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

Miriam S. Phillips, PhD

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.

Due to copyright concerns, the film and video media of the two performance projects accompanying this written thesis are not available on the UL Glucksman Library portal. If you wish access, please contact the author Miriam Phillips at miriphil9@gmail.com.

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. 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.