

BRAZILIAN ARTS: FUSION DANCE

by

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Eu dedico este trabalho aos Orixás, à Maura, minha mãe, que não me deixou desistir; ao meu pai de coração, Luís, que sempre esteve ao meu lado. Minhas irmãs que me amaram e ajudaram em momentos específicos. Todos os meus professores de dança, a minha avó de alma que investiu no meu futuro sem questionar minhas decisões. Meu mentor, amigo, professor, que facilitou o desenvolvimento da minha pesquisa acadêmica; Armando, serei eternamente grato pela sua confiança no meu trabalho artístico. Agradeço ao meu eu do passado que, em meio à tempestade, seguiu trabalhando.

University of Iowa Acknowledgment of Land and Sovereignty

Acknowledgment

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ABSTRACT

In this choreographic work, I will create a concert dance based on the fusion of Capoeira, Flying Low Method, and Candomblé to serve as a medium in which I will deploy Diana Taylor's concept of person-to-person as a theoretical framework. As a Brazilian researcher, I will unfold the embodiment embedded in Candomblé rituals to generate movement. The inspiration is connected to Malidoma Patrice Somé's perspective on rituals as a means of binding communities together in a close relationship with spirit. Building upon Somé's distinction between planned and unplanned rituals, akin to choreography, I seek to cultivate an environment where six dancers can forge connections and a sense of kinship within a dance community that extends beyond the boundaries of the dance studios.

Through this project, I will utilize my embodied knowledge of rituals to facilitate connections between the body, mind, and spirit on stage. I embody the essence of undefined rituals through a researched dance language. Ultimately, I aim to transcend mere performance and foster a more profound sense of community and spiritual engagement among participants and audiences alike while developing a unique dance vocabulary.

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BRAZILIAN ARTS: FUSION DANCE

Introduction

Through my thesis project, I wanted to create a systematic approach to movement fusion dance unique to my embodied experience. I used Diana Taylor, a professor and performer, as a person-to-person theoretical container. This project was autoethnographic, and the focal point of my research was the intersection between dance and undefined rituals. Malidoma Patrice Somé was a writer with a focus on spirituality that states, "Rituals are the most ancient way of binding a community together in a close relationship with spirit." (Somé 1998, 143) This definition emphasizes the importance of ritual as a group activity for building community bonds. Furthermore, Somé delineates rituals into two primary aspects: planned and unplanned. Like choreography, participating in a ritual requires individuals to carefully arrange the space, set aside time, and make various efforts to bring it to life. I aimed to cultivate an atmosphere where dance students could form a sense of kinship within a dance community that reaches beyond my project and into their daily lives. This project aimed to utilize my researched dance language to establish connections between the body, mind, and spirit on stage through the embodiment of an undefined ritual.

Based upon these definitions, I believe this concert dance worked as a medium of inquiry through the fusion of dance and my Brazilianness Candomblé/Capoeira epistemologies. Specifically, this research aimed at the fusion of Capoeira, Candomblé, and Flying Low Method embodiment practices. How can I transform a concert dance performance practice into a performative movement into an undefined ritual? How do I develop and facilitate body consciousness through ritualist enactment?

In order to develop and unfold this project, it seemed necessary to map my research trajectory and dance lineage. In my biographical account of my dance history, I provide detailed information on my lineage and genealogies to trace the evolution of my embodiment practices. This is more than just a simple retelling of my past; it contextualizes the foundations of the dance practices and techniques that have shaped and guided my research inquiries.

I specifically cite each source of influence, including the teachers I studied with, to create an accessible comprehension of the meaning of Anthropophagic Body Formation, a framework that encapsulates the concept of knowledge acquisition in dance through the constant transmission of different dance forms. Thus, I used my body as the primal source of production in this framework, which served as a living archive, collecting and synthesizing information to honor the origins of each practice.

Ben Spatz is a lecturer in drama and theatre, and based on Spatz's article, *Choreography as Research – Iteration, Object, Context*, I will deploy the concept of community research to explore the intricate web of influences that has contributed to my unique style. (Spatz 2017, 68)

My embodiment knowledge was built over thirty years of practicing dance, from tap dance to non-Eurocentric/Eurocentric dance forms. Brazil and its syncretism allowed me to understand the plurality of rhythms and practices, such as Capoeira and Candomblé¹ Ana Paula Höfling, a scholar and performer, defines syncretism in a less broad term by shedding light on its distinctive traits, such as a specific process of acculturation based on correspondences, fusion, and disguise. (Höfling 2019, 4) Thus, fluctuating between formal dance education and informal

¹ - African diasporic religion developed in Brazil during the 19th century and historically related to enslaved transatlantic trade.

practices imparted knowledge acquisition while I developed my artistic goals. As a result, my inquiries and strengths as a researcher are mainly based on practice as research.

In my first and second professional dance companies, from 2002 to 2007, I worked with several teachers who encouraged my dance education and fostered my perception of the world beyond the dance studios. My dance inheritance is connected to remarkable instructors, such as Ricardo Vinicius, who in my hometown taught me the foundations of ballet and release techniques; Otto Ramstad & Olive Bieringa, Jeremy Nelson, and Luís Lara Malvacias for Contact Improvisation and how to perform in site-specific; with Christopher Dozzi and Boris Storjokov, I had excellent training in classical ballet. David Zambrano taught Flying Low Method and Passing Through. Being exposed to such diverse and privileged dance education shaped my formation in understanding art forms, such as choreography. Brazilian scholars such as Helena Katz and Cristine Greiner² affirm that “bodies and environments are constantly exchanging data, or shaping and being shaped by one another, through continuous processes of mutual *contamination*.” (Rosa 2015, 5)

As a professional dancer, I have worked with some of the most important dance companies in Brazil: Balé Teatro Guaíra, Balé da Cidade de São Paulo, and São Paulo Companhia de Dança, among others. In that capacity, as a soloist, I performed in the works of internationally acclaimed artists such as Ohad Naharin, Alexander Ekman, Andonis Foniadakis,

² Helena Katz graduated in philosophy and music, studied mathematics, was always interested in biology and medicine, and became one of Brazil's most recognized dance critics. She has been in cultural journalism, specializing in dance since the 70s. She is a professor and coordinator of the faculty of communication and body arts at PUC-SP, where she conducts research in cognitive sciences.

Christine Greiner (São et al., 1961) is a University professor, researcher, and journalist. She began studying modern dance with Renée Gumiel (1913-2006) in 1965, at the age of four and continued with her until 1981. Subsequently, she underwent practical training in Noh theater from 1983 to 1987 with Noburo Yoshida. That year, she graduated in journalism from Faculdade Cásper Líbero (São Paulo). As a journalist, she worked at Editora Abril, initially at Capricho magazine in 1983, then transferred two years later to Veja magazine, and later returned to Capricho (1986-1987). During that time, she worked across the behavior and health departments.

Felix Landerer, and others. I had the privilege of being in touch with some of the most refined artistic expressions in performance and concert dance. For that reason, I would highlight the performance of *Perpetuum* by Ohad Naharin with a live orchestra at Grand Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona in 2008 as one of the most iconic performances in my career.

Moreover, in 2010, there were performances in the theater DeLamar in Amsterdam and the Steps Dance Festival in the same year around different cities in Switzerland. In 2014, I had the incredible chance to perform *Cacti* by Alexander Ekman in Brazil with a live orchestra. In 2016, I danced *Adastra* by Cayetano Soto, and the whole process turned into a documentary for a public television network in Brazil. In other words, the exposure to different cultures while touring the world made me consider many aspects of my own identity as a performer and dancemaker.

