk. And what is it to be raised with no sense of lineage. And where do those threads and roots go back to all of humanity. So it evokes so much about the human condition, and how important it is not to wash away those roots, those trails. No matter Jewish or not Jewish. So by telling this specific [story], it opened up the general for me, it opened up the global humanity.

(J. Gantz, focus group participant, 17 February 2024)

One of the most profound statements for me came from Laurie,

Speaking to the art aspect of it – because it's so ritualistic and full of symbols and because of course you're moving – it's much more accessible emotionally than words would have been. I got much more emotionally moved from your film than I've ever felt, in all the years of hearing my mother [who escaped the Holocaust] speak about her experiences. I felt pain, I really felt sad. And I don't think I've ever felt that kind of grief in my whole life [or] allowed it in. Like somehow your film gave me access because there was nonverbal stuff in it. And that nonverbal communication through art is I think what really speaks because yes, my mother also was in a hell of a lot of denial.... Very painful to contemplate. Not just my mother's family, but the whole of it. And you know, the nonverbal aspect of the film I think really makes that possible.

(L. Eisler, focus group participant, 10 February 2024)

The last question I asked was if they felt they learned anything new about Jewish history or culture. I noted the question felt a little silly since many viewers were Jewish. Atesh responded: *"I don't know if I learned anything in the traditional sense of learning, but I embodied some things that I never had embodied before because of the openness [or] permeability that you carried through this film and let in the material of the past. It it's very great."*

Linda said something interesting:

Well, this may not at all be what you would expect but what I learned, which came about because so much sadness was stirred for me [in watching]. For you Miriam, and others who you refer to.... like when you say, 'much of my generation' ... you said something about Judaism was colorless for you, it really made me so sad because for me..., I'm pretty strongly identified as Jewish. So then it would be quite a different end of the continuum to think about how colorful Judaism has always been for me. And so what I learned through your expression of it in that way was something about losing a connection to one's heritage and identity, and also the forms in which this country moved at that time, especially toward assimilation, sort of stripped people of the color. And I think that it's less so now when people come to this country. I think we have as a society less maybe I hope, less of a need to strip people of their histories and cultures. But anyway, that's what I learned when you used that one term that it was colorless for you, and for many people, you know.

(L. Kanefield, focus group participant, 17 February 2024)

Curiously, Linda is the same generation as I and we grew up near each other but clearly had very different experiences. A week later she sent me the book, *Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life – In Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)* (Hurwitz 2019). I look forward to reading it post PhD!

The LIVE: Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother

The Shluva Project: Part 2 – Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother was a live dance-theatre event performed on 15 April 2022 at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick in Ireland (Fig. 27). It consisted of roughly twelve sections that interwove dance, spoken-word, as well as live and recorded music, on stage drawing, and projections. If Part 1, *The Journey to Find My Grandmother's Grandmother*, was about the journey to find any traces of Shluva, then Part 2 became about embodying the knowledge I discovered through that genealogical, ethnographic and autoethnographic journey.

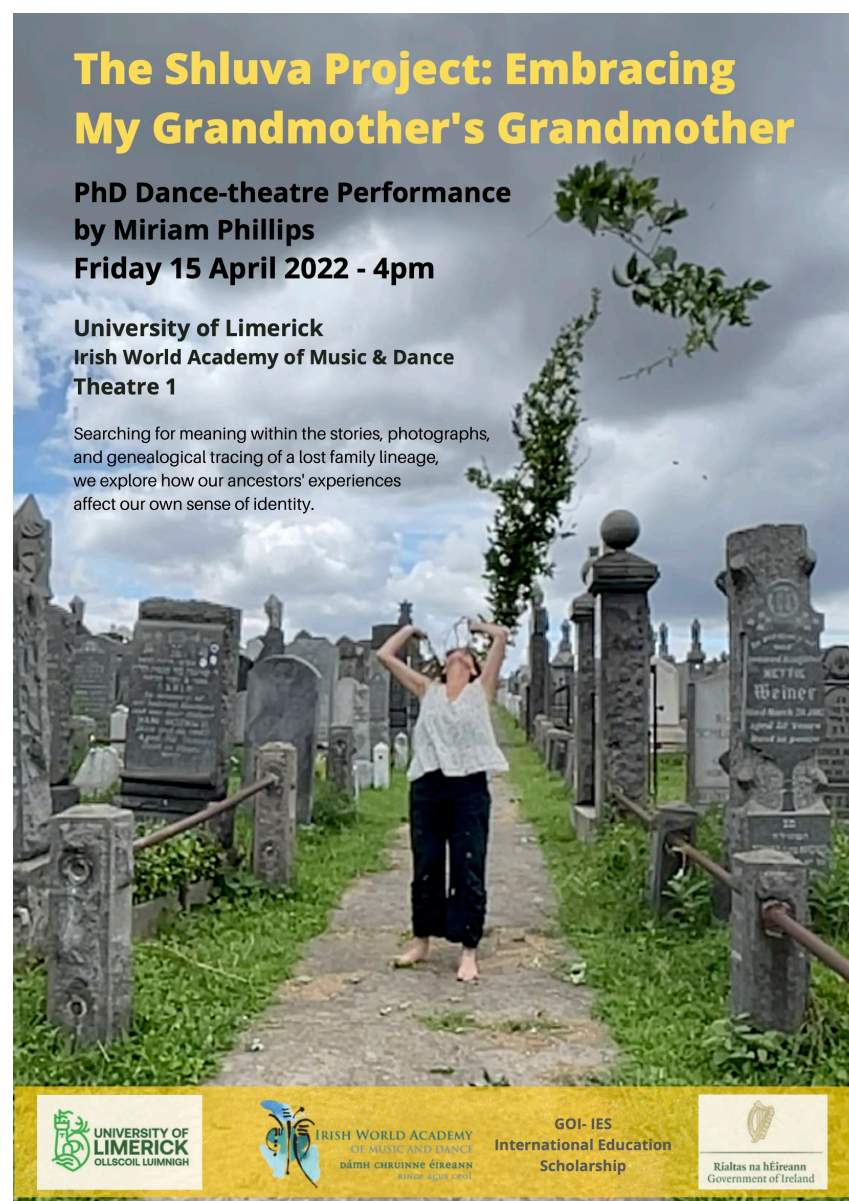


Figure 27: Announcement for live performance. Poster created by M. Phillips.

The work was predominantly a solo, with the exception of one additional dancer appearing occasionally as an apparition. As in the film version, I alternate between

playing 'Me' and depicting what I imagined Shluva's life was like after her arrival to America. I did this by robing and disrobing layers of clothing on or off stage with the help of Grace Cuny, the other dancer. I interwove vocalizations of 'Dear Shluva' letters questioning her about her life and dancing to her. I also narrated stories about my own memories or feelings of being Jewish, or those that came from family interviews making them as if my own story. I detail these in the scenic descriptions below including timestamps of the video that was made to document this research output.¹⁰¹

Although the live performance included three scenes from the film projected onto the scrim, it was very much about embracing what I sensed to be a subtle intergenerational trauma embedded within my genes which has affected my own sense of identity (or lack thereof). The live performance process was about accepting the experiences of how I came to feel a loss of identity within me that this research excavation unearthed. Ultimately, this led me to a resolve about such. Through the recounting of these stories, the live performance also invited audience members to consider how the experiences of their ancestors might have impacted their own identities.


Theatrical Coaching

An important experience in preparing for this theatrical performance was work with Irish-based actor Dr Simon Thompson.¹⁰² Because there was so much acting in this work, I felt the need to be coached by a skilled theatre person. Simon, also a UL AP alum, graciously offered to work with me. Only a few days before showtime, we worked on how I delivered the script. Simon's keen ability to 'see through the pages' so-to-speak, got me to connect to the words more deeply. I wrote these letters, but Simon got me to really feel the meaning underlying the words. He noted how I moved from asking about very ordinary everyday actions: 'how did you bake a cake?', to the tragedy and terror of: 'what was it like to leave your home forever?' Simon coached me in vocal inflection and gestural movement related to words. Working with him was a profound experience that helped me to get behind this work.

¹⁰¹ The video created was for documenting purposes only, therefore, the quality of the lighting looks obscure. Had the video been made for rebroadcasting, I would have asked for stronger lighting but as we only get one performance with a same-day dress rehearsal, IWAMD cannot accommodate that. The projector was also in need of a new bulb, so the projections of the film scenes are hard to see.

¹⁰² <http://www.clownnoir.ie/>

Even before working with Simon, in March 2022 I took a five-week online workshop with American actor, Julia McNeil, called ‘5 Ways into Character.’¹⁰³ I was compelled to take this workshop to better understand the character of Shluva and what her movements and motivations to move were like. Even though most of the work had been choreographed by then, this workshop helped me hone Shluva’s style of movement. She mapped her work onto certain aspects of the movement theorist, François Delsarte’s (1811-1871) characterizations. Julia gave us writing prompts to discover if our characters were intellectually (head/mind), emotionally (heart), or physical (body) centered. Then, how that understanding would affect their movements. Although it was challenging to absorb my discoveries so close to the time of performance, it nonetheless was helpful to know that Shluva was more heart and body-centered, whereas I as narrator, was mind and body-centered. Not surprising that Shluva and I met on the body level.



The Shluva Project: Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother


*Dedicated to Elizabeth J. Phillips
my beloved blood & soul sister*

Conceived, choreographed, and performed by Miriam Phillips
Poetry written and spoken by Miriam Phillips
Except where otherwise noted

The Shluva Project: Embracing My Grandmother's Grandmother is an arts-practice research dance-theatre performance that searches for meaning within the stories, photographs, and genealogical tracings of my erased Jewish family lineage. The second of a two-part series, one storied in film, this storied through live performance, *The Shluva Project* explores themes of persecuted and marginalized races, displaced immigrants, desires to be 'other', and family lore that perpetuates a sense of loss and lost identity through the generations. Shining light on dark immigrant shadows lurking within familial cracks, we ask how the experiences of our ancestors affect our own sense of identity.

WARNING: This performance will explore themes of anti-Semitism and violence that people may find disturbing.

- 1. Known/Unknowns**
 Videographer, Sound/Video Editor: Paul D. Jackson*
 Interview: the late Alan J. Phillips aka 'Uncle Alan'
 Music: Old Jewish Polesye. Vocals - Olga Mieleleszczuk (from the repertoire of Miriam Nirenberg), Violin - Daniel Hoffman, Klarinet - Ittai Binnun, Accordion - Ofer Malchin
- 2. Shofar - The Call**
 Music: A Jewish Prayer, Yamma Ensemble.
Mi'mekamcha by Rabbi Carlebach
 Interlude: Family photos film: Lucy Dawson



- 3. Passage**
 Sound: Titanic's Engine Sounds - YouTube
 Interlude: *Letters to my great-great grandmother.*
- 4. Grapevine**
 Music: *MaNavu*, Jill Devlin (harp)
 Film: *Vine Burden*: Videographer, Sound/Video Editor: Paul D. Jackson*
- 5. Reminiscence**
 Music: *Dance Me to the End of Love* (excerpted live), Leonard Cohen
- 6. Marked**
 Music: *Mirame a los Ojos*, Enrique Morente.
 Bodhran: Aditya Muckherji
 Interlude: interview w. Marco Aurelio (another of Shluva's great-great grandchildren)
- 7. Family Tree**
 Music: *Klezmer Der Gasn Nigun and Freilach*
 Performed by: Aditya Muckherji (violin), Hains Tooming (viola), Nuria Vizcaino (cello)
 Musical transcription: Anna Gioria
 Film: *chalk tree*: Videographer: Paul D. Jackson*
- 8. Erased**
 Performed by: Grace Cuny
 Music: *Oyfn Pripetshik*, Aditya Muckherji (violin)
- 9. Last Dance**
 Performed with Grace Cuny and members of the audience
 Voiceover: Mara Plone. Text: Joanne Hoffman (a relative of Shluva's).

*Filmed on location in Hyattsville, Maryland (USA) – the ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscatawy People.

Figure 28: Performance Program.

¹⁰³ See: <https://www.5waysintocharacter.com/>

Stage Space Opening

The stage is set up with a small table and chair placed downstage right with a long burgundy and teal-striped chiffon scarf draped over it and a pen on top. Upstage left is another small table draped with the same chiffon scarf in grey and black stripes. There are long trails of grapevines laid across the downstage floor and the stage left wings. Musicians are seen on the side. Lights are dim.

1. Known/Unknowns

(00:00:07) - The live performance opened with the seven-minute projection of Scene 5 from the film (Shluva Part 1). Filmed in a wooden fence-bounded section of my backyard in front of a pale wooden shed with antisemitic graffiti chalked on in three languages, the scene depicts Shluva in the old country packing to leave for America. A richly layered Yiddish song is heard as excerpts of an interview with my uncle weave in and out of the song. In his 87-year-old raspy voice, he tells stories about his memories of his grandparents (who would have been Shluva's daughter and son-in-law), and his ideas about Jewish history pre-World Wars, including Jews fleeing the Tsar of Russia and arduous passages to get to the United States. I, as Shluva, enter the space carrying a living vine. We see different articles of clothing and props draped over the fence: a skirt, apron, a long-grey and black striped chiffon fringed scarf reminiscent of a *tallit* (Jewish prayer shawl), candlestick holders, and a book suggestive of a *siddur* (Jewish prayer book). Shluva, one by one picks up and interacts with these props putting them into the suitcase. The movement consists of stylized flowy utilitarian gestures and phrases with themes of gathering and enclosing, actions upward, and movements looking out as if through a veil or looks between the slats of the fence.

The scene ends with the long-drawn-out tones of a shofar¹⁰⁴ as Shluva walks away at dusk with the suitcase in one hand as the other hand caresses the fence boards and the chalked graffiti "No Jews". The scene switches to her walking up a steep staircase toward a brick house as we hear the last line of the interview, "And when he got to New York, he saw the freedom and he saw the future."

¹⁰⁴ An ancient biblical instrument used in ritual contexts, the shofar, made from the horn of a ram, is sometimes referred to as 'the Jewish calling voice.' Played in long sustained resonances which can make wobbling wailing sounds, it is sounded to start Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and believed to open up the gates of heaven. The shofar marks transitions from secular to sacred time, as in the beginning of the Sabbath in religious neighborhoods in Israel. Many consider its use 'to call the Jewish people to a spiritual reawakening' (<https://www.britannica.com/art/shofar> [accessed 2 June 2022]).

(00:07:11) - INTERLUDE 1: In darkness, clanky rhythmic mechanical noises are heard sounding something like a train. It is a replica of a steamboat engine (the type Shluva would have taken to come to America) and the sounds of the black scrim being cranked down to replace the white that was used for film projection. These sounds echo the stories just heard about Jewish ancestors' passages from one European city to another to America.

2. *Shofar - The Call*

(00:08:15) - This is the first live dance of the performance. I am wearing the jacquard-vine-patterned knee-length burgundy dress over black pleated cargo pants. Every 'body extension' used in the work has a meaning, each article of clothing, prop and paraphernalia has a story that is connected to a symbology that helps 'story the dance' (see Symbols of Tradition above).

Dancing as 'myself,' I enter upstage right with a trailing grapevine in one hand and an open pink book in the other as a sweet guitar sounds. Releasing the grapevine on the floor, I continue walking, sometimes pausing to look at a map in the book or gesticulating toward upstage. I pause to take in the sound of the same shofar heard in previous scene. Guitar strums weave in and out of the shofar's bellows. I call out the words "Russia, Poland, Lithuania" outlining these countries in the air. I turn swiftly, dipping the book down and through my legs, then stomp my foot, calling out "it was all mixed up." Meaning, it was all mixed up in my mind where my ancestors came from. The multiple stories I heard but nothing quite clear, the genealogical records I found with many indicating Russia, but seeing my ancestors buried in Lithuanian plots. It was all mixed up because at that time (mid-1800s) the 'Russian Empire' encompassed many Eastern European countries. It was also 'all mixed up' because national borders kept changing.

Waving the book in the air, I glide downstage left toward the table calling out: "Manhattan, Brooklyn, Atlantic City, Philadelphia ...these are the places I know. I am trying to trace the connection."

The music then opens out to the remainder of the soulful song, *Mi'mekomcha*,¹⁰⁵ derived from a prayer exalting King David and asking him to reign over 'us' (the

¹⁰⁵ *Mi'mekomcha* was originally composed by the late 'singing rabbi', Rabbi Carlebach. This version is performed by the Yamma Ensemble

Jewish People) generation after generation and for all eternity. I chose the song because it is beautiful and, the sense of longing to be reunited in Jerusalem evoked in the song, became my metaphor to be reunited with my ancestors through knowledge.

The movement themes and words I had been working with in the earliest rehearsals were enacted in this dance: track, trace, lineage, family, broken, ...erased. Gesturing levels with palms flickering up and down like building a family tree in the air expanding out generationally, leans, tilts, circlings, searching, running, catching, linking, breaking, falling, rolling on the floor as if lost at sea. This is the oldest dance of the project. It was one of the first dances to be choreographed in 2019, pre-pandemic. Once the original live performance was cancelled, and I accepted making a film, it was this piece that showed me there was a whole new story after all the genealogy research I had done.

The theme of this work for me was about A Call, my call, a call for me to awaken to my heritage which I had abandoned, a call to find out about my family tree, a call to know my family's legacy and their experiences from the old country to the new world, then, to identify those strings within me that were impacted.

(00:13:58) - INTERLUDE 2: *The Call* is followed by an interlude of projected photographs, mostly black and white, that trace my lineage back to Shluva. These include photos of me as a child and others with my nuclear family. The photo of me and my father speaks to that it is his maternal line I track in this work, through his mother (my grandmother), her mother (my great-grandmother) and finally Shluva, my grandmother's grandmother (my great-great grandmother).

3. *Passage*

(00:15:55) - This scene opens with the monotonous rhythmic rocking steam engine sounds heard earlier. Entering from house left, a mysterious figure appears wrapped in an old purple stained *schmatta* (Yiddish for 'old, ragged piece of clothing') and carrying an old tattered brown suitcase and trailing vines (Fig. 29). The dancer walks in a stylized three steps forward, one step back, side, sidestep up the diagonal as the suitcase swings in response. Rocky, reticent, and deviating, nonetheless a straight pathway to the destination of the small table in the upstage left corner. I thought of Shluva getting off the boat after the long passage. Still feeling the rocking motion of the

boat and destabilization from the journey knowing she is walking into the unknown. A longing for home – the past, but a determination for safety and possibility in the future.

