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Mobilizing Jewishness

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Advisors: David Freidenreich and Annie Kloppenberg

Abstract

As a dance practitioner and self-identified Jew, I am deeply committed to social action through performance. Over the course of the past year, I explored the capacity of contemporary dance practices to support Jews in reflecting on and conceptualizing their Jewish experience. Through literary and creative research, the designing and facilitating of movement workshops in mid-Maine Jewish communities, and the creation of an evening-length performance piece titled, *Shelanu (Ours)*, I discovered the numerous ways in which these two aspects of my identity could enrich one another. In the wake of several anti-Semitic incidents both nationally and locally this year, this project served as a form of response and resilience. Through the process of this research, I strengthened my skills as a scholar, choreographer, and Jewish leader, and learned how to employ scholarship and dance practices in my commitment to the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. This writing explores my journey of mobilizing Jewishness through several lenses—embodiment theories, history, tradition, and Jewish studies—and reflects on all that I gained over the course of this year-long research endeavor.

In loving memory of the lives lost to anti-Semitism, violence, and hate this year.

Loi Gilbert-Kaye, 60, of Poway, San Diego County

Richard Gottfried, 65, of Ross Township

Rose Mallinger, 97, of Squirrel Hill, City of Pittsburgh

Jerry Rabinowitz, 66, of Edgewood Borough

Cecil Rosenthal, 59, of Squirrel Hill, City of Pittsburgh

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עשה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל–ישראל, ואמרו אמן.

May the One who brings peace to God's universe bring peace to us and to all Israel.
And let us say: Amen.

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Acknowledgments

About a year ago, I sat in my apartment in Jerusalem, Israel reading an email chain from my academic advisors, Professors Annie Kloppenberg and Nikky Singh, suggesting I apply to partake in the Senior Scholar Program for my final year at Colby. With the deadline for applications just days away, I entered into a whirlwind of research proposal writing. This year of research has proven to be no less fast-paced and no less of a whirlwind than those few days. I could not have completed this project without the support of so many valued individuals in my life.

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Preface

Performance powerfully creates new realities that open us to new possibilities of existence and relationships in ways that our world does not. I recall the moment, now two years ago, that this truth revealed itself to me. I lay on my back on the stage floor mid-performance with a group of fellow performers outlining my body in prop dollar bills. Feeling the heat of the stage lights beaming down on my face and the attentive stares of the audience members, I become aware of the oddity of this interaction. Within the confines of our world's constructed reality, nothing about this moment is "logical." Yet, the oblique logic established by the performance world makes this moment entirely sensical. As a cast, we collectively crafted the reality of this performance and in doing so, granted purpose and meaning to a body traced in prop money. Realizing the power of performance through this experience emboldened me to continue employing performance to reflect, subvert, and create realities.

My ongoing practice, throughout these undergraduate years, of shaping realities through dance-making instilled in me the belief that reality is fluid and impermanent. Paralleling this practice has been my ever-changing relationship to my Jewishness. My undergraduate years have granted me independence and in turn, agency in the construction of my Jewish reality. Without being confined to the practice of my home community, I began to explore other modes of engaging Jewishly, from keeping stricter rules of *kashrut*, to electing not to wear a *kippah* in *schul*, to establishing an individualized belief in *HaShem*.[1] My relationship to my Jewishness has always and will always shift. However, due to my involvement in the Jewish community in Waterville throughout my time as a resident here, and my study abroad experience in Jerusalem

[1] *Kashrut* refers to the food rules outlined in the Torah that are still observed today by many Jews. A *kippah*, sometimes referred to as a *yarmulke*, is a head covering worn as a sign of respect. *Schul* is a Yiddish word for synagogue. *HaShem*, translating directly to "the name," is a Hebrew name for God.

in the spring of 2018, my relationship to my Jewishness has greatly deepened in the past four years. I learned that I embrace spaces of Jewish multiplicity, but also seek a commitment to tradition, ritual, and religious texts. Upon returning to Colby after a semester in Jerusalem, during which I became more committed to religious practice, I felt particularly inclined to create a Jewish space that would support my new commitment. Due to my continued practice of dance-making, I did not feel discouraged by this challenge, but rather inspired to employ choreographic practices in the construction of the Jewish space I sought. As I reflect upon this commitment to "bettering" my Jewish experience through dance, I realize this desire is in and of itself deeply "Jewish."

My motivation to improve my reality has been a driving force in my life since age 13, when I learned about the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. *Tikkun olam* emphasizes that the world is imperfect and every person is responsible for healing its imperfections. Each person holds a particular role in the effort of the collective reparation of the world that is based on their unique skills and interests. This year, I have put my commitment to *tikkun olam* in partnership with my belief that dance can be used to shape new realities. Holding these two aspects of my identity in tandem, I aimed to shift conversations about and perceptions of Jewishness through dance practices. I sought a space of Jewish multiplicity that lacked judgement, but also valued the rich tradition of Judaism. And thus, I spent the year exploring the potential of my dance-making practice to construct the Jewish reality I desired.

Introduction

When addressing the current state of American Jewry, we often analyze the life choices of American Jews and mark them as threats to the American Jewish population.[2] Interfaith marriage, the Reform movement, assimilation, and attempts to reconcile a conservative tradition with progressive views are all frequently discussed "causes" for the challenges the American Jewish community faces. Discussions also focus on the practices, customs, and beliefs that we have defined as characteristically "Jewish." For example, when attempting to gauge how "Jewish" someone is, we ask questions such as, "Do you keep kosher?"; "Were you *bat mitzvah*-ed?"; "Which of your parents is Jewish?"; "Do you believe in God?" and so on. Yet, we ignore an integral aspect of the answers to these questions. We fail to acknowledge thought and in particular, that thought is what propels us into action and compels us to make choices such as keeping kosher or having a *bat mitzvah*. Why is it that someone chooses to keep kosher? What are they thinking as they opt out of ordering that bacon cheeseburger? What is the college student who lights Shabbat candles in her dorm each week, only to then open her laptop and continue writing an essay, thinking about as she performs the ritual? And what thoughts prevent her also Jewish roommate from joining her?

Through my research this year, I have learned that in trying to resolve this "21st century American Jewishness problem" we have been asking the wrong questions, or rather we stop the inquiry too soon. The question is not "to what are American Jews connecting?" but rather, what are they thinking about when they feel connected, what does this connection feel like, and how can we create a space that elicits this experience? By employing dance practices to explore

[2] Frequently discussed challenges in Jewish leadership circles, in which I have been involved over the past four years, include low attendance to synagogue, a decreasing Jewish population, lack of commitment to the tradition, lack of activism to combat bias incidents, and so on.

Jewishness, I learned that engaging the felt experience is essential in unearthing the truths we hold about our shared and individual Jewish identities. By studying the embodiment theories of scholars like Richard Shusterman, Mark Johnson, and George Lakoff, I discovered the importance of understanding thought as an embodied action that propels us into choice-making, connection-building, and making meaning from our world. Defining thought as "action," acknowledges that perception, conception, and categorization are all embodied experiences. In other words, we do not simply understand our world through intellect, but rather through the felt experience of existing within it. Using this framework, we can ask deeper questions about American Jewishness and discover what it means to be Jewish in a more nuanced way. We then have the information necessary to shape American Jewish communities in precise ways that enliven and connect the individuals within them. Thus, by introducing a consciousness of the embodied experience of thought and being, we can better address the factors that challenge the state of 21st century American Jewry. I believe that contemporary dance practices have the potential to do just that.

Throughout my dance training, I have witnessed the capacity of contemporary dance practices to generate conscious, embodied experiences. Through dancing together, diverse groups of individuals become unified in a collaborative process of research. I employ dance to makes sense of my positionality in the world, which includes my role as a Jewish individual. Throughout this year, I investigated the relationship between my dance practice and my Jewishness. I then employed my discoveries to support others in the exploration of the Jewish self. My curiosity about the potential for a collaboration between these seemingly disparate aspects of my identity fueled this project. I sought ways to employ my peculiar pair of passions

to create nonjudgmental spaces for self-exploration, reflection, connection, and conversation in the larger Jewish community of mid-Maine, which has become my community over the past four years.

Inevitably, I faced resistance to my work. Dance is an unfamiliar and intimidating form to many and thus it was challenging to convince others to become involved. I often tried to employ words other than dance, such as "movement" or "alternative prayer" to try to reduce the impact of the assumptions individuals hold about "dance." However, my approach is undeniably "dance" and choosing not to call it so fails to accredit the art form. I employ contemporary dance practices in enabling others and myself to reconceptualize our Jewish identities. I do not aim to offer my collaborators new ways of expressing Jewishness, but rather to make more tangible and visible the embodied process of meaning-making that impacts how we choose to express Jewishness. In so doing, I aim to deepen our understanding of the ways we already choose to express Jewishness and to highlight the agency we hold over what that expression looks like. In turn, I create spaces where Jewishness is defined by those who occupy them and where various definitions can exist together.

While dance practices are the mode I use to facilitate a heightened awareness of embodied responses, the resulting dance is not the goal of the endeavor. Rather, I aim to utilize these practices in order to expose participants to the principle that thought, meaning-making, and choice-making are all embodied processes. Thus, they can look to their bodies for insight into their individual expressions of Jewishness and they can use their bodies to create new conceptualizations of Jewishness. Provoking consciousness of the embodied experience of being creates space for earnest inquiry about one's own Jewishness and how it operates in relationship

to that of other Jewish individuals, in turn offering information about how one can construct a Jewishness that better supports their life.

By reflecting on the embodied responses to our lived experience, we can better understand our positionality in our world. I believe that this guiding principle is the key to regaining a true understanding of contemporary American Jewishness and how to better serve American Jews at present. This belief is what enabled my year long commitment to engaging Jewish individuals in my community in the practice of dance in order to examine their Jewishness through their bodies. Through mobilizing Jewish communities to gain a more deeply embodied understanding of their Jewishness, I learned about the rich potential of dance practices to address the concerns community faces.

Methods

I have spent the past year investigating and discovering the possibilities for the ways in which my dance practice and my commitment to my Jewish identity can be in relationship to one another. This investigation employed varying approaches to uncover the possibilities of this relationship. In the study of history, theory, global communities, and Biblical texts, I found ways that these two realms of practice enrich one another across time and space. Employing this knowledge and my training in dance as a form of community engagement, I designed a movement workshop structure that I believed could construct the space of Jewish multiplicity and diversity that I sought. Through these workshops, I entered local Jewish communities and introduced dance as a way of sharing, empathizing, researching, responding, and supporting one another in individual and collective relationships to Jewishness. I strengthened my understanding of the connections between my personal Jewishness and my dance practice. And finally, I

brought this relationship to the stage, constructing a reality through performance in collaboration with three other Jewish women in which our shared Jewishness could reside and become visible to others.

Originally, this project aimed to address relationships between Jews and within the Jewish community. However, this year, I was confronted by more incidents of anti-Semitism than ever before in my life. I believe that valuable scholarship remains relevant and responds to its context. Thus, my work was highly impacted by the hateful acts I faced. While at times this research was challenging to continue, it also gifted me the skills I needed in order respond effectively to the troubling times in which we live. Throughout the year, I used dance as a form of response to my reality and as a mode of constructing a new one in which I could bear the tragic state of my world. As the year unfolded, I learned about the value of engaging scholarship (though the study of Jewish studies theories, embodiment theories, religious texts, traditions of dance in Jewish spaces, and contemporary dance practices) in this process. By drawing on the knowledge I gained through this research, I learned how to effectively employ dance to respond to my environment, to create empathetic spaces of Jewish multiplicity, and to provide visibility to my experience and that of other Jews.

Chapter I: Embodying Contemporary American Jewishness

The Current State of American Jewishness

Contemporary America is a world of pluralism, multiculturalism and identity politics. As perceptions of identity within American culture progress, the collective and individual conceptions of self, culture, race, and religion among Americans grow increasingly complex. Jews are not exempt from these developments.[3] Following the end of World War II in 1945, America became a center for Jewry and began to embrace itself as a Judeo-Christian nation. As a result, America molded Jewishness and continues to do so.[4] Jews assimilated into this pluralistic American culture and thus, as American culture and identity politics shift, so do conceptions and perceptions of Jewishness. In turn, we see an American Jewishness that is complex, multiple, divisive, progressive, and ultimately, confusing.

Shaul Magid argues that formerly accepted terminology such as, "culturally Jewish," "ethnically Jewish," and "religiously Jewish," no longer applies because terms like "multicultural," "multiethnic," and "interfaith" are now part of the conversation.[5] Furthermore, as more liberal approaches to Jewish expression are popularized, words for religious denominations like conservative, reform, and orthodox become more challenging to define. These identifiers have ceased to indicate what they once did and this change calls for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be Jewish in 21st century America. Magid offers the term "post-Judaism" to capture the complexity of American Jewishness today. Though I am not

[3] Magid, Shaul. *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
[4] Nadell, Pamela S. "Jews and Judaism in the United States." In *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, 208-32. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
[5] Magid, Shaul. *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*.

convinced that his term resolves the terminology problem, I believe that his theorizing behind "post-Judaism" is valuable in conceptualizing the phenomenon of 21st century American Jewishness. Magid outlines

> Jews in America today do not *need* Judaism in order to identify as "Jewish," and they do not *need* to identify as "Jewish" or to identify with a Jewish collective (nor do they need to convert to some other religion) in order to live fully integrated lives in twenty-first-century America. Yet increasingly many Jews in America *want* to identify as Jews—even many who are married to non-Jews or who have one non-Jewish parent—and they *want* Judaism in some form to serve that identity. But they want it on *their* terms in part because the *myth* of tradition no longer operates for them as authoritative. Moreover, being *ethnically* Jewish (Jewishness *sans* religion) is no longer sufficient when a growing minority—and soon, the majority—of American Jews are multiethnic. For many of them, being Jewish is one part of a more complex narrative of identity.[6]

According to Magid, the identity of "Jewish" has become incredibly individualized and as a result, the categorically-organized model for establishing Jewish community—meaning the ways in which we divide by religious denominations, ethnic origin, location, age, and more—no longer serves the American Jewish community at large. American Jews may seek community, but the pre-existing constructions of community require that they alter their practices to assimilate into the culture of these constructed communities, which frequently results in American Jews opting to stay removed from a formal Jewish context.

This distancing from structured communities can also be explained by the ways in which Jews assimilated into American society. As Magid argues, Jewishness has become just one aspect of a "more complex narrative of identity" for American Jews.[7] Due to the successful assimilation of Jews into American society following World War II, Jewish identity no longer

[6] Magid, Shaul. *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*, 11.
[7] Magid, 11.

has to be at the forefront of this complex narrative. Jews have the option of identifying as American before Jewish. The comfort and safety that comes with assimilation can result in a distancing from the practices that mark one as "Jewish," for example wearing a *kippah* or being *shomer Shabbat*.[8] By choosing to identify as first American, then Jewish, Jews in America distance themselves from the sense of community and solidarity that is implicit in being marked a marginalized individual. Prior to assimilation, Jews remained an insular group as a mode of survival, which created an automatic sense of togetherness. Now, Jews are not immediately marked as the "other" and no longer remain insular for protection. They are more dispersed throughout American society, and thus, must actively seek ways of creating community, as it is no longer an inherent part of their Jewish existence.

