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## A delicate dance: autoethnography, curriculum, and the semblance of intimacy

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A DELICATE DANCE:  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, CURRICULUM, AND THE  
SEMBLANCE OF INTIMACY

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

By  
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May 2006

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His curriculum was sparse. Materials included a calculator, a tablet of typing paper, a blue mechanical pencil, a pack of Lucky Strikes, and one really rich problem. Growing up, I watched my mathematician father go about his business as a scholar. Now, as I trudge home from the university, weighted down like a pack mule with books and questions, I marvel at the curricular elegance of not even owning a brief case. My father was fond of telling people that the reason he became a mathematician was because one could do math anywhere: all you needed was dirt and a stick—and of course one really rich problem. My mother's curriculum is much rowdier and social. She is an artist. In contemporary educational vernacular, her design is much more visibly *hands on*. When my mother wants to know, for example, how to anodize aluminum, re-stitch an oriental rug, or marry metals, she culls the registry of experts in her head, finds the person whose passion matches her interest, and puts herself in their way. Her ability to identify good teachers, place herself strategically inside their network of knowledge and live awhile is an organic lesson in ethnographic methods. I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of John W. Jewett, for all that he taught me, and to Conlee Jewett, for all that she continues to teach.

## Acknowledgements

*How much is still possible!  
Lift up your hearts, you good dancers.  
—Nietzsche, 1958, p. 407*

Thank you to committee members Dr. Nina Asher, Dr. William Doll, Dr. Petra Munro-Hendry, Dr. William F. Pinar, and Dr. Helen Regis. Each of you is a fine teacher and thinker who helped me experience the redeeming grace of my own questions while encouraging me to give weight to those of others. I am a better thinker, writer, and teacher for having followed awhile your impeccable lead. I would particularly like to thank Dr. William Doll, whose enduring encouragement and lithe good cheer provided much momentum for this project. Foremost, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. William F. Pinar, whose patient intellectual lead provided generative patterns to follow, while always allowing me room to move.

Thank you also to my friends and family—many of whom I literally dragged with me dancing all over Southwest Louisiana. But I also owe thanks to other sorts of partners who danced with me, more figuratively, through their support. A special thanks in this regard to Steve Clark, whose generous and gentle spirit made the steps of this dissertation so much smoother.

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## **Abstract**

Have you ever had a dream that you shared an intimate moment—grew close—with someone who in your waking life you barely knew; or that you knew a language that outside of your dream you did not understand? Or if you are a teacher, have you ever dreamt that you connected with a student—actually taught them something? If upon waking you have felt the residual yet potent ephemeral *as-ifness* of such closeness, you have experienced what is the focus of this study: the *semblance of intimacy*.

This dissertation, via autoethnography, couples experiences teaching multicultural education and learning to zydeco dance in order to explore semblances of intimacy across self and other; also, to consider the implications of such semblances in terms of thinking about curriculum and research. I use the term “semblance” to suggest that the intimacy at work in the embodied virtual worlds of zydeco, autoethnography, and curriculum can be a powerful as-ifness, or what Jerome Bruner (1985) might describe as a “truth likeness” (p. 97).

Thrift (1997) explores dance as “as an example of play; a kind of exaggeration of everyday embodied joint action which contains within it the capacity to hint at different experiential frames, ‘elsewheres’ which are here” (p. 150). Thrift (1997) calls these hints to elsewhere “semblances,” which he describes as an embodied meaning that is “not taken for real, but it is enacted as if it were” (p. 145). In what follows, I borrow Thrift’s (1997) notion of semblance to look specifically at semblances of intimacy embodied on the dance floor, and the implications such intimacy might have for thinking about curriculum and autoethnographic research.

What might it mean to envision curriculum as an embodied locale much like

zydeco dancing: where the play of epistemological forces replaces technocratic force, and where students experience the relative weight of desire, fear, and knowledge; the reciprocal touch of self and other; and the mysterious momentum of the semblance of intimacy?



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction: To and Fro**

Have you ever had a dream that you shared an intimate moment—grew close—with someone who in your waking life you barely knew; or that you knew a language which outside of your dream you did not understand? Or if you are a teacher, have you ever dreamt that you connected with a student, actually taught them something? If upon waking you have felt the residual yet potent, ephemeral *as-ifness* of such closeness, you have experienced what is the focus of this study: the *semblance of intimacy*.

I use the dreamscapes above to evoke the fleeting experience of semblance. The narrative that follows departs from the symbolic world of dreams and instead focuses on semblances of intimacy in embodied, yet no less imaginative, interpretive contexts. Via autoethnography, I couple my experiences teaching multicultural education and learning zydeco dancing in order to explore semblances of intimacy across self and other; and also to consider the implications of such semblances in terms of thinking about curriculum and research. I use the term semblance to suggest that the intimacy at work in the embodied virtual worlds of zydeco, autoethnography, and curriculum can be a powerful *as-ifness*, or what Jerome Bruner (1985) might describe as a “truth likeness” (p. 97).

My discussion of semblance borrows heavily from geographer Nigel Thrift’s (1998) article “The Still Point: Resistance, Expressive Embodiment, and Dance.” In it, Thrift (1997) explores dance as “as an example of play; a kind of exaggeration of everyday embodied joint action which contains within it the capacity to hint at different

experiential frames, ‘elsewheres’ which are here” (p. 150). Thrift (1997) calls these hints to elsewhere “semblances,” writing that semblance is an embodied meaning that is “not taken for real, but it is enacted as if it were” (p. 145). In what follows, I borrow Thrift’s (1998) notion of semblance to look specifically at semblances of intimacy embodied on the dance floor, and the implications such intimacy might have for thinking about curriculum and autoethnographic research.

Although separated into discrete chapters, it is my intent that narrative exploring my experiences teaching multicultural education to teacher-education students, and my experiences dancing zydeco, be read as moving together in joint action. Both might be understood as dances among self and other that raise broader questions about the curricular potential for intimacy across perceived otherness—specifically that constituted by the relationship between black masculinity and white femininity. The particular aims of multicultural curriculum, designed as they are to address issues of cultural difference, make it a rich site to explore such a dance. I also want to suggest that all curriculum can be seen as an embodied semblance of epistemological intimacy: a dance across difference. I concur with Maxine Greene that curriculum is an intimate project of bringing “self in relation to knowledge to the world” (Miller, 2005, p. 46).

In the ensuing chapters I dance across locales with many theoretical partners and ideas. Like a good social dancer (and social theorist), I mingle. The first chapter is intended to lead readers through an overview of what is to come. Like the paper cut-outs of feet taped to my living room floor, chapter 1 provides a template-tracing movement, both textual and methodological; it is an attempt to map steps. This chapter also outlines

some general patterns of educational significance that this study might be perceived in relation to.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to locating the study in terms of levels of abstraction and embodiment. Drawing on literature about the dancing body, I follow Elspeth Probyn's (1990) metaphors of location in order to locate embodiment as an interpretive practice, and the body as a site of knowledge that moves—on its own terms as well as in concert with other forms of knowledge. I use the dancing body, rather than the autoethnographic body or the teaching body, to flesh out Probyn's metaphors of location. This is because I believe that the notion of embodiment at work in relation to the dancing body is easier to follow, and thus provides a first step toward exploring curriculum and research as embodied knowledge.

The discussion of embodiment in the second chapter becomes important in understanding how knowing is done across the locales that compose this study. Although I have taken copious field notes and conducted many informal interviews, the most important lessons I learned about intimacy from zydeco and teaching multicultural education were through embodied experiences. Self-reflexive experience can be understood as one of the primary instruments of autoethnographic research. Taking Merleau-Ponty's lead, embodiment becomes the existential basis in this study for making knowing possible. Nigel Thrift (1997) likewise uses dancing as an example to suggest that embodiment is constitutive and not merely representative. Thus, rather than expressing knowledge or creating a space for resistance to local constructions of, say, race or gender, dancing and other embodied activities are also interpretative acts. They are able, therefore, also to give rise to new potentialities of knowledge—Thrift's (1997)

semblances. Following Thrift (1997), I suggest that the momentum of the semblances of intimacy at play in zydeco, autoethnography, and curriculum is contingent upon the embodied experience of self moving in a tandem defined by reciprocal tension with perceived others.

In chapter 3, I look at semblances of intimacy at play in literature about autoethnography. Drawing heavily from the work of sociologist Carolyn Ellis and other literature on autoethnography, I explore autoethnographic aims in relation to traditions of autobiography and ethnography, from which autoethnography draws and ultimately hopes to transform through its hybrid identity. I take this approach in order to more closely examine autoethnography's desire for a radical intimacy that collapses knower and known, and self and other, under one identity.

Autoethnography claims to offer a promising reconciliation of the autobiographic urge (toward self) and ethnographic desire (toward others). Such claims hinge upon notions of intimacy, a textual intimacy between text and reader, and more seductive still, an epistemological intimacy between self and other through a research subjectivity that claims to collapse such categories.

In terms of textual intimacy, autoethnography makes alluring claims, such as those offered by Gergen and Gergen (2002), who write that "autoethnography reduces the distance between writer and reader. . . . First person expression of private matters brings us into a space of intimacy" (p. 15). Jones (2002) seems equally tempting in her description of autoethnography's textual intimacy: "Within the intimate, sensual contact among readers and texts, autoethnography create[s] a space of 'critical vigilance' in which 'communities of resistance are forged to sustain us'; a place where we come to

know that ‘we are not alone’ (p. 54). Literature about autoethnography makes similarly alluring claims regarding the potential intimacy of the autoethnographic self and its others. According to Russel (1998), “the autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other” (p. 4). Autoethnography, he explains, “produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze under the sign of one identity” (Russel, 1998, p. 25). This tight fit between subject and object creates a space of intimacy where one can “document one’s experience of cultural diversity, without commodifying or objectifying . . . without othering” (Russel, 1998, p. 23). Autoethnography offers itself as an intimate act of knowing in which the other is not betrayed. Autoethnography, writes Jones (2002), “is a conscious act of being in love with another and staying true to that love” (p. 52).

I am dubious about autoethnography’s claims that it, or any research methodology for that matter, has the capacity to blur the distinction between knower and known and self and other. I suggest in chapter 3 that claims about such blurring, and the desire for intimacy that they point to, serve as pedagogical semblances that circulate among the many shadowy truths at play in autobiography and ethnography, and in a broader sense, qualitative research in general. Further, chapter 3 asserts that it is the play of subjectivities—the back-and-forth motion of the autoethnographic gaze, moving among self and other operating in generative reciprocal tension—and not their hybrid collapse that gives rise to such intimacy.

Similarly, the curricular stories I tell in chapter 4 rely on wavering degrees of intimacy. As I will explore further in that chapter, the semblance of intimacy, circulating through relationships of dancing as well as research, is inextricably related to knowledge.

Intimacy implies knowing, while knowing involves a semblance of contact; knowledge involves the sense of coming close, touching, and being touched. I use autoethnography in chapter 4 to sculpt a kind of teacher story, which I refer to as a curricular story, to explore multicultural curriculum as a liminal locale among and between familiarity and strangeness, fear and desire, and intimacy and its betrayal. It was through my teaching that I began to realize that, like many of the white female students in my class, I was implicated in a strange dance of self and other: the tense historical intimacy between white femininity and black masculinity.

In chapter 4, resistance is recast as one force in the play of forces at work in a multicultural curriculum that is shaped by not just by the force of my desires and intentions, but by my students' as well. Distance and intimacy are its own kind of teacher. Also powerful in chapter 4 is the curriculum of distance constructed by my students, who often drew difference into our curriculum as embodied by black masculinity, only to push it away in a symbolic betrayal—not unlike the white Delilahs that Ida B. Wells (1892) writes about regarding the rape myth. The fourth chapter examines the play of familiarity and strangeness (plays of intimacy) in my multicultural curriculum in relation to dangerous remembrances of white Southern femininity, and how such forces might relate to what Murrell (1993) sees as a crisis of intimacy among white femininity and black masculinity in schools.

In opposition to the comparatively rigid multicultural curriculum I teach by day in teacher education, chapter 5 explores my experience with a looser curriculum embodied by dancing couples, grinding their way through temporarily ritualized body-spaces of transgression and semblances of intimacy. It is a curriculum in which the racial

segregation that often characterizes Southern social surfaces sometimes loosens, a loosening perpetually lost to the simultaneous constriction of complicated Southern fantasies linking race, gender, and desire.

While literature on zydeco (Sexton, 2000; Tisserand, 1998; Spitzer, 1986) focuses on zydeco in relation to race, chapter 5 explores how local constructions of gender intersect with those of race to create semblances of intimacy reliant upon movement between the startling physicality of flesh and the social skin of South Louisiana. Chapter 5 examines zydeco dance as an embodied curriculum constituted in important ways by women I refer to by Wells' term: *white Delilahs*. Through their dance, these white Delilahs embody, express, and ultimately move contradictory constructions of race, gender, desire, and knowledge into powerful semblances of multiracial intimacy.

I use the term *white Delilah* to highlight zydeco as a racialized and sexualized locale, in which historical as well as contemporary relationships of race and gender are (re)articulated and shaped through dance. The term was coined by anti-lynching activist Wells (1892/2002) as a clever inversion of the black seductress Jezebel figure and an evocation of Delilah, who, as the Bible tells us, was used by the men of her country to seduce the other and then betray him. I suggest in chapter 5 that the dance being performed by the white Delilahs of zydeco evokes historically and locally salient oppressive social narratives that concern miscegenation myths and the rape myth, while at the same time placing semblances of cross-racial intimacy into public play, thus betraying a system of white patriarchal power that seeks to regulate such intimacy.

My conclusion provides no grand gestures forcing three very different contexts of interpretation (dancing, research, and curriculum) to permanently partner up. I offer

instead points of departure toward thinking about relations among self, other, and curriculum. These points of departure, organized in terms of touch, weight, and momentum, are meant to point toward interpretive, not prescriptive, locales. Drawing from curriculum theory, my conclusion asks rather than tells about the relationship among the semblances of intimacy that circulate through zydeco and autoethnography; and how these semblances might generatively be put into play in the as-ifness of curriculum. I end my study by asking what it would mean for curriculum to be located as a mode of relation rather than a bounded locale, one where the play of epistemological forces replaces technocratic force; one where we might experience the relative weight of history, knowledge, and power, feel the reciprocal touch of self and other, and embody the mysterious momentum of intimacy.

### **Methodological Moves**

For the purposes of introduction, autoethnography can be defined as a combination of “autobiography, the story of one’s own life, with ethnography, the study of a particular social group” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 6). This study is shaped by the self-reflexive movement of its method. As tap dancer and dance historian Brenda Bufalino tells Dixon Gottschild (2003), “it is the movement that pronounces the shape” (p. 29).

Describing the movement of the autoethnographic gaze, Ellis (2004) has this to say:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. . . . They zoom backward and forward, inward, and outward. (pp. 37-38)



These movement metaphors are germane. Autoethnography is both a mode of representation and a mode of inquiry (Richardson, 1994) that shapes, or perhaps, as I discuss in chapter 4, forces an intimacy between “the story of the self who has the stake, asks the questions and does the interpreting, and the stories of others who help us find or create meanings” (Goodall, 2003, p. 60). In this study, autoethnographic method provides a way for me to couple inquiry into “what is felt, fantasized, and thought—the reality underneath the words, events, and schedules” with questions concerning the embodied experiences of dancing, research, and curriculum in relation to sociocultural context (Pinar, 1988, pp. 138-139).

This study is a “layered account” (Goodall, 2003, p. 57). Following Ellis’s (2004) lead, I start with my personal life and “pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions . . . to try and understand an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life” (p. vii). Autoethnographic understanding provides a way of framing (not fencing) embodied experience that acknowledges, through its methodology, that “knowledge, subjectivity, and society are inextricably linked” (Pinar, 2004, p. 11). Such a framework must be loose enough so that its relevance moves gracefully among categories and glides smoothly across contexts. On another level, the framework needs to be taut enough to give form to fluid relevance. Its course is, naturally, recursive and relational; questions lead to other questions, and so on. All knowledge falls back upon itself.

There was considerable overlap in the autoethnographic methods I employed and in the ways interpretation unfolded across the sites (zydeco dancing, research, and curriculum) this study examines. I gathered experiential data mainly through participant

observation, dancing, doing autoethnography, and teaching. I analyzed data by pulling apart the elements of my experiences and the experiences of others, then reuniting them through writing in what I hope to be “surprising, shocking, and sometimes deliberately experimental combinations” (Turner, 1977, p. 43). Goodall (2003) describes his own interpretive practice similarly:

You get pulled into different ways of reading clues to a culture, and while you are doing that (and however you are doing that), some interesting personal questions connect you—your life, your goals, your purpose—to what begins to look and feel like a pattern. The clues about a meaningful pattern act as an inducement to discover, and to create, connections among the complex intersections of selves, others, and cultural contexts. (p. 60)

In this study, this dialectic expresses itself in the reflexive relationship between fieldwork and analysis. Interpretation informed the experience of data-collection and analysis, themselves social realities. This to-and-fro between analysis and interpretation helped shape a pattern of movement across diverse locales of interpretation—dancing, research, and curriculum—that outside the nexus of my own experience might initially seem disparate. However, as I suggest later, these sites are also linked by more than my own experience.

Like zydeco, autoethnographic methodology as I employ it here is polyrhythmic. Using the multiple methods of participant observation, informal interviews, textual analysis, and reflective writing helped me move with multiple facets of autoethnographic exploration across diverse locales in interpretive syncopation. The rhythm of setting,

participants, and data collection varied by site. Below I provide, by site, a brief outline of those aspects of this study.

Autoethnographic data for chapter 5 was gathered over three years I spent learning zydeco dance in informal settings—primarily in the section of Southwest Louisiana known as Acadiana. Participants included my dance partners and other dancehall habitués, and zydeco musicians. I used ethnographic methods of participant observation, informal interview, and document analysis to interpret the “routines, rituals, concerns and conversations” (Goodall, 2003, p. 55) of white Delilahs through my own lived experiences as a white, middle-class, logo-centric woman learning how to dance. I learned primarily from men who identify themselves, at least sometimes, as Creole of Color.<sup>1</sup> In terms of participant observation, I began with “broad sweep observations” and “observations of nothing in particular” (Glesne, 1999, p. 49) among a variety of zydeco dance contexts in Southwest Louisiana. These contexts included predominately white and predominately Creole dancehalls and clubs, cultural festivals, church dances, parties, and

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Creole*, as Spitzer (1986) points out, has a long history of being a semantically elastic term” (p.31). Similarly, according to Tisserand (2003) “the definition of “*Creole*” changes as you move through Louisiana” (p. 77). When I use the term in reference to research participants, I am referring primarily to descendants of free people of color who settled in Southwest Louisiana. For a more complete discussion of the term Creole see Brasseaux, C.A., Fontenot, K.P., & Oubre, C.F. (1994). *Creoles of color in the bayou country*. Jackson: MS: University Press of Mississippi and S. (Ed). (2000) *Creole: The history and legacy of Louisiana’s free people of color*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.

house dances. Broad sweep participant observations proved useful in gaining a general understanding of the research setting. In order to narrow the focus of the study, I used “observations that search for paradoxes” (Glesne, 1999, p. 49) to help identify fertile conflicts of meanings. I sometimes wrote field notes on the spot, though more often immediately after the dance event, later translating my notes into more detailed accounts combining observation and reflection. I use pseudonyms for all participants, with the exception of Alphonse “Bois Sec” Ardoin, Geno Delafosse, and Harry Hypolyte. All three are internationally acclaimed musicians whose lives have been well documented by journalists, musicologists, and folklorists to the extent that pseudonyms would do little to shield their identities.

Early in my fieldwork, I used field notes to record observations and to document dancer discourse. As my dancing progressed, I spent less time watching dancers and listening to them talk and more time “listening” to them move. Learning to do so became its own form, or perhaps method, of intimacy. As Edgerton (1993) writes, “listening, like engagement with a text, effects a dissolution of the boundaries of self. . . . Simultaneously frightening and exhilarating, it allows the ‘outside’ ‘inside,’ opening up channels of possibility, sharing languages, inspiring action” (p. 66). Good dancers must be good physical listeners; researchers (all kinds of students for that matter), teachers, and curriculum theorists have much to gain from cultivating the intimate skill of listening to embodiment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> By listening to embodiment, I mean the complex process of making meaning from the way people move as opposed to or in addition to what they say. The necessity of this became apparent to me after many futile attempts to interview people about how they danced. I subsequently realized that participants offered such information more

Participation, rather than observation, carries the methodological weight across sites in this study. It was through dancing that I learned about dancers and the powerful semblance of intimacy that sometimes characterizes zydeco. For a period of two years I devoted on average 20 hours a week to dancing. My embodied experience as a white woman learning from Creole of Color people how to dance across culture became the primary context within which I explored the complex psychosocial relationship between black masculinity and white femininity, in relation to semblances of intimacy that circulate through zydeco and beyond in the broader sociocultural milieu. In the second chapter I hope to complicate the notion of embodiment. Via philosopher Merleau-Ponty and geographer Nigel Thrift, I want to suggest that embodiment is more than the physical vehicle for experience. As Okely (1992) writes, researchers “learn not only through the verbal, the transcript, but through all the senses, through movement, through their bodies and whole being in a total practice. We use this total knowledge to *make sense* literally of the recorded material” (p.16). Embodiment is an interpretive act accordingly.

Autoethnography is the method I use to explore zydeco, though as I hope to demonstrate in chapter 3, the methodology itself is a kind of dance of self and other. The rigorous reflexivity this methodology requires “gives weight” to self. Performing autoethnography means studying the process of performing autoethnography—a tangle some might call recursive and others solipsistic. In his autobiography, Amiri Baraka (1984) describes another sort of tangle: one of “non-self.” Baraka (1984) writes of “a

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fully in the dance itself. But I had to hone my dancing ability in order to make meaning of their movement. As a participant observer, I had to learn to listen to embodiment.

non-self creation where you become other than you . . . imbibing, gobbling, stuffing yourself with reflections of the *other*” (p. 120). Although it is also a dance of self and other, autoethnography to me often feels like a tangle of self: a process of self-creation where I become too much as I am, imbibing, gobbling, and stuffing myself with self-reflection.

I try to step back a bit in chapter 3 and explore autoethnographic calls to intimacy through textual analysis, identifying a pool of influential autoethnographic texts and coding them for themes on the relationship between self and other, self-reflexivity, and intimacy. As Miles and Huberman (1994) state, “coding is analysis” (p. 56). Of course, nothing gets untangled through this analysis. Textual analysis requires close reading. My efforts to step back by studying the textual claims of autoethnography did not distance me from autoethnography’s tangle of self and other; instead, such attempts brought me closer. As an interpreter, I was still in the middle—as useful a place as any to try and understand how a research methodology’s claims relate to its desire and the desires of its researchers. The experience of doing autoethnography was also a way of exploring the semblances of intimacy at play within it. Textual interpretation uncovered a discrepancy between the degree of intimacy that autoethnographic method claims and its logical capacity to provide that intimacy. While textual analysis demonstrates this discrepancy adequately enough, its utility lies to some degree in the eye of the beholder. It was only through my practical engagement with the embodied experience of autoethnography’s back and forthing, and the semblance of intimacy to which it gives rise, that I came to see the discrepancy as pedagogical.

I use autoethnography in chapter 4 to explore my experience of the curricular dance of self and other I experienced over several semesters teaching a mandatory multicultural education course to teacher education students at Louisiana State University. According to Hildago (1993):

Teachers need to become introspective ethnographers in our own classrooms to decipher the cultural meanings that we and our students bring to the group. Once teachers understand our assumptions and beliefs and can appreciate and accept the unique cultural contributions of our students, we can use this knowledge. (p. 105)

I gathered the data for chapter 4 through an introspective exploration of my experience of the curriculum—hidden and null—that my white female students brought to the course. In a sense, I use autoethnography to construct what narrative researchers in education would call a “teacher story” (Clandinin, 1993; Schubert, 1992). Like autoethnography, narrative research in education posits itself as a mode of both representation and inquiry (Richardson, 1994). Much like the claims of autoethnography, narrative research advertises itself as a mode in which those most likely to be researched (teachers) become the researchers. According to Akin (2002), narrative research is “a way for teachers to write ourselves back into the text of teaching” (p. 67). Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin (2005) describe teacher stories as “stories to live by” (p. 291).

My teaching story, which is also a learning story, is not a linear retelling of my ten semesters teaching the course Education and Diverse Populations. Instead, chapter 4 functions as a curriculum story, gathering patterns that emerged during that time and combining them into an autoethnographic composite representing the course of my own becoming as a teacher and student of multicultural curriculum. Recollections and analysis

of course material, assignments, and class discussion comprise this story, as do well reasoned generalizations about my white female students.

The process of writing my teacher story became a method of inquiry in itself. Writing about my curriculum became a way of understanding my experience of it in a different light. However, as Smith and Watson (2001) observe, understanding one's own experience can seem deceptively simple:

What could be simpler to understand than the act of people writing about what they know best, their own lives? But this apparently simple act is anything but simple, for the writer becomes, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation. (p. 1)

### **Choreographing Significance**

The course of this study pivots on desire: the desire to dance, to know or not know, to teach, and for an intimacy with the other that is in play/work in my experiences with autoethnography, zydeco, and curriculum. This study is also an attempt to understand that desire. As Edgerton (1996) notes, “teachers and their relations (students, parents, public) stand to benefit immensely if teachers are equipped to examine their own desires—desires to teach, desires for students, desires for themselves (p. 135). The same is true of researchers. The process of writing this dissertation in part represents my effort to understand how a somewhat sedentary and clumsy graduate student could become so seduced by movement she can no longer sit still to read a newspaper—much less write a dissertation. It is also an attempt to understand how my desire to move together in time with Creole of Color men implicates me in a sometimes violent history of desire that is disavowed in ways that are even more difficult to grasp. Further, this work is an effort to



discover how my own desire is linked to autoethnographic efforts to know or touch other worlds; and how this connects to my curricular desires to encourage students to allow themselves to be touched by the worlds of others. According to Sedgwick (1985), desire is a structure in itself: an “affective or social force, the glue that shapes an important relationship” (p. 137).

I use autoethnographic methods in this study to lend pattern to my own complex tangle of desire and experience (my own curriculum) learning how to zydeco dance in South Louisiana and how it relates to the equally delicate dances of autoethnography and teaching. By arranging my discussion of curriculum in direct relation to autoethnography and dancing, I focus on the epistemological ground of self and other they circle over. In doing so, I show that the theoretical ground covered by the notion of curriculum theory as an interpretive locale might be generatively extended beyond school and used to better understand other types of becoming. Because zydeco and autoethnography both can be considered educative (perhaps in some respects more educative than the multicultural knowledge of formal curriculum), its dancers embody a curriculum of sorts. Thus, according to Schubert (1981), it might be studied through curricular lenses.

As Phillip Jackson (1990) reminds, the bells and buzzers signifying the start and finish of the school day are technologies of power. But despite their disciplinary salience, such technologies do not really separate the classroom from the real world. Similarly, despite the disciplinary mandates of education, knowledge outside of classrooms (even “controversial knowledges” about race, gender, and sexuality that “education wants to put elsewhere”) interpenetrates the desires that constitute formal curriculum (Britzman, 1998, p. 117). As Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts (2000) assert, “education does not

take place just in schools. . . . It occurs at dinnertime, in front of the television set, on street corners, in religious institutions and in coffee shops” (p. 131).

The complicated dance of race, culture, gender, and knowledge embodied by zydeco shows that important teaching and learning takes place in the pedagogical spaces of bandstands, dancehalls, festivals, rodeos, and plantations as well as in classrooms.

According to Pinar (2001):

The main issue of the twentieth century may have been the color line, but this line did not stay within itself, by itself, dividing what would otherwise be a monolith: humanity. The color line traverses other planes, inhabits other problems, especially educational ones. (p. 1)

Zydeco can be seen as embodied local curriculum outside of but not unrelated to schools, through which Pinar’s color line entwines itself with local constructions of race and gender, doing so in ways that both promote and inhibit intimacy across otherness.

In examining zydeco and autoethnography as embodied curriculum, I hope to demonstrate important links between desire, culture, intimacy, and knowledge.

Through autoethnographic interpretation of the complex processes of intimacy, desire, and knowledge as they play themselves out in an embodied curriculum (specifically, my embodied curriculum, undertaken through dancing, autoethnography, and teaching), this study contributes to and extends current discussion of curriculum as “a site of struggle over meaning identity, and power” (Pinar, et al, 1995).

While the curriculum story I tell in chapter 4 is specifically about a curriculum of multicultural education, Castenell and Pinar (1993) point out that all curriculum—not just that labeled multicultural—might be generatively discussed as racialized and gendered

text. According to Paley (2000) in her book *White Teacher*, such conversations remain “uneasy” in the contemporary educational context influenced by the “fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us” (p. xx). This study uses zydeco as a fertile interpretive locale where some of the fears, prejudice, apprehension, expectations, and intimacies at play in dances of self and other can easily be seen. The surface play of zydeco is saturated with the semblance of intimacy as well as racialized and gendered narratives that complicate it. My goal is to consider the ways in which these tensions might also be generatively at play—albeit sometimes with more subtlety—in autoethnography and curriculum, and more locally, in my autoethnography and the curriculum of the multicultural education course I teach.

Pinar (2001) writes: “As a feminist man it is clear to me I must confront my own manhood, understood of course not essentialistically, but historically, socially, racially in terms of class and culture” (p. 1). Likewise, as a researcher and a teacher educator, it is clear to me that in order to think about culture, curriculum, teaching, and learning, it is necessary for me to confront my own femininity. Toward that end, this study offers an autoethnographic examination of local constructions of white femininity, my own and that of my students. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) point out, “the discourses that shape whiteness are not unified and singular, but diverse and contradictory” (p. 9). My use of the interpretive figure of the white Delilah is intended to provide a vivid local example of how the forces of fear, desire, intimacy, and difference are dispersed by white women in contradictory ways that intersect with larger sociohistorical forces that shape white femininity and its potential for intimacy with others. I hope to demonstrate that

whiteness and femininity, rather than serving as impermeable categories, are embodied epistemologies—ways knowing is done (Bateson and Bateson, 1987)—that are deeply embedded in, but not trapped by, local discourses of power, knowledge, and desire. Such ways of knowing are also enmeshed in the multiplicities of submission, confusion, and the desire not to know. The forces shaping white femininity concomitantly shape research and curriculum and should therefore be addressed. Willinsky (1998) writes:

We are not anything so much as what we have learned to call ourselves. Learning to read ourselves within and against how we have been written, too, seems part of the educational project ahead. But learning to read oneself is also about learning to read the other, as we consider how to rewrite the learned and learn-ed perceptions of difference. (p. 264)

The white Delilahs who dance, teach, and learn throughout this study all deliberately put themselves in the way of otherness through dances of self and other: zydeco, research, and curriculum. Such otherness, while racialized and gendered, is not simple and cannot be defined in opposition to one dominant group.

This study also invites critical conversation about the psychosocial dynamics among black masculinities and white femininities as they interact inside and outside the formal curriculum. According to Rippy (1999), “as an outward, physically visible system of signification, the black/white racial border remains one of the primary social borders of American society, equaled only by the borders of gender” (p. 27). On one level, much of this study is about relationships between self and other as they body forth in plays of intimacy in relation to this historically racialized binary of black masculinity and white femininity. This particular play of perceived difference carries particular historical

weight, particularly in the South. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the touch of interracial intimacy, while giving weight to local narratives that construct dichotomies of racialized and gendered difference and constrict intimacy across its contours. According to Murrell (1993), the psychosocial relationship between white femininity and black masculinity should carry more weight in discussions of education as well. The dance of fear and desire connected to the allure of racial difference—something I have witnessed in zydeco dancers and teacher education students—also circulates in schooling. Murrell (1993) calls this psychosocial dynamic between white femininity and black masculinity a “subtle yet critically important factor in the desperate plight of Black boys in public schools” (p. 235).

While it is beyond the scope of this study to suggest that black boys are betrayed by white female teachers, black masculinity obviously has been betrayed by the system of public schooling in the United States—a system often gendered as female and racialized as white in the public imagination. This betrayal of black masculinity might be seen as directly embodied by white femininity: by the bodies of white teachers. However, much like the dance of self and other I describe in relation to white Delilahs, the dance of self and other that is schooling takes place within the context of an internalized control, itself linked to a white patriarchal system of institutionalized racism whose intent is mastering, not understanding, difference. As Murrell (1993) writes, “clearly, there is a combination of political, economic, and sociological circumstances that contributes to the demise of educational success among African American males. But the desperateness of the educational problem has focused energy on an educational solution” (p. 231). My study does not offer a solution. I am not sure how semblances of

intimacy might mitigate such betrayal. According to Murrell (1993), “teachers from mainstream backgrounds simply have to overcome too much to be able to express . . . positive regard, and love for African American boys.” Nevertheless, I believe that my autoethnographic interpretation of the dance of the white Delilah—the psychosocial shimmy vacillating between the desire for, and fear of, being overcome by difference—touches on or connects with the fertile contradictions inherent in the alienation Murrell (1993) describes. I certainly hope it offers momentum for further study.

The autoethnographic stories I offer are not “models or solutions to the problems of teacher education but are stories that highlight the tensions” (Clandinin, 1993, p. 14). At the same time, I hazard that the tension of difference and the semblance of intimacy resulting from self and other moving together in time, besides being obviously central to the momentum of literal dancing, are also central to the momentum of other “methods of worlding” such as research and curriculum (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 9). Thus located, the semblances of intimacy that emerge from the joint action of difference moving together in time in reciprocal tension are “epic in their force, pressure, twists, reversals and returns” (Britzman, 1998, p. 1).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Dancing Across Metaphors of Location**

Writing about the dancing body as a body of knowledge rather than as a cultural spectacle is not always easy. As de Certeau (1984) writes, “the paths that respond to each other in this intertwinement, unrecognized poems of which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility” (P. 93). Writing about the dancing body is difficult, in part, because our ability to locate embodied knowledge and subsequently make meaning of it is distracted by unbridled metaphors of location and bound by constricting theories of mind and body. This chapter is something like the paper cut-outs of footprints taped to my living room floor. It is an attempt to provide a template of initial theoretical moves found in literature about dancing bodies—a template that might help locate the body as a site of knowledge where dancing as “a way knowing is done” can be seen as an epistemological locale, one deeply influenced by local constructions of culture, race, and gender. It is an attempt to map steps (Bateson and Bateson, 1987, p. 20).