The movement is very matter-of-fact with stylized gestures of turning looking back reaching an arm, circling lifting the suitcase up and the weight of it dropping propelling her backwards. Eventually she reaches her destination, the table signifies her new home. Opening the suitcase, one by one she unpacks the contents, the same ones seen in *Known/Unknowns* where Shluva is depicted packing: a grapevine, a long black skirt, the apron, the striped fringed shawl, the candlesticks, the prayer book (Fig. 29). Interacting with each prop by echoing Jewish ritual movement I saw growing up, she places each one deliberately on the floor creating a circle. She steps into the center descending on her knees with the prayer book at her chest and begins rocking to the sound. For the first time she becomes rhythmically in sync with the tempo, suggesting she has accepted her new fate. The lights fade with Shluva kneeling and rocking surrounded by her ritual and domestic objects from back home. Somehow there is safety in this familiarity of possessions and tradition.



Figure 29: *Passage*, photos: Maurice Gunning.

In the transition to the next scene (00:20:52), a dark clad masked figure appears to help me take off the layers of clothes to leave Shluva's world and become me again. This dark figure appears and disappears throughout the rest of the performance. She is a shadow figure who represents a hovering spirit which will be discussed later.

Letters to My Great-great Grandmother

(00:21:45) - Lights up, I am now sitting at the small desk placed downstage right with another long chiffon fringed shawl draped over it. This shawl echoes Shluva's muted

gray and black-striped shawl only with the colors of Miriam, burgundy and turquoise-striped. I enact writing letters to Shluva, sometimes gesticulating as I recite the words out loud (Fig. 30). I ask a series of *what was it like* questions, alternating between very mundane, *what kind of soup did you make?*, to the very harrowing, *What was it like to live with no rights or belonging?* to the soulful – *How did you have joy? Could you have joy?* (see App. IV).

These ‘letters’ evolved over the years as I delved deeper into historical information about what Eastern European Jews experienced who were part of the diaspora coming to America to escape religious persecution and economic oppression.



Figure 30: *Letters to my Great-great grandmother*, photo: Maurice Gunning.

At the end of the interlude, I stand up and walk downstage. I dance while asking: “Shluva, may I dance with you? May I dance for you? May I dance into your past to know my present?” The next dance, *Grapevine*, begins.

4. *Grapevine*

(00:25:45) - Delicately stepping downstage, I walk through a grapevine-edged pathway, then crisscross along another grapevine strand that is placed parallel the downstage edge. Light plucks of a harp are sounded. Moving from one side to the other while the harp strikes irregular atonal pitches, I start to form a deconstructed grapevine step similar to what occurs in many Eastern European folkdances, such as the Hora dance. Crossing over the grapevines, I bow towards them gesturing forward continuing with

various arm and leg gestures and body tilts (Fig. 31). The harp tones become denser until a distinguishable melody is formed. This coincides with a dance structure that becomes filled in and repeated, but melody and movement are still quite abstract. Moving towards ‘Shluva’s table’ I dance a structure based on Laban’s B-scale. It is windy, viny, sinuous, spiraling with punctuations, pauses of gestures reminiscent of a horn-o-plenty, or tossing leaves or blessings. I then make my way downstage left to the corner of the vines where the two perpendicular strands meet. Harpist and mover now in sync, the deconstructed song/dance is now filled in enough to recognize it as *MaNavu* (at least to anyone familiar with Israeli folkdance tunes).



Figure 31: *Grapevine*, photos: Maurice Gunning.

I was hesitant to use this tune at first or anything that could evoke current-day political strife in the Middle East. When I expressed my reluctance to actor/director of Jewish theatre, Corey Fisher, he pointed out, that it was culturally inappropriate to use and it would send the wrong message. Not so much for political reasons but for the fact that the song was not the expression of ‘my people.’ While *MaNavu* was composed in 1956, it became a popular part of Israeli folkdance repertoire, a modern form created as a response to the building of the nation of Israel (1948). “‘My People’ were part of the Eastern European diaspora coming to America in the late 1800’s, NOT the Jews who promoted the State of Israel or Zionism” (personal communication Corey Fisher Nov 2019). Furthermore, my ancestors spoke Yiddish not the Hebrew that the song lyrics are in. When I mentioned using Celtic harp – Corey thought that this changed the character of it enough to use as it became abstracted and recontextualized.

I ended up using *MaNavu* as a melody played by harp and used the structure of the original folkdance as a loose arrangement to my dance. I chose this song because it has a sweetness, particularly when played by harp. It was a tune I grew up with and danced at Israeli folkdance events in the US and Israel. To me this dance represented a long intertwining road of Jewishness. I was honoring my ancestors through remembering, reverencing, bowing, bestowing, and yet, the vines of my past heritage tangle and thread through my own life taking new turns, shapes and forms throughout the history of my own life.

When the melody of *MaNavu* is fully constructed by harpist Jill Devlin, I pick up the vines and start to dance the traditional folkdance as best I could with long trailing vines. I wrap them around my shoulders or they wrap around me as I move through the stage space. I become more tangled in them as they bind my body. Eventually, I pick up the end trails, twirl them around and, center stage, I let them fall to the floor around my legs. These are the vines that tie me to my heritage — that link me to the past, that express a depth of connection to my people – vines, a strong symbol in Judaism and symbol of wine – a drink figuring prominently during the Jewish Sabbath and High holidays – wine, that my ancestors drank, that I drank. But these vines also bind me, burden me, keep me tethered to an inherited darkness. Thus, as the lights fade, *Vine Burden* –Scene 2 from the film, is projected (0030:16). As written above, it is very much about what I see as an intergenerational fog of shame, secrecy, and hiding that has shadowed me; a burden I carry. For my ancestors, it was the shame of believing they were flawed for who they were, oppressed and persecuted for what they believed.

They concealed their identity in order to survive, and later, to belong; to be afforded opportunities and the ability to pursue a better safer life. The lights dim.

5. *Reminiscence*

(00:32:38) - The sounds of audiences clapping and cheering are heard as lights amplify to reveal Shluva entering from upstage right. Garbed in her billowy burgundy dress and a lace headscarf, melancholic chords sound as she picks up her suitcase, pauses, looks up as if remembering something. She walks pensively toward her upstage left table then places her suitcase on the floor as the audience's cheers fade. A romantic piano melody is heard as she takes out her gray and white-striped scarf spreading it on the desk as if setting a dinner table. With its klezmer-like violin arabesques, the music becomes more rhythmic and recognizable as the popular Leonard Cohen song, *Dance Me to the End of Love*. Shluva takes out her brass candlesticks and dances with them miming the playing of a violin before placing them on her table. She picks up a broom and begins sweeping the floor. Often dancing in a waltz-like step she sweeps the scattered vines into a pile centerstage. She swings the broom, sometimes dancing with it as if it were a long-lost dance partner. Other times pausing, as if in response to a bad memory. 'Dance me to your beauty, like a **burning violin**' (Cohen, 1984). Finally, she waltzes off from whence she came. The song continues softly; the words 'dance me to.... Dance me on...' reverberate in darkness. This song is covert – like the hiding of identity my ancestors did, this seeming love song has an undertone of obscurity.

I intended this scene to be like a memory, a longing, a hope all in one. Shluva's memory of past times, both the good and the bad, her longing to return home at the same time laying out her possessions of tradition as she creates a new life in a new future. In choreographing this scene, I wanted it to be dance-y but utilitarian. If the opening scene had been Shluva coming off the boat after arriving to America, then this scene imagines her life in her New York apartment doing domestic chores, but still with reminiscences to her past and ties to tradition. As I danced it, I imagined Shluva preparing her home for Shabbat as she swept and laid the scarf and candleholders on the table. I imagined her also remembering relatives, perhaps ones she danced with who she left in the old country. I wondered what she wondered about them and if she knew of their whereabouts, and their destinies.

This dance is a segue to set up the next scene which is the only time I reference the Holocaust. The rationale of why I chose this 'love song' is revealed in the next section.

6. *Marked*

(00:36:42) - As *Dance Me to the End of Love* fades, I enter in as myself dressed in black. With a light shining on my desk, I sit down and page through my notebook. Looking up to the audience I ask, 'You know a lot of people think that that song is a love song. But do you know what Leonard Cohen was thinking when he wrote the lyrics?' Answering the question, I shout out, 'it came from hearing about the death camps in the Holocaust. That beside the crematoria where they [the Nazis] were murdering six million Jews, they forced a string quartet to play classical music while this horror was going on; while their fellow prisoners were marching to the gas chambers.' I utter the first lines of the song and echo gestures from the dance.

Initially I did not want to mention the Holocaust since my ancestors, at least the ones I knew about, left Eastern Europe before World War II and missed it. Because of that, I thought I was not affected by it much. I stand to take my flamenco shoes that have been hanging on my chair. As I lace them up I recount stories my grandmother told us kids about the Holocaust, her crying, and my afterthoughts.

I did not want my piece to center on the Holocaust but decided it was still important to reference. For one, no Jewish person is not affected by it in some way. I was thinking of Shluva's parents, siblings, cousins, and all other of my ancestors that stayed and likely didn't make it. Just because I did not hear about them, doesn't mean they had not been murdered there. I imply this as I stand up and boldly walk downstage to a pool of red light and exclaim, 'What Jew didn't have a family member murdered in the Holocaust?'

My second reason for mentioning the Holocaust is that I think there is a tendency for people to forget that as appalling as the Holocaust was, there was also a ton of brutal violence, persecution, and murdering of Jews that happened long before. In fact, the likely reason my family left Eastern Europe. I hold my last line and open arm gesture for many seconds – frozen, as if traumatized by fear.

I sound a quick foot roll and abrupt turn twisting around my body. Another 'Dear Shluva' letter is sounded, this time over the theatre speakers. The dance unfolds using gestures echoing the words in the recitation (Fig. 32). The series of 'Dear Shluva' poems reference four generations of my family's experience as Jews: Shluva's, her daughter Rose, my grandmothers, me. Each poem represents a different time period and

geographical locations. The poems are based on historical research along with my own or my cousin's childhood memories (see App. IV). Each poem concludes with a segment of percussive foot rhythms.



Figure 32: *Marked*, photos by Maurice Gunning.

By now I have circled the stage and end up near Shluva's table (00:41:32). A dreamy, recorded drone music begins as I bend forward moving with tense outstretched arms clasped together. A singer calls out long wailing phrases in Spanish; *Mírame*, meaning 'look at me'. I start pounding an irregular heartbeat rhythm with the heel of my hard-soled shoe. The sound of a bodhrán (played live by Aditya Muckherji) picks up this rhythm. It is an underscore to the wailing flamenco song of *Seguiriyas* sung by Enrique Morente. I chose this song because of its haunting melody and because this song form is typically used to describe tragic themes such as, death of a loved one.

As this soulful music continues, I dance with tense, staccato movements, accenting the asymmetrical monotonous beats. Sometimes with outstretched fist-held arms, other times hitting my body, dropping to the floor, or articulating percussive foot rhythmic phrases in my flamenco shoes. Several images came to mind in the creation of the movement motifs choreographed in this dance. Punching my fist up then slapping my hand on my left upper arm reminded me of how in Nazi Germany Jews

had to wear Star of David patches on their arm to identify them. Violent gestures of beating, punching, kicking, throwing reminded me of images of *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass).¹⁰⁶ When tossing my body to the floor in a plank position then using the strength of my muscles to circle my torso, I thought of Jews being tossed to the ground and their inner strength to bear. Pounding my feet, I spiral up and continue dancing these forceful phrases. The floor path I take throughout the dance follows a counterclockwise direction where I ‘visit’ different stations around the peripheries of the stage where I had previously been. For some reason, I thought of the Stations of The Cross. Perhaps because this dance felt very ritualistic to me. I was moving from Shluva’s world and experiences (by her table) through to my world (by my table). I felt like this dance was a call from my ancestors. They could not protest or else they would be killed. I became their voice, their rage. The stomping of my feet, their scream. My thrusting body parts were their rebellion against all the injustices thrust upon them. My outstretched eagle-like arms symbolized their power for all they endured.

This was the most physically and emotionally demanding dance of the performance. It needed much more rehearsal time, from the time I finished the choreography, due to the need for rhythmic precision. Though I do not think I danced it well, it nonetheless felt like a kind of exorcism – an exoneration of my ancestors’ agony and turmoil – a liberation from the inherited pain. A Gabrielle Roth quote summing this up, just passed over my newsfeed as I write: “When you put the psyche in motion, it heals itself.”¹⁰⁷

After beating my knuckles on my table, I use a percussive foot run to the middle of the stage where I began. Stomping my feet, I abruptly cut the space open with my arms as the recorded music stops. The sound of the heartbeat drum continues for a few more measures in the dark.

¹⁰⁶ *Kristallnacht* was a series of riots Nazi leaders released on Jewish communities in Germany and Austria in 1938. Because of all “the shattered glass that littered the streets after the vandalism and destruction of Jewish-owned businesses, synagogues, and homes” the event came to be known as ‘The Night of Broken Glass’ (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht>). How serendipitous that as I write these words on 10 November 2023, this date marks the 85th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*.

¹⁰⁷ The original quote is: “Put your body in motion and your psyche will heal itself” (Gabrielle Roth n.d.).

Marco's interview – Part A

(00:44:04) - I had intended for interviews with family members to be heard in the Viewing Rooms of the original performance version. The idea to include excerpts of a recorded interview of my cousin Marco that the audience hears in the dark, served this purpose. I also needed time to change costumes. In this excerpt, Marco shares a story about how our family were fur traders in Siberia and fled the Tsar to come to the United States as refugees. Whether this is fact or fiction is not as important as this notion of family fleeing for their lives and security. What is true, is that that side of the family ended up in the garment industry in New York. In Marco's telling of this story, he echoes some of the same geographical locations I mentioned previously, namely Manhattan, Philadelphia, Atlantic City.

7. Family Tree

(00:45:04) - Yiddish music, often referred to as Klezmer, is sometimes described as 'music that makes the bride cry.' It is filled with pathos and joy (workshop on Yiddish Music, KlezCalifornia, 13 February 2022). This scene is essentially me drawing my family tree in chalk across the stage floor while a live string trio plays (Fig. 32). The style of music is similar to what Shluva could have heard. For this reason, I knew I wanted live klezmer music and was fortunate to find three talented musicians from the MA Classical Strings program at the Irish World Academy, and another who did the musical transcription of my chosen songs (see Fig. 28 for musician credits).



Figure 33: Family Tree, photo: Maurice Gunning.

Played in a minor key, warm deep tones repeat in long 6/8 notes as I enter looking at the chalk in my hands. I walk introspectively downstage then kneel as a heartfelt ritual melody (*niggun*) starts to play. I write 'Shluva' in big letters centerstage, a penetrating violin melody sounds. I begin to draw my family tree accompanied by sweet violin alternating velvety cello and balmy viola melodies. Dimly projected on the back curtain is a video image of me chalking my family tree on stone on the ground. This footage was the background to the Shluva film scene, *Track, Trace, Erased*. I wanted to use it as a mirror image, only then I drew from present to past, whereas on the stage I drew from past to present.

This scene represented all the times I tried to find my family, all the times I searched for links between different family relatives, even, the times I had to write out my family tree to prove my lineage in order to ascertain death certificates. I was trying to fill in the gaps of what had been erased.

Halfway through my genealogical mapping, the music shifts to an upbeat dance tune reminiscent of ones I heard growing up, or that could be danced at a Jewish wedding. I complete the family tree and while looking at my ancestors' names on the ground, I start to dance with prancing steps and raised arms. Skipping across my lineage, although I am dancing solo, I imagine dancing the hora at a rambunctious Jewish event with family and friends. The song ends suddenly as I toss my arms up and look out.

8. *Erased*

(00:49:50) - With lights still on, I walk backwards into the upstage right wing as violinist Aditya strolls forward onto the stage. Walking the peripheries of the family tree he plays the somber Yiddish lullaby, *Oyfn Pripetshik*. From the wings I start to recite a poem I wrote that takes listeners through five generations of erasure (see App. IV). The stanzas describe all the reasons the knowledge of my lineage has become eroded with each passing generation. As I recite, a mysterious masked figure dressed in black emerges from house left and rolls to the middle of the floor. Dancer, Grace Cuny, continues sliding, rolling, and gliding over my family tree. Her slithering slowly erases it (Fig. 34). As the poem comes to an end, the dark figure lies in the middle of the erased chalk tree. The violinist kneels down beside her. Lights fade gradually; my last lines are heard in the dark, 'Track, Trace, Erased.'

The idea to draw on the stage floor then ‘dance erase’ it was there from the project inception. Since I had long intended for Aditya to play solo violin in the original Shluva version, I was happy we could include it here. After discussing a number of musical options, Aditya, who has had an affinity with Holocaust music, suggested *Oyfn Pripetshik*. Although it was written mid-19th century before the Holocaust, it became associated with it due to its mournful tone and lyrics describing a Rabbi teaching children the alphabet so it does not get lost. Even though we did not include the lyrics, I found the history of the song apropos to the theme of the dance. Also, it is quite possible Shluva had listened to *Oyfn Pripetshik* as it was quite popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Figure 34: *Erased*, danced by Grace Cuny, violin: Aditya Mukherji. Photo: Maurice Gunning.

From this project’s inception, I was clear I wanted to integrate a blob-like figure as an apparition, yet I was not sure why or what it represented. Because in this scene I did not feel I could execute the rolling and level changes in the way I envisioned, and I wanted to be reciting the poem directly, I invited Grace to collaborate with me. She also provided practical support during onstage costume changes or moving props.

Once integrating Grace as the ‘body eraser,’ I was bothered that I did not know the metaphoric significance of this character. I started looking up ‘spirits’ in Jewish

mysticism. I had known about the malicious possession spirit, *The Dybukk*,¹⁰⁸ but I had not known there was a benevolent counterpart, *The Ibbur*.

Like a *dybukk*, an *ibbur* is a form of temporary spirit possession but it enters, or ‘impregnates’ a living host with their consent. There are many purposes an *ibbur* can fulfill either for its own soul or for the benefit of the host. The ones that drew my attention related to a departed soul wishing to complete an important task or *mitzvah* (a good deed). I mused, ‘was Shluva coming down to help me tell the story of my family?’ A host can also call upon an *ibbur* in order to “seek power and aid from the spirit of a mighty ancestor. By joining one’s own vital energies to a guide from the spirit world, new pathways in life and new habits of thought are made possible” (Lockwood n.d.). Many traditions including Judaism, have rituals to honor or even supplicate ancestors and there were certainly many times where I called upon my own to help me when I felt stuck in this project. Certainly, I have many stories to tell where I believe they did help me in some uncanny ways.