Magid also argues that American Jews want to express their Jewishness "on *their* terms in part because the *myth* of tradition no longer operates for them as authoritative."[9] We no longer need to uphold perceived "traditional" aspects of Jewishness, such as believing in God or attending synagogue regularly. Instead, we each develop individualized approaches to expressing Jewishness. The ways in which American society is constructed impact the "terms" that we establish for ourselves. In our increasingly secular world, religious expression is often deemed taboo. In addition, several of the structural aspects of American society are based on Christian values and ideals, for example the structure of our week is based on the Christian Sabbath. The Christianity-based weekly calendar makes it rather challenging for Jewish individuals to fully

[8] A *kippah* is a head covering, typically worn by Jewish males to show respect to God. Being "*shomer Shabbat*" refers to the observance of the Jewish Sabbath or day of rest, which is on Saturday, unlike the Christian Sabbath, which is on Sunday. Observing Shabbat entails that one refrains from any tasks that may be deemed "work," which includes electronics. For those in contemporary America, refraining from the use of electronics can be incredibly isolating.
[9] Magid, 11.

observe the Jewish Sabbath, Shabbat, which begins on Friday evenings and ends on Saturday evenings. Thus, it is far easier to assimilate to the mainstream structure of life than to uphold that of Jewish tradition, an approach that Magid refers to as, "pragmatic pietism."[10] While the assimilation of Jews shaped American culture into a Judeo-Christian society, American culture also shaped the ways in which American Jews elect to express their Jewishness. America was not designed for Jewish life and so Jews living in America must make choices about how they incorporate Jewishness into their lives, often employing this pragmatic approach. Unfortunately, this pragmatic, highly individualized approach does not easily lend itself to building a sense of community.

With so many individualized conceptions of Jewishness, organizing ourselves into coherent communities is all the more challenging. In addition, the pluralistic nature of self-identities can produce a lack of clarity in one's own sense of their Jewishness. This experience is perhaps linked to context. If one is in a predominantly Jewish area, it is possible that they would not experience this sense of conflict because they would receive clearer messages about what it means to be Jewish. However, in places like mid-Maine where the space does not feel inherently Jewish, how one elects to connect with their Jewishness has a greater impact on their Jewish experience and that of the Jewish community at large. Thus, finding ways to create community and clarify one's sense of Jewish self is particularly essential in areas with small Jewish populations. However, if Jews in American have such vastly different, individualized modes of expressing Jewishness, how do we discover what draws them together and connects them?

[10] Magid, Shaul. *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*, 57-74.

These traits of present-day American Jewishness outlined by Magid express the complexity and in some senses, disarray of the American Jewish community. The turbulent times within which we live only further complicate and endanger American Jewry. Just within the timeframe of this project, I have witnessed numerous disturbing acts of hate, both nationally and locally. I mourned the deaths of 12 innocent Jews after two separate synagogue shootings exactly six months apart, and I grappled with the discovery of four swastikas etched into the walls of elevator cabins here on Colby College's campus. When faced with such a hateful environment, our relationships to our Jewishness become all the more complex. With vastly differing definitions of American Jewishness, coupled with an increase in destabilizing, violent acts of bias, how do we come together, remain resilient, and shape spaces that will effectively serve 21st century American Jews?

The solution lies within a deeper examination of how individuals conceptualize their Jewishness within contemporary times. This year, I witnessed how contemporary dance practices offer uniquely apt tools for this investigation due to their ability to highlight the embodied process of meaning-making. By unearthing the ways in which Jews experience Jewishness through their bodies, we can discover how they are constructing definitions of Jewishness and use this information to build spaces that support these definitions. The following section explores the role of the human body in one's lived experience in order to highlight how ideas about Jewishness can be mobilized through the activation of one's body.

Embodying Jewishness

The human body has the incredible ability to think, feel, and conceptualize. These capabilities are entirely impacted by embodied responses to which we frequently do not assign

any cognitive attention. At any given moment, we are confronted by a plethora of sensorial information. While we execute a given task, our bodies respond to this sensorial information, but we have trained ourselves to focus our attention on the task at hand rather than the full scope of this sensorial information. Despite not assigning cognitive attention to these embodied responses, we remain in constant conversation with them. Since thought is infrequently visible or tangible, we often do not consider thought as an action, but rather as a process isolated to the mind, separate from the body. This separation of thought processes from the body is a common misconception that upholds a false distinction between the mind and the body. In reality, thought is indeed a dynamic process that is impacted by and impacts the embodied experience of being. Jewishness takes part in this experience of being and thus by assigning cognitive attention to these embodied responses, we can learn about how one relates to their Jewishness. This shift in attention requires the application of a new lens to how we view our lived experience.

American philosopher Richard Shusterman's "somaesthetics," refers to "thinking through the body."[11] According to Shusterman, every experience is conceptualized through both the mind and the body. He also suggests that embodied responses impact consciousness. For Shusterman, the body is both subject and object. In other words, what Shusterman calls "body consciousness" creates awareness of actions themselves and their implications.[12] Thus, "conscious critical reflection," gives us the ability to consider the impetus behind decision-making, as an embodied process.[13] Choice-making, conceptualization, categorization, and response are all forms of

[11] Shusterman, Richard. "Introduction." In *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, 1-23. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094030.002.
[12] Shusterman, Richard. "Body Consciousness and Performance." In *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, 197-216 . Cambridge University Press, 2012. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094030.013, 197.
[13] Shusterman, Richard. "Body Consciousness and Performance," 200.

thought that serve us in making meaning from our world. Thought makes meaning from our environment through categorizing the information we receive in relationship to our embodied reactions to this information. The direction of our thought is impacted by the meaning we make from these varying forms of information. William James offers the metaphor of birds to explain how thought is directional, dynamic, and "flows." He explains that, "thought has the structure of the flightings and perchings of birds." Thought moves from one temporary "resting place" (one substantive image or idea) to another. What we feel are the patterns and qualities of this transitional flow of thought, even though most of the time we have lost the habit of noticing these feelings."[14] Thought constantly moves through our bodies and we feel the flow of thought regularly, but are infrequently attentive to this sensation. Johnson offers the example of speech or writing to explain the effect of these embodied feelings. The feelings between thoughts are the "gut reactions" that compel us to stop mid-sentence and to rephrase our idea. As Johnson describes, "We feel the quality of the situation and thus grasp the tendencies and directions carrying forward the meaning of our present situation. We feel 'how to go on' connecting one thought to another."[15] Thoughts propel us into action, impacting our every move. Thus, an examination of thought through the lens of embodied responses is useful in the exploration of contemporary expressions of Jewishness. How are these thoughts propelling Jews of today into action and what do these actions look like?

Gestures offer visual and tangible manifestations of this embodied flow of thought and can provide insights into one's process of choice-making. Our bodies support verbal communication by accompanying words with gestures that describe the ideas our words aim to

[14] Johnson, Mark. "Feeling William James's "But": The Aesthetics of Reasoning and Logic." In *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, 86-110. London: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 95.
[15] Johnson, Mark, 104.

convey. These gestures highlight our bodies' involvement in the process of constructing thoughts. David McNeill refers to these gestures as "gesticulations," motions that embody a meaning related to the accompanying speech.[16] In other circumstances, physical actions replace words. McNeill labels these actions "speech-linked gestures."[17] Speech-linked gestures demonstrate the efficiency of physical action to communicate an experience, idea, or emotion. Replacing words with physical action shows that thought is not solely a mindful task, but rather involves the entirety of the body. Gesticulations relay information that speech fails to capture and are therefore deeply valuable in communication, collaboration, and this research. By engaging these spontaneous gestures, this research illuminates elements of one's experience that are not communicated through their words and in turn, unearths truths about Jewishness.

In some cases, physical action is intentionally ascribed to an idea in order to capture its meaning and essence in an embodied manner. Contemporary dance practices frequently ascribe movements to ideas for a number of reasons. Physical actions help individuals process an emotion, thought, experience, or concept by making them more tangible. Actions are also used to subvert or challenge pre-existing concepts, for example the reclaiming of an oppressive gesture. The ascription of action to an idea also serves to express the concept to others or to invoke emotions, thoughts, or questions in others observing the action. When carefully constructed, action has the potential to communicate great depth of meaning and to be a valuable tool in expressing, explaining, or challenging realities. McNeill offers the stance that, "To make a gesture...is to iconically materialize a meaning in actional and spatial form" and emphasizes that gesture is not a representation of an image, but rather a "materialization of meaning."[18] In other

[16] McNeill, David. *Gesture and Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 5.
[17] McNeill, 5.
[18] McNeill, 56-7.

words, physical action holds meaning, whether consciously constructed or spontaneously performed, and through contemporary dance practices, one can expose these meanings and in turn, the peculiarities of the human experience. In the context of this research, physical action serves to capture and dissect the complexity of the Jewish experience.

Another central aspect of the human experience is the process of categorization; we constantly categorize, consciously and unconsciously. Categorizing is a primary way in which we conceptualize our world and a method of developing understanding that separates humans from other living beings. The process of creating categories is inevitable and often considered purely intellectual.[19] However, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, our categories are formed through embodiment. Lakoff and Johnson believe that our ability to categorize is a product of evolution and essential to survival. They describe that our approaches to categorization and conceptualization are entirely dependent on the peculiarity of the human body and its specific anatomy and capabilities.[20] In other words, our conceptualization and categorization of our world is determined by the ways in which our bodies retrieve and process information. However, not all human bodies are the same and due to our environments, cultures, and experiences, we all have unique ways of processing and conceptualizing information. In other words, two bodies can respond to the same information in distinct ways due to the fact that the specific stored information in their bodies impacts their embodied responses to stimuli. However, scholars like Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes explain that it is likely that those who are raised in similar environments, cultures, or religions would have shared

[19] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. "The Embodied Mind." In *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, 16-44. Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1999, 19.
[20] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson..

embodied information and associations with certain stimuli.[21] In turn, they may respond to scenarios in similar embodied fashions. Jewish individuals are likely to have shared information written into their bodies due to the number of similar experiences they have had. This embodied information can serve as a site for connection between Jews across differences in outward expressions of Jewishness.

Furthermore, cultural constructions impact how we physically interact with others.[22] In each Jewish community, there is a culture to the way that individuals physically interact with one another and with stimuli in their environment. This culture shifts from community to community, but there are also elements that typically remain the same. For example, it is customary that one does not turn their back to the Torah and thus, when the Torah is carried throughout the synagogue in a processional fashion, there is a collective rotation of bodies in the space. This physical response to the procession of the Torah is an example of an embodied response to stimulus, when the Torah passes, a Jewish individual turns to continue facing it. Also in synagogue, it is customary to shake hands with fellow congregants when verbally wishing them a "Shabbat Shalom." This handshaking moment is an example of a physical response to another body in space; when someone extends their hand to another individual, the recipient also extends their and together they say, "Shabbat Shalom." These responses become written into the bodies of those in the congregation and over time, congregants no longer need to tell their bodies to execute the physical action that accompanies the response. These learned, reactionary responses result from the categorization of information that all of the bodies in the space share and can create a sense of commonality and connection.

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[21] Durt, Christoph, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes, eds. *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*. MIT Press, 2017.
[22] Durt, Christoph, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes.

In addition, these shared responses are in part due to what Richard Shusterman calls, "muscle memory." According to Shusterman, muscle memory is often inaccurately associated with mindless practice because of the frequent divide between muscle (in other words, the body) and the mind. Instead believes that muscle memory does not have to be mindless, but rather an attentiveness to visceral reactions of the body that result from memories of experiences and places being stored in the body. Shusterman writes that muscle memory is connected to William James' idea of implicit body memory, which is the feeling of "being the same self as one was before."[23] In other words, when an individual performs a task, they may feel a connection to a previous version of themself and a memory or an experience that self endured. Muscle memory offers insight as to why individuals choose to repeat or recreate experiences, such as religious rituals or recurring religious traditions. The reenactment of a previous experience offers this feeling of "being the same self as one was before" and reinforces the both conscious and unconscious categories that one creates for one's own expressions of Jewishness.

Furthermore, implicit body memory highlights the body's role as a storage center for one's experiences. Within the concept of implicit body memory, the body is inherently deemed a "continuous percept," or in other words a constant presence in one's experience of perception.[24] This concept of the "continuous percept" connects to Jay Michaelson's central argument in his book, *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*. Michaelson claims that attentiveness to the body is essential for connecting with spirituality because the body

[23] Shusterman, Richard. "Muscle Memory and and the Somaesthetic Pathologies of Everyday Life" In *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, 91-111. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094030.007, 93.
[24] Shusterman, 93.

is present for every moment of one's life, from the mundane to the highly spiritual.[25] When performing a Jewish ritual or gesture, one's embodied response is impacted by their body's stored memory of previous experiences with that action, what Shusterman would call "implicit memories." Shusterman writes that these implicit memories can help an individual to align themself with their "perspective on the world.[26] Which is to say that when an individual performs a movement to which they have an implicit memory attachment, that action locates their previous self in space and through this experience, they may gain insight into how they perceive their present experience. By encouraging practitioners to be reflective and respond to their felt experience, contemporary dance practices can deepen one's understanding of their relationship to any given Jewish practice and its significance in their life.[27] This attentive, embodied experience can then lead an individual to make more reflective choices about how they choose to express Jewishness.

However, this reflective process is more complex than simply choosing to be aware of one's own responses to stimuli; several factors impact one's conceptualization and perception of their experience. Among these factors are the unconscious categories we all establish in our minds. According to Lakoff and Johnson,"our unconscious categories enter into our choice of possible conscious categories."[28] In other words, it is extremely difficult to train our brains and bodies to challenge previously established categories of identity. However, the two scholars do offer a parenthetical glimpse of hope in which they claim that through experiences, our

[25] Michaelson, Jay. *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing., 2007.
[26] Shusterman, 94.
[27] Durt, Christoph, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes, eds. *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*. MIT Press, 2017, 68.
[28] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. "The Embodied Mind." In *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, 16-44. Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1999, 18.

categories are subject to "reshaping and partial change."[29] This battle between the unconscious and the conscious is deeply related to Magid's explanation of the challenges facing American Jews and their ability to conceptualize their Jewishness. Jews have consciously created categories of Jewishness, yet through experience our subconscious understanding of our Jewishness conflicts with these consciously created categories. At the same time, we face the challenge of consciously re-establishing categories because the unconscious categories are deeply embedded in our beings.

Through this research, I employ dance practices to support Jews in challenging their conscious and unconscious categories of Jewishness. Together, we use dance as a mode of inquiry, exploring our embodied responses to stimuli in our world and the impact they have on our choice-making in terms of Jewish expression. How do we feel in synagogue spaces in comparison to community center spaces? What is our felt connection to particular ritual practices? What language do we feel accurately describes our experience? What do we require of a space in order to feel Jewishly connected? Which rituals elicit an emotional response and what is this emotional response? Through tasks grounded in contemporary dance techniques, such as improvisation, chance procedure, ascribing movement to ideas, and authentic movement practices, I raise these questions among participants in this research so that in answering them, we may all find clarity in how we desire to shape our individualized Jewish experience and reorient our Jewish trajectory to support our preferences.

Contemporary dance practices prove particularly useful in Jewish communities due to the fact that they encourage a new relationship to one's own body, destabilizing preconceptions of

[29] Lakoff, 18.

the human experience, and in turn the Jewish experience as well. In so doing, participants are able to fully reimagine what it means to be Jewish at present. By placing the familiar (Jewishness) in an unfamiliar context (dance), this research raises a new awareness to one's embodied experience of Jewish expression. Due to the ways in which conceptualization is embodied, this process supports a revision of the previously established ideas about what it means to be Jewish and how we define Jewishness in contemporary times. In so doing, my approach employs dance practices to create new categories and new language through experience.