Toward this end the chapter dips and swings among literature about localized constructions of culturally, socially, and historically grounded dances and dancers, and more abstract notions of the body, embodiment, and dancing bodies. That said, I begin by introducing Elspeth Probyn’s (1990) discussion drawing distinctions between three central metaphors of locatedness: the local, locale, and location. As I move through literature about dancing bodies, these metaphors representing three levels of abstraction provide a pattern to locate ways of thinking about social dancing. At the same time, they provide a template for thinking across levels of abstraction. While I use the dancing body to flesh out Probyn’s metaphors, I might have used the autoethnographic or curricular body.

My first move is to look at dancing as a local practice in relation to literature that attempts to localize larger issues of black vernacular dance and, more local still, first-person narratives that explore the experience of dance. Next, I swing out toward locale by locating dance as a locale of mixed pleasures, where dancing emerges as both a spatial practice and discursive event. Here I couple Probyn's (1990) discussion with that of Nigel Thrift (1997), who suggests that in addition to expressing knowledge or creating a space for resistance to local constructions of knowledge, dancing as an embodied locale can give rise to new potentialities (semblances) of knowledge. Lastly, I try to insinuate the dancing body into bodies of knowledge while locating dancing as an embodied epistemological locale.

### **Local, Locale, Location**

In the event the reader's mind (and body) is spinning with metaphors of located-ness, Elspeth Probyn's (1990) article "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local" offers to make sense of postmodernism's preoccupation with such metaphors, by delineating the metaphorical usage of the terms *local*, *locale*, and *location*. Probyn (1990) writes regarding postmodernists' apparent pleas toward a politics of the local:

It seems that an unspecified local becomes the site for an unnamed politics. As such, local, locale and location become abstract terms, cut off from a signifying ground and serving as signposts with no indication of direction. However, feminist reworking of these metaphors may bring them down to earth; doing so may even bring us to consider both the construction of sites and the methods of researching sites. (p. 177)

In bringing these metaphors "down to earth," Probyn (1990) seeks clarity in regard to feminist as well as postmodernist claims to the local. Probyn works to rework Adrienne Rich's (1984) contested notion of a feminist politics of location grounded in "the fragments of one's own



body,” but that “combines the specificity of individual female bodies with a larger feminist politics” (Probyn, 1990, p. 177). She does so in order to explore the question of “how to speak without the comfort of a preliminary gesture toward the shared ground of women’s common oppressions” (Probyn, 1990, p. 177). She reworks the question of whether the subaltern can speak, to where the subaltern speaks from. Probyn (1990) writes:

A central problematic within feminist cultural theory: Whether the subaltern can speak. I see this problematic composed of a number of intersecting critical questions: the epistemological constitution of knowledge, the ontology of the questioning subject, and the conjunctural question of where and how we may speak. (p. 177)

Probyn (1990) delineates local, locale, and location so as to look at them in relation to one another. Her theoretical framework highlights an interpretive intersection, where considerations of local practice rub up against epistemological questions about how such knowing is done, or can be done. Probyn’s efforts to locate notions of local, locale, and location as levels of abstraction do not represent an effort to distance the abstract from the actual. Rather, it is an attempt to examine theoretical space and the places of practice as common (though not identical) ground.

In stressing that these concepts indicate different levels of abstraction, I want to emphasize that theoretical constructs allow for different forms of practice; the “ground” of practice is, after all, not an empirically knowable entity but lies in our ways of thinking. (Probyn, 1990, p. 177)

Probyn’s levels of abstraction are not meant to scaffold relative proximities between theory and practice. Rather, for her these levels represent an attempt to locate distinct yet interrelated ways of thinking about practice, whereby practice itself becomes located as an interpretative space.

Probyn (1990) describes the local as “that directly issuing from or relating to a particular time” and/or place (p. 179). She locates the local as “practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them” (p. 178). In contrast to the local, Probyn (1990) understands the concept of locale as a space and a time—what Nigel Thrift (1993) might call a “space-time” (p. 93). She understands locale to be both “a discursive and non-discursive arrangement” (p. 178). According to Probyn, “the concept of ‘locale’ then serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event” (1990, p. 182). Her notion of locale links, but does not collapse, place and event in order to explore spatial and discursive practices, highlighting contradictions. The home is Probyn’s (1990) primary example of locale.

She uses Betty Friedan’s (1963) feminist critique of home as a patriarchal place of unfulfilled desire for women as an example of work that collapses place (home) with the family (event), contrasting this sort of work with that of Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982), which Probyn believes addresses the “two-fold character of ‘the family’” (p. 180). Referring to Barrett and McIntosh (1982), Probyn (1990) writes that “while they recognize the subjective experience and pleasures that the place of the family may offer, they are quick to point out the ways in which the family serves to reproduce patriarchal structures of power” (p. 181). As an illustration of Probyn’s (1990) concept of locale, Barrett and McIntosh (1982) allow readers to analyze the home as both a place and event in order to recognize the “affective lure of place and the ideological working of events” (Probyn, 1992, p. 181). Probyn (1990) writes that “in recognizing a locale, we see both regulation of practices and why those practices in themselves might also be a source of mixed pleasures” (p. 183). Locale, as she sees it, directs us “to the struggle between being positioned within patriarchal practices and the intertwined pleasures that we may experience in our day-to-day living” (Probyn, 1990, p. 186). In contrast, location is

where “we are brought to consider how those experiences may be denied and ordered into the periphery” (Probyn, 1990, p. 186).

Probyn (1990) writes that location can be seen as “explicitly articulating epistemological and ontological concerns” (p. 184). In her schema, location is more than an epistemological space through which knowledge is ordered” (1990, p. 185). For Probyn (1990), location also “delineates what we may hold as knowable” (p. 178):

Through this process of sifting and sequencing, location describes epistemological maneuvers whereby categories of knowledge are established and fixed into sequences. It is also the process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we know as experience. (p. 184)

Location, as Probyn (1990) understands it, refers to both the process of determining what constitutes sites of knowledge and the process of arranging these sites into categories. More fundamentally, location “is also that process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we know as experience” (Probyn, 1990, p. 184). As the third level of abstraction, location is the epistemological process that renders the local and locale knowable. Probyn writes that “in looking at how location disqualifies certain experiences, we begin to realize that the knowledge of locale is important and powerful” (1990, p. 187).

Her notions of locale, local and location work together; they must, if I am to look at, as Probyn (1990) suggests, “the construction of locale: what event is being reproduced in what place and how individuated knowledge and experience of locale is circumscribed through the process of location” (p. 186). I appreciate her effort to tether these metaphors—at least in terms of research. In looking at dancing as an embodied locale that does not just reflect but actually constitutes the sorts of knowledge associated with culture, gender and race; the dancing body, the

dance itself, and the local social and cultural milieu they exist within all seem to serve as sites for research. It is important to remember that in her delineation of the local, locale and location, is “working with a consciously loose rather than tight relation in mind, . . . establishing loose sets of relations, capillary actions and movements, spilling out among and between different fields” (McRobbie, 1984, p. 142).

Probyn (1990) writes: “In taking up these often bandied about terms, and in arranging them together, I want to focus on the ground they circle over” (p. 177). In the following sections, I try to ground discussions of zydeco as local practice. Next, I attempt to ground dancing (zydeco specifically) as a space and event as locale. Lastly, I explore the difficulties of trying to pin down the dancing body as a site of knowledge.

### **Local Dances**

Writing about music, goes the famous saying, is like singing about architecture. Similarly, efforts to write about dancing somehow seem to miss the mark. As Barbara Browning (1995) points out in regard to dancing, “the body says what cannot be spoken” (p. 9). Yet writers make dazzling textual attempts: Austerlitz (1996) considers Merengue and Dominican identity; Browning (1995) focuses on samba and resistance; Daniel (1995) links rumba and social change; Dunham (1947) looks at Voodoo ritual dances; Jennings (2004) engages with hip-hop dancing in the United Kingdom; Limon (1994) partners postmodernism and poetics in his study of polka in Mexican-American South Texas; and Malnig (2001) addresses ballroom dancing and social mobility in progressive-era United States. Further, Malone (1995) traces the cultural history of African American step-dancing; Mead (1939) probes dancing along with sexuality in Samoa; Mendoza (2000) discusses Peruvian Mestizo performance as resistance; and Savifliano (1995) struggles with the struggles for power embodied through tango.

A Deleuzian analysis of Cajun dancing twirls through Stivale (2003); Taylor (2001) explores tango in relation to violence in Argentina; Thomas (2003) examines the subjectivities and intersubjectivities of dance rave culture; and Vianna (1999) writes about the mysteries of samba. This group of scholars examines the ways dancing is directly related to the particularities of its local context: how dancing speaks the specificities of the historical, social, and culture moments through which it moves.

The local, writes Probyn (1990), are “those practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them” (p.178). It goes without saying that all dance embodies the place and time it belongs to. “Evoking the way a group of people move,” writes Cohen Bull (2001), “can call up the ambiance of a cultural time and place with clarity and immediacy” (p. 407). As Quincy Jones says, “the times are always contained in the rhythm” (as quoted in Dinerstein, 2003, p. 119). According to modern dance matriarch Martha Graham, dancing bodies embody the rhythm of the historical moment and the tempo of its social body: “The psyche of the land is to be found in its [physical] movement. . . . We move; we do not stand still. . . . In the dancer is to be mirrored the tempo and essential rhythm of his country” (Jowitt, 1988, pp. 176-177).

The relationship between the tempo of the times and its dance is deliberately evident in much of the literature concerning social dancing. Many contemporary ethnographic and historical studies look at dance as a reflection of its social, cultural and/or historical context (see Austerlitz (1996); Browning (1997); Daniel (1995); Dinerstein (2003); Dixon Gottschild’s (2003); Dunham (1947); George (2002); Hazzard-Gordon (1990); Jennings (2004); Malnig (2001); Malone (1996); Mendoza (2000); Taylor (2001); and Vianna (1999). In other words, a

central purpose of such studies is to explore the way dance practices are “stitched into the place and time which give rise to them” (Probyn, 1990, p. 78).

Marshall and Jean Stearns’ (1994) almost encyclopedic *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* dances across time and place to present a comprehensive social history of jazz dancing in social context. The writers lead the readers through the Voodoo dances of West Africa and the West Indies, the “mixed” dances of 19th-century New Orleans, and the *Darktown Follies* of early Harlem to contemporary dance spectacles of Broadway shows and television productions. In the process, Stearns and Stearns (1994) place the history of vernacular dance in step with African American history to demonstrate how dance served in the past (and continues) to struggle against racial oppression. In her book *Jookin: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture*, sociologist Katrina Hazzard-Gordon (1990) juxtaposes the rhythms of black vernacular dance with the social rhythms of the African American movement from Africa—not just on slave ships and plantations, but also in the migration from the rural South to the urban North. Hazard-Gordon’s (1990) sociohistorical account of African American social dance practices “from the time of English slavery to the sociocultural explosions in the 1960s” is vividly intertwined with broader social practices concerning social change, racial oppression, and the process of urbanization (p. x). Likewise, Jacqui Malone’s (1996) *Steppin’ on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* relates a variety of dance practices—West African circle dancers, minstrelsy’s tappers, Lindy-hoppers, second-liners, college-steppers—to the broader cultural practice of which they were/are a part. As Malone (1996) writes, “African American vernacular dance embodies African American values. It reflects a way of looking at the world and provides a means of survival” (p. 7).

Instead of looking at dance practices across time, some literature focuses on how dance practices relate to specific social or cultural elements. For example, Michael Tisserand's (1998) book *The Kingdom of Zydeco* offers a brief but lucid discussion demonstrating how zydeco dance practices are stitched into local culture. While devoted mainly to presenting a hierarchical history of zydeco musicians, the book's first chapter discussed how racialized social dynamics of zydeco dance reflect current social relations between Cajun and Creole people in the broader context of Southwest Louisiana.

Julie Malnig's (2001) *Two-Stepping to Glory: Social Dance and the Rhetoric of Social Mobility* studies the relationship between ballroom dancing and social mobility in progressive-era America. In this study, Malnig (2001) discusses how the concepts of progress and social mobility—social ideals very much in the forefront of the minds of Americans—became “enmeshed in the very fabric of ballroom dance practices” (p. 271). Similarly, Joel Dinerstein's (2003) *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the Wars* vividly explores the tempo of swing-era social and political life via dances of the day. More specifically, Dinerstein (2003) suggests that American social dance practices (derived from black vernacular dance) between the wars reflect and simultaneously resist the moves of modernism. Considering swing as the “music of black migration” from the rural South to the urban North, Dinerstein (2003) conjectures that the increasingly technological movements embodied in swing dance, such as the Lindy hop, reflect the increasing mechanization of modernism, while the “popularity of dance between 1910-1945 signals a cultural (and physical) hunger for rhythmic engagement in response to the industrial landscape” (p. 27).

Brenda Dixon Gottschild's (2003) book *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* locates the social geography of black dance more locally in black dancing bodies.

With chapters titled “Feet,” “Butt,” “Hair,” and “Skin,” Dixon Gottschild examines how racial stereotypes and prejudices are inscribed through dancing bodies, though she moves quickly outward toward a sociocultural geography, demonstrating how the black dancing body embodies larger issues concerning black-white relations in contemporary American society.

Each of the above-mentioned works fits into Probyn’s (1990) notion of the local by demonstrating how dance practices are “stitched into time and place” (p. 174). Yet each of these studies is, in a sense, not local enough. For example, while Hazard-Gordon (1990) and Dinerstein (2003) demonstrate with substantial rhetorical force the connection between dance and African American urbanization, they omit discussion of the dance practices of those African Americans who did not migrate. Zydeco, for example, might be included here as a rural black dance form, though it is excluded from Hazard-Gordon (1990) and Dinerstein (2003), and is likewise missing from Malone (1996) and Stearns and Stearns (1994). In each of these texts, the broader social experience of migration subsumes local narratives. Concomitantly, the dance practices of urban African Americans begin to define what counts as black vernacular dance. Such studies, while offering important commentary on the relationship between dance and the tempo of public life that gives rise to them, are not localized enough to adequately encompass the ephemeral micropolitics of the dance, much less the body. Further, questions about how dance reflects, or resists, social and cultural order often “subsume the reality of the body”; forgetting that the “body itself and its experiences moving in the world are an essential part of consciousness: of the ways in which lives are understood and carried out” (Cohen-Bull, 2001, p. 404).

In contrast, first-person accounts of dancing, such as those of Browning (1995); X and Haley (1964); Rand (2004); and Taylor (2001), approach dance as a local site of specificity,



where particular bodies (even mine) and not “the body” become “the site and the grounds from which to speak” (Probyn, 1990, p. 177). These studies localize dancing within the context of individual as well as social bodies by offering “first-person and singular version[s] of culture and history as these are embodied in the concretely existing individual in society in historical time” (Pinar, 2004, p. 28). Through localized narratives embodied in the concretely existing dancing body, dance then might be seen as a “mirror in which I could see my own experience of culture” in relation to larger cultural and social rhythms (Taylor, 2001, p. 75).

Julie Taylor’s (2001) autoethnographic *Paper Tangos* poetically details her love/hate relationship with Argentina and tango. Without falling into representation, Taylor’s conflicted tale of melancholia, violence, and passion demonstrates how tango is stitched into a broader Argentinean ethos of violence and domination. As she describes it, “the tango did not give us any rules or a representation of anything. It gave us space to reflect on rules, to despair or to feel our bodies recognize, sometimes with disconcerting solace, the way things are (Taylor, 2001, pp. 83-84). Tango, for Taylor, is not representative of an Argentinean ethos; rather, it is an intimate space of reflection and recognition, where bodies come to recognize their place in response to larger social narratives. Taylor’s narrative is a local one in which the local body is never subsumed by the body politic, and “the private sphere itself” is demonstrated to be “occupied by the public” (Pinar, 2004, p. 28).

Similarly, in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—nearly a quarter of which is devoted to dancing, descriptions of Malcolm X’s experience dancing show how the social body becomes—and resists becoming—embedded in a particular body. Like Dinerstein (2003) and Hazard-Gordon (1990), Malcolm X’s narrative describes the relationship between the dance and the northern migration of African Americans. Unlike Dinerstein and Hazard-Gordon, Malcolm

X's narrative (via Alex Haley's narrative) embodies this migration and its associated dances with individually conscious bodies as well as social bodies. Writes Malcolm X:

Like hundreds of thousands of country-bred Negroes who had come to the Northern Black ghetto before me, and have come since, I'd also acquired all the other fashionable ghetto adornments . . . all to erase my embarrassing background. But I still harbored one secret humiliation: I couldn't dance. (p. 56)

Moreover, Malcolm X's autobiographic account of dancing—at Jimmy's Chicken Shack, Rosedown, or "domestic night" at the Savoy—describes how dancing became a way for individual African American people to come close and recognize their own experience of race, ethnicity, and culture in relation to larger notions of "authentic" African American culture:

I can't remember when it was that I actually learned how to dance—that is to say, I can't recall the specific night or nights. . . . It didn't take long to loosen up the dancing instincts in my African heritage. . . . Here among my own less-inhibited people, I discovered it was simply letting your feet, hands and body spontaneously act out whatever impulses were stirred by the music. (p. 57)

In this autobiographical account, Malcolm X's dance does more than reflect the notions of race and culture that produced it. As he describes it, dancing became a process of his own becoming: a type of mirror in which Malcolm X came to recognize his own experience of culture in relation to larger cultural and social rhythms.

More local still is Robert Rand's (2004) memoir about how Cajun and zydeco dancing helped him heal from a panic disorder. In *Dancing Away an Anxious Mind: A Memoir about Overcoming Panic Disorder*, zydeco and Cajun dancing becomes a way for Rand to embody a different relation to the social world and, as such, a new relation with himself. In Rand's memoir,

the constitutive potential of social dance emerges, as new patterns of movement give rise to new patterns of being. Rand (2004) writes:

And gradually you get it right, and you begin to enjoy the music, and you begin to enjoy the whole experience of moving on the dance floor. And then your world off the dance floor seems a whole lot better, too. And then all of a sudden you're operating at a whole different level of life. (p. 57)

For Rand, learning how to dance becomes a process of moving toward a new consciousness: a new way of being in the world.

In each of these very local narratives, dancing becomes a locale wherein the psychologically, “culturally and historically changing epistemology of the self finds particular expression” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 85). In a very embodied way, the local is where my zydeco study began and still primarily moves: zydeco brunches spent bouncing along with other white middle-class women; steamy South Louisiana afternoons swinging out on a festival’s asphalt dance “floor”; starched-shirt church dances, waltzing with “pa-pas”; nights grooving, pressed close to Creole of Color men. The local is familiar epistemological ground in part because I have danced its social surfaces and felt its questions under my own feet. The topography of the local also feels like familiar territory because, as I pointed out earlier, many excellent studies of dance are firmly planted in local concerns. Yet in failing to address broader questions concerning construction of the sites from which they speak, local sites run the risk of collapsing “onto the surface of what they study, and in so doing, risk triviality” (Pinar, 1988, pp. 138-139). As Probyn (1990) suggests, “instead of collapsing the local we have to open it up, to work at different levels” (p. 186).

In the following section, I move across Probyn’s levels, looking at literature that

discusses dancing as a practice that is both spatial and discursive so that, as Probyn (1990) suggests, “we can begin to deconstruct its movements and its meanings” (p. 187).

### **Dancing as Locale**

As I noted previously, Probyn (1990) understands locale to be both a space and an event: a practice that is at once spatial and discursive. In what follows, I move similarly toward a notion of zydeco as a locale of mixed pleasures, where “body and mind, sexual desire and political critique, the body’s anatomy and the anatomy of the body politic, the material and discursive . . . weave in and out of one another” (Smith, 1994, p. 288).

Stivale (2003) describes Cajun dancing as a constitutive spatial event of becoming.

Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, he describes dancing as a “connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities in an active becoming with a partner, with a crowd, as an event” (p. 161). Similarly, through Probyn’s (1990) notion of the locale, zydeco can be viewed as an embodied event of social/spatial relations rather than a container of (or space for) local culture and its accompanying resistance. This perspective shifts the question away from how dance provides a space for cultural expression or resistance, and toward inquiries about bodies of knowledge that constitute gender, culture, and their movements in relation to a particular locale.

As a locale contingent on movement, the dance itself emerges as a spatial event and practice “made up of a number of different but connected settings for interaction,” rather than a static setting (Thrift, 1996, p. 81). On one level, the place where dancing happens could be conceived as its setting. For example, in Hazzard-Gordon’s (1990) discussion of black vernacular dance, the importance of dance’s spatial context is seen as inextricable from the importance of the dance tradition itself. Hazzard- Gordon (1990) writes:

No institution . . . equaled the importance of the classic jook and its derivative forms. For it is in the jook that core black culture—its food, language, community fellowship, mate selection, music, and dance—found sanctuary. (p. 173)

Dinerstein (2003); Malone (1996); Stearns and Stearns (1994); and Malcolm and Haley (1965) illustrate the significance of place and space in their discussions of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom as a symbol of both integration and the widespread significance of black vernacular dance across color lines. According to Dinerstein (2003):

Perhaps no other spot in this great country is so symbolic of the American ideal. The Savoy is truly a melting pot—a cross-section of American life . . . [where] every night in the week, every race and nationality under the sun, the high and the low, meet and color lines melt away under the influence of the rhythms of America's foremost sepia bands (p. 259).

Similarly, Browning (1995); Daniel (1995); Jennings (2004); Limon (1994); Malnig (2001); Sexton (2000); and Tisserand (1998), to name a few, demonstrate that the place of dance events—the various bars, clubs, schools, dancehalls, and festivals—are linked in important ways to the dance practices they host.

Setting can also be configured in terms of spatial practice. A couple's glide across the floor or the particular syncopation of an individual woman's sway becomes, in Foucauldian terms, an event characterized by “location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 205). Dancing, zydeco dancing specifically, as a locale is partly defined by proximity: individual bodies coming together in joint action with other coupled bodies, “intersecting, traversing, and disrupting each other” (Thrift, 1997, p. 130).

As Probyn (1990) understands it, locale also embodies discursive relations; locale is a communicative site. In keeping with Probyn's notion of locale, dancing too can be seen as a discursive site. Zora Neale Hurston (1981), speaking specifically of discursivity in terms of black vernacular dance, calls dancing "compelling insinuation" and "dynamic suggestion" (pp. 55-56). Meanwhile, Cohen Bull (2001) writes that "like language, movement is ubiquitous, a cultural given which people are constantly creating, participating in, interpreting, and reinterpreting on both conscious and unconscious levels" (p. 405).

Much literature on dancing, in fact, approaches the discursivity of dance practice as an articulation of social conditions and/or a way of "speaking with the feet" in resistance to these conditions (Browning, 1995, p. 1). For example, Sexton (2000) illustrates how the race relations embodied in local attitudes toward zydeco in turn articulate relations between Cajun and Creole people as they manifest themselves in the broader arena of French Louisiana culture/s. Similarly, Austerlitz (1996); Daniel (1995); Dunham (1947); and Mendoza (2000) all offer fascinating, insightful discussions of dance as cultural expression. In their works, dance becomes a representative act, one in which movement seems to substitute for the real language of verbal or written social discourse. Literature on dance practices also explores how dance functions in speaking against local social and historical conditions. For example, Dinerstein (2003); Dixon-Gottschild (2003); Hazzard-Gordon (1990); Malone (1996); and Stearns and Stearns (1994) all describe how "African Americans 'talk back' to their environment through imitation and dance" (Dinerstein, 2003, p. 254).

Yvonne Daniel's (1995, 1991) ethnographic work explores rumba as both an articulation of—and a way of speaking resistance to—constructions of race, identity, and political ideology in contemporary Cuba. Daniel (1995) looks at rumba as "an indicator

of social conditions” in Cuba (p. 13). As she sees it, rumba articulates important things about race, gender, politics, and national and local identity. Daniel (1991) writes regarding gender: “Rumba is a performed contradiction in terms of dance, expressing both respect and honor for the sexes through courting/chasing sections and simultaneously expressing inequality and oppression through limited movement participation by women” (p. 5). She regards the politics of rumba as an expression of the broader politics of Cuba; the dance for Daniel becomes a way of talking about power. Yet as Thrift (1997) sees it, “dance seems to center around a number of overlapping expressive body-practices which it both expresses and is expressed by” (p. 143). Certainly, rumba as a discursive event expresses cultural practices, empowering and otherwise. However, as a discursive event it is not merely a reflection of a preexisting social condition analogically represented. In concert with Thrift, I want to suggest that the social momentum of rumba (more broadly, dance in general, and more specifically, zydeco), as a combination of constitutive forces spatial and discursive, does more than indicate, express, or reflect politics and culture.

Like all dance, rumba also constitutes cultural practice by creating “images of who [and where] people are and what their lives are like, encoding and eliciting ideas and value” (Cohen Bull, 2001, p. 405). As Strathern (2004) reminds, the dancing body “is socially constituted not just in the sense that it is constructed as an object of knowledge or discourse, but also because it is culturally shaped in its actual practices and behaviour” (p. 38). The dance itself, as discursive practice, constitutes its own set of culturally, socially, and historically situated discursivity through which people come to know themselves (Cohen Bull, 2001, p. 405). In contrast to Daniel’s (1995) understanding of

rumba as sociopolitical expression, Thrift (1997), too, sees the dynamic suggestions of dance as constitutive. He writes that “the dance is not aimed at describing events (that is, it is not representational) but in evolving a semblance of a world within which specific questions take their meaning” (Thrift, 1997, p. 147). The discursive and spatial event of the dance is one in which the body does not just signify realities that local conditions, such as culture, make it impossible to state linguistically—per Daniel’s (1991, 1995) analysis of rumba or Browning’s (1995) analysis of samba. According to Thrift (1997), the dance is also a locale where bodies of knowledge come close, reconfigure themselves in interaction, and give way to something to new.

The discursive practices of rumba, like those of all couples dances, are not monologues but rather “complicated conversations” among and between couples. In the words of Hayman (2000), zydeco is “an unspoken language that takes place between dancers.” Further, each new zydeco dance can be seen to constitute its own constellation of discursive events as a “polylogue between musicians, spectators, and dance partners” (Stivale, 2003, p. 122). Each exchange of lead and follow is a new dialogue between partners, “themselves in dialogue with other dancers” (Stivale, 2002, p. 125). As Stivale (2003) sees it, each new dance also provides for a unique “aural and visual exchange between musicians and dancers, the music and beat enveloping, penetrating, and propelling” dancers and spectators (p. 126).

As an embodied discourse invested in an ongoing play among body novelty, cultural innovation, and wavering degrees of social fixity, the knowledge circulating through dancing bodies refuses to be captured by cause-and-effect. As Browning (1995) writes, “Rhythmic and gestural vocabulary—the language of the body . . . is not merely frozen in time. It can itself refer to ruptures in historical time, rhythmic disjunction—and



it can figure itself in relation to its past” (p. 9). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon (1963) describes the dance similarly in terms of its double capacity to serve as both social commentary and rupture:

Men and women come together at a given place and there, under the solemn eye of the tribe, fling themselves onto a seemingly unorganized pantomime, which is in reality extremely systematic, in which by various means—shakes of the head, bending of the spinal column, throwing of the whole body backward—may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits. (p. 57)

Like Fanon, William McNeil (1995) sees dancing as an important way communities communicate among themselves and foster solidarity. According to McNeil (1995), dancing evokes new meaning and new ways of being in the world through the embodied experience of dancers, not through the expressive quality of the dance itself.

The basic premise of McNeil’s book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* is that practices of moving together in time, such as dancing and marching, function as a sort of muscular bonding that leads to feelings of solidarity essential to community-building, which is in turn central to individual survival. McNeil (1995) traces the phenomena of moving together in time back to prelingual societies in order to illustrate the impact of muscular bonding in evolutionary terms:

By engaging in prolonged group display behavior and discovering the delight of keeping together in time (perhaps helped by the beat of sticks against the ground or some more resounding surface), they could begin to feel, as the Swazi king said of his warriors in 1940, that “they were one and can praise each other. Praise had

to wait upon words, which came later; but the expanded emotional solidarity that dancing together arouses must have conferred an important advantage on those groups that first learned the trick of keeping together in time. So great, indeed, was the advantage, that other hominid groups presumably either learned to dance or became extinct. That is why all human societies dance today and have done so through the recorded past. (pp. 22-23)

McNeil's evolutionary argument covers vast ground, at times with too broad a brush. His discussions about the social benefit of shared movement call upon primate behavior, village festivals, military drills, dervish dances, Hitleresque goose-stepping and morning calisthenics to demonstrate how, across social contexts, moving together in time creates solidarity.

McNeil's (1995) basis for this argument is quasi-biological. According to McNeil (1995), the rhythmic input from muscles moves through the nervous system and may provoke echoes of the fetal condition when a major and perhaps principle external stimulus to the developing brain was the mother's heartbeat. If so, one might suppose that adults when dancing or merely marching together might arouse something like the state of consciousness they left behind in infancy, when psychologists seem to agree that no distinction is made between self and surroundings. (p. 7)

McNeil writes that the capacity of dance to evoke such "boundary-loss" is fundamental to its capacity to facilitate solidarity.

As Thrift (1997) sees it, the sort of rupture or liberation—the social work—that Fanon (1963) describes, and the solidarity McNeil (1995) ascribes to dance, is undertaken by way of

play. Dance, according to Thrift (1997), means “using the body to conjure up ‘virtual’, ‘as-if’ worlds by configuring alternative ways of being through play, ways of being which can become claims to ‘something more’” (p. 147). Thrift (1997) uses the notion of semblances to describe the “as-ifness” that dance conjures up. Quoting Radley (1995), Thrift explains the way these semblances work:

In the world of everyday relationships, the creation of semblances involves the attribution of figural operators to persons and settings. The gambler’s “dangerousness” or the hostess’s “coldness” are examples of social qualities which are not objectifiable precisely because they are not literal. (1997, p. 147)

Likewise, continues Thrift (1997), via Radley (1995):

If I actually move towards someone this can only be appreciated through the way that I appear. Being a virtual quality it cannot be denoted in a form sufficient to capture its full [figurative] meaning. It can only be shown forth or displayed, and the medium for such display is the body. (p. 147)

In this light, zydeco (as I hope to point out in chapter 5) might be seen as a play of proximity reliant on semblances of intimacy: relative closenesses across difference that reveal the ambivalent cross-fertilizations of cultures in large part responsible for zydeco’s efflorescence. That such play, as part of the world of virtual forms, necessarily lies outside fixed means-end relationships and therefore eludes intentionality, does not necessarily negate the salience of its worldly work.

The effects/affects that dance as a virtual form and its semblances have on the world are not just imaginary: According to Radley (1995), what dance make possible is:

not just the maintenance of imaginary worlds, as if these stood apart from everyday “reality.” This sets apart the virtual from the real, when the whole point of social activities is that they can be expressed as more real, more vital than the mundane sphere. In effect, such liminoid activities, play or ritual, have their significance because of the way they mirror the remainder of life (more precisely, because of how the remainder of life is refracted through them). (pp. 13-14)

The way dance works on the world lies in its capacity to both embody and reconfigure—play with—local reality and then “colour experience with a light they cast in it” (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). Dancing strikes the body’s recognition of how things really are against embodied possibility. In this light, the solidarity that McNeil attributes to moving together in time might be seen as a powerful semblance while the dance that gives rise to the boundary-loss becomes “the grounds for configuring an alternative way of being that eludes the grasp of power” (Thrift, 1997, p. 150). Indeed, in subsequent chapters I wish to suggest that autoethnography and curriculum, like zydeco, might serve as similar sorts of locales where powerful semblances of intimacy are embodied, the grasp of local narratives loosened, and other kinds of boundaries temporarily lost.

### **Locating the Dancing Body**

As Probyn (1990) views it, the metaphor of locale “serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event” (p. 182). The dancing body—with Probyn’s social and cultural push-and-pull—is contingent upon this tension. “If we are to take seriously these relations” she writes, “we have to consider the knowledge produced in their interaction” (1990, p. 182). Thinking about the spatial and discursive event of the dance means thinking and speaking the body as a body of knowledge (Smith, 1994). The dancing body, as Browning

(1995) notes, is difficult to think because “its strategy is one of constant motion—both literal and figurative. Just when we ascribe a straightforward meaning to it, we find it is turning itself upside-down” (p. xiv). Knowledge of static bodies is hard enough to pin down, but the knowledge encouraged or constricted by “the movement of bone, the body, of breath, of imagination, of muscle” simply will not stand still (Probyn, 1990, p. 172).

Locating the moving body as a body of knowledge is difficult in part because of its peculiar epistemological nature. Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out this difficulty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

Our body is not a space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body, as we move an object. We transport it without instruments; since it is us and because, through it we have access to space. (p. 2)

Put another way, the body provides its own “opportunity for action and the constraints upon action; that is, the base for what is known about the world and the material with which to do (or not to do) something about it” (Thrift, 1996, p. 81). The body provides an opportunity for knowledge and its own constraint, and in doing so, keeps us in an epistemological twirl that Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls “double embodiment—i.e. our bodies are simultaneously biological and lived phenomenological structures” (Pinar, et al, 1995, p. 424).

In their book *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, Lackoff and Johnson (1999) make a persuasive argument that the reasons people (particularly Anglo people) have such difficulty thinking the body are grounded in Cartesian notions of reason and the disembodied mind:

Descartes' view of knowledge has left its fateful mark on much contemporary epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. . . . His argument is well known. . . . First, that being able to think constitutes our essence; second, that the mind is disembodied; and third, therefore, that the essence of human beings, that which makes us human, has nothing to do with our bodies. (p. 400)

Similarly, scholars Andrea Jaggar and Susan Bordo (1989) write about the reliance of Cartesian reason on “dualist ontologies that sharply separate the universal from the particular, culture from nature, mind from body, and reason from emotion” (p. 3). Both sets of scholars make important points about the connection between Cartesian reason and the separation between mind and body. Yet later in their text, Bordo and Jaggar make the important point that, despite Western philosophy's influence, dissent has always existed.