Including the *ibbur*-like figure was an example where the practice led to research enabling greater meaning to the choreography. Intuitively I wanted to include a spirit-like form but did not know why. This ‘spirit’ helped me practically to become and unbecome Shluva; it also represented all the forces that erased the knowledge of my lineage. Eventually by the last scene the spirit transformed to form.

Marco’s Interview – Part B

(00:53:00) - Because of a lengthier scene change, for practical reasons we broke up my cousin Marco’s interview using the second part here. Again, in the dark, to sounds of café noises, Marco who is half Eastern European Jewish and half Italian Catholic describes how he feels more affined to his Jewish culture. He converses about how this is partly due to growing up in New York City, which “has a very Jewish vibe.” Also, how he feels attached to that lineage of fur traders who escaped the Tsar and settled in America for safety and have a strong emphasis on education and family.

¹⁰⁸ A *dybbuk* is the spirit of a dead person that was unable to fulfill its function during its life. Consequently, it attaches to the body of a person on earth who is facing similar challenges. The unfulfilled soul is given another opportunity to do so in the form of a dybbuk. Because it can be problematic for the person whose body the dybbuk attaches to, it sometimes requires exorcism [<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Dybbuk> – Accessed 15 November 2023].

9. *Last Dance*

(00:54:08) - The lights brighten; viewers can now make out two bodies (Fig. 35). The *ibbur*, played by Grace, is now seen as Shluva standing stoically at her desk upstage left garbed in the crimson Shluva dress and lace headscarf (Fig. 36). I stand at my desk downstage right donning the burgundy Miriam dress once again. Tendrils of vines, which are laid out diagonally between us, are seen at our feet. We make gestures, motifs from earlier dance phrases, that mirror one another across the distance.



Figure 35: Screenshot of *Last Dance*.



Figure 36: Grace Cuny as Shluva. Photo: Maurice Gunning.

Throughout this performance, viewers saw an alternating between scenes depicting Shluva then myself. I always knew I wanted the last scene to be where viewers unexpectedly see Shluva and me together. This was to give the impression that Shluva lives in me in the present, or I in her in the past.

We bend down, and as the lights continue to illuminate, we each start pulling the vines toward ourselves as if in a never-ending cord of connection. Standing up, we reach out our hands towards each other as a woman's voice in a thick Eastern European accent recites, "*I think of strings or ribbons that tie every generation to the next. That is what I see when I look at these things. I see connection. All the people who have appeared in our lives, who just appear -- but we didn't know we had. We just had to put out our hand*" (personal communication, Joanne Hoffman, 29 September 2019). I was moved by the words I heard in an informal interview I had done with the wife of Shluva's great grandson who knew a lot about our family. I wanted this voice to be as if Shluva's. Fortunately, one of the Academy cleaning staff, Mara from Latvia, agreed to record this for me in her eloquent voice.

(00:55:55) - As the performance is coming to a conclusion, the last Dear Shluva letter is heard as Shluva (Grace) and I start to dance to Jill's harp playing *MaNavu* again. "Dear Shluva - Thank you for all that you endured. For your hope, your resilience, and determination. You, that carved a path for me."

Although I was not able to do the original participatory activities in the way I envisioned in either the film or live performance, I still was determined to have the audience become a part of the performance in some way. It was important to me that this work not only be about my story, but a story that other's might reflect upon in relation to their own lives. Hence, in the finale (00:56:32), speaking directly to the audience, I invite them to think about how the paths their ancestors forged gave them the opportunities they have now. I wanted to move from presentational to participatory dance by inviting the audience onstage to enter this communal dance together (Fig. 37).

In retrospect I realized that I should have simplified the choreography and rehearsed it with a mock audience because what came out was a bit awkward. Nonetheless, I feel I had accomplished my goal of having the audience become part of this performed story.



Figure 37: Participatory dance with audience. Photo: Maurice Gunning.

Next, I share audience impressions and questions from the post-performance discussion.

Live Event – Post-Performance Discussion

There was a post-performance audience discussion following the live performance on 15 April 2022 facilitated by my co-supervisor Dr Colin Quigley. The intention was to hear audience reactions and answer any questions. The audience was informed ahead of time that the session was being recorded and that their words could be cited in my thesis. The discussion was strictly voluntary and was approved by the UL Ethics committee.

Practical questions about the research or movement came up in this discussion, as well as impressions the work left on people. Excerpts from these conversations are listed below, sometimes edited to make the speaker's informal talking style more readable. Some themes that came up were around the power of art, how the body can integrate experience, the artistic process, identity and lineage.

Colin first asked the audience for comments on the effect of presenting this kind of documentary material in a theatrical way. Some answers:

"I had this sense of unease, but at the same time, I felt like it was safe to feel uncomfortable."

"I felt very strongly the theme of displacement and searching. I suppose most cultures in the world have experienced that or many are experiencing it at the moment. So that, for me was very resonant."

"There were moments when I really felt a genuine emotional response. And for me, that's what theater can do. That's hard to achieve in some kinds of writing. But there are things that writing does that are hard, or just different than what we do in the theater."

Similar to the comment above, one audience member said:

"I thought it shows how art can portray something that maybe words can't. Especially when you took so much time to write the genealogy carefully on the floor. And then the masked figure came along and very gradually, and in such an obvious visual way, erased the history bit by bit. I thought that was the moment I really felt something."

My co-supervisor Dr Jenny Roche asked about the process of going outwards, then inwards back into my body. Moving these stories through my body; where or how do they live in my body? As we often feel fragmented in our lives, did working on this/dancing it make it feel like the pieces became more knitted together? Was there a shift and was it in a bodily place?

Although I didn't answer the question so directly because the experience was still too close to me, this question made me think about how I first started as a dancer and mover, very much in my body. Then I developed an interest in dance ethnology because I wanted to better understand the meaning behind dance within its cultural context. I felt that I had to dance to understand meaning, but also complement the physical practice with reading, observing, analyzing, which can sometimes take one out of the body. I was very aware that I wasn't creating an ethnographic representation, but there were sometimes when I went more into the research than into the dance. After I got an idea of a scene, the question to me was, how best to 'tell' the story. Sometimes it was including a lot of text, other times dance, but oftentimes the 'choreography' consisted of layering sonic, visual, and kinesthetic elements. I answered:

Every section I came to, it was always a little bit of this struggle, or like a question. Like, I don't have words, but I have gesture, and I have body movement, and I have movement motifs and it was always a little bit like, I go into the studio, completely overwhelmed. And then I would do all my arts practice stuff with big sheets of paper and colored drawings, and then I would start moving. It's still such a mysterious magical process for me going from concept to movement. It was finding it in my body, finding it in my body until there was a resonance.

(Miriam Phillips, post-performance discussion, 15 April 2022).

Another person asked about what it was like to meet Shluva through my research, and then to meet her on stage. I described the inception story of the photo, but also how the question, “what does it mean to find someone, to know someone” haunted me. I commented how there were various levels of ‘meeting’ her as more and more factoids were uncovered and when I tried to embody her through movement. The moment of meeting her on stage was not something I had thought about consciously. I explained the meaning of the *ibbur* and my strange musings wondering if Shluva was ‘coming back’ through me to complete something. I shared how in the last rehearsals and days in tech when all of the elements started coming together, I felt like I met her again.

‘Meeting Shluva’ was through the process of artmaking. In retrospect I thought that it was not so much about meeting Shluva the person, because I will never really know her. It was more about meeting Shluva as a symbol, as a representative of my ancestry of Jews fleeing Eastern Europe pre-Holocaust; of my heritage as part of the Eastern European Diaspora to America; as my identity as an Ashkenazi Jewish woman.

This reflection reminded me again of the quote from Kathleen Vaughan where she describes artistic research as a way of coming to know. “Embedded and embodied within a work of art, almost holographically, is a reservoir of knowledge and understanding, the ‘research’ of the work as conducted by the artist” (2012, p.170).

Toward the end of the session, an amusing dialogue ensued between me and Dr Catherine Foley, founder of IWA’s ethnochoreology MA program. Responding to some of the very personal text and how I performed it, she asked, “*you said, you hated the name Miriam, when you were a child. And now you say you hate your surname Phillips. So, I was wondering what do you do with that now? We know how art can transform us, so what do you do with this now?*”

As I gestured tracing my arms down my body, I answered:

I think it's done! I think it's like, 'this is it.' I mean, I made a choice not to take my husband's last name. And I don't like the original surname that I heard before it got translated to Phillips – the name before they came here. I think it's done.

Personally, [doing this work] was a little bit of a healing for me. Even though I'm talking four generations away, how the trickle-down effect affected me. Some of the stories were mine, for example, I did hate my Jewish first name for a while, and then I really started to like it [once I learned its meaning and started to embrace my Jewish identity]. But some of the stories were actually other family members' stories that I turned into mine. Because after all, I'm a representative of my People in my family. But as much as it was a healing for me, I started to feel towards the end that I was speaking the voice that they could not speak. Like that percussive [dance] was like an exorcism or like the rage that they could never let out because they would have been killed.

Catherine then returned: *“Well I suppose it is a matter of accepting, embracing, and understanding everything that happened.”*

Excited by her response, I exclaimed: *“That's the answer! Because this gave me the whole bigger context of some of my feelings, some of my background, some of the history I learned of my people and of my family.”* Tracing my arms once again down the side of my body and punctuating the end of the sentence with a foot stomp, I declared, *“And it is embracing and accepting that 'this was this' and 'this is it.' And MY name IS Miriam Phillips!”*

Some informal post-performance conversations occurred days after. Several performance attendees said that the work caused them to think about their own lineage. One Indian acquaintance shared how it got her to think about where her ancestors were from and how and why her immediate family got to the geographical area in India in which they now reside.

Different Ways of Telling Stories

‘Telling’ stories, albeit in different ways, was the unifying dynamic element between the various layers of research that allowed me to tell, that then enabled me to craft and perform three performance productions (including the cancelled one), which led to this storied account about the voyage. My narrative voice and the embodied knowledge expression it served, circulated throughout. While writing, devising and performing dance-theatre, and creating film are distinct forms, how my narrative voice expressed

itself throughout became a broader applicable point to the body of works produced (Colin Quigley, personal communication, July 2023). One expression came through my choreographic and dancing voice, another through my writing and poetic voice, and another, which wove together elements of the above, into my filmmaking voice. Similar to Bannerman's description of in/tuition (2006), these voices became so intertwined in the 'getting lostness' of the process, that it is hard to parse out distinctions.

Storytelling in Judaism

Late in the process it occurred to me how much storytelling is a rich part of Jewish tradition. Schram states, "the particular system that the Jews use to celebrate their sensory and mental memories is the telling of stories" (1984, p.33). Not unlike other religious traditions, stories are centered in our holidays and repeated annually. For example, the Passover Story with each action of the celebratory meal having a remembered tale and each item sitting on the ritual plate having its own story. Aside from story-telling in religious contexts, Jewish people love sharing stories which are accompanied by a particular way of gesturing and vocal inflection. In the dance *Marked*, I tried to embody these in one of the stories I was dancing out, but a non-Jewish person would not necessarily recognize them. Several of my family members, including my uncle Alan who was featured in *Known/Unknowns*, were great storytellers. In general, storytelling is a way to transmit cultural heritage and values, but for Jewish people, stories are told and retold so as not to forget what happened to us. As we shall look at later, stories are a form of resistance.

Embodying Research in Live Theatre vs. Film

Although each creative undertaking of *The Shluva Project* utilized much of the same research, I reflect on what it was like to tell stories using different modalities. One, with my body and the immediacy of live performance; the other, the abstraction of my body and the fixity of its inscription onto digital filmic format (Bannerman 2006). One, which included the bodies of my audience with their eyes watching me in three-dimensional space allowing my eyes to capture their glances, which in turn stimulated shifts in my vocal inflections and the quality of the execution of my movement phrases. The other, once removed from the body, where three-dimensional space is portrayed within two dimensions and no ability to engage with my audience through our lived experiential senses.

The notion of author's agency played out differently in each. I had agency in the live performance because I could interact with my audience and musicians – change things in the moment. However if I made a mistake, I had to dance on, rendering imperfections perfect. In the film, on the one hand, there was an absence of agency as I had no ability to 'speak with my eyes' to my audience. On the other hand, I had much agency because if I made a mistake, I could do a retake, cut out/paste in, manipulate movement or sound through camera/editing techniques, speed up, slow down, crossfade to cover up.

Other themes that came up when contrasting the two expressions of storytelling included, absence/presence, ephemeral/enduring, permanence/impermanence. For example, did the absence or presence of bodies and their sensorium affect the way I told stories? Did the ephemeral nature of live performance versus the enduring nature of film affect the kind of stories told? How did the sense of time, space, embodiment interact in a more impermanent/versus permanent performative environment? I am still reflecting on these questions.

The live performative event that did occur at IWAMD, with its fleeting fragility offered a power because of the presence of bodies and the immediacy of the moment to engage with a sensorial world – even if it was not to the degree that I had hoped for. The filmic event, with its absence of bodies, yet with its capacity to leave a trace creating the illusion of sensory worlds brought forth through visual and aural representations.

As stated previously, the film documents a journey to trace my family lineage through a woman unknown to me yet who was a part of me. It is a diasporic journey, my journey to find Shluva's journey. Passages that took place in the present yet rendered historical by documents and the documentary nature of film. The live performance then was my embodiment of discoveries made from the now historical journeys (mine and Shluva's). I embraced the stories I found in the research which were 'told' in the film. I brought those stories to an ethnographic present, and an autoethnographic space of storied memories stored in my body.

The ritual practices, so-to-speak, of tracing lineages, scouting and perusing records, re-membering and inscribing memories to text, spoken-word and gesture, and collaging a vast array of elements onto film, became an ethnochoreological choreographic practice.

Dance Event vs. Performance

When these two creative outputs were completed and shared, I began to revisit some of my research questions. Specifically:

What happens when I consider my contemporary dance choreography as a ‘dance event’ rather than a performance – particularly, during the creative process as I am designing and crafting it? How does this change my process, design, and intentions for an audience experience? What effect does this have on the dance product? And actual audience experience?

When I first wrote this question, it was phrased for others, e.g. ‘what happens when choreographers consider their work as ...’ Although several former students answered this during their interviews (Ch. 1, section *Why is this important?*), I had to change the statement to ‘I’ when the pedagogical piece dropped out. My research focus was now solely on my choreography not those of other choreographer’s experiences. That said, in order to answer this question, I contrast my doctoral works to times when I did not consider my performance a ‘dance event’ – at least not so conscientiously, because as stated, I am so enculturated into this mode of thinking it is hard to consider otherwise.

I think the two biggest differences when considering my dance productions as ‘dance events’ versus as ‘performances,’ are how conscious I become about ‘my’ audience and about the total space-time environment. This is true during my creative process and presentation. My perception is more inclusive all around. Rather than only projecting my art, I also consider the audience’s experiences. It is less about a me/them relationship, rather, they become part of the whole situation. Hence, my preference to the word ‘beholders,’ which to me signifies those who perceive the whole of what I am sharing. That perception can come through the eyes, through the ears, as well as olfactory and other senses – even in proscenium-styled performances that center the visual and aural senses.¹⁰⁹

As a contrasting example, I think back to a staged performance I created in 2014, *Soleá de Edad*, a collaboration between myself and a roaming musician. Here, I was more focused on the presentation of the work contained within a black box space.

¹⁰⁹ When attending staged performances in India and Spain, I was often struck by the aromas wafting through the events and the feel of the quality of air or of people’s bodies near me. Although I never researched this, I often thought that the warm smells of curry spices at Indian events compared to the citrus floral colognes at events in Spain were indicative of cultural values.

Although I played with stage space quite a bit, my awareness was on binary divisions within the total theatre: us/them, watchers/watchees, on/off stage. The content related to time because I played with dance phrases from when I started performing flamenco long ago and made reference to time ‘across life changes’ in the program description.¹¹⁰ The piece also connected to time via musical structure and rhythm because of the dance style performed. But conceiving it as a ‘performance,’ I had more awareness of temporal boundaries (e.g. beginning/end) and time within my own mind than how I might be projecting time to viewers.

The staged version of Shluva was also performed within a black box space, however, I was more attuned to creating an atmosphere through dance that engaged with various soundscapes, ‘body extensions’ (props), and spoken-word that could alter the perception of space and time. In both Shluva versions, I played with spatial layering in multiple ways. The live had spatial zones for Shluva and for me and made reference to various geographical places. I could ‘break the fourth wall’ by walking from the audience’s place to onstage, talk directly to them, and invite them to reflect on their own ancestors as well as come down to dance with us performers. The film also ‘broke the fourth wall’ as I spoke to viewers and invited them to participate with me in certain activities. It covered a wide range of outdoor environments and indoor spaces but the point was, I often felt I was taking viewers with me during the filming and editing process. One film viewer said: *“It was such an intimate journey. And I felt drawn into that intimacy, I felt the intimacy of the storytelling on a real sensing feeling, taking the journey with you”* (D. Riley, 17 February 2024).

I consciously played with time as I presented visual materials from different time periods or as I dressed and undressed to become or unbecome Shluva, or as myself recited letters to her asking about life back then. There was a poem that traversed five generations. Similar to the way in dance ethnology that we consider many layers to the temporal aspect of time in a given event, I definitely was playing with a layering of time within the one hour each of the live and film performances.

I was not only creating dances within space/time containers, but how I played with these aspects was more multifaceted. I had more awareness of how the beholders of my events would experience time and space – what it would be like from their vantage

¹¹⁰ See: <https://theclarice.umd.edu/events/2014/umd-faculty-dance-concert-dance-rhythmsound-and-space>.

point. And on the whole, I was much more aware of the different personnel that helped realize this project, inclusive of recording one of the IWAMD cleaning ladies recite the last poem in the live (also credited in the paper program).