By guiding others through the process of noticing their felt relationships to Jewishness, they are then able to explore the creation of a space that feels supportive for their individualized Jewish needs. Through this process, they also must collaborate with others. In this way, dance practices serve to evoke intercorporeality, which is the notion that we deepen our understanding through a heightened attention to the relationship between our bodies and other bodies.[30] By extension, intercorporeality also supports the notion that through watching and engaging with other bodies, we learn about ourselves. While this process of reflection happens through a combination of physical practice, conversation, and writing, all aspects of the approach access the dynamic quality of thought in order to investigate the felt, embodied experience of Jewishness. By studying the various embodiment theories explored above, I have begun to understand why dance is so effective at cultivating spaces for conscious critical reflection, conversation, and collaboration. In the process of applying these theories, I have learned how to more effectively employ dance to trace felt experiences so that we may better understand their

[30] Durt, Christoph, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes, eds. *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*. MIT Press, 2017, 68.

roots. In so doing, I offered other Jewish individuals the tools to more precisely introduce new approaches to Jewish expression that heal the wounds of negative relationships to Jewishness and to develop more positive relationships between Jewish space, self, and community.

Chapter II: The Tradition of the Dancing Jewish Body

Jews are deeply committed to tradition and to history. In the most central prayer of Judaism, the *Amidah*, we chant, "*l'dor v'dor*," from generation to generation. The "passing down" of teachings, customs, and rituals is a primary component to the ways in which we engage with our Jewishness and aim to ensure the longevity of our religion. Historically, Jews engaged their bodies in expressions of Jewishness and did not hold such a mutually exclusive perception between the body and Jewish practice, as we do at present. In ancient times, the integration of the human mind, body, and soul was deemed a reflection of God.[31] Yet, this deeply embodied nature of Jewish tradition is no longer at the forefront of how Jews, particularly in America, relate to their Jewishness. Despite our attentiveness to the "carrying on" of Jewishness *l'dor v'dor*, we have failed to pass down this valuable tradition of embodiment.

Jews are frequently described as a "People of the Book," which implies a commitment to intellect sourcing from the brain and in turn, establishes a distinction between mind and body. However, we know from the traditional literature that the body plays an essential role in how we conceptualize the Jewish experience. In Psalms 19:15, we read, "Let my mouth's utterances be pleasing and my heart's stirring before You, Lord, my rock and redeemer."[32] In this excerpt from the ancient text, one's words and meditations are placed directly in sites of the body, the mouth and the heart, rather than in the mind. This body-centric language can be found throughout the traditions' texts and prayers.

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[31] Ingber, Judith Brin. "Introduction." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 1-22. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 8.
[32] Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, 64.

For example, the prayer often recited in the morning and after relieving oneself reads

> Blessed are You, the architect our God, the Sovereign of all worlds who shaped the human being with wisdom, making for us all the openings and vessels of the body. It is revealed and known before Your Throne of Glory that if one of these passageways be opened when it should be closed or blocked up when it should be free, one could not stay alive or stand before You.[33]

This prayer is one of many that shows appreciation for the body and its functions. The texts and prayers demonstrate that, traditionally, the body was not ignored in Jewish practice, but in fact, central. In addition, nearly every Jewish ritual requires an engagement of the body. Perhaps the most prominent embodied action in Jewish observance is that of *davening*, or the swaying movement of the upper body, forward, backward, and side to side that Jews often perform while praying. This movement is most commonly associated with Orthodox Jewish men, but can be seen across denominations and genders. A short anecdote that speaks to the prominence of *davening*—a friend of mine, who lives in Jerusalem, once sent me a video of her one-and-a-half year old son swaying forward and backward, side to side with a siddur in hand at the Western Wall in the Old City. This story aptly demonstrates that Jews learn such gestural movements from a young age and they become a part of one's movement vocabulary for a lifetime.

Other Jewish movement rituals include the circling of the hands over the flame of the Shabbat candles, the three steps backward and forward at the beginning and end of the recitation of the *Amidah* and the bowing throughout the remainder of the prayer, the organized procession of the Torah each week on Shabbat morning, the striking of the heart with a fist on Yom Kippur, the shaking of the *lulav* and *etrog* on *Sukkot*, and several more. These gestural movements become a part of the learned behaviors and the muscle memories of those who practice these

[33] Ingber, Judith Brin. "Introduction." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 1-22. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 8-9.

Jewish rituals, and yet, we rarely question how these actions impact our felt experience. We perform them starting at incredibly young ages just as we are instructed and as we witness, but we scarcely reflect upon the contributions these rituals make to our expressions of Jewishness as a whole. How are these rituals impacting one's thinking about Jewishness, one's felt experience of Jewishness, and one's relationship to other Jews? The lack of attention paid to the felt experience of expressing Jewishness encourages a relationship with one's own Jewishness that lacks a sense of agency in practice. Which is to say that if we do not encourage individuals to question and explore their relationship to the various forms of Jewish expression, we create a generation of Jews who either practice Judaism out of a sense of obligation, or who choose to abandon Jewish practice because they feel a lack of connection to it. Contemporary dance practices can serve as a mode of researching these individualized relationships to Jewish expression through physical action and can reignite a connection to ritual in those who are lacking one.

As I received resistance to my approach of using dance to forge connections to Jewishness, I became compelled to prove that engaging these practices is not anomalous or uncommon. While employing dance practices to investigate the Jewish experience may seem atypical to the Jewish culture here in America, it is no way nontraditional, nor is it unfamiliar to several global Jewish communities. Traditionally, the "dancing body" was considered a demonstration of one's appreciation for life and in some cases a method of honoring God.[34] Dance is one of the body's many functions that encourages individuals to discover a deeper appreciation for their bodies. When one engages in dance practices, they expand their perception

[34] Ingber, 8.

of their body's possibilities and potential, illuminating the ways in which their body serves them. In addition, an attention to the embodied experience prevents the neglection of the body's role in the human experience. In his book *God in Your Body*, Jay Michaelson emphasizes this awareness of and appreciation for the body, bringing movement back into conversation with ways of honoring God. Through a *kabbalistic* perspective, Michaelson argues that attentiveness to the body is essential because the body is present for every moment of an individual's life.[35] Even when the brain is distracted, the body is present, receiving and storing information. Michaelson's argument is helpful in rationalizing how and why several dances and movement rituals of Jewish tradition endure, by marking the body as a vessel for storing information.[36] Michaelson's approach illustrates the ways in which Jewish tradition encourages the body to be a site of spirituality, despite contemporary times' neglection of the body. In light of tradition, the integrated body, mind, and soul operates as a manifestation of God.[37] Given this conceptualization of the body's role in spirituality, engaging the body through dance becomes an ideal way to celebrate God and the body God created, and to connect to Jewishness.

The use of dance as a celebration of God is present in the Biblical texts. In Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam leads the Israelites in dance to celebrate their freedom from slavery, which is deemed a direct act of God.[38] Several chapters later in Exodus 32:19, Moses catches the Israelites dancing around a calf.[39] Though this may be an odd example to employ here, as the Israelites are idol-worshipping in this chapter, it is clear that even when honoring a false god, they believed it

[35] *Kabbalah* refers to Jewish mysticism.
[36] Michaelson, Jay. *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing., 2007.
[37] Ingber, 8.
[38] Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, 402-3.
[39] Alter, 497.

should be done through dance. While dance has continued to be a part of Jewish celebrations in America, it is limited to events, such as weddings and *b'nei mitzvot*, and is often disconnected from a celebration of God. Yet, historically and presently in other regions of the world, dance is not only performed at celebratory events, but is also part of the rituals of daily life. Across time and space, dance has been used as a mode of mobilizing Jewish communities, cultivating a sense of resistance, celebrating Jewishness, creating meaning from texts, and ensuring the longevity of Jewish traditions.

Wedding ceremonies in diasporic Jewish communities offer insight into the traditional roots of movement rituals and their ability to connect communities across borders. At Ethiopian weddings, women and men dance separately until two gendered processionals lead the bride and groom to one another.[40] Ashkenazi, Orthodox weddings follow a similar structure and also involve a custom in which the bride encircles the groom seven times. The seven circles reference the numerous mentions of the number seven in the Bible, as well as the motif of rotating around sacred objects, like David's encircling of the altar in Psalms 26:6, found in the text.[41] Similarly, at Yemenite Jewish weddings, a processional welcomes the new couple's entrance and the rotational imagery reappears through a circular dance around a bowl of henna during the henna evening ceremony.[42] In these transcontinental wedding customs, both written and unwritten tradition are upheld. Additionally, the congruencies between customs connect these diverse, yet still Jewish, communities.

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[40] Lille, Dawn. "Ethiopians in Israel: Their History and their Dance from Ethnic to Contemporary." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 183-197. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 190.
[41] Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, 89.
[42] Staub, Shalom. "Wedding Dances of a Yemenite Jewish Village in Israel: Repertoire, Values, and Social Meaning," 205.

The customs at a Yemenite Jewish wedding further highlight the impact of tradition on contemporary customs. The elderly women perform a choreographed dance that moves through specific circular and linear formations. Yet, according to Shalom Staub's ethnographic research in Yemenite communities, when asked about how they know the order, the women simply explained, "This is the way it was done in Yemen."[43] These traditional movements are not written down or described concretely, but rather inscribed in the bodies of the women who perform them. The resistance of the Yemenite women to explain the movement patterns demonstrates how these dances have become part of their experience of being and thus, they do not question them. However, raising questions about the sources of these movements enables the women to consider its prominence and lasting impact on their Jewish expression. The very fact that these women do not need to actively think about this complex movement pattern emphasizes that these practices have been absorbed into the ways in which Yemenite Jewish women conduct themselves through space. By asking them to consider the source of the movement, they are encouraged to explore what, if not the steps or the configurations, they are thinking about and feeling while performing this dance. In this particular case, the dance connects them to their history of life in Yemen. Staub's probing for reflection demonstrates how dance and traditional movements hold information about what it means to be Jewish for those performing them, and that asking questions about the movement can reveal the meaning the dance holds for its performers.

Like the women, Yemenite men also engage with tradition through their dances. Men at Jewish Yemenite weddings perform improvisational dances to songs rooted in the religiosity of

[43] Staub, Shalom. "Wedding Dances of a Yemenite Jewish Village in Israel: Repertoire, Values, and Social Meaning" In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 201-211. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 207.

the wedding ceremony. These dances serve three primary purposes in the ceremony. First, they offer moments for individual expression. Staub describes that the community emphasizes group expression and uniformity, particularly in the setting of the synagogue. However, in these dances, the men are able to reveal their individuality.[44] These improvisational dances are also deeply specific. The men listen carefully to the words of the songs for inspiration for movement. The influence of text on the embodied expression of Yemenite men reflects the impact of the textual tradition on one's felt experience. Finally, Staub describes that these men "dance for the *mitzvah*, to honor and gladden the hearts of the bride and groom" and that through these dances, "the old men represent the traditional Jewish values and practices of Yemen."[45] *Mitzvot* are written into the Jewish tradition, outlined in the texts, and contribute to the shaping of Jewish values. Staub's description highlights that these dances encompass elements of what it means to be Jewish for these Yemenite Jews. Through analyzing the dances of Yemenite Jews, we witness how dance unearths what it means to be Jewish in a given time, place, and culture.

Kurdish Jews are an oft-disregarded group that can offer insight into how dance is employed among Jewish cultures to bridge gaps between "Jewish" and secular aspects of life. The Jewish community in Kurdistan also serves to demonstrate how dance as a celebration of life strengthens community among Jews. Among Kurdish Jews, dancing is commonly practiced in circles by intergenerational groups, often at celebrations of Jewish holidays like Passover and Sukkot.[46] However, Kurdish Jews also perform the same dances when a new Torah scroll is

[44] Staub, 209.
[45] Staub, 209.
[46] Goren-Kadman, Ayalah. "Feet on the Ground: Experiencing Kurdish Jews Through Their Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 171-181. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 174.

dedicated to a synagogue as when the building of a new roof of a house is completed.[47] In addition, Kurdish Jews hold wedding celebrations that last for several months and feature substantial dancing.[48] The dance practices of Kurdish Jews exemplify the power of dance as a mode of celebrating Jewishness and cultivating togetherness both in Jewish and secular life. Kurdish Jews also demonstrate how secular and religious life can interplay with one another, making the assimilation of religious practice into secular life appear more feasible in the eyes of American Jews.

Dances of Jewishness capture memories of the past through their ability to offer information about the experience of Jews across history. By comparing the movement rituals of various Jewish communities across time and space, we learn about Jewish life in the past and in turn, better understand our present. Upon analyzing the Hasidic Jews in Eastern Europe and the Yemenite Jews in the southern peninsula of Saudi Arabia, Sara Levi-Tanai explains that despite their geographical differences making it impossible for them to have directly influenced one another, both communities produced vertical gestures featuring individuals bending down close to the ground or reaching upward with their arms.[49] She argues that these movements are reflective of the limited space they had when living in ghettos. Levi-Tanai's explanation of the similar movement ritual styles among two geographically distinct Jewish communities illuminates movement's ability to capture history and to help it endure. As these ritual movements are passed *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation, the memory of the suffering

[47] Goren-Kadman, 175.
[48] Goren-Kadman, 175.
[49] Ingber, Judith Brin. "Shorashim: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 133.

endures within them and manifests itself in the bodies of the future generations as they perform these same rituals.

As demonstrated through this survey of the body in Jewish thought, as well as Jewish dance across time and space, embodied practices play an essential role in tradition preservation, celebration, and Jewish expression throughout the diaspora. Furthermore, these dancing communities show that dance is uniquely apt to engage individuals in an embodied awareness that adds meaning and richness to the Jewish experience. While the goal of this project is not to recreate the dances of Jews throughout history, nor to teach those involved how to dance or how to employ dance as a form of Jewish expression, studying these Jewish dances across communities demonstrates the potential of the practice to cultivate an embodied awareness that heightens the Jewish experience. As highlighted by these historic and contemporary Jewish communities, dance practices raise awareness to the embodied aspect of expressing and conceptualizing Jewishness, while also providing tangible modes of viewing the nuance of the Jewish experience that cannot be conveyed through writing or language alone. In studying these global Jewish communities, I became able to ground my work in a tradition of Jewish dancing, which supported me in proving, to others and also to myself, the value of dance in Jewish expression.

Chapter III: From The Israeli Folk Dance Movement to Mid-Maine

The Israeli Folk Dance Movement: A Site for Mobilizing Jewishness

At the time of the proposal of this project, I was living in Jerusalem, studying at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance and the Hebrew University. There, I enrolled in a class taught by Deborah Friedes Galili, a dance scholar, called "Dance in Israel." We spent a significant portion of the course studying the Israeli folk dance movement. As I reflect on my original motivations behind leading movement workshops here in Maine, I realize they were deeply connected to those of the choreographers of the Israeli folk dance movement that I had been studying when I proposed this project. The Israeli folk dance movement, which is frequently dated to the 1980s, is a pertinent historical site for examining the potential of dance practices to cultivate community and clarify collective understandings of Jewishness in the face of marginalization. In the early years of Israel's nationhood, waves of *aliyot* arrived in Israel and settled in *kibbutzim*, where they could create a Jewish space that exceeded the confines of a synagogue.[50] *Kibbutzim* operated as a means of survival and an act of resistance in the face of oppression and genocide. In the *kibbutz* life, dance served as a mode of celebrating this newfound freedom and helped *kibbutznikim* to establish themselves in this new setting, seeking a sense of community and peoplehood within it. Over time, those with dance backgrounds took leadership positions in teaching and choreographing the specifics of these folk dances. Prominent choreographers in the Israeli folk dance movement include: Gurit Kadman of Germany, Rivka Sturman of Poland, Sara Levi-Tanai of Jerusalem, Yardena Cohen of Wadi Nisnas, Lea Bergstein of Galicia, Shalom Hermon of Germany, Yoav Ashriel of Kibbutz Ramat David in

[50] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 101.