Indeed, traveling and working extensively with various dancers and dancemakers from different cultural backgrounds supported the tailoring processes of my personal development as an artist. I excelled as a soloist because I was imbued with various dance forms in my dance vocabulary, making me an ‘uncanny’ dancer with multiple skills and a dancer who understands the fusion between dance forms.

Researching Background

As a researcher, I initiated a profound reflection on identity and the value of my heritage in embodiment practices. Capoeira's movements could represent more than an exotic aesthetic interesting to foreign choreographers while exploring Brazilianness in creative processes. Hence, it is compelling to analyze why romanticizing the history behind these embodiment practices is not the alternative to building consciousness towards Brazil's historical practices. Cristina F. Rosa, whose work is based upon the intersection of dance, bodily arts, and visual culture, states,

“Romantic narratives contributed to further de-historicizing the physical and epistemic violence of the European process of colonization implemented in Brazil, both the genocide of Amerindians and the traffic in and enslavement, torture, and rape of African nations.” (Rosa 2015, 162)

As a result, during the company’s international tours, I began to entertain questions such as why Brazil's most important contemporary dance company invests more in creations based on a European dance form in opposition to forms of Brazilian dances that could represent our rich plurality worldwide were common. Subtle questions about the root of Brazilianness identity and decolonization in dance productions, which was developed from a cultural mix, gained more space among us professional dancers, and further understanding of non-Eurocentric forms was essential to deepen my inquiries. Coupled with that, two leading dance companies in São Paulo have programs called *Brasileiros*, an entire evening choreographed only by Brazilian dancemakers. The idea is to hold space for creations that explore Brazilianness in contemporary dance, such as the blending of Brazilian social dance, Capoeira, and concert dance, among others.

Different words can describe what occurs after the contact between two or more ethnicities. Thus, various categories, such as cultural mixing, transculturation, cultural hybridity, and multiculturalism, are used to define these contacts, among others. All the terms mentioned above serve a purpose; however, I do not intend to explore their meaning in depth. For this thesis, I used the term encapsulating the concepts I researched: cultural hybridity.

To conclude, I accessed my body archive to explore the knowledge acquired throughout the years working as a professional dancer to unfold my choreographic language while respecting the African-Brazilian ancestralism embedded in Capoeira and Candomblé. Citing

Melanie Bales, the journey of discovery in creating a dance and researcher-self is full of trials and errors. (Bales, Nettfl-Fiol 2008, 28)

Choreography and Concert Dance

Classifying the practice was essential to mapping my knowledge and determining where to go in future research. After naming my practice, the abstract concept or something I have researched in the studio can be developed and transmitted to one's body. Thus, I could address specific questions related to my practice to foster and understand my dance language, such as questions about the dance floor movements commonly used in my choreographic works. Consequently, I sought a concept that dwells in my Brazilianness to describe the process of acquiring new knowledge related to my investigation as a researcher.

Anthropophagic Body Formation is a framework that I created to describe knowledge acquisition by embodying dance through cultural hybridity. The anthropophagic art form is associated with the 1960s Brazilian art movement called Tropicália.³ The term/expression anthropophagic art was coined by the poet Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954); he argued that Brazil's history of cannibalizing other cultures brought strength to the country and was also a form of deviating from colonialism by searching for cultural independence. Thus, based on this concept of anthropophagic art, I consider the influences of a blend of Capoeira and Candomblé profoundly significant for my long-term research. Working with several international and

³ Tropicália was a creative movement in Brazil in the late 1960s. Encompassing music, art, and writing, it celebrated Brazil's culture and people. It was also a protest movement against the lack of freedom experienced under the military government's oppressive regime.

national choreographers, teachers, and artistic directors for over thirty years greatly imparted my artistic body; therefore, I comprehend that as an Anthropophagic Body Formation.

I fostered my performance by eating, ingesting, and consuming choreographers, teachers, and colleagues I worked with. My body exceeded in performance because I was fulfilled with selected nutrients and formed upon contacting these excellent choreographers and teachers. Moreover, ingesting and consuming, in this case, is related to adapting the Eurocentric dance forms for my Brazilian body. In other words, I was eating them to decolonize while absorbing information. Lastly, this was not a neutral action; it involved a social contract when they visited Brazil to work with dancers, and the dancers selected which information should be taken or not.

Exploring this subject further, now defined as Anthropophagic Body Formation, will require questions, such as how I research choreographic forms while attempting to accommodate my research and the definitions around choreography. In order to accommodate my choices and research questions, I will argue that knowledge of dance is not linear and that defining what choreography is can potentially support my creativity while bridging with existing theories in dance. Choreography can be defined as a multidisciplinary action that combines different sources into the creative processes. According to researcher and philosopher in dance Anna Pakes, "Choreographic practice is clearly a form of intentional action." As a practitioner, Iracema Cardoso, the former artistic director of Balé da Cidade de São, profoundly understands the choreographic process for concert dances. She worked closely with choreographers Ohad Naharin, Willian Forsythe, and Jirí Kylián, among others. During a choreographic process, when I was creating a dance piece, she stated that choreography is not only a combination of dance steps. Initially, I did not understand the note regarding my creative process, but this note was essential to developing critical thinking regarding the plurality in choreography definitions.

Coupled with Cardoso's definition of choreography, Susan Foster's choreographer and scholar's definition transcribes academically what Cardoso mentioned in an informal statement. To Foster, choreography can be perceived as a framework of decisions that implements a set of representational strategies, which evidences a theory of embodiment. The significance of this statement for this creative framework connects to my considerations of understanding the semiotics behind the movements I made for this piece.

In this framework, I was interested in how the axiological stance in inquiring about fusion could inform what dance language to use in this research. For instance, I tried to avoid pointed feet or ballet shapes for the fingers/hands because these forms do not entail decolonising forms. In opposition, pedestrian and Capoeira movements served as a source of decolonization in this framework. The attempt to research non-Eurocentric inquiries using classical ballet as a medium could be perceived as an axiological contrast. This approach delved beneath the surface to explore the deeper layers of the research. It involved identifying the meaningful motifs that resonate with this thesis inquiry and determining which movements best bridge the gap between them. Ensuring that every movement had a purpose and was significant to the overall dance scene was essential. While residual and ornamental movements are welcome, they should still be chosen with intention and meaning. Based on Capoeira, I carefully selected movements that fit within this creative framework to create a cohesive and impactful performance.

In conclusion, the integration of embodied practices and theoretical frameworks offers a rich avenue for exploring the axiological dimensions of inquiry into fusion, particularly within the scope of dance. The choreographic process emerges as far more than a mere amalgamation of dance steps; it embodies a complex interplay between embodied practices and theoretical considerations. A deeper understanding of the semiotics underlying movement unfolds through

critical reflection on the plurality of choreographic definitions, particularly illuminated by Susan Foster's conceptualization. This understanding, coupled with privileging non-Eurocentric forms over traditional ballet, shapes the decolonization of the narrative that served my research purposes. Hence, this approach underscores a commitment to delving beneath surface aesthetics, identifying motifs that resonate with the research inquiry, and selecting movements that bridge theory and practice—every movement attempts to be imbued with purpose and significance, contributing to a nuanced and impactful performance. The choreographic journey becomes an exciting opportunity to infuse creativity and intentionality, ultimately crafting a cohesive artistic expression rooted in meaningful exploration and dialogue.

THE BEGINNING OF A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

This framework was divided into the first part, which starts with the group walking opening scene and follows onto group, solo, duo, trios, groups, and ends with the second duet. The second part begins when the music changes, and the group returns to center stage in a similar group formation. Although there is a division based on my artistic decisions in building the dance scenes, this division was only attached to personal organization in time management. Moreover, it feels compelling to explain in detail the layers in this framework. Therefore, there are more layers to what I have been citing as artistic decision-making in this dance piece.