The creative process of *Soleá de Edad* felt more two-dimensional; *The Shluva Project* felt more three-dimensional. *Soleá* was more like a telling, whereas *Shluva* was more as a conversation. These strategies certainly served each choreographies content, but I assert that I crafted the works in the way I did precisely because I conceived of one as a performance and the other as an event. Had I conceived of *The Shluva Project* works as ‘performances,’ the forms would have turned out quite differently even if the content were the same.¹¹¹

One live audience member commented:

“I love how densely layered the experience was, and how feeling-full just listening to you talk about it, and how much of that I felt came through for me in terms of just feeling” (post-performance discussion 15 April 2022).

When asked the first question, “What did you find meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work you witnessed,” one film viewer responded:

“For me the, I loved not only what your focus was and how it unraveled, but then the way that the story was told, with different scenes, with nature, with that image of the wrapping of ivy around you, the writing of the chalk, on your knees, your interaction with different environments, the washing it away, it was absolutely stunning, and provoking. Really inspiring and accessible. It's not something that's distant on a stage with high technique but it was the movement storytelling in various environments that called to my humanity. Whether it's the bed, the fact that you made that bed sheet so flat and so straight, the vines, the garden, the water through the hands, the kitchen, the chopping sound of the knife. Life. Life was really portrayed through your dance artistry, through your questions through your ... Yeah, it was beautiful.”

(J. Gantz, focus group participant 17 February 2024)

So despite not being able to fully articulate the sensorial aspect of either project, nonetheless, sensory knowledge did appear to come through. The film and performance discussions demonstrate that the rich tapestry of visual, aural, and kinesthetic layers and

¹¹¹ I do recognize that comparing one twenty minute dance within a faculty concert to two full-length performance projects by one artist is like comparing apples to oranges. Nonetheless, I stand by my statements.

stories effectively engaged the audiences and stirred them to reflect on their own identities or to connect to a broader humanity.

In the next chapter I consider how the creative projects demonstrated the empowering effects of this approach and examine distinct themes that emerged from this research. Among them, I revisit the connection between the concept of the dance event and postmodern dance Happenings and why sensory engagement is such a significant part of these kinds of experiences.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion: The Telling and the Told

Conventional distinctions between performance and text—the telling and the told, the act of saying and the what is said, action and meaning—fall away in favor of a dynamic reconception of texts as inseparable from the processes by which they are made, understood, and deployed.

(Pollock cited in Denzin 2014, p.1)

Coming to the end of this long story about a bunch of ‘tellings’ through performed stories, and this text that has ‘told’ about those tellings, I pause to consider the main contributions to knowledge that unfolded during this AP journey and how such methodological layering might add to the field. Further, what the creative outputs revealed could contribute to expanding practice. Below are my ‘little offerings’ first listed in the Fig. 38 diagram, followed by elucidations of the ideas.

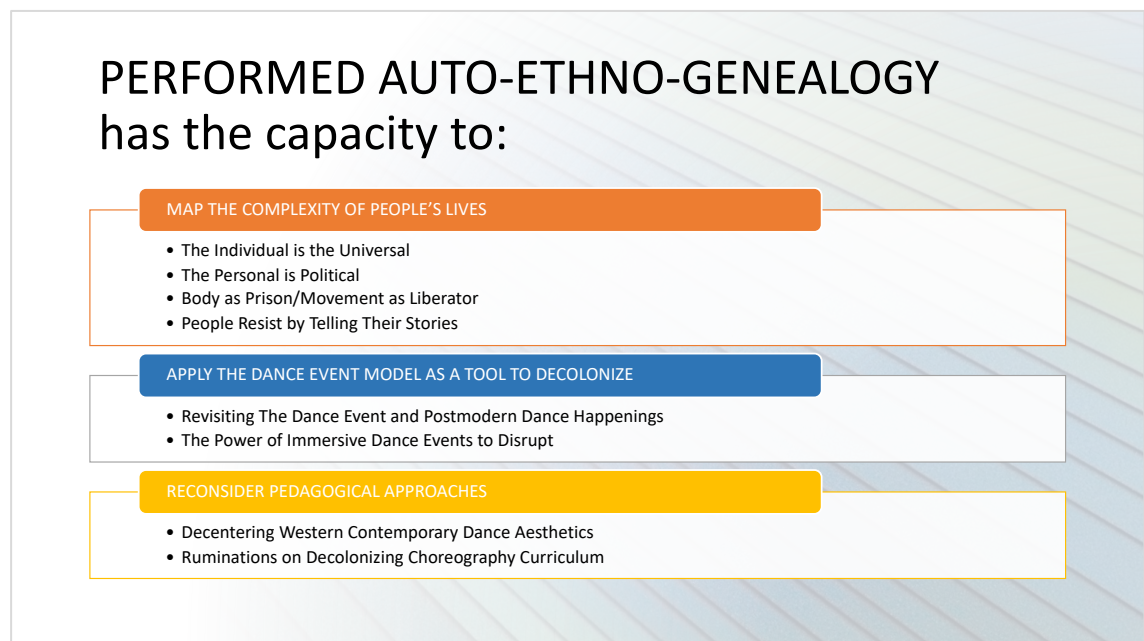


Figure 38: Chapter 7 findings.

One striking aspect that I have drawn from analyzing the various forms of research, creative practices, and resulting *Shluva Project* artefacts is that, although the project centered on my personal family lineage and utilized an ethnochoreological framework in its creation, what emerged was the importance of stories. The power of storytelling to connect individual stories to universal themes, to spotlight how the personal is political, and to reveal the healing potential of telling ancestral stories through embodiment became paramount to this research. Ultimately, that storytelling can be a form of resistance.

Mapping the Complexity

My AP research incorporated a complex web of multimodal approaches. In summary, the dance event model derived from ethnochoreology served as the scaffolding to create two distinct but interconnected creative outputs that sought to explore one side of my family lineage. Previously I referred to the scaffolding layers as the *meta level* of my practice and the creative outputs as the *content level*. I also utilized a layering of research methods to collect and mine various forms of data to ascertain the content level conveyed in these outputs. This led me to a better understanding of the historical and cultural context of my family lineage and through personal meaning-making, evolved into a reclaiming of identity. All of this became expressed as storytelling through the body and spoken-word in live performance and film. In fact, an important finding to emerge from this project was that the various aspects emphasized the role of stories and the power of storytelling through performance.

The arts-practice approaches used in *The Shluva Project* highlight the relevance of *interweaving modalities to understand complex cultural and artistic phenomenon* as mentioned in ‘Situating self/Situating Practice’ (Ch.2). Here, I presented a diagram I had created for my students to represent the intertwining methodologies needed to make a comprehensive cultural study of dance (see Fig. 4). My doctoral research demonstrates that interweaving modalities can be used to understand and reveal the complexity of an individual and understand how their lived experience relates to a history beyond an individual’s life (see Fig. 7). My research suggests that in order to understand an individual’s strands of identity and then represent those findings artistically, one must dive deeply into researching various layers. These layers must include something similar to emic and etic viewpoints in the sense that one searches for intrinsic meaning systems within an individual, such as through autoethnography and narrative inquiry, and also researches more external forces, such as history or genealogy. This echoes Denzin’s perspective that one must access many levels to gain understanding of personal stories.

In Interpretive Autoethnography, Denzin suggests:

No self or personal-experience story is ever an individual production. It derives from larger group, cultural, ideological, and historical contexts... To understand a life, the epiphanies and the personal-experience and self stories that represent and shape that life, one must penetrate and understand these larger structures. They

provide the languages, emotions, ideologies, taken-for-granted understandings, and shared experiences from which the stories flow.

(Denzin 2014, p.56)

I believe my research demonstrated one means to access and comprehend the larger structures at play in the lives of my ancestors and the diaspora of Eastern European Jews. I presented them as self-stories through dance performance as a way to understand a life. Unraveling the density of an individual's stories through interweaving modalities and creative process empowers one to connect their individual story to a larger world context.

The Individual is the Universal

The field of dance ethnology generally frowns upon universalism trading it for cultural relativity. Thus, I never thought I would say *the individual is the universal*. Mapping the complexity of lived lives (mine and some ancestors) through various research modalities and performance enactments made me truly understand how autoethnography connects to larger social and cultural understandings. Several autoethnography scholars mentioned previously (like Chang 2008 and Pelias 2016) show how self-narratives are of the self but not of self alone and how autoethnography uses self to get to culture. Similarly, several focus group members noted above saw how because of embodying my personal story, the self-narrative was able to speak to a more universal level. Mary O. mentioned that although she did not relate to the details of my personal story (of having a Jewish lineage), she felt I was addressing universal themes – ones that related to people's sense of displacement, rootlessness, searching to reclaim their ancestors. I mentioned how I worried about sharing a project so deeply personal. I wondered if it would resonate with others both 'inside' and 'outside' of my culture. But as was evident in the post-performance discussion and focus groups described above, people expressed a resonance and *heartfeltedness*.

Qualitative researcher Ronald Pelias, who I have cited previously, suggests that performative writing "often evokes identification and empathetic responses [because it] creates a space where others might see themselves" (Pelias 2016 p.13). I could easily say this about performative storytelling through dance and the use of layered media I employed in my film. Pelias cites Trinh Minh-ha's 1991 notion of the 'plural I' which he describes as "an 'I' that has the potential to stand in for many 'I's.' It is an 'I' that resonates, that resounds, that is familiar" (Pelias 2016 p.14).

In addition to seeing how my individual story (and Shluva's) relates to universal themes, doing this extended autoethnography allowed me to experience that common expression, *the personal is political*.

The Personal is Political

My project underscored the connection between personal experience and larger political structures and social histories. For me, *The Shluva Project* was a story about an individual's plight as part of a subordinate minority community living within a denigrating majority class in two different countries (Russia and New York). The individual story was part of a larger story about a Peoples' struggle to survive – their flight away from religious persecution, violence, economic oppression and social marginalization in search of freedom, and the efforts to create life anew in a new place. This is an age-old story. Recall the Passover story in the Old Testament and how African Americans embrace this story as it mirrored their plight. Unfortunately, it is a world story that continues today in other parts of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and I'm sure other places that may not even make the news headlines. *The Shluva Project* and the stories contained within them were also about the affects that a Peoples' life experiences had on future generations; how our ancestors' lived experience of trauma may affect our present day lived experience. In this regard, it was also a way for me to decolonize the historical amnesia of my family lineage. An amnesia that resulted from being a part of the Ashkenazi lineage where Jewish people, cultural artefacts, history, archives and memory were erased by dominant authorities, and later how that transmuted into the intentional erasure by those persecuted in order to forget the past and to fit into a dominant society of their future.

Mapping the complexity of an individual using the layering of the AP methodologies I interwove may offer tools for others to recognize how the personal is political. Furthermore, this method provides a way to, as former student Colette wrote “dive deeper and explore uncharted territories within scholarship, creative practice, and artistry” (Krogel 2017) which can lead to creating deeper more meaningful artistic outcomes.

Body as Prison/Movement as Liberator

In the theories on intergenerational trauma summarized above, I introduced Bessel van der Kolk's assertion that traumatic experiences can leave traces on families, on the minds, emotions and bodies of offspring passed down the line. I cited Wolynn who also

states, "...the family story is *our* story. Like it or not, it resides within us" (2016, p.6). He tells us that fragments of a deceased person's traumatic life experience inclusive of memories and body sensations can live on in the bodies of those living in the present. Fortunately, professionals affirm that there is a way to end the cycle and that the body, in addition to mind, can support the transformation of trauma's tendrils.

For me this connects to Richard Shusterman ideas of *somaesthetics* as described in Ch. 3. He has suggested that because the body is the primary way we engage with the world and the constructs of our mental life, that by developing our body consciousness we can know ourselves and the world better. He asserts that somaesthetics as a practice, can facilitate us to recognize the body as a place we generate meaning and that it can offer "meliorative cultivation" (Shusterman 2008, p.1) of how we experience and use the living body as a site of sensory experience and creative self-fashioning. Echoing this, Stoller (1997) has maintained ".....the body is more than a surface for social inscription: it is a repository of 'conscious,' of existential memory that fleshes out that which has been forgotten or erased from the past" (pp.91-92). Therefore, since dancing uses the body as its instrument of expression, then dancing, as Cancienne suggested above, is "a corporeal way of knowing" and could offer ways to examine the "living enactment of culture and social beliefs" stored in the body (Cancienne and Snowber 2003, p. 244). If dancing offers a different way of seeing and inquiring into beliefs, then dancing, at least from a place of somaesthetics or sensuous scholarship, can also be a way to liberate constraining self-beliefs that may have roots in ancestral trauma.

I recognize that I am verging on profound psychotherapeutic principles like those found in the professional fields of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) or Somatic Experiencing (SE),¹¹² and I certainly do not claim that what I did could replace these very deep therapeutically-guided psychotherapy practices. Only to say that this thesis may have relevance for artists who are engaged in performative autoethnography as a form of personal release from the past and as a catalyst for social change. I believe this AP research project demonstrated that through mining the layers of pained history in family stories and embodied within, AND working in a creative bodily process, a kind of emancipation from the prison of held-in-the-body stories can occur. This process may offer to an artist-scholar a way to reclaim identity and potentially break a lineage

¹¹² SE is a body-oriented modality that helps heal trauma and other stress disorders that was developed by psychotherapist Peter Levine, PhD See: <https://traumahealing.org> and <https://www.somaticexperiencing.com>.

of trauma by embracing it in a softer more artful. But what about the beholders of such embodied scholarly-layered performances?

Earlier I presented some work of dancer-anthropologist Cynthia Novack (Bull 1997) where she considered her dancing experience inclusive of her awareness of kinesthetic, visual, tactile, and auditory sensations. She proposed that this “*sensible* dance experience” contains and suggests “*intelligible* choreographic and social meanings” (p.269). She described how the physical act of dancing generates feelings and ambiance both for dancer and hopefully audience, which in turn creates cultural meaning. The whole experience of researching, creating, and performing *The Shluva Project* was cathartic for me. While it might not necessarily have been ‘cathartic’ for viewers, they nonetheless seemed to derive meaning from witnessing the performances.

The outcomes of this in-depth research and embodied storytelling impacted film viewers in a variety of ways as noted previously. Mary mentioned, “*one thing is to go and do therapy and talk about it and try to remember but to be able to witness someone's story through art is just so moving.*” Laurie felt that because the film was so ritualistic and used movement, the story was more emotionally accessible than words would have been. She noted how she “*got more emotionally moved ... than [she] ever felt in all the years of hearing [her] mother speak about her experiences [fleeing the Holocaust] ... I don't think I've ever felt that kind of grief in my life or allowed it in... That nonverbal communication through art made that possible.*”

Commenting on the uniqueness of dance and how the body can be both a prison and a liberator, Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin states,

There is beauty and a direct connection to the body, under the clothes. A connection to the essence of existence that doesn't need any mediation. Anyone who sees and feels that body is able to communicate directly with the realms of imagination, thoughts, senses. There is no other art that can do it this way, with the aid of the body that was your prison and is now what releases you to freedom with its movement.

(Naharin cited in Izikovich 2024 p.12)

Although artists have been investigating identity through their artistic process for a few decades, I think the acknowledgement of ancestral lineage and intergenerational trauma has been more on the rise in recent years. It seems every week I am seeing an announcement for a contemporary dance performance that explores intergenerational

trauma and dances for ancestors.¹¹³ We are in a time of wanting to look at this aspect of the human condition and a time of wanting to heal. Or as Lily stated above, *we're living in a time where [acknowledging identity] is not a luxury, you either own your identity, or you suffer your identity!* *The Shluva Project* has been a response to its time. It seems many are wanting to 'decolonize' our own experiences from the shackles of voices that were historically silenced but that held critical memory of our identities. The kinesthetic, sensorial choreographic approach in which I shared my lived experience and family stories may offer ways for creators and viewers to connect, as Naharin states above, *to the essence of existence that doesn't need any mediation*. The perspective that emerged by making myself vulnerable in this way, and from audience and viewers' responses, validated the power of dance-theatre to transform experience of maker-performer and beholders.

People Resist by Telling Their Stories

In this time of radical social change where many are interrogating history as represented in textbooks, city monuments, park names, stolen artefacts, and even current news, the power of storytelling or re-telling as the case may be, has become more critical than ever. Once while in the midst of working on this project I visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, a museum devoted to the stories of African Americans through their journeys, history, culture, community expressions, art, artefacts and other contributions. High on a wall I saw two quotes by feminist cultural critic bell hooks: "People resist by naming their history" and "people resist by telling their stories." Reflecting on these quotes I wondered how naming my history and performing me and my family's stories were a form of resistance. What or who am I resisting?

In the live dance '*Marked*' described in Ch. 6, I share how the choreography felt like a response to my ancestors' plight – that in some way I had become their voice. That I was storying their resistance four generations later through my body, for if they had resisted the persecution back then, they would have been killed. In an article related to "stories as a liberatory praxis," González and Sánchez-Lasaballett (2023, p.9) assert that

¹¹³ The Kennedy Center recently presented former MFA students, Ama and Chris Law's work, *Chronicles of Nina...What now?* which "explores the process of living on in the wake of death and examines the longing to establish an everlasting connection with our ancestors" (<https://www.kennedy-center.org/whats-on/explore-by-genre/dance/2023-2024/ldcp-project-charma/>). Dance Place devoted an entire show to "*These Beating Hearts: Dances for our Ancestors*" (<https://www.danceplace.org/performances/open-call/>). These are two examples among many that I have seen in the past year.

“stories have emancipatory potentials by offering a historical reconstruction that witnesses resistance and traces political agency conditions and possibilities” (p.3). They suggest that “storytelling by racialized and feminized people become ways to resist and find dignity by revealing truth and reclaiming ancestral knowledge and practice” (p.13). Citing O’Brien, they acknowledge how stories function as “the spiritual scaffolding for navigating present struggles” (p.10). So in this regard, by naming my ancestors’ histories through embodied storytelling became a form of resistance, and consequentially revealing this knowledge became my own healing practice. I am reminded of Sara Motta’s quote at the opening of this thesis:

I stand on the shoulders of my grandmothers ... The ancestors, of my maternal lines, with all their stories of exile, pain and abuse, and those of survival, protection, desire and resilience, anchor me into this practice of remything and enfleshing a politics of knowledge of the racialised and feminised flesh; a methodology otherwise.