Eretz Yisrael, Yonatan Karmon of Romania, and Moshiko of Jaffa. As demonstrated, these choreographers came from all over the world and they drew on the traditions from their countries of origin when offering dances to their *kibbutz* communities.

Dances were frequently made for specific Jewish holidays and several served as a revival of historically-accepted occasions for dancing, such as Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.[51] Many of these choreographers also created dances with the intention of holding onto traditions lost in their persecution. For example, Gurit Kadman is recognized for her re-creation of a dance known as the *sherele*, the true origin of which has been lost over time, but is considered representative of the Jewish home culture lost in World War II.[52] As seen in Kadman's *sherele*, the dances of the Israeli folk dance movement did not begin from a blank slate, but rather built on the traditions that already existed. The purpose of capturing the presence of the past through these choreographic creations is two-fold. In one sense, these dances act as time capsules for history and tradition. They also serve as tools for inciting muscle memory. According to Shusterman's definition of muscle memory, these dances illicit the the feeling of "being the same self as one was before."[53] When performing the *sherele* on the *kibbutz*, an individual from Germany may feel a connection to a previous version of themself, one that performed this dance with their home community, prior to the war. By drawing on and performing movements from their past, individuals are able to create an embodied sense of "home" and "comfort" in this new land. In

[51] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance."
[52] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 106.
[53] Shusterman, Richard. "Muscle Memory and and the Somaesthetic Pathologies of Everyday Life" In *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, 91-111. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139094030.007, 93.

this way, dance serves as a tool for constructing a Jewish space that supports the *kibbutznikim* and their particular relationships to Jewishness.

Both the choreographic and musical creations of the Israeli folk dance movement were influenced by Biblical texts. For example, Rivka Sturman describes that she struggled to find musical accompaniment for her choreography until a friend directed her to the Song of Songs. She discovered that the text precisely matched the choreography she had already created, and she used it to compose an accompanying melody.[54] This peculiar detail of Sturman's choreographic process highlights that Biblical texts become a part of the embodied knowledge of those who engage with them. The rhythmic pattern of the words and the imagery they elicit are inscribed into Jewish bodies, contributing to expressions of Jewishness. These idiosyncratic details written into our bodies shape how we conduct ourselves through space and time, including how we express ideas through physical movement. Lea Bergstein a choreographer of *Kibbutz Mattityahu Shelem*, explains that all of her dances were drawn from descriptions of holidays in the Bible. Bergstein recalls that she and her collaborators aimed to be as exact in the choreographic process as the rules of *kashrut* in the Torah.[55] Like that of Sturman, Bergstein's choreographic process highlights the Torah's impact on the thinking of those living in the world in front of the text. While choreographing, a practice seemingly unrelated to *kashrut*, the *kibbutznikim* employ a precision that sources from the food rules written in the Torah. The embodied experiences of these *kibbutznikim* were directly impacted by the Jewish practice of reading Torah. Engaging

[54] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 121.
[55] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance," 142.

their bodies through dance-making revealed that they connect with their Jewishness through precision, learned from the language in the Torah.

By mobilizing Jews through the practice of dance-making, the Israeli folk dance movement served to reveal the aspects of Jewish life that the *kibbutznikim* felt most compelled to preserve in their life in the new land. In so doing, the *kibbutznikim* established a new culture and new expressions of Jewishness in the post-war world. Though Israeli folk dance is less prominent today, dances from the Israeli folk dance movement have survived and contribute to Jewish culture across the globe. As Ingber describes, "folk dance of Israel is no fossil…for it is implanted into the vitality of youth groups, schoolchildren, and all manner of citizens in their weekly experiences, not to mention festival and holiday celebrations."[56] The carefully crafted dances of the Israeli folk dance movement now operate as time capsules that hold memories of Jewish resilience, unity, and pride, while also propelling elements of traditional Jewish thought, practice, and community into the future.

Bringing the Movement to Mid-Maine

The Israeli folk dance movement serves as a historical site for this idea of "mobilizing Jewishness" that fueled my research. In light of studying the choreographers of the Israeli folk dance movement, I realized that through this project, I employed dance for the same purpose. Though the project did not initially aim to respond to the marginalization that Jews face, the anti-Semitic incidents of this year compelled me to add an emphasis on the value of dance to respond to hate. Over the year, I danced to shape Jewish spaces, strengthen Jewish community, practice resilience, and gain visibility, much like those involved in the Israeli folk dance

[56] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance," 164.

movement. Like Gurit Kadman, I sought to offer Jewish individuals the opportunity to connect with their Jewish pasts in the present, and to shape their futures by listening to the information their bodies hold. My research provides participants with tools to establish for themselves which Jewish practices evoke positive embodied responses so that they may choose to employ this information when deciding how to express individualized Jewishness. My first attempt at putting this concept of "mobilizing Jewishness" into action ensued through the designing and conducting of movement workshops in Maine Jewish communities. Engaging contemporary American Jewishness, embodiment theory, history, and community engagement skills, I established a structure for these workshops that aimed to create togetherness and a celebration of Jewishness through the task of dance-making.

I conducted "Mobilizing Jewishness" workshops in three different Jewish communities of Maine: Temple Beth El of Augusta, Beth Israel Congregation of Bath, and the extended Waterville/Lewiston/Brunswick community at the Colby-Bates-Bowdoin Shabbaton. In collaboration with Liz Lerman, founder of the Dance Exchange, Matthew Cumbie, Associate Artistic Director of the Dance Exchange, and the rabbinical leadership within each congregation, I carefully designed these workshops to best serve the members of these communities. While each workshop had unique variations, some of which I planned in advance and others I elected improvisationally *in situ*, the structure of the workshop remained relatively consistent across the three iterations. I designed these workshops at the beginning of this project and even though I was thoughtful in the design process, I did not have the knowledge to fully understand how and why these workshops could be impactful. As I reflect on the details of the workshop design

through the lens of the historical, theoretical and creative research I have now completed, I see the intricacies of the design and its effectiveness with more clarity.

All three workshops began with participants seated in chairs arranged in a circle. The workshop structure begins with introductions. I first introduce my project and myself through an abbreviated description of the Jewish journey that compelled me to design the workshop. I then request that all participants introduce themselves by saying their name and one word to describe "something they are bringing with them today." I explain that this "something" can be anything from an emotion, to a memory, to a physical object, or even a person. The purpose of this exercise is manifold. First, it helps me to learn about each person in the circle, which is particularly useful because the group is majority strangers. In addition, this exercise supports me in learning the names of the attendees—something I believe is especially valuable. In her book *Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer*, Lerman explains that upon reflecting on her dance training she believes that she danced "better" when her dance teacher knew her name.[57] In the context of the workshop, I believe knowing the names of the participants or at the very least displaying an effort to do so (which can simply take the form of saying, "Remind me again of your name.") gives each participant a sense of value and recognition. An effort to learn their names communicates, "I see you and I am glad you are here." This introductory task also gives other participants an opportunity to learn one another's names and to judge the current emotional state of their peers. An answer such as, "Hello my name is Steve and I am bringing with me curiosity" could express willingness and excitement while a response such as, "Hi my name is Caryn and I am bringing with me my daughter" might demonstrate that this individual

[57] Lerman, Liz. *Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014.

feels uneasy and finds comfort in the familiarity of her family member. I cannot make an apt judgment of an individual based off of this one task, but I can begin to "read the room" and take this reading into consideration as the workshop progresses, a skill that I developed more with each workshop.

The second task in the introductory section of the workshop provides frameworks for the session. I offer the following three frameworks: 1. You are in charge of your body, 2.Turn discomfort into inquiry, and 3. We will be partnering with time.[58] These three frameworks, learned from Dance Exchange practices, work together in varying ways to cultivate a productive workshop environment. The first framing intends to ease some of the nerves many participants often feel by offering them the option of "opting out" or modifying any task, at any time. The framework also creates a welcoming space for the wide range of physical abilities that might exist in the space.

The second framework—turn discomfort into inquiry—is the most essential of the three. The workshop asks participants to attempt tasks they likely have never executed previously, which can easily lead to feelings of discomfort. Acknowledging this reality at the beginning of the session creates space for that discomfort to be deemed the new norm. The encouragement of turning that discomfort into inquiry offers tools for managing the uncomfortability so that participants can feel confident to continue in the workshop. While describing this framework, I also advise participants that when they initially feel uncomfortable, I recommend taking a deep breath. The breath has the power to provide a sense of relaxation and a moment of pause. During this pause, participants are then able to more deeply consider why they feel discomfort. When

[58] These frameworks are all sourced from language used by the Dance Exchange, with whom I trained in July 2018.

describing this approach, I invite all of the participants to take a collective breath together, after which I say "Congratulations, we just completed our first dance together." This one-liner, which I learned from Matthew Cumbie, offers a moment of comic relief, while also challenging the preconceived notions about dance with which participants might have entered the workshop. This moment of marking collective breath as dance also frames the 90-minute experience ahead as an unfamiliar approach to both dance and Jewishness.

The third and final framework explains the partnership with time that participants can expect in the session to follow. I explain that there may be moments when they feel there is not enough time allotted to complete a conversation and that there may be other moments in which they are counting down the seconds until the next activity. This framing prepares the participants both for their conversations to be interrupted and for points of uncomfortable silence as they wait for others to finish their conversations. Participants are also prepared to shift through boredom, tension, and also joy at different moments throughout the workshop. I found that this framing created a sense of ease across through group that I could physically see in the ways that participants would release tension from their shoulders and relax their faces. While they still did not fully know what to expect, participants found a restoration of feeling in control through these frameworks. Once I complete the presentation of these frameworks, I begin with the first task in the workshop.

Following in a practice that Lerman has used in her synagogue-based dance workshops, I use a task she named, "Build a Warm Up" as the first formal activity of the workshop.[59] To begin

[59] Lerman, Liz. "Choreographic Practices in Concert and Congregation." Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World, Arizona State University, Tempe, October 15, 2018. After having a dinner meeting with Liz at this conference, she graciously restructured her plans for her conference session to show me some options for tasks to include in my workshop. This "Build a Warm Up" was one of the several tasks she facilitated as a demonstration for me.

this task, I simply invite participants to move in whatever ways they need to feel more comfortably seated in their chairs. While participants complete this task, I observe them, taking note of the movements they create. I then select several of these movements and relay them back to the participants in a sequence. As I do so, I name the individual who performed each movement, giving them credit and recognition. I then invite all of the participants to join me in performing each movement. Eventually, these movements become a smooth, learned sequence that the group is able to execute in unison. I name this sequence our "Warm Up Phrase" and ask that participants perform several iterations of the phrase. At some workshops, I invited half the group observe the other half as they dance this phrase. After the participants appear very comfortable with these movements, I encourage them to let the dancing subside. I then explain that I choose to begin with this exercise to show them that their "intuition is already beautiful" and that they already have all of the tools and skills they need to succeed in the workshop.[60] I also use this activity to exemplify that every and any movement *can* be dance.

At this point in the workshop, participants gain a heightened sense of body consciousness, as Shusterman would describe, becoming aware of just how much they move, even when being told to relax. Several participants have expressed that through this initial activity, they begin to noice not only how they move their own bodies, but also how other bodies move. This new awareness of their physicality and that of others prepares participants for the next exercise, which is a collaborative brainstorm of the numerous movement rituals that exist in the Jewish tradition. I prompt the group with a few examples, such as shaking the *lulav* or lighting the Shabbat candles, and then invite them to pose their own ideas. After each idea is

[60] Lerman, Liz. "Choreographic Practices in Concert and Congregation." After guiding the session attendees through the "Build a Warm Up" exercise, Liz explained that this task shows congregants that their "intuition is already beautiful."

offered, I ask that all participants perform the movement ritual, imagining that the necessary props are there in the space.

The "Movement Ritual Brainstorm" section of the workshop is usually rather brief. I designed this portion of the workshop to support the argument that movement already exists in expressions of Jewishness. Through studying Shusterman's theories, I learned that this exercise also encourages participants to apply the body consciousness skills that have been cultivated in the previous task to aspects of their Jewish expressions. Furthermore, this task brings individuals from a place of unreflective behavior to conscious critical reflection. By performing religious rituals outside of their traditional contexts, participants are able to reflect upon their embodied experience of these rituals. Encouraging everyone to mime the ritual offers an opportunity for participants to note if they have any memory or emotions tied to the ritual. When an individual performs the action of a ritual, the task may incite muscle memory, causing them to feel a connection to a previous version of themself. This experience offers insight to this individual about their relationship to this ritual. Through this section, participants not only begin to see rituals as physical actions, but also reflect upon which of these rituals hold meaning in their lives and support their personal expressions of Jewishness. The movement ritual brainstorm also highlights the shared knowledge among the group, which serves to strengthen a sense of community through drawing connections between the participants. From this brainstorming task, I enter a different approach that likely feels more comfortable for the participants—questioning and conversation, two highly "Jewish" activities.

Inspired by a Dance Exchange practice, I call this next portion of the workshop a "Moving Q & A," during which I pose a series of four questions to the group and ask them to

respond by moving across the circle, meeting another participant, and conversing about the prompt. I request that after each conversation, they return to the outskirts of the circle to hear the next prompt and repeat the process, finding a new partner. These four prompts include: 1. Name something Jewish you do each day.; 2. When was a time that you felt it was particularly challenging to be a Jew in Maine?; 3. When was a time that you felt particularly grateful to be a Maine Jew?; and 4. Name a time that you felt especially connected to your Jewishness. Where were you and what were you doing?

This process of immediately moving in response to a prompt connects to Johnson's theories of thought as action. The task highlights the ways in which the body participates in responding to stimuli and propels us into action. After hearing the prompt, a participant may feel an urge to walk in a specific direction, to pause for a moment, or to slowly meander until they find a partner. Each of these responses provides the participant with information about how they are making meaning from the question at hand. Finding another individual with which to converse about these responses illuminates the intercorporeality that is inherent in our conceptualization of what it means to be Jewish in contemporary times. Participants may notice that their response is influenced by that of their partner or that their response influences their partner's. A participant's engagement with each step in the process of the "Moving Q & A" may also differ from prompt to prompt. Each moment of the task provides the participants with new embodied information about how they conceptualize Jewishness and due to the previous tasks in the workshop, participants are primed to be more reflective and receptive to this type of information.

After the final question, I instruct participants to turn away from their partners, entering into a "private studio" space.[61] In their "private studio," I invite them to create a movement that captures the journey of questions and conversations they had. Through this task, participants reflect upon and ascribe a gesture to their embodied experience in order to archive it in their memory. McNeill would call these gestures "materializations of meaning." This portion of the workshop gives agency to the participants, empowering them to create a physical manifestation of their experience. In so doing, participants are shown that they have the power to construct new expressions of Jewishness based on their experiences and "their terms," as Magid would say. Since employing dance to express Jewishness is a new practice for most participants, this task shows them that they do not need to restrict themselves to their previous notions of what it means to be Jewish. If they are capable of dancing about Jewishness, possibilities for new expressions become endless.