One of the most influential dissenters is phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His work encompasses too vast a territory to cover here, thus for the purposes of this study I dance with his ideas selectively. In attempting to look at dancing as a way knowing is done, Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment provides necessary momentum. The philosophic base he provides in terms of establishing the body as epistemological ground via embodied phenomenology is a generative point of departure from the cogito of Descartes, which views mind and body as completely distinct from one another—a dichotomous relation in which the former becomes preeminent and the latter a mere physical extension. The body, according to Descartes, “is only an extended being which does not think, [while] ‘I,’ that is to say my soul by virtue of which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body and can exist or be without it (1641/1951, p. 70, as cited in Doll, 1993, p. 116).

In contrast, Merleau-Ponty sees the relationship of the biological and the phenomenological in more fluid relation, and the body as mindful. Referring to Merleau-Ponty, Strathern (2004) writes: “The phenomenological cogito that he proposes instead is one that emphatically locates us in the intersubjective and temporal world. In this regard not only does the body become mindful, as we have already seen, but the mind becomes fully embodied” (p. 38). Merleau-Ponty’s project is one of “double embodiment” through which the duality between body and mind collapses and intentionality becomes incarnate (Langer, 1989, p. 40). Writes Merleau-Ponty (1962):

The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and running from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits such as dancing. (p. 146)

The embodied phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty counters the concept of the body as object, instead offering the body as our “point of view on the world” (Langer, 1989, p. 30). For Merleau-Ponty, “bodily spatiality . . . is the very condition for the coming into being of a meaningful world” (Langer, 1989, p. 47).

In his nimble exploration of embodiment, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Mark Johnson (1987) draws from Merleau-Ponty to explain embodiments similarly as

the way we “have a world,” the way we experience our worlds as a comprehensible reality. Such understanding, therefore, involves our whole being—our bodily capacities and skills, our values, our moods and attitudes, our

entire cultural tradition. . . . In short, our understanding is our mode of being in the world. (p. 102)

Embodied knowledge, for Merleau-Ponty and Johnson, is a literal apprehension. In Thrift's (1997) words, coming to know "involves an active grip on the world" (p.128).

Knowing is done within the context of transaction among mindful bodies and their world.

According to Thrift (1997):

Merleau-Ponty takes the sensing to be active from the start; he conceives the receptivity for the sensuous element to be a prehension, a *prise*, a 'hold' . . . certain pressure, pacing, periodically, across a certain extension, and they are patterned ways in which movement is modulated. The hard and the soft, the grainy and the sleek, moonlight and sunlight in memory give themselves not as sensorial contents but as a certain type of symbiosis, a certain way the outside has of invading us, a certain way we have to welcome it. (p. 128)

Merleau-Ponty's notion of "the flesh," according to Thrift (1997), presents the flesh as a "reversible and reflexive fold between subject and object (p. 139). Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Grosz (1994) describes this relationship in terms of play:

The flesh is composed of the "leaves" of the body interspersed with "leaves" of the world: it is the chiasm linking and separating the one from the other, the "pure difference" whose play generates persons, things, and their separations and unions. (pp. 102-103)

Similarly, Sidone Smith (1994) argues that the individualized body serves "as the margin joining and separating the subject and the other, the inner and the outer, the male



and the female, one race and another” (p. 269). Like Merleau-Ponty, Smith (1994) conceives the body as permeable:

Although bodies provide us, as individuals, the boundaries of our isolated being, they are obviously and critically communal and discursive bodies; and community creates a superfluidity of “body” that marks us in practices, discourses, and temporalities. (p. 268)

As I stated earlier, it is hard to think the body. The temptation is to leave the personal, highly localized topography of bone and flesh and flee quickly toward analysis of the social body. However, “thinking the body,” as Smith (1994) notes, “is thinking social topography and vice versa” (p. 270).

As a body of knowledge, the dancing body configures the world by using “its character of being material, of being able to ‘dwell in’ the particulars of things, of being able to press, caress, or resist other bodies (Radley, 1995, p. 15). Dancing as a gendered and racialized locale relies on the intimacy of movement between and among the startling physicality of flesh and social skin. As an embodied discursive locale, zydeco puts in motion semblances concerning the condition of being black or white, for instance, or male or female, Creole or Cajun, or fat versus thin. Dancing inscribes these proximities on the body in ways that are more difficult to articulate; its ways are spoken with touch, weight, and momentum via hips, shoulders, butts, and feet. Through the spatial practices of dancing, Stivale (2003) argues, “bodies take shape and materiality in a collective assemblage of enunciation through the rhythms, patterns, movements, speeds, and intensities in which they engage on a dance floor, thereby producing the event of spaces of affects” (p. 122). According to tap dancer and dance historian Brenda Bufalino, “it is

the movement that pronounces the shape” (quoted in Dixon Gottschild, 2003, p. 29).

Yet the body is not a blank slate upon which social knowledge is written, while dancing is more than a passive surface of gendered, raced, or cultured inscription. As Strathern (2004) suggests, “the body is not an object that takes on cultural form but is, in fact, the subject of culture, its ‘existential ground’” (p. 177). It is through the body that knowledge is “lent significance [and] approached/ touched/gripped” (Thrift, 1997, p. 148). The body, as Merleau-Ponty illustrates, “is a way of accessing the world, not just a means of achieving ends that cannot be named” (Thrift, 1997, p. 147). The specific ways bodies of knowledge and corporeal bodies shape and are shaped by zydeco as a locale are as solid and enduring as the division of labor, and as ephemeral as touch.

Dancing’s constant play of loss and recovery turns Cartesian dualism on its head by privileging the body as a local site of knowledge. Yet in locally choreographed arrangement, such as the social mandate that men lead the dance, socially disciplined “relations of time, bodies, and forces and space” cut in on individual bodies of knowledge, merging them with those of the body politic (Foucault, 1977, p. 154). Such knowledge also can be described in terms of potential proximities: those knowledges that become im/possible through the relative closeness of dancing bodies. As Stivale (2003) writes, it is through the body in motion, its “speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else” (p. 9). As a joint action between and among coupled bodies, dancing gives rise to unintended knowledge. The joint action of coupled dancing bodies has “consequences which are not intended by any of the participants in an interaction but are a joint outcome” (Thrift, 1997, p. 120). As an embodied discourse invested in an ongoing play among body novelty, cultural

innovation, and wavering degrees of social fixity, the intimate knowledge circulating through dancing bodies refuses to be captured by cause and effect. Citing Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Thrift (1997) writes that “the dancing body ‘moves promiscuously with all manner of assemblages, it is a teeming mass of multiplicities,’ a teeming mass of knowledge produced in joint action” (Thrift, 1997, p. 132).

In this way, the dancing body becomes a site where knowledge might be transformed as well as circulated. Radley (1995) describes dance as both a potential and actual locale:

Dance can . . . be considered as the fabrication of a “different world” of meaning made with the body. It is perhaps the most direct way in which the body-subject sketches out an imaginary sphere. The word imaginary is used here in the sense “as-if,” suggesting a field or potential space. (p. 12)

As such, dancing becomes a locale where embodied knowledge locates, dislocates, and touches “new configurations and twists of ideal and experience” (Thrift, 1997, p. 145). Dancing as a spatial and discursive locale is one of recognition and elaboration; a way bodies of knowledge reason through local questions, physically grapple with lived contradictions and play with alternatives. It offers “a chance to approach problems from different angles, to assay the effect of different combinations, to contemplate a history we [know] and a future” that we do not yet know (Taylor, 2001, p. 82). Dance as locale provides an embodied discourse through which local questions get their meaning and, as a spatial practice, serves to embody new semblances of knowledge. Dancing, like curriculum, becomes a locale for bodies of knowledge to recognize themselves, think things through, and embody possibility.

## Conclusion

The problem of language and the body is a familiar one. Modern dancer Isadora Duncan points to this truth in her famous quote: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing” (quoted in Bateson, 1977). As postmodernists have pointed out, the relationship between knowledge and language is equally as slippery; that is, language can never truly capture what we mean to say. The relationship between embodied knowledge and language, then, becomes hyperlubricious. Although “we understand viscerally the language of gesture, posture, and nuances of bodily expression,” bodily knowledge seems intuitive, non-verbal and natural—therefore it and its movements seem outside of language (Snowber, 2002, p. 22). Indeed, as Cohen Bull (2001) notes, “movement is unique. It precedes language in individual development, forming a primary basis for both personal identity and relationships” (p. 405). Likewise, McNeil (1995) argues that systematic movement precedes language use in social development as well. He suggests that “among our ancestors the habit of dancing together probably began to have strong positive effect of survival before articulated language arose” (p. 31). However, as Thomas (2003) points out, “although there may be difficulties in translating dance into words, it does not necessarily follow that dance lies outside of language and is therefore ineffable” (p. 174).

In step with Probyn’s (1990) notion of locale, the last steps of this chapter are an attempt to write about the dancing body as a site of knowledge through which my local questions about zydeco derive and inscribe their meaning. As Probyn (1990) writes, “if we are to take seriously these relations of place and event, we have to consider the knowledge produced in their interaction” (p. 182). Doing this involves thinking the body.

Moving through the local in this way feels awkward; it is an unfamiliar pattern, at once too reflexive and remote.

Writing about the body as a site of embodied knowledge seems oddly disembodied. Despite Strathern's (2004) claim that the "stress on embodiment" constitutes "an emphasis on local knowledge and local constructions of the person," understandings of *my body* slip into explanations about *the body* much too quickly (p. 198). This makes my discussion of embodied knowledge feel uncomfortable in its own skin. I am not alone here; other discussions of dance as a spatial practice, such as those of Stivale (2003) and Thrift (1997), rely on the dancing body as a site of knowledge and suffer similarly. As I suggested earlier, perhaps embodied knowledge is too difficult to think for thinkers whose ungraceful concept of knowledge is habitually contingent upon separating mind and body.

More locally, my thinking is made difficult by the fact that Probyn's (1990) discussion aiming to orient site of research is really not designed to be followed too closely. After her "theoretical meanderings" back and forth through the local, locale, and location, Probyn (1990) explains that "at the end of these scattered travels, it would be tempting to offer a map of the local, something that would point out 'you are here,' with arrows to indicate the path to be followed" (p. 187). Despite the misleading way I partnered Probyn's (1990) theoretical meanderings with my own, her levels of abstraction were not designed to show knowledge matriculating first through the local, stopping at locale, and finally winding up on location. Rather, Probyn (1990) attempts to work on and through these sites "with a consciously loose rather than tight relation in mind . . . establishing loose sets of relations, capillary actions and movements, spilling out among

and between different fields” (p. 142). Her levels of abstraction overlap, demonstrating “a porous closeness of sites that questions the very basis of the site itself” (2001, p. 178).

Thinking and writing (even less than gracefully) about specific locales of embodied knowledge, such as dancing (especially zydeco), research, and curriculum provides opportunities to examine the way embodied “concepts, practices, and fragments rest upon and lean on each other” (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). Even partial and incomplete gestures toward locating dance as an embodied curriculum, and the body as a transactive site of knowledge, lend insight into—borrowing from Bateson’s (1987) definition of epistemology—“how knowing is done” in relation to local contexts (p. 20). Further, dancing across levels of abstraction and negotiating locales leads us through important questions about research, curriculum, and what it means to want to know across otherness.

### Chapter 3 Dancing Autoethnography

Research for this study began as an assignment in an anthropology course in which I looked at zydeco as a curriculum of culture and a pedagogy of place. I conducted participant observation and informal interviews with Louisiana musicians, dance instructors, and dancers about teaching and learning zydeco, and also its role in transmitting and transforming notions of Creole of Color culture. I spent every Friday with zydeco patriarch Alphonse “Bois Sec” Ardoin, drinking coffee, watching soap operas on television, and listening to music. On good days, we danced.

Interviews with zydeco musicians, most of them men, entailed following, watching, and listening. Traveling with them to gigs, chauffeuring, making supper, dancing, or sitting backstage while they performed, I began to feel uncomfortable in my skin: the line between ethnographer and groupie is surprisingly fine. It soon occurred to me that my persona as an ethnographer intermingled with notions of normative femininity—that approaching these men with a listening eye was dangerously close to making eyes. As Langness (2001) writes regarding the relationship between researchers and their participants, “we think we are being cool, and unconcerned with status; but they too often experience our transient gestures toward equality as *massive* seductions (p. 131).

Learning zydeco is massively seductive. Dancing with participants requires that I touch them and follow their moves with an ambivalent gendered intimacy. As a researcher invested in an ongoing play between body novelty, cultural innovation, and wavering degrees of social fixity, such movement is leant further complexity by my position as a white woman working mostly with black Creole men.

Soon most of my fieldwork was spent dancing in dancehalls, festivals, churches, and kitchens across South Louisiana. The more time I spent in the field the more I began realize that I, too, was in many ways a white Delilah—that my ethnographic desire to know Creole culture was/is never too far from a desire for black masculinity. As Britzman (1998) notes, “the desire to know within the work of learning, is, after all, a symptom of our sexuality” (p. 77).

Newton (2000) describe this ethnographic desire as the “romantic yearning to know the other” (p. 243). In my ethnographic work, such desire began to leak through reflexive turns to locate the other in myself, thus pointing toward other apparently less anthropological yearnings. What began as a study of zydeco’s role in cultural transmission and transformation, and concomitant relations of gender and race, began to be superseded by the desire to understand my own ethnographic desire as a white female researcher doing research with black Creole men.

Despite my best ethnographic efforts to focus on the other, as Okely (1992) describes it, “the self’s engagement in fieldwork could not be naturally suppressed. . . . The self would leak out (p. 9). Searching for a way to contain myself and my desire by putting them in methodologically proper relation to my ethnographic text and my ethnographic *others* made me vulnerable. Enter the seductive promises of autoethnography .

Autoethnography can be seen as one of those playful postmodern forms. Russel (1998) writes that the “oxymoronic label autoethnography” announces a total breakdown. . . . Indeed, the critical enthusiasm for its curious forms situates it as a kind of ideal form of antidocumentary” (p. 2). Autoethnography as a playful form and method can be



characterized by a sort of deceptive looseness, pliability, or labiality through which researchers might reflexively use the play of their own experiences in a culture “to bend back on themselves and look more deeply at interactions between self and other” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Particularly in the early stages of this work, the playfulness of autoethnography in form matches the sometimes playful nature of my study’s dancing content. As the incredulous expressions on the faces of participants I have told about my autoethnographic “work” attest, learning how to zydeco dance in southern Louisiana involves its fair share of play. Among the more obvious forms of play, writing an autoethnography about zydeco dance involves the play of forces, the deep play of self and others negotiating the mysteries of touch, the weight of history, and the ambivalent momentum that puts semblances of intimacy into play.

In this chapter I want to suggest that the work of autoethnography involves similar plays at, or semblances of, intimacy between/among autobiography and ethnography, knower and known, and self and other. Further, I believe such play is central to autoethnography. Toward that end, this chapter offers a discussion of autoethnography and its desire for intimacy among self and other.

### **Autoethnography**

Immersing oneself in another culture by venturing into “the field” has long been a rite of passage for would-be ethnographers (Bazzanger and Dodier, 1997; Glesne, 1999; Rosaldo, 1993). The field always has been where lone ethnographer “encountered the object of his quest” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 30). For ethnographers such as Malinowski, Parsons, and Mead (whose task it was to “grasp the native’s point of view . . . to realize his vision of his world”), the field was the place where a particular culture manifested

itself most naturally (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25). My experiences in the fields of qualitative research seem somehow less neatly contained by such boundaries; the networks that comprise the places of qualitative research seem less like the fastidious grid of conscientious cartographers, and more like shifting eddies of self and other.

Likewise, postmodern and poststructuralist ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994; Lather and Smithies, 1997; and Nesper, 1997) make self-conscious efforts to avoid fixing ethnographic fields temporally or spatially as containers of culture. But such efforts pay less attention to the psychosocial significance of selves, both in terms of culture and its representation. If, as Behar (1996) argues, all ethnography is also inevitably autobiography, what might constitute the field in this uncertain topography of self and other?

Van Maanen (1995) proposes autoethnography as an alternative to ethnographic realism, “where the culture of one’s own group is textualized” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 5). Even earlier, David Hayano (1979) defines autoethnography as “a set of issues relating to studies by anthropologists of their ‘own people’” (p. 99). According to Behar (1996), autoethnography has made an academic name for itself, and has begun to be defined in opposition to ethnography and autobiography as an alternative text written by “those who had been more likely to be ethnographies rather than the ethnographer,” and which “challenged monolithic views of identity” as well as “the assumption that the anthropologist was the sole purveyor of ethnographic truth” (p. 27). Autoethnography, writes Ellis (2004), “has become the term of choice. Even critics of the genre use it” (p. 40). Owing much to feminist autobiography and ethnography, current descriptions of autoethnography portray it as a postmodern, postcolonial, ethnographic example of the

combination working together to become a new mode more than the sum of its parts.

Autoethnography, writes Ellis (2004), “is part auto or self and part ethno or culture. It is also something different from both of them, greater than its parts” (p. 32).

Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests such autoethnographic work is contingent upon this auto-plus-ethno play of doubles:

The term has a double sense—referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or autobiographical (auto) ethnography can be signaled by “autoethnography.” (p. 2)

There is a curriculum of doubling, grounded in both autobiographical urge and ethnographic desire, at play in the ambivalences of autoethnography. Such play works to dance among the astonishing particularities of individual lives and larger notions of culture and knowledge, subject and object, and knower and known. Autoethnography is seductive in the way it overestimates the grace of movement between the individual bodies of its coupled modes of representation. This seduction, like the double desire it reflects, is paradoxical. Autoethnography’s attempts to gloss over the problematic potential of the relationship between the work of autobiography and ethnography belie its double desire to smoothly negotiate notions of self and other, while simultaneously reifying the split by insisting on a representational identity as separate from both autobiography and ethnography.

In this chapter, I examine the possibilities and limitations of autoethnography by way of this double desire. I begin by situating autoethnography in relation to autobiography and ethnography; this is done by examining autoethnography’s desire to

represent itself as a mode of representation distinct from autobiography and ethnography. The chapter then examines autoethnographic desire and concomitant claims toward reconciling problematics of self and other through a claim to hybrid identity.

### **Autoethnography Is Autobiographical but Not Autobiography**

“Autoethnography,” writes Ellis (2004), “is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (p. 37). While she places autoethnography within an autobiographic genre, Ellis (2004) stops short of calling it autobiography. Kaplan (1998) contends that autoethnography likes to represent itself as an “outlaw genre,” outside of both autobiography and ethnography (p. 210). I want to suggest here that in many cases autoethnography can be profitably considered and critiqued as autobiography—counter to its attempts to claim a separate hybrid identity for itself that fuses ethnography’s interest in culture and the social world with autobiography’s interest in the personal. In a pragmatic sense, most works claiming to be autoethnographic probably count as autobiography. According to Russel (1998):

Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film or video maker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a “staging of subjectivity”—a representation of the self as a performance. (p. 1)

My question for this section becomes this: at what point or points does autoethnography become autobiography?

Autoethnography displays a self-conscious interest in narrative form. According to Ellis (2004), the distinguishing formal characteristics of autoethnography are as follows:

The author usually writes in the first person, making herself or himself the object of research. The narrative text focuses on generalization within a single case extended over time. The text is presented as a story replete with narrator, characterization, and plot line akin to forms of writing associated with the novel or biography. The story often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience. (p. 30)

Edgerton (1996) writes similarly that “autobiographical writing contains elements of fiction and elements of fact or at least ‘truth.’ . . . Autobiography, or the writing/written self, is represented metaphorically by style” (p. 122). The written conventions of autobiography and autoethnography seem to overlap in terms of style—so much so that scholars of autoethnography and scholars of autobiography often study the same authors as examples of their respective crafts. For example, the work of Dorothy Allison is addressed by both autoethnographer Ellis (2004) and scholar of autobiography Gilmore (2001). Autoethnographic style is often defined by Bochner and Ellis (1996); Reed-Danahay (1997); Sparkes (2002); Ellis (2004); and Richardson and Lockridge (2004) in relation to its narrative goal of evocative rather than explanatory ends. In autoethnography, literary conventions of fiction are used to evoke emotional identification and help readers put themselves “in the place of the Other” (Bochner and Ellis, 1996, p. 22). Pinar (1988) writes about the similarly aesthetic goals of autobiographic writing:

I am thinking of the ways in which gifted novelists and poets use language, painters use paint, dancers use movement. Linearity, or logical relations among words, is less important than words' power to recreate the situation they portray. So used, language enables the reader or listener to emphatically take part in the situation which he only hears about, or sees pictures of. (p. 144)

In both autobiography and autoethnography, writers often use narrative conventions of fiction and biography to make readers feel like they are there “feeling the feelings, experiencing the conflicts” (Ellis, 2004, p. 140).

Although autoethnography and autobiography share formal concerns, they both can take multiple forms. For instance, autoethnography may take the form of a play such as Johnny Saldana's *Finding My Place: The Brad Trilogy*, based on the turbulent story beneath the story of Harry Wolcott's (2002) ethnography *Sneaky Kid*. Or it might take the form of travel writing, one example being *Travels with Earnest: Crossing the Literary/Sociological Divide*, written by sociologist Laurel Richardson in collaboration with her novelist husband, Ernest Lockridge (2004). Questions about what counts as art, experience, science, self, and other wind themselves through the coupled perspectives of the book's authors as they narratively backtrack their lives and travels together. Other forms of autoethnography, according to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, may include “novel forms of expressing lived experience,” such as literary-poetic, multi-voiced, conversational, critical, visual or performative representations (in Richardson and Lockridge). Autobiography, too, takes on multiple forms. Gilmore (2001) writes:

As a genre, autobiography is characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within the

testimonial contexts as seemingly diverse as the Christian confession, the scandalous memoirs of the rogue, and the coming-out story. (p. 3)

Autoethnography and autobiography, “as practices through which people assemble narratives out of their own experiential histories,” share formal concerns as well as a concern for broadening the rhetorical settings through which experiential histories can be told (Smith and Watson, 1996, p. 9). Both also share an interest in experimenting with forms and rhetorical contexts, in order to produce representations that “self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language and history” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

Autoethnography, while interested in forms of representation, is also interested in the forms research takes. Fleeing from a realist model of social science, autoethnography seeks to reconfigure naturalistic research as reflexivity. Ellis (2004) describes this process:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward, and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. (pp. 37-38)

As the above quote illustrates, autoethnographers are particularly interested in the complex and, at a minimum, double subjectivity of the researcher as the self who studies and the self as an object of study—as both knower and known. Russel (1998) writes that “autoethnography produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and

informant, subject and object of the gaze under the sign of one identity” (p. 25).

According to Smith and Watson (2001), autobiographical researchers inhabit a similar subjectivity:

What could be simpler to understand than the act of people writing about what they know best, their own lives? But this apparently simple act is anything but simple, for the writer becomes, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation. (p. 1)

In both autobiography and autoethnography, simply “telling the story of one’s life” is demonstrated to be a complex, intersubjective endeavor that is personal, cultural and transformative (Gilmore, 2001, p. 3). Both modes seek to create “a textual space wherein the culturally and historically changing epistemology of the self finds particular expression” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 85). Yet autobiography and autoethnography are “contextually marked, collaboratively mediated, provisional” (Smith and Watson, 1996, p. 9). Autoethnography as well as autobiography tell the story of selves in the world. “While autoethnographers write about themselves, their goal is to touch ‘a world beyond the self of the writer’” (Jenks, 2002, p. 174). Both offer versions of “culture and history as these are embodied in the concretely existing individual in society in historical time” (Pinar, 2004, p. 28).

Further, both autoethnography and autobiography can serve to “talk back” to dominant representations. Autoethnography, writes Tierney (1998), “confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces” (p. 66). Similarly, Russel (1998) writes that “autobiography has become a powerful tool of cultural criticism, paralleling postmodern



theories of textuality and knowledge” (p. 1). In her influential essay “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Mary Louise Pratt (1999) defines autoethnography in a postcolonial context. In her definition, what distinguishes autoethnography from the traditions of both autobiography and ethnography is the way its texts “often constitute a marginalized group’s point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture,” while also rearranging power relations between self and other and their representation (1999, p. 3). Of autoethnography Pratt (1999) writes:

[It is a] text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with these texts. (p. 3)

However, as Smith and Watson (1996) note, “there are no inherently liberatory or repressive [narrative] practices” (p. 17). For Tierny (1998), Pratt (1999), and countless other autoethnographers, autoethnography seemingly offers a liberatory alternative to the oppressive tradition of ethnography. Similarly, scholars of autobiography such as Gilmore (1994, 2001); Smith and Watson (1996); hooks (1998); Langness (2001); Lionett (1998); and Pinar (2004) see autobiography as a method of social transformation. Langness (2001) writes that “for the autobiographer and for readers influenced by published examples of people claiming the right to define themselves, autobiography can be a revolutionary act” (p. 93).

Where and when does autoethnography become autobiography? Perhaps an even a better question is where does it stop being autobiography? I will return to the latter question in the third part of this study, where I address autoethnography's dubious claim that it somehow transcends both autobiography and ethnography to become more than the sum of its parts.

### **Autoethnography Is Apart From, Not a Part of, Ethnography**

Autoethnography, writes Ellis (2004), is “a form of ethnography” (p. 31). Yet Ellis' (2004) book *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* goes on to separate autoethnography from ethnography. In autoethnography, “authors focus on a group or culture and use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on themselves and look more deeply at interactions between self and other” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Those authors then write it up as an “evocative, unfolding, scenic, and dialogic plot” (Ellis p. 32). In contrast, Ellis (2004) writes, traditional ethnographers privilege theory generation, typicality, and generalization to a wider world over evocative storytelling, detailing concrete experience, and multiple perspectives that include participants' voices and interpretations. They tend to write realist tales in an authorial, omnipotent voice, using selected snippets of fieldwork data to represent participants' stories, illustrating general concepts, patterns, and themes. (p. 29)

According to Ellis (2004), autoethnography is distinct from ethnography in its rejection of “realist tales” and its emphasis on the literary conventions.

However, Glesne's (1999) description of the goals of ethnographic texts sounds very similar to Ellis's (2004) characterization of autoethnographic conventions.

Ethnography, according to Glesne (1999), is a research method that

describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action. The goal of theorizing then becomes that of providing understanding of direct lived experience instead of abstract generalizations. These scholars consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple meanings and interpretations. (p. 22)

The above description of the goals of ethnography sounds much like those of autoethnography, although this is not exactly a surprise. Goldschmidt (1977) writes: "There is a sense in which all ethnography is autoethnography" (p. 294). Despite the claims of autoethnographers, the goals of autoethnography and ethnography seem to overlap.

It is within issues of the relationship between the researcher self and those being researched that autoethnography claims its strongest departure from ethnographic tradition. Denzin (1989) distinguishes autoethnography from ethnography based on the role of self, writing that autoethnography has abandoned the "objective outsider" convention common to ethnography, so that the self of the researcher becomes a source of data (p. 10). Whereas ethnography is often reductively defined as "the practice of attempting to discover the culture of others," autoethnography likes to define itself as "the use of self and self's experience to 'garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part'" (Ricci, 2003, p. 593).

Keep in mind, however, that ethnographic desire is sometimes fickle. Despite its guiding infatuation with culture and anthropological customs that marginalize self-narrative, at some base level ethnography has always wanted, and still wants, to explore (and simultaneously escape from) its self. As Behar (1996) points out, ethnography is a strange “cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts” (p. 7). Throughout the history of ethnography, the interest in self expresses itself with some ambivalence.

As Langness and Frank (2001) observe, ethnographic autobiography—by which I mean autobiographies of usually exotic others put into writing by ethnographers—was a popular if contested genre. I mention these early ethnographic autobiographies in reference to Reed-Danahay’s (1997) double definition of autoethnography, cited earlier as “ethnography of one’s own group or autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest” (p. 2). Early ethnographic autobiography is an interesting example of writing that might fall into the latter category: autobiographical writing containing ethnographic interest. Such writing presents an opportunity to examine autoethnography’s double identity as simultaneously a part of and apart from autobiography and ethnography.

Even before the birth of formal anthropology, and until the mid-eighties, ethnographers attempted to give voice to others by composing their autobiographies. Langness and Frank (2001) point out that *Memoir of Catherine Brown: A Christian Indian of the Cherokee Nation* (Anderson, 1825) was probably the first of what Russel (1998) or Fischer (1986) might today refer to as an experimental ethnic autobiography. Paul Radin’s (1926) piece titled *Crashing Thunder* represents another early experiment blending autobiography with the ethnographic. Referring to this experimental writing, he makes it clear that his autobiographical aim was not confined to a singular representation

of one individual life, “the aim being not to obtain autobiographical details about some definite personage” (Radin, 1926, p. 384). Filtering autobiographical data through the ethnographer, Radin’s attempt, like similar attempts by other ethnographic autobiographers toward autobiographical montage, predates contemporary autobiographical scholarship by the likes of Gilmore (1994, 2001) and Smith and Watson (1996, 1998), authors who emphasize interweaving multiple subjectivities to reflect a dispersal of fragmented identities. According to Langness (2001), the work of these autobiographers was criticized by their anthropological contemporaries as failing to provide readers “even the shadow of a life,” showing instead “merely the outlined skeleton” and being too individual for adequate comparative cultural study (p. 22).

Like autoethnography, ethnographic autobiographies lie in the contested borderland between ethnography and autobiography, yet their early merger of autobiographical and ethnographic aims illustrates that autobiography cannot be confined to the “story of one’s own life” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 6). Likewise, these early ethnographic autobiographies, as unsophisticated as they might seem by contemporary standards, acknowledge an autobiographical self that extends beyond Western notions of an individual autonomous self and into the realm of culture. These autobiographical works of ethnographic others were mediated by ethnographers, thus the ethnographer self stayed safely in the shadows. Putting themselves into their work remained more problematic. According to Behar (1996):

In anthropology, which historically exists to “give voice” to others, there is no greater taboo than self-revelation. The impetus of our discipline, with its roots in

Western fantasies about barbaric others, has been to focus primarily on “cultural” rather than individual realities. (p. 26)

Visweswaran (1994) demonstrates how the individual experience of ethnographers is marginalized in form as well as content through its textual customs:

In traditional ethnographic practice, if the first-person narrative is allowed to creep into the ethnographic text, it is confined to the introduction or the postscript; if a book is devoted to the firsthand experiences of the novice ethnographer, it is after a monograph written in the proper objective manner has been produced. (1994, p. 21)

This sort of positioning of self is clear in early ethnographies. Even ethnography that demonstrated self-restraint, by confining its first-person discussion mainly to introductions and epilogues, often was lambasted for being too personal. Gregory Bateson’s deeply theoretical *Naven* (1958) is an example of this; dismissed by scholars as insufficiently ethnographic, the main body of *Naven* offers a description and interpretation of an Iatmul transvestite ritual. The work’s brilliance, however, lies in self-reflexive epilogues in which Bateson deals with the challenges and limitations of his own fieldwork and interpretation (Houseman and Severi, 1998). In the first epilogue, Bateson (1958) anticipates his critics by acknowledging the ethnographic vulnerability of his text, writing that “it is clear that I have contributed little to our store of anthropological facts.” (p. 278). Ratcliffe-Brown (1937) summed up anthropology’s rejection of Bateson’s book, as well as self-narrative, when he dismissed *Naven* as little more than an “intellectual autobiography” (Houseman and Severi, 1998, p. 3). Discussions of self were and are often relegated to the margins of ethnographic texts (introductions and postscripts) and

academic careers—after the central work of tenure is complete. Yet issues of self in the form of first-person narrative, and issues of self-reflexivity, inevitably wind their way, however ambivalently, into straight ethnographic texts. Despite the historical taboo regarding the self, established insider critics of ethnography—people like Clifford and Marcus (1986); Geertz (1988); and Behar (1995); and ethnographers Bateson (1958); Malinowski (1967); Myerhoff (1978); Okely (1992); and Wolcott (2002)—encourage and borrow from genres like literary theory and autobiography to spend a fair amount of time talking about themselves.

According to Okely (1995), “the self’s engagement in fieldwork could not be naturally suppressed. . . . The self would leak out: in the oral culture of the academy, secreted in diaries, transformed as fiction or split into separate and hitherto marginalized accounts” (pp. 9-10). A vivid history of feminist ethnography comprises a tradition of women ethnographers dealing with their own experiences of cultural encounter through first-person narratives. Such works include the “confessional tales” of Elizabeth Fernea (1969) and Laura Bohannon (1964); the novels of Zora Neale Hurston, the poetry of Ruth Benedict, and the dances of Pearl Primus; the sometimes secret writings of Margaret Meade, Elsie Clews-Parsons, and Hortense Powdermaker (1967); Katherine Dunham (1994); Manda Cesara (1982); and Karen McCarthy-Brown (1991).

Katherine Dunham (1994), for example, describes the overlapping subjectivities at play as an African American anthropologist studying dance customs in Haiti during the thirties. She writes: “As the situation presented itself, I seem to have wavered or catapulted from mulatto to black, elite to peasant, intellectual to bohemian, in to out, up to down, and tried hard to keep out of trouble but didn’t succeed” (Dunham, 1969, p. 13).

Contemporary feminist ethnographers such as Anzaldua (1987); Behar (1995); Gordon (1995); and Lather and Smithies (1997) contribute overt discussions of the sort of theoretical, epistemological, and empirical self-awareness that Dunham (1994) demonstrates and that Lather (1991) terms “vigorous self-reflexivity” (p. 66). Similarly, postcolonial feminist efforts to reconceptualize notions of ethnographic representation of others have highlighted self-reflexivity in their hyphenated play of self-other (Behar, 1996; Lather, 1991; Narayan, 1993; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Villenas, 1996; and Visweswaran 1994).