(cited in González and Sánchez-Lasaballett 2023 p. 11-12)

Previously I described narrative inquiry as peoples’ lived experience as expressed in storytelling and suggested that mining stories could lead to better understandings of those studied or even of self. But in order to story-tell, I had to story-excavate, story-find, story-embodiment. Through this project I have come to recognize genealogical records as the footprints of a person’s life story that track how they got from there to here. Historical descriptions are the shadows which trace those footprints revealing why someone relocated. Auto/ethnographic accounts are the remnants of those shadows disclosing meaning and spotlight an individual’s survival strategies in relation to a collective journey. Embodied arts practice and performance offers ways to *remyth and enflesh a politics of knowledge*.

Although Shluva did not live to tell her own story (to me), my tracking her footprints backwards allowed me to tell some semblance of her life – even if fractional and fragmentary. One personal aim of the Shluva works was to reclaim my lineage that I felt had become erased by all the external and internal factors I describe above in the poem-dance ‘*Erased*.’ These included erasure due to ethnocide of Jewish people’s customs and assets, collective agentic amnesia (communities choosing to forget for their own safety or efforts to fit in), dispersal of records due to destruction or human error, silencing resulting from family estrangement, or abandonment due to my own apathy. Mapping the complexity through my arts practice research gave me the tools to

fill in the gaps of erasure that caused me to lose my identity, to break the silence that resulted from the blotting out of memory. Like a reused manuscript which still bears visible traces of its earlier writing, I restoried my ancestors' stories, which were embedded within my life story. I have come to call this embodied storytelling practice *performed auto-ethno-genealogy*. It is a method that encapsulates the process of reanimating the muddy traces of the palimpsest of my ancestors' storied lives.

During one of the focus groups Atesh commented, "*you express that there was an emptiness in you that you needed to fill, you needed to explore. It became powerful and you started doing it and then you did it. Do you feel better?*" I replied, "*There's a sense of reclaiming something of my identity. Because I was always going to the Other. So being able to say I'm an Ashkenazi Jew from the Eastern European Jewish Diaspora into the United States pre World Wars, pre Holocaust. There's something about that identity of knowing I'm from this diaspora community that is healing in a certain way*" (focus group discussion 10 February 2024).

By inhabiting Shluva's life story – at least as I imagined it based on deep research, I was able to understand my lineage and a culture that had previously been foreign to me (my own). This not only allowed me to relate more deeply to the stories of fellow humans whose families also left one place to journey to another in search of freedom and a better life, but it also helped viewers have more empathy too. Several viewer comments demonstrated this. Recall Linda's comment in Film Sharing Discussion Groups section (Ch. 6): *It gave me a lot of empathy and compassion, not only for my own family that came here ... but also for all the people who are desperate to come to the United States today, many of whom are unable to, even though they too have to deal with persecution in their homelands. And ... the heartache of having to leave your homeland in the hope of something better, and [then] the cost of that, that can be in some families, the erasure of an identity.*

My hope is that my very personal story will resonate with readers and offer artists tools to create their own *performed auto-ethno-genealogy* research. My wish is that the perspectives I developed, which have been outlined in this thesis, can provide resilient agency for those interested to rekindle identity, reclaim dignity and discover a sense of belonging by recognizing the self as part of a larger flow of collective strength. Storytelling through an artistic process can help one "to piece oneself back together with tenderness, devotion and faith [and] to transform feelings of loss, betrayal, and

powerlessness into love, connection and great wisdom” (González and Sánchez-Lasaballett 2023, p. 11). By dwelling within our own personal stories as well as deeply listening to other peoples’ stories, we become more empathetic and understanding of our own present struggles and other people’s circumstances. Person-by-person, story-by-story, we can change the world. And this indeed is a form of resistance.

What’s in a Name? Performed Auto-ethno-genealogy

While working on this research, I came across different kinds of terminology to describe what seemed like similar types of practices, such as Turner’s previously named ‘performing ethnography’ (1982) or performance ethnography. However, upon closer examination I found they had a different intent; they are research strategies used to learn about culture by noticing or utilizing more embodied or ‘performed’ practices. Hamera describes,

Performance ethnography offers the researcher a vocabulary for exploring the expressive elements of culture, a focus on embodiment as a crucial component of cultural analysis and a tool for representing scholarly engagement, and a critical, interventionist commitment to theory in/as practice.

(Hamera 2018, p.360)

Other terms I came across seemed more resonant. These included: performed autoethnography, ethno-fiction, ethno-drama, and the previously named imaginary ethnography. Saldaña’s (2005) descriptions of ethno-drama and ethno-theatre seems closest to what I did when researching, creating, and performing *The Shluva Project* works.

Ethnodrama, a compound word joining ethnography and drama, is a written play script, teleplay, or screenplay consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and digital artifacts such as diaries, social media, email correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, and historic documents. ... This approach dramatizes the data.

(Saldana, 2005, p. 2)

Ethnotheatre, a compound word joining ethnography and theatre, employs the traditional craft and artistic technique of theatrical or media production to mount for an audience a live or mediated performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of empirical materials. The goal is to investigate a particular facet of the human condition for purposes of adapting

those observations and insights into a performance medium. Ethnotheatre uses fieldwork for theatrical production work.

(adapted from Saldana, 2005 p.12; cited in Denzin 2018, p.377)

There were additional terms I came across that seemed to have an affinity with my work. These included, ethno-storytelling, ethno-performance, performing autobiography, investigative theatre, autoethnodramatic monologue, etc. (Denzin 2018). There is not a standardization of terms for practices that utilize auto or ethnographic research for the sake of enacting it. In fact, Denzin and Lincoln's *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2018) lists 100 related terms to the emerging terminology around the spaces that include auto/ethnography and performance.

Although I find resonances with several of these terms, still there are nuanced distinctions to what I did. They all have parts of what I was doing but seemed to leave out critical aspects. My research and subsequent works that resulted were critically connected to genealogy and ethnochoreology specifically, and choreography and dance were the core methods and means of storytelling.

What is the Western mind's need to name something I wondered? Sure, naming something can make it describable, understandable, and shareable. Characterizing novel methods by naming them has become incessantly important in academic contexts where research is valued based on that which generates new knowledge. Thus, in tandem with conveying new knowledge is the need to name it, to coin a phrase, even to make it brandable. One could argue that to name something is to know it or to give it power. I played around with 'performing ethno-genealogy' (which left out the auto) or 'performing auto-ethnochoreology' (which left out the genealogy). In discussing this with supervisor Dr Jenny Roche, the term we thought best integrated my practice was '*performed auto-ethno-genealogy*.' Although it leaves out the choreo/dance part, it nonetheless seemed like the best fit.

Towards the end of my research, by happenstance I came across Layla Zami's *Contemporary perforMemory: dancing through spacetime, historical trauma, and diaspora in the 21st century* (2020). Zami describes her research as exploring:

how movement and, more specifically, contemporary dance productions, may inform and transform access to traumatic pasts, current power relations and perceptions of (post)human futures at a personal and a societal level. Contending that corporeality is a site and a source of power, I ask what happens when bodies

propel the past into the present, metaphorically and materially. By challenging the presumed ephemerality of dance, I contend that it can be read as a dynamic epistemology that mobilizes memory, in a way that has a long-lasting impact on the production and transmission of memory. ...this book argues that dance as an epistemological medium functions as a fundamental tool for processing historical trauma in relation to current sociopolitical relations.

(Zami 2020, p.17)

Connecting dance, memory, storytelling, diaspora and politics, Zami reflects upon seven dance works by artists spanning a range of cultures whose pieces engage with themes of diasporic journeys, cultural memory and historical trauma (including Jewish and Holocaust stories among others). While each piece is distinct, they all “perform memory in a timespace that moves beyond past, present, and future distinctions” (p.55), and they represent repertoire that Zami refers to as *perforMemory* using a process she terms as *choreobiography* (the intertwining of choreographing and autobiographical storytelling). I strongly resonate with her description of the process of choreobiography

Choreobiography allows dancers to put a name to the face of memory, to zoom in on an individual within the broader picture of history, to search for personal ancestors or artistic soulmates through choreography. To choreograph a biographical piece, centered on one individual who is named and embodied, is in itself a strong political statement.

(Zami 2020, p.55)

Recalling Zami’s notion of *choreobiography* described above, *The Shluva Project* certainly puts a *name to the face of memory* – the memory of my erased Jewish family lineage, how that came to be and its impact on me. It *zoomed in on an individual within the broader picture of history to search for personal ancestors through choreography* – that was Shluva as representative of late 19th century Eastern European Jewish Diaspora that fled oppression and persecution prior to the Holocaust. *The Shluva Project* encompassed two choreographed biographical pieces that *centered on one individual who is named and embodied*, and without conscientiously intending to, this project became *a strong political statement* (2020, p.55).

What to call the process of what I did, or the type of dances that I made? In light of Zami’s coinage of *choreobiography*, I thought of naming my work *performed choreo-auto-ethno-genealogy* to bring the choreography back to the process and presentation but decided it was too unwieldly. Regardless of the name, my hope is that the methods

of creative practice research I have outlined here highlight the power of sensorially-rich dance-art storytelling to transform performer and beholders to re-member, re-claim, and re-root ourselves; then to re-listen and re-extend empathy to others and their life stories. May this work help to elevate historically marginalized voices, reinscribe erased ancestry, and offer an arts practice roadmap that can illuminate forgotten memories that need to be re-storied using the aesthetics of art and the gentler practice of dance.

The Dance Event Model as a Tool to Decolonize

Previously I have mentioned that I thought that what we were doing in UCLA's former dance ethnology MA program was 'decolonizing' dance even before the idea became culturally significant. Over the years of teaching and practicing the application of the dance event model to create choreographic events, I have come to appreciate its potential as a tool to further this cause. Digging a bit deeper into how this is so, I revisit postmodern dance Happenings and other experimental artists of the time in light of the dance event model and how the senses played a big part in this.

Revisiting The Dance Event and Postmodern Dance Happenings

I previously alluded to parallels between the dance 'Happenings' of the 1960s and ethnochoreology's notion of 'dance events.' While Happenings were created by many different kinds of artists, I focus this discussion primarily on dance. I mentioned that Happenings were dance events like any other dance occurrence but that a fuller sense of context and audience experience seemed to be present during artists' conception and presentation of them. Happenings often occurred in alternative physical sites than the stage and sometimes included immersive or participatory audience experiences. They may have incorporated nontrained as well as trained dancers, use of pedestrian movement, everyday clothing, props or sounds that could stimulate multiple senses, with all these elements sometimes juxtaposed in bizarre ways. There was also importance placed on process using unconventional methods (at that time) – transparent ways of making dances that articulated the before part of a dance presentation rather than the mysterious final product often seen in ballet or the modern dance at the time, or what Yvonne Rainer called, spectacle or the "seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer" (1965, p.178). There was also consciousness of doing things differently; breaking down what choreographers felt was a hierarchy of personnel and creative process. But in order to break conventions, one had to know what the rules were.

My point is that there was a consciousness of a larger sphere of context and recognition of the many elements that go into creating dance art events and their connection to each other that is resonant with how ethnochoreologists research dance. Recall the dance event model that provides a simplified visual representation of different aspects to consider when investigating dance (Fig. 5). These include different levels of how space is structured and danced in, temporal aspects including the preparation and recuperation beyond the confines of the main performance event, soundscape and other sensory aspects, what kinds of bodies are in the space, movement style, and body extensions (attire, props, paraphernalia). Also important to consider is the social structure of an event inclusive of different kinds of personnel that participate in creating the event (not simply audience and performers), codes of conduct and tacit rules that may be subconsciously at play. It seems to me the postmodern artists of the 1960s were in fact ‘decolonizing’ art by breaking down rules and previous hierarchical structures that had been carried through a Western colonial aesthetic lineage of dance-making and performance.

This kind of consciousness of elements was also resonant with the experiences of my former MFA dance students previously described. How, when going through the deep participant-observation during their dance event fieldwork – “in a selected practice [they’d] never experienced” and was “outside [their] comfort zone” (Law 2017, p.31) – this opened up new creative insights and ways of conceiving and presenting their thesis concerts. For example, hip-hop dancer Chris Law, who did his fieldwork at Brazilian capoeira events, experienced parallels between capoeira’s *roda* (the circle formation in which all participants play an active role) and hip-hop’s *cypher*, which he describes as “a performance circle in which there is an exchange between and among performers and observers” (2017, p.7). Chris decided to use the cypher as a choreographic structure and a spatial formation to situate performers and audience because it offered a more interactive and intimate possibility than a proscenium stage orientation. Stepping outside his comfort zone in capoeira, not knowing the rules, allowed him to eventually recognize the communicative power of the cypher in his own dance form – a sensorial embodied experience.

As mentioned, I have often questioned to what degree did the dance ethnology-to-choreography pedagogy I taught my UMD students via the dance event model influence how they created and performed their work, and how much of their work was simply reflective of what was brewing in the air already. For example, site dance, film dance,

community dance, immersive performance have all been on the rise; choreographers want to make dance more accessible by breaking down ‘the fourth wall.’¹¹⁴ Artists increasingly have been disrupting binary and hierarchical structures of theatre even before the recent conversations of decolonization began. So I wondered, was my pedagogy so effective precisely because choreography learners were yearning for something more?

This yearning and how it impacted our dance world only seemed to amplify during the Covid-19 lockdowns which created a hunger for the intimacy of human embodied connection (even though it also gave many the ability to connect across time zones through virtual space). Additionally, the ongoing racial injustices towards African Americans in the United States that became more globally visible in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder (2020) shouted a call to action which rippled throughout the world to examine our prejudices, acknowledge our biases, and interrogate the stories we grew up with, including who we centered, who we silenced. I wonder, would this methodology be as effective now?

In the interview with Matt Reeves shared above, he considered that immersive theatre is *a hot thing in the zeitgeist* because it reflects a desire for art not to be detached from life, and *artists don’t always want to be separated from audiences*. He described how many are *striving for different kinds of intimacy* and that other forms of media might not provide that. He stated, *we can watch something through a proscenium all the time now*, alluding to the relationship of watching through the box of TV screen or computer monitor or the ‘box’ framed by the proscenium arch – the frame that surrounds a stage space, separating the audience from the stage.

So what is it about breaking down the fourth wall and the inclusion of sensorial experience that lends itself to fulfilling these longings? What is it about dancers’ interests to provide a more embodied experience for their audiences, or for performance-goers to even want to participate in such? It seems to me that this hunger for intimacy, this yearning to disrupt hierarchical structures, this quest to examine

¹¹⁴ Referencing the three walls of a theatre box, the fourth wall is an imaginary wall in front of the stage separating the ‘fictional’ or performance world on stage from real life where the audience sits. This invisible wall creates a boundary between performers and audience, thus ‘breaking the fourth wall’ is a way to diffuse or disrupt this separation. A number of tactics can be used to do this, such as, speaking directly to the audience, dancing in the audience’s space, inviting the audience into the performance space or any variation of immersing audiences within the performance itself (immersive theatre).

biases and include more voices may be fulfilled precisely by breaking down ‘the fourth wall’ through multisensory, immersive, or interactive performance and its offshoots of site dance or community dance.

It seems, if bodies – both performers and audiences’ bodies – have more involvement with the totality of a performance, this can offer a deepening of experience, intimacy, or provide more holistic knowledge of that which is being presented. This aligns with theorists mentioned above: Shusterman’s (2008) ‘somaesthetics’ Gallagher’s (2005) ‘embodied cognition,’ Stoller’s (1989) ‘sensory anthropology,’ Hahn’s (2007) ‘sensorial knowledge,’ Sklar’s (2008) ‘embodied knowledge.’ These theories speak to the relationship between body and mind, and sensory experience and knowledge, or as Stoller (1997) suggested, *the sensuous body ... as central to the metaphoric organization of experience* (p.xv). He promotes a ‘sensuous scholarship’ that can unite head and heart and open our being to the world; he believes that the secret of great scholars and artists are those who can ‘resensualize’ us. In calling for a more engaged embodied scholarship Stoller considers how “the sensuous wonders of the world [can] humble and illuminate [and] awaken a scholar’s body” (1997, p.xi). So in the *zeitgeist* that Matt described, artists and certain spectators seem to be yearning for this more engaged and embodied performance experience that might *humble and illuminate*, awaken body-heart-mind precisely through a fuller engagement of their senses. Thus participatory and immersive dance events have the capacity to do just that. But why is this so? Rather, how is this so?

To find answers, I turn once again to Paul Stoller, who interestingly also expounded on postmodern artists in several of his writings on sensuous scholarship.

The Power of Immersive Dance Events to Disrupt

In Stollers’ *Sensual Scholarship* (1997) section on ‘embodied representations,’ he discusses and compares the French avant-garde artist Antonin Artaud’s (1896-1948) Theatre of Cruelty (1930s) to Jean Rouch, a French filmmaker and anthropologist (1917-2004) considered the father of the previously named *ethnofiction* and his ‘Cinema of Cruelty.’ Both Artaud and Rouch, in their own ways, wanted to reawaken people’s senses, to de-anesthetize art that promoted inactivity, and disrupt culturally conditioned perception (Stoller 1997). Because each artist did this in ways that engaged even assaulted viewers senses, Stoller considers these artists as practitioners of the earliest sensuous scholarship. But more important to this discussion is that sensorial

experience as part of performance events were in fact the means to “jolt the audience” because “European decolonization must begin with individual decolonization — the decolonization of a person’s thinking, of a person’s ‘self’” (p.126).

In Artaud’s case, he “wanted to transform his audiences by tapping their unconscious through the visceral presence of sound and image, flesh and blood...to revert to ‘pre-theater,’ a ritualized arena of personal transformation, a project for a ritualized stage” (p.125) He yearned for what he saw as the participatory theatrics of non-Western rituals which foregrounded transformative spectacle” (p.123). Rouch was influenced by the sensuous nature of Surrealism and impacted by witnessing possession rituals in West Africa. In many of his films Stoller points out, “Rouch wants to transform his viewers. He wants to challenge their cultural assumptions. He wants the audience--still mostly European and North American – to confront its ethnocentrism, its repressed racism, its latent primitivism” (p.126). Artaud and Rouch did this through the inclusion of sensory images and/or participatory immersive experience. Postmodern dancers had some similar strategies by recontextualizing spaces and inverting elements to reposition hierarchies or senses. In commentary about postmodern dancer Jill Johnston (1929-2010), Lax writes, “acknowledging the hierarchy of mediums and senses that had for centuries positioned painting and sight at the top, [Johnston] calls for an *intermedia attempt to put the object back in the forest where it’s a tree among trees*” (2018b, p.184).