After a couple of minutes, I ask participants to share their movement with their partners and then return to the circle, staying alongside their partner. If time allows, I ask the pairs to spend a few minutes placing their two movements in relationship to one another, creating what Liz Lerman would call "Instaduets."[62] Once the partnerships realize their duets, we view them in succession, creating a wave of duets that travels around the circle. These Instaduets highlight the intercorporeality of meaning-making; the gestures are manifestations of Jewishness that were sourced through conversation with others and now exist in conversation with one another through the duet. The Instaduets also illuminate the multiplicity of Jewishness by placing varying expressions of Jewish identity alongside one another. In light of Magid's theory of post-Judaism,

[61] "Private studio" is a phrase I learned from Matthew Cumbie, Director of Communications and Associate Artistic Director of the Dance Exchange, when training with him at the Dance Exchange Summer Institute 2018.
[62] Lerman, Liz. "Choreographic Practices in Concert and Congregation."

these Instaduets serve to communicate new definitions of Judaism that live in the body rather than in the culturally constructed language that no longer sufficiently describes the Jewish experience.

For many individuals, working in the context of a large group can be overwhelming. This section of the workshop allows these individuals to have the opportunity for more personal interactions. I choose to end this section with a viewing of the Instaduets because throughout the "Moving Q & A," the group spends a significant amount of time separated and I do not offer moments for collective reflection. The Instaduet "performance" provides the opportunity for everyone to see some product of the journeys others in the group endured in this more individualized section. In this way, the Instaduets bring community and collectivity back into focus, which is essential for the next portion of the workshop.

For the final portion of the workshop, I create space for the participants to offer their reflections and noticings from their experience. I allow this open discussion to occur for awhile, inviting participants to share any and all ideas that surfaced over the course of the workshop. After the journey of unfamiliar tasks leading to point in the workshop, participants typically feel comfortable to share everything that is on their mind. Across all three workshops, this conversation was immensely fruitful. Participants began to meet the experience with a tone of curiosity, demonstrating that the workshop had expanded their thinking. Even though they did not use theoretical terms to describe their experience, participants' newfound body consciousness and attention to intercorporeality came through in their responses.

When the momentum of the discussion seems to slow, I pose a question to reignite the energy. I first highlight the fact that each question I asked in the "Moving Q & A" operated

under the assumption that we had an understanding of what it means for something to be "Jewish." Yet, I never offered a definition for "Jewish." Instead, I allowed the participants to apply their own definitions of "Jewish" in order to answer these questions. After calling attention to this aspect of the workshop, I pose the question, "So then, what does it take for something, someone, someplace to be 'Jewish'? What does 'Jewish' mean to you?" By posing this question, I engage the same dilemma that Magid grapples with in his work—"Jewish" no longer means what it once did. Thus, I inquire what it means to these people in this time and place.

As participants offer answers to this question, I watch for spontaneous gestures, or what McNeill would call gesticulations, moments when individuals use gesture to offer an image that helps describe what they are communicating verbally.[63] I take note of these moments and memorize a selection of the gestures, as well as the stories and individuals from which the gestures are sourced. I also listen for imagery in the participants' responses that inspires me to create a gesture, again noting both the details of the response and the person who shared it. When the conversation comes to a halt, I admit to this secret task I have been executing and offer the movements back to the participants in a sequence I find compelling. As I relay these movements, I describe the definition of Jewishness that is paired with them and name the individual(s) who offered this definition. Eventually, the whole group learns this "Definitions of Jewishness" dance and can perform it in unison.

Once the participants learn the sequence, I add two additional movements. I suggest that we begin the phrase by taking three steps backward, three steps forward, and bowing, just like we do at the beginning and end of the *Amidah*.[64] I explain that the *Amidah* is often thought of as

[63] McNeill, David. *Gesture and Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 5.
[64] Lerman, Liz. "Choreographic Practices in Concert and Congregation."

a time for reflection and for having a conversation with God. I offer the perspective that throughout the workshop, we have been in conversation with ourselves and with others about the multiplicity of Jewishness, similar to an extended *Amidah* experience. By adding these ritual movements to the beginning of our dance, it becomes a moment of prayer that is rooted in our religious tradition.[65] As I reflect on my desire to connect this moment back to tradition, I realize that I am influenced by the choreographers of the Israeli folk dance movement. By rooting this dance in the religious tradition of reciting the *Amidah*, I fulfill my personal desire to create spaces of Jewish multiplicity that still engage with tradition and I use the choreographic processes of the Israeli folk dance choreographers for insight as to how to accomplish this.

I then suggest that after bowing, each participant perform their movement from their Instaduets so that a part of their personal Jewishness and shared experience with another individual in the group is present in the dance. This moment highlights the importance of individuality within a community, connecting to the tradition of wedding dances among Jewish Yemenite men. Finally, I explain that once each participant completes their Instaduet movement, we will then perform the "Definitions of Jewishness Dance" in unison together. Typically, I vocally guide the group through practicing the complete dance a few times, eventually letting my voice subside and allowing the group to perform the dance together either in silence or with a congregational leader singing a *niggun*.

The idea for this addition came from Liz Lerman's "bowing structure" that was inspired by the story of Jacob and Esau. In this structure, people assemble into duets and stand across from one another. One partner begins by approaching the other, bowing toward their partner with every few steps. Each bow is deeper, closer to the ground. When the partners meet, they begin dancing together. Liz led a group in this task during her "Choreographic Practices in Concert and Congregation" session.

[65] Vinikoor, Lisa. "Planning Phone Call with Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor." Telephone interview by author. October 23, 2018. The idea to frame this as an extended *Amidah* came from Rabbi Vinikoor, the rabbi of Beth Israel Congregation of Bath.

This "Definitions of Jewishness" dance becomes reminiscent of celebratory Jewish dances across global communities and history, while also holding deeply specific details associated with the individuals present in the room. The sequence shifts between unison and non-unison movement, which functions to as a manifestation of both the shared definitions of Jewishness and highly individualized conceptions of Jewishness these participants hold. Through performing the Instaduet moment of this dance, participants can both observe and experience what it feels like to simultaneously express their distinct connections to Jewishness. On the other hand, when participants perform in unison in the latter half of the same dance, they experience solidarity in the Jewish experience and a sense of empathy for the ways in which others connect with their Jewishness. These practices of dancing together, both in unison and not, highlight the roles of both the individual and the collective definitions of Jewishness, while also illuminating the multiplicity and simultaneity of these definitions.

Dance practices offer the unique ability to capture the variety of definitions of Jewishness in a singular moment. Physically embodying these definitions offers insights to both those performing the action and those observing. By capturing multiplicity through dance, we highlight the complex reality of contemporary Jewishness. For example, in a traditional Shabbat service, one individual may connect deeply to the act of gathering together their *tzitzit*, while the individual to their right feels more connected to covering their eyes for the *sh'ma*, and the person to their left is awaiting handwashing before reciting the *hamotzi*.[66] These varying connections to

[66] *Tzitzit* are the fringes on a *tallit*, a prayer shawl. Placed at the four corners of the shawl, these fringes are gathered together and wrapped around one's index and middle fingers during prayer. The *sh'ma* is a prominent prayer in Judaism that proclaims God's oneness. It is customary to cover one's eyes during the recitation of this prayer in order to prevent from distraction. The *hamotzi* is the blessing said over *challah*. A ritual hand washing before the recitation of this blessing is common practice.

Jewishness consistently coexist. However, the act of performing physical materializations of these connections, offers a unique tangibility to the complexity of Jewishness. The heightened body consciousness established throughout the workshop supports participants in extracting meaning from this shared dancing moment. Through creating and dancing the "Definitions of Jewishness" dance, participants locate themselves within the community and within the broad spectrum of conceptions of Jewishness, ultimately gaining perspective on how they exist within the Jewish world. These definitions are of these people, at this time, in this place. While they may hold true for participants in the future, they also may change. The ephemerality of dance creates space for this reality. Participants can explore different expressions of Jewishness, without the pressure of committing to them because if they choose, these definitions can dissipate with the dance. The challenge is to encourage participants to keep the exploration going, despite the fact that the dance ends.

Following the final performance of the "Jewishness Dance," I offer concluding words that shift and change in response to the reflections that arose during that particular workshop. Over the course of the 90-minute workshop, I raise questions that illuminate the ways in which the participants express and connect with their Jewishness. I offer an opportunity to consciously reflect on aspects of Jewish life that have been submitted to our subconscious and in turn, are taken for granted. Through movement tasks, I encourage participants to critically reflect upon the ways in which they choose to engage with their Jewishness and how these choices impact their personal relationship to Jewishness and to one another. These conversations rarely take place, particularly in the framework of an accepting, nonjudgmental environment. However, the careful design of the workshop that connects the state of contemporary American Jewishness,

embodiment theories, tradition, and culture creates a space in which norms of Jewishness are challenged and individuals feel compelled to openly express their beliefs.

This workshop structure was carefully designed with the mid-Maine Jewish communities in mind. I selected to include such a high proportion of conversation-based tasks knowing that the dance practices would feel unfamiliar to those involved, while asking questions and discussing would be far more familiar. This intuition was informed by my previous experiences in Jewish communities here in Maine. From my observation, some of the most highly attended events have been those that include elements of learning and discussion, such as "Thai and Torah," "Torah on Tap," and "Community Conversations." Thus, I decided to build upon this pre-existing culture of Jewishness here in mid-Maine, by leaning into elements of conversation and discussion in the design of my workshop and thus, creating a "Jewish" dance experience unique to these Maine communities. In light of reading Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes' work, I now understand how this choice contributed to the success of the workshops. I allowed the workshop structure to be influenced by the culture of the community it aimed to serve and due to the embodied nature of culture, participants in turn felt a sense of security. Ultimately, the workshop cultivated an environment in which fruitful, collaborative, intercorporeal examinations of Jewishness and the ways in which it manifests within individuals and communities could exist.

Three Distinct Celebrations of Jewishness: Reflections on Each Workshop

My first workshop took place on Saturday, October 27, 2018, the same day sa the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that resulted in the murder

of 11 people.[67] The session was one of many that were programmed into a weekend full of Jewish learning—the annual Colby-Bates-Bowdoin Shabbaton. Most of the participants had not heard the news of the shooting and those who did were not discussing it openly. I knew that in order to keep the sacred Shabbat space and to lead an effective workshop, I needed to overlook the news and to focus on the facilitation of the workshop. I also knew that those who had heard the news, and those who were bound to hear the news after leaving the workshop, could both benefit from a positive, enriching, communal, *Jewish* experience, and I believed the workshop had the potential to provide participants with such an experience.

This workshop was the first time attempting the structure and thus, I had no precedent to offer the assurance that the arc I developed would be effective. The results, however, amazed me. Over the course of 90 minutes, my co-facilitator, Matthew Cumbie, and I facilitated a room of intergenerational, Jewish individuals in the collective dancing of movements sourced from their lived experiences. The group celebrated their Jewishness and all it entails—from "wrestling with God" to curating a "Jewish music" radio show—through their bodies.[68] In the wake of the day's tragedy, the sight of a large number of individuals celebrating the very aspect of their being that might have resulted in their death had they been in Squirrel Hill that morning, felt profoundly resilient, communal, and inspiring.[69]

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[67] On the synagogue shooting of October 27, 2018, see Robertson, Campbell, Christopher Mele, and Sabrina Tavernise. '11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged With 29 Counts." The New York Times. October 27, 2018. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html, "Mass Shooting at Pittsburgh Synagogue Leaves 11 Dead." CBS News. October 28, 2018. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.cbsnews.com/video/mass-shooting-at-pittsburgh-synagogue-leaves-11-dead/, and Chavez, Nicole, Emanuella Grinberg, and Eliott C. McLaughlin. "Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman Said He Wanted All Jews to Die, Criminal Complaint Says." CNN. October 31, 2018. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/28/us/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting/index.html.

[68] These examples connections to Jewishness are all sourced from the participants in the first workshop.

[69] I would also like to extend gratitude to Joey Weisenberg, the Creative Director of Hadar's Rising Song Institute, and author of *Building Singing Communities* and *The Torah of Music*, for providing percussive musical accompaniment to this workshop.

I had not intended for this workshop to serve as a moment of resilience and for many of the attendees, it did not. However, in light of the very subject of this research, I cannot deny the impact the events of that day have on my perception of the workshop. In truth, facilitating this workshop gave me the strength and the tools to cope with the tragedy of the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation. The day following the workshop, Colby College held a vigil to mourn those who died in the shooting. Following the vigil, I felt a flood of emotions that at first, I felt ill-equipped to handle, until that is, I remembered the dance studio. I rushed over to the studio, played Miri Ben Ari's, "Symphony of Brotherhood," which I had heard her perform live at the Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts years prior, and I began to dance. For the purpose of this research, I filmed my dancing. In this healing dance, I found strength in performing the gestures created in the workshop the day prior. I ultimately shared this video on social media with the following caption:

> I have been trying to figure out how to respond to the murder of 11 innocent Jewish people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh yesterday since I first heard the news. I haven't been able to find the words that feel right and after the vigil hosted at Colby tonight I not only couldn't find the words, but I couldn't find my breath. And so I did the one thing that has always made sense to me—I went to the studio and I danced. I put on a song I first heard performed by a Jewish musician at the Holocaust Memorial in Boston years ago and I danced. I danced to try to process. I danced to grieve. I danced to let out my anger. I danced to breathe again. So here is my dance. It's raw. It's painful. It's angry. It's sad. It's scared. It's honest. And most of all, it isn't enough.
>
> עשה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל–ישראל, ואמרו אמן.
>
> May the One who brings peace to God's universe bring peace to us and to all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

From leading the workshop the day prior to the vigil, I learned the power of dance to serve as a source of strength in trying times and I employed this lesson to support myself and also to share

my experience with others. Jewish friends and family shared that they found solidarity and security in watching my dance and non-Jewish individuals became allies in response to the pain and vulnerability I showed in sharing my dance video. Over the course of one weekend, I gained immense insight into how dance could function in my Jewish life, and these two events were only the start of the year-long project.

I facilitated the second workshop at Beth Israel Congregation in Bath, Maine the first Shabbat following the Pittsburgh tragedy. Admittedly, I felt hesitant to lead this workshop. I knew that members of the Jewish community worldwide, including me, were emotionally traumatized by the recent events. Many felt isolated, targeted, and unsafe to attend synagogue. After my experience the previous weekend, I believed that the workshop had the potential to be precisely what these individuals needed to help them process and heal. The entire workshop became framed within the context of the recent events and I made adjustments to the structure to support this inevitability. However, I also knew leading the workshop at that time was a risk. Our embodied memories are powerful and when we begin to mobilize our bodies, we can stir up these emotions in unexpected ways. I prepared for passionate emotions to play a prominent role in the workshop, which in fact, they did.

Individuals expressed their fear, their sadness, and their instability in response to the recent events. There were tears of sadness and faces turned red from anger. Yet, the most prominent product of the workshop was the sense of community established through this collective grappling. I watched as participants introduced themselves to those they previously did not know, bonded over shared experiences, and listened with compassion as strangers displayed vulnerability. Dr. Alyssa Finn (who is married to Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor, the rabbi at Beth Israel

Congregation of Bath) told me following the workshop, "Tonight was the most connected I have felt to this community since moving here." In the wake of such a tragedy, we were able to find connection and community by sharing space and sharing dance. That Shabbat, I witnessed a room of Jewish individuals celebrate their Jewishness in resilience. In that moment, the power of dance to mobilize a community in the face of oppression and struggle was realized, mirroring the impact of the Israeli folk dance movement decades earlier. Like the *kibbutznikim*, these Jews of Bath, Maine constructed a space for their Jewishness to live despite the proximity to an event that threatened their existence.

I led my third Jewishness workshop at Temple Beth El, Augusta on January 25th, 2019. This workshop had the fewest and likely the most hesitant participants of the three. Yet, the results of the workshop mirrored that of the other two. Throughout the experience, participants reflected on the elements of their Jewish identity to which they felt connected and despite their verbally expressed hesitations, weariness, and concerns at the start of the workshop, they all arrived at a sense of ease and even joy during our final dance together. Due to the demographic of the crowd, I modified several aspects of the workshop to be executed while seated in the chairs. From the necessity to make the tasks accessible to all in the group, I learned about the value of being able to see and be seen equally by all those in the congregation for the duration of the workshop. In addition, the more timid atmosphere of this crowd allowed me to better see how each step of the workshop is effective at peeling off an additional layer of reserve. Through leading this workshop in Augusta, I learned how to employ dance to gradually establish ease, connection, and joy among even the most timid of groups.

I developed these movement workshops for the Jewish communities in Maine with the intention of challenging normative ways of expressing Jewishness and creating a nonjudgmental space for individuals to explore what it means to be Jewish in Maine today. However, due to the tragic reality of what it means to be Jewish in contemporary America, these workshops ultimately served as a response to troubling times and an opportunity for resilience. Thus, the conversations, dances, and discoveries that resulted from these workshops were even more informative and inspiring than I predicted. In leading these three distinct workshops, I witnessed the power of dance to strengthen community and a sense of Jewish identity among Maine Jews, to cultivate space for resilience and togetherness in the wake of trauma, and to respond to the looming question mark that seems to characterize American Jewishness in the 21st century. I began the "Definitions of Jewishness" dance at the first workshop with the gesture of drawing a question mark in the air as a symbol of the questioning we had done together. In the facilitation of these workshops, I found answers. Through my collaboration with Matthew and Liz, my theoretical and historical research, and the experience of facilitating, I learned how to employ dance in order to bring the same benefits it has on global Jewish communities to the Jewish communities here in in mid-Maine, supporting the Jewish expression of those living in this time and place.

Chapter IV: *Shelanu (Ours)*: A Culminating Performance

Finding the Language: A Choreographic Approach to Meaning-Making

The third phase of this investigation of the relationship between dance practices and Jewishness was the creation of an evening-length performance piece to be performed in Colby College's first-ever fringe festival.[70] In order to create this piece, I elected to collaborate with solely Jewishly-affiliated, Colby students. The cast ultimately featured four women: Sara Friedland, Sonia Lachter, and Tina Odim-O'Neill, and myself. My choreographic process was inspired by my desire to respond to Magid's theory that the language once used to categorize Jewishness is no longer useful. I aimed to support my collaborators in finding the language, be it physical or verbal, to express, name, and own their experiences of their individual and collective Jewishness. Through contemporary dance-making practices, we challenged the structural definitions of Jewishness and sought new definitions, shaped by us rather than for us.

One of the four cast members, Tina, had a particularly powerful realization in the process that highlights dance's ability to guide us to new conceptualizations of our lived experience. Tina was adopted by two women in Boston, Massachusetts. She identifies as a biracial woman of color who was raised with Jewish influences, but often grapples with whether or not she can rightfully identify as Jewish due to the fact that neither of her mothers are Jewish. At Colby, Tina is a leader in several of the Pugh Center clubs, student groups organized to support marginalized identities on campus, yet she expresses that she never feels fully part of any one identity. Tina

[70] Fringe festivals are performing arts festivals commonly produced in large cities. The goal of fringe festivals is to create visibility to performance by offering a plethora of performance-viewing opportunities in a condensed period of time. The Colby College Department of Theater and Dance elected to produce a fringe festival in the spring of 2019 in order to create excitement about the arts on campus. *Shelanu (Ours)* performed the first weekend of Colby Fringe, which lasted three weeks in April 2019.

exhibits the challenge of those in Gen. Z that Magid argues in his book—her identity is multiple and thus, the developed language used to categorize identities is not sufficient for her.

Since Tina had expressed such turmoil in balancing her multifaceted identity, I became deeply committed to trying to capture her internal identity struggle through choreography. Through our one-on-one sessions, I became aware that Tina's movement background did not provide her with the tools she needed to effectively ascribe movement to her experience and so I decided to work intimately with her to translate her experience to a physical form. I asked her to name the various elements of her identity, the things she perceives make her who she is. As she described these aspects of her being, I watched closely for spontaneous gesture, and listened for images that I could use as source material for movement generation, employing the same tools I used in the workshops. Eventually, we arrived at an element of her movement history that deeply impacts the way she conducts herself in her various identities—a detail that was previously unbeknownst to me: Tina is an athlete.[71]

Tina explained to me that she fenced competitively throughout her childhood, moving as though she were in the midst of a fencing match as she did so. As she moved, Tina described that fencing is like a game of chess—it involves strategizing as well as quick reactivity. One pointer her coach (who, by the way, was a Ukrainian Jew) consistently gave her was "two in, two out." Tina explained that this phrase meant that she should take two steps in to assess what her opponent wants from her and then two steps out to strategize. This approach is ongoing, meaning that the whole match is a series of "two in, two out." As Tina spoke and mimed her fencing

[71] In working with Tina, I became aware that I had not taken the time to broaden the questions I asked to encompass the whole identity of my collaborators. I had been deeply focused in what I had defined in my mind to be the "Jewish" aspects of Tina's being that I contradicted my own agenda and overlooked the breadth of what could be "Jewish."

experience, I noticed a parallel between her language regarding her coach's philosophy and her relationship to her multiple identities. Tina had expressed repeatedly that she never felt fully Black, fully Jewish, or fully any one identity because of her complex identity story. After listening to her describe the full scope of her fencing history, I asked her to pause. Unaware of the incredible depth of meaning behind that moment, she apologized saying, "I'm not sure that was relevant at all." In response, I explained to her just how rich that moment had been. I offered back to her the parallel I had perceived between her fencing and self-identification, making it clear that she could disagree with my observation. Instead, she responded, "Thank you for saying that" and then explained that she had never considered her identity in those terms, but that it offered her immense clarity.

Tina and I discussed the potential of this connection between her athletic past and her current self. Shusterman would likely argue that Tina's fencing training impacts the ways in which she conducts herself both physically and mentally. Throughout the process, Tina had expressed that she frequently strategizes which aspects of her identity she makes visible, depending on her environment. She made clear from the first rehearsal that she does not feel comfortable calling herself Jewish because she does not have Jewish blood and she never had a *bat mitzvah*. However, Jewish tradition and religious beliefs played a major role in her upbringing and she still feels at home within Jewish communities. When she talks about this part of her identity, Tina often takes two metaphorical steps in, claiming her Jewishness, and then takes two steps out, doubting the validity of that title. Through the guided movement practices and lengthy discussions about Jewishness within the choreographic process, Tina accessed language and accompanying physical movement that embodies how she conceptualizes and

approaches her multi-layered identity. When I asked her to return to this language several days later in order to share it with the remainder of the cast, she could not explain the connection we discovered without performing the miming action. The physical experience of her body when miming fencing allowed her to access the mental strategizing that she subconsciously employs on a regular basis in order to then explain it to her peers. Tina's discovery of language and movement that helps her to conceptualize her experience demonstrates the power of the choreographic process to unearth the truths we hold about our positionality within our world and to express these truths to others.

Upon discovering this gem in Tina's movement history, I became curious about the seemingly non-Jewish aspects of life that nonetheless impact our Jewishness. In the following rehearsal, I explored this curiosity with my collaborators. I requested that they each record themselves responding to the four prompts I posed in the workshops: 1. Name something Jewish you do every day.; 2. When was a time that it was especially challenging to be Jewish here in Maine/at Colby?; 3. When was a time you were particularly grateful to be Jewish at Colby?; and 4. Describe a time that you felt particularly connected to your Jewishness. Playing the voice recordings through the speakers in the dance studio, I invited them to respond physically. I offered tools to doing so and advised them to employ the approach(es) that felt most useful for them.[72]

After this improvisational task, I asked for feedback on the experience. I found Sara's response to be particularly compelling. She admitted that she "did not love" the experience, explaining that she felt like her movements were inauthentic and "forced." I asked her what

[72] Some options for responding that I offered included: moving to the rhythm of the words, ascribing movement to the message of the spoken words, miming the verbal responses, and moving from the emotion that the recordings elicit for them.

aspect of the task resulted in this response and she described that the simultaneity of hearing the recording while trying to move did not allow her the space to absorb the information and to move in ways that felt meaningful for her. Admittedly, what she described is a challenge for anyone completing the task, regardless of experience. However, I followed up by reinforcing the fact that she had complete agency of choice in how she completed the task and yet she did not consider the option of pausing to listen to the recording before choosing to move. I relayed back to her that she had endless options of response, but she selected to stick with the one that was not working well for her.

In collaborating with Sara, I learned that she abandoned her Jewish upbringing because she perceived that the structure of her synagogue did not hold space for her beliefs. On several occasions, she has raised the issue of feeling "not Jewish enough" because she does not believe in God, keep kosher, or go to synagogue regularly. In addition, like Tina, Sara is adopted and does not carry any Jewish blood, but she was raised Jewish and was *bat mitzvah*-ed. Similar to her response to the improvisational task, Sara never felt empowered to choose her own expressions and definitions of Jewishness, despite having the freedom to do so, particularly in her college years. She deemed the structure unfitting for her beliefs and yet, did not even consider it a possibility to challenge the constructed ideals of Jewishness to which she was exposed. When I asked Sara why she did not change approaches in the improvisational task, given that she had the freedom to do so, she said that she finds freedom to be challenging. She likened the experience to that of "having a closet full of clothes and nothing to wear." These words seem to capture Sara's experience with her Jewishness as well. She has numerous options for Jewish expression, and yet for so long, she has felt like there is nothing for her.

Sara's experience relates to Magid's theory regarding 21st century American Jewishness. American Jews of today feel attached to the arbitrary categories and labels that we employ to define Jewishness and if we do not completely align with these categories, we feel lost. By using these choreographic practices to deepen our understandings of our own Jewishness, my collaborators and I were able to free ourselves from these labels. If examined through the lens of culturally-constructed terms used to identify Jewishness, gathering in a dance studio every Friday afternoon and Sunday morning does not seem inherently "Jewish." Framing the work within a practice that is so far from what we inherently deem as "Jewish" allows us to refrain from restricting ourselves to the norms of Jewishness and to accept Magid's theory that Jewishness is not fully explained through the terms of identity we have been taught. This contemporary dance-making approach creates a space in which fencing strategies can be a part of Jewishness and in which Jewishness can be explained as "having a closet full of clothes, but nothing to wear." Through this choreographic process, we gradually grew closer to finding language that captures our true Jewishness experiences. Together we sought our own truths, our own definitions, and our own conceptualizations of Jewishness, meanwhile, collaboratively constructing a world for the stage in which these perspectives could live. Through the performance of *Shelanu (Ours)*, we shared this world and these definitions with others.

To create *Shelanu (Ours)*, I led a collaborative, devised choreographic process. Which is to say that I did not know what the final performance would look like when I began creating it. Through conversation, writing, improvisation, and other choreographic tools, we generated the movement, text, and scenic elements that shape *Shelanu (Ours)*. Over the course of several months, we developed these pieces separately. Following Merce Cunningham's chance

procedure, coupled with my aesthetics as a choreographer, I layered these pieces and organized them into an order. I attempted several variations of this order before arriving at the one used in performance. As I made adjustments to the layering and sequencing of the sections, I employed the theories of embodiment I had studied to support my decision-making. I repeatedly asked myself, how does each moment impact my lived experience as a performer and how might it impact that of a viewer? Using these embodied reflections, I was able to settle on an order. However, like the workshop structure, I was not confident in the piece's effectiveness until after the first performance, and I am still uncovering its depth of meaning as I reflect on it weeks later.

Shelanu (Ours): Sharing Our Definitions of Jewishness

Shelanu (Ours) was performed on Saturday, April 13th, 2019 and Sunday, April 14th, 2019.[73] An approximately 40-minute immersive performance, *Shelanu (Ours)* engages the joys, challenges, tensions, memories, rituals, traditions, and personal stories of Jewishness of those in the piece and those I engaged with throughout my year-long research endeavor. The piece was performed on Strider Theater, the Colby College Department of Theater and Dance's primary proscenium arch performance space. However, the stage was not utilized proscenium-style. Rather, the theater was inverted, with a screen hung where the red curtain ordinarily lives and the audience seated on stage in rows of chairs with an aisle in between, emulating pews in a synagogue (See Figure 1). At capacity, the space seated no more than 60 people, keeping the viewing experience intimate.

The performance begins as soon as the house opens. Audience members are granted entrance in groups of about seven individuals and are guided through a hallway to a back-door

[73] The Saturday performance did not begin until *motzei Shabbos*, the end of Shabbat. As this piece is about Jewishness, I felt compelled to challenge typical performance times in America, which frequently conflict with the observance of Shabbat.

entrance to the stage. A woman, positioned in the hallway, greets the group and guides them through the door, kissing a *mezuzah* that is hung in the doorway as she enters. Upon entering the stage door, the guests arrive at a scene of four performers organizing items on the stage (See Figure 2). We, the performers, welcome the guests, hand them programs, and tell them to make themselves comfortable as we "finish setting up a few things" and "wait on a few more guests." This process repeats itself until all guests are seated and the stage is set for the beginning of the show. The complete set features an old-fashioned television streaming the *Vegetales* episode, "Dave and the Giant Pickle," a side table with a lamp, a stack of *siddurim*, and other Jewish educational texts, a podium, and a structure emulating a Shabbat dinner table that is made of Jewish *tchotchkes* and ritual items, used for nontraditional purposes,. For example, *matzah* boxes operate as dinner plates and a rolling pin is a placeholder for *challah*.

A shift in lighting and music marks the formal beginning of the piece. With the stage fully prepared for performance, we seat ourselves on the floor in an arc close to the audience, Shabbat candlesticks set before us. Sonia lights the candles, at which point the television turns off to further symbolize the beginning of Shabbat.[74] After Sonia lights the candles, we perform the circling hand motion of the ritual and take a collective deep breath (See Figure 3). Following the candle lighting, I move to the podium, which operates as a representation of the *bimah*, to deliver a welcoming speech.

[74] In observance of Shabbat, Jews will often refrain from the use of technology. During my study abroad experience in Israel, I stayed with numerous *shomer Shabbat* (a term that describes those who strictly follow the rules of the day of rest) families. As they prepared their homes for the holiday, I would see the children running around the house, turning off every last electronic device. I wanted to capture this ritual in the performance, thus I included this moment of the television turning off just as the Shabbat candles are lit, marking the beginning of both the day of rest and the performance.

Figure 1: A photograph capturing the peculiar orientation of the stage.

Figure 2: The four performers collaboratively organize the props in the correct configuration.

Figure 3: The four performers practice the ritual of lighting the Shabbat candles.

This opening scene captures the essence of a family preparing for Shabbat and holds details that are deeply personal to the performers. The music combines songs my father routinely plays when preparing for special dinners in my home, with songs that hold Jewish significance for the other performers. Each prop was selected due to its ability to make a space *feel* Jewish. Prior to even entering the stage, audience members note that the space is markedly Jewish due to the *mezuzah* hanging in the doorway, to which the greeter draws attention by kissing it as she guides guests inside. We intentionally use language that invokes the experience of welcoming guests into one's home. In so doing, we create a specifically Jewish space, according to *our* definitions. As I reflect on the impact of this scene, I imagine that audience members who held similar definitions of Jewishness likely felt at home in our world, while those who do not, might have felt apprehensive. In rehearsals, I enjoyed the task of discovering creative ways to

repurpose the familiar Jewish items and the collaboration required in the set-up of the space. However, I did not consider the depth of meaning this task holds. As we use traditionally Jewish items for nontraditional purposes, we employ Magid's theory of post-Judaism. We highlight our agency to subvert previous definitions of Jewishness (in this case the constructed purposes of these ritual items) and construct new definitions on our "own terms." Through this opening scene, we mark this world as Jewish, welcoming, and yet, peculiar.

From the very beginning of the performance, we tangibly demonstrate the construction of a Jewish space. We ask questions, both verbally and implicitly. What items do we need? How do we create the inviting environment we desire? How do we determine when the space is ready for use? This process serves both the audience and the performers. Organizing a space for a Jewish gathering is a familiar task for the four of us and we noticed in rehearsal that it "felt good" because of its familiarity. Drawing on the language and actions of this task awakens our muscle memories. The experience of preparing the space for performance connects us to previous versions of ourselves that exist in more traditionally Jewish spaces than Strider Theater. As we light the Shabbat candles, we recall the versions of ourselves that have performed this task a multitude of times. Through these details, we shape our environment, creating a Jewish space that did not exist in Strider Theater before we arrived to the stage.

After I deliver the curtain speech, I exit the stage with the Shabbat candles in hand. The remaining three performers create a stage picture. Sara sits on the floor by the "Shabbat dinner table" playing with a large pile of *dreidels*, Tina stands at the *bimah* reading through the *Etz Hayim*, and Sonia stands by the television, holding a phone and having a conversation with her

mother.[75] Though the audience only hears one end of the phone conversation, they can gather that this conversation takes place following a vigil after a tragic event. Sonia does not name this event, but notes that she saw "the news," which highlights the gravity of the unnamed tragedy. This moment serves to foreshadow the several other references to the same event that are made later in the piece. Given the proximity to the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, audience members likely recall this tragedy as they witness the phone call. If they are left with questions following the reenactment, they receive more clarity as the performance unfolds.

Framing the piece within the context of the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting was not my initial intention for the performance. I aimed neither to offer a political voice through the work, nor to create a performance "in the wake of the Pittsburgh shooting." However, in the creation of the piece, I could not deny the relevance of this tragedy and its impact on our process. The first movement workshop that I led took place on Saturday, October 27, 2018, the same day as the shooting. I facilitated the second workshop at Beth Israel Congregation in Bath, Maine on the first Shabbat following the Pittsburgh tragedy. Much like the performance, these workshops were not designed with the intention of addressing the tragic, anti-Semitic events of the past year. However, suffering and confronting the challenges of being a marginalized identity are no doubt a part of contemporary American Jewishness and thus, cannot be ignored. Grappling with the events of October 27th, 2018 played an undeniable role in the lives of American Jews during the time of my research and I felt that failing to include references to this tragic event in the performance would only further silence the oppression of Jews and the impact it has on our

[75] *Bimah* refers to the elevated surface upon which the ark that holds the Torah resides. The *Etz Hayim* is a book version of the Five Books of Moses. Tina reads the *Etz Hayim* of The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, produced by The Jewish Publication Society.

senses of Jewish self. Thus, I began the formal portion of the piece with Sonia's phone call that conveys her sense of isolation and hopelessness following the shooting.

As the phone call ends, I re-enter the stage, pick up a plush, toy Torah from the ground, begin to speak in a pleasant, reminiscent tone, "Do you all remember when there were two swastikas drawn on campus within two weeks?"[76] I then toss the Torah to another cast member who reflects on a different memory of marginalization. As the sequence continues, the time between tosses decreases, the speed of the movement around the stage increases, and the lines are delivered more frantically. The task progresses into a sort of game in which the performers try to name as many incidents as they can. As the game becomes more frenetic, the Torah is put in a more precarious position (See Figure 4). Some of the spoken text in this section includes: Remember when you said you had a ghetto in your backyard for me to live in? Remember when 11 people died and no one asked if I was okay? Remember when you looked at my lunchbox and said, "Ew"? Remember when you wouldn't let me miss practice? Remember when you said you had nothing against me or my people because you're a *huge* fan of Billy Joel? The game progressively increases in speed until the performers are interrupted by the sound of a song featured in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, "Remember That We Suffered."[77]

[76] Over the course of the 2018-19 academic year, a total of four swastikas were found on Colby's campus etched into elevator cabins. On the anti-Semitic incidents at Colby College this academic year see Lachter, Sonia. "Campus Community Outraged after Swastika Discovered in Dana." The Colby Echo. February 28, 2019. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://medium.com/colby-echo/campus-community-outraged-after-swastika-discovered-in-dana-2d94dcd3abff.

[77] Crazy Ex-Girlfriend Cast. "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend | Remember That We Suffered | The CW." YouTube. January 14, 2017. Accessed May 19, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chyUpmnKimU.

Figure 4: The performers toss the Torah as they recall memories of marginalization.

This scene juxtaposes a child-like, playful tone of voice with deeply disturbing content. In our conversations during our choreographic process, we repeatedly discussed the many anti-Semitic acts both nationally and on campus that happened this year alone. We were distressed that they did not figure more prominently in ongoing conversations about bias. Repeated exposure to these acts often results in internalized anti-Semitism that becomes self-deprecating humor as a coping mechanism. The game-like texture of this scene does just that. Frantically tossing a plush Torah about the stage at first quells the anxiety that a threat to the holy object might induce. Viewers are then implicated as they become invested in our success at a familiar game. Then, the Torah drops. We immediately rush over to is, shouting

"kiss it, kiss it!" We ensure that each performer has kissed the Torah, and then we carry on with the game. In the face of anti-Semitic incidents, Jews must adapt and carry on.

When we hear the song from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, we cease playing the game and begin improvisationally dancing about the stage, singing along to the music. The song employs humor to reflect on the continual conversations about suffering that are common in Jewish communities. During a rehearsal in which we discussed our experiences of marginalization, we realized how much this topic had dominated our conversations. Sonia showed us this scene from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, because it reflects this very phenomenon. Like the cast in the video, we quote movement vocabulary from various Israeli folk dances. In so doing, we draw on the history of a time of Jewish togetherness in proximity to great tragedy. Much like the *kibbutznikim* during the Israeli folk dance movement, we develop a sense of shared experience following the traumatic events that are shared in the previous scene. When the song ends with a collective "Hey!," we strike a proud pose, appearing unaware of the song's haunting content. Like the previous scene, this "Remember that We Suffered" dance highlights humor as a coping mechanism for marginalization.

The music transitions into a song by Matt Bar titled, "I'm Not White, I'm Jewish." This song is "hip hop" in style, though entirely appropriative of hip hop culture, and repeats the refrain, "Back when I rapped in high school, people told me that I'm tight for a white dude. What'd you tell 'em? I'm not white, I'm Jewish, I'm not white, I'm Jewish." In unison, we execute a sequence of gestural movements, derived from the movement workshops and pre-existing Jewish movement rituals. These gestures include the drawing of a question mark, the covering of one's eyes with three fingers in the shape of the Hebrew letter *shin* (as is

sometimes done when reciting the *sh'ma*), the beating of one's own heart with a fist as is practiced in repentance on Yom Kippur, gestures used in the recitation of the *modeh ani*, the gesture of "air quotation marks," (See Figure 5), the turning of an imaginary radio dial, and several others. We perform this sequence repeatedly until one performer exits, collects a number of props and carries them down the aisle between the audience pews, offstage. In no particular order, performers depart from the choreography, collect items, exit the space with them, and then return to the gesture sequence. As the process of reorganizing the space progresses, the performers begin to comment on the problematic elements of the song, entering a discourse about race, stereotypes, and the complexity of contemporary Jewishness. This cycle continues as nearly all of the props are removed from the space, leaving just the podium, which is moved to center stage, and six blue, rectangular cushions arranged in two rows facing the *bimah*. Three of the four performers are left seated on the cushions with their backs facing the audience.

Figure 5: Performers execute the gestural phrase to the sound of Matt Bar's, "I'm Not White I'm Jewish."

This section of the piece demonstrates the confusion and complexity that arises from the multiplicity of identity that Magid addresses. The performers are witnessed authentically trying to make sense of the lyrics to this song, clearly horrified by its implications. Shockingly, this song was used in my personal Jewish education, and not as an example of problematic perspectives of Jewishness. While now undergraduate students, my fellow performers and I clearly see the problematic aspects of this song, at age 13, when the song was first introduced to me, I did not have the same perspective. Racially identifying Jews as non-white contributed to my understanding of my Jewishness for years. I lacked an awareness of my white privilege because I was taught to not consider myself white.

Furthermore, when I hear this song, I am reminded of Matt Bar's collaboration with my religious school in which he assisted my seventh grade class in the creation of a rap and accompanying music video addressing the challenges of choice-making in the lives of young Jewish adults.[78] The lyrics of this song were full of dichotomies, for example, "kosher or pork rinds" and "Jew friends or friends from school." These lyrics made it seem impossible to be Jewish *and* eat pork, or to have Jewish *and* non-Jewish friends. Both of these songs convey particular messages about what it means to be Jewish that influence the thinking of those who are exposed to them. By commenting on Matt Bar's song, we provide our own perspectives on his definitions of Jewishness, highlighting the fact that Jewishness is individualized, yet also impacted by environmental influences. In layering the sequence of movement workshop gestures and religious rituals with this song and discussion, we create a multivalent scene of questioning what it means to be Jewish, the very inquiry that motivated this research.

[78] While the majority of American society deems 13-year-olds to be teenagers, in the Jewish community age 13, marks Jewish adulthood.

As the sound of Matt Bar's voice fades, the lights create a stained glass effect and the audience sees Sara, Tina, and Sonia seated in what appears to be a synagogue space. They recite lines all beginning with "I'll never forget," which recreates the environment of reminiscing from the earlier "Remember when" scene, while also engaging the memory of "never forget" rhetoric following the Holocaust. Some of these lines include: I'll never forget the smell of her house, just like soup, I'll never forget the 60s-style floral curtains on those basement windows, I'll never forget the rainbow of sushi. So much sushi. Unlike the previous reminiscing scene, this scene highlights positive memories. As the performers recite their lines, it is clear that they are *noshing* on something, though the exact item remains a mystery. The performers begin to overlap the delivery of the text and as it becomes nearly incomprehensible, they return to silence, stand up, and form a line facing the audience.

The lights shift and a spotlight reveals the performers delightfully devouring bagels with lox and cream cheese. Audience members have no choice but to observe the three women chewing on bagels for an uncomfortably long time. Interrupting the discomfort, I enter the stage, *noshing* on two loaves of *challah*. I join the line and Sara jealousy inquires, "Oh my God, is that *challah*? Also, no knife?" In response, Sonia, Tina, and I simultaneously exclaim: "You're a slicer!?" "Excuse me?" "No no no." We devolve into a brief debate over whether *challah* should be sliced or torn. I then ask the audience if they would like to share in the *nosh*. Met with emphatic nods, I send the *challah* around the audience, instructing them to *tear* a piece and pass it along, ensuring everyone gets a taste. We continue to *nosh*, now in the company of the audience members, as Billy Joel's "For the Longest Time" plays (See Figure 6). We finish snacking and then improvisationally mime gestures typically performed in synagogue, such as

davening, reading a *siddur*, sheepishly unwrapping mints to share, dozing off, silencing grumbling stomachs, and so on.

Figure 6: Performers delight in *noshing* on bagels with lox and *challah*.

This scene highlights the joys of being Jewish, a prominent aspect of the cast's relationship to Jewishness that frequently arose in conversations throughout the process. This scene layers the expression of positive memories connected to Jewishness and Jewish spaces with the consumption of bagels (a staple Jewish food in America) and the sharing in the enjoyment of delicious foods with others (a characteristically Jewish experience). Each of these elements is deeply Jewish and holds positive implications for the performers. The selection of music in this moment was multi-purposeful. Billy Joel is a Jewish artist to whom my family listened frequently throughout my child. However, I also selected a song by Billy Joel as a

reference back to one of my lines of text in the Torah tossing scene. In addition, the repeated lyrics of the song—"oh-oh-oh-oh for the longest time"—draw attention to time and duration. The performers snack on large bagels and *challah*, both chewy treats that take substantial time to devour. This music is also layered with the image of a synagogue, playing with the common joke that synagogue is a space where Jews frequently spend unpleasantly long spans of time.

As the music fades, we descend into a lunge with one hand on the head of the dancer to our left, symbolizing the covering of heads with *kippot*, which is customary in a synagogue space (See Figure 7). We then enter into a unison sequence of movement that moves us through proud stances and painful, reserved poses. Seated on the floor, we draw our knees into our chests and then extend them back out, repeating this action at varying paces and vigor. Our hair cuts through space as the inertia of our knee movements ripple through our spines to the top of our heads

Figure 7: The four performers cover one another's heads, referencing *kippot*.

(See Figure 8). When the speed of this action becomes too much endure, we fall to our sides and then carefully rotate to lay on our abdomens. We shift our faces to the audience and cover our eyes with three fingers, again referencing a customary movement ritual performed when reciting the *sh'ma*. We each stand one at a time, arriving into a powerful pose with our hands behind our heads and our chins lifted toward the ceiling. Following a scene about joy, this section returns to the pain felt by contemporary American Jews and emphasizes the solidarity felt when surrounded by other Jews in responding to marginalization. A gesture of Jewishness that is associated with a commitment to God (the three finger gesture) is interspersed with arduous movements to demonstrate how our ties to Jewishness do not dissipate with our suffering.

Figure 8: Performers move vigorously through the pain of Jewish suffering.

Once we are all standing, we re-organize ourselves in the space. I go to the podium, Sonia sits with her back leaning against the bottom of the podium, and Sara and Tina move downstage left, preparing for a duet. This duet features a series of unison movements sourced from Tina's history of fencing. However, when contextualized in the synagogue space, the images created through these gestures are reminiscent of gun violence and invoke the memory of the Pittsburgh Synagogue shooting (See Figure 9). Sara and Tina perform the same sequence twice in a row to the sounds of a violin. During the second iteration, I read the following poem:

Two in, two out. Be agile. Adapt.
I've practiced how to keep distance. Studied it. Lived it.
I've practiced reaction. There is shielding, laughter, hurt.
Every moment of acceptance feels like it has an alternative intention.
If you let them, they will too.
Two in, two out. Be agile. Adapt.

Figure 9: A photograph of the fencing duet, highlighting the imagery of gun violence it created.

This scene draws on Tina's fencing experience and its impact on how she conceptualizes her Jewishness and its origins. By recontextualizing this fencing movement vocabulary into a synagogue space, we reference the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation. The poem is a compilation of Tina's written reflections about her multiple identities and illuminates the necessity of protecting oneself in the face of marginalization. As the poem captures, individuals with marginalized identities are frequently asked to "adapt" to their hostile environments, a reality dating back to conversations about Jewish assimilation prior to World War II.[79] The violin music is the first of several songs featured in the piece from Lorenzo Ponce and Ben Zebelman's

[79] On the discussion of Jewish assimilation globally see "Political and Racial Antisemitism" In *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 277-345. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

album, "Song of Songs." The inspiration to use this music came from Rivka Sturman's use of the Song of Songs in her choreography during the Israeli folk dance movement.[80] This scene is striking, haunting, and emotional as it grapples with the challenging reality of what it meant to be Jewish in American this past year.

This duet is followed by a series of three other duets featuring various pairings of performers. Sara and Sonia perform a duet with precise, controlled movements, while Tina tells the story of her family's connection to the Jewish community in Squirrel Hill.[81] The choreography of this section sourced from duet the two made about their love for bagels. Yet, when layered with Tina's storytelling, the unison nature of the duet illuminates the importance of community. Following this duet, Sara performs a sequence of poses that elicit discomfort, while verbally naming the precise positioning of each part of her body. She names details such as, "my right hand is playing with my earring, my left knee is shaking up and down, and my gaze is pointed at the ground," changing the verbal details as her poses shift. Once she performs the full sequence of poses, she repeats it without the text, gradually increasing speed with each iteration. Tina is seated with her right shoulder pressed against Sara's back for the duration of this process. Simultaneously, Sonia and I perform a duet with a series of weight-sharing tasks. While these

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[80] Ingber, Judith Brin. "*Shorashim*: The Roots of Israeli Folk Dance." In *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 121. The music selection was also a suggestion from Professor Annie Kloppenberg, who had used this music in her previous work, *The Waters at Whose Edge We Stand*.

[81] Tina was adopted at 18 months old from Boston, Massachusetts by two women. One of these women was born in Nigeria to a Nigerian man and an American woman from North Carolina. When the Biafran War broke out, Tina's grandmother and mother moved to America, where they lived with Tina's great-grandparents in North Carolina. Her grandfather stayed behind to serve as a surgeon during the war. The family eventually reunited in America and moved to Squirrel Hill, a neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They were the first Black family on the block, and their Jewish neighbors became quick friends, as the predominantly Anglo area was not hospitable to either party. Tina's grandmother still lives down the street from the Tree of Life Congregation and is frequently there to support neighbors and friends. In addition, Tina's other adopted mother works as an educator at a synagogue in Boston.Thus, the news of the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation felt particularly personal to Tina.

two duets unfold, I begin singing "*oseh shalom*," a song in Hebrew about peace.[82] Tina joins me in song and as my voice fades out, hers is left singing alone. Once she completes the song, Tina puts a hand on Sara's shoulder to stop her from continuing the cycle of poses. All of us find a moment of stillness and then depart from their positions to reorganize the space one final time (See Figure 10).

This series of duets serves to highlight togetherness in the pain and suffering we had all felt throughout the year, and in our lives due to our marginalized Jewish identities. We perform raw, unstable movements to show the impact of the marginalization we have felt in its most honest form. In this section, Sonia and I practice weight sharing techniques. Out of the cast, Sonia and I have the most similar Jewish upbringing and dance training. This duet in which she physically holds all of my weight, preventing me from falling to the ground captured the feeling of support and solidarity that the entirety of this process brought me. I included the singing of *oseh shalom* to contrast the pain and highlight the hope brought by connecting to others. These two layered duets are the last time all four performers are seen on stage together prior to the final bow. Following these duets, the space is reorganized with everything removed, including the performers, aside from six electronic, touch-on lights set in the shape of a Star of David, downstage left.

[82] The lyrics of *oseh shalom* translate to: May the One who brings peace to God's universe bring peace to us and to all Israel. And let us say: Amen. This song is frequently sung to bring the congregation back together at the end of the silent recitation of the *Amidah* and these words are the closing lines of the Mourner's Kaddish. In addition, this song holds deep personal meaning for me. It was my grandmother's favorite Hebrew song and so, we sang it at her funeral.

Figure 10: Two duets create images of support alongside one another.

The next section of the piece consists of a solo performed by me, followed by a duet between Sonia and me. Throughout the duration of the solo and duet, the sounds of Ponce and Zebelman's "Song of Songs" album return. The solo begins with me standing upstage left, manipulating my hair with my two hands pinching at the crown of my head. I then place the palm of my hand on the top of my head, again creating the image of a *kippah*, a head covering. My hand then slides off my head which causes my entire torso to ripple in the direction my hand drops. This process recurs three times, first dropping to the back, then to the side, and then to the front. Upon the third drop, I lift up my torso and mime the action of dressing myself in a *tallit*, a prayer shawl. The spiraling action of placing the imaginary *tallit* on my body propels me into a series of more dynamic, full-bodied movements. Mixed into the choreography are movement rituals, such as kissing the *mezuzah* and shaking the *lulav*. In addition, this section includes the

sequence sourced from the movement workshops that is performed to the sound of Matt Bar's "I'm Not White I'm Jewish" in the beginning of the piece and movements generated in my improvisational dance following the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting vigil. As the momentum of the movement slows, I walk into the center of the Star of David of lights.

Upon arriving in the center of the lights, I descend into a kneeling position. I then "ignite" each "candle" individually with the touch of a finger. Once all six lights are lit, I stand and look directly into the space before me. I then slowly walk around myself in a circle, which draws on the circular motion of numerous Jewish rituals. I imagine the procession of the Torah around a synagogue, but others may envision the circular rotations of Israeli folk dances, or the circularity of Jewish wedding rituals. Once I am three-fourths of the way around the circle, I extend my arm out into the space and then kiss my hand, emulating the customary action of kissing the passing Torah. As I face front, I execute a series of quick movements that cause me to fall to the floor, laying on my side in the center of the lights. I then use the ritual of beating my heart with a fist in repentance and a gesture from the recitation of the *modeh ani* prayer to carry me outside of the lights, at which point I am joined by Sonia.

Sonia and I perform a series of movements in unison, drawing on the gestural material that recurs throughout the piece. We also introduce new gestures, including that of the "*Heil* Hitler" gesture, which we powerfully break at the elbow in order to carry on with more full-bodied dancing (See Figure 11).

Figure 11: Two Jewish performers "*Heil* Hitler" as they glance candles organized in the shape of a Star of David.

The trajectory of the duet guides us to the upstage right corner, where we gain contact and revive the weight-sharing moments performed earlier in the piece. The duet ends with my hands placed inside of Sonia's as we perform a series of gestures that recur throughout the piece. Our attached hands beat my heart with a fist (the gesture of repentance), then point with our pinky fingers to the upward right diagonal as is done when the Torah is lifted at the end of the Torah service, and finally perform the gesture that accompanies the lighting of the Shabbat candles, ultimately covering my eyes and taking a deep breath, just as the piece began (See Figure 12). The piece ends with the lights dimming on us breathing deeply, slowly walking backwards, eyes covered, bodies connected. We exit the stage, leaving just the lights of the Star of David shining.[83]

[83] Sonia and I performed this excerpt of the piece at the American College Dance Association Conference. There, the adjudicators noted the multivalence of our relationship. We appear as sisters, as a mother and daughter, as a living being and a ghost. All of these relationships invoke support across generations invoking the Jewish value of *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation. In creating this material, Sonia and I discussed varying meanings one may draw from our relationship, all of which the adjudicators noted. The feedback to this material demonstrates the vast possibilities for finding meaning in all of the scenes in this performance and how despite the difference in these interpretations, they elicit similar felt responses.

Figure 12: One performer places her hands in the palms of the other.

This final scene is a culmination of all that precedes it. The choreography arranges material from prior scenes in an order that evokes isolation, sadness, and solidarity. Zebelman and Ponce's music returns, connecting back to the striking scene of gun violence. The sustained solo emphasizes my personal, individualized relationship to Jewishness. Introducing another body into this solo space breaks the isolation, highlighting togetherness. By sourcing a significant portion of the solo choreography from the my rawly improvised dance in response to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting vigil held on campus, this material responds to bias, much like several scenes leading up to the solo movement. The performance ends in a moment of connection, reminiscent of an embrace. At the same time, this ending conjures the ritual of

lighting the Shabbat candles, which reinforces that through the performance we created a Jewish space, one that is ours and thus, that we embrace.[84]

[84] Due to the multilayered nature of *Shelanu (Ours)*, one can extract any number of meanings form each moment. The meanings described here are what I see in the piece as the choreographer reflecting on it at this time and in this place. Others may view moments differently and that is one of the characteristics of live performance that makes it so powerful. By reflecting on the imagery I note in the piece, I aim to offer my reflections on my own work to serve as a time capsule for the thought process that resulted in my first evening-length piece as a young choreographer. I hope to reflect on this work in the future as I continue making Jewish dances.

Conclusion

V'ahavta et Adonai Elohekha, b'khol l'vavkha u-v'khol nafsh'kha u-v'khol m'odekha. You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.[85] Jews across the globe proclaim these words following the recitation of arguably the most well-known prayer in our tradition, the *sh'ma.* Yet, much of our practice is rooted in intellect and the brain, disregarding the body and the essential role it plays in our lived Jewish experience. Motivated by my desire to make sense of the relationship between my Jewishness and my love of dance, I spent the year bringing the Jewish experience back to the site of the body, so that we may reconnect with our Jewishness with all of our hearts, our souls, and our might.

Throughout the course of this year, I explored the potential of contemporary dance practices to function as a bridge between the body, the mind, and the soul. By engaging with history, tradition, Biblical texts, embodiments theories, dance practices, Jewish studies theories, and civic engagement ideologies, I learned the role of scholarship in supporting this exploration. Through this research, I discovered that dance practices have immense potential to strengthen a sense of Jewish self and community, particularly in response to hateful acts. In the face of the numerous anti-Semitic incidents that happened this year alone, my research became an opportunity to respond and to be resilient. In the wake of tragic incidents, I employed dance to process, to seek connection, to empathize, to reflect, to research, and to provide visibility to my experience and that of other Jews.

I began this project aiming to rationalize these two seemingly disparate parts of my identity. I believed that since if I felt so committed to both, they were inevitably connected to

[85] "K'riat Sh'ma." In *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, edited by The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 112. New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2005.

one another. I had not predicted the vastly numerous ways in which these two aspects of my identity could support one another and have been supporting one another for centuries. Inspired by choreographers of the Israeli folk dance movement, I employed dance to cultivate resilience in response to marginalization. Through dance, I mobilized Jews to consider their relationship to Jewishness, to one another, and to their positionalities in both Jewish and non-Jewish environments. Like the dances of Yemenite, Ethiopian, and Ashkenazi wedding ceremonies, my choreography draws on tradition, keeping it relevant.[86] Similar to the cultural dances of Yemenite Jews, my workshops and choreographic process elicit a sense of togetherness and celebration of Jewishness among the participants, while also creating space for individuality.[87] By honoring and studying past and present dancing Jews across the globe, I became more skilled in guiding participants in my project to utilize dance in their own expressions of Jewishness. In turn, I learned how to more adequately raise questions that supported my collaborators in the discovery of Jewish expressions that are most meaningful to them. By performing creative research alongside literary research, I was able to apply methods of global Jewish dances as inspiration for my work, serving the contemporary American Jewish community here in Maine.

The grander impact of this project on my growth as a scholar, choreographer, and practicing Jew came to light through the preparation and delivery of my presentation at CLAS Highlights.[88] Two weeks prior to the event, I had planned to engage attendees in an abbreviated

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[86] *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber, 99-169. Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.
[87] *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, edited by Judith Brin Ingber.
[88] CLAS Highlights is the final event of a two-day celebration of student scholarship at Colby College called, "The Colby Liberal Arts Symposium (CLAS). CLAS Highlights is a concluding event that features the scholarship of four students whose work is deemed a "highlight" of the day by faculty of the college. The event took place at 4pm on Thursday, May 2nd, 2019 and I presented fourth of the four selected students.

version of a movement exercise from the workshop structure. However, between the day I proposed this plan to the CLAS Highlights committee and the day of the event, a fourth swastika was found etched into an elevator on campus and a second synagogue shooting occurred. This shooting took place at the Chabad of Poway in Poway, California on April 27, 2019 at 11:23 am. [89] The tragedy resulted in the death of an innocent woman and the injury of a rabbi, a veteran, and a child. As I grappled with the knowledge of these two acts of hate, one occurring in close proximity to me and the other across the country, I felt compelled to use my CLAS Highlights presentation as an opportunity to respond, just as I had employed the other phases of my project. I wanted to highlight the ways in which my research had been in conversation and in response to the recurring threats to American Jewishness throughout the year. Just two days prior to the presentation, I abandoned my original plan and decided to create a short film that included footage and photographs of *Shelanu (Ours)* interspersed with images of the two synagogue shootings and the four anti-Semitic incidents on Colby's campus that took place during the scope of my research.

On the day of CLAS Highlights, I opened my presentation with a moment of transparency, admitting to my "eleventh hour" change of plans in the wake of these recent hate incidents. As the film played on a projection screen behind me, I framed the presentation in the spirit of scholarship and its power to effectively respond to our environment. I explained that I

[89] On the shooting at the Chabad of Poway in April 2019, see Johnson, Andrew, and R. Stickney. "1 Dead, 3 Injured in Poway Synagogue Shooting." NBC 7 San Diego. April 30, 2019. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/poway-synagogue-shooting-chabad-way-san-diego-sherrifs-department-509162631.html, Paul, Deanna, and Katie Mettler. "Authorities Identify Suspect in 'hate Crim'' Synagogue Shooting That Left 1 Dead, 3 Injured." The Washington Post. April 28, 2019. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/27/california-synagogue-shooting-multiple-injuries/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1b7c3e7185d5, Goldstein, Yisroel. "A Terrorist Tried to Kill Me Because I Am a Jew. I Will Never Back Down." The New York Times. April 29, 2019. Accessed May 20, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/opinion/rabbi-chabad-poway-antisemitism.html.

felt driven by the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, repairing to world, to dedicate my year to engaging bodies in the process of responding to the intolerance and divisiveness of our current world. "Through this research," I explained, "I employed dance to unearth the haunting, challenging, and also joyful realities of what it means to be Jewish in our community here at Colby and in America today." I further expressed my belief that it is our responsibility as scholars of the liberal arts to keep our research relevant and in conversation with our larger context. Throughout the scope of this project, I allowed my research to be impacted and fueled by my environment. I listened to my personal embodied responses (and those of the participants in my research) to the reality of the contemporary American Jewish condition, and allowed them to propel me into action, revising my research objectives in response. Through my continual listening and responding, this year-long research project remained exciting and alive. This project both clarified my role in the field of Jewish Dance scholarship and deeply impacted the conceptualizations of Jewishness held by my collaborators.

In her book *Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer*, Liz Lerman writes, "It may look as if the artist is behaving like an activist, when actually all she is doing is building a world in which she can live and work."[90] I have spent this year building a world in which my Jewishness can live in relationship to my identity as a dance practitioner *and* alongside the Jewishness of those who are both similar and different to me. I learned methods to construct this world, engaging Jewish history, tradition, global communities, and of course, the contemporary state of American Jewishness. This construction took several phases, from the workshop designing and conducting, to the choreographic process, to the performance, and

[90] Lerman, Liz. *Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014, 42.

finally, this written document. Each element served me in the conceptualization of what it means to be Jewish today and how I can respond to that reality through my interdisciplinary scholarship.

This project will propel me forward into a lifetime of dancing my Jewishness. While this iteration of this research must end, due to my time at Colby College coming to a close, I know that this inquiry will be ongoing for the rest of my life. I am a dancer and I am a Jew. Therefore, I will forever hold these two identities in my body and thus they will forever impact the meaning I draw from my experiences and how I choose to respond to them. Through my mobilization of Jewishness over the course of the year, I began the construction of a world in which I felt connected to my Jewishness through all of my heart, my soul, and my might. I will carry this connection with me wherever I go next.

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