For example, Narayan’s (1993) article interweaves theory and narrative to propose a reconfiguration of longstanding dichotomies of native/non-native and insider/outsider in anthropological discourse. Extending Clifford’s mantra of ethnographic truth to ethnographer, Narayan (1993) argues that subjectivity is multiple, situated, committed, partial, and incomplete. The postcolonial emergence of Third World scholars and feminism, writes Narayan (1993), has “turned the gaze” inward and helped realign research relationships between native/non-native, self/other, knower/known, and participant/observer so that the “lines between them are no longer so easily drawn (p. 6).” By reflexively detailing her own complex identity as a “halfie,” Narayan (1993) demonstrates how blurring essentializing distinctions gives way to shifting epistemological distance and produces the need for more multiplex understandings of subjectivity, identity, and culture. Such understanding, according to Narayan (1993), means researchers need to explore the shifting nature of identity; acknowledge the overlapping situativities of all people involved in ethnographic projects; enact hybridity



by integrating narrative into written texts; and focus more sharply on the quality of the relations with the people researchers seek to represent in these texts.

Such critique works within the tradition of feminist ethnography—albeit at its boundaries—to articulate the problematics of what Newton describes as ethnography’s “romantic yearning to know the other” (pp. 25-26). Newton (2000) writes of this yearning: “Traditionally, this romantic component has been linked to the heroic quests, by the single anthropologist, for ‘his soul’ through confrontation with the exotic ‘other’” (p. 234). Postcolonial anthropologists have been intimately entwined with the project of demonstrating the prurience of this yearning. Unmasking the dogged pursuit of the other by a predominately Western gaze, such critique has demonstrated the multiple and contradictory ways through which the imperial eye of anthropology (primarily ethnography) works to reinscribe hegemonic relations of self and other. Similarly, postcolonial proponents of autoethnography such as Pratt (1992) see it as a new form of “native research” that looks back at the imperial eye of ethnography. As Reed-Danahay (1997) notes, “as anthropologists increasingly engage in their own ‘self-documentations’ through autobiographical writing, the line between ethnography and autoethnography becomes increasingly faint” (p. 8).

Contrary to much of autoethnography’s critique, ala Ellis (2004), of the exclusion of substantive self-examination from ethnographic tradition, ethnography from Bateson (1958) to Wolcott (2002), as well as a rich history of feminist and/or postcolonial ethnographers in between, have written vulnerably in the midst of this “felt problematic” of self and other central to ethnography, and more broadly, to qualitative research (Pinar, 1988, p. 148). Ruth Behar, in her 1996 book *The Vulnerable Observer*, writes about this

vulnerability, articulating the value that a hermeneutics of vulnerability might offer ethnography. Looking to reconfigure relations between the observer and the observed, she evokes Clifford Geertz's (1995) thick description of ethnographic vulnerability. "You don't exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image would have it," writes Geertz. "You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes you" (Behar, 1996, p. 5). Later in her text, Behar counterpoints Geertz's passionate description of the ethnographic observer, self-subsumed by culture, through questioning how the autobiographical self seems to be overtaking the voices of others in ethnographic representation: "How . . . might we make the ethnography as passionate as our autobiographical stories? (Behar, 1996, p. 18).

One response to this plea has been autoethnography; a large part of autoethnographic intent involves this sort of passionate vulnerability. Ellis (2004) writes: "The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience, and to write from an ethic of care and concern" (p. 46). Similarly, Jones (2002) conveys this passion when she writes about her own autoethnographic goals: "Create a highly charged atmosphere and heightened emotional state with and for my audience. Then use this energy to understand and critique my own relationships, as well as the place of these relationships in larger social structures and histories" (pp. 53-54). *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* by anthropologist Karen McCarthy-Brown (1991) enacts on multiple levels the sort of passionate hybrid text Ellis (1996) and Jones (2002) describe. This ethnography—what McCarthy-Brown calls a spiritual biography—explores the ways Vodou interacts with the life of a Haitian, but also looks at how Vodou interacts with the researchers' "own very

different blend of experience, memory, dream and fantasy” (McCarthy-Brown, 1991, p. 13). While ethnography such as Bateson (1958), passionate in its own rite, offers isolated self-revelatory interludes, McCarthy-Brown (1991) interweaves autobiographical, ethnographic, and analytic narrative throughout her text. In her “aim to create a portrait of Vodou embedded in the vicissitudes of particular lives,” McCarthy-Brown (1991) consistently includes the multiple and sometimes contradictory particularities of her own life in order to illustrate, among other things, the inconsistencies inherent to research, religion, and identity (p. 17).

McCarthy-Brown (1991) presents no illusion of objectivity. Instead, she offers a self-consciously subjective story of shifting distance among a multiplicity of selves and others, in which she herself is implicated on multiple levels as a feminist, researcher, practitioner, student, author, and friend. She writes, regarding her study’s main informant, that “the Vodou Alourdes practices is intimate and intense, and I soon found that I could not claim a place in her Vodou family and remain a detached observer” (p. 9). McCarthy-Brown’s description of her relationship with Alourdes and with spirits demonstrates that “as researchers, we can be insiders and outsiders to a particular community of research participants at many different levels at different times” (Villenes, 1996, p. 722).

McCarthy-Brown (1991) extends this multiplicity to Vodou’s practitioners: “My aim is to create an intimate portrait of three-dimensional people . . . who do not live out their religion in unreflective, formulaic ways but instead struggle with it, become confused, and sometimes even contradict themselves” (p. 15). McCarthy-Brown’s (1991) ethnography acknowledges the multiplex desires, fantasies, and identities of its spiritual

and corporeal participants (p. 14). In this way, her ethnographic work succeeds in excavating “layers of intention and experience which antedate and live below the text which is daily life” (Pinar, 1988, p. 139).

*Mama Lola* presents a complicated web of relations: relationships among spirits and people, ancestors and descendents, people and place, research and religion, mother and daughter, author and Alourdes, McCarthy-Brown and herself, and text and reader. McCarthy-Brown’s (1991) text demonstrates that, in both Vodou and ethnography, “virtue is achieved by maintaining responsible relationships” (p. 6). Echoing Narayan (1993), McCarthy-Brown writes: “Ethnographic research, whatever else it is, is a form of human relationship” (p. 12). The brilliance of McCarthy-Brown’s ethnography is in the way it dramatizes “the ebb and flow of relationship” among “connected lives across the curve of time” and space (Ellis, 2004, p. 30).

According to Jones (2002), autoethnography seeks to forge a new identity “within the intimate, sensual contact among readers and texts. . . . Autoethnography create[s] a space of ‘critical vigilance’ in which ‘communities of resistance are forged to sustain us’; a place where we come to know that ‘we are not alone’” (p. 54). Ethnographic work such as that of Behar, Narayan, and McCarthy-Brown, who all work within a long-standing tradition of feminist ethnography, demonstrate that such a place—defined by “reflexive connection between the lives of participants and researchers”—already exists (Ellis, 2004, p. 30). Brettell (1997) asserts that “there are, perhaps, many ethnographies that shelter autoethnographies within them” (p. 245). Perhaps there are many more autoethnographies that shelter—or rather conceal—the feminist tradition of ethnography within them.

### **Autoethnography Is More than the Sum of Its Parts**

Autoethnography, writes Ellis (2004), “overlaps art and science; it is part auto or self and part ethno or culture. It is also something different from both of them, greater than its parts” (p. 32). In the “sprawling middle ground of qualitative research” (Ellis, 2004, p. 28), sometimes a simple definition is more evocative of the lies and concomitant truths of self-representation than reams of thick description. The reductive formula of auto (self) + ethno (culture) < autoethnography is often repeated and rarely transcended in common definitions of autoethnography. Ellis (1999, 2004); Holt (2003); Picart (2002); Scott-Hoy (2002); Barone (2000); Russel (1998); Brettell (1997); Reed-Danahay (1997); and Denzin (1989) all use some version of it. For example, Reed-Danahay (1999) writes that “autoethnography combines autobiography, the story of one’s own life, with ethnography, the study of a particular social group” (p. 6). Reed-Danahay’s rather provincial (pragmatic?) definition draws a rigid picture of the interests of both autoethnography and autobiography, whose interests are inherently intertwined without superficial efforts toward merger.

As Leigh Gilmore (1994), a scholar of autobiographics, notes, “questions of genre immediately pose the problem of boundaries, of determining limits” (p. 35). I want to suggest here that autoethnography’s claim to a blurred-genre, hybrid identity is self-limiting and constrictive rather than expansive, in that it vastly underestimates the epistemological vicissitudes that lie on both sides of the disciplinary border upon which it situates itself. Ellis (1999, 2004); Holt (2003); Picart (2002); Scott-Hoy (2002); Barone (2000); Russel (1998); Brettell (1997); Reed-Danahay (1997); and Denzin (1989) situate autoethnography at a boundary between autobiography and ethnography, thus

highlighting its hybridity. However, in each of these works autoethnography seems to depend for its coherence on the license of ethnography to underwrite its “contract of autobiography” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 96). By this I mean that autoethnographers often use ethnography—expressed rather reductively as an impetus toward cultural study that transcends the personal—as a cultural counterbalance to self stories in order to fend off critics outside of autobiography who call such work self indulgent. Ricci (2003) rings like a refrain when she writes that autoethnography “is the use of self and self’s experience to ‘garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part’” (Ricci, 2003, p. 593). In autoethnography, notions of self remain largely subordinate to culture. Reed-Danahay (1997) and Ellis (2004), along with other autoethnographers, diligently point out that, although autoethnography starts with the self, it must not end there—as if it could. The work of autobiographically inclined scholars such as Gilmore (2001); Smith and Watson (2001); and Pinar (2004) demonstrates that the self is never an end in itself.

At the same time, scholars of autoethnography seem to expend little explicit textual thunder discussing issues of autobiography in its own terms. The term “autobiography” does not even appear in the index of Ellis’s (2004) book. Mimicking their rhetorical emphasis on evocative rather than explanatory texts, such scholars tend to evoke rather than explore autobiography—mostly when allegations of “naval gazing” or self indulgence arise in regard to autoethnographic texts (Sparkes, 2002). Despite the fact that the overlap between autoethnographic and autobiographic work is so thorough as to make them mostly indistinguishable, it seems like autoethnography’s autobiographic interest is not so much in enlarging notions of social selves or exploring subjectivities. Instead, autoethnographic scholars appear to be more interested in enlarging ethnographic

texts so that they might more thoroughly resemble autobiographical ones, without making serious inquiries into the nature of the autobiographic self.

Paradoxically, its efforts to enlarge ethnography are mediated by autoethnography's ironically rigid formula for hybridity. Ethnography's struggle with notions of the self and its relation to ethnographic others demonstrates that "there is no clear and easy route by which to confront the self who observes" (Behar 1996, p. 6). Part of autoethnography's claim is that this difficulty lies outside of ethnography. But as the legacy of ethnographic autobiography and feminist ethnography demonstrates, the complexity of reflexivity is not external to ethnography: it helps define it (Gilmore, 1994, p. 70). Autoethnography's self-representation as a new hybrid form composed of cultural and self interest—but authentically separate from ethnography and autobiography—works to reify rather than diminish "the fallacy of self/other, individual/social dichotomies" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 217).

In this section, I have tried to suggest that autoethnography relies on a claim toward a new identity, one separate from and somehow more than autobiography and ethnography. In the next section, I will focus on the way autoethnography's double claim plays with crucial limits "understood as the boundary between truth and lies," and with "the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and constrict" (Gilmore, 2001, p. 5).

### **The Joint Action of Double Desire**

Earlier I suggested that autoethnography's simple formula of auto (self) + ethno (culture) < autoethnography does not add up—that instead of striking autobiography and ethnography in dialectical relation, "so that each element contributes to the

transformation of the other to achieving higher-order synthesis,” autoethnography’s hybrid identity might actually serve to reify the binary notions of self and culture and their respective knowledge (Pinar, 1988, p. 137).

If we look at pedagogy as the transformation of consciousness that takes place at the intersection of at least three agencies (often constructed in education as the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce together), while regarding autoethnography as the double desire for self and other and the knowledge they produce in play, perhaps the double desire of autoethnography is pragmatic: while it may not transcend the complexities of self and other, such doubleness might keep subjectivities (even inauthentic ones) in play. Far from fatal, the reciprocal tension of autoethnography’s double desire, which moves throughout autoethnographic claims, can work to carve out “a disjunctive space that expands rather than reduces interpretive possibilities” (Lather, 1997, p. 7).

Autoethnography’s claim to be more than the sum of its parts may be mainly desire, though such a desire provides generative opportunities to play with “interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 42). The “oxymoronic label autoethnography” can be understood as a form of “self-fashioning,” in which autoethnography comes to inscribe a more complex doubleness within the autoethnographic mode of relation (Russel, 1998 p. 2). In this light, perhaps autoethnography can be explored or played with “as a potential site of experimentation rather than a contractual sign of identity” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 42).

Play, like autoethnography, is “tainted by inauthenticity, duplicity . . . looseness, fooling around and inconsequentiality” (Turner, 1983, p. 233). However, epistemological



work of play, per Doll (1993); Geertz (1973); and Turner (1977) can be deeper. According to Doll (1993): “Play deals not with the present foundational but with the absent and the possible. Its very nature invites dialogue, interpretation, and interaction. . . . All of these activities are essential to meaning-making.” Dialogue, interpretation, and interaction are essential to the possibilities of autoethnography, both as a method and literary product. The discursive play that circulates throughout autoethnography is central to its aim of “trying to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making meaning in our lives” (Ellis, 2004, p. 25). Autoethnography becomes a means of configuring alternative ways of knowing through the play of difference—ways of knowing that can become claims to something more (Thrift, 1997, p. 147).

Speaking to the critical potential of play, Hearn (1976) writes: “To the extent that play affirms the possibility of a ‘better world’ it retains the potential for highlighting the negativity of and contributing to the subversion of the prevailing arrangements” (pp. 150-151). The pedagogical desire of autoethnography, then, might be seen as an example of play in which the exaggeration of the everyday, embodied, joint action of its coupled modes of representation (autobiography and ethnography) contains the capacity to hint at “different experiential frames, ‘elsewheres’ which are here” (Thrift, 1997, p. 150). This sort of play is the un/real: the fictional work of autoethnography’s double desire.

### **Autoethnographic Desire**

According to anthropologist Victor Turner (1987), “The way people *play* perhaps is more profoundly revealing of a culture than how they work—giving access to their heart values” (p. 76). Given the nature of my research, I think Turner makes much too

firm a distinction between work and play. After all, as Britzman (2000) writes about ethnographic work, “ethnographies promise pleasure” (p. 27). Cartesian habits lead me to Turner’s subtext of heart as opposed to head: subjective rather than objective value, based on feeling rather than knowing. In this sense, Turner’s notion of cultural heart value seems to be akin to some semblance of collective desire. If, as Turner (1987) suggests, it is play and not work that reveals a culture’s heart values, what might autoethnography’s play—given its claim exaggerating the joint action of its coupled modes of representation and simultaneous efforts to distance itself from those modes—reveal about autoethnographic desire and the desires of the autoethnographer herself?

I posit that at the heart of autoethnography exists a double desire for intimacy: a textual intimacy between text and reader and, more seductive still, an epistemological intimacy between self and other by way of a research subjectivity that claims to collapse such categories. Such claims operate as semblances of intimacy that circulate between the back and forth among autoethnographic selves and others.

Autoethnography demonstrates a textual desire for closeness with a text: the sense of wanting to be touched by the evocative stories of self/others. This desire for textual intimacy is transparent in claims, such as those by Gergen and Gergen (2002), who suggest that “autoethnography reduces the distance between writer and reader. . . . First person expression of private matters . . . brings us into a space of intimacy” (p. 15). Jones (2002) offers a less subtle suggestion, affectionately referring to autoethnography as “an act of love in which we seek to create a charged exchange with our readers that encompasses all parts of love—desire, pain, and longing, wisdom, and irony (p. 143). Jones’s (2002) call to intimacy becomes more plaintive and ambivalent as she continues

with a rhetorical question: “We do want our readers to feel passion, along with vulnerability, even love us when they read our stories. Don’t we?” (p. 143). Similar yet less assertive claims come from Bochner and Ellis (1996); Ellis (2001, 2004); Jenks (2002); Reed-Danahay (1997); Richardson and Lockridge (2004); Russel (1998); and Sparkes (2002). Further, these works reveal autoethnography’s desire to make research relationships as intimate and vulnerable as their texts. Literature about autoethnography makes much of the potential intimacy of the autoethnographic self and its others (Bochner and Ellis, 1996; Ellis, 1991, 2004; Gergen and Gergen, 2002; Jenks, 2002; Jones, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ricci, 2003; Richardson, 2004; Russel, 1998; and Sparkes, 2002). However, as my earlier discussion might suggest, we cannot always trust autoethnographic claims. Neither, according to Gergen and Gergen (2002), “can we be certain of the intimacy that is implied” (p. 15). According to Russel (1998), autoethnography “produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze under the sign of one identity” (p. 25). This tight fit between subject and object situates autoethnography as a space of intimacy where, as Russel (1998) explains, “the autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other” (p. 4).

I return to Ellis’s (2004) description of autoethnography’s reflexive gaze, which suggests a similar desire for an all-encompassing intimacy where self/other distinctions dissolve:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by

and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward, and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. (pp. 37-38)

Ellis's (2004) description of the autoethnographic gaze reveals a desire for a sort of boundary-loss, in which the to-and-fro of self and other gives way to a submergence of self and other in flow. McNeil (1995), who writes about boundary-loss and dance, likely would consider this a "blurring of self-awareness and the heightening of fellow-feeling with all who share in the dance" (p. 8). As a postmodern form of research, the autoethnographic desire for intimacy offers a layered response to the realism of positivist research traditions that privilege distance or objectivity. Autoethnography's desire for intimacy is signified by boundary-loss, in which intimacy becomes the absolute absence of distance between knower and known: an epistemological surrender to subjectivity.

I want to suggest that autoethnography's descriptions of extreme intimacy in terms of boundary-loss are problematic, since a boundary-loss of this kind relies on an intimacy defined by diminishing difference. As the energies and passions of the private self become merged with those of the public self/other, the generative play of difference upon which autoethnography relies is obliterated. According to Rosaldo (1993), "if classic ethnography's vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, that of present-day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other" (p. 7). In terms of the double subjectivity of the autoethnographic self, intimacy becomes a similar vice whereby, through the drive for reflexive immersion, the cultural otherness of the self effectively becomes lost to the self. The autoethnographic passion toward epistemological intimacy,

as demonstrated in its idealized self-reflexive gaze between knower and known, if realized would effectively extinguish autoethnography's ability to strike diversity against unity in order to vitalize them both (Babcock, 1995). Otherness, in other words, would be lost. The desire for an intimacy defined by the submergence of difference is potentially dangerous to a form of representation whose knowledge-claims rest on a pedagogical desire that, to some degree, is propelled by such difference. Further, if, as Jones (2002) suggests, autoethnography "is a conscious act of being in love with another and staying true to that love in our representation," then a desire for an intimacy in which otherness is annihilated might be deadly (p. 52).

The word "might" is key: autoethnography may be like love, but it is not love. Research, despite historical claims to objective reality, moves in the realm of semblance. Indeed, as a contemporary departure from realist traditions of research, autoethnography is not merely a matter of describing events as they "really are." Rather, its narratives are aimed at "evolving a semblance of a world within which specific questions take their meaning" (Thrift, 1997, p. 146). Much like the semblances of intimacy that circulate among dancers, my notion of autoethnographic intimacy is that it is mostly "a virtual quality" produced through movement among self and other, and therefore "cannot be denoted in a form sufficient to capture its full meaning" (Thrift, 1997, p. 147). This is not to say that such intimacy is not real. Rather, it is simply to state that the gestures of autoethnography, as a mode of representation and embodied practice, are reliant on figural meanings—semblances. Such figural meanings are at work in the multitude of metaphors at play in autoethnographic texts.

In autoethnographic research, these figural meanings lie in the as-ifness of fieldwork, while the autoethnographic field is ultimately embodied by the relationship between selves and others, whose meanings are never fully objectifiable (Ellis, 2004). To illustrate: the warmth signified by an embrace versus a handshake is no less real because it is figurative, and altogether different from the warmth of skin touched by the sun's radiation. Thrift (1997) offers another example of figurative meaning at work in embodied practice: "In the sphere of social relationships, the way that a dancer touches her partner with a lightness that signifies (that is opens or invites) gentleness rather than distance" (Radley, 1995, p. 15). The intimacy at play in both dance and autoethnography is similarly figurative. Its meanings move as semblances sometimes expressed as "more real, more vital" than literalities of closeness (Radley, 1995, p.14). On the other hand, I do not want to imply that semblances of intimacy preclude the possibility of other forms of intimacy with which such semblances might coexist. As Wolcott (2002) reminds, "intimacy is also a matter of the heart, of emotions, of physiological response as well as intellectual response" (p. 161).

## **Chapter 4**

### **A Curricular Dance of Desire**

This chapter is an autoethnographic story of reciprocal tension as it patterned my experience teaching a compulsory multicultural education course to teacher education students at Louisiana State University. This tension circulates among teachers and students, although is not contained by them. More broadly, I am concerned with the ambivalent desire for perceived difference that circulates through the dance between students' selves and the other that is curriculum—specifically, in this chapter, multicultural curriculum. Less than graceful experiences trying to teach through this tension deeply resonated with conflicted desires and experiences on the zydeco dance floor and in the research field, as a white Delilah struggling with intimacy across perceived otherness.

The particular curricular dance I describe involves the psychosocial dynamic between white femininity and black masculinity, a dynamic that proved to be a force in the multicultural curriculum of a mainly white and female student body and their white female teacher. As Murrell (1993) writes, the strained intimacy between white femininity and black masculinity is also “a subtle yet critically important factor in the desperate plight of Black boys in public schools” (p. 235). The overall aim of this chapter is to ask questions, however, not make conclusions.

In one sense, what I offer here is what narrative researchers in education might call a “teacher story” (Clandinin, 1993; Schubert, 1992). Such stories can be problematic. As Janet Miller (2005) notes, “‘teachers’ stories’ often offer unproblematized recountings of what is taken to be the transparent, linear, and authoritative ‘reality’ of those teachers’

experiences. Their ‘teacher identities’ in these stories are often crafted as unitary, fully conscious, universal, complete, and non-contradictory” (Miller, 2005, p. 51). In this chapter, I hope to move away from the force that so often characterizes narratives of transformation (multicultural education among them), and toward an autoethnographic examination of the play of forces—“the unruly and contentious relations among the imagined conditions of knowledge, identity, lived experience, and social conduct”—that is curriculum (Britzman, 1993, p. 188).

My teaching story, which is also a learning story, is not a linear retelling of my last eight semesters teaching *Education and Diverse Populations*. Rather, my teacher story is an autoethnographic curriculum story. It gathers up patterns that emerged during my time teaching multicultural education at LSU, combining them into a composite curriculum that represents the course of my own becoming as both teacher and student of multicultural curriculum. Finally, my curriculum story suggests a connection with the schooling of black masculinity. To this end, I extend my story (which mainly entails a white woman’s perspective of white femininity) and connect it to constructions of white femininity from the perspective of black masculinity via autobiographies by African American men. Reasoned generalizations about my students, white female students in particular, pattern this story. While I realize that such a pattern risks essentializing, I maintain that an essential tension is involved in patterning the dance of self and other among black masculinity and white femininity.

Autoethnography is the method I use to conjure up and represent this unruly dance of self and other moving together in curricular time. According to Slattery and Rapp (2003), autoethnography “has the power to evoke memories and elicit insights that



contribute to our understanding of students and classrooms” (p. 172). Despite the powerful semblance of intimacy that sometimes permeates pedagogical relations, I do not understand my students. Despite the intimacy autoethnography promises, I cannot help but feel like I am betraying them by claiming to know them. That such a claim feels like a betrayal is testament to the potency of the semblance of intimacy at work in teaching. Interpretation feels like a violation precisely because I feel close enough to my students to know that I do not know them. This semblance of intimacy makes me reluctant to characterize my relationship with them as either familiar or strange.

There is familiarity. In some ways, it is the deceptive familiarity of seemingly shared proximities of gender, race, and social class. Out of the hundreds of students I have taught in EDCI 2400, fewer than twenty could be considered nonwhite; eight were male; ten grew up outside of the southern United States; three claimed a religious identity other than Christian; and two were openly gay. I worked with only one student whose first language was not English, and have never taught an African American male student in EDCI 2400. The vast majority of my students have been from upper middle-class homes and spent at least part of their K-12 education in private schools. This sort of homogeneity is a familiar story in teacher education. As Sleeter (1993) notes, “in the education literature one finds frequent reference to the fact that the teaching population in the U.S. is becoming increasingly white while the student population becomes increasingly racially diverse” (p. 157). This wider trend seems to apply to the teacher education program in which I teach.

Most of my students seem familiar to me in that we share general patterns of subjectivity; like most of them I am white, middle class, female, and formally educated.

This familiarity works quickly to foster superficial semblances of intimacy, which I exploit to my advantage in teaching multicultural education and writing about it here. It is the intimacy of default that people faced with perceived otherness—even the intellectual otherness of teaching and learning—often grasp. I cling to it in my assumption that, when I write about my students in terms of white femininity, their stories are also always in a sense my stories. This assumption is made possible only through a fantasy of rapport, which is its own kind of semblance of intimacy.

My students and I also share a familiarity born of propinquity. It has been said that love is mainly attributable to propinquity: the shared experience of being together in time and space. The same might be said for intimacy. Arguably, the short time my students and I spend together each week provides precious little propinquity. However, this does not preclude the curricular propinquity of moving together in time to the rhythm of texts, assignments, and ideas—of traveling a course together. The semblance of intimacy that curriculum can give rise to is subtle and tenuous, but like zydeco, it can also be sensuous and tender.

Rather than focus on the fantasy of familiarity or the semblance of intimacy among my students and their teacher, I want to focus on this familiar yet strange intimacy of curriculum. This chapter examines the play of familiarity and strangeness—plays at intimacy—in my multicultural curriculum in relation to dangerous remembrances of white Southern femininity. Resistance becomes recast as one force in the play of forces at work in a multicultural curriculum shaped not only by the momentum of my desires and intentions, but also by those of my students. I begin by examining the strange ways my students give weight to the notion of difference in the odd light cast by historical

constructions of the relationship between white femininity and black masculinity. An examination of my students' curious curricular contributions requires me to "excavate layers of intention and experience which antedate and live below the text" (Pinar, 1988, p. 139). In what follows, I explore my experience of a hidden or not-so-hidden curriculum of racially inflected desire and fear that circulate just below the familiar surface of a standard multicultural curriculum.

### **Critical Incidents of Difference**

On the second class period of every semester I take photographs of my class. Each student's assignment is to bring an object larger than a credit card, and something other than a photograph, that they believe represents their culture. Next they discuss why they chose their object. We arrange these bits of realia in and around a lectern upended to form a crèche, and we analyze our material-culture sculpture in terms of what it might or might not say about the joint culture of the course we are just starting. The sculptures are revealing: it is interesting, but not surprising, that every sculpture includes multiple Bibles and no less than three green canisters of Tony Cachere's Creole Seasoning. In the semester immediately following 9/11, the class sculpture was dominated, predictably, by American flags. Cell phones are nestled among family heirlooms, most of which seem to be wedding-related. Mardi Gras beads always dangle somewhere in the midst of cookbooks, crucifixes, and organizers. On one occasion a student brought a tortilla trimmed into the shape of the Star of David. Every sculpture has included a shoe of some sort.

I use this cultural show-and-tell as a springboard to problematize culture, while encouraging students to begin to think about their own cultural affiliations. As Hidalgo

(1993) notes, many white teachers “may not be accustomed to thinking of ourselves as cultural or ethnic” (p. 99). This activity is a first step in helping my students understand that culture can be seen as a performance—not merely the province or burden of those they perceive as ethnic and racial others. In hopes of mobilizing a sense (or semblance) of esprit de corps, I make available on the students’ Semester Book (course-management software) desktop the photographs of our class gathered around its sculpture. Looking at those photos this morning, I am startled by how happy and light these young hermeneuts appear in the early days of the semester, before the weight of our formal multicultural curriculum has kicked in.

This lightness is, of course, an illusion. Living in the South, my students are always already inculcated in a complicated multicultural curriculum heavy with history.

Students are storied by, among other things, a history that is and is not their own. These stories, as Castenell and Pinar (1993) note, are “racial stories, even when denied” (p. 10). Part of the goal of the class is for students to explore their own embodied curriculum of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and culture in new ways. One tactic I use in teaching multicultural education is to try and make familiar associations of race, gender, and knowledge seem strange, so that students might more deeply consider them in relation to power and knowledge. According to Edgerton (1996), making the familiar strange means “critically examining the clichés one has learned to live by—clichés which are not only expressed through language but also through routines, habits, ways of seeing” (p. 135). The relationship between white femininity and black masculinity as conceived socially in the South is an example of a racist cliché that deeply influences, and is simultaneously influenced by, habits of seeing and routines of being in the world.

Ironically, one way I try to get students to examine such clichés is by having them write an autobiographical paper on a “critical incident” of difference, an idea I borrowed from a work by Bullough and Gitlin (1995), *Becoming a Student of Teaching: Methodologies for Exploring Self and School Contexts*. Bullough and Gitlin (1995) describe a critical incident as “an event that signals an important change in course, a shift in one’s thinking” (p. 28). My idea was to critically analyze students’ incidents of difference as sites of rupture in relation to the more familiar issues of racial equity in schools—issues to which multicultural education curriculum is often devoted. In a sense, the assignment asks students to make the strange (critical incidents of difference) familiar by connecting it to educational practice. Rather than narratives of rupture, students often wrote of their triumphant victory over difference. To paraphrase a typical story line:

*I never understood racism until my school’s basketball team played against an all black high school on their home court. I was a cheerleader, and at halftime went to the concession stand for a Coke. Me and my friend were surrounded by black faces. We were the only white people in line. We never got served. I could not believe that I would not be served just because of the color of my skin. That really taught me something: I will make sure never to judge my students based on color and will treat all students, no matter what color, fairly.*

More than three-quarters of my students’ papers followed this narrative pattern—not surprising given the fact that the frame of the assignment begged for superficial tales of transformation, not rupture. Miller (2005) cautions about framing autobiography:

Autobiography, whether in the form of “teachers’ stories” or teachers’ and researchers’ examinations of the filters through which we perceive our

work, must move through and beyond traditional framings of educational situations and issues in order to “take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to.” (pp. 53-54)

Considering Miller’s (2005) suggested course, my assignment was ill-advised on several levels.

The critical incident assignment did little to encourage students to examine the filters of familiar perceptions. Although that destination was what I had planned for the small group discussions of the autobiographical writings, that level of classroom conversation was never reached. According to structurally minded multicultural educators, part of the problem of having students critically examine their own experience is that students and teacher are, to a certain extent, caught in the circle of their own sociocultural and historical horizons. The clichés of hegemony that multicultural education is meant to uncover limit its interpretive force. Multicultural educators Hidalgo (1993); Nieto (2004); and Sleeter (1993) all see students, particularly white students, as trapped in the curriculum of the status quo that structures their own lives. Sleeter (1993) states:

Given the racial and class organization of American society, there is only so much people can “see.” Positions they occupy in these structures limit the range of their thinking. The situation places barriers on their imaginations and restricts the possibilities of their vision. (p. 168)

I agree with Sleeter that our position in the midst of social structures can limit our thinking. However, it also stands to delimit it: our position between the horizons of our

own interpretive prejudice is what makes learning possible. Knowledge is constituted by the interaction of difference.

My assignment framed difference—which students often framed almost exclusively in terms of racial difference—as a critical incident rather than a critical factor in knowing. This kind of framing also amplified the fear of racial difference my students and I frequently exhibited in subtle and not-so-subtle ways while I encouraged them to construct their narrative as working through and overcoming racial difference. Relationships of self and other were distanced as critical and somewhat isolated occasions of difference. Any intimacy across difference was pushed away and seen as only meaningful in terms of future practice. Within these familiar patterns of student stories, however, a strange undercurrent seemed to be pulling students “somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to” (Miller, 2005, p. 54). Or at least, in the surface context of multicultural education, we could not get there easily.

This pull might be better described as the push-pull of the psychosocial dynamics among black masculinities and white femininities as they exist in relation to desire and knowledge, particularly in the South. In the classroom, this gendered and racialized dance of self and other became a powerful hidden curriculum, one through which my students countered the weight of the formal multicultural curriculum I was trying to lead them through. According to Sleeter (1993), educators who try to teach white people about racism “often experience tenacious resistance” (p. 158). Likewise, my white female students, who had their own lessons to teach about the relationship among gender, race, and knowledge in the broader curriculum of culture in South Louisiana, experienced a powerful resistance in the form of the formal multicultural curriculum. As Britzman

(1993) notes regarding multicultural education, mainstream orientations rarely address “how knowledge of social differences might rearrange and bother the identities of the knower. The question of how knowledge of identities and cultures is produced, encountered, and dismissed in classrooms homogeneous and heterogeneous is completely ignored” (p. 189). In what follows, I pay attention to the paradoxical curricular force of difference put in play by my white female students, who were bothered by multicultural education, and who bothered the curriculum with their own hidden curriculum of intimately related fear and desire.

### **Black Masculinity as a Landscape of Difference**

My students’ multicultural curriculum might be considered a controversial one, at least in places like the one from which I write, where intimacies among white femininities and African American masculinities is still constricted by narratives of patriarchal racism. By exploring my experience of a multicultural curriculum of desire constructed by my students, I hope to uncover local “controversies of how any knowledge—including multicultural—is constructed, mediated, governed, and implicated in forms of social regulation and normalization” (Britzman, 1993, p. 189). I restrict my discussion below to localized controversies related to specific forms of regulation that my students called upon to mediate curricular intimacy among self and other, although such controversy is familiar outside the particularities of multicultural education. Looking at how my students call forth patriarchy to regulate their desire for difference may be relevant to more general discussions of how students use curriculum to regulate epistemological intimacy between the knower and the known—the self as the knower and the other embodied as the unknown.



According to Paley (2000) in *White Teacher*, the curriculum between white female teachers and African American masculinity remains particularly “uneasy” in the context of education influenced by the “fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations, which have become a carefully hidden part of every one of us” (p. xx). My students often expressed this uneasiness, usually resisting with some adamancy any formal curricular effort to address difference, especially racial difference. “Fears and prejudices, apprehensions and expectations” concerning black masculinity, however, refused to stay hidden. For ten semesters I have asked students to create multicultural lesson plans. During that time only three white students voluntarily produced lesson plans featuring an African American man other than Martin Luther King. Students rolled their eyes and remained silent during discussions about the overrepresentation of African American boys marked for special education.

Still, black masculinity crept into our curriculum in ambivalent yet powerful ways. Sleeter (1993) observes that “education about race conflicts with many white teachers’ strategies of denial, compounding the psychological energy they must expend to continue being ‘blind’ to color” (p. 162). On one level, this observation certainly seems to be true: several African American students and many white students entered and left my course professing color blindness. On another level, the psychological energy expended resisting difference that Sleeter (1993) describes was undone by a strange hidden curriculum of ambivalent desire for difference that inhabited a familiar narrative form.

In the critical incident assignment I describe above, and in subsequent assignments, the white students often employed black masculinity to embody difference.

In critical incident narratives, black masculinity was often used as the setting for students' stories; nearly half those stories were set in what Rippy (1999) describes as symbolically black male arenas, such as basketball courts, football games, or dances. Students seemed to use such sites, much like Rippy (1999) describes in relationship to the settings of anti-miscegenation films of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as “exotic and dark landscapes which serve as scenery to highlight whiteness” (p. 99). However, my students also used such sites to articulate difference.

This thematic was intensified during the two semesters my course took place at a predominately African American inner-city middle school. My department's intent in locating my course in this setting was never explicitly articulated to me, nor did I offer much in the way of explanation to my students. I surmise that the relocation of EDCI 2400 from the ivory towers of the university to the halls of McKinley Middle School was an effort to familiarize privately educated white students with what was, to them, a strange environment of public schooling. Instead, McKinley served mostly as an “exotic and dark landscape” upon which students projected their fears and desires regarding racial difference (Rippy, 1999, p. 99). This was replayed in student writing that used blackness as a landscape to interpret racialized difference.

Students often used black masculinity as a trope of difference. The field experience logs that my students—nearly all of whom were privately educated—used to document observations (imaginings?) at inner-city schools often focused exclusively on African American male children. African American boys became emblematic of the difference between inner-city schools and my students' schooling experiences. Public schools in general seemed to be personified in student discussion and writing as black,

male, and threatening. When students observed classes at predominately white schools, their gaze often fell on the black male minority and their relationship with white female teachers. Once again, blackness was used as a background for discussions of whiteness, and as a trope of difference.

Black masculinity became a trope of difference foreshadowing the thematic climax of most students' autobiographical work, which told of difference overcome by colorblindness. I am called to wonder how these gendered and racialized tales also hearken to white female students' fear/desire of being overcome by difference. According to hooks (1993), teachers' resistance to multicultural practice "is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained" (p. 93). On the surface, students' narratives denied difference, merely reproducing a "hierarchy where blackness remains outside or 'other' and Whiteness remains in the center" (Paulin, 2002, p. 127). Yet their persistent use of racial difference as a rhetorical device demonstrates a curious passion for it, or at least a curiosity for the body they use to personify difference.

### **A Curious Curriculum of Difference**

Curiosity about black masculinity does not necessarily lead to a more egalitarian attitude among white women, although it does act as a curricular force, one that some white female students employed in ambivalent ways to indulge their curiosity and fears about racial difference embodied by black masculinity. In this section, I discuss the ambivalence with which one class of preservice teachers brought black masculinity into our multicultural curriculum, via an assignment in which students were to identify and explore a multicultural site or event. Our class was held in a small windowless classroom

at McKinley Middle School on the first semester of our curriculum of culture assignment. The room had no bulletin boards or overhead projectors—not even chalk. It was only my 16 students and me—all female and all white—sitting in a small circle twice a week and talking. It felt so intimate.

Operating from Nieto's (2004) reminder that being a multicultural educator takes more than good intentions but also knowledge, I wanted students to examine sites outside of the formal classroom where cultural knowledge is represented, produced, taught, performed, and even transformed. Students were to choose a place or event such as a museum or festival that was designed to teach the public about culture. Working in groups, students visited these sites as locales of multicultural education, gathered data, then reported back to the class with an analysis of the curriculum that addressed the following questions:

*What is being taught? More specifically, what is being taught about culture/s in the broad sense? Which cultures are being represented and how? What are the strengths and weaknesses (stereotypes, essentialism, romanticism) of this representation? Taking notice of conspicuous absences, who or what aspects of culture are excluded or underplayed? To what extent does the curriculum of the event/site reflect the diversity (age, ethnicity, race, gender, social class) of the social context in which it takes place? Are there any discrepancies between the articulated aims of the event/site and its curriculum? Might there be a hidden curriculum?*

I also asked my students to discuss how their site might be beneficial to multicultural educators by addressing the following questions:

*How might this site/event be valuable to your teaching? Could you/would you take a class to a similar event? Why or why not? In terms of pedagogy and curriculum, did you learn anything that you could use in the classroom? Did the event/site introduce you to ideas, resources, or people or that could be assets to a multicultural educator? What issues concerning multicultural education does this site highlight?*

Given a choice of any event or place in the state of Louisiana, half my students (two groups) chose to attend the Angola Prison Rodeo, while the other half (divided into two more groups) chose to explore Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana. Neither was on the list of sites and events I had offered, and I was initially irritated when students informed me of their plans. Their choices seemed to violate the spirit of the assignment and the entire multicultural curriculum in general. Stranger still, their choices also felt like a violation of intimacy between us. While prison rodeos and antebellum plantations arguably offer a curriculum of culture deserving critical examination, I did not get the sense that critical analysis was my students' intent. And I was a bit flummoxed as to how students, per the second requirement of the assignment, might demonstrate that the Angola rodeo might have something educative to offer elementary students. During eight semesters of conversations about racism, prejudice, and oppression in classrooms filled primarily with white female students (and their passionate ideas about issues of race and power), I have often had to take a deep breath in response to comments. That I can take a deep breath and stand back in the face of what sometimes seems like blatant racism is more a function of white privilege than reflective pedagogy. I am ambivalent about the distance such privilege provides, although I sometimes use it in

order to keep the conversation of multicultural education going—to maintain a semblance of intimacy.

There are many ways to make meaning out of my students' choices. I don't attempt to explain why they chose sites evoking violent histories against African American people. I asked them about it, although the question was met with socially cultivated innocence. These locales of racist violence, said my students, were important sites to Southern history and offered an important curriculum of local culture. Plus, they pointed out, both the rodeo and plantation offer activities for the entire family. According to Najmi and Srikanh (2003), this is a familiar ploy: "White women give racism a veneer of innocence and of family values; in doing so they invest themselves with a vulnerability that has easily been deployed to oppress men and women of color" (p. 17). The specific complexities these sites represent individually, or the specificities of how these sites might be historically and socially linked, certainly exceed the scope of this writing. I do want to suggest, however, that my students' choice of sites for multicultural education seemed less than innocent on multiple levels. This impression reveals as much about the ambivalent desire of the white Delilah teacher as it does of her students' ambivalent desire.

It is useful to examine the role of desire for difference and the fear of difference my students' choices represent. In doing so, I do not want to romanticize racism: no reading of my students' decision to study the Angola rodeo as an educative event can deconstruct the racist conceptions of blackness inherent in that decision, nor can it rehabilitate their prejudice. Nevertheless, it does represent a curricular choice, providing an educative site for exploring the play of forces such as difference, desire, and fear

among the rigid racial and gender hierarchies at work in my student's lives, in my life, and thus in the multicultural curriculum we share. Our curriculum, like all curriculum, can be understood as a course "overburdened with meanings one may not choose but, nonetheless, must confront and transform" (Britzman, 1993, p. 189). In selecting the rodeo and the plantation as sites for multicultural education, my students made an interesting curricular detour, one that may be seen to reveal an ambivalent desire to engage with racial otherness embodied by black masculinity, yet mixed with an almost aggressive fear of such engagement. The Angola rodeo is a strange choice, although not necessarily a surprising one, for a group of young women who are part of an all-white female class that on the surface often seemed to exhibit what Fanon (1967) terms "negrophobia" (p. 156). Similarly, the plantation as an embodiment of the historical Southern horror of slavery is one that my students diligently avoided in the formal curriculum. Given curricular choices, my white students rarely picked books or themes for study that include any mention of African American history, and they are particularly shy about the topic of slavery. On the surface, these students often demonstrated a near narcissistic refusal to engage with African American history or culture in any way, frequently relegating racial otherness to "irrelevant spaces" (Britzman, 1993, p. 192). In choosing to examine Angola and Rosedown, however, these students drew the black male body into our curriculum, emphasizing its relevance in ways both strange and curiously familiar. I say familiar because the choice of plantation and rodeo as curricular sites conjures up colonialist constructions of the black body as the site, for white people, of both fear and fantasy.

The black body, as Dixon Gottschild (2003) writes,

has served as the screen upon which white fears and fantasies have been projected. It is the Self-versus-Other syndrome of colonialist discourse at work. Attract. Repel. Attract. Repel. Underneath the critique of the black body lurks sexual innuendo and physical danger. The geography of these desires and hatreds has been charted as one dimension of the long history of violence against black people: slavery, lynchings, chain gangs, rape, and more. (pp. 41-42)

My students' interpretation of sites that commemorate and perpetuate the history of systemic racist violence as educative can be seen to reflect the familiar pattern of fear and desire that Dixon Gottschild describes, and which I discuss in relation to white Delilahs. In fact, I will suggest that the students I write about here might also be considered white Delilahs in light of how they wrote themselves into a multicultural curriculum of desire for difference and its betrayal via the plantation and prison rodeo. Like me and the other white Delilahs dancing through this dissertation, these students positioned themselves in the way of a curriculum where a complicated notion of otherness bodied forth and enmeshed them. My students' choices reflect a similarly strange curricular intimacy of fear and desire moving together in tense and perhaps disingenuous opposition.

As I describe above, the ways my students brought black masculinity into the curriculum might be read as a trope of difference. The black male body became, in a sense, a screen upon which they projected their fears and fantasies about difference. This was particularly evident in my students' presentations on the curriculum of the Angola



rodeo. Rather than answer questions about what it had to teach about culture, or offer details about the way the rodeo itself was a cultural performance, the students recounted in impressionistic detail the experience of being at the prison. Specifically, they talked mainly about the experience of being physically close to prisoners and what it felt like to be “watched by criminals.” This was coupled with a discussion of the discontinuity of Angola’s black cowboys. Many of my students remarked that they had never seen “black cowboys”: African American men dressed in Western clothing or engaged in rodeo events. While I usually try not to intervene in student presentations or the discussions that follow, I could not help but remind them, several times, that most of the participants were in fact not experienced rodeo riders or cowboys. Rather, they were prisoners with very little rodeo training, whose physical vulnerability provided public spectacle.

In listening to my students’ presentations, it seemed that it was the visible difference of African American prisoner bodies, not the rodeo bulls, that represented the threat of danger. The gaze of black prisoners who served at the rodeo was perceived as both suggestion and threat. Difference became danger, as prisoner bodies came “dangerously close” to the bodies of my students. Black prisoner cowboy bodies became eroticized as the familiar trope of white masculinity was rendered strangely exotic by its reconfiguration of blackness. In student discussions, the black bodies of the Angola rodeo became a metaphor for a thematic of visible racial difference linked to both fear and desire. The discussion surrounding the Angola rodeo represented a mingling of powerful curricular forces of fear and desire moving together in sexual innuendo.

Johnson (1956) describes the force of racialized visible difference:

A situation which combines the forbidden and unknown close at hand could not do less than create a magnified lure. . . . It is possible that Dame nature never kicks up her heels in such ecstatic abandon as when she has succeeds in bringing together a fair woman and a dark man together; and vice versa. (p. 390)

The curricular sense my students made of the Angola rodeo can be read as an “intimate mixture of extremes” (Britzman, 1998): the fear of the forbidden and the power of its allure.

Sexual innuendo and the theme of interracial intimacy permeated both presentations about the rodeo. During the first presentation, one student stopped talking about the rodeo all together. After briefly introducing the visual novelty of black cowboys, it was as if she was simply overcome. Instead of getting back on task, the student launched into a remembrance of once seeing a black athlete on television and commenting to her mother: “I think he’s hot,” to which her mother replied: “You better not let your father hear you say that.” This seemed like a non sequiter to me, although not to my students. The presentation was then derailed by a passionate discussion of the various threats class members’ fathers had made to them about “messing with” interracial desire. This discussion of desire and concomitant aggression calls forth the betrayal of Wells’s white Delilahs and the historical moment of lynching. In that moment, our curriculum called forth a historical psychosexual dynamic between black masculinity, white femininity, and white patriarchal authority recast in the historical moment of our class. Enthralled, I began to experience rapid heartbeat: I was nervous about where the discussion was going but did not want it to stop.

During the question and answer section, audience members asked each of the presenters if they had “ever dated a black guy.” This was a strange discursive rupture for a class that still very much adhered to what Oliver (2002) describes as “the strongest American taboos: sexual liaisons between black men and white women” (p. 148). (I would argue, however, that sexual liaisons between white women and black women are an equally strong, if not stronger, taboo.) None of my students by their own account had ever dated an African American man, although many of their friends reportedly had.

The second group of presenters began with a thick description of walking a long narrow path past a gauntlet of black prisoners who whistled and cajoled, trying to draw the students in and make conversation. These students’ narrative of their arrival at the rodeo was anxious, edgy, and vaguely sexual in a way that resembled the shadowy rhetorical fashion shared by Gothic romance and horror. As with the first presentation, the class listened to the presenters in an uncharacteristically rapt manner: they were fascinated, as I was. As Rippey (1999) notes, “the white observer, like the male voyeur, derives both pleasure and anxiety from visible difference” (p. 99). This portrait of the Angola rodeo was an odd mixture of pleasure and anxiety with very little of the overt sexual innuendo that characterized the first presentation, yet a sense of sexuality still saturated this narrative of my students’ encounter with racial difference. As Hernton (1965/1988) writes, “all race relations tend to be, however subtle, sex relations” (p. 6).

The second Angola presentation was indeed a curricular locale of mixed pleasure. Students juxtaposed this strangely Gothic portrayal of visible difference with a detailed analysis of the prisoner craft show, an aspect of the event deemed pedagogically promising in that P-12 students potentially stood to learn something about culture from

prisoner crafts. Indeed, compared to the rest of discussion, this aspect seemed perversely wholesome. However, in this presentation the question and answer section also spun quickly off track (or on track, given the curriculum of intimacy among self and other as conceptualized by my students), veering toward questions about the racial identification of a Baton Rouge serial killer police were seeking. The class debated whether or not this person was black or white, using reported crime scene clues and racial stereotypes to support their conjecture. This led, how exactly I do not know, to a discussion of enforced racial segregation of school dances. One student complained that her school still held separate proms for African American and white students. Her classmates, most of whom attended all white schools, ironically agreed that such segregation was very old fashioned.

In both Angola presentations, the rodeo served as a safe site where students could sculpt what in our local social context was a risky curriculum of self and other out of the thematic trinity of desire, fear, and difference. Whatley (1993) notes:

In Western white culture, there has long been a fascination with the Black as “other.” In a sexual context, this “otherness” is seen as unbridled sexuality, free from the constraints of society (p. 92). . . . When “exotic” sexuality is distant from Western culture or under control, it may be tolerated, but, when there is no longer geographic separation, it may be viewed as threatening. (p. 95)

The Angola rodeo as a curricular site provided for fantasies of an unbridled sexuality safely sequestered. This locale allowed students to draw otherness in close, while still distancing themselves from difference.

According to Whatley (1993), “the images of Blacks appearing in textbooks may reflect a great deal both about the way Blacks are perceived by the majority white population and about how this dominant group might consciously or unconsciously want them to be” (p. 89). In a similar vein, the various ways my students brought black masculinity into our curriculum were connected to stereotypes that criminalize and sexualize black masculinity. My students’ curriculum of self and other reveals the dance of fear and desire inherent in the allure of perceived racial difference as a “combination of pleasure and danger” (hooks, 1992, p. 26). At the same time, these students’ curriculum reflects how a system of white patriarchal dominance consciously or unconsciously wants white femininity to behave. Like white Delilahs, my students’ dance of difference takes place between pleasure and prohibition mediated by white men. I suggest that students’ choice of the prison and plantation as a curricular context from which to explore their desire/ fear of difference, embodied by black masculinity, reveals the force of this mediation. I go further by saying that my students often appeal to this force (mediation by white men) in order to counter the force of epistemological difference with which multicultural curriculum threatens to confront them.

The Angola rodeo and antebellum plantations can be seen as sites of cultural encounter—encounters often racialized as black and white in the polarized social imagination of my students, most of whom were from the South. Both sites are arguably less segregated (quantitatively not qualitatively) than the institutions where the majority of my students were educated. These students’ autobiographical and autoethnographic work frequently emphasized how they had been sheltered from racial and ethnic difference by their parents’ decision to send them to private school. Most students

seemed to recognize an academic advantage in this choice, while suggesting that their lack of exposure to difference made them somehow less capable of dealing with racial and ethnic differences as a teacher. Hidalgo (1993) describes a similar narrative she experienced while providing multicultural education workshops to teachers:

On occasion, introspective teachers communicate a sense of disadvantage from our own schooling. We sense that past knowledge presented to us has offered only a partial picture of our multicultural heritage. We have received only a partial picture of our multicultural heritage. We have received only a partial education because our schooling was monocultural in nature. . . . We realize that exposure to alternative interpretations of reality may dispel the sense of superiority implicitly taught to mainstream citizenry and may better promote egalitarian social relations between people from different backgrounds. (p. 103)

Perhaps Hidalgo's students are more introspective than mine, or perhaps she is less cynical than I am sometimes about the performative capacity of multicultural education students. The disadvantage of monocultural education, as my students see it, has more to do with controlling racial difference than promoting egalitarian relation or understanding. As a result, it is little surprise that students might choose to study sites of multicultural contact defined, like school, by technocratic and disciplinary force. The curriculum of the plantation and the prison features a blackness at least symbolically contained within a technical rationality of white patriarchal systems of bodily discipline and mastery. While the prison rodeo might be seen as a breakdown (a break from the disciplinary monotony of prison life), a curriculum of bodily control is at play nonetheless. The plantation might also be understood as a site emblematic of white

males' mastery of difference as embodied by black bodies, and also their mastery of white female bodies.

In student discussions as well as in the white Southern popular imagination, antebellum plantations are often viewed romantically, ala *Gone with the Wind*, as emblems of Southern culture. I expected student discussion of the curriculum of culture embodied by Rosedown to be a similarly romantic portrayal of Southern nostalgia. Instead, they focused on the plantation in terms of economic function and the physical torture of slaves. Students' presentations departed from the "big house" almost entirely, focusing their discussion of Rosedown's curriculum in terms of what it might or might not teach students about slave life. The students did a fair job critiquing the plantation's omission of historical artifacts depicting slave life, although their own discussions focused almost entirely on male slaves, and what the plantation could teach students about the physical punishment slaves endured at the hands of white masters. On one hand, I was pleased that students were not recanting the familiar Southern myth that slaves were well treated. However, it was still disturbing to me. While they did not openly address interracial desire as in discussions of the Angola rodeo, there was still an almost prurient focus on black male bodies. The emphasis on punishment meted out by Rosedown's white masters worked in alarming ways with the undercurrent of white female desire for black masculinity that drove the Angola presentations.

On one level, it was as if by entertaining black masculinity in the intimacy of our all white female curriculum, *some body* needed to be punished. Historically, as Wells (1892) points out, and other scholars (Oliver, 2002; Pinar, 2001; and Rippy, 1999) remind us, liaisons between white women and black men often ended with the black male

body being victimized. On another level, it was as if my students were regulating their own desire by bringing in white patriarchal figures of plantation masters, thereby disciplining difference. Students' presentations about plantation brutality and their subsequent discussions worked to defer desire of the black male body to white patriarchal mastery of black masculinity. This represented a larger pattern going beyond the curriculum of culture assignment and penetrating the multicultural curriculum in multiple ways.

It occurs to me that over my entire eight-semester course teaching EDCI 2400, the dance of self and other embodied by multicultural curriculum has been under the "intense continuous supervision" of grandfathers, fathers, husbands, boyfriends, brothers, sons, and other patriarchal figures (Foucault, 1977, p. 174). Patriarchy is of course embodied within the formal curriculum represented by male theorists, influential theories of knowledge, the division of school subjects, and policy makers. Yet just as students flirt with the intimate extremes of fear/desire for difference by inviting black masculinity into the hidden curriculum, they also submit this desire to know across difference to regulation, by evoking the presence of white patriarchal figures such as the plantation master. Or they will bring up their fathers, as during the discussion following the Angola rodeo presentation, in which students made sure to sanction desire by bringing in the anticipated paternal consequences of interracial dating. Just as interracial desire, as projected by my students onto the bodies of Angola's black cowboys, was contained by its context within the disciplinary force of the prison, their discussions of interracial desire was made possible only through the mediating force of white patriarchal sanction—often represented in these conversations by "Daddy."



As scholars such as Britzman (1993), Edgerton (1996), hooks (1993), and Nieto (2004) note, multicultural curriculum often engages white students with otherness in ways they experience as strange and uncomfortable. The epistemological pluralism proffered by a multicultural curriculum represents “shifts in paradigms that seem to them completely and utterly threatening” (hooks, 1993, p. 95). In the hidden curriculum that my students offered, the threat and allure of racial difference represented by black masculinity nearly always took place within the context of the internalized control of white patriarchal systems of institutionalized racism—systems whose intent is mastering, not understanding, difference. My students often wedged into our curriculum clichés of family values clothed in autobiographical discussions of the authority of family. This was particularly true in discussing issues of sexuality. When talking about their role as future teachers in leading antiracist, antisexist, and antiheterosexist classrooms, a familiar refrain was that “those are family, not educational issues.” Students also gave tremendous weight to the familiar intimacy of family. Despite the fact that many of my students no doubt came from families that are not close, in their discussions and writing they evoked the family as a nest of self: a safe haven from difference. This was particularly evident in an autoethnographic assignment in which students were to perform, via some sort of aesthetic means, an aspect of their cultural identity. Worried that they would use the assignment as an opportunity to romanticize genealogy, I warned that in this assignment culture was to be conceptualized as more and bigger than their families. Nonetheless, the majority of their performances conceptualized culture in exclusively familial terms: collages and PowerPoint family albums; poems, songs, sculptures, and films, all focusing on the closeness of their families. The intimacy among self and other that the

autoethnographic gaze promotes was countered in this assignment by tender tributes to an intimacy exclusively familial. The weight my students gave to a rather rigidly defined notion of family and its semblance of intimacy, versus the weight they gave to the touch of culture or education, worked in subtle ways to counter the possibility of intimacy across difference toward which multicultural education's pluralisms point.

My students kept their families close to our curriculum. Similar to the white Delilahs of zydeco, as my students matriculate through our multicultural curriculum, it is as if their moves are monitored by a patriarchal network—a family—seeing to it that their good daughters (soon to be good teachers) maintain a (dis)respectful epistemological distance between self and other. According to Najmi and Srikanh (2003), “becoming a ‘good girl’ within the context of white family relations often takes on a racialized dimension, as what it means to be ‘good’ is frequently bound up with issues of race, loyalty, and solidarity” (p. 16). Like the white Delilahs of zydeco, dancing with difference has consequences: “New ways of knowing may create estrangement where there was none” (hooks, 1993, p. 96). Multicultural education involves the sense of coming close, touching, and being touched by the worlds of perceived others, although often this sort of intimacy simultaneously means distance. Hall (1999) frames her own experience of the semblance of distance she experienced in relation to a multicultural curriculum in terms of betrayal: “In these moments I betray my family in my refusal to be a good southern white woman. In those moments histories of fear, rage, shame, and pain mark the distance between me and my father” (p. 32). In a curriculum at least partly of our own making, my white students and I find ourselves caught in a double bind in which

even the illusion—the semblance—of the strange intimacy between self and other, itself a multicultural curriculum, risks becoming a betrayal of intimacy.

In her depiction of the white Delilah, Ida B. Wells skims over the double nature of their act of betrayal. Before her white Delilahs disavow desire for black masculinity, they succumb to it: they pursue knowledge of black masculinity. Like the symbolic zydeco dance of their descendant white Delilahs, they surrender to a desire to know. Instead of thrusting the intimacy of knowledge away, white Delilahs bring it in close, making it part of themselves. Sex and learning both involve potent semblances of intimacy among self and other. Such semblances are, of course, intimately related to knowledge. As Britzman (1998) observes, “the desire to know within the work of learning, is, after all a symptom of our sexuality (p. 77). On one hand, to make knowledge of the other part of the self’s body of knowledge, as Maxine Greene (1993) writes, is to “open up our experience (and yes, our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds, is to extend and deepen what we think we think of as community” (p. 190). Such extension defines the ideological movement of multicultural education: the simultaneous reaching out to “engage with the incommensurable otherness of the ‘Other’” while opening inward (Sparkes, 2002, p. 223). Opening inward means to risk being overcome by otherness while working to “overcome the foreignness that we have so often made of the other . . . by first finding it within ourselves” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 264).

On the other hand, this opening up disrupts the surface equilibrium—the semblance of difference, racial and otherwise—maintained by the distance of physical and epistemological segregation. Attempts at inclusion (the tenderness of bringing in the knowledge of others and otherness) compromises the semblance of intimacy that is also

at work in acts of exclusion, both curricular and extracurricular. After all, the very notion of the canon as the fantasy of a shared body of knowledge relies on the semblance of intimacy. Much like the close familial relationships about which my students often dream out loud, the canon is a tightly knit family, both intimate and authoritative, kept intact only by distancing the knowledge of others. Epistemological pluralism strains such intimacy and is therefore suspicious. Indeed, the tension with regard to multiculturalism, writes Greene (1993), “may be partially due to the suspicion that we have often defined ourselves against some unknown, some darkness, some ‘otherness’ we chose to thrust away, to master, not to understand” (p. 190).

The desire for epistemological miscegenation—as represented in my class by my students’ ambivalent desire for black masculinity—is suspicious in that it is always already threatening to take students, not by its own force, but by the familiar force of the desire to know. What Britzman (1998) describes as the “passion for ignorance” becomes a form of disciplining desire and mastering bodies of knowledge. Like the authority my students evoked in discussions of their families, canonical authority is raced and gendered. To dance with difference via the epistemological pluralism of multicultural education is to betray the intimacy of exclusion and the authority of the father. It is a betrayal of the very proximity through which white femininity has been made knowable.

The deep ambivalence with which students brought their desire for difference close, and the passion with which they then thrust otherness away in order to re/enact a historical psychosocial betrayal onto our multicultural curriculum, points to the curricular force of the psychosocial underpinnings framing intimate knowledge of difference as betrayal. Further, this dynamic of self and other is not confined to the multicultural

education of preservice teachers: it leaks out into another sort of curricular betrayal intimately related to the multicultural education of students. Like the curricular dance I describe above, this is a psychosocial dance of self and other embodied by white femininity and black masculinity. It is a dance of interracial intimacy that has something to do with sex and everything to do with education.

### **White Devil Ladies**

As I have described, for white Delilah zydeco dancers and teacher education students, black masculinity represents a curious mixture of the pleasure and prohibition of knowledge concerning racialized difference as it circulates in a context of white patriarchal power. Of course, as Oliver (2002) states, “this fascination with the sexuality of the ‘other’ is not a one-way street” (p. 156). White femininity, as representative of racial difference, represents a tangle of desire, knowledge, prohibition, and freedom as well. According to Tate (1987), white female bodies embody

the means by which black people in general were penalized for exercising freedom of choice, in that the penalty was translated into the accusation of rape and the sentence was death. The symbolic linkage between white women and freedom, therefore, finds its origins in hundreds of years of southern race relations. (p. 166)

As the above quote illustrates, the symbolic linkage between white women and freedom is interconnected with the linkage between white women and bondage. According to Rippy (1999), the body of the white woman represents the “lure of liberation and the threat of madness” (p. 50). White women embody the threat of physical and psychic danger.

Ida B. Wells (1892/1993) calls them “white Delilahs,” these temptresses who deploy their smiles to lure black men into self destructive unions). In his play *Mad Heart*, Amiri Baraka (1969) calls us “Devil Ladies.” According to Oliver, 2002 W.E.B. DuBois compared us to “the American hog in its native simplicity” (p. 153). We are the “silk broads” who stalk pimp Iceberg Slim (1971) in his autobiography and the “maddening blonde” that agitates Frantz Fanon (1967, p. 63). Although we have different names, each of these white female figures embodies the temptation of intimacy with whiteness and the threat of psychic dissolution that such intimacy poses in terms of black masculinity. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, intimacy with a white woman results in Malcolm X’s imprisonment. He is sentenced for burglary, and Malcolm X’s enduring hunch was that it was his relationship with the white Sophia that lands him in jail. Sexual intimacy with “negro-happy” white women symbolize the trap of whiteness, as Malcolm X’s lawyer repeats the societal refrain: “You had no business with white girls!” (MX, 1965, p. 173). Paradoxically, Sophia also represents salvation—or wisdom perhaps—as Malcolm X credits his jail sentence with saving him from the gangsterdom of street life and leading him toward his conversion to Islam. Yet throughout the story, white women symbolize inauthenticity and intimacy degraded. The white women who dance with black men and lure them into bed, according to Malcolm X (1965), “had no more respect for those negroes than white men have had for the Negro women they have been using since slavery times. And, in turn, Negroes have no respect for the whites they get in bed with” (p. 156).

According to Oliver (2002), white women represent a similarly dehumanizing intimacy in the work of Richard Wright. For example, in *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*:

*An Autobiographical Sketch*, Wright (1968) describes “snowy-skinned” blonde prostitutes for whom the black men with whom they flirted (Wright included) “were regarded as nothing” (p. 295). In *Native Son*, the carelessness of “white women who entrap black men in dangerous, forbidden relationships” is embodied in the character Mary Dalton, who suffers a dehumanizing death and dismemberment (Oliver, 2002, p. 155). Yet for Malcolm X, the semblance of intimacy with white women poses physical and psychic danger, yes, but also some degree of salvation.

This symbolic mixture of promise and psychic danger is also at work in Fanon’s discussion of white women in *Black Skin White Masks*. According to Rippy (1999), for Fanon

the White woman’s body acts as physical manifestation of forbidden civilization, but attaining her also threatens psychic dissolution even at the moment of liberation, as Fanon (1967) relates the case of a “coal-black negro, in a Paris bed with a maddening blonde.” (p. 50)

Similarly, the soul-killing blonde woman figures prominently in the plays of Amiri Baraka. For example, in *Madheart*, Baraka’s (1969) white “Devil Lady” tempts black masculinity with her body, but it is her offering of a white mask and its symbolic capacity to erase blackness that is the real temptation. It is the emulation of whiteness, represented by the tempting blonde Devil Lady, that must be overcome. There is a similar temptation embodied by a white female character in Baraka’s play *The Dutchman* (1964/2000). The apple-eating, note-taking, redheaded Lula offers something more (or less) than an apple or her body to Clay, the black male protagonist, when she plunges her

hand into the bag of apples on her lap, pulls one out, and provocatively asks: “You want this?” (p. 81).

The white teacher in James Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son* represents a similar offering. In Baldwin’s autobiographical essay, the threat of an ambivalent intimacy with whiteness, and its concomitant knowledge, is embodied by the young white schoolteacher who encouraged a 10-year-old Baldwin to pursue reading and writing. She also paid him extracurricular attention, mentoring him for five years. During the entirety of this tutelage, according to Baldwin (1983), his father “never trusted her and was always trying to surprise in her open, Midwestern face the genuine, cunningly hidden, and hideous motivation” (p. 155). In Baldwin’s anecdote, the teacher invites him to a play. While his father is generally skeptical about the value of events deemed cultural, he allows him to go. Baldwin (1983) writes:

Before the teacher came my father took me aside to ask *why* she was coming, what *interest* she could possibly have in our house, in a boy like me. I said I didn’t know, but I, too, suggested that it had something to do with education. And I understood that my father was waiting for me to say something—I didn’t quite know what; perhaps that I wanted his protection against the teacher and her “education.” (p. 91)

While not overtly sexual, Baldwin’s discussion of his father’s enigmatic concern about the white teacher’s attentiveness to his son alludes to the psychosocial dynamic between white femininity and black masculinity that strains intimate interracial exchanges of knowledge—including those that take place in the milieu of education. Baldwin’s tense



account of this encounter with his father hints at a salient, yet often silent, psychosocial dynamic at work in education.

In her analysis of this passage, Oliver (2002) writes that “the only interest that Baldwin’s father can accept as understandable from a white woman is sexual” (p. 155). On one hand, I agree with Oliver’s analysis: as I have asserted throughout this dissertation, the relationship between white femininity and black masculinity has been historically thoroughly sexualized. As Hernton (1965/1988) writes:

There is a sexual involvement, at once real and vicarious, connecting white and black people in America, that spans the history of this country from the era of slavery to the present, an involvement so immaculate and yet so perverse, so ethereal and yet so concrete, that all race relations tend to be, however subtle, sex relations. (p. 6)

Baldwin’s passage does seem to indicate that a subtle sex relation might be at work between him and his white teacher.

This powerful passage is saturated with the psychosexual tension surrounding the exchange of knowledge across psychosocial constructions of black masculinity and white femininity. In Baldwin’s passage, as in works by Baraka, Iceberg Slim, Malcolm X, Wright, and Fanon, the threat and promise that the potential for intimate knowledge of whiteness brings converges on the body of the white woman. But whereas Oliver (2002) senses that Baldwin’s father sees the threat posed to his son by intimacy with the white teacher as potentially perverse only in its relationship to carnal knowledge, I want to suggest that the suspicion Baldwin’s father demonstrates might reasonably be viewed as

also related to the untoward, yet tender, trap that education proper represents via the white teacher. He senses betrayal.

While it is perhaps an overstatement to assert that African American boys are betrayed by white female teachers, black masculinity has obviously been betrayed by the system of public schooling in the United States (Delpit, 1996; Murrell, 1993). Murrell (1993) describes the consequences of this betrayal in his forceful discussion of the inability of white female teachers to meet the academic, social, and developmental needs of black masculinity in school, writing that,

it is widely accepted and generally lamented that frighteningly large proportions of African American males are failing in school at every level from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In every large metropolitan school system across the nation, they are disproportionately expelled, suspended, and relegated to programs for learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and mentally retarded. They have dramatically lower grade point averages and rates of matriculation. (p. 231)

The academic failure of so many African American boys, as Murrell (1993) rightly sees it, is in part a failure of public schooling to fulfill its promise. It is a betrayal of the promise of progressive education.

For some African American boys, the achievement gap also represents a psychosocial sinkhole. As Murrell (1993) observes, the failure to support the academic development of these students also represents a broader threat to the development of African American masculinity. The threats of psychic dissolution and social disintegration that school poses for black masculinity, per Murrell (1993), sound

remarkably similar to those Baldwin, Baraka, Fanon, and Malcolm X confront in their works. Murrell (1993) describe this soul-killing psychosocial dynamic as

visceral fear of Black men and boys, a fear fueled by rampant rates of violence, joblessness, and crime among African American males, leading to teacher feelings that “culturally black” behaviors have to be suppressed and eliminated in African American boys before they “turn bad” and become “unteachable.”

(p. 242)

For Murrell (1993), this danger is racialized and gendered as white and female. Thus the betrayal of black masculinity to which Baldwin’s father alludes, and which Murrell (1993) illustrates, becomes directly embodied by white femininity: by the bodies of white teachers.

For Malcolm X and Fanon, white women represent the impossibility of authentic interracial intimacy in which black masculinity is not compromised. Likewise, Murrell (1993) views the intimacy of authentic education—real learning—as an impossibility among mainstream teachers whose ability to connect with African American boys is blocked by fear. Murrell (1993) writes:

Teachers from mainstream backgrounds simply have to overcome too much to be able to express the same degree of esteem, positive regard, and love for African American boys. . . . To establish the same degree of connectedness, teachers must overcome fear. (p. 241)

Murrell uses the term “teachers from mainstream backgrounds” as a sort of euphemism for white female teachers. In light of the ambivalent relationship with notions of black masculinity demonstrated by my white female multicultural education students, Murrell

(1993) does not take undue liberties in suggesting that white female teachers have many barriers to overcome in establishing and expressing intimacy with black male students.

Much like the dance of self and other that I write about in regard to white Delilahs, the dance of self and other that is schooling takes place within the context of an internalized control, which is linked to a white patriarchal system of institutionalized racism whose intent is mastering, not understanding, difference. The dance of self and other in the classroom, as experienced by African American boys in Murrell's (1993) description, seems similarly contained. According to Murrell (1993), education for African American boys is "based on rules of control: fueled by the visceral fear and discomfort many teachers have of expressions of 'blackness' in African American males, behavior is managed by attempts to suppress those expressions" (p. 238). Like the archetypal White Devil ladies in Baraka's plays, Murrell's mainstream teachers offer the fruit of knowledge, but only at a price: an aggressive reeducation of black masculinity in which racial identity must be driven underground.

Murrell's (1993) analysis of the role fear plays in constricting the educational intimacy among white teachers and their students deeply resonates with the fear my white multicultural education students and I sometimes exhibited in response to expressions of black masculinity. However, Murrell's analysis completely omits any discussion of the flip side of fear, which is desire. He seems to forget that in patriarchally governed social environments, like most schooling, expressions of white femininity (expressions of most difference, for that matter) are also aggressively driven underground. The educational betrayal of African American boys is, of course, bigger than their relationship with their teachers. As Murrell (1993) astutely points out, "clearly there is a combination of

political, economic, and sociological circumstances that contributes to the demise of educational success among African American males. But the desperateness of the educational problem has focused energy on an educational solution” (p. 231). Murrell (1993) is correct in that both desire and fear pose problems. However, these are also epistemological problems that neither education nor intimacy can do without. Yet as Britzman (1998) notes:

These are the conflicts—Eros and Thanatos, love and aggression—that education seems to place elsewhere. And then these forces seem to come back at education as interruptions, as unruly students, as irrelevant questions, and as controversial knowledge in need of containment. (p. 133)

The psychosocial relationship between black masculinity and white femininity, what Murrell (1993) calls “a subtle yet critically important factor in the desperate plight of Black boys in public schools,” is one that educational literature seems, for the most part, to place elsewhere (p. 235).

This chapter is not an attempt to solve the very real problems African American boys suffer from an education that fails to connect with them; or to justify their betrayal at the (snowy-skinned) hands (hearts) of an education that has to overcome too much to create even semblances of intimacy across difference. This chapter is, however, an effort to demonstrate that the tension between fear and desire at work in the dance of self and other that is education will not contain itself. This chapter is also an attempt to explore how this conflicted intimacy bodies forth and interrupts (or erupts in) the multicultural education curriculum of teacher education students, and how it distorts the schooling of African American masculinity. However, if multicultural curriculum (all curriculum,

really) can be interpreted as a dance that moves together and apart among the familiarity and strangeness of self and other, fear and desire, and intimacy and its betrayal, then does the conflicted intimacy of difference and its concomitant tension really interrupt understanding, or might it actually put it in motion? Might curriculum be explored as an embodied mode of relation, where the semblances of innocence often deployed by white Southern teacher education students and their teacher unveil themselves, and bodies of knowledge mobilized to reason through local questions, grapple with lived contradictions, and play with alternatives? What would it mean to envision curriculum as an embodied locale much like zydeco dancing, where the play of epistemological forces replaces technocratic force, and where students might experience the relative weight of desire, fear, and knowledge, the reciprocal touch of self and other, and the mysterious momentum of the semblance of intimacy? In what follows, I partner my experience with the multicultural curriculum described in this chapter with my autoethnographic experience as a white Delilah researcher learning how to zydeco dance, primarily from black men, in order to consider such questions.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Zydeco Dancing, White Delilahs, and the Semblance of Intimacy**

*Oh, what a potent elixir zydeco proved to be: a libidinous nectar, sipped with dogged and scrumptious regularity—* Rand, 2004, p. 109

*Dancers are notorious . . . for only wanting to dance. They only want to shake their butts—* Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002, p. 91

In this chapter, I examine semblances of intimacy in relation to the dance of self and other that is zydeco. From the embodied perspective of a white Delilah, I explore a dance where otherness bodied forth and I became enmeshed. The narrative that follows combines my own experiences with those of other white Delilahs in the context of historical narratives of interracial desire that locate white femininity between innocence and betrayal.

You will not find a set definition of what it means to be a white Delilah. Contrary to local, stereotypical constructions of white women who dance with black men, there is no “type” for me to report. Rather, I offer the term as an interpretive one, meant to describe how social constructions of white femininity are done and undone in a particular dance (zydeco) and in a particular place (Southwest Louisiana). I define white Delilahs in terms of dance proclivities that evoke social narratives concerning miscegenation and the rape myth and simultaneously put semblances of cross-racial intimacy into public play. This embodied exploration relies on the particularities of its local context, though it is also connected to other endeavors to examine white femininity. As Philibert (2002) notes, “important steps have been made, principally by feminist critics who have shifted their reflection from ‘the Other’ to ‘I’—the one who theorizes, gazes, and speaks—and have examined the construction of ‘whiteness’” (p. 208).

As Bailey (1999) warns: “Anger or discomfort with the costs of white privilege, white guilt, frustration with white intolerance, or just plain boredom with whiteness has led many whites down a bizarre path” (p. 89). I hope that “bizarre” in the case of this dissertation’s path is an overstatement. Miles Horton referred to education for social justice as a road or path we make by walking (Bell, 1991). I want to suggest that, for white Delilahs, zydeco dancing is a course toward cross-racial intimacy, mobilized by a semblance made possible by moving together in time across difference. Intimacy is a path, not toward mastery of difference, but toward understanding. For white Delilahs, intimacy across perceived otherness is a pattern made by dancing.

Zydeco is noted for its polyrhythmic sense. Similarly, it is polyvocal: zydeco is many dances, made up of a multiplicity of dancers all with their own stories. Each dance that takes place between two people is in fact its own intimate story. In this section, I use my experiences as a white Delilah to focus on one small but potent psychosocial dynamic in relation to the semblances of intimacy that circulate through zydeco dance as I experienced it.

This chapter serves as a step toward an understanding of the semblances of intimacy at work in literal dances of self and other, such as zydeco, but also in the more figurative dances of research and curriculum. Toward that end, the chapter begins with background information about the “kingdom” of zydeco. Next, I introduce zydeco’s white Delilahs and their paradoxical dance of intimacy in relation to social narratives, such as the rape myth, that constrict such intimacy. I then swing out to explore semblances of intimacy at play in zydeco.



## Zydeco

The term “zydeco” refers to a multiplicity of related phenomena. According to Ancelet (1996), “in South Louisiana, zydeco refers to dance styles as well as to the music associated with them. The meaning of the term has expanded (or survived) to refer also to the music, the musicians, the dance, and the entire social event” (p. 131). Zydeco is a verb: Do you zydeco? It is also a noun: I know zydeco. It is an elastic term that conflates place and event. Further, in dancing with zydeco musicians, dancers, and fans, I found zydeco to be a multiplex phenomenon deeply enmeshed in a broader constellation of historical, social, and cultural contexts and practices that reflect the hybridity from which zydeco emerged. Here I attempt to introduce zydeco dancing as embodied in terms of its highly—but not exclusively—local musical and cultural milieu.

According to Hazzard-Gordon (1990), “social dancing links African-Americans to their African past more strongly than any other aspect of their culture” (p. 3). Similarly, Dempsey (1996); Mattern (1997); and Tisserand (1998) link zydeco with other African American social dance forms stemming from slave adaptations of West African dances. Such adaptations often combine a basic series of steps and moves, such as “wringin’ and twistin’” (later to become the twist) and snake hips (the basis for ‘the jerk’), adapted from West African dances; imitated motions of slave work routine such as picking cotton; and movements encountered through interactions with European, American Indian, and Caribbean people (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990, p. 19). Like those dances, zydeco relies on a series of basic steps. As zydeco accordionist Geno Delafosse told me during a 2002 interview, “if you can take two steps to the left and two steps to the right, you can zydeco” (interview transcript). While making it out to be much simpler

than it is, Delafosse (2002) is right. Zydeco is a couples dance that overlaps with the simple two-step of its Cajun neighbors, though it moves in time with an arguably more complex, syncopated rhythm. Zydeco steps are done in a syncopated slow-quick-quick-slow-quick-quick pattern to an eight-beat count.

Zydeco is also a spatially economical dance. According to Dempsey (1996), this economy of movement can be tied to social and material constrictions: the forced dances in the tight quarters of middle-passage slave ships; the tight economic and social segregation that confined zydeco dancing to Creole of Color house dances; and today's crowded dance halls. All of these sociohistorical conditions, according to Dempsey (1996), "have kept zydeco dancers in place on the dance floor, rather than circling the room like Cajun dancers (p. 1). These tight spaces pulsating with zydeco's polyglot syncopation give rise to its characteristically "bouncy, vertical style with few turns" (Dempsey, 1996, p. 1). Further, such tight spaces give rise to the characteristic closeness that distinguishes zydeco from other two-steps. Addressing this distinction, Stivale (2003) writes that "it is the much closer, sometimes intimate, physical movements that can characterize the zydeco dance style" (p. 129). This closeness, along with zydeco's emphasis on the movements of the hip and buttocks, moves in tandem with its "open derivation from black culture" to construct zydeco's image as an overtly sexual dirty dance (Cohen Bull, 2001, p. 408). Donovan (2002) speaks to the apparent sexuality of the dance and racialized notions of sexuality when he describes zydeco as "a sultry, fecund music rooted in the Creole communities of southwest Louisiana" (p. 2). Much like the twist, zydeco is tied to local and larger stereotypical notions of black sexuality as wild, unbridled, and in opposition to the constraints of society; thus, its concomitant cultural

knowledge is often embodied as sexy, exciting, and wild (Banes and Szwed, 2002; Cohen Bull, 2001; De Frantz, 2002; Dixon Gottschild, 2003; George, 2002; Hazzard-Gordon, 1990). However, as Cohen Bull (2001) reminds, ways of moving “are not monolithic and static, nor is their relationship to social contexts always direct” (p. 412). Zydeco is also a relatively variable form of systematized movement that takes on the shape of the dancers who embody it. As Dempsey (1996) observed during his time in the field,

older dancers danced zydeco more subtly. Younger folks danced zydeco more conspicuously, sometimes adding moves such as hip-hop in the apart position, sometimes dropping their single held hand. One young couple gyrated with a flamboyant African style in the apart position. The hip-hop variations spun off from the “New Zydeco” style, where they stepped on every beat and embellished with small kicks. (p. 1)

Traditionally, Southwest Louisiana’s Creole of Color people learn such moves when they are children. It often begins early: in utero, in tandem with maternal moves; being bounced on familial knees in time to the music; or feeling the steps riding atop father’s feet. As Ancelet (1996) writes, “in Louisiana, zydeco dancing is usually a habit acquired at an early age. The right and wrong ways to move to music are learned and relearned over a lifetime of church dances, trail rides, and weekends in the clubs” (p. 136). Likewise, dancers transform this knowledge by appropriating from highly localized dance forms, such as the Lake Charles shuffle or the Cajun freeze, embellishments such as slides, brushes, taps, and spins. Dempsey (1996) describes one version of this transformation:

Traditional zydeco dancing is done subtly, smoothly and upright by couples in a closed position. But the “Boozoo Evolution” of the 1980s (named for Boozoo Chavis) made the dance bouncier, often open, bent-kneed, and lower to the ground. In the 1990s, the “Beau Jocque Revolution” added the flamboyant flavor of hip-hop. Zydeco dancing appears to be evolving from a couples dance towards individual free-style. (p. 2)

In addition to local influences like those mentioned above, zydeco dancing is touched by national and transnational forms such as the jitterbug, rumba, and salsa. The embodied knowledge of zydeco is transmitted across vital transnational and highly localized networks. Contemporarily, one can also learn to zydeco through videos, formalized classes at festivals, community centers, dancehalls, and universities across the United States and Europe. One can even learn zydeco in the Caribbean on one of several annual cruises that provide “seven straight days and nights dancing to live zydeco bands aboard an enormous luxury liner,” where “breathtaking ocean views and lonely deck chairs lie largely forsaken as hundreds of dancers groove and sweat in the Caribbean heat” (Donovan, 2002, p. 2). Like its musical aspect, zydeco the dance contains contested diasporic routes shot through with notions of cultural authenticity and innovation.

Similar to works by Austerlitz (1996); Daniel (1995); Dunham (1947); Jennings (2004); Limon (1994); Malone (1996); Mendoza (2000); Savigliano (1995); Stearns (1994); Stivale (2003); Taylor (2001); and Vianna (1999), my discussion of zydeco dance cannot take place completely outside of its companion musical form. They are steady partners—if less than monogamous. One can certainly zydeco to rumba music or rumba

to a zydeco band, though zydeco music and dance share a complex musical and social history of some specificity.

Linked to notions of Creole of Color culture, zydeco has remained a vital part of cultural performance by adapting in dynamic ways to altered landscapes of intersecting communities through which the notion of Creole is constituted. Zydeco remains in some sense rooted in a tradition through familial, regional, historical, and cultural networks of transmission. It is also perpetually “routed” by its own hybrid origins as a “diasporic resource,” and by itineraries of innovation embodied by musicians, dancers, fans, and businesses dispersed across shifting local, national, and transnational networks (Nassey Brown, 1998).

As a musical form associated with Creole of Color African American, and/or Afro-French, and/or peoples of southwestern Louisiana, zydeco can be characterized by cultural encounters, colonization, and resistance rather than by essentialized notions of race. Traditionally syncretic, zydeco has rhythmic roots—what Gilroy (1993) might call “routes”—in African, Caribbean, and French music and in an early form known as *juré* (Ancelet, 1996; Minton, 1998; Sandmel, 1999; Sexton, 2000). Deeply influenced by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century introduction of the accordion, these *juré* rhythms took early 20<sup>th</sup> century root among the Creole of Color people of Southwest Louisiana in the form of la-la: an up-beat two-step deeply influenced by both Cajun music and Delta blues (Sexton, 2000). Dempsey (1996) writes:

Many black field workers prayed and gave thanks by singing, clapping their hands, and stomping their feet in a syncopated style called *juré*, which is an

important root of zydeco music. By 1900, the juré songs merged with Creole and Cajun influences into a musical tradition called La La. (p. 1)

After World War II, la-la evolved into the rich mixture of French, Cajun, and blues music that in the early sixties became known commercially as zydeco. Contemporary zydeco continues to evolve and influence (and be influenced by) contemporary hip-hop, soul, rock, and country sounds (Ancelet, 1996; Minton, 1995; Sandmel, 1999; Sexton, 2000).

But even this generic genealogy of zydeco is under perpetual reinvention by players, dancers, fans, and scholars. Minton (1998) finds problematic the extent to which zydeco can be identified as a Creole tradition. He writes that “identifying zydeco as the music of southwestern Louisiana’s black, French-speaking Creoles is likewise somewhat misleading, at least to the extent that this creates—and considerably overstates—the impression that zydeco evolved organically within a singular community (p. 417). As Tisserand (1998) notes, “defining zydeco is a matter of considerable contention. . . . It is likely that musicians will never agree on the borders of zydeco, because in true improvisational spirit, they set out to redraw the map in every performance” (p. 11). Internationally known zydeco dance instructor Gary Hayman talks about the improvisational spirit of zydeco dance similarly: “With every step you create a new language” (2001, interview transcript).

However, as Tisserand’s (1998) *The Kingdom of Zydeco* suggests, the legacy of zydeco is decidedly patriarchal. With the exception of accordionists such as Grammy-winning recording star Queen Ida; Houston’s Adoria Jenkins of Dora and the Zydeco Bad Boys; regional favorite Rosie Ledet; and bassist Jennifer Frank, men dominate zydeco locally and nationally, at least in terms of a musical tradition (Fuselier, 2001). True to this

tradition, the family bands that populate zydeco are most often composed of male relatives exclusively. Scholarly and popular literature on zydeco focuses on black Creole or African American musicians, describing a paternal tradition passed down from father to son and across broader patriarchal lines of brothers, godfathers, uncles, nephews, and male cousins (Blagg, 2001; Hochman, 1996; Parales, 1990; Point, 1996; Sandmel, 1999; and Tisserand, 1998). For the most part, zydeco literature omits any significant discussion of white male or female zydeco musicians, thus zydeco becomes embodied textually as an essentialized Creole or black male cultural form. Such scholarship also ignores music/culture-sustaining networks of dancers, grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, girlfriends, female groupies, fans, musicians, promoters, and dancehall workers that constitute the backstage realities of zydeco.

### **Joanne's House**

*I ride with Geno and his band French Rockin' Boogie to the home of his mother, Joanne, in Eunice. This is where the band parks the van and trailer and stores all the band equipment. Her house reminds me of my own mother's house, though not in architecture or interior: you can tell that a busy 65-year-old-plus matriarch lives here. Years of knickknacks and familial ephemera clutter surfaces. Much like mothers' homes everywhere, many of the objects filling the rooms belong to someone else. Jackets and windbreakers ranging in size from infant to XXXL hang on the coat rack next to the door. Toy cars intermingle with French Rockin' Boogie stickers and caps, while sorted stacks of mail (addressed not to Joanne but rather any of seven grown children) are piled precariously next to the phone. Since Geno lives at the rural family homestead on a gravel road, he keeps his red Corvette and motorcycle in his mother's driveway so they*

*“won’t get all messed up.” Joanne isn’t home today, but in New Orleans tending to her oldest son Tony, who is recovering from complications of a heart attack. When she is home I wonder where, among the family’s assorted vehicles, she parks her car.*

*Geno’s younger sister Cheryl is perched on a stool in her mother’s kitchen, spooning hot pralines onto wax paper. I try to make conversation by asking about the pralines. Cheryl tells me they are the “chewy kind” and that she is going to sell them for a \$1.50 a piece at a church dance where her brother is playing later. She calls me honey, though does not offer any pralines or much talk. Cheryl has been at every gig I have seen her brother’s band play. At the bars and dancehalls she is the constant presence at the “insider” table, usually located close to the stage. Geno’s close friends, girlfriends, and family sit here. His mother and other sisters usually come too. Other musicians and family—in-laws, cousins, nephews, or zydeco old-timers who sit in with Geno’s band—also sometimes sit here. Cheryl is always here. Geno tells me that she has come “every time I have played soon as she turned 18, old enough to get into the clubs.” Cheryl shows her support not by clapping, but rather in the accepted zydeco way: by dancing, sometimes with a partner. She dances with what Geno calls “respectful restraint” and with the dignified grace that zydeco dance instructors often attribute to Creole women (Hayman, 2001). Other times she just stands up, with arms raised waving and swaying in time to her brother’s accordion. Joanne or other females at the table sometimes join her, though at every show I have been to Cheryl dances this way for at least one song, usually late in the set when things are really kicking. Geno always looks over, nods acknowledgment and smiles broadly. He told me that Cheryl almost never misses a gig and that having family in the audience “gives me energy.”*



This notion of energy and its exchange in conjunction with zydeco performance frequently emerges when talking to zydeco musicians and dancers. Unlike other types of musical performances, such as Cajun or country, zydeco bands usually do not leave the stage for breaks. Often they will play four-hour sets without stopping (Ancelet, 1998). “There is little time,” writes Ancelet (1998) “for stargazing when people want to dance” (p. 140). Unlike Cajun performances, which rely on slow waltzes, it is unrelenting, up-beat, syncopated dance songs that characterize zydeco shows (Sexton, 2000). Zydeco bands often invite other players to “sit it” with them, thus mixing it up a bit and providing band members brief respite.

But zydeco also relies on the exchange of other sorts of energy among dancers and musicians. Framing his discussion in Tisserand (1998) as a lesson he taught to his son Geno, John Delafosse talks about the sort of emotional exchange that is a fundamental part of the zydeco performance:

Like I told Geno a long time ago, do some touching music. That’s what counts. The music you’re playing gets to the people: that’s what you want. When you’re doing music like that, you have to be thinking deep love-emotion or trouble-emotion to have it be played correctly. You got to have that feeling about it. . . . And when you see people dancing to that, all their emotions in it, the excitement, the feeling, it makes you put more effort into the song. And when you’re playing the music, it makes everyone better with their feelings. Because you’re doing something with it: singing about it, screaming about it. It’s not just thinking about it. And then while you’re playing, you got people screaming at you, waiving at you, winking at you, hollering at you, so it makes it exciting (p.297).

Clearly, John Delafosse is describing a mutual performance in which the audience/dancers and the performer exist in reciprocal relationship based on emotional exchange. When I ask Geno Delafosse what it is like to “play up there on stage,” he describes a successful performance in similarly reciprocal terms:

It’s wonderful when it all comes together: practicing your song and playin’ your song and watching people just, you know, go berserk over some of the stuff your playin’ and all that. That’s a wonderful feeling. It really is. You can’t beat that. I give energy to you and the energy you receive, you give it right back. And it just goes on.

Playing zydeco well is dependent upon this sort of generative, reciprocal exchange. Zydeco dancing demonstrates a similar emphasis on reciprocal relation. In Tisserand (1998), dance instructor Hayman describes zydeco as a “tremendous communication device” (p. 338). In my interview with Hayman, he talked about the exchange facilitated by zydeco music as “an unspoken language that takes place between dancers.” Such exchange is pivotal in zydeco. Meaning lies not in the musicians or the dancers but in the reciprocal relation between and among them. I am thinking about this sort of interactive exchange when I consider the Delafosse women—and more broadly all of the women involved in the zydeco scene.

*The curly cursive letters on a bright pink flyer advertising a church dance featuring French Rockin’ Boogie read “refreshments by Geno’s mamma.” Joanne is famous for her sweet potato pies and baked beans. Every year she and her daughters prepare and serve these dinners to upwards of 600 guests at Geno’s fan-appreciation barbeque. Geno tells me that his mother is a constant source of support and that she*

*“wouldn’t miss nothing, [she’s] there all the time.” Yet when I ask him what his mother taught him about zydeco, he replies: “Nothing, not a thing, she’s not a musician. She taught me how to pray.” In an informal interview, band leader Terrance Simien’s wife and manager, Cynthia put it equally as succinctly: “Zydeco, it’s a man’s world.”*

### **White Delilahs**

Even so, as couples dances go zydeco is often considered a liberating dance for women (Hayman, 2001; Pagac, 1995). Although danced to a quick eight-count beat, women dancing zydeco are required to follow only four beats in sequence. The remaining four beats of the sequence, according to Hayman (2001), “are free.” Yet women still follow, propelled across social space backwards with upper bodies and hips subdued by a well placed hand at the small of their backs. In zydeco you can tell an experienced female dancer by the way she gives weight and will to the arms, hips, and feet of her male partner. Sean Donavon, a zydeco dancer located in Seattle, Washington, localizes this capacity:

Many of the better dancers in Louisiana are extraordinarily sensitive follows. I find that many of the women in other parts of the country—even though they may be exceptional dancers—are missing a key element that prevents finding that “groove” that is, for me, so uniquely zydeco. Oftentimes, this will be the inability, in my perception, to let go control. (Email correspondence, May 31, 2005)

In what follows, I want to suggest that in “letting go control” to intimacy across otherness—embodied by black men—white Delilahs are playing at letting go of white patriarchal control. In the as-ifness of giving in to notions of irresistible otherness, white Delilahs use their capacity for following to resist white patriarchal control. However, as

Thrift (1997) reminds, “to state that dance can be used to subvert power or to combat it is to sorely miss the point. Play eludes power, rather than confronts it” (p. 149). Resistance in the case of zydeco is playful in that it relies on the play of forces, not force itself. For white Delilahs, zydeco becomes a way of “off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below, behind, and to the side of” narratives of white patriarchal control (Thrift, 1997, p. 145).

But such a dance, as Coward (1985) points out, can be complicated by the fact that “desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege” (p. 15). Similarly, the desire that encircles white Delilahs moves in relation to discourses that sustain racial othering and patriarchal privilege. As Whatley (1993) points out, “in Western white culture there has long been a fascination with the Black as ‘other’” (p. 95). My interest in zydeco reveals this historically prurient fascination. In a visceral sense, zydeco dancing seems to amplify this system: I feel my whiteness and my heterosexual woman-ness more when I am dancing zydeco. The desire of white Delilahs relies on “the simulated threat of dissimilarity” as embodied through the dance of otherness (Rippy, 1999, p. 120). Zydeco dancing can be seen as offering a simulated model of gendered and racialized difference, embodied for pleasure, which seems to increase pleasure in its very simulation (Rippy, 1999, p. 115). The white Delilahs I write about here are indeed racialized as white, although I am not sure they must be, and with the exception of Sean Donovan and Robert Rand, gendered female. Meanwhile, the objects of their desire that this chapter mainly deals with become, to some degree, racialized as black.

Of course, this is an artificially polarized dichotomy; neither the self nor the other is singular and reducible. Instead, both the self and the other can be seen as holding multiple subject positions which shift and slip into each Other. To be white is not a monolithic experience. There are, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) remind, “many ways to be White, as whiteness interacts with class, gender, and a range of other race-related and cultural dynamics” (p. 8). Blackness, too, is multiple (Reid-Pharr, 1999). When I write about the desire of white Delilahs it is with a clear understanding that whiteness and its desire are slippery. The blackness white Delilahs want is similarly diffuse and inherently unstable, yet powerful. Dixon Gottschild (2003) writes:

The black dancing body exists as a social construct, not a scientific fact. However, this phantom body, just like the phantom concept of a black or white race, has been effective in shaking and moving, shaping and reshaping, American (and now global) cultural production for centuries. It has been courted and scorned—an object of criticism and ridicule as well as a subject of praise and envy. (p. 8)

Similarly, the blackness of dancing bodies that white Delilahs court is, on one level, a social construction shaped by a racialized ideology that posits blackness and whiteness as in opposition to one another.

*For sure, black guys are better dancers,” Leslie assures me with the authority of a white Delilah who is a fine dancer herself. “Now it’s like, well, there are white guys who are OK, but black guys got rhythm,” she continues, undulating her soft hips a little as she talks. Although I met Leslie and her friend Tonya (also white) at the weekly Cajun French Music Association dance, an exclusively white space, both are zydeco regulars. They tell that they never miss a zydeco dance within 60 miles of Baton Rouge.*

*As I look out on the freshly corn-starched wooden floor on this Wednesday night, Leslie appears to be right in her assessment of dancing partners. Twenty-odd couples are dancing: three black Creole men, one black Creole woman, two African American men, and the rest white. It is a rather typical zydeco night at Rick N' Robin's, a hotel bar just off I-12 in Baton Rouge. Normally a white jitterbug club, every other Wednesday Rick & Robin's hosts zydeco bands, with free dance lessons an hour before the music starts. A third of the dancers here tonight appear to be beginners. With two notable exceptions, the white male dancers do seem to be, well, a little stiffer than the rest. Leslie explains:*

*"White guys, they lead with their shoulders. Creole men lead with their hips and dance close, like Humper there."* With that she points to a compact Creole man in his early 40s, waltzing with her friend Tonya.

*Humper, his nickname, is an accomplished dancer who has won several national dance contests and has appeared in films as a dance extra. By day he works on a grounds crew for the City of Lafayette. He has traveled 42 miles on a work night just to zydeco.*

*"Watch his hip action," Leslie instructs. Humper's funky waltz is characterized by a steady, purposeful rocking motion that begins with his hips. His shoulders follow so that he and his partner dip profoundly side to side as they glide in perfect tandem. Dancing so close that their bellies touch, their footwork is a simple two-step, danced to the one-two-three, one-two-three waltz count. I juxtapose their style with one more prevalent on this floor, which Tonya disparages as "the white guy waltz." "See how he looks like he's just running, but like there's a string tied to his belt buckle pulling him?" She is referring to Todd, another zydeco regular. Todd has been dancing zydeco and Cajun for 11 years. He took his first Cajun dance class right after his divorce and is still taking zydeco lessons.*

*He is technically proficient: he knows the steps, his feet stay in time, and he can spin and such. But 72-year-old Elise, a lifelong dancer who (like many Creole women) learned to waltz by dancing on her pa-pa's (grandfather's) feet, says this about Todd: "That one there is too textbook. Back home in the country, Creoles, we learned it at home." Dance instructor Troy offers a racialized physiological explanation for the difference: "It's a scientific fact that white men's spines are constructed straight so that it is more difficult for them to move their hips that way. The spine of the black is different."*

Afternoons and evenings spent dancing in the field made it clear that racial stereotypes were used to maintain and push social boundaries between black men and white women. In her book *The Black Dancing Body: From Coon to Cool*, dancer/scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild (2003) addresses the signification of the black body in terms of the racial stereotypes and the self/other dichotomy:

The black body has served as the screen upon which white fears and fantasies have been projected. It is the Self-versus-Other syndrome of colonialist discourse at work. Attract. Repel. Attract. Repel. Underneath white critique of the black body lurks sexual innuendo and physical danger. The geography of these desires and hatreds has been charted as one dimension of the long history of violence against black people: slavery, lynchings, chain gangs, rape, and more. The flip side of the coin reveals the exotic-erotic syndrome. (pp. 41-42)

Through the hegemony of race, blackness often becomes essentialized as natural, uncivilized, wild, and threatening in some white imaginations, and thus othered. Such stereotypes are part of a larger system of stereotypes through which blackness becomes

othered for some white people (bhabha, 1994). Zydeco, for white Delilahs, is a locale that exoticizes culture and eroticizes race. Stereotypes of black men serve to maintain separateness. But at the same time, the complex gendered and racialized physical intimacy of zydeco dance—the exotic/erotic push-pull of racialized sexual innuendo and stereotypes of the other—encourage white Delilahs to play at coming closer.

*As we creep over the crest of the levee, Angelle's Whiskey River Landing comes into view. Nestled on the edge of the Atchafalaya Basin, the rickety wooden dancehall sits on stilts. The parking lot is filled with pickups, SUVs, motorcycles, three-wheelers, and other vehicles. A few patrons even arrive by boat. There is a smoker on the front porch where Mike "The Meat Man" is cooking up pork chops and hot links for the sandwiches he sells, Angelle's has been having dances here on Sunday afternoons for over 20 years. However, according to Mike, zydeco is a new arrival to this Sunday tradition:*

*Mike: "Oh, it wasn't until about, I'd say, last year that they ever had zydeco over here. It had gotten real popular but Terry was afraid of the crowd it would bring. Geno is the only one of them we ever have. He carries himself and his band real good."*

*Laura: What do you mean by that?*

*Mike: "Oh, like he's one of us, but he's not. He's black of course. You don't see him dancing with blondes or nothing like that."*

*Laura: "But he has a white girlfriend?"*

*Ray: "But he doesn't flaunt it or nothing. Doesn't come with a blonde on each arm. Ever seen Rockin' Dopsie? Always with a white girl, sometimes two. Geno don't have to prove nothing. He's all right."*



*While Geno does not usually bring white women with him, he is known for bringing the women out. As one Creole man told me: "All the ladies, black and white, love Geno. He gets 'em all to step out and kick it." Leslie and Tonya corroborate. "Geno is so hot. When he plays lots of girls come and guys follow. You should check it out."*

*On this Sunday I do just that, bringing along a friend, Michelle, a self-proclaimed Cajun girl from Gueydon. She lives in Baton Rouge now, though the social separation between Creole and Cajun people that Sexton (2000) describes is evident in the stories she tells of her hometown. Gueydon is known for its dancers. Michelle is a good Cajun dancer and an excellent jitterbug who often helps me with my moves. Once when I ask her about zydeco in Gueydon, she responds that "the blacks in Gueydon don't dance." When I ask why not, she replies: "Those blacks well, they're, uh, they're just black. They aren't into culture."*

*Inside Whiskey River, the dancing crowd bobs up and down in a rhythmic accordion-fueled wave. It is hot and crowded and the music is loud. About half of the 200 or so dancers are black and half are white, yet there are only a few black women—mostly Geno's relatives. White, black, and mixed couples are tearing it up. I stumble through several dances with a patient Creole man dressed in overalls, but notice that Michelle is not dancing. While I buy her a beer, I see her turn down a dance with a youngish black man in tennis shoes. When I ask her about it, she shrugs and says she is "watching for now."*

*I step outside for some air and find Tonya sitting on the steps drinking a Diet Coke. "So how you like Geno? Hot, huh?" she asks. I nod. She laughs and tells me I*

*should dance with one of those “Creole prairie boys. They are fine. I mean fine. And make sure to take a look at their pants.”*

According to Rand (2004), “as innocent, as anxiety reducing, as fun as social dance may be, what you have, at bottom line, is the potentially inflammatory act of males and females touching one another. . . . When the races mingle, things can get more complex” (p. 163).