Judson postmodern dancers sometimes did bizarre things. I am thinking of Trisha Brown’s *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) – literally just that; or Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* (1964) in which performers interacted with raw fish and meat; or Lucinda Child’s *Street Dance* (1964) where performers move from studio to elevator to street and voice recorded instructions are given to the audience to look out the window onto the NYC streets where performers become part of the flow of pedestrian passersby. These artists were using dance as social commentary – as subversive means to challenge and disrupt hierarchical structures that existed in the dance art world at that time. Many times they were using sensorial means to achieve that – some more consciously than others. Schneemann comments on her own work, “I wanted touch, contact, tactile materials, shocks—boundaries of self and group to be meshed and mutually evolving” (Schneemann cited in Gollnick 2018, p.166). Gollnick sees *Meat Joy* as exemplifying Schneemann’s concept of *kinetic theater*, which Schneemann describes as, “each piece is structured on a basic visual metaphor which acts as a shifting plane on which tactile, plastic, kinetic encounters are realized –

immediate and sensuous. [She creates art to] expose and confront a social range of current cultural taboos and repressive conventions” (Schneemann cited in Gollnick 2018, p.167).

Professor Zingisa Nkosinkulu defines decolonial art-based methodology as:

a new approach to research and analysis that seeks to challenge and subvert dominant Western epistemologies and colonial ways of thinking. It aims to provide alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing social, political, and cultural issues that have been historically shaped by colonialism and imperialism. The characteristics of decolonial art-based methodology include a focus on centering marginalized voices and perspectives, challenging established power structures, engaging with and learning from non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems, and promoting social justice and equity.

(Nkosinkulu 2023, p.397).

While not specifically focused on ‘racialized people,’ were the Judson Church dancers practicing a form of decolonization through their Happenings? Although not necessarily *centering marginalized voices or learning from non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems* (although Rouch did), were these experimental artists of the 1960s not liberating arts practice from prior colonial structures? Were they not providing alternative frameworks by repositioning conventional dance performance elements of time, space, movement, the senses, codes of conduct, and often replacing technical virtuosity for a more neutral or natural body to create art that disrupted, subverted, shattered Western hierarchical structures?

These questions arise in the context of the more recent conversations about decolonization and the need to include historically marginalized people, yet I am sensitive to the fact that postmodern dance in America was an overwhelmingly white space. While (white) Judson and subsequent postmodern dance artists strove to break down the sensationalism of the virtuosic dancing body, black artists were striving to make a place for themselves in the marginalizing dance world and to be recognized for their technical prowess not just for their often stereotyped innate rhythm or athleticism. Rebecca Chaleff elucidates this issue in her critical essay, ‘*Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance*’ (2018).

The priorities of modern dance shifted away from technical ability just as black dancers and choreographers (such as Dunham and Alvin Ailey) began to be recognized as technicians. I suggest that the aesthetics of US American postmodern dance preserved and perpetuated the whiteness of high modernism by

twisting the trope of racial exclusion from a focus on trained bodies to a focus on ordinary bodies. The ideological, corporeal, and affective formations of ordinariness afforded by the unmarked whiteness of postmodern artists in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s fundamentally excluded implicitly racialized “extraordinary” and “spectacular” bodies from their movement(s).

(Chaleff 2018, pp.71-72)

Claid (2006) discusses a related phenomenon that occurred during Britain’s 1970s *new dance* movement when British postmodern (white) artists were rebelling against patriarchy which resulted in them interrogating Western dance culture and its accompanying hierarchical systems. As part of this deconstruction process, these artists wanted to liberate themselves from previous formal forms and structures. Further, to eliminate the virtuosic movement language of ballet and modern dance and “to establish a minimalist presence” (p.117). Claid describes this “feminist, post-modern attention to the absence of presence [as] a white privilege – the consequence of a white inquiry and experimentation, a re-figuring of presence in a white, Western post-Enlightenment crisis of identity” (p.100). But the problem was similar to what Chaleff (2018) describes.

Black artists strove for *visibility* as practitioners of a range of different black dance forms – within the same European culture that white artists were attempting to reject. While white artists were busy rejecting the European aesthetics and colonial heroism of dance culture, black British artists were working to establish individual and different identities of presence that would be recognized within that context.

(Claid 2006, p.101)

It is important to acknowledge this history so as not to re-appropriate the notion of decolonization that persons of color and other marginalized people have struggled to bring into the limelight. Nonetheless, I believe that postmodern dance Happenings and their affinity to ethnochoreology’s dance event perspective provides a useful lens in which to support the dismantling of historically oppressive power structures. As stated earlier in this chapter, in the Happenings, *there was a consciousness of a larger sphere of context and recognition of the many elements that go into creating dance art events and their connection to each other that is resonant with how ethnochoreologists view dance in context.*

We must remember that American postmodern dance, like Britain’s *new dance*, was not defined by a particular style of dancing but by artists who were united by a social

and political countercultural movement whose interests lay in breaking away from convention.

How artists' different statements appeared and disappeared, bounced off each other according to their relations with a much broader set of cultural and political issues. ... New dance was always a becoming context, always in the moment of now, and the performance forms were influenced by [a] developing awareness of context and place. The dance performance and the artist's awareness of the social, cultural location within which it was constructed were crucial to the artist's formation of both.

(Claid 2006, p.79)

Despite its European origins, I still believe that ethnochoreology's model of the dance event offers a means to expand arts-based practices in ways that Nkosinkulu describes above, in ways that Artaud, Rouch and Judson Church dance artists experimented with, and in ways that my former postgraduate students who experienced the dance event perspective did. Several of these students did or continue to make works that *promote social justice and equity* by crafting dance events that utilize space, bodies, movement, the senses, community, sound, projection and other media, etc., in nonconventional ways not all that dissimilar from 1960s dance Happenings (although perhaps slightly less bizarre).¹¹⁵ I would argue that by recognizing that they were creating dance events rather than simply dance performances offered them additional tools to create deeply poignant work that disrupts colonial narratives of race, gender, class, etc., and narratives that erase the history or experiences of historically marginalized people.

Former MFA student Chris Law integrated participatory and presentational dance in his thesis *Full Circle: Bridging the Gap*. He described his intentions in this work.

I used Hip-Hop and Modern dance to address cycles that have been recurring throughout American history since Congress' abolishment of slavery in 1865. ...The concert was performed in the round to pay homage to Hip-Hop's practice of the "Cypher" (performance exchange within a circular gathering of people). Within the cypher, my goal was to encourage dialogue concerning issues of race, gender, community, and police brutality.

(Law 2017, abstract)

¹¹⁵ See: Sarah Beth Oppenheim's Kennedy Center site-specific [Skirt the Wall](#) (2016), Ama and Chris Law's [Full Circle: Bridging the Gap](#) (2018), Sinclair O'gaga's Kennedy Center dance installation [Office Hours](#) (2019), Colette Krogel and Matt Reeves' [The Barrier Project](#) (2019), among others.

The immersive nature of Chris' fieldwork experience caused him to consider his own work in a new way. He states, "As I was creating the piece, I did not think of it as an ethnographic work even though I invited the audience into a situation with which most were unfamiliar" (p.31).

Pedagogical Deliberations

When I originally taught the ethnochoreology-to-choreography method I refer to throughout this thesis, it was not totally formed but more like a method becoming. Because I did not have the opportunity to accomplish the pedagogical portion of my research as intended, I was unable to develop the method further, nor to authentically engage with one of my research questions: *Could including dance ethnological pedagogy to the study of choreography create a more inclusive environment for dancers coming from culturally-specific forms?* Nonetheless, I suggested that this pedagogy could provide a means for dance makers to discern aesthetic principles and choreographic practices from where they come from and to create new choreographic works that embrace those performance values.¹¹⁶

Decentering Western Contemporary Dance Aesthetics

In the section 'Why is this important?' in Ch. 1, I described how several of my students who practiced traditional or culturally-specific dance styles felt marginalized and struggled with the aesthetic priorities they felt cast upon them choreographically in our modern/postmodern dance department that prioritized movement invention, individuality, and a host of choreographic approaches to space, time, gravity, dynamics, narrative, abstraction, and stagecraft, etc.

As noted above, several South Asian choreographers have grappled with creating a contemporariness in dance that expresses the East in its own terms not simply imitative of the West as stated above by Chandralekha (2003) and Deboo (2011).

¹¹⁶ In many ways, I see this being done by the innovative work of African and Indian contemporary dance choreographers. And African American choreographers have been integrating structures derived from their cultural history for some time. For example, types of 'ring shouts,' call and response techniques and the use of hip-hop's cyphers. See the films: [Movement \(Re\)volution Africa](#), [African Dance: Sand, Drum, and Shostakovich](#), and publications *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (Katrak 2011), *Butting Out : Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* (Chatterjea 2004).

The editors of the publication *Traversing Tradition: Celebrating Dance in India* (2011), describe South Asian scholar-artist Ananya Chatterjea's chapter titled, 'Why I am Committed to a Contemporary South Asian Aesthetic: Arguments about the Value of "Difference" from the Perspective of Practice.' The chapter "underlines with the insistence on working with movement and choreographic principles that are South Asian even as that complicates reception in the global cultural marketplace of 'contemporary' dance" (Burridge and Munsri p. xxvi). Chatterjea herself asserts, "While it is important to remain vigilant to possibilities of reductivist analysis (e.g., this group does this kind of dance), it is equally, if not more, important for marginalized groups to be able to argue for localness of cultural specificity, such that we are not all swirled into the black hole of a 'universal' which in fact ensures certain hierarchies" (Chatterjea cited in Burridge and Munsri 2011, p.89).

Noted dance anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler, describes how each society has standards of aesthetics that are based on philosophical systems of principles and values. She asserts, "these standards, whether they are overt and articulated, or merely covert, can be said to constitute an aesthetic for that society ... If we are to understand (rather than just appreciate) an aesthetic, or a society's cultural forms, it is essential to grasp the principles on which such an aesthetic is based, as perceived by the people of the society which holds them" (Kaeppler 2003, 154).

In order not to be swept into what Chatterjea describes as, "the black hole of a 'universal' which in fact ensures certain hierarchies" (2011, p.89), choreographers would need to have cognizance of the distinct principles underlying the aesthetic values inherent in the dance they practice inclusive of their traditions' dancemaking process. That way, they can make more informed choices to find ways to connect movement and aesthetic features of their cultural history with the contemporariness they desire – to tell current 'stories' in a way that my student Colette described above as, with 'truth and honesty.' In other words, similarly to how Chandralekha articulated; to understand and express *contemporariness* in a culture or dance form's own terms – to explore and extend the frontiers of the rich cultural language from their soil, not through the lens of Euro-American concert dance choreographic conventions.

Ruminations on Decolonizing Choreography Curriculum

The notion of decolonizing dance studies in higher education is a hot topic right now in the United States and there are many ways that artist-scholar-educators propose to do

that (see Brown 2014, 2017, O'Shea 2018, Horrigan 2020, Davis 2022). In efforts to decenter dominant Western perspectives, emphasis is placed on adding additional dance styles to the curriculum (e.g., the aforementioned African and African American urban dance forms that are currently in vogue), restructuring dance history courses to include the voices of historically marginalized artists, and hiring more diverse faculty that reflects the diverse demographics of the student body. However, I sometimes wonder how deep this goes if people are not given tools to recognize power structures and biases that underlie the very systems that created the imbalance in the first place. In this same light, I believe that the teaching and learning of choreography is often left out of the conversations. Students wishing to bridge culturally-specific or traditional movement practices into new 'contemporary' choreographic contexts can feel alienated or struggle with how to do that. In the article, 'Welcoming in Dancers from All Traditions: De-centering Modern/Contemporary Dance in Choreography Class,' Horrigan states,

Dancers with backgrounds in forms other than contemporary dance such as hip-hop, salsa, kathak, etc., must learn a new set of movement principles and aesthetic values to enter into contemporary-dance-focused classes on dance-making. This creates a barrier that disproportionately affects students of color. Moreover, it perpetuates a vision of dance in which Western concert dance is valued above all other forms, a vision increasingly out of step with the professional dance world in the United States.

(Horrigan 2020, p.142)

While it is out of the scope of this thesis to delve into this important topic, I only wish to point out that in order to 'decolonize' there must be an acknowledgement of the aesthetic biases that do occur in the teaching and evaluating of choreography and that these are rooted in their own historical and cultural legacy. If 'contemporary dance,' at least as considered in the West, was established via Euro-American modern and postmodern dance, there needs to be recognition that there are aesthetic preferences inherent in the choreographic strategies that emerged from those lineages. We need to question our own thinking about the dance-making practices we espouse as educators. Or, did the notion of 'contemporary dance' blossom as an answer to the multicultural pot of dance styles and creative approaches that have been jumping onto the scene of the dance world (a subject for a journal article, but also see Kwan 2017 'When is Contemporary Dance?')?

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd (2020) which catapulted the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US to the global stage, many of us began examining how some of our teaching practices may have caused harm by centering certain criteria and not validating other kinds of experiences, bodies, styles or aesthetics. To this end, many professional organizations or collegial pods formed to discuss such matters and identify rectifying action steps. In 2020 and 2021 I was involved in two groups. One, was the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee where we examined the history of Laban's legacy and evaluated the dance styles, movement biases, even body types that were preferenced as part of the Certification Programs. Although there is still more work to be done, this interrogation proved useful in making changes to the curriculum and teaching methods. The second was a small group of dance academics that were having conversations around 'intercultural choreography.' We shared strategies, approaches, and obstacles we were facing in teaching choreography to culturally and racially diverse students. Although due to everyone's busy schedule we were not able to realize some of our goals of producing a summer workshop and conference, nonetheless, the many questions we discussed were of significance. In an email copied from a Google doc, (January 2021) Rebecca Pappas compiled our questions from a previous meeting. Among them were:

- How do we promote and engage in critical conversations about choreography when it is coming from a culture other than our own?
- What exactly does intercultural mean/look like in choreography? Who is allowed to teach what? i.e. if your expertise comes from a Western European contemporary lens of making dances, how do you take on a different approach? Are you qualified to?
- What does "equity" or "representation" look like inside of a [dance] composition course?...and are we assuming that the students are learning specific styles (Modern, African diasporic, *Folklorico*) of composition?... or that they have to align with the technique/studio courses our departments offer?
- How do we make space for all cultures and various aesthetics while demanding rigorous engagement, critical thinking, and innovative approaches?
- ...the difference between technical movement vocabulary (jazz, hip-hop, etc.) and choreographic strategies?
- Do idioms other than modern dance "teach" people how to compose?

I believe that reflecting upon these questions could be of benefit to teachers of choreography in higher education, particularly because there is such an increase in international education. I envision that the research process behind this thesis, particularly applying a dance ethnology lens to choreographic practice, may benefit educators who teach dancemaking to diverse student learners coming from different

kinds of dance styles. Further, it may have relevance to choreographers wishing to better *understand and express* ‘contemporariness’ that is rooted in *the rich cultural language from their soil*.

Future Directions/Imminent Stories

As educators and as artists we know that sharing our work through teaching and artmaking with others is an effective way to continue developing our learning.

Although I was unable to develop the pedagogical aspect of my research, it was essential to my current research to identify it. One future aim is to create a more streamlined ethnochoreology-to-choreography pedagogy than what I previously taught, because in reflection, the process was lengthy and not well-suited to dance programs shorter than two years (our MFA program was three years). I ponder other ways to guide learners in a more condensed way to achieve similar goals. Based on examination of previous student experiences and reflecting upon my current practice, I believe this evolving method proposes a means to ‘decolonize;’ it offers tools to “identify culturally prescribed patterns and personal biases” and “expand cultural sensitivity to discern tacit power structures that influence how dance is conceived or represented, and consider how others may perceive students’ semantic choices, or dance and choreographic preferences” (Phillips syllabus, DANCE-784 *Dance in a Global Context*, Spring 2017).

I also intend to develop practice-based curriculum that teaches *performed auto-ethno-genealogy* and offshoots that I had already started designing. These included course proposals such as, *Mapping the Landscape: An Ethnographic Approach to Choreography*; or *Somatics, Culture, Identity and the Body*.

Outside of academia, I plan to develop community arts workshops centered on embodied storytelling. I believe it is important during this age of disconnect and divisiveness. As my research revealed, garnering life memories to generate stories and tell them through movement, as well as witnessing stories of others, is a powerful unifier of self and connector of individual to community. To this end I recently became certified as a Narrative 4 Story Exchange facilitator¹¹⁷ and hope to design ways to integrate this typically verbal practice into movement.

¹¹⁷ Narrative 4 is a facilitator-led practice of sharing, retelling, and reflecting on individuals’ stories in order to promote a culture of inclusivity, empathy, and connectedness. It provides educators with tools to create spaces of compassionate listening. See: <https://narrative4.com/story-exchange/>

I have a number of other writings in the pipeline, academic articles and creative writing essays and poems, including in publications which focus on Jewish culture. My goal has always been to re-perform the live piece in the United States and I still hope one day to realize Perf. 1 as originally conceived — as an immersive, site-sensitive, multisensory dance event. Several film viewers strongly felt that, after editing, I might consider submitting the film to Jewish film festivals. There seems to be more interest in roots themes – of people going back in time to search their ancestry and making films about them (e.g. *Fioretta* and *Between the Stone and the Flower* both released in 2024).

Conclusion

AP research offers resources to explore complex issues of identity, lineage and culture. AP can expand our understanding of self and other and lead us to becoming more compassionate human beings. *Performed-auto-ethno-genealogy* suggests a new cartography that has the capacity to liberate intergenerational memory and reclaim parts of our-selves that were hidden or lost. Looking to ancestral stories can help us understand our past. Embodying these stories can help to re-root us and provide inroads to discover our positionality within our own intergenerational lineage. Dance has a power to perform and transform, to reconcile and inspire, to create and mitigate. May this work help to re-envision a world “when and where persecution, discrimination, oppression and genocide are no longer imaginable” (Zami 2020, p.12). As a pebble is thrown into the water causing ever-growing concentric circles to emanate out, my hope is that this research in some small way has a ripple effect on such aspirations.

Postface

Dear Reader,

Thank you for joining me on this long and winding journey that investigated the application of the dance event model to choreography and the novel approaches of embodied genealogy, performed autoethnography and storytelling that this work germinated. Whether you followed along from beginning to end or hop-scotched your way through, I appreciate your attention. I hope that somewhere in these pages you found something meaningful or of use.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Storyboard Sample

This was one of the earliest storyboards I created (pre-pandemic) for the original multi-sited immersive Perf.1 that got cancelled. Making these storyboards was a big part of my creative process as each day I was adding to them and updating them as ideas became clearer or questions were answered. It shows that most of the ideas from this original vision got transfigured into scenes that went into the film version (new Perf. 1) and the live version (Perf. 2.)

The Shluva Project

My Grandmother's Grandmother

1

Naomi's Questions/ Miriam's Answers

- Whatever texts you've written, played with, or imagined. See this storyboard. Also see AJS Perspectives article w poem: <https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/ajs-perspectives/the-body-issue/the-shluva-project-my-grandmother-s-grandmother-the-embodiment-of-a-new-work-of-choreographic-research>
- Descriptions of 3 spaces you'll be working in and what you imagine happening or exploring in each. See this storyboard – but now there are 4 spaces – one being transitional.
- A paragraph about what you're aching to express in The Shluva Project? *I am wanting to express some of my journey to understand parts of myself that have long felt othered, shamed, at odds, on the outside. Feeling like I was 'carrying' something that was a part of me, but not me. A kind of intergenerational trauma (or pain) of being othered, trauma of being erased, trauma of trying to be someone else to fit in. I felt that I needed to return to my lineage that I knew so little about to understand this. Maybe Shluva is a metaphor for me. Or, my search to find her is. Through the symbol of her, I am trying to understand my shame. Then I can transform it.*
- A Paragraph about how this exploration connects to our current world challenges. *The overall theme relates to discrimination, being exiled, loss of identity and rights taken away. How certain populations were 'othered' or objectified or even erased by dominant groups (out of fear). This is more recognized about Black, First Nation, or Colonized people but it is often forgotten about Jewish (and Irish) people. We (those othered), can lose our identity by covering up and trying/needing to fit in to a dominant group in order to survive. But we in turn also do the othering. We distance ourselves from people who are different or have different beliefs than us. We divide humanity. I'm using my own life and my search to find my (lost) identity as part of the Eastern European Jewish diaspora as the example. And question what it is that I carry from my ancestors having been exiled, discriminated against, or erased. The stories I heard which symbolized anti-Semitism; the feelings of shame or fear I felt. These themes are very much alive in our world challenges, include how we treat Mother Earth. The discrimination, divineness, loss of rights (and human dignity) seem to be picking up steam again.*

2

The Shluva Project: is a Practice-as-Research PhD choreographic dance event that searches for roots within the stories, photographs, and genealogical tracings of my erased Jewish family lineage. Using creative process to shine light on the dark immigrant shadows lurking within familial cracks, *The Shluva Project* explores themes of excluded races, displaced and re-placed immigrants, desires to be 'other', and family lore that perpetuates a sense of loss and lost identity through the generations. This interactive interdisciplinary* work premieres **16 April 2020** at the University of Limerick's Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. The audience will be guided through different sonically and visually textured spaces.

April 2021- How to turn a multi-sensory immersive dance work for an itinerant audience traversing through 4 sites into a film dance ...due to the pandemic?

"What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others," Nicolas Abraham, cited in Philippe Sands, 2016, p 7.



3



Space 1: The Large Metal Spiral Staircase

- Main performer (Miriam) is Heard but not Seen.
- Staircase not used much, transitional space. People use in ways not intended for: i.e.: practicing music or smoking cigarettes.
- Significance: place where audience feels 'othered'. They don't know what is going on, what the rules are. They are being shepherded into the bottom of the staircase from a fire exit. Not much room for people to see.
- Ambience: dark, echoey, textured, percussive and vocal sounds, performers use the fixed features of the staircase to make the music (i.e. gold ring scraping on metal banister, playing metal rungs of the stairwell like a harp, drumming on a metal column at top of stairs. Possibly having a Shofar blown at the outset.
- Performers: a blob-like figure at bottom of stairwell in a dark crevice. Main performer (Miriam) is at top of staircase participating in the percussive sounds with a drummer, sometimes chanting a highly deconstructed Jewish chant. Possibly *Hineh Ma Tov*.

4

Spiral Staircase - images



5

Spiral Staircase

- Time: 10 minutes.
- (Naomi had suggested this might be about all the ways my lineage has been erased. Not sure if this is where that should go.)
- Time and Space: displacement. the history of (Jewish) migration. colonial encounters, and political/economic/social pressures that give rise to particular forms of migration

Brainstorm:

- Strange, unknown
- Audience does not know what, where....lost
- Don't know rules.
- Otherworldly, timelessness
- (Audience) feeling 'othered'
- Audience shepherded in/through unknown territory
- Strange, trapped, fearful
- Dark, cold, metal; musty
- Floating rhythms, vocal calls, percussive & rubbing sounds

6

TRANSITION TO SPACE 2:

outdoor patio and 3 viewing rooms

- Audience gets divided into 3 groups to go into 3 viewing areas. Each to have a slightly different experience of the performer who is on the outdoor patio.
- Original idea was each person fills out a form answering identity question (like kind found on census reports I was reading) – or make up one ('do you know your great great grandmother's full name?'). Depending on what they answer, they are told to go to a designated room. Could also be something non-descript, like those with names A-G go to room 1, those with H-N to room 2, P-Z room 3.
- My supervisor concerned as to how much time filling out a form will take and suggested being asked out loud and told to go in which room

7



Space 2: Abandoned Patio w 3 viewing rooms

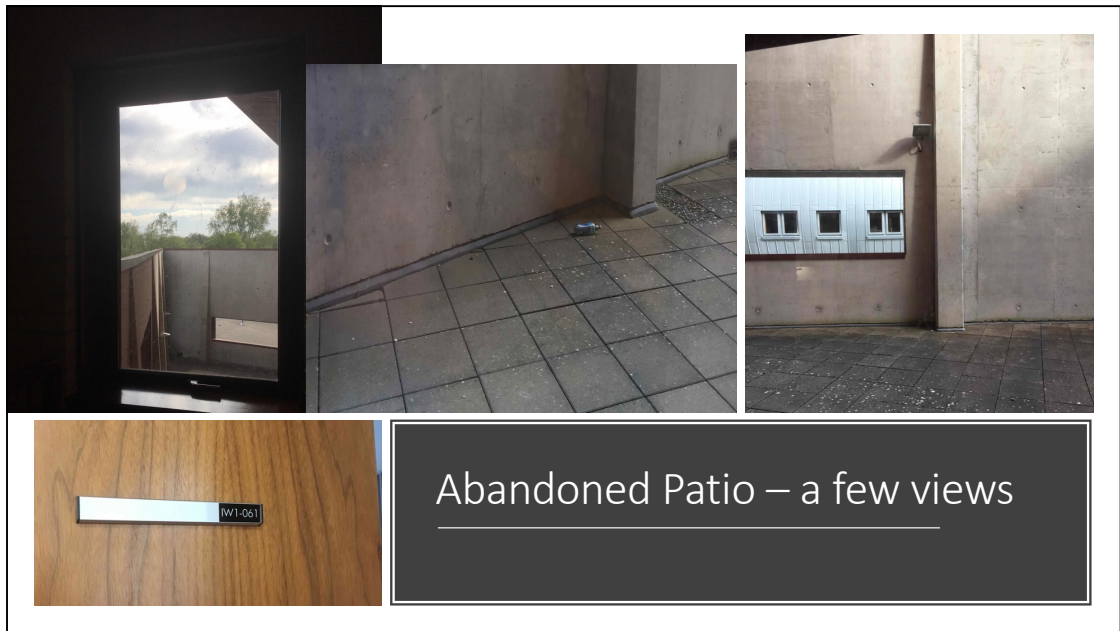
- Audience now 'othering' as performer is Seen but not Heard.

- First time we see Shluva (outside).

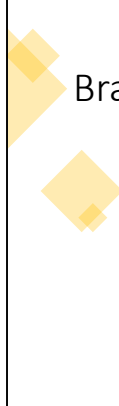
Each viewing room has different sonic element going on:

- Room 1: interview of uncle recalling his grandfather's religiosity & davening; cousin recounting he was told of great grandparents being fur traders in Siberia & had to escape the Czar of Russia who was brutal to Jews.
- Room 2: interviews w 1st cousins about their childhood memories of being spit on by neighbors for being Jewish, being told 'you killed Christ', Jews not allowed in the local country club, cousin's wife did not know she was Jewish until her wedding day as it was erased from family then hidden for awhile.
- Room 3: solo violin of a Jewish song (possibly a *doina* song to be determined)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM1i6-IDTA4&list=RDWtXeimdEARQ&index=2>
- Photo to left is simply a birds eye view of the patio. It is not 1 of the viewing areas.

8



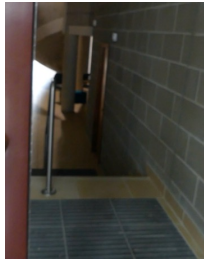
9



Brainstorming Space 2

- A window into the world of Shluva back in the old country? Her daily life. Taking laundry off a clothesline?
- OR, A passage. A transition. Leaving. Getting ready to leave? An old suitcase present.
- Being watched. Being othered.
- The audience does the 'othering' while watching through a window in an abandoned space. They hear stories of 'otherness' or 'other' music playing. 3 different audience experiences.
- Placed in a ghetto, no rights, different, feared.
- Time: 10-15 minutes

10



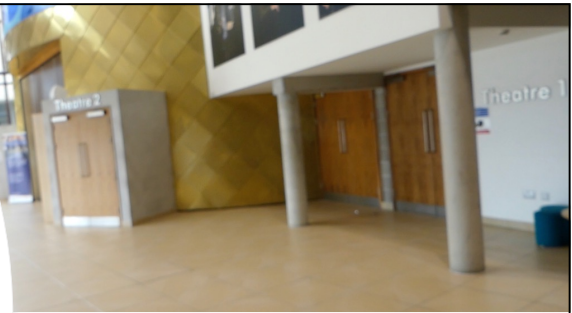
Space 3: Light-filled Atrium - transition space

- Back down spiral staircase, outdoors, then back inside; transitioning to indoor hallway before reaching theatre space.
- Audience passes another spiral staircase as they walk by. Same blob figure underneath wrapped in stretchy fabric (need to clarify who/what this character is).

11

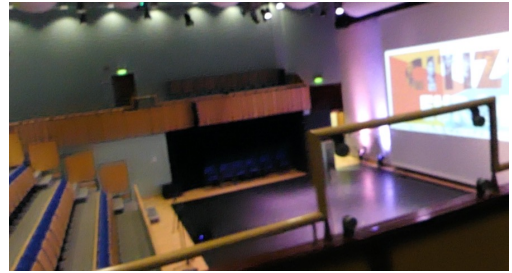
Space 3 – Atrium hallway

- Audience comes to a long table before Theatre 1 entrance. Here they are guided to do the Passover washing of hands ritual and taste matzoh and *charoset*.
- Miriam not in this; audience will be directed by guides.
- Music: possibly more violin traveling with audience. What music? 1 idea: *A Khotiner Doina*:
- <https://youtu.be/bM1i6-iDfA4>
- Yonit mentioned that *Shirat HaYam*, Song of the Sea (Miriam's song) is often chanted on the 7th day of Passover.
- Time: 10 min.



12

Space 4 – Theatre 1



Time: approx. 30 minutes (max 40)

13

"Dialogue" between Miriam & Shluva thru dance, gesture, spoken word, music.

I see this as a series of back & forth vignettes (maybe 4), where some sections I play myself, other sections I play Shluva. Alternating 'character' through a turning movement, change of location, and possibly the draping/undraping of a costume or scarf.

Miriam

- Dance and stories about trying to find Shluva. Reading poems & imaginary letters I wrote to her. Sometimes I sit at a desk reading these from my journal, then intersperse with dance.
- Sometimes telling her (or the audience) about my journey to find her (actual experiences I had during this research process).
- My own journey leading me away from my culture to seek other cultures (India/Spain).
- Perhaps this is where 'all the ways my lineage got erased' goes.
- My home base stage area is downstage R.

Shluva

- Different 'scenes' of Shluva's life.
- She never speaks, she is an enigma. Her movements tend to be more gestural or pedestrian. Although she may do waltz-like steps or grapevines.
- Ironing, folding clothes and putting them in the suitcase we saw in Space 2. OR taking clothes out of the suitcase (after the journey to New York) and irons and folds them.
- Sweeping the floor.
- Lighting Sabbath candles?? Braiding challah?
- Shluva's home base stage area is upstage L.

14



Miriam area, downstage R. Sometimes sitting writing/reading in journal at desk.



Shluva area, upstage L. standing at desk

15

ERASED - brainstorm

- Towns abandoned.
- Villages destroyed.And along with it, public records.
- Names changed to fit in.
- Data skewed because immigration officers or census takers wrote vaguely.
- Left off. Forgotten.
- Hiding identity.
- Lack of interest.
- Wanted nothing to do with family. Running the other way.
- Relatives forgetting.
- Death, divorce, remarriage.
- Lack of continuity from one generation to next.
- People not talking to each other.

16

Scene 1: Miriam (opening dance in theatre)

- Choreography almost complete.
- Performed to music of Yamma Ensemble: <https://youtu.be/Rnkb7M3dKTg>
- Miriam comes onstage w journal in hand, does introductory gestures echoing what is to come in this first dance. Music comes on, I 'listen' to the shofar, then turn upstage L to trace out imaginary maps. I say: "Russia, Poland, Lithuania....it was all mixed up."
- Dance with journal in hand using it like a Spanish fan, come downstage L and say: "Manhattan, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Atlantic City.....these are the places I know. I am trying to find (or track) the connection." Then finish the rest of the dance.
- Dance motifs based on: "track, trace, lineage, family, broken, lineage, erased, linked, lost."

17

Scene 2: Shluva

- At home ironing. Something domestic.
- She must be in new world after all the passages.
- She is reminiscing of the home and people she left behind.
- Need work on who Shluva is. How does she move? What her clothes are like. Edwardian style black coat dress that I can drape on/off to change character.
- Music: something like: <https://youtu.be/jC9FVbdMFao>

18

Other possible 'scenes'

- Next pages are possible vignettes. Don't know exactly where they go or even if they go.
- When I 'become' Shluva, these are my imaginations of what life might have been like for her. She is an enigma in my imagination.

19

Another scene: Miriam

- My own stories growing up: ... Talking/dancing
 - Grandmother's mother drinking vinegar to make pink cheeks white.
 - Other grandmother too ashamed to talk of her vegetable peddler peasant parents. I asked questions but she didn't want to talk. She had vast amounts of shame.
 - Being called 'little peasant girl'. Shopped at The Peasant Shop in the 70s (all clothes back in style now). My own memories of being 'othered' from a social click of mostly upper middleclass Jews (went to a Jr high school of those).
 - Father sitting on another section of the bus. (Did Jews in U.S. go through that? Or was he telling me about blacks & his friend Paul Moses who got murdered.)
 - Story of Mayer Fivel walking from Poland to England where name was changed to Maxwell Phillips.
 - Story of how one set of grand aunt & uncle had to change last name to hide their Jewish identity to get into college.

20

Scene - Wondering about who Shluva was

- I read a poem similar to what was published in AJS publication 'Ode to Shluva'
- <https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/ajs-perspectives/the-body-issue/the-shluva-project-my-grandmother-s-grandmother-the-embodiment-of-a-new-work-of-choreographic-research>
- Am I reading this while images of her and lineage projected?
- Do I have a recording of my voice while she dances?

21

Miriam – family connection, burden of shame

- The Grapevine symbol is significant, like vine I saw in cemetery half dead/half alive. Connecting past to present. The dead with the living.
- Where is the grapevine? (I brought one to Ireland to use in piece)
- Images of it strewn across stage separating (or connecting) Shluva space and my space. Like a river, and ocean. A barrier but also a connector to homeland and new land.
- Images of rolling, pushing, eventually gathering the grapevine up and walking off stage with it.
- Becomes that Burden of shame passed on intergenerationally.

22

I erased my lineage by going away.

- Went to the East (like many Jews)
- Native American, nature, the Great Spirit when I was 12.
- Hinduism when I was 14. Loved the rituals, the chants, the ornamentation connected to spirituality in Indian culture. The color (I found my own heritage so dark, photos of dark clothing, dark circumstances).
- Went deeply into kathak dance. Do I tell above story while unfurling 2 (borrowed) strands of kathak bells laying them in tracks across stage, as I work my way into saying then how I found flamenco? It had the pain of suffering like Jews. Drawn to the 'oriental' musical modes and movement motifs.
- Maybe dance a flamenco piece (Soleares – one of the most soulful, opening calls reminiscent of a cantor). At end of this tell story of how when the Gypsies (the gitanos) heard that I was 'soy Judia' (I am a Jew), they embraced me with opened arms. Some would say, 'Somos igual' (we are equal). The empathy and connection through shared suffering. It is estimated that 500,000 Roma (Gypsies) were also killed in the holocaust. along with the six million Jews.

23

Miriam-reading journal of my research out loud to Shluva. Like letters to her. Dear Shluva, today I found:

- Story of how I 'found' Shluva in photograph after dad died. see AJS article. My search to continue 'finding' her.
- Projected images of my family lineage. Photo of me & dad, my grandmother Pearl as child, grandmother adult, her mother Rose Greenfield Levin (betrothal and older), then Shluva.
- Images of related family cemetery (Atlantic City). Beautiful Hebrew lettering. Image of the long vine half dead/half alive.
- Images of massive cemetery of piles of gravestones in Brooklyn where Rose (Shluva's daughter) & her husband Hyman and his parents are buried. As is their son. My finding the location through census reports. Tracking these back to 1900 trying to find Shluva through Rose.
- Images of the birth/death certificates tracking family lineage so when I went to NYC Department of Vital Statistics, I could prove my relation to my great grandmother Rose to access her death certificate. There was her mother's name 'Sarah' (Shluva is Sara), but maiden name is blank, most likely because the son that signed it didn't remember it (erased again).
- Looking at records in Manhattan municipal archives. And ship manifests, trying to find Shluva. So many Sarah Greenfields. And did she arrive married or marry in U.S. (I think she arrived married). Was it Greenfield, Greenfeld, Greenvald? Was it Hyman, Herman, Harry, Levin, Levine, Lev...??? Not enough factors coming together to know if this person in my family is really my family. Like Census reports clear, because I at least knew the names of my grandmother's siblings.
- Naturalization records, do you know how many Hyman Levin's there were naturalized in the late 1800s? I have 3: Occupations: grocer, tailor, and....one that says 'Furs' identifying Former Nationality as "Emperor of Russia" not "Russian" like other ...(recall the story of them being fur traders escaping Czar)!
- My heart beating Finding original copy of Rose and Hyman's marriage certificate showing not only that they lived in the tenement houses on Henry Street, where they married and who the Rabbi was. But all four of their parents' ORIGINAL names. As of this date, the closest I gotten to Shluva is finding out her maiden name: Sarah Gla

24

Family Tree and difficulty in understanding certainty of found records

- Do I speak these stories while trying to draw a family tree with chalk on the Marley stage? That gets erased as I dance on it? (how do I do this without memorizing? Keep the journal in hand so it looks like I'm drawing the family tree from my notes?)
- FYI: (on the side) as I was searching for the naturalization records of my ancestors, my West African husband was undergoing his naturalization process. I have recordings from U.S. immigration doing the ceremony and calling out the names of all countries represented that day.

25

How do you know someone?

Maybe this goes toward end (or not at all)

- How do you 'find' a person?
- How do you 'know' a person? What does it mean to know someone?
 - Is it from where they were born? And when?
 - When & where they died?
 - Is it their name? Their occupation?
 - Where they had lived and with whom?
 - Where they traveled from? And traveled to? Who and what they traveled with?
 - What they wore? How they cooked? What they found funny? What they loved?
 - How they were hurt? What they were hurt by?
 - How they felt 'othered'? And how they did the othering and to whom?

As of this date, I got as far as knowing Shluva's real name (as it appeared in U.S. Sarah Glassier Greenfield.

- I once had a cream-colored lace scarf my grandmother gave me. I don't recall if there was a story behind this. I had it for years and years. Wore it, danced with it, and eventually let it go. In looking closely at the photo of Shluva, my heart dropped when I saw/see that scarf around her neck. Was the story that it was my grandmother's grandmother's scarf.....and I erased it from my memory?

26

How do you define a family?

- Where do you draw the boundaries of family?
- Who do you include? Exclude?
- Who gets lost?
- Who gets erased and by whom?
- “She got left behind” (another peer of Jewish diaspora). “And then got lost in the Holocaust.”

27

Another scene: Shluva

- Remembering past or dreaming of future ... for a better life....again.
- Dancing with a broom??
- Yiddish Tango Rebeka: <https://youtu.be/ENSFSYqgfOk>
- Although the time period this song was written is presumably after Shluva died. (Written in 30s I think; composer & lyricist murdered in Warsaw Ghetto).

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Another scene Miriam: Links (how we are linked)

- Even if we don't know it. Through DNA, family trees, genealogical trauma....
- How we are links. Movement vocabulary something like this: <https://vimeo.com/371588945/a4803383b7>
- Song: Ma Navu to harp: https://youtu.be/PsSW2Lv_bQY

29

Holocaust reference??

- Story of my grandmother crying when telling us about the holocaust.
- Even though my family left before, how could we not have lost family members.
- What was it like for Shluva (and Rose) being here, knowing your family was probably taken away to concentration camps.
- But for all I know, Shluva came to U.S. and returned. Only thing I know she was in NY in 1907. For all I know, she was murdered too?
- Play Leonard Cohen's Dance me to the End of Love. Most think is a love song, but he says he was thinking about the musicians who were hired to play as their brethren were marching into the gas chambers.
- <https://youtu.be/NGorjBVagOI>
- Is Shluva dancing with the broom to this song? And then I say story after?

30

Questions

- What is Shluva doing? How is she moving? Not clear her character?
- What about the strings of lights? I brought 10 threads of them.
- Ocean videos?
- Grapevine?
- Shluva's costume?
- Check in on my costume.
- Scarves that are reminiscent of prayer shawls. One in my colors of burgundy and turquoise, one in Shluva colors of black and gray.

31

Ending – the last dance

- Up until this point audience has only seen one dancer on stage (me alternating between Shluva & myself). Now, another dancer appears playing part of me (or Shluva). So it becomes first time the two of us are together on stage.
- We dance towards each other. The guides (from the earlier spaces) invite the audience down to join in a simple participatory circle dance, using grapevine step among other things.
- Thoughts of using this Van Morrison song, Shenandoah. (he happens to be Irish)
- <https://youtu.be/nj0IFKX7o68>
- Why this song? It has nothing to do with Jewishness, but everything to do with passages of people, waterways, longing for a better life, longing for people left or returning to, remembering, and it is an exquisite song. (It also has an interesting history too.)

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Appendix II: Ethics Forms and Sample Interview Questions

FORMER STUDENTS

INFORMATION LETTER FOR FORMER STUDENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR FORMER STUDENTS

CONSENT FORM FOR FORMER STUDENTS

FAMILY RELATIVES

INFORMATION LETTER FOR FAMILY RELATIVES

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR FAMILY RELATIVES

CONSENT FORM FOR FAMILY RELATIVES

Information Letter for Former Students



FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Dear Former Student (by name),

I am currently working on a PhD in Arts Practice at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. In my doctoral project, titled *Opening up the Dance: Widening the Scope of Contemporary Dance Choreography through an Ethnochoreological Perspective*, I am researching how utilizing dance ethnographic methods to create choreographic works might offer new insights into the creative process in how work is developed and its potential to invigorate its form and content.

My project requires different kinds of research, including interviewing, to gain insight into other's experiences and perspectives on the subject. I am interested in including students who studied with me at the University of Maryland during the years I worked there from 2009-2017, particularly those who took my course DANC784- *Dance in a Global Context* where I first developed this applied dance ethnology to choreography method. I will be conducting interviews with former students who wish to share their viewpoints. Since you were a student in my classes and I mentored your performed and written thesis, I would greatly value your participation in my research. In order for you to make an informed decision to participate, here are some helpful aspects about the interview process.

An interview will last between fifteen minutes to one hour. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed. The interview will take place at a quiet location with little background noise, that is most convenient to you, or over an internet-based phone service such as skype or whatever technology you feel most comfortable using. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, you may stop the interview and you have the right to ask that it not be used within my research. You do not need to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable answering.

Data collected from interviews will be used in my dissertation, subsequent publications or public presentations. You have the right to request that I not use certain materials. If you would like to remain anonymous, you have the right to do so and can inform me before or after the interview.

The interview data I collect will be stored in a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet at the university, and only accessible by myself and my supervisors. It will be destroyed after seven years. If you wish to have a copy of our recorded interview or the transcripts, please ask. If you have any questions or would like more information about the project, please contact me at:

miriam.phillips@ul.ie / 415-272-0432

Dr. Colin Quigley (supervisor)
Colin.Quigley@ul.ie

Dr. Jenny Roche (supervisor)
Jenny.Roche@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2019-04-22-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study or your participation and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Email: FAHSSethics@ul.ie / Tel: +353 61 202286

Warm Regards, *Miriam*

Sample Questions for Former Students

Interview questions will be adapted depending on if the former student specifically took the course *Dance in a Global Context* or another type of research-led practice or practice-led-research course with me. Or, depending on the content of their choreographic work while working with me as a thesis chair or research advisor, or any subsequent choreographic work that I am aware utilized ethnochoreological principals in its design. Examples of such interview questions would be:

Can you tell me what your current relationship is to dance? To choreography?

What motivated you to want to do a dance degree at UMD (University of Maryland)?

How do you think your perspective and/or practice changed as a result of your studies?

How would you describe the types of choreographic works you did before your degree? How would you describe your works now?

Can you tell me something about how you go about making a choreographic work? What types of steps are involved?

What kind of research or investigation do you do? Where do you do it, with whom or what?

How do you turn an idea into movement into a choreographic structure?

Thinking back to the course *Dance in a Global Context*, what are some of the main ideas and experiences that you recall? What did you find appealing? What did you find challenging?

What do you understand dance ethnology (ethnochoreology) to be?

Did you find the dance ethnology fieldwork process that you were guided through helpful or meaningful to you as a choreographer or dance practitioner? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

Do you find yourself utilizing any of the methods or experientials from that course in your creative process? If so, what and how?

What is your definition of 'research'? How do you see research fitting into your practice? Or practice into your research?

To you, what is a 'dance event'? Did thinking of creating a 'dance event' vs a 'dance performance' shift for you? If so, how?

Thinking about your thesis concert, how did you go about investigating your family lineage, personal memories or sense of identity? How did you choose and map these concepts to movement?

Do you feel that the course helped you to develop greater cultural sensitivity? If so, how?

Consent Form for Former Students



FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Consent Section:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled

“Opening up the Dance: Widening the Scope of Contemporary Dance Choreography through an Ethnochoreological Perspective”.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me, and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am aware that my participation in this study will be audio recorded and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording software be switched off. I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I am also aware that any information, or recordings collected will be securely stored, and destroyed after seven years in line with the Data Protection Act.
- I am aware that such information may also be used in future academic presentations and publications about this study.
- I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am entitled to full anonymity.
- I am entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

I may choose to waive my anonymity by ticking the box below; in this case, confidentiality will still be maintained with regard to any statements I make which are not relevant to this particular project.

☐ I would like to be named in the reporting of this project, including within future academic presentations and publications.

If I have ticked the above box, I would like to be referred to as: _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Information Letter for Family Relatives



FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Dear Family Relative (name),

I am currently working on a PhD in Arts Practice at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. My doctoral project, which relates to choreography and dance ethnology (a.k.a. ethnochoreology) requires different kinds of research. It is titled, *Opening up the Dance: Widening the Scope of Contemporary Dance Choreography through an Ethnochoreological Perspective*. As part of the arts practice research, I will be choreographing a dance solo called, *My Grandmother's Grandmother*. In order to create this work, I will be investigating aspects of our Jewish family lineage through ancestry research, documenting family stories that I recall from my childhood, and interviewing my relatives about family stories they recall.

As I wish to understand our heritage better, I am interested to know the perceptions that family relatives have about our lineage and any stories they remember growing up told to them by their parents or grandparents related to being from a Jewish immigrant family. I will be conducting interviews with relatives who feel comfortable sharing this information. Since you are a family relative, I would value your participation in my research if you are so inclined. Here are some helpful things for you to know about the interview process should you like to participate.

An interview will last between fifteen minutes to one hour. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed. The interview will take place at a quiet location with little background noise, that is most convenient to you, or over an internet-based phone service such as skype or whatever technology you feel most comfortable using. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, you may stop the interview and you have the right to ask that it not be used within my research. You do not need to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable answering.

Aspects of some of the stories or ideas that come up in the interview could be referred to in the spoken word text of my performance, or in my dissertation or subsequent publications or public presentations. However, you have the right to request that I not use certain materials. If you would like to remain anonymous, you have the right to do so and can inform me before or after the interview. The interview data I collect will be stored in a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet at the university, and only accessible by myself and my supervisors. It will be destroyed after seven years. If you wish to have a copy of our recorded interview or the transcripts, please ask. If you have any questions or would like more information about the project, please contact me at: miriam.phillips@ul.ie / 415-272-0432 (USA).

Dr. Colin Quigley (supervisor)
Colin.Quigley@ul.ie

Dr. Jenny Roche (supervisor)
Jenny.Roche@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2019-04-22-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study or your participation and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie / Tel: +353 61 202286

Warm Regards, *Miriam*

Sample Questions for Family Relatives

(Research for Performance 1: *My Grandmother's Grandmother*)

Interview questions will be adapted to the particular family relationship, for example, sister, first cousin, uncle, first or second cousin once removed. Examples of such interview questions would be:

Questions for sister or first cousin

Generally speaking, what do you understand your/our family lineage to be?

Do you recall our/your mother telling you any stories about her grandmothers? If so, what?

What stories do you remember our grandmothers telling us about their childhood, parents, or grandparents?

Do you remember any stories our grandparents may have told us about what it was like being the children of Jewish immigrants?

What feelings did these stories evoke in you?

What questions did they leave you wondering about?

Are there particular objects from our grandmothers that you remember and find meaningful?

Can you tell me how you see us related? Can you draw our relationship through a simple family tree or say what people connect us?

Questions for Uncle or First/Second Cousins once removed

Do you have a sense of where your family lineage is from?

Can you remind me the names of your grandparents and if you recall where they were born?

Did you ever meet them? If so, what were they like?

Do you recall any stories your mother may have told you about her grandmother?

Do you recall anything your parents or grandparents may have told you about what it was like being the children of Jewish immigrants?

Can you tell me how you see us related? Can you draw our relationship through a simple family tree or say what people connect us?

Consent Form for Family Relatives



FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Consent Section:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project titled

“My Grandmother’s Grandmother” which is performance research for the larger doctoral project of my relative, Miriam Phillips, titled *“Opening up the Dance: Widening the Scope of Contemporary Dance Choreography through an Ethnochoreological Perspective”*.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me, and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am aware that my participation in this study will be audio recorded and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording software be switched off. I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I am also aware that any information, or recordings collected will be securely stored, and destroyed after seven years in line with the Data Protection Act.
- I am aware that aspects of some of the stories I share may be used in the dance performance and information may also be used in future academic presentations and publications about this study.
- I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am entitled to full anonymity.
- I am entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

I may choose to waive my anonymity by ticking the box below; in this case, confidentiality will still be maintained with regard to any statements I make which are not relevant to this particular project.

☐ I would like to be named in the reporting of this project, including within future academic presentations and publications.

If I have ticked the above box, I would like to be referred to as: _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix III: Focus Group Participation Agreement & Questions



The Shluva Project: the Journey to Find My Grandmother's Grandmother (film)

Participation Agreement:

- ☐ I will not share the video link with anyone else without Miriam's permission.
- ☐ I understand the focus group will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes.
- ☐ I understand this is part of doctoral research with ethics approval from the University of Limerick, Ireland.
- ☐ I understand that Miriam could cite my words in her written dissertation (with credit).

QUESTIONS

1. What did you find meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work you witnessed?¹¹⁸
2. Did this film make you think about your own ancestry? Please elaborate.
3. Did this film make you think about your relationship to place, where you live now or grew up and how you got there? Please elaborate.
4. Did the film evoke any questions or memories about your own ancestors' experiences and how that might have impacted you? Please elaborate.
5. Did the film allow you to think about your own family stories or memories?
6. Were you able to partake in the participatory activities? If so, what was your experience? Please elaborate.
7. How did the film make you feel about the role of art in interrogating personal histories, family stories, or lineage? Please elaborate.
8. Do you feel you learned anything new about Jewish history or culture?
9. Are there any other questions or comments you wish to share?

¹¹⁸ From Critical Response Process of Liz Lerman.

Appendix IV: Scripts for live Performance 2

All poems and scripts written by Miriam S. Phillips

Letters to My Great-great Grandmother (recited live)

Dear Shluva,

What was it like?

Growing up in—... There...?

At that Time ... When...?

What were your childhood hopes... and, then?

How did you bake a cake?

Were you allowed to love?

What was it like to live with no rights **OR** belonging?

What was your favorite song? For Shabbat?

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Hanukkah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, PESAH – that's Passover, which starts... Today

Dear Shluva,

What was it like being a Jew in unwanted places?

What kind of soup did you make?

Did your husband treat you well?

What were your hopes for your children?

Dear Shluva,

What did you dream? What did you desire?

What brought you joy? Did you ... Have joy?

Dear Shluva,

How did it feel to leave your home forever?

Did you approve of Hyman, the man your daughter Rose was to marry when you came here?

What was it like to be an outsider **again**?

Again!

Dear Shluva,

Could you talk to your granddaughter?

My Grandmother, did she understand you?

Dear Shluva

May I dance with You?

May I dance for you?

May I dance into your past, to know my PRESENT?

Transition into **Marked**

(After Shluva sweeping to Leonard Cohen, recited live)

You know, a lot of people
think that song is a love song.
But do you know what
Leonard Cohen was thinking
about when he wrote it?

It came from him hearing
about the death camps, -- in
the Holocaust.

That beside the crematoria
where they were murdering
six million Jews, --

they forced a string quartet to
play classical music while this
HORROR was going on –

while their fellow prisoners
were marching to the gas
chambers.

“Dance me to your beauty
with a burning violin,” “Dance
me through the panic till I'm
gathered safely in.”

When I was a child, my
grandmother would tell us
stories about the Holocaust
___ and weep.

When we asked her, she said
we did not have family
members lost in it.

But as an adult I thought,
“What Jew **DIDN'T** have
family members

Murdered

in the Holocaust?”

MARKED

(Recorded narration over dance)

1. Dear Shluva,
Russian Empire, 1840.
Citizenship denied.
Forced to live in
ghettos. Not allowed to
own property.
Persecution. Homes
burned, windows
shattered, relatives
murdered.
Rose went first. Your
daughter, Seeking
freedom – America.
2. Dear Shluva,
Lower East Side.
Arrived. 1893.
Packed neighborhoods.
Sharing a toilet with 100
neighbors. A single
water-pump. Rampant
disease.
But safer than you
were.
Still, prejudice,
marginalized.
Endured – You - on.
3. Dear Shluva,
Your daughter/my
grandmothers, married,
built families, climbed
the economic ladder.
Upper West Side.
Brooklyn, Atlantic City,
Philadelphia.

My other grandmother,
too ashamed.
Refused talking about
her vegetable peddler,
peasant parents. But
what immigrant Jews in
the Lower East Side
were NOT peddlers?
4. Dear Shluva,
I was teased. Called
little peasant girl. We
were spit on, told our
people killed Jesus. I
hated my Jewish first
name; now, I hate my
Anglo last name.

ERASED (recited live)

Track Trace Displaced

Track Trace Erased

ERASED: Villages Abandoned; Towns Destroyed

People fleeing

Possessions Lost

Records Burned

ERASED: Immigration officers left off facts

Data Skewed – identity fell through the cracks

Census takers made mistakes

My ancestors could not speak English

They did not want to remember

ERASED: Names changed

Records appear then disappear

Keeping secrets,

Identity hidden in order to survive

They ran away from the past

ERASED: Their children-- disregarded

Divorce, remarriage, death

History lost; memories forgotten

Tradition broken; family broken

ERASED: My own lack of interest

My sister died; her son stopped texting me

My father died; my half-brother stopped talking to me

His son will never know...the history of our people thru me

Family Erased

Track Trace Erased...

FIN