After thirty years of practicing dance, my perception of decision-making is substantiated by my lived experiences. For example, I decided that the piece should start by using the cast to enter a sacred space, based on aesthetics and my higher education in dance.

Coming from upstage dark to a silhouette of bodies creates an atmosphere of tension, expectation, and subjective narrative. Tension and resolution are a constant element in this performance's layers, such as lightning (brighter vs. darker) and revealing body shapes. The

atmosphere and movements create tension, and the resolution comes shortly after, either with a different group formation or a dancer performing a set of phrases at a different pace.

According to the Argentine choreographer Luís Arrieta (Arrieta 2015), the upstage is a place for mystery, past, and unknown; the downstage is associated with the present, confronting audience, and where the fourth wall dwells. I understand this statement as a reference to rituals, thus leading to a choice to start the piece with dancers slowly performing pedestrian movements upstage, followed by walking in a circular pattern and in a cannon format, individually placing their foreheads on the floor. Since this project aimed at ritualistic enactments, I had this as a source to represent/present the stage as a sacred place where a ritual would be performed. These movements can also be interpreted or perceived as intent to ask for permission before entering sacred or ritualistic places. Moreover, these movements were performed by the dancers in order to create the idea of a community. Social enactments related to rituals are used as a medium to embody what this dance represents. Meredith B. McGuire, Professor of sociology and anthropology, states, "Essentially, ritual practice is symbolically laden action (e.g., posture, gesture, pronouncement), the performance of which is intended to accomplish what it represents." (McGuire 1996, 108)

The following scene is when the group gets physically together by setting a different dance formation for the first time. The unison dance attempted to represent the power of the group that organically decided to perform a ritual. Repetition is essential in delivering data to the audience. The dance's pace allows the audience to access more data/information. This way, the audience's attention can remain and follow the less subjective narrative now since the group is dancing together and using similar codified movements. Ben Spatz, regarding repetition, suggests that "It is neither pure, changeless repetition nor random difference, but a system that

repeats the technical in order to produce specific differentiations that draw the practice into the epistemic." (Spatz 2017, 71) These movements are performed intentionally to represent their community – a group with similar values. I argue that the audience can follow the abstractionism embedded in the piece by creating repetition in the choreography. Intentionally, the attempt is to maintain the observer and object of observation connected to the lived experience (performers). Therefore, the dance community formed on stage by the cast can extend their intentions to the audience as part of the ritualistic enactment, and the audience will interpret the liturgy according to their lived experience without separation between observer and object. To the French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "[o]ur perception ends in objects, and the object, once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it that we have had or that we could have." (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 77)

Immateriality on Stage

Despite the intense physicality with which the dancers performed the piece, the immaterial portion of this research dwells in the intersection of body/mind. The embodiment of spirituality also has materiality, gestural, and movement associated with sacredness, such as praising hands in a mass. David Morgan, a professor of religious studies and arts, states, "The body of the believer is made to mediate the individual and his tradition as well as the individual and the divine." (Morgan 2010, 16) Hence, the materiality of faith passes through the body. The hands and head are the medium through which I delivered the message of sacredness.

The first section, until before the solo, represents the beginning of a spiritual journey. The tension created over the first four minutes of the piece resolves when they get to the floor, and a new lighting design arrives to depict the importance of the hands in the air. The gesture is to evoke. All the hands symbolize how to evoke a higher state of mind and a form to access the

spirit. Something with the hands and forehead is compelling to transmit the idea of sacredness. I deploy these movements not from an exclusive religion but from observation of a diversity of religions and how they use heads and hands to transmit a sense of connection with the spiritual. The first section ends when one dancer stays on stage to perform a solo, and this moment is the resolution of a beginning embedded in community engagement and ritualistic enactments that attempt to represent a spiritual journey. Thus, the solo is a form to narrow the audience's attention toward one single performer by shifting from a group section to a solo, representing the individual spiritual journey in juxtaposition to the group's journey.

Solo

A soloist is a performer who can hold the audience's attention for longer. In this creative process, the soloist plays an important role on and beyond the stage. The solo is a seven-minute dance with group interweaves to consolidate the character's role in the piece. Claudia Jacobson's character is inspired by an older person in a village, a wise woman, a leader, or an enchantress. Throughout the creative process, Jacobson demonstrated a high level of commitment and maturity, which made the group decide to have her as the cast representative. The extra responsibility enhanced her character's performance role and inspired the other dancers, especially the first-year students. However, I would not define this position as hierarchical. Somewhat, the differences in the cast supported forming an engaged community.

Moreover, Jacobson was responsible for guiding the group's concentration during the transition from the off-stage to the on-stage—an extremely relevant task due to the importance of concentration in this dance piece. Her task on opening night was to conduct the concentration circle before dancing. Inspired by undefined rituals, I shared the following phrase with her: "May there be peace so that the light can be made, and we can inhabit ourselves in one being."

(Unknown author) The ritual was to Jacobson say it first, and the cast would repeat it after her three times, like practices in Candomblé and Capoeira. The intent was to research different tools to enhance their experience and performance by creating an engagement in the process before opening the curtains. Lastly, the solo material was rooted in the Capoeira movements and the Flying Low Method. Jacobson's maturity and technical dance skills granted me a deeper understanding of fusion dance and dramaturgy. At the end of the piece, her walking away from the group demonstrates a metaphor that seeks to show when it is time to move on and start a new trajectory and the diligence to guide the group. This character was a valuable asset in transmitting sacredness and my researched dance vocabulary.

Duo and Ending Part I

The duo is a complex dance structure rooted in Capoeira's movements, refers to the negotiation between space and time, and is a metaphor for the battles we must choose in life. This complex dance represents the hurdles of a spiritual journey and the human search for purpose. As suggested by Edward R Canda, "spirituality as an aspect refers to the human search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with oneself, other people, the universe, and the ground of being; however, that is understood (such as theistic, non-theistic, animistic, combinations of these, and any other ways you can imagine)" (Canda 2008, 27) This duo is the first interaction in the situation of questioning the self in regard spiritual journey and beliefs.

They will return to this in-depth close to the end of the piece, and this construction/order has a purpose. Breaking the piece into small parts was the solution to portray the diversity in reenacting a ritual—different lenses for the same ritual. Therefore, the purpose is to dynamically perform changes in the stage in connection to the unfolding undefined ritual. This section of the

choreography contains duos, groups, solos, and trios. It is the chronological piece's middle part. Here, scene construction has a downside, as I did not know how to approach it choreographically. I believe the lower energy and loss of punch is the bridge between a strong beginning and a conclusive ending. How do you keep high attention during the thirty minutes of dance? This question is important to the process, and as a researcher, I wanted to understand these moments deeper.

After all the trios and groups, the cast returns to the movement motifs, such as hands in prayer at the heart center and throwing arms. The ritualistic enactment sought to provide this action as the starting point of artistic self-liberation, and the most iconic symbol is the hair down. The hair down symbolizes this liberation and the end of this bridge between parts I and II.

Second Duet

The second duo represents the beginning of the second and final part of the piece. It is a visceral, complex dance construction that took time for the dancers to tailor and master so that they could perform at the speed that I intended. Capoeira, rather than other martial arts, mainly inspires the roots of the duo. Although Capoeira Angola is played closer to the ground and slow, the movements and pace inspired by this practice emerged naturally in the duo's constructions. I researched for movement expressions that could portray spiritual conflicts and questions. The American dancer and dance scholar Ana Paula Höfling gives an overview of Capoeira Angola that supports my research and staged work. Höfling states, "...moving with control and fluidity, slowly, close to the ground, my keens always bent, my arms arching from supporting the weight of my body as I repeatedly sank to the ground dodging imaginary kicks..." (Höfling 2019, 2) This creative process extended my lived experiences as a performer to the cast and a certain form

of cultural exchange, which is important to understand/measure the extension of cultural hybridity in this process.

I intended with the duo to present a deeper engagement with the researched dance material interweaved with fusion dance and questions related to purposes and meaning in life. I argue that spiritual practices come with some doubts. The conflict situation performed by the dancers intends to bodily represent not only the possible inner spiritual conflict but also how this outer world representation could demonstrate the hurdles of a spiritual journey. The duo section was composed of tension/resolution and some dramatic moments. However, violence was shunned while dancers ducked and dodged to avoid physical contact. Some of the movements are intentionally repeated to connect them to the first duo. A tangled set of fast-paced movements evolves into a brief pacification moment within the posing forearm in a gesture of unification, followed by a second section of entanglement. All the built tension culminates in a similar hand-head motif performed at the beginning of the piece, in addition to the group's reentrance.

The End

How does utilizing a ritual performance in dance strengthen community practice? The ritualistic enactment at the end of the piece became a practice that enhanced their experience of the outer dance's world. Unity without uniformity was the choice for the end/group parts. On the other hand, it makes it harder for them to perform together. This generates conflicts around the group due to the difficulties in following a group leader. I sought organic growth for the cast in terms of energy and unity to build the desirable unity for the ending section; they did not follow numbers and count, which arguably mechanizes the dance by removing the inevitable aspect of dancing ahead or behind the group - organicity. Uniformity could potentially exclude their identity as artists, and I wanted them to be them.

Another tool applied to develop this last scene was the increase of vigor and physicality. Kinetic energy is an explosive source used for the end of the piece to produce a concrete effect for this ritualistic embodied enactment. The motif for the end section is washing the forehead with the hands and repetition. As Ben Spatz suggests, I applied 'repetition to produce difference.' (Spatz 2017, 71) However, the difference here refers to the dance material and objective transformation of the group after dancing a long piece.

In the last section, they learned how to dance together by becoming a strong community. According to Anna Pakes, "Choreography is itself arguably a form of praxis because it involves collective production." (Pakes 2017, 20) The last group section was a collective construction that grew stronger during tech week and over the performances.

PRE-PROJECT

Albeit my inquiries, the chronological order for the construction of this thesis followed the dance department schedule. Balancing demands is complex, and the dance department's schedule must be considered as a subject before making any artistic decision. However, I had to learn how to navigate throughout the process. A good example is the audition, the process of selecting dancers. Depending on the dancers, this can easily change the whole project scope because they are an intrinsic part of the creative process. In other words, the creative decision for the thesis starts with balancing my idea and the dance department's schedule and finding the dancers who could absorb my language as fast as possible due to the lack of time to develop in-depth research. For instance, the audition for this project was on the day the department selected thirty-eight students for *Panorama* – Marta Graham's dance company performance at Hancher Theater. Therefore, my options were limited, and time was a subject in this process. My cast was formed with six female dancers, and I observed them during classes after the audition to learn

about their strengths and qualities. Observing my cast even before I started working with them allowed me to place them in positions like soloist and duet. Hence, I learned that working with a cast for a specific project implies disciplined time management and sharp communication with the cast.

Initially, the idea was to create a group dance with eighteen dancers to explore unison sections and the movement of large groups around space. I wanted to impel my boundaries as a researcher and face the challenge of dealing with large dance groups and crafting dance in this format. Working with more dancers can change the methodology applied to the creative process and the way in which the students absorb the information required to create a dance piece. I sought juxtaposition dance forms to create a language capable of answering my research questions, especially to further understand fusion forms.

Production

The complexity of crafting a dance piece and the boundaries of this research went beyond the simplicity of ensemble dance steps. Combining music with dance, costumes with research ideas, and lighting to increase the audience experience in an immersive connection with the physicality embedded in the dance piece was a complex task. Moreover, dance costumes differ from costumes made for a religious party or a fashion collection showcase. It is hard to dance when the attention is narrowed to the question: Will I stumble on my skirt while performing a solo? Similarly, it is to perform without knowing the music score or dance intentions. I tried to cover all the possible gaps in this creation. Although I understand that perfection is a fantasy, I took all the experiences in this project as a curve learning with the hopes of applying them to my following creative process.

Music

The music is an essential component of this project because it gives the atmosphere to the dance that I intended. A specific sonority would be required to create a ritualistic enactment. Thus, I searched for a sound score that could enhance choreography but a sound that was not specific to religious practice. I was interested in researching musicality that would combine aspects of sacredness, mystery, and, at the same time, contemporary elements to detach the piece from any religious forms and sounds. Gregorian chants, African drums, Brazilian *Berimbaus*⁴ songs and other musical traits could bring this about; however, I wanted to research the abstract aspect of this sonority. Classical music was an alternative to prevent this characteristic sound in the dance piece; however, I did not find a classical piece that served the research.

I contacted several artists, including Patrícia Vasconcelos, widow and curator of Brazilian percussionist Naná Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos was supportive of the project even though the album I wanted for the project was one of the few for which she did not have the copyrights. After trying to negotiate alternatives to use different sound scores with Vasconcelos, I decided to come back and research classical music again.

Researching European classical music led me to research classical music from other cultures, and that is how I found Ramin Roshandel's album in partnership with Professor of the music department at the University of Iowa, Jean-Charles Francois. *Jamshid Jam* (2022 – New Flore Music) carries traits that resonate with my research and bring the atmosphere that I believe to be the right for the dance piece.

⁴ Berimbau is a Brazilian musical bow made of wood primarily used to accompany the martial art of Capoeira.

Nima Janmohammadi, composer and performer of Persian classical music, stated about the album: “The two sonic sensibilities do not meet for a dialogue, peace-making, or other metaphorical forms of meaning-making external to the sounds, but to touch, just to touch what is in front of them through the medium of an ancient instrument and a futuristic machine.” (Janmohammadi, Nima 2022). The ancient instrument made a juxtaposition with the ritualistic aspect of the research and the futuristic machine for the fusion dance. This potent combination intentionally promoted the research without being a folkloric dance. Moreover, in Janmohammadi’s description, words such as mysticism and perfect union with the divine were used in a PDF file released alongside the album in 2022.

The second part of this process was finding a sound score for the piece's final section. As a researcher, I believed that the piece required an energetic ending inspired by Candomblés parties that lasted around four hours and had a catharsis aspect. Because I had electronics as a subject that connects with contemporary aspects of my research, it felt natural to bridge the electronics sounds to a different artist.

Nils Frahm is a pianist and Berlin-based artist whose works have inspired me because of the contrast between classical and minimalist music formats. Frahm had re-released the original Juno tracks with guest reworks by Border Community’s modular synth wizard Luke Abbott and Warp veteran Clark. Both are known for their like-minded use of analog synthesizers in their music. (Nils Frahm). The analog synthesizers were the element that musically connected the first part of the piece with the second and final section.

The song *Peter (Clark Remix)* has the punch to increase energy for the final section and lead the dancers to the energetic state I was interested in.

Costumes

For the costumes, I wanted to bridge two elements: first, a costume that would make the dancers feel comfortable and confident while protecting their knees and lower legs, and second, a costume that should contain traits from Candomblé. Skirts are fundamental in Candomblé for female bodies, and because of that, I wanted to have some similarities in my costumes. I worked collaboratively with Juliana R. Waetcher to elaborate on which colors and textures we could use in the piece. After testing some options, we concluded that skirts and a double-layered upper-body blouse were the most efficient in terms of dialogue with the research and the act of dancing.

Although finding a composition for the dance piece was relatively uncomplicated, one of the ideas did not work. I argue that part of a spiritual journey is the transformation. Transformation here is not only in terms of beliefs but also in how one can learn that certain things must stay behind, such as Jacobson's last walking. That said, the idea was to have layers of costumes for the dancers to remove during the piece in a representation of transformation. The metaphor I used to explain this idea to the dancers was like a snake shedding its skin. However, it did not work as intended. The cast felt uncomfortable removing the costumes while dancing. Without time to work more profoundly, the more exposed body would have been misplaced and disconnected from the research. This is an example of an idea-solve-problem situation in which the choreographer, who is the person responsible for bringing ideas and leading the study, provokes a problem. Solving this situation was straightforward and took no more than ten minutes of conversation with the cast. I attribute the easy solution to our well-established communication during studio time.

Lastly, the cast performed with skirts and white blouses. White is the universal symbol of peace and is highly related to religions, like in Candomblé. This combination bounded aspects from my research with an efficient costume.

Lighting

Jeffrey A. Oakley was the lightning designer for the piece. As with the costumes, we worked in collaboration to develop ideas for the piece. A dance piece with several cues did not meet the necessities for this work. The pace of the lightning scene in this piece is related to the slow atmosphere and possible characteristics of the outer world.

We had a couple of meetings to discuss our goals, and I shared videos from rehearsals to provide specific directions on what to aim for. The motifs I shared with Oakley were rituals, sacredness, physicality, and mystery. The moments I aimed to have before the tech week were the beginning and a bright light coming upstage on the left-hand side in a diagonal. The second important moment that I aimed to have on stage was how to have a strong beginning regarding ritualistic enactment. The first three minutes of a dance piece can be analyzed as the moment when the public will engage with the piece or not. I wanted to build a solid ten-minute piece to maintain the audience and dancer's attention upon the experience of being part of a ritual, either as a practitioner (dancer) or an observer (audience). That is why I had the mysterious moment of half-body appearance and gaze toward the center stage.

The complexity of crafting a dance piece and the boundaries of this research went beyond the simplicity of ensemble dance steps. Combining music with dance, costumes with research ideas, and lightning to increase the audience experience in an immersive connection with the physicality embedded in the dance piece was a complex task.

Moreover, dance costumes differ from costumes made for a religious party or a fashion collection showcase. It is hard to dance when the attention is narrowed to the question: Will I stumble on my skirt while performing a solo? Similarly, it is to perform without knowing the music score or dance intentions. I tried to cover all the possible gaps in this creation. Although I understand that perfection is a fantasy, I took all the experiences in this project as a curve learning with the hopes of applying them to my following creative process.



Figure 1. Capoeira & Flying Low Method

CAPOEIRA AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE

As a researcher, my autoethnographic exploration was anchored in this thesis, with the focal point being the intersection between dance and embodied ritualistic enactment. I intended to ground this choreographic process in spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences can be the boundary between our body and worldly sensorial information. Sondra Horton Fraleigh, who chairs the Dance Department at the State University of New York, states, “Our skin, that organ where the brain begins, connects us to a large world of aesthetic possibilities beyond its boundaries.” (Fraleigh 1998, 190) One of the forms that can affect the body is choosing which sensory experiences we are allowed to experience and which ones we have no access to; dance and religion can be the medium to facilitate sensory experiences. That is the intersection that was compelling to this research. Underneath the personal experiences dwell memories, lineage, and cultural traits or epistemology. I am aware of the power and control over bodies that religion can create. McGuire suggests, “When we frame the linkage of religion and the body in terms of regulation, we must confront themes of power, coercion, and (often) violence.” (McGuire 1996, 105) McGuire is assertive by posing, “Under what circumstances does religion legitimate oppressive social control of bodies/minds; when does it promote liberation?” (McGuire 1996, 106) Candomblé is an act of resistance against the colonizers. It carried history and was a form to survive against the imposition of catholic beliefs upon different African ethnicities and spiritual practices. It has arguably brought spiritual liberation to enslaved people in Brazil colonial. In the personal sphere, Candomblé facilitated my understanding of how to deal with life's hurdles, including a deeper understanding of resistance in Brazil.

I intended to extend my spiritually embodied experiences to my choreography practices. While being a Candomblé practitioner, I used embodied experiences in the religion as a source

due to the personal significance in my life. I refer to embodied experiences because, in Candomblé and dance, an essential part of the knowledge is transferred by embodied actions in opposition to verbal communication. According to Taylor, "Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity..." (Taylor 2003, 2). I argue that Candomblé can be analyzed as a performance. A planned dance and chant are present in Candomblé rituals. The juxtaposition between personal experiences and their reflections on art is a rich phenomenon that could foster creative processes, which is compelling to my research.

Nevertheless, where did the inspiration for the thesis come from?

Part of the inspiration comes from embracing what I am producing as a researcher, artist, and performer. In other words, acknowledging that my language in dance is a blending of embodied knowledge was the first step to consciously situate myself as a researcher/choreographer. My last three choreographic works are embedded in ritualistic enactment and Capoeira movements. A'Keitha Carey published about my solo on her website, specializing in black dance, "This beautiful ritual is captivating, drawing the viewer into the sacred and personal expressions of worship. As an elegant gazelle, Jaruam shifts his body side-to-side, never neglecting his hand/head motif. Carving space, searching for, and receiving the ancestral spirit – he is anointed." (Carey, A'Keitha)

Embedded in crafting this dance piece, I sought classifications that could foster my practice. In addition to Foster's definition of a theory of embodiment, I argue that choreography is a non-verbal language that allows me to express what I cannot say through verbal communication. The choreography itself is the medium through which my research inquiries can be embodied. That is, spiritual experiences are a subject, and choreography is the medium to

intentionally communicate this lived experience. I explored emotions and physicality connected to this research by transcribing my symbolic dance language to the dancer's body. The intense physical engagement during the creative process was essential to build energy and momentum for the performance's pace. Because of that, I researched different embodied forms to push the boundaries of spiritual experiences further, and Capoeira and Candomblé are used as a main source to support the intersection in this choreographic work that bridges dance forms into the spiritually lived performed experiences.

The Current Project

This piece was inspired by the embodied practices of Candomblé rituals that I have inherited. I believe that the interweaved research between Candomblé and concert dance could serve as an opportunity to explore the invisible aspects of spiritual embodiment practices while preserving respect for this culture. Although Candomblé inspires this creative concert dance, I have no intention of attaching this dance to an ethnic group or religion. The idea of a ritualist enactment is intentionally detached from actual rituals and beliefs, but it does not isolate the body from the spiritual labor—practicing presence. Detaching religious meaning from mechanics movements practiced in rituals enables an opportunity to recreate ritualistic meaning for similar movements. Placing the head on the floor during a Candomblé ritual means something; in this framework, the same movement implies something else.

In addition, the Yoruba language is used mainly in Candomblé rituals as a form of acknowledgment for the African diasporic religion in Brazil. Within this religion, Ori signifies the head/mind. For this reason, I have named my dance piece ORiNOKO, phonetically linked to the term Ori. The Orinoco is also one of the largest rivers in South America. There are myths, native communities, life, and more connected to rivers. Spiritual rituals are performed in rivers,

and abundant information supports this thesis, including the Bible and the Jordan River. The piece's name is also connected to other forms of spiritual practices other than Candomblé.

According to writer, teacher, and activist Jacqui Alexander, “The purpose of the body is to act not simply, though importantly, as an encasement of the Soul, but also as a medium of Spirit, the repository of a consciousness that derives from a source residing elsewhere, another ceremonial ritual marking.” (Alexander 2006, 298) Thus, a performance-based upon rituals could evoke an emotional response that ultimately results in the dancer’s full consciousness presence on stage.

This thesis emphasizes unfolding, blending, and observation rather than measurements, such as the quantity of each technique deployed in the process. The phenomenological hermeneutics of this dance is rooted in the transmission of my idiosyncratic dance style, which transmits the epistemology of my Brazilian/Candomblé philosophical and lived experiences to other dancers' bodies.

ORiNOKO, as the container of this research, works as the limit between knowing and the unknown—a place of discoveries and experiments. I like to approach the often-obscure space between knowing and unknowing as fertile soil where seeds will become trees. More than a binary system based on right and wrong, this place can teach from both sides of the amalgam of the creative process.

I understand this as an idea to be bodily/mentally experienced and not just a form to be achieved or designed with the dancer’s bodies—empirical knowledge and observation during studio time were necessary to develop further the hidden messages that movements and motifs carried over the process.

I classify the process into creative practice, the Clustered Flow Motion Method, and crafting a choreography.

1. *Creative Practice* - The process involved creating a series of dance phrases through practice-as-research, drawing inspiration from motifs found in Candomblé and Capoeira. Rosa Cristina describes "choreographies of identification" as an amalgamation of various concepts. It began with the recognition of the body as both the creator and conduit of its own expression. As such, my body served as the conduit for this dance production. I imparted my epistemology and sources to the dancers, including the Flying Low Method, which I utilize to generate movements. For instance, the first scene acknowledges that the stage holds sacred memories from past performances. The cast walked around to evoke these memories before beginning to dance. These practices not only connect to the sense of community and circularity but also with Candomblé embodied practices.
2. *Clustered Flow Motion Method* – Guided how we, as a collective, accessed techniques to serve the phrase and explore what has been researched bodily. For example, floor work in my works is approached through the Flying Low Method, so every time that I explain a movement set on the floor, it is through the FLM lens. Capoeira provides the aesthetics that I am researching. For instance, I gave a note to student A about the pelvis far from the ground, and because of that, performing the step would require more effort and, therefore, be distant from the techniques that I deploy in my process. Lowering the

pelvis goes beyond the aesthetics that I am researching for my dance vocabulary. The apparent simplicity of having the pelvis far from the floor could illustrate Eurocentric dance forms instead of grounded positions for Capoeira movements and the Flying Low Method. This explanation was effective for the student and research, resulting in grounded movements.

3. ORiNOKO – Citing Anna Pakes: “Choreography is itself arguably a form of praxis because it involves collective production.” The last part bridges upon each previous section to navigate over motifs and collectively explore the unknown. At the same time, the choreography unfolded itself, such as defining which movements should stay in the dance phrase or not, such as two acrobatic movements from Capoeira and a lift during the duet that showed itself to be misplaced. Lastly, I used what was produced to bridge the creative process, the Clustered Flow Motion Method, into choreography motifs and artistic choices.

In conclusion, fusion dance is a broad term with various applications in creating dances. Joshua Monten, on the combination of ingredients, defines fusion as “the blending disparate dance elements together so thoroughly that they appear to fuse into a new, hybrid dance form.” (Monten, Joshua, and Lee 2001)

METHODOLOGY

The axiological foundation of my thesis is fusion dance and cultural hybridity. I intended to shift the mechanic learning process by repetition by giving context that supported the students' education in dance. Students may develop critical thinking skills by exploring the potential of blending Capoeira, Flying Low Method, and Candomblé. For instance, I constantly shared with

students the Portuguese names of Capoeira movements, where and when I practice, and most importantly, who my Capoeira Mestre is. As Taylor states, “Embodied practices, along with and bound up with cultural discourses, offer a way of knowing.” (Taylor 2003, 3) I described my sources to the students as much as possible so they could have a global perspective of dancing as a medium to acquire new knowledge. The invitation to reflect could prompt them to consider shifting from classical ballet to non-Eurocentric embodied practices, including the fluid blending of flexed and pointed footwork.

I explained to students performing in this piece why and where the choice of flexed feet came from. For example, a pointed foot should be avoided in this work, as my interpretation of a pointed foot is equal to European-based dance forms, such as classical ballet. In opposition to the pointed foot, using a flexed foot in this work refers to the roots of my research, the variations presented in Brazilian Capoeira movements. On the other hand, due to my and the dancer's background in dance, it is certain that the classical ballet vocabulary would also be present in this choreography.

Working with this framework required disciplined management of rehearsal time and sharp communication with the cast. During our studio time, I tried to be precise with the type of information I wanted to transmit to them and why. I explained my sources and demonstrated the Capoeira movements as many times as were necessary. Another methodology applied to this process was the use of recorded sections. Every rehearsal, after creating a new dance phrase, we recorded it, and I uploaded it to our OneDrive account. The information was accessible to the students all the time. Using the video archival tutorials supported my pedagogical approach to the dance material and rehearsals.

Moreover, accessing videos from previous rehearsals increased their acquisition by eating – ingesting and consuming my dance vocabulary. Another portion of this method is naming sections. I asked the students to name our dance sections to organize the dance material and our rehearsals. We had regular names, such as the beginning, and more complex names, such as the lost group. These strategies were necessary to balance time and manage studio time. Secondly, we worked responsibly; each student checked the video and prepared their solo material before rehearsing it with me. Dissolving responsibilities within the group was essential to foster their commitment to the project. Thirdly, I worked one-on-one at the beginning of each rehearsal to give personal notes and directions on what to do. This system was a great form of sharing responsibility, and it opened the relationship between the choreographer and dancer to a deeper level. Questions like how to do a Capoeira movement or spiral motion to get closer to the floor came up. However, inquiries were not only connected to movement mechanics. These private section moments were also used to bring their suggestions and wishes as part of the creative process for the piece; for example, when a student asked if she could do a modified cartwheel as part of her solo, I promptly accepted. This is the definition of sharp communication that I am referring to. It balances the process regarding the predominant opinions and gives space to explore the dancer's idiosyncratic interpretation of the movement vocabulary.

Coupled with the creative process comes solving problems and decision-making. For instance, during our third stage rehearsal, I had to solve a situation when the final group formation was off – meaning dancers were hidden in line while performing. A student approached me and said: I know how to fix that. Let us change the formation that we have now to one composed of two triangles; in this way, nobody will be hidden. I promptly accepted the student's inside views and suggestions. Another strategy to decrease possible hurdles is to ask the

dancers to give reports from inside. As a choreographer, my perception of the piece was limited to an outside perspective. Dancers can offer an effective report capable of real improvement in their performance.

Clustered Flow Motion Method

The Clustered Flow Motion Method is the system I developed to approach the different embodiment forms I used to create this choreographic work. My position is that knowledge is not linear, and when dancing, we constantly flow through a variety of dance forms to embody an idea; this flow can be verbally activated by naming the techniques and methods of dance forms that I use in the studio, in opposition to a pure dance technique/form. Citing Jo Butterworth, Professor of Dance Studies at the University of Malta, and Liesbeth Wildschut, lecturer in dance history at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, “The term hybridity and fusion are used to denote work that moves away from singular meanings, homogenous movement styles or disciplinary norms towards multiplicity and complexity.” (Butterworth and Wildschut 2017, 309) Whenever I use a form, such as Capoeira or the Flying Low Method, to build a dance phrase, it is a movement of contacting previous knowledge in dance to use it to create a dance phrase.

In other words, the Clustered Flow Motion Method is the navigation over dance knowledge that works under the umbrella of Anthropophagic Body Formation. It allows dancers to understand my research intentions and the type of engagement they need to approach the movement. For example, a *Negativa*, a movement borrowed from Capoeira Angola, puts the upper body close to the floor by engaging the arms (Elbows should be connected to the ribcage), especially the triceps, to release the legs for a kick that is parallel to the ground. Butterworth and Wildschut state, “These interdisciplinary tendencies demonstrate deliberate attempts by groups or individuals across international divides to explore personal or cultural identity, or to look for

ways in which cultural borrowing can enrich the dance of the home state.” (Butterworth, Wildschut 2017, 311) This is an example of how the flow works for this method; once the dancer knows I am borrowing Capoeira movements, they must engage their bodies differently.

Another situation I would like to mention for the students is how to use my hands and fingers in my work. Hands are the verbalization of non-verbal signs in my work, and this is important because of communication and delivering ideas on stage. Overall, I see classical ballet forms for the hands during rehearsals, and in opposition to that shape, I used to offer baby hands. Baby hands are a more pedestrian shape for the hand, so muscle engagement is not a subject; instead, bones are the subject. This is inspired by the GAGA technique and personal archives from the works I performed created by Ohad Naharin. Through this method, students will be exposed to diverse dance forms and consciously work to embody and acquire new knowledge; therefore, Anthropophagic Body Formation will function to enhance their dance education.

I refer to the Clustered Flow Motion Method as the continuous verbalization of techniques and dance methods used in the studio to create a concert dance. However, CFM goes beyond this, as it also involves clustering bodies within the dance studio. Floyd Merrell, Professor at Purdue University, aptly notes, "Others are, like us, concrete, embodied individuals within their respective culture; all cultures are unceasing, situated practice, practice is a continuous process, and the process is ongoing change within space and through time." (Merrell 2005, 248) This methodology utilizes labels to segment crucial creative processes, ultimately enhancing cultural diversity. It identifies methods and lineages within the learning process, acknowledging that individuals in the same space form a cluster culminating in a live performance enriched by shared knowledge exchange.

The rehearsals were organized on a weekly basis according to our necessities and the students' schedules; for example, some students had to miss a rehearsal due to course exams. I embraced these situations as a form of exploring and working more individually with the dancers. Thus, working individually was undoubtedly when the Clustered Flow Motion proved effective in giving the students a conscious approach to the dance material by understanding the navigation through different techniques, which was crucial in fostering their dance training.

As a researcher, choreographer, and performer, one aspect is always present during studio time: the memories I carry as a professional dancer and how to share them with the students. Transmitting these memories was a resource I used to support their growth as students. That is, pushing their boundaries when performing the steps. I often asked them to use curiosity as a form to explore the unknown, and once they reached this moment, things would be out of place. A student performed a series of movements that required her to go to the floor and stand up before a turn/landing on one leg. When over-energized, the dynamics for this section wobbled her by making it harder to perform. On the other hand, after repetition, the student had a new standard for the exact dance phrase and was conscious of the amount of energy applied to perform a step. Studio and stage time until the day before the open night are places for discovering new sensations, qualities, and exploration. The idea of a wrong dance movement was not part of this process. I did not give notes on the exploration process of discovering a new form of performing a step. On the contrary, I always encourage the students to push their boundaries further.

Lastly, I often say that we are the only ones who know what the steps should be; therefore, the dance performance is always new at first sight.

CONCLUSION

My lived spiritual experiences carry value and impact my artistic expression. Blended with that is my embodiment knowledge. Therefore, I wanted to make a dance piece inspired by my spiritual experiences. Relying solely on my lived experiences could limit the universality of my choreographic work. However, by inviting faculty members and acquaintances to offer feedback, I was able to transcend these limitations. This collaborative approach not only brought the dancer's idiosyncrasies to the forefront but also sparked a collaboration process, creating a more nuanced dance piece that we all could be proud of.

The dance department supports artists, professors, educators, and students as they pursue their passion for dance. When I select students for my thesis, I am not just building a cast but a new community that will exist under this giant umbrella. To accomplish this, I carefully selected a cast for this project's duration, with the specific goal of assembling a dance during this short period.

I intended to transmit the transformative power of ownership of the dance material to the cast. Ownership is the act of possessing the relation between the dancer and the act of owning the dance material. The dance vocabulary I am researching is a fusion of different embodied practices. I have embodied my dance vocabulary, and the act of transmitting it transforms it into an immaterial object. My cast can experience this immaterial object through embodiment or dance practices using movement repetition and verbal explanations. On the other hand, memorizing a routine does not make you the owner of this routine. In that regard, the immaterial object I am researching needs to be mastered when the dancers own it, empowering them to embody the dance material truly.

Even more, the choreographic process can facilitate this educational development to an extent in which the cast senses the ownership of the dance material before going to the stage. I agree with the dance artist, lecturer, and consultant offering professional development Diane Amans's definitions of ownership and embodied movement, like how the movements appeared to be comfortable for each one of the dancers in opposition to imposed movements – movements that dancers cannot perform due to the technical level. (Amans 2017, 254) As Susan Leigh Foster said, “There, students’ expectations inevitably focused on learning the movement first, acquiring technical proficiency, and then dancing a dance.” (Foster 2009, 115)

Lastly, this project's outline predicted the cast's dispersion after completion. Due to the circumstances, the expectation of learning and mastering the movements differs from other types of projects the dance department offers, like short-term preparation for site-specific performances, improvisations, and the intersection between performance and technology. It is easier to work with the same cast repeatedly because they will embody the material within less time. The senior lecturer in dance, Jenny Roche, states, “The need to adapt to the particular requirements of each choreographic process creates highly fluid dancing subjects capable of materialising choreographic ideas through embodying...within short-term project timelines.” (Roche 2017, 150) Dancers constantly learn and absorb new material; thus, adaptation is expected during the creative process. Time is a subject because creating a vocabulary rooted in the fusion of different embodied practices requires more repetition. Although the projects have a similar format, thesis concerts, according to the department’s handbook, are expected to be a creation of at least twenty minutes in length. This is a significant difference from other projects, and because of that, the time of mastering and developing ownership is relatively different for my thesis concert.

Changing Perspectives

As a graduate student, I wanted to synthesise three years of research into this dance piece as a form to embody the acquired knowledge. Undeniably, after this project's accomplishment, I am more knowledgeable in creating, directing, and producing choreography. The pedagogical approach to teaching dance movements, followed by crafting dance phrases, was functional and supported the students' success during the process and showings. I deployed the Clustered Flow Method to build a process of learning in which the students would focus first on the mechanical aspect of movements and their lineage to introduce the students to various dance forms and techniques. That is, giving the students information about what technique we deployed was necessary for their dance education in a global context. Secondly, after mastering the movements with the cast, I started to work with the intentions, such as emotional traits to deliver the artistic message, personal interpretation of my ideas, and complexity in nuances for the dance phrase. These two parts in this framework were followed by ownership acquisition. Dancers use repetition to develop muscle memory, to master the movements, and to have ownership of the choreography. I focused on an expressive part of this process to establish this ownership. I believe the cast performed the way they performed due to their trust in my work and ownership of the choreography. My role switched from choreographer to director, and this change was pivotal to fostering their preparation before the opening night. Moreover, I can see the impact of my research in fusion dance on dancer's bodies and education.

During the piece's creation, I was so embedded in the dance that it was complex to find new perspectives to see the strengths and weaknesses in the work. However, upon finalisation, the perspective has changed to a new space. In other words, the most substantial part of this process was the practical construction of fusion dance when characteristics of Capoeira,

Candomblé, and Flying Low Method were preserved. I was concerned about creating a long dance piece where dancers have no experience sustaining the scene for a more extended performance. Despite the length of the work, the dancer's concentration, attention, and commitment were connected to rituals.

Moreover, they performed at a high level despite their age. The choreography held a narrative in which the audience could perceive ritualistic enactments. Even though the whole process was successful, I would have done differently with more studio time. The constraints on how much time I could use to create a thesis imparted the outcome. For instance, more time during the process would have allowed me to research in-depth meaningful motifs and avoid using repetition as a tool to transmit an abstract message.

The lack of male bodies and diversity in the cast could have influenced artistic decisions and the outcome of the dance piece. This underscores the need for diversity and innovation in the dance department. I am eager to explore working with different bodies and technical levels, as it would challenge my boundaries as a choreographer and encourage the audience to reflect on their role in shaping dance's future.

Lastly, looking back as an outsider and analysing my research questions, I was entertained during the process, and this was what I employed: the uniqueness of my material, a high level of unison, and the organicity of the process of dancing together. Through this process, we built a dance community, shared knowledge, and produced new knowledge. I am secure in affirming that my cast gained experience and was conscious regarding their boundaries in dance. The remains of this creative process will be accessible to them when applying for the coming creative process. They can establish a dialogue with choreographers and their dance material to produce and perform in different creative processes.

Anthropophagic Body Formation and Clustered Flow Method

Anthropophagic Body Formation is my long-term research. There is so much more to unfold, and it will undoubtedly take years to consolidate this framework into my practices. The Clustered Flow Motion Method is my short-term research. Despite their different classifications, both served as the methodological framework for my thesis. In terms of hierarchy, we need to have the information before accessing storage information. Anthropophagic Body Formation precedes ‘eating, ingesting, and consuming’ artistic information that the Clustered Flow Motion could access. Once we have information storage, we can deliberate on which technique we will deploy to source our creations. I will keep working and studying how to consolidate this process as an object tool for students. The research unfolds theory, such as decolonisation, by selecting what information to consume and questions about the difference between globalisation and appropriation in the dance scope.

Future Endeavors

I acknowledge that the measurement of spiritual experiences does not occur objectively or scientifically. This project aimed to create a ritualistic enactment with artistic purposes only and deploy personal experiences as a creative source. That is, rituals can be translated and understood in different ways. According to Meredith B. McGuire, “Ritual *practice* is symbolically laden action (e.g., posture, gesture, pronouncement), the performance of which is intended to accomplish what it represents.” (McGuire 1996, 108) I designed gestures, such as the hands and head at the beginning and end of the piece, to expand the undefined ritual and artistically explore spiritual representations. Abstractionism can be perceived as a hindrance to the dancer’s postures, gestures, and intentional pursuit of this dance. I intentionally kept the abstract portion of this work under my radar while crafting the choreography. Somé states,

"Ritual is the most ancient way of binding a community together in a close relationship with Spirit." (Somé 1998, 141) There are probably different ways to keep track of how to build an undefined ritual; however, for this project, my focus was on hands and head.

I used journals to cover, analyse, and track the raised questions, such as how to build transition scenes according to my concept of fusion dance. In my research, I delved into movement compositions and space transitions to explore the ritualistic meaning of embodied practices rather than working with beliefs, especially because Brazilian cultural traits inspired a portion of the research.

Their understanding of cultural hybridity and Candomblé was specifically compelling to observe in this project. Candomblé has performative actions, which could deviate the dancer's attention from the more profound significance of the movement in Candomblé's practice. The organic absorption of information holds more value than imposed assumptions.

ORiNOKO was rooted in an undefined ritualistic enactment created explicitly in the concert dance format to be performed as a ritual. Somé states, "Ritual has always been the way of life of the spiritual person because it is a toll to maintain the delicate balance between body and soul." I am dedicated to refining my dance language and incorporating spiritual motifs into my work; thus, ORiNOKO is the third dance piece inspired by these spiritual enactments.

Lastly, the process flow was enjoyable, and we learned collaboratively. I am delighted with their performance and how they achieved movement material ownership on stage, mainly because they are first- and second-year students. I understand that developing a language vocabulary takes time and practice, and I intend to keep track of my research for future creations. Capoeira and the Flying Low Method have been great match sources for generating dance movements. Candomblé carries an African-Brazilian lineage and spiritual philosophies that are

compelling to my research. There is an interconnection between them, and coupled with education in Eurocentric forms, it feels like stepping into fertile soil. I can see some traits in my dance vocabulary that were enhanced throughout the years I have been studying at the University of Iowa.

Ultimately, the dance department will continue to invest in diversity and innovation in the future to support newfound choreographic languages and performances.



Figure 2. Exploring Hand Motifs

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Jaruam Xavier

Choreographer

Biography

Jaruam Xavier, a talented Brazilian pursuing an MFA in Dance specializing in Choreography at the University of Iowa, brings a rich background as an accomplished dancer and choreographer. His artistic journey has taken him to stages across the globe, including Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, China, Uruguay, the United States, and his home country, Brazil. As a choreographer, Jaruam delves into the fascinating realm of Anthropophagic Body Formation. This concept serves as a metaphor for the assimilation of knowledge through the embodiment of dance and the exploration of cultural hybridity. His works uniquely reflect influences from Candomblé, Capoeira, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, resulting in distinct and captivating choreographic expressions. Beyond his role as a choreographer and academic, Jaruam imparts his knowledge as a somatic form instructor, teaching yoga both at the university and at a local studio. His unique Clustered Flow Motion Method emerges as a systematic approach to exploring diverse dance forms, facilitating the fusion of movements. This practice, in turn, allows dancers to tap into previous knowledge and use it creatively to achieve overarching goals, such as creating concert dance.

Jaruam Xavier's artistic and academic endeavors illustrate a holistic approach to dance, where the body becomes a vessel for the continuous exploration and assimilation of knowledge. Within the academic community, Jaruam actively contributes as a teaching assistant for the Brazilian Cultural and Carnival course. His commitment extends to being a guest presenter for courses like Performing Power/Performing Protest and African Caribbean Dance Practices.

Sonidos Que Bailan

Choreographed by Jaruam Xavier in collaboration with the artists

Please be advised this performance includes haze.

I find it fascinating when artists from different disciplines come together to create something new and unique. In this multidisciplinary performance, titled "Sonidos que Bailan," the synergy between two female bodies is the medium through which abstract movements evolve into a live experience. The artists weave a narrative through their abstract choreography and diverse cultural backgrounds, Spanish, Brazilian, and American, inviting the audience into a world where movement and music intertwine in a spellbinding dance of creativity and emotion.

Dancer

Lauren Short

Artistic Team

Musician:

Maria Torres Melgares

Costume Designer:

Juliana Waechter

Lighting Designer:

Jeffrey Oakley

Special thanks to Maria Torres Melgares.

ORiNOKO

Choreographed by Jaruam Xavier

Please be advised this performance includes haze.

Experience the transcendent journey of *ORiNOKO*, a mesmerizing concert dance that draws inspiration from the rich traditions of Candomblé. Delve into the depths of ancestral wisdom and ritualistic practices as we explore the sacred realm of the invisible. Through dynamic movements and intricate choreography, *ORiNOKO* embodies the profound values inherent in Candomblé, inviting you to witness the fusion of culture and spirituality on stage. This immersive performance transcends mere entertainment, offering a transformative experience where bodies move through space and time, evoking a sense of ritualistic enactment. Join us on this ritual of maturity, where every step taken connects to our heritage and celebrates the human spirit.

Dancers

Brenna Labus
Claudia Jacobson
Erin Muntz
Evelyn Becker
Isabella Kees
Lilly Aylward

Artistic Team

Music:

Bayāt-e Esfahān

Chāhārgāh (or Chahargah on streaming platforms)

Album: Jamshid Jam,

Label: New Flore Music

Published: October, 2022.

Ramin Roshandel, setār

Jean-Francois Charles, live electronics

Title: Peter (Clark Remix)

Artist: Nils Frahm

Album: Juno Reworked - EP

Composer: Nils Oliver Frahm & Christopher Stephen Clark

Costume Designer:

Juliana Waechter

Lighting Designer:

Jeffrey Oakley

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