*We are lucky to have a stool at one of only two long wooden bar-top tables demarcating either end of the crowded dance floor. These tables face the floor and each other. As we watch the zydeco dancers we can also watch those seated at the tables across the floor. The people at our table all appear to be white; the people across the way appear to be black. “Look at how the white girls dance with black guys,” says my friend, pointing to a particular couple. She has wild red hair, freckles, and tight jeans, and her partner wears a big white cowboy hat. As they dance, he is bent deep over her so that their bodies nearly parallel the floor in a complicated choreography of mock copulation. The next week, I see the same redhead at another dancehall. On this afternoon a white Cajun band is playing, and the crowd is mostly white. Today, as she waltzes and two-steps, the redhead keeps a careful distance—20 inches or so—from her white partners so that their bodies do not touch. When an older black man asks her to dance to a zydeco-influenced Cajun song, she replies demurely: “Thank you very much sir, but my daddy would kill you if he found out.”*

The fickle dance of this freckle-faced white Delilah succinctly articulates the constellation of desire, patriarchal power, and racism as it plays itself out in dancehalls

across Southwest Louisiana. However, such a dynamic extends the boundaries of this local context. Hernton (1965/1988) writes:

The sexualization of racism in the United States is a unique phenomenon in the history of mankind; it is an anomaly of the first order. In fact, there is a sexual involvement, at once real and vicarious, connecting white and black people in America, that spans the history of this country from the era of slavery to the present, an involvement so immaculate and yet so perverse, so ethereal and yet so concrete, that all race relations tend to be, however subtle, sex relations. (p. 6)

In this section, I introduce the figure of the white Delilah to explore a particular locale of racialized desire in relation to the larger a context of a historically constructed binary of punishment and pleasure, forged in relation to the historically constructed binary between white femininity and black masculinity. These binaries are central to social narratives, such as the rape myth or anti-miscegenation ideology, which work to constrain intimacy between white women and African American men. Further, these binaries provide a fundamental frame through which racialized notions of white femininity become constituted. As Rippey (1999) writes,

interracial intercourse is either violent (virtue despoiled) or illicitly pleasurable (smiles mixed with betrayal). Thus, the question of pleasure and punishment lies at the center of the discourse of racial identity, a discourse inscribed on the female body and framed by the undefined term “whiteness.” (p. 13)

I suggest that the dance of self and other embodied by white Delilahs still circulates among and between duplicitous binaries of innocence and betrayal, and punishment and pleasure. In doing so, their dance provides a rich site for exploring the complexities of

cross-racial desire, intimacy, and constructions of white femininity.

While there is very little scholarly literature using social dancing as a space from which to explore white female cross-racial desire, scholarly attention has been paid to white women's experience of interracial desire and issues of intimacy across difference. I mention Ida B. Wells first, as she coined the term "white Delilah." Her political writings, such as *Southern Horrors* (1892/1993), bravely articulate the relationship between racism, sex, and violence, and implicate white women in this poisonous triad.

African American historian J. A. Rogers (1919/1987) discusses white women and interracial intimacy with startling frankness (and no lack of sexism) in a book devoted to the topic of miscegenation: *As Nature Leads*. Robinson (2003) provides a historical analysis of anti-miscegenation laws in the American South that pays scant but relevant attention to women's particular vulnerability to such laws. Talty (2003) makes a similar point in his social history *Mulatto America*. Rippy (1999) examines as a mode of fantasy 20<sup>th</sup> century film and stage representations of social anxiety concerning miscegenation and interracial encounters. This thoughtful feminist analysis uncovers how the figure of the predatory white woman in American film and stage was used to portray both the possibilities and dangers—physical and psychological—of cross-racial intimacy. Similarly, Philibert (2002) uses film as text to explore the implications of interracial desire. In her analysis of Claire Denis's *Chocolat*, Philibert (2002) looks at cross-racial sexual desire as an "impossible desire for reconciliation between colonizer and colonized" (p. 221).

Grover (2004) examines miscegenation anxiety as manifested in terms of the figure of the black male rapist in American literature between the world wars. A central

focus of this work is how the rape myth's triad of black rapist, passive white woman, and avenging white male erases black femininity, and how the symbolic figure of the black male rapist works to deny the power of black women and their historical agency. While white women are not the focus, Grover (2004) offers an interesting analysis of their positionality in the rape myth. In contrast, Paulin (2002) specifically addresses the ambivalent desire of white women in her analysis of Louisa May Alcott's radical depiction of cross-race relationships between the white heroines and light-skinned black male characters in "My Contraband" and "M.L."

Oliver (2002) follows the figure of the "white temptress" through the autobiographies of Malcolm X and Iceberg Slim in order to demonstrate how white female desire historically has been portrayed in African American men's autobiography as dangerous. In Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, psychoanalysis becomes a site to look at the psychological threat white femininity poses to black men. The figure of the white temptress is also found throughout writings by noted African American male thinkers James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph Ellison, and Malcolm X—all of which connect white female desire for blackness with psychic dissolution on the part of black men.

In the above mentioned works, autobiography, fiction, film, theater, and legal history all become sites from which to explore white female desire in relation to African American or black men as it circulates between prohibition and pleasure, and innocence and betrayal. Although these narratives evoke specific historical times and places, they are also tethered to broader constructions of white femininity, black masculinity, and the relationship between the two. I propose that the dance of white Delilahs provides a

similar locale. In conjunction with notions of white female interracial desire as dangerous, white Delilahs are perceived and treated with caution: they are (I am) trouble. In much of this discussion, I focus on how the semblance of cross-racial intimacy embodied in the dance of white Delilahs evokes a history of trouble: an uneasiness that intrudes on the psychosocial intimacy between white femininity and black masculinity. Yet even as we follow our partners through a dance between pleasure and prohibition, white Delilahs trouble patriarchal constructions of race and gender through their public embodiment of a semblance of interracial intimacy. As Cohen-Bull (2001) observes, “movement is ubiquitous, a cultural given which people are constantly creating, participating in, interpreting, and reinterpreting on both conscious and unconscious levels” (p. 405).

*Bois Sec is asleep in an old cane rocker on the porch of the conference center. His hands are folded, legs crossed. Although his head is leaning down on one shoulder, his soft brown fedora remains perfectly in place. Inside, 30 or so apparently white people who have paid \$700 for a weeklong conference on Cajun/Creole heritage are sipping bottled water and waiting to listen to 86-year-old Alphonse “Bois Sec” Ardoin, listed in the program list as a “living Creole legend,” play his accordion. But he is sleeping. My rocker is so close to his I can hear him breathe. From time to time I think I hear him sigh, soft as velvet. I have been waiting like this for 20 minutes, hoping to introduce myself and arrange an interview. As I look closely at him, his eye twitches and it occurs to me he is feigning sleep. Bois Sec opens his eyes, looks right into mine, closes them again and smiles. We sit like this for another quarter of an hour, when Bois Sec rises, lisps*

*something inaudible in French, and with a shallow bow kisses my hand. He goes inside to perform.*

It was not so long ago that Bois Sec's older cousin Amede Ardoin, reputed to be the founding father of zydeco music, took another white female hand to his face. As the local legend goes, Amede, a black Creole man, was in Eunice, Louisiana, playing for a Cajun dance. The year was 1939. Ardoin was singing hard and pushing his accordion harder. It was hot. He needed a rag to wipe the sweat dripping from his brow onto his box. Noticing this, one of the daughters of the house reached up and handed him her handkerchief. As Tisserand (1998) notes, this sort of exchange very much violated the social separation of the day:

There were rules about these things. A black Creole man can play accordion for dancing, but a hired musician is one thing and a tiny white hand on a small black face is something else—at least in Eunice on a Saturday night. (p. 64)

Later that night as he walked home from the dance, Ardoin was ambushed by two white men who beat him senseless and left him for dead in the ditch. “That damn nigger there, that white lady ain't going to never wipe his face,” snarled one of the white men as they turned their back on Ardoin's broken body—at least this is how Creole fiddler Canray Fontenot related the story to Tisserand (1998, p. 64).

Bois Sec and zydeco band leader Terrance Simien speculate that there is more to the tale: “The story that we hear down here is that he had a secret affair with a white woman, they found out about it, and they beat him till he lost his mind” (Tisserand, 1998, p. 77).

Amede survived, though violent encounter left him with severe brain damage. He tried

but was never able to perform in public again. According to Bois Sec, “Amede’s music was gone after that.”

A long history of violence associated with intimate, interracial relationships still haunts the South. The various kinds of corporeal, emotional, and social violence enacted by white masters toward black slave mistresses is a relatively well documented, though contested, part of black Creole history (Brasseaux, 1994; Hall, 1992; Martin, 2000). The social complexities of sexual relationships between black men and white women are less often discussed. As Oliver (2002) notes, sexual liaison between black men and white women is often considered one of the “strongest American taboos” (p. 148). Yet as African American historian J.A. Rogers notes in his 1919 collection of *anti anti-miscegenation* essays, titled *As Nature Leads*, such relationships—though socially sanctioned—were not uncommon:

Liaisons between white women and colored men began with the entry of the Negro in the New World, and in spite of the severest penalties have persisted. Today they are frequent with the women, as I said nearly always taking the initiative. . . . A Southern white girl told me rather positively that she believed the majority of Southern girls had colored lovers. How true this is I do not know. (p. 57)

White women, as well as black men, historically have suffered punishment for sexual liaisons that crossed this patriarchally inscribed color line. As Talty (2003) writes, “it was white women . . . who bore the brunt of society’s disapproval when they strayed from their assigned beds” (p. 54). From early colonial America through the antebellum period, the turbulence of the Civil War, the angst of reconstruction, the (anti) progressive era of



the Jim Crow South, and into the civil rights era, anti-miscegenation laws worked within a paternalistic social order to govern the color of men whom white women could have sex with, and vice versa.

Central to this effort was the rape myth. Especially prevalent following the Civil War, African American men who had had consensual sex with white women often were charged with rape. Many of the lynchings that took place in the South from Reconstruction on were preceded by the mythical rape of a white woman by a black man: “This conflation of sex and race—a deeply felt taboo—was the main rationale for lynching” (Pinar, 2001 p. 65). Angela Davis (1983) writes:

In the history of the United States, the fraudulent rape charge stands out as one of the most formidable artifices invented by racism. The myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and error against the Black community have required convincing justifications. (Whatley, 1993, p. 95)

Scholars such as Brundage (1993); Harris, (1984); Rippy, (1999); and Wells (2002/1892) also make mention of the connection between the rape myth and lynching. These scholars all point out that the relations upon which rape myths were based were often less than mythical. Rather, they represented consensual, sexual relationships between black men and white women.

*He is a smallish, slightly disheveled Creole of Color man who appears to be in his early 30s and nearly always wears the same pilling gray acrylic sweater to the dances. He has a reputation, and most white Delilahs won't dance with him more than once, though I dance with him often. We do not dance well together. He mostly shuffles and*

*holds me too tight. I tower over him and have a hard time following his idiosyncratic shuffle. For women, zydeco has much to do with learning how to follow. His strange steps are no excuse for my failure in this respect, but he always asks me to dance anyway. Tonight he asks another white Delilah.*

*Suzanne has only been to a zydeco dance once before. Growing up in a small rural town in Southwest Louisiana, she stills feels strongly the racist taboo against interracial intercourse of any kind between white women and black men. Such taboo, according to Freud, (1918/1950) “possess[es] simultaneously the sense of sacred and forbidden” and “is principally expressed in prohibitions and restrictions” of which the central prohibition is “against touching” (Rippy, 1999, p. 52). He takes her hand and leads her to the dance floor. This is Suzanne’s first time, she tells me, to touch black skin. Their dance is a syncopated slow groove to swamp pop favorite “It’s Rainin’ in My Heart.” Suzanne is such a consummate follower she makes any partner look good. While hardly docile in “real” life, Suzanne has a much sought after ability to surrender her body to her partner. Like many women in the United States and elsewhere, particularly in the South, Suzanne grew up learning how to give up control to men, or at least present the illusion of such surrender. It pays off on the floor tonight. Her partner’s usually awkward shuffle seems perfect, while the tightness of his grip around her waist, and the way her flesh overlaps his fingers, looks sexy, like the song sounds.*

*About three- fourths of the way through the dance, I see Suzanne rush off to the bathroom. The dance floor is a symbolically sacred space. There are rules about entering and exiting. It is almost never done: leaving the floor before a song is over. Fearing trouble, I head to the bathroom, where Suzanne is wiping her face with a wet paper towel*

*which does nothing to lessen the flush on her porcelain skin. Seething, Suzanne tells me: "I was raped out there. I feel like I've been raped." Overhearing, a white woman wearing a hot pink micro-mini and ankle boots tells us that he once "did her like that" too. On the way out the door an older Creole of Color woman shakes her head and says, "trouble."*

*The semblance of intimacy maintained by Suzanne's surrender was experienced as too real for both dancers. Many who heard her story that night, me included, were moved to ask, like Fanon (1967): "Does this fear of rape not itself cry out for rape?" (p. 156). Or to ask, like Rogers (1919), "who can wonder at the wild dreams . . . which fire the hearts and fill the imagination of the impressible southern maiden? (p. 59).*

In 1892, African American anti-lynching activist Wells created controversy by daring to suggest that most of the sexual liaisons between African American men and white women that led to lynching were consensual. Throughout her work *Southern Horrors*, Wells makes the bold claim that the sexual liaisons between white women and African American men do represent a violation, yet not of the sort the rape myth purported. Instead, Wells argues that it is African American men who are violated. The real victims, according to Wells (1892/2002), were the "poor blind Afro American Sampsons who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs" (p. 25). Wells describes innocent black men seduced and betrayed by wanton white women, who disavow sexual responsibility by crying rape.

In many ways Wells (1892/2002) shocked the South with a truth it already knew. She writes in her work *A Red Record*:

Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women. (Wells, 1892/2002, p. 61)

Wells's rhetoric hits on a central patriarchal vulnerability: white men's control over white women's desire. According to Stokes (2001), Wells's admonitions tapped a deep "uneasiness over the nature of white women's desires, an uneasiness that lynching and antimiscegenation laws attempt to mask" (p. 102). White men's outrage at this claim was heightened by Wells's powerful use of rhetoric, which connected white men's well known and violent proclivity for sexual relations with African American women to a similar, yet unspeakable, proclivity in white women's attraction to African American men:

The miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate unions of the races: they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women. White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women. (Wells, 1892/2002, p. 31)

Wells points out the southern double standard of the day: interracial sex could take place as long as it involved white men. Interracial sex involving white women brought death to black men and posed a direct threat to a white patriarchal social structure. Such a threat was deeply controversial.

Wells's writings unmasked white women's sexual desire for African American men, and shone a public light on white female sexuality in general. As Stokes (2001) perceptively observes, in naming white women's desire Wells can be seen as "offering the fruit of knowledge" to white women" (p. 102). Wells's offering, at least to some degree, diminished the power of the semblance of innocence sometimes affected by white women. According to Najmi and Srikanh (2002), "white women give racism a veneer of innocence [and] in doing so they invest themselves with a vulnerability that has easily been deployed to oppress men and women of color" (p. 17). Within the context of the patriarchal construct of the anti-miscegenation South, any discussion of female sexual desire, much less interracial desire, rewrites the innocence of the fair sex and renders them suspicious. Wells's influential rhetoric relies on the binary relation of two alternatives of sexual representation for the white Southern woman: innocent angels of the house or white devil ladies. Doubly vulnerable to the "magnetism associated with the tropical race" and to the social sanction of white men, Wells's white Delilahs danced between binaries of innocence and betrayal, and pleasure and prohibition (Rogers, 1987/1919, p. 59).

The dance of contemporary white Delilahs still circulates between these same binaries. On one hand, white Delilahs are passive followers whose innocence is symbolically betrayed by their black male partners. Inherent to the structure of zydeco dance itself is a physical boundary transgression tied to a social one. The exact steps, of course, depend on the individual dancers, though in general on the half beat between the seven and eight count, the leader (who in the heterosexual performance is usually male) tightens his grasp on the partner's lower back, intensifies the weight he gives to her right

arm, and thrusts his pelvis forward. Simultaneously, his partner jerks her hips back with tense resistance, then immediately submits, moving in tandem with his thrust. On the eight count he shimmies across the front of her hipbones with his pelvis, then both partners move apart for another seven counts.

As the musical tension of a song builds, the thrusting action often gets more aggressive: a male partner sometimes will shove his knee forward to pry open the legs of his female partner, then lean deeply, covering her upper body with his. At this point in the dance, the balance is such that the male partner has almost total physical control of his partner—excluding a physical fight or flight, which rarely happens. This is the nature of the play Rand calls “sex on the dance floor.” Describing the truthlikeness of the sort of violation zydeco evokes, Rand (2004) writes:

Sex on the dance floor, in its harshest and most extreme form, can be ugly: a guy overwhelms an unwilling partner with his strength and slams her against him like a piece of meat on a butcher’s slab. This form of nonconsensual touching is not only offensive, but borders on assault and battery. (p. 114)

On one level, all couples dancing is reliant on the play of opposition. The ability to move as a unit is contingent upon the optimal mutual resistance of bodily force. Similarly the psychosocial play of zydeco is driven in part by the tense physical proximity of consent and violation. In the as-if play of zydeco, she “wants it” and simultaneously does not. As Freud (1918/1950) says, at the heart of taboo is ambivalence (p. 31).

On the other hand, white Delilahs also have been characterized as predatory seductresses. In his autobiography, Iceberg Slim (1971) describes the sort of women who went to clubs to dance with black men as “silk broads itching for forbidden fruit” (p. 96).

It is tempting to believe those days are gone, however in Southwest Louisiana—arguably in the United States as a whole—these racialized and gendered tales of desire remain salient. Even today, for white Southern women the knowledge of black male bodies often represents forbidden fruit. Pinar (2001) discusses the historically problematic pleasure white people have taken from black bodies:

From the beginning of the slave trade, blacks were seen not as separate individuals but fundamentally as vehicles for white enjoyment, in all of its nightmarishly variegated and often specifically sexual expression. . . . Whites forced blacks to dance on the decks of slave ships crossing the middle passage, step it up lively on the auction block, amuse the master and his friends with good humor while they felt his muscles, fondled his genitals to check for “breeding potential.” (p. 41)

The white Delilahs I write about (myself included) do not force black or Creole dancers to dance for them, though we do invite them to dance with us—with a forcefulness, always social and historical. Such invitations are not always innocent.

Ask any black man over 30 in Southwest Louisiana about cavorting with white women and he will very likely tell you that outside New Orleans it still means trouble, though not as much as it once did. Bois Sec tells me stories of how “the little white women” would pursue him when he was a young musician, and how he had to watch his step: “*Mais oui* (oh yeah), they were *canaille* (mischievous trouble).” The late Creole musician Harry Hypolite conceded getting “into some trouble with the white ones. *Oui*, had to watch myself. They’re some bad, blonde motor-scooters out there.” Both men told me tales in which a blonde “thrill-seeking white woman actively seeks out the black

male, becoming the white huntress who stalks her prey in his own territory” (Oliver, 2002, p.149). According to Harry and Bois Sec, such women would show up at their gigs and flirt shamelessly. As a white female researcher—a white Delilah autoethnographer?—stalking subjects and pursuing knowledge of zydeco via male Creole of Color musicians, I am implicated here.

*I guess I sort of stalked him. I certainly wasn't at Jacqueline's—a Cajun/Franco/Chinese restaurant—for the French toast soggy with wonton grease or the potstickers mixed with hashbrowns. Creole blues guitarist Harry Hypolite played here every weekend for brunch. It was a steady gig, but that was all. It was odd to see the enormously statuesque six-foot-six, 270-pound man tucked into the corner without a band, just a boom-box with drum machine tracks. It was sad to hear such a commanding and nuanced musician, a legend really, mute his astonishing licks and soulful Creole French lyrics as background music for mimosa-sipping tourists, who nevertheless were appreciative with their tips. For a month of Sundays I was, too, and finally arranged an interview.*

*Like Harry said: just past the Happy Foods on the left, a short driveway and a formerly cream-colored trailer with cinder block steps. Harry is waiting in his office: a 1975 Ford LDT with fleabane growing from the wheel wells. He gets up early every morning, heads over to Happy Foods for something sweet, then returns to the LTD to gab on CB radio. Don't try to call him in the afternoons; that's naptime. But this afternoon he is up waiting for me. Wearing an electric purple suit and a leather fisherman's cap, Harry greets me with two guitars, an amp, an enormous boom-box, a portable file cabinet, and a small shaving kit. I wonder how long we will be gone.*



*I suggest that we go into town and talk over lunch, but he proposes driving to a remote lake, 20 miles away. Knowing neither the area nor this huge black man very well, I am a bit frightened by his suggestion, but I agree. On the drive, he brings up the Baton Rouge serial killer and says a woman like me should be careful. Then he offers a detailed account of the recent slaying of a female clerk at Happy Foods. He laments about the crazies out there these days and tells me I have nice legs. I thank him for the warnings and the compliment, adding that a woman should always be prepared to protect herself, insinuating that I am—that I never travel without a gun. With a chuckle that sounds like gravel Harry assures me he likes smart women: “Some frogs might not, but I like a smart lady. You are a smart lady, you could teach me things.”*

Bois Sec and Harry have traveled around the world to cities where social lives are arguably less rigidly segregated by race than in the American South. Still, both men are unaccustomed to being seen in public in their hometowns with white women. The novelty is deeply amusing to them, eliciting comments like: “*Mais, oui*, I didn’t think I would be eating here with a little white woman.” Bois Sec continually marvels that local racial segregation has given way enough that he could record an album with a white woman, which he did, with Cajun bandleader Christine Balfa. For Bois Sec and Harry, white women represent, among other things, a history of imposed distance and the newfound (relative) freedom of intimacy without penalty. As Tate (1987) understands it, white women represent

the means by which black people in general were penalized for exercising freedom of choice, in that the penalty was translated into the accusation of rape and the sentence was death. The symbolic linkage between white women and

freedom, therefore, finds its origins in hundreds of years of southern race relations. (p. 166)

Bois Sec and Harry enjoy a less punitive system of racial segregation than the one in which they grew up, although white women still mean trouble.

While both Creole of Color men appreciate the Southern irony of a white woman driving them around, they are still cautious about where we stop to eat or put gas in the car, or which pharmacy we choose for blood pressure medicine. Neither wants any trouble; both tell me I don't know the people around here, although I have an inkling of the sort of trouble they are talking about. In Midland, Louisiana, for instance, I watched a bouncer literally kick a black man out of a bar and chase him into a cane field for allegedly making unwanted advances toward a white Delilah. As I talked with her later in the week she confessed that she had slipped her phone number into the black man's back pocket while they were dancing, but that the man's reciprocal flirting had irritated her brother-in-law, who was best friends with the bouncer. Often the violence that regulates, to some degree, intimacy between white women and black men in Southwest Louisiana remains convoluted, overt, and ugly. More often, this sort of patriarchal protection is subtle and symbolic.

*I see a young Creole man lead to the dance floor a young white girl, about the same age as my students, with a mop of blonde curls and a short plaid skirt. As I move closer to the group of friends who seem to be with her, I notice one of the men keeping a close eye on the Creole dancer. As the song ends the concerned man moves in closer toward the couple. But they dance again. This time the spectator is visibly agitated, shaking his head and spitting on the floor. When the song ends, he strides onto the floor*

*and grabs his sister's hand, yanking it away from her partner's grip. For this brother and many other white men I interviewed while learning how to zydeco, the prospect of white female desire for black men—more abstractly the black dancing body, and further still, black masculinity—is still blocked by paternal denial. It is still taboo.*

At zydeco events, white women can still be seen to function in relationship to black men “as sexual capital, capable of symbolizing punishable transgression” (Rippy, 1999, p. 39). The body of the white Delilahs symbolically becomes “sexual territory to be displayed, fought over, and protected” (Stokes, 2001, p. 133). When Creole of Color or black men zydeco with white Delilahs, they are dancing with trouble, which though mainly symbolic can feel very real, even to their white Delilah partners. This symbolic danger, associated with anti-miscegenation narratives via the rape myth, is in constant play in zydeco, and is most profound in white-controlled spaces. As Malcolm X (1965) posits in his autobiography, “most white men’s hearts and guts will turn over inside of them, whatever they may have you otherwise believe, whenever they see a Negro man on close terms with a white woman” (p.109). Although it may appear so, it is not my intention to speak for all dancers; certainly some never experience this sense of danger or the semblance of intimacy I have experienced as at play in zydeco. However, at some point during every dance event I have attended, at least some dancers do.

When I dance, particularly in a white-controlled rural space, with African American, Creole of Color, or any man who occupies a visible social subjectivity that might be construed as blackness, I feel the weight of patriarchal racist narratives: my own internalized narratives as well as those of other dancers and spectators. The charge of potential trouble is palpable, as if “centuries old archetypes of the black male rapist,

white female victim and avenging white male” are being acted out, and “subverted as well as reified” (Grover, 2004, p. 5).

*Nearly on top of one another, my upper body bent back rigid and rear end pushed out as if I were sitting on a swing; legs bent and slightly spread, pressed close, his right leg between mine so that I ride his knee like a horse in time to the music—our dance speaks to this local taboo. “Look at the way the white girls dance with black guys,” echo the words of my white male friends, respeaking a historical fantasy deeply embedded in the white Southern male psyche and still circulating through Southern social surfaces. “Always, it seemed, the Southern white man’s ‘mis-en-scene of desire’ (Silverman 1992, p. 337) featured muscular young black men penetrating fragile young white women against their will” (Pinar, 2001, p. 14). This myth is rearticulated in many contemporary Southern contexts. Tonight it is retold on the dance floor, as black male dancers mock ravage their willing white female partners. Although this dance—a symbolic language of sex—takes place between the legs of white women, it is clear that it is also a complex bodily conversation between white and black men. As I dance with black men, I become aware of my corporeal and symbolic place between black men and women, as well as between white and black men. I can feel the complicated paternal gaze of white male spectators, watching my partners watching me. I try not to look back.*

### **Semblance of Intimacy**

Stake (1998) describes qualitative researchers as “guests in the private spaces of the world” (p. 99). Yet the most powerful moments of my autoethnographic research learning how to zydeco dance took place in the intensely private space of public embrace. Although embodied in public, zydeco dancing is an oddly intimate curriculum.

According to Rand (2004), zydeco “is a private affair, conducted consensually in the ballroom by a dancing couple: thighs may brush, cheeks may touch, hips may lock. . . . It can be a striking, if short lived, experience” (p. 113). I have been struck by the ephemeral intimacy that moving together in time with another person, among other couples similarly engaged, can give rise to.

It is hard to explain this intimacy—a feeling, however fleeting, of physical oneness—to those who have not been touched by it. Despite countless hours pressing my flesh against the skin of people I knew barely if at all, the tender touch of strangers is still strange to me, even though such touch is a central facet of the intimacy of dancing. Also central is *weight*: the perfect pressure of well balanced, reciprocal resistance. This subtle exchange of lead and follow relies on the tension of bodies working together in opposite directions. It is this play of oppositional forces that generates the sense of unison that is so satisfying. Sustaining the momentum of unison is a matter of a million micro-alignments that take place between partners. Each assertion has to be listened to, accounted for, and countered to keep a couple dancing in graceful motion. It is a state of grace when the joint physical contour of interconnected bodies takes flight, putting semblances of intimacy into motion.

Writing about zydeco is much like writing about sex; indeed, many dancers describe zydeco in sexual terms. According to McNeil (1995), this proclivity is a cultural one:

The emotional spectrum aroused by dance, sexual exhibition and excitement are always latent and often become explicit. Since the Renaissance, this aspect of dancing has tended to displace others in European society, first in courtly circles

and later in middle-class urban ballrooms, until in our own time mass culture has made song and dance almost synonymous with sex throughout the world. This constitutes a specialized, historically exceptional meaning, and has helped to blind us to the other roles that dancing played in other times and places. (pp. 64-65)

This seems to be especially true with zydeco, whose meanings are often read in sexual terms. Julie, a white Delilah who dances exclusively with black or Creole of Color men, had this piece of advice for me as I tried to write about the semblance of intimacy at work in zydeco: “The best way to describe it is sex on the dance floor.” Like Julie, Rand (2004) describes zydeco as “sex on the dance floor” (p. 114). Zydeco is a sexy, hip-centered dance whose sexuality is often heightened—at least for some dancers and spectators—by the historically sexualized fantasy of visible racialized difference.

According to Rand (2004), zydeco dance often involves

provocative, salacious exhibitionism. Groin to groin, with Kama-sutra ingenuity as far as positioning goes, a man and woman . . . interlock and ride the music as if it were a water bed, humping and moaning and sweating and all but exchanging bodily fluids in the vertical position. (p. 114)

Early in my research, I was reluctant to carry on like this. I had what some Creole of Color men call a “hair trigger”: Like many white female dancers, especially zydeco tourists, I mistook the sexual play of the dance for actual sexual interest.

Although our dances had multiple meanings, when Creole of Color men pulled me in close and gyrated me on their knees, I thought they were making moves. Such is the nature of play. Much like the playful nip of kittens engaged in the sibling combat that Bateson (2000/1972) writes about, the sexual gestures of zydeco work together as an

interactive sequence in which the unit actions or signals are similar to physical intimacy, but not the same as that to which they allude. Bateson's (2000/1972) discussions about animal play demonstrate kittens playing at combat, albeit with some aggression; similarly, while sexuality is at work in zydeco, dancers are playing at sex.

Dancers also play at other sorts of intimacy. As Donovan (2002) explains: "If you've ever been through a relationship, you know what it is to dance. The tentative first steps . . . balanced by the rush of infinite possibility. Upon finding your rhythm, the euphoria of unabashed connection and understanding" (p. 1). For some dancers I meet, physical rapport is their mode of relation: dancing is the way they come to know others; it is a first step toward understanding. The superficial embrace and tentative first steps of a first dance is their small talk, although there is no actual talk. These dancers do not ask your name or what you do for a living until after the dance—after they have already learned what they first needed to understand. It is a subtle process of physical acquaintance where touch is introduced, rhythm is met, and the potential for intimacy is felt out.

Sometimes it stops there, because some people just cannot dance together, or else proceeds to the flirtatious physical banter that is the most common mode of relation on the dance floor. Social dancing is an intimate bodily conversation where people come together via the exchange of gestural innuendo, subtle physical offerings, and plays at decline. Stivale (2003) borrows from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to describe dance in terms of its capacity to connect, writing that dance is a polylogue that flows via the "connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities in an active becoming with a partner with a crowd, as an event" (p. 123). Social dancing involves the

proliferation of intimacy, and Rand (2004) offers an apt description of the way intimacies proliferate:

You dance with somebody and you go, “Wow, this person was wonderful!”

You’ve looked into their eyes and you go, “Yea, this was great!’ And then the next person you dance with you have the same thing, and you’ve just wiped the other one right out. So it goes, through the whole night. (p. 116)

Part of the pleasure of zydeco dancing is the easy circulation of connection. It is all right, even necessary, for intimacy to get around on the dance floor. Being a good social dancer is partly about being open to the multiplicity of movement, and having the capacity to engage easily and quickly with multiple partners.

On one level, social dancing is a promiscuous polylogue in which intimacies are exchanged and circulated among and between dancers, musicians, and spectators. On another level, a dance can be simultaneously experienced as intense dialogue. Dancing doubtless involves monologues as well, although that is not my focus here. White Delilah Valerie Sher (2005) describes the deep semblance of intimacy that saturates the ephemeral monogamy of zydeco as it takes place in dialogue:

He took me in his arms and the dance began. The distance between us faded and we came together as if we’d never been apart. It was a dance of passion, of surrender and control, the complete attunement of one body with another, moving in an endless flow of energy, space, and rhythm . . . Sending me out and pulling me in tight, I surrendered completely. It is a moment of complete abandon, of trust, feeling the strength of muscled arms—sure and decisive. It is a union of the



masculine and feminine in a dance of unwavering passion. . . .One o chaos and order, everything that is, all blended into the preciousness of this moment (p.1)

Using romantic metaphor, Sher (2005) describes a moment of unison. Again, it is difficult to describe this sense of “time out of time” (Falassi, 1987) that moving together in time produces. Efforts to describe it employ the language of sex and love as a metaphoric for a semblance of intimacy that is like love, but is not love. Sher (2005) goes so far as to conclude the description of her sensual dancing encounter in terms of love: “In the after glow of one magical dance, I laughed and spontaneously told him, ‘I think I’m in love.’ ‘It’s just a dance,’ he said. But no, it’s so much more” (p. 2).

Sher’s last lines suggest that the intimacy of dance is a semblance; it is, after all, just a dance. However, her description points to the power of such semblance, highlighting the fact that the dance is more than itself. As an interpretive act, the joint action of self and other moving together in time involves a surplus of meanings in interactive play. As Thrift (1997) writes, “dance can be seen as an example of play; a kind of exaggeration of everyday embodied joint action which contains within it the capacity to hint at different experiential frames, ‘elsewheres’ which are here (p. 15). Sher (2005) alludes to this sense of elsewhere in her description of zydeco as a “magical, sensuous, mysterious” locale where she “transcended any reality [she] knew of, where [she] disappeared and only the pure joyfulness of the dance remained (p. 2). Donovan describes it as “an out-of-mind, in-the-moment, ecstatic experience—with others” (Email correspondence, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005). Similarly, McNeil (1995) associates dancing with a “boundary loss, the submergence of self in the flow” or “a blurring of self-awareness and the heightening of fellow-feeling with all who share in the dance” (p. 8). Donovan,

McNeil, and Sher, along with many other dancers with whom I spoke and danced, described a transcendence grounded in the semblance of intimacy produced by embodied joint action.

In the next chapter I suggest that, like zydeco, the dances of self and other at work in curriculum and autoethnography might be generatively approached as similar sorts of locales, where powerful semblances of intimacy are embodied, the grasp of local narratives loosened, and other kinds of boundaries temporarily moved.

*I am sitting on a tall stool at a long wooden table at the edge of a freshly corn-starched dance floor. Moving up and down and side to side simultaneously, coupled bodies groove together as if they are stirring the same big pot. A copper-colored man in leather pants motions for me to dance. I nod. He takes my hand. As we take our first steps, it is clear that I am no dancer. I am out of step. Hips bouncing independently of feet, and I keep bumping into the broad brim of his cowboy hat. He swings me out with particular vigor and I careen into an amplifier. When his hand finally finds the small of my back again, my partner simplifies his steps, leans close, and whispers: “Just hang on.”*

## **Chapter 6**

### **From Force to Play of Forces: Weight, Touch, and Momentum**

I conclude this dissertation in much the same way I proceeded in general: without grand gestures forcing the three very different but also interrelated contexts of interpretation (dancing, research, and a multicultural classroom) to partner up. All the same, subtle connections exist. Much like Probyn (1990), I proceeded “with a consciously loose rather than tight relation in mind . . . establishing loose sets of relations, capillary actions and movements, spilling out among and between different fields” (McRobbie, 1984, p. 142). Rather than forcing connections, I use Probyn’s (1990) metaphors of locatedness—local, locale, and location—to guide my curricular movements in, out, and across three diverse contexts of interpretation, themselves linked by my own back and forthing in literal and figurative dances of self and other, and by the semblances of intimacy that such movement can give rise to. Let me take a moment to retrace my steps in Probyn’s terms, with the knowledge that retracing is never a simple process of backtracking, but rather yet another twist of interpretation.

I begin my retracing in the light of the local. As educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) suggests, starting here allows us to “move from the close to the distant, the particular to the general, without the risk of losing ourselves in the large abstractions that are so often confused with certainties” (p. 68). Probyn (1990) describes the local as “practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them” (p. 178). This dissertation moves across three interrelated local contexts. I experimented with writing about these contexts together, but found it dizzying. Instead, I attempted to

uncouple the subject of my research from the method of investigation and localize my discussion in discrete chapters.

In chapter four, the multicultural classroom can be seen as a localized dance of self and other, one contingent on resistance to propel a joint action that moves among the curricular aims of teacher and student. My localized curriculum story about particular instances of reciprocal curricular force at play in a multicultural curriculum also helps localize questions about how curriculum, as embodied by student and teacher, might be located, to use Probyn's term, similar to zydeco as a dance of self and other. More specifically, chapter four raises important questions about the potential for intimacy across perceived otherness in curriculum; about the implications for curriculum of the semblance of intimacy I experienced while dancing; and about the power of semblance in general.

In chapter 5, zydeco can be seen as a local practice: a literal dance of self and other from which to explore how such movement can give rise to semblances of interracial intimacy—despite locally racist social narratives that, outside of the dance, often serve to ground such connection. What began as an autoethnographic examination of learning to dance took unanticipated twists and turns, as my observations of the physical dance revealed another kind of dance at work, one reminiscent of an ambivalent desire that emerged in classroom assignments and discussions. My observations of intimacy between white Delilahs and their black male dance partners seemed to be leading me further from cultural understanding and closer to what Rabinow (1977) described as “the comprehension of the self by detour of the comprehension of the other” (p. 5). As a curriculum theorist, part of the goal of this dissertation is to look at the notion

of curriculum as an embodied locale characterized by movements in time and space among selves and others—with zydeco serving as a vibrant local example of such movement.

This final chapter points toward a practical link between autoethnography and curriculum to suggest that the movement or play among self and other moving together in time—reciprocal tension in dancing and the back and forthing of the research gaze in autoethnography as discussed in chapter 3—can generate a pragmatic semblance of intimacy embodied in action. Similarly, I suggest that curriculum might be understood as a verb or an action rather than a static thing or place: a condition in which students can move together (and apart) in curricular time across difference. As an interpretive act (like dance and research), the dance of self and other that is curriculum can be seen as an intimate project in motion of bringing “self in relation to knowledge, to the world” (Miller, 2005, p. 46).

Each of these locals constitute contexts worthy of study in their particularity. However, as Probyn (1990) advises, “instead of collapsing the local we have to open it up, to work at different levels” (p. 186). Rather than focusing on a local problem concerning schooling, such as test scores or the exclusion of Creole of Color experience from the formal curriculum, this study takes a step back. William F. Pinar argued as early as 1974 that the field of curriculum’s exclusive focus on the externalities of schooling be redirected, though not replaced, to include systematic study of individual experience. Pinar writes: “It is not that the public world—curriculum, instruction, objectives—become unimportant; it is that to further comprehend their roles in the educational process we must take our eyes off them for a time, and begin a lengthy systematic search

of our inner experience” (1974, p. 3). Following Pinar’s lead, I step back from schooling proper and instead use my own experiences of intimacy and desire as a primary, though not exclusive, interpretive locale. This study’s movement, albeit sometimes clumsy, between and among my own experiences and those of other dancers and students points to the permeability of curriculum: the intimate proximity of knowledge inside and outside of schooling. As Britzman (1993) notes:

Classrooms are not hermetically sealed worlds; teachers and students bring to the construction of school knowledge contradictory and conflictive criteria by which knowledge and identity are deemed relevant or irrelevant; the larger social conditions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class domination fashion the borders of interpretation. (p. 190)

Thus, questions about the relevance of the curriculum inside schools, in terms of “real life,” shift toward questions that move along the nexus of inevitable relation: the inevitable intimacy between individual and social experience and their curricular closeness. Curriculum is, among other things, a mode of relation between self and the world—what curriculum theorist Dwayne Huebner (1975) calls “patterned forms of response-in-the world” (p. 231). Foshay (1990) writes:

What is required is that we recognize the curriculum as an array of personal encounters. Being personal, they are inward, in the main. One encounters the outside world in school and uses the experiences as an instrument of self-discovery, or self-realization. It’s an intimate affair. (p. 274)

Stepping back from the local context of schooling while stepping out through zydeco for purposes of this study equals a simultaneous step closer to issues of intimacy

across perceived difference that are fundamental to curriculum. Questions brought forth in this study regarding how zydeco relates to school become more profitably patterned as autoethnographic questions about how the semblance of intimacy across perceived racialized and gendered otherness—which I experienced dancing in rigidly segregated dancing events in Southwest Louisiana—translates to a fundamental curricular consideration of the intimacy involved in bringing “self in relation to knowledge to the world” (Miller, 2005, p. 46).

Like curriculum, autoethnography might be thought of as an intimate project of bringing self in relation to knowledge. In this study autoethnography on one level has served as a methodological tool that shaped my understanding of semblances of intimacy. Huebner (1975) writes that “all educators attempt to shape the world; theorists should call attention to the tools used for shaping in order that the world being shaped can be more beautiful and just” (p. 269). This also holds true with researchers. A major goal of this study has been to couple the semblance of intimacy among self and other that I was exploring with the methodological movements of autoethnography. As detailed at length in chapter 3, literature about autoethnography reveals the desire to reshape research relations among the knower and the known in order to fashion a more intimate and just mode of relation among self and other. As I argue in chapter 3, skepticism is warranted in terms of autoethnography’s claims to reconcile the unequal power relation between self and other inherent to qualitative research. At the same time, the back and forthing between self and other of the autoethnographic gaze, at least in some instances, does seem to result in a powerful semblance of intimacy. Like the semblance of intimacy across perceived otherness that I experienced zydeco dancing, movement is key. I quote

again dancer Brenda Buffalino as cited in Dixon-Gottschild (2003): “It is the movement that pronounces the shape” (p. 29).

Similarly, the shape this dissertation as a whole has taken has been contingent on its movement across interpretive contexts of research, dancing, and curriculum; among Probyn’s levels of interpretation; and in and between experiences of self and other engaged in dances of intimacy. It should be remembered that Probyn’s (1990) levels of abstraction are not designed to show knowledge matriculating first through the local, stopping at locale, and finally winding up on location. Rather, Probyn (1990) attempts to work on and move through these sites “with a consciously loose rather than tight relation in mind, . . . establishing loose sets of relations, capillary actions and movements, spilling out among and between different fields” (p. 142). Her levels of abstraction overlap, demonstrating “a porous closeness of sites that questions the very basis of the site itself” (2001, p. 178).

Thinking and writing (even less than gracefully) about locales of desire and semblances of intimacy such as dancing, research, and curriculum provides opportunities to examine the way embodied “concepts, practices, and fragments rest upon and lean on each other” (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). Such movement lends insight into—borrowing from Bateson’s (1987) definition of epistemology—“how knowing is done” in relation to local contexts (p. 20). Further, dancing across levels of abstraction and negotiating locales leads us through important questions about research, curriculum, and *what it means to want to know* across difference. I want to suggest here that in dance, autoethnography, and curriculum (interrelated locales from which I think about semblances of intimacy),



bodies of knowledge insinuate themselves into local questions, rubbing up against each other to elaborate the doubts, fears, and pleasures of confronting difference.

As in the case of dancing, the interpretive intimacy shared by coupled locales such as, say, curriculum and zydeco, is made through motion and sometimes only fleetingly. The ephemeral intimacy of interpretation can be a bit like that of a dance, one that Thomas (2003) describes as existing “at a perpetual vanishing point. At the moment of its creation it is gone. . . . [It is] an event that disappears in the very act of materializing” (p. 121). At most zydeco dances it is rude not to switch partners at some point. As dancers mix it up, the joint action of couples vanishes and recombines into new configurations. Being a good social dancer is, in part, represented by an ability to connect with others easily in productively promiscuous modes of relation. Such promiscuity is not the opposite of intimacy; rather, it relies on intimate contact and is mobilized by the “connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities in an active becoming with a partner, with a crowd, as an event” (Stivale, 2003, p. 123). This seems useful in thinking about the intimacy at work in curriculum, which often requires of both its teachers and students the ability to connect—sometimes quite promiscuously—with a multiplicity of ideas. Indeed, as Maxine Greene contends, one of the goals of curriculum should be to “release the kind of energy that will permit familiar contact with everybody and anything”(1995, p. 63) so that “so they can see more, hear more, make more connections, embark on new and unfamiliar adventures into meaning” (Greene, 2001, p. 50). That is what I have tried to do here: proliferate the sort of energy that generates a multiplicitous intimacy among ideas collocated by my lived experience trying to move among notions of self and other—locally embodied by the delicate dance of white

femininity and black masculinity, and more abstractly, by difference more generally defined.

In these last pages of my dissertation I am still left moving back and forth among Probyn's metaphors of locatedness. In doing so, I dance across locales of intimacy among racialized and gendered otherness, and a more localized discussion about the implication of such intimacy among white Delilah dancers, teachers, and their partners. All the while, I try and shift weight and move to a more general discussion exploring curriculum as a play of forces—forces I was touched by through an embodied curriculum of zydeco: the weight of reciprocal tension, the touch of intimacy, and the momentum of semblance across perceived difference. I do this in order to consider questions about how curriculum might become an embodied mode of relation, one where the semblances of innocence often deployed by white Southern teacher education students (and their teacher) might unveil themselves, and bodies of knowledge mobilized to reason through local questions, grapple with lived contradictions, and play with alternatives. In the autobiographical writings of Malcolm X, Iceberg Slim, and Richard Wright that I mention in chapter 2, the potent mixture of desire and fear leads white women into “seedy” downtown areas and clubs in search of intimacy with black masculinity—so too with zydeco's white Delilahs. The nightclub or the dancehall is, as Oliver (2002) writes and as I experienced, “the perfect modernist space in which traditional social structure can unravel” (p. 156). In what follows, I want to suggest that curriculum—contingent on a semblance of intimacy among self in relation to knowledge in the world—might serve as a similar locale for psychosocial structures of knowledge to unravel and reinterpret themselves.

### **The Weight of Reciprocal Tension**

The dancehall seems an unlikely place for social life to unravel itself and reveal something new, as it is often relegated to the sphere of leisure: a diversion from the quotidian tensions of daily existence. Indeed, writer turned dancer Robert Rand (2004) makes a compelling point that dancing provided him the means to abandon work-related perfectionism and elude his anxiety disorder. While dancing did relieve Rand's psychological tension, for him zydeco did not provide a place of escape from the psychosocial tension often associated with intimacy across race and gender.

Dancing, regardless of the venue, can stir up men and women. As innocent, as anxiety reducing, as fun as social dance may be, what you have, at bottom line, is the potentially inflammatory act of males and females touching one another. This, in turn, can fuel the emotions and spark some baser human impulses, such as jealousy and lust, mistrust and suspicion. These feelings can and do exist in a homogenous environment, in which everyone on the dance floor belongs to the same race. When the races mingle, things can get more complex. (Rand, 2004, p. 163)

The autoethnographic narrative in chapter 5 serves to illustrate some of the social and historical tensions, much like those Rand (2004) describes, that surround intimacy across perceived otherness embodied by zydeco dancers. The complex gendered and racialized curriculum of zydeco dance—reliant as it is on stereotypes of the other, and social narratives such as the rape myth that constrain intimacy between black men and white women—demonstrates itself to be “a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of

representation, as anxious as it is assertive” (bhabha, 1994). However, as the dance of white Delilahs illustrates, social tensions are not only played out in zydeco but also played with. I believe that the form that play occupies—“tensionality in difficulty and difference” (Aoki, 1990, p. 113)—might be useful in thinking about multicultural education, and more generally, curriculum.

According to Fanon (1963), “dancing takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most compelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away (p. 57). Yet my experience as a white Delilah made it clear to me that zydeco remains resonant in part because it symbolically amplifies, rather than diminishes, the tension of racialized and gendered difference. The rhythmic intertwinement of black and white bodies grooving together plays on rather than resists the trope of visible difference, its concomitant racial segregation, and the violent social narratives that serve to maintain such psychosocial separation. Dancing, curriculum, and autoethnography may indeed have the potential to serve as relatively safe channels for such tension. But the semblance generated by moving together within the joint reciprocal tension does not transform such tension into intimacy; the momentum of joint action relies on tension. In dancing terms, giving weight means leaning simultaneously inward toward your partner and away, in order to achieve the optimal reciprocal resistance allowing two people to move as one. As I mention in chapter 5, it is the play of oppositional force that generates the sense of unison that is so satisfying.

As I have already suggested, the dance of self and other embodied by white Delilahs in zydeco, and the one that jostles multicultural education, is choreographed between dichotomous poles of desire and fear, pleasure and prohibition. On one hand,

these white Delilahs seem stuck in the middle. However, this in-between might also be seen as a generative locale characterized by motion, rather than as a static local.

According to Najmi and Srikanh (2003), on the subject of white women:

At once racially privileged and sexually marginalized, their in-between status theoretically should give to white women the resources and the sensibilities to become a significant mediating force in bringing together the center and the periphery and eventually blurring the distinction between the two. (p. 14)

White women, as Najmi and Srikanh (2003) see it, occupy a theoretical middle ground between self and other that can offer them an advantage in establishing an intimate mode of relation, one that blurs the distinction between the two. This notion of blurring is reminiscent of an intimacy defined by diminishing difference that autoethnography also seems to strive for: an epistemological intimacy in which, as Ellis (2004) describes it, “distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (p. 38). As I point out in chapter 3, such intimacy is problematic. Michael King (2001), drawing from Gadamer, writes that “the quest to understand is made necessary by difference” (p. 51).

Let me suggest that we look at this in-between not as a space for blurring but rather as an embodied mode of relation characterized by a back-and-forth motion among self and other. Yes, things get blurry; as with the reciprocal tension of a vigorous twirl on the dance floor, perception is altered. However, to quote Gadamer (1976), “the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other,” and the indissolubility of the self do not lose their distinction (p. 9). We do not somehow become the other through this mode of

relation, but rather make contact, perhaps move away, and then, never unchanged, move forward to touch again. The momentum of difference is not relinquished.

As I move on to talk about intimacy, I am compelled to ask what it might mean for curriculum to give weight to difference in a similar way—not in terms of simply valuing difference, but rather as the embodied act of giving ethical and epistemological weight to the reciprocal tension of radical difference. Curriculum theorist Ted Aoki (1990) evokes a similar curricular mode of relation, one that seeks:

not a way of ease but rather a way, though difficult, that may grant an opening to new possibilities. And in the lived tensionality that marks such difficulty and difference, they seem to be within the reach of a quality of tautness—like that of a properly attuned violin string—that allows a sounding and resounding that resonate vitality. (p. 113)

### **The Touch of Intimacy**

As Snowber (2002) points out, “knowledge is essentially a thirst, a desire, a longing. . . . It is a call to intimacy” (p. 25). I propose that the double desire dwelling deep within the heart of autoethnography is also at work in my own autoethnography, and that such a call is grounded in simultaneously autobiographic and ethnographic desires: to know myself and to know others. On one hand, my autoethnography belies the ethnographic desire for otherness. A deep yearning to get to know the other—a powerfully offensive hegemonic curiosity; a “contaminated, promiscuous and impure” (Geertz 1988) desire to get close—and then write about it is at the heart of my autoethnography, no matter how self-reflexive, no matter how vulnerable. At the same time, my study is an attempt to understand—get in touch with—my own contradictory

desires to know across perceived otherness (not defined exclusively in opposition to one dominant group), and explore what it means to want to know. Yet in doing so, my study continually risks becoming a monument to my own “fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries” (Olney, 1980, p. 23). However, as Sparkes (2002) reminds again, “writing the self involves, at the same time, writing about the other,” while “the work of the other is also about the self of the writer” (p. 217). Or as Dorothy Lee (1976) writes, drawing from Dewey:

When the self is open to the experience of the other, of the surround; then, to use Dewey’s term, it is transacting, not interacting. When the other in the transaction is human, value is social, though it is experienced by the individual self. In this sense, what is valued experience for the self is found in relatedness to the other and is bound to have value for the related other also. (p. 5-6)

I spent two years trying to get close to people in the field: establishing relationships, learning to dance well enough to learn dancing’s embodied lessons from partners, and taking notes on my own “transaction.” I also volunteered at a local organization for the preservation of Creole heritage, and for a summer program designed to transmit Creole of Color cultural practices, zydeco dancing among them. These points of entry were attempts to get to know something about the historically cultural context of zydeco—though I also wanted to get to know Creole of Color people.

This autoethnography is a story about relationships. I learned to dance mostly from Creole of Color and African American men and fellow white Delilahs. In addition to the spatial relations of dancing, through other sorts of relationships I learned what it means to be a white Delilah. As McCarthy Brown (1991) observes regarding

ethnographic research, “whatever else it is, [it] is a form of relationship” (p. 12). So too with autoethnography. Through projects in several anthropology classes, I also got to know many zydeco musicians and became closer to one of them; I say closer instead of close, since intimacy is naturally relational and always a matter of vantage point.

In chapter 5, I describe the first time I met Alphonse “Bois Sec” Ardoin: the first time he kissed my hand. Bois Sec would tell a different story of when we first met. His stories and mine about our time together are necessarily different because they are told from very different vantage points, though our stories are not completely separate, sometimes shifting and slipping into one another. I never formally interviewed Bois Sec or recorded our conversations and I do not try to represent his story here. Other than a few quotes, his voice is largely absent from this dissertation’s narrative. Bois Sec’s voice *is* still heard, though less frequently than in years past, at festivals and other public events throughout Southwest Louisiana. It is also heard in countless interviews (see Savoy, 1984; and Tisserand, 1998). Filmmaker Les Blank, who for a year lived with Bois Sec and his late wife, Marscline, offers an intimate if somewhat anachronistic slice of Ardoin life in his film *Dry Wood*. More recently, Ardoin family friend Ching Veillon’s biography, *Creole Music Man Bois Sec Ardoin*, provides a thorough account of Bois Sec’s life through interviews with him and 11 of his 14 children.

In terms of the semblance of intimacy that can result from moving together in reciprocal tension, I consider Bois Sec my primary informant: we share barriers of language, age, social class, culture, race, religion, and dancing (he is a much better dancer than I am). However, as Bois Sec is fond of telling his accordion students: “If you want to learn, you’re going to know it.” In my case he was right. I learned about the semblance



of intimacy that subtle dances of self and other can give rise as Bois sec and I watched soap operas together, shared a bowl of gumbo, shopped together for a belt, and so on. I also learned, in a very direct way, about the social and historical tension surrounding the semblance of such intimacy among white femininity and black masculinity. I still struggle with the difficulty of translating this sort of intimacy in terms of research and curriculum.

As I discuss in chapter 3, autoethnography has less trouble making claims about the potential for intimacy it offers; in fact, intimacy among self and other seems to be autoethnography's primary destination. Autoethnography, as Gergen and Gergen (2002) write, "brings us into a space of intimacy" (p. 15). Autoethnography's space of intimacy is a tight one. According to Russel (1998), autoethnography "produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze under the sign of one identity" (p. 25). I argue that neither research nor curriculum serves as a static space; rather, they might more generatively be conceptualized, using Probyn's term, as locales, embodied by modes of relation. Likewise, the intimacy such locales give rise to is not static. The closeness I shared with countless people on the dance floor, and perhaps most profoundly with Bois Sec, was not a space for collapsing subjectivity.

Autoethnographic intimacy is certainly a project of understanding the self as other. Yet as I seek to understand myself as other, I do not somehow become the other; instead, I touch and allow myself to be touched by "the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9). This sort of intimacy (a semblance really) can be seen as a back and forth among self and other, where embodied questions and insights about "how to relate to what is other, to what confronts us across the rifts of difference"

are encouraged to make radical contact with inquiry into “how can we be affected by, even transformed by the other’s differentness (and vice-versa)” (King, 2001, p. 51). It is the movement that makes the shape.

Concerning this sort of intimacy, Gergen and Gergen (2002) ask whether we can be “certain of the intimacy that is implied” (p. 15). This is also a fitting question regarding curricular intimacy. As chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, the implications of intimacy across white femininity and black masculinity seem particularly uncertain. Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells unmasked and fought against the violent physical destruction such intimacy threatened, while the writings of male African American authors Malcolm X, Iceberg Slim, Amiri Baraka, Frantz Fanon, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin describe the threat of psychic dissolution that intimacy with white femininity poses for black masculinity. Murrell (1993) also perceives white femininity as a threat to black masculinity; more particularly, he views white female teachers as a threat to the education of African American boys, a threat that has materialized in the comparatively low academic achievement of African American males. As Murrell (1993) understands it, white female teachers riddled with “visceral fear of Black men and boys” simply “have to overcome too much to be able to express esteem, positive regard, and love for African American boys” (p. 242).

To a certain extent I agree: the visceral fear perpetuated by stereotypes of violent or hypersexualized black masculinity demonstrated by some of my white female students does seem to present a nearly insurmountable obstacle to intimacy. Still more difficult to overcome, however, is the fear of alienation such intimacy might provoke on the part of the intimate familial authority of the father. As I argue earlier, and like the white Delilahs

of zydeco, it is as if the “moves” of some of my white female students are monitored by a patriarchal network—a family—seeing to it that their good daughters (soon to be good teachers) maintain a (dis)respectful distance between self and other. Unfortunately, as Murrell’s (1993) disheartening research illustrates, some of those African American male others with whom any intimacy is constructed as dangerous and fearful will be students of those good daughters.

While Murrell (1993) does not address desire, white female teachers might also need to overcome an often ambivalent, dehumanizing desire for the “forbidden fruit” of the black male body in order to connect with African American boys. As Dixon Gottschild (2003) notes, this ambivalent desire has epistemological as well as sexual implications:

By emphasizing the black body as sexualized, the black intellect could, accordingly, be demoted in the white imagination. Whites left the body to blacks and kept the (thinking) head as their exclusive terrain. I surmise that one of the white underlying fears, in this case, was the incipient sense that bodies are *not* ignorant—that black bodies were, indeed, thinking bodies. . . . Black bodies weren't dumb. They were extensions of black minds—intelligent minds—in a physical landscape where the Cartesian mind/body split refused to take hold. (p. 44)

Dixon Gottschild (2003) brilliantly couples the notion of the black body with the black mind to address the push-pull of fear and desire that strains both interracial intimacy and the fertile transaction of knowledge that could result from conjunction. Combine those factors with a patriarchally inscribed fear, and it certainly seems that Murrell (1993) is

correct: white female teachers do have much to overcome in order to connect with African American male students. Murrell (1993) concludes that, rather than risk alienation at the hands of a white female teacher and her education, African American boys should be taught by African American people. No doubt intimacy with white femininity poses risks for black masculinity. However, as a white woman with much to overcome, but who has experienced what seemed a powerful semblance of intimacy with black men on the dance floor and through other research relationships, I am called to wonder, as I did in chapter four: If multicultural curriculum (all curriculum, really) can be interpreted as a dance that moves together and apart among the familiarity and strangeness of self and other, fear and desire, and intimacy and its betrayal, must the conflicted intimacy of difference and its concomitant tension necessarily prevent intimacy—or might it actually put intimacy into motion? If so, what could this mean in terms of thinking about curricular intimacy?

### **The Momentum of Semblance**

It would not mean curriculum *about* intimacy, multicultural or otherwise. Rather, what is required is to foster curricular modes of relation that allow students to embody intimacy—to get close across difference. This does not entail facile field experiences designed to expose students to the so-called other side, but rather a more imaginative intimacy, though no less embodied. It is much like what Gilroy (1993) calls a “playful diasporic intimacy,” characterized by movement among selves and others (p.16). Such curriculum might take the shape of a semblance of intimacy that encourages students to promiscuously court multiple combinations of relations of self in relation to knowledge, and to flirt with new sorts of closenesses with people and ideas they consider other.

While I am not willing to argue it here, the notion of the semblance of intimacy across difference I experienced dancing zydeco may be significantly different from the notion of *authentic* intimacy as deep connection. However, as I note in chapter 4, the two are not mutually exclusive; they may in fact be interdependent, though the latter is often privileged. Again, this is beyond the scope of my study, though as ethnographer Harry Wolcott (2002) writes, “the important thing for fieldworkers is the nature of intimacy” (p. 164). Like Wolcott (2002), I am skeptical about the nature of intimacy across difference involved in research, as were many of my participants. Similarly, as Murrell (1993) points out, skepticism is warranted in regard to the capacity for intimacy across otherness in school. The intimacy of dancing, however: that is another matter.

The intimacy of zydeco, writes white Delilah Valerie Sher (2005), means “to be joined at the hip, heart, soul, and fully alive with another human being. It’s magic, it’s mystery, and I long to know it completely” (p. 1). Although this study has not attempted to “know” zydeco, it has tried to understand the intimacy I experienced dancing. Sher (2005) is correct: there *is* a mysterious momentum to the semblance of intimacy produced by two bodies moving together in joint action across reciprocal tension. Historian William McNeil’s (1995) hypothesis concerning this semblance of intimacy is not so mysterious. According to his evolutionary account of dancing as a form of muscular bonding, the semblance of intimacy created by keeping together in time can be seen as central to the survival of human civilization.

The basic premise of McNeil’s book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* is that practices of moving together in time, such as dancing and marching, lead to feelings of solidarity that are essential to community building, which in turn are central to

individual survival. McNeil traces the phenomenon of moving together in time back to prelingual societies in order to illustrate the impact of such movements in evolutionary terms.

By engaging in the delight of keeping together in time (perhaps helped by the beat of sticks against the ground or some more resounding surface), they could begin to feel, as the Swazi king said of his warriors in 1940, that “they were one and can praise each other.” Praise had to wait upon words, which came later; but the expanded emotional solidarity that dancing together arouses must have conferred an important advantage on those groups that first learned the trick of keeping together in time. So great, indeed, was the advantage, that other hominid groups presumably either learned to dance or became extinct. That is why all human societies dance today and have done so through the recorded past. (McNeil, 1995, pp. 22-23)

McNeil believes that the rhythmic input of moving muscles that pulses through the nervous system evokes the womb to the extent that “adults dancing together might arouse something like the state of consciousness they left behind in infancy, when psychologists seem to agree that no distinction is made between self and surroundings” (p. 7). This capacity of dance to evoke such “boundary-loss,” McNeil continues, is fundamental to its capacity to facilitate solidarity.

While it is well beyond the scope of this study to build a cause-and-effect argument about dancing and solidarity, I am compelled by the pragmatism of McNeil’s (1995) reasoning. He does not argue that dancing builds solidarity because it actually induces boundary loss; rather, McNeil (1995) contends that dancing is a mode of relation so reminiscent of the boundary-loss (intimacy) of the womb, that it gives rise to a

solidarity nurtured into becoming through the embodiment of joint action. McNeil's (1995) argument points to the power of joint action and the momentum of semblance. This has important implications for thinking about curriculum, research, and the potential for intimacy across notions of difference.

As I discussed at length in chapter 5, despite narratives that sometimes constrain interracial intimacy, zydeco dancing seems to evoke strong feelings of intimacy across perceived racial difference among dancers. As any white Delilah and her black male partner know in South Louisiana, outside of the dance the sort of intimacy they share suffers from social sanction. Yet such intimacy resonates on the dance floor. It is as if zydeco, to use Maxine Greene's (2001) words about art, "releases hidden energies, that unlock the structures of habit and sets the community strangely free," at least temporarily (p. 53). Borrowing again from Greene (2001), zydeco seems to "make perceptible, visible, and audible" an intimacy that is "not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (p. 49). Thrift (1997) addresses the power arising from the joint action of bodies moving together in time, across difference, in reciprocal tension. He writes that dance can be considered as a

fabrication of a "different world" of meaning, made with the body. It is perhaps the most direct way in which the body-subject sketches out an imaginary sphere. The word imaginary here is used in the sense "as-if," suggesting a field or potential space. The dance is not aimed at describing events (that is, it is not representational) but at evolving a semblance of a world within which specific questions take their meaning. (Thrift, 1997, p. 147)

As he sees it, dancing is a world-making activity where imagination is embodied and

potential is “creatively worked through, so throwing up new actions and interpretations” (Thrift, 1997, p. 139).

Thus, semblances should not be considered merely static facsimiles of “the real thing” they refer to; their momentum is not a representative one. Rather, the momentum of semblance lies in its capacity to “hint at different experiential frames, ‘elsewheres’ which are here” (Thrift, 1997, p. 150). Through semblance “we are enabled to look at things, to think about things as if they were otherwise” (Greene, 2001, p. 65). In this light, the semblance of intimacy embodied by the dance of white Delilahs and their partners, for example, resonates as a “compelling insinuation” or “dynamic suggestion” of a mode of relation—a world—that in its local context must be put elsewhere (pp. 55-56). Through semblance, we are allowed to embody alternative ways of being in the world, and bring forth new relations of self to knowledge to the world.

It is clear that semblance is the stuff of curriculum and autoethnography as well as dancing. As I suggest throughout this dissertation, curriculum and autoethnography might be generatively considered as dances of selves and others. To tap Huebner (1975), both curriculum and autoethnography can be viewed as “patterned forms of response-in-the world, which carry with them the possibilities of the emergence of novelty and newness” (p. 231). Instead of thinking about curriculum and autoethnography in terms of theories of knowledge they supposedly represent, it could be generative to consider them “relationally”; that is, we might approach curriculum and autoethnography (both projects of bringing self in relation to the world) as being mobilized by semblances of intimacy (the multiplicity of possible connections and relations), semblances that point toward the manner in which self in relation to knowledge comes into radical contact with the world.



Like zydeco, these dances are not always graceful or easy; the movements are often constrained by epistemological, social, historical, and psychological forces. As my discussion on the history of mistrust and violence that surrounds the intimacy among white femininity and black masculinity illustrates, the dance between self and other that takes place in classrooms, fieldwork, and dancehalls can be problematic. Aoki (1990) writes that “such a realm of the between is a situated place where difficulty resides. In such a situation many of us tend to problematize the difficulty and seek solutions that offer closure” (p. 112). The semblance of intimacy offers no solutions, curricular or otherwise, and promises no closure—no autoethnographic reconciliation of tensions between self and other. Rather, the curious momentum of the semblance of intimacy—its seductive to and fro among the difficulties and pleasures of difference—might only move us “to approach problems from different angles, to assay the effect of different combinations, to contemplate a history we [know] and a future” that is elsewhere (Taylor, 2001, p. 82).

Both educational research and curriculum theory need such momentum. As evolving modes of relation charged with bringing self in relation to knowledge to the world, they perpetually need to be moved. As curriculum theorist Janet Miller (2005) writes about educational research, though it holds true for curriculum theory as well, we “must move through and beyond traditional framings of educational situations and issues in order to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to” (p. 53-54). Intimacy across difference is one of those places that is often hard to get to via research and curriculum. In autoethnography and the school curriculum, moves toward such intimacy can seem forced, or in the case of Murrell's lucid argument about the intimacy between white teachers and black male students, superficial.

Nurturing intimacy across difference in curriculum and research is not altogether different from that which allows the semblance of intimacy shared by dancers to exist. Like the perfect pressure of a well placed hand in the small of a partner's back, nurturing intimacy in curriculum and research can be understood as a matter of touch, weight, and momentum: a play of forces. Thus, curriculum and autoethnography can be located as modes of relation, where the play of epistemological forces replaces technocratic force; where we experience the relative weight of history, knowledge, and power; feel the reciprocal touch of self and other; and embody the mysterious momentum of intimacy. Again, it is the movement that makes the shape.

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## **Vita**

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As a doctoral student, Laura taught multicultural education courses, served as the general supervisor for first-year teachers in the alternative baccalaureate program, and presented her scholarship at regional, national, and international conferences. She is a member of the American Educational Research Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, and the Southern Anthropology Society.