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Dance as Political Activism: Two Popular Choreomusical Responses to the Orlando Shooting

Foreword

A published paper is inherently limiting—it cannot truly show moving bodies, it cannot be conversational or self-reflexive. It cannot, in other words, substitute for interacting with human beings. For these reasons, as I describe the physical body and more-than-two-dimensional identities, I ask you, the reader, to go beyond the page. Watch the music videos, dance to the music, take careful notice of your own body, your own identity, to whose realness this article cannot do justice.

Introduction

On June 12, 2016, a 29-year old United States American man entered the Pulse gay bar and nightclub in Orlando, Florida. He was armed with two legally purchased firearms and took 49 lives, the majority of whom identified as queer persons of color. At the time, the Orlando massacre was the deadliest mass shooting in the United States. It remains the country's deadliest hate crime against the LGBTQIA+ community.

Among mass media responses were two popular music videos that are noteworthy for the ways in which they unite music and dance in a political critique of the violence. The music video for Sia's "The Greatest" (Sia et al. 2016) infuses its music with a queer choreographic aesthetic and uses a filming style that invites the spectator to participate in a communal response to the tragedy. I use the term "queer" to describe dance—and intersecting modes of performativity (Kattenbelt 2010)—as sites of resistance and political possibility (DeFrantz 2016, Croft 2017). Rather than critiquing the stylistic structure of mainstream music and dance videos, the dance video for X-Ambassador's "Unsteady" (Diorio, Boyd and Johnston 2016) reconceives the heteronormative commercial contemporary dance duet with two male dancers. The video infuses its music with a political validation of homosexuality. Through a more intimate and dynamic filming style, it asks the spectator to confront structures of marginalization empathetically. Exploring these intricately correlated musical and choreographic structures forms the basis for an argument with larger implications: that in their convergence, music and dance imbue one another with new political power. These case studies are all the more poignant because their choreomusical unity amplifies the very sonic and visceral acts of living that were silenced in the shooting, people dancing to music together.

In this article, I contextualize these arguments, first by understanding the dancing body as a political force. I then propose a system of choreomusical analysis that uses examples from "The Greatest" and "Unsteady" to explore the ways the body as a political force joins and politically amplifies music. To illustrate the significance of this amplification, I offer a thought experiment,

“the three listenings,” which considers how danced political messages remain vivid in music, and how this relationship can reflect back on specific events while also carrying into broader global dialogues. I close with a more focused analysis of “The Greatest” and “Unsteady” which includes YouTube viewer comments as one indicator of the videos’ political impact.

The Dancing Body as Political Force

Many dance and feminist scholars have written about the body’s political power. In an argument foundational to new material feminism, Karan Barad compellingly claimed that “[the body in] its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power” (Barad 2003, 809; italics original). The dancing body, which visibly animates the body’s materiality, is an especially rich site to study powers negotiated in political struggle. This has been a central claim in theories of both popular and queer dance. Dance scholar Sherril Dodds has written, for instance, that “[P]opular dance constitutes a site of social and economic power that has the capacity to destabilize and transgress cultural norms” (Dodds 2011, 3). Describing the active materiality of dance, dance theorist Clare Croft also names political action as fundamental to queer dance: “Queer dance argues [...] that queerness emerged in action, in protests, on stages (as well as in writing), demanding physical history” (Croft 2017, 13).

The concept of “queer corporeal orature”, coined by Thomas DeFrantz in reference to black social dance (DeFrantz 2016; 2004, 4), describes the specific capacity of dance to “incite action” through “performative gestures which cite contexts beyond the dance” (ibid.). Following these many conceptions of the dancing body as an active political force and theories of queer dance as challenging political structures, I maintain that the dancing bodies in the music videos “The Greatest” and “Unsteady” cannot be considered as passive instruments, but must be seen as active forces engaged in the negotiation of political boundaries.

An Approach to Choreomusical Analysis

The term “choreomusical” has been embraced by a handful of scholars to describe the relationship between music and dance. Chief among these is Paul Hodgins (1991, 1992) whose seminal work in the early 1990s proposed a musical foundation for the analysis of choreographic structures. Critiquing scholarship that frames dance as subordinate to music, other choreomusicologists, most notably Stephanie Jordan (1993, 2002), have sought more flexibility in thinking about the possibilities co-produced by music and dance. By “choreomusical,” I here mean those specific ways dance and music overlap or are parallel to one another to the degree that they create the impression of being a single force. This take on choreomusicality is different from those conceptualizing dance and music as contrapuntal (Leaman 2016). It aligns most closely with what Turner and Fauconnier (1995) called “blended space” and what Jordan (2012, 13) describes as “a new composite form.”

My approach to choreomusical analysis also sits adjacent to the work of music video scholars. Carol Vernallis (2004) and Nicholas Cook (1998), for instance, dissect music videos according to parameters that are very similar to, and in some cases more extensive than mine. But our aims are somewhat different. Although they each describe characteristics of synchronicity be-

tween mediums that amplify one another, they attend more to the ways individual elements interact than to their composite effect. Akin to contrapuntal understandings of music-dance relationships, Cook's conformance, complementation, and contest, for example, are based on his definition of multimedia as "the *interaction* of different media" (ibid., viii; italics original) rather than on a "composite form" (Jordan 2012, 13) Vernallis, likewise, contrasts the dynamic, multimedia nature of music videos with narratively unified Hollywood film. She describes music videos as "always in flux" and "unpredictable," owing to the camera's obligation to follow the music (Vernallis 2004, 110). I have not found this to be the case in "The Greatest" and "Unsteady," which differ from many mainstream music videos in that "the dance" and "the music" are equal and overlapping subjects of the film. I am interested not only in what is musical about dance or dance-like about music, but in those moments of co-articulation that erase the boundaries between them. In this erasure, dancing bodies deepen music politically.

Throughout my analyses I draw on a concept known in dance as kinesthetic empathy (Daly 1992, 243; Reason and Reynolds 2010), known in music as the mimetic hypothesis (Cox 2001), and in film as the phenomenon of the cinesthetic subject (Sobchack 2004). All hold that the listener-viewer makes sense of the world through their body and that bodily understanding participates in constructing aesthetic experience. I will prompt you, the reader-viewer-listener-dancer, to bring your awareness to your body often. Part of the political power of these short films is that their structures resonate in us.

In the context of these videos, I have found it most useful to think about the convergence between music and dance through five parameters, which I propose as the basis for my method of choreomusical analysis: (1) choreomusical form, (2) choreomusical texture, (3) emphasis of pulse, (4) rhythmic amplification, and (5) choreomusical text painting. Through each parameter, music and dance meet one another in a space that is between and beyond either alone. As I introduce each parameter, I will offer an example from the case study videos.

(1) By *choreomusical form*, I mean the feeling of formal structure articulated by the music and dance together. A good example in "The Greatest" is the climactic initiation of the final chorus (3:38). At this moment, the escalated energy of the music and the choreography converge in a unified feeling of large-scale arrival. Watch and listen to the video, taking note of your own embodied response to this moment. Likewise, in the introduction of "Unsteady" (0:00–0:35), the two dancers' movements are linear and confined as they slowly address one another from across a small, square table. This is amplified musically by a smooth, percussion-less introductory vocal line. When the percussion enters, setting up the rhythmic backdrop for the first verse, the dancers' movements are simultaneously freed from the table. Their more dynamic and sporadic movement emphasizes a formal shift from the introduction to the first verse that I, the dancer-listener, experience as a united energy. Watch and listen to the beginning of this video, taking note of your own embodied response to the choreomusical shift in form.

(2) By *choreomusical texture*, I mean the combined impact of musical textural forces and dance textural forces. Musical textural forces include the number of musical lines, the quality of movement in those lines, and their relationship to one another. Dance textural forces include the number of dancers, their organization or distribution throughout the performance space, and relationships between their qualities of movement. But more than synchronizing these textural elements, choreomusical texture synthesizes them. It exists in the space that music and dance coproduce. In "The Greatest," for example, choreomusical texture offers a more

specific way to talk about the escalated energy that initiates the final chorus (3:38). At this moment, the largest number and most dense concentration of dancers joins the thickest combination of musical sounds. A splash cymbal, clap with chorus effect, and fricative “F” of the word “free” join the dancers’ airborne hands, actively spread fingers, flying hair, wide eyes, and open mouths in a focused buzziness. At the same time, the dancers anchor their lower bodies with widespread feet and bent knees and commit their arms to extended positions in an energy that converges with the crisp drum-kit snare and substantive bass entrance. Try imitating the dancers’ movements in time with the video at (3:38). Take note of the way your body participates in this moment’s sudden, bright, anchored, yet fizzy choreomusical texture.

As the high point (3:38) shows, choreomusical texture can help articulate choreomusical form. In contrast to the dense, fizzy onset of the chorus, for instance, the verses are characterized by a choreomusical narrowness that widens slightly. In the first verse, Sia’s solo voice, which is lightly harmonized on the phrase “I got stamina,” projects over an unadorned drum-kit bass and keyboard synth. At the same time, the camera focuses on dancer Maddie Ziegler and a single-file line of dancers she directs down a hallway. Together, the sonic and visual organization produces a choreomusical texture that is narrow, thin, and focused. Halfway through the verse, a bass line and somewhat more active keyboard synth open the musical texture slightly. Simultaneously, the dancers arrive at a staircase and break out of their single-file line to ascend the stairs. The staircase continues the linearity of the dancers’ path and widens it. Together, the thickening musical and visual features create a choreomusical texture that has been nudged opened. (see 1:20 and 1:29). This same narrowness and subtle intensification also shapes the second verse (see 2:14 and 2:18) where Ziegler is as texturally singular as Sia’s voice and the surrounding dancers are as texturally augmenting as the accompanimental musical lines. In the verses, I, the dancer-listener, experience not the separate textural elements of music and dance, but a deeper, synthesized narrowness and widening.

The prechorus zeroes in even further. Visually, it drops to a nearly singular focus on Ziegler, completely eliminating other dancers on the second and third iterations (see 1:40, 2:33, and 3:31). With a similar level of focus, the “o” vowel sound becomes primary in the straightforward lyrics, “Don’t give up, I won’t give up, don’t give up (no, no, no).” Sia’s harmonized voice stands out easily from the drum-kit bass and the keyboard synth that support it. The visually simplified texture and diminishing musical texture intersect, giving the pre chorus a highly focused, decrescendoing choreomusical shape that is designed to be broken open by the energy of the chorus.

The chorus is the most texturally dense part of the song. Following the high point (3:38), for instance, Sia’s voice harmonizes itself as background vocals sing in their own texturally distinct line. The clap with chorus effect, the drum-kit bass, and the splash cymbal are joined by a drum-kit ratchet suspending over downbeats and three additional keyboard synth parts. Each chorus contains more dancers than the last, culminating in the massive unison articulation of the final chorus.

(3) *Emphasis of pulse* is a choreomusical parameter that connects music and dance through co-emphasis of an underlying pulse. For the sake of brevity in this article, I will focus on one particular type of pulse emphasis: emphasis of the downbeat. Musicians and dancers use downbeats to organize the pulse underlying their performance into repeating groups. For dancers performing choreography in 8-count phrase lengths, downbeats are usually felt on

counts 1 and 5 (and sometimes on 1, 3, 5, and 7), resulting in pulse groups of 4 (or 2). Musicians typically count these 8 beats as two measures of four with a downbeat on each count-one: $\underline{1}$ 2 3 4 $\underline{1}$ 2 3 4. Because downbeats are so fundamental to the temporal structure, they compositionally attract other salient features. Often, they highlight important words in the lyrics. They might take on louder dynamics, distinct articulations, or make a timbral shift for contrast. Choreographic gestures draw the body into the downbeat through physical extension or dynamic articulation. For instance, in “Unsteady,” we might perceive an underlying pulse occurring at the pace of 58 beats per minute. The pulses fall easily into a repeating pattern of 4. At 2:05 on the dancers’ and musicians’ count-one, the dark-shirted dancer (Will Johnston), laying across the light-shirted dancer (Kent Boyd), sweeps his arm clockwise across the floor with an extended, wide-spread hand. The reaching gesture synchronizes with the vocalist’s clearer timbre on the first word of the song’s chorus, “Hold...” and amplifies a choreomusical downbeat. As you listen, try sweeping your arm on the word “Hold” to feel the choreomusical emphasis.

While downbeats have been my focus here, it’s important to note that downbeat pulses are not the only pulses musicians and dancers regularly emphasize. In “Unsteady,” for example, there are several instances of a sharp choreographic gesture joining the snare hit on musical beats 2 and 4. For instance, at around 0:47 on the musical beat 2, the light-shirted dancer (Boyd) quickly lifts the dark-shirted dancer (Johnston) and pivots him out of a dip into a standing position. At 1:44, on the musical beat 4, both dancers toss their heads back with the snare in a choreomusically percussive gesture. The regular shape of choreomusical emphasis of the pulse in “Unsteady” sets up an expectation of a choreomusical meter. As you listen to the music, see if you find yourself inclined to move in any kind of temporally regular pattern. If so, what are the tendencies of its shape?

(4) *Rhythmic amplification* connects music and dance through a co-articulated rhythm. Rhythmic amplification can be incidental, or it can occur as part of an important repeating pattern. The instrumental break in “The Greatest” offers a good example of the latter. Matching the inflection of the primary synth voice’s repeated note, three dancers sharply articulate hit points on count 1, the “a” of 1, and the “&” of 2 (~3:20, 3:21, 3:23). The music and the choreography amplify one another in a punchy, sharp choreomusical rhythm. The rhythmic figure is repeated and elaborated with various choreographic gestures and slight variations in musical timbre. The repetition etches itself into our embodied, choreomusical memory. Watch and listen to the instrumental break and notice how your body engages with the sharpness of the rhythm. Notice, even after the instrumental break has given way to the smooth, unarticulated prechorus, that the rhythm continues to echo in your body.

(5) *Choreomusical text painting* occurs when an action or characteristic described in a song’s lyrics is expressed in the music and dance. While choreomusical text painting might be thought of as dance and music mimicking text, the effect is more than imitation. Instead, music and dance work together to bring about a realization of the text. Unsurprisingly, the words I have seen painted choreomusically most often are verbs. For an example, consider the word “hold” in “Unsteady.” “Hold” appears three times in succession in each chorus (“Hold, hold on, hold on to me”). Musically, the first “Hold” (1:17) lingers over two beats, rising in pitch longingly from the third scale degree to the home-seeking fifth scale degree on the second beat. The following “Hold on” (1:20) places “Hold” on a single beat and reverses the previous upward pitch motion through movement from the overshoot sixth scale degree back to the unsettled

fifth scale degree. “Hold on to me” (1:23) then casts “Hold” into a fleeting, unstable upbeat, and continues to tether it to the unresolved fifth scale degree. In each chorus, “Hold” is painted with an energy that is increasingly destabilized and beseeching.

The music’s desperate trajectory is co-opted at a larger level in the dance. Over multiple choruses, the dance, too, uses text painting to convey a sense of longing for impossible closure. In the first choreographed chorus, “Hold” is underscored by the light-shirted dancer (Kent Boyd) jumping and holding onto the back of the dark-shirted dancer (Will Johnston) (1:17). “Hold on” is accompanied by movement to a suspended, facing embrace (1:20). Through “Hold on to me,” the dark-shirted dancer slowly lowers the light-shirted dancer to the floor, maintaining a close embrace (1:23). As you listen to the first chorus, try performing a motion in time with the word “hold” that you feel expresses the word’s meaning. Take note of the quality of your movement and what it implies about your connection with the space around you. In my body, “hold” becomes a choreomusically sustained motion that asks for connection.

In the next iteration of the chorus, “hold” is absent from the choreography until the lyrics’ final “Hold on to me” in which the dark-shirted dancer offers the light-shirted dancer his arms like rungs of a ladder (2:11). As you listen to this chorus, see what it feels like to wait to express “hold” in your movement until its third statement. The chorus immediately repeats and the light-shirted dancer reaches to help the dark-shirted dancer to his feet on the first “hold” (2:22). In the “hold on” that follows, the dancers undo the word: they initially connect before dark-shirted dancer pushes his partner away (2:25). The third chorus’s final “hold on to me,” falls unpainted in the distance between the dancers. See what it feels like to express “hold” in your movement on its first two iterations in this chorus. Notice the effect of leaving the third “hold” unexpressed. The fourth and last iteration of the chorus paints only its final “hold on to me” where the dark-shirted dancer hugs and lifts his partner, reversing—for the moment—his earlier physical rejection (2:44). Remind yourself of the impact of expressing only the final “hold on to me” in your movement.

Together, the four choreographed choruses use text painting to project an ABCB quatrain. The first chorus, characterized as “A,” paints “hold” choreographically in all three utterances. This consistency establishes a stability to which the following choruses will never return. The second chorus, characterized as “B,” leaves its first two “hold”s unpainted, choreographically painting only the third instance. The diffuseness of the first two “hold”s sets up the final “hold” as a glance back to the steadiness of “A.” The third chorus, characterized as “C,” picks up where B left off, continuing to paint the word “hold” through its first two iterations. But the third iteration, whose position communicates the most resolution, is left unpainted. Without painting its final “hold,” “C” ends with the greatest amount of unrest. Chorus 4, characterized again as “B,” continues and escalates the silence of the third chorus’s conclusion by leaving its first two “hold”s unpainted. The painting of the final “hold” carries a bittersweet weight: it brings the dancers together in a long-denied embrace, but without ever regaining the stability of “A.” Below, choreographically painted lyrics are italicized and the word “rest” substitutes for unpainted text.

Chorus 1: *Hold, hold on, hold on to me.* (A)

Chorus 2: Rest, rest, *hold on to me.* (B)

Chorus 3: *Hold, hold on,* rest. (C)

Chorus 4: Rest, rest, *hold on to me.* (B)

As the music's desperation courses through each iteration of the chorus, we are left with the sense that something has transpired that cannot be undone – there is no path back to the way things were “before.” The choreomusical story of the word “hold” is one that longs for impossible stability.

Choreomusical form, choreomusical texture, emphasis of pulse, rhythmic amplification, and choreomusical text painting are useful parameters when considering specific ways music and dance converge. In their convergence lies a powerful political potential. The following section explores this political potential through a thought experiment I call “the three listenings.”

The Three Listenings

“The three listenings” is a hypothetical series of listening and viewing experiences that shows how political statements enter the choreomusical space in music and dance videos and remain active in music beyond the video's frame:

In the first listening, you hear the music in an everyday context. Perhaps you hear it on the radio or through a streaming service playlist. Maybe someone has recommended it and you give it a listen.

In the second listening, you watch the song's music video. As you hear the song, you watch a co-articulating dance. The music and dance converge in choreomusical textures and forms. They amplify rhythms and emphasize choreomusical downbeats. They cast the lyrics in new dimensions of sound and motion. Together, dance and music integrate politically active bodies, aesthetics, and narratives. You experience them together—the politically-situated music and dance are one choreomusical experience.

In the third listening, you hear the music again in an everyday context, but your hearing of it has been transformed. You cannot hear it as you did in the first listening. The second listening has knit into it echoes of politically-situated moving bodies. In becoming one with the dance, the music now carries the dance and its many meanings beyond the video's frame.

“The three listenings” shows that choreomusical relationships may continue to shape subsequent hearings of the music outside of the context of the video. Drawing on the choreomusical parameters outlined above and the framework of the three listenings, the next section analyzes specific political statements realized in “The Greatest” and “Unsteady.” For each case study, I will first describe the video as a whole and encourage you, the reader, to watch it all the way through. I will then make a case for political statements carried into the music through the videos' choreomusical structures.

Case Study I: “The Greatest”

Before reading this analysis, take a moment to watch “The Greatest” from start to finish. “The Greatest” begins with the white letters of the text “#WeAreYourChildren” flashing against a black background. The camera cuts to its first image—a dark hallway leading to a pile of inanimate dancers behind a barred gate. With the cut to this first image, we hear an empty sine

tone, as though our ears are ringing after a gunshot. The camera pans through an abandoned building, revealing 49 inanimate dancers sprawled in various locations. In front of a grey wall, dancer Maddie Ziegler runs her fingers down her cheeks, leaving the mark of teary rainbow streaks. Standing among the fallen dancers, she beckons silently and violently against the dominating sine tone for them to rise. When the music begins, the dancers follow her bidding. The music has transported us into a place where the dead are living. The first group of dancers, piled behind bars, is released by Ziegler who kicks open an interior gate. Together, they run up a flight of stairs and dance in small groups through two linear hallways. Ziegler then enters a new room and finds her way to the center of a large circle of dancers. Leaving the circle for a brief trio, and a briefer solo in front of a bloodred wall, Ziegler makes it to her last destination: a large, dimly lit room. The room is filled with more dancers than any of the spaces that have led to it. Disco balls lay on surfaces and light peers through bullet-pierced walls. The music finally fades back to the eerie stillness of the sine tone and all of the dancers, including Ziegler, drop to the floor. We have returned from the life and dance of the music's world to the silence and death of the present. Opening her eyes, but seemingly defeated, Ziegler appears to be the only conscious dancer. The camera pans again through the building, this time in reverse order, showing all of the dancers returned to an inanimate state. The gate that Ziegler kicked open in the beginning is closed as though it was never opened. The camera cuts back to Ziegler, weeping in front of the red wall.

"The Greatest" imbues its music with a political message that speaks powerfully against the horror of the Orlando Shooting by elevating an empowered community of unique, expressive individuals. To do this, the video choreomusically combines dancing bodies with overt references to the shooting, physical symbols of oppression, a queer dance aesthetic, a filming style that addresses the spectator, and lyrics that celebrate love, endurance, and individuality.

A handful of overt references contextualize the video as a response to the Orlando Shooting. Perhaps the most direct references are the use of 49 dancers—in honor of the shooting's 49 victims—and the bullet-strewn walls amidst disco balls in the video's final room. Gunshots are also referenced significantly throughout the video. The opening and closing sine tones, for instance, are ear-ringing—a fitting post-gunshot timbre for entering and leaving the world of the dead. As though caught in crossfire, the dancers frequently collapse against walls (1:57, 1:58, 2:08–2:09, 3:49–3:52). The most salient gunshot collapses are choreomusical, occurring in the unison between falling bodies and dissipating splash cymbal in the first chorus (1:57, 1:58) and in the final chorus (3:49). Gunshots even seem to ricochet through the choreomusical articulation of the opening snare hit that collides with the dancers throwing their heads back and opening their mouths percussively (1:09–1:18). In another visceral reference to the shooting, a dancer in the final room appears to be using her shoe as cell phone (4:06), alluding to those trapped in the club with the shooter who were calling for help. One viewer suggested that the pulse-like rhythm of the bass drum that enters at 1:13 was itself a reference to the Pulse night club (Micah Jane 2016).¹ More broadly, Ziegler paints rainbows on her cheeks that remain visible throughout the video in a nod to LGBTQ pride flags. The opening text, "#WeAreYourChildren," also attests to a larger history of queer political struggle. The phrase refers to a chant used in San Francisco's Castro

1 Viewer Micah Jane's full YouTube comment: "Did anyone else notice that the entire beat of the music (especially in the beginning) sounds like a legitimate pulse? That was not on accident people. The rainbow face paint was not on accident. The 49 dancers were not on accident. The fact that the final room is equipped with disco balls and dark, colorful lighting (plus a stage) is not an accident. If you don't think this is about the Pulse shooting you are simply lying to yourself" (Micah Jane 2016).

District in 1977 in response to the “Save Our Children [from homosexuality]” movement initiated in Miami, Florida the same year (NGTF 1977). This historical context sends the message “save us” ringing ironically through the film’s 49 dancing bodies.

“The Greatest” contains many physical symbols of oppression. The setting of the abandoned building and the striking first image of the barred gate allude to marginalization and imprisonment, paralleling queer experience in a heterosexist society. One viewer described the barred gate as a “cage” symbolic of gay oppression (Leone 2016).² In complete opposition to the rainbows on Ziegler’s cheeks, dark grey costuming and face paint cast the dancers in the same colors as the building’s walls. The dominance of dark grey on the dancers’ bodies and in the space that contains them recalls heterosexist structures imposing conformity at the expense of individual expression. Moreover, the dark grey face paint is mask-like, eerily suggesting identities concealed by a death-like stillness—a stillness made yet more eerie against the living movement of the music and dance.

The video’s sharp, gestural choreography is the result of Sia’s long-standing collaboration with choreographer Ryan Heffington. Describing the collaborators’ viral premier video, “Chandelier” (Sia et al. 2014), dance critic Gia Kourlas wrote in the *New York Times*: “[It] is a far cry from the typical dance in a pop video, where militaristic arrangements of background dancers follow the beat like human metronomes or, on the opposite end, sultry, slow-motion movement borders on soft porn” (Kourlas 2016). What Kourlas omitted in this critique was the adjective “heterosexual.” The Sia-Heffington “far cry” rejects not only “the typical dance in a pop video,” but also the mainstream heterosexuality associated with it. Embracing this queer choreographic aesthetic, Sia said to the *New York Times*: “I couldn’t think of anything I’d want less than just another video for little girls and boys to watch that tells them: ‘Look pretty! Be sexy!’ I want my work to say: ‘Get weird! Express yourself freely!’” (ibid.).

The prominence of the open mouth in Heffington’s choreography for “The Greatest” offers a good example of how the aesthetic cuts against the normative grain. To understand the ways the widely open mouth challenges conformity, try on the movement in your body. Open your mouth wide. Notice that, if you open it wide enough, the skin on your face stretches to accommodate a movement you don’t often ask your body to perform. Notice, too, that if there are other people in your vicinity, you probably feel social pressure to limit this movement in some way. Perhaps you only opened your mouth briefly, or perhaps you stopped shy of its full range of motion. What you feel in your skin and in your social awareness is a political boundary that expects the silence of bodies.

The open mouth, after all, is also something we associate with the sound of screaming. If not read as a political critique of the control of bodies, the recurring open mouth in “The Greatest” still reads as the politically powerful image of a silent scream. Amplified through choreomu-

2 Viewer Leone’s full YouTube comment: “Just In case you guys didn’t understand or missed out some of the representations of this piece...This is dedicated to the Orlando shooting as the rainbow colours on her face represent gay pride. The cage at the beginning shows how homosexuals feel ostracised from society. Maddie telling them to get into the room is them trying to get away. Them splattering against the walls and the white paint on the wall behind Maddie shows the shooting. When Maddie is turning in the room inside the circle it represents them as ghosts haunting the room. The ending is them before being shot and they are just being crazy and having fun (like they are able to just be themselves without being judged.. You know) that’s why the disco balls are rolling around the room. After they are shot down in the end you see gun shot holes through the wall as they drop down. Everyone is dead by the end of the video. Some of these ideas are from my own perspective but it’s just to give u an idea” (Leone 2016).

sical rhythms and emphasised downbeats, variations of the open mouth feature prominently throughout the film. The movement even defines the pivotal transition to the final prechorus and chorus in which dancers overtly intersperse with disco balls and are enclosed by bullet-pierced walls. In this iconic transition, the camera zooms all the way into Ziegler's open mouth in a fade to black and zooms back out of Ziegler's mouth again to find her in front of the red wall.

Individual variance between dancers in the choreography, too, reflects a celebration of free, unique expression. In the first hallway, each dancer performs their own set of movements (1:37); in the next hallway, Ziegler addresses each dancer, as though acknowledging their individuality (2:09); and in the final chorus, dancers break into small groups or solos with almost no two facial expressions exactly alike (3:54). This final dance section was described by one viewer as "just being crazy and having fun (like they are able to just be themselves without being judged)" (Leonesse 2016; see Fn. 2).

The political and affective power of Heffington's choreographic aesthetic was noted by viewers. One viewer compared the political and emotional affect of the dance to painting outside the lines:

Dancing is like painting. Anyone can paint by number. Some people follow the steps perfectly and stay in the lines flawlessly. And the painting comes out just as it should. Then there are those that just free paint. Sure they may paint out of the lines or use the wrong colors, but what they end up creating is an [emotionality]. (Jenny From the Flock 2016)

Another viewer described the dance in the same way queer activists have described love (The New York Times 2016): "The dancing to some may seem 'weird' or 'confusing'. The thing is you don't need to understand it. ... You just need to understand the energy and emotion" (Š3th1905 2020).

Daniel Askill, who directed "The Greatest" and other Sia-Ziegler-Heffington collaborations, framed the video simply but powerfully. Through the frame, Ziegler appears to address the spectator directly. We are eye-level to her, positioned as listeners invited to a conversation. This is not a dance about controlled patterns of bodies designed to be enjoyed from an elevated perspective. It is not a dance about intimate contact. It is a danced message from silenced voices. The frame allows Ziegler to tell us, very directly, that things cannot stay as they are, that *we* have to do something about it, together. The music becomes inseparable from that imploring feeling drawn out of the dance through the frame.

Alone, the lyrics of "The Greatest" seem simply to be those of workout or dance music ("Oh oh, I got stamina"). But when contextualized in this music video, the words take on a much greater meaning. "I got stamina" and "I won't give up" become statements echoing the endurance of the queer community. This determination and endurance are cast into the dancers' viewer-directed eye contact, clenched fists, bent knees, flexed arms, and pivoting torsos as the "the greatest" repeats through the structurally significant dance chorus (2:03) (Barna 2018). "I'm free to be the greatest, I'm alive" takes on a heart-wrenching duality. In the unique inflections of each dancer, the phrase serves as an empowering celebration of individuality. In the dancers' 49 motionless bodies, it delivers a viscerally poignant critique of lives taken.

Through these many choreomusical infoldings, "The Greatest" takes on a political meaning in "the third listening." Viewer comments support the power of the third listening by equating the video's message with the song's meaning. Here is what some had to say:

When I saw this... I started crying. I'm a Florida resident, very close to Orlando. The shooting broke me. This song is amazing. No one should joke about this video. (Nike Girl 2016)

This song has to do with the shooting. It was a gay club so she puts rainbow tears, there are 49 of them I think and at the end there is a disco and they are all dancing until they all fell, letting us see the bullet holes. [...] it does give me chills at the end... (YikesCami 2016)

Maybe this song is about the Orlando LGBT Club Massacre.. 49 dancers representing 49 souls.. "I'm free to be the Greatest here tonight" (beefycheesysaucylazagna :3 2019)

I felt nostalgic so I started looking through my old playlists and found this. I never knew it was about the shooting. It really hits differently now, it's very chilling and powerful. (Ha! 2019)

One viewer even described the film and its meaning as becoming part of the music:

It's very Impressive that nowadays the videos or the "short films" is part of the music, they bring double meaning, double understanding[.] (Noureddine Ziani 2016)

Listen to the music again, without watching the video. In this "third listening," the music is transformed: its choreomusical structures echo the shooting's specific violence, a larger history of queer oppression, and an invitation to celebrate bodies dancing beyond convention.

Case Study II: "Unsteady"

Before reading this analysis, watch "Unsteady" from start to finish. The video opens with white text on a black background: "Love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love." The first piano chord collides with the camera's cut to a man wearing a dark jacket (Will Johnston) who sits alone at a table in a well-lit public café. It appears to be daytime. The camera approaches the table and pans left to show another man in a blue overshirt (Kent Boyd) pulling the empty chair back to sit across from his pensive partner. After a hesitantly given but pointed moment of eye contact, the dancer in the dark jacket looks away. For a few seconds, they sit across from each other without making eye contact. Then, with the iconic word "unsteady," the dancer in the dark jacket slides his arms across the table to join hands with the blue-shirted dancer. They both rise, leaning forward until their foreheads touch. As a distorted, airy synthesizer and diffuse snare articulate the beginning of the first verse, the camera cuts to the two dancers standing in a new version of the café space. It has been emptied of its tables, chairs, and other people. It seems to be nighttime and the space is more warmly lit. In the transition from the public café to this intimate dance floor, both dancers have become barefoot and shed a layer of clothing. The blue-shirted dancer now wears a white t-shirt and the dancer in the dark jacket has donned a three-quarter sleeve dark shirt. In the contemporary, lyrical dance duet that follows, the two dancers navigate a complicated tension. At times they push each other away, but their escalated energies seem always to return them to one another in intimate lifts and positions of support. Their troubled facial expressions sometimes convey longing, sometimes sadness, sometimes anger. Their final embrace on the dance floor is the most prolonged. As the music's last "unsteady" fades, the camera cuts back to the daylit public café and the two dancers clasping hands over the table with their foreheads touching. They begin to pull back from each other. The dark-shirted dancer then tears his hands away quickly and slouches into

his chair as he crosses his arms to close his jacket. The light-shirted dancer, again wearing the blue overshirt, sits down more slowly, and remains forward, at the edge of his chair with his arms on the table. Returning to white text on a black background, the video closes in silence with a list of the Orlando Shooting's 49 victims.

"Unsteady" infuses its music with an empathetic, political validation of homosexuality while contemplating the shooting's impact on survivors. The video does this through several means. Overtly, the opening and closing text reference the shooting. In a powerful political statement, the video uses two male dancers to challenge power structures in the heterosexually dominated commercial contemporary duet. Choreomusically, it casts their bodies and movements into symbols and metaphors of death, desire, and oppression. The camera frames the dance with empathy by moving intimately through the duet, blurring the spectator's position as observer or participant.

The video situates itself as a response to the shooting through its opening quote, "Love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love." These words were spoken by Broadway musical composer Lin-Manuel Miranda at the Tony awards ceremony that took place the same day of the shooting, June 12, 2016. The words are the penultimate line in a sonnet Miranda composed reacting to the tragedy, which he then read when he accepted the Tony award for best score for "Hamilton" (The New York Times 2016). The famously long, repetitive "love is love" line is politically rupturing in at least three ways. Most overtly, the line claims that love, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, is love. Author and journalist Charlotte Runcie has argued that the line also challenges normative structures by breaking the form of the sonnet with three extra syllables (Runcie 2016). Runcie also suggests that the sonnet as a whole mimics a set of sonnets by the English poet George Meredith that reject love. Instilling a celebration of love in the same shapes of a poem that denounced love, she argues, is politically powerful (ibid.). Lin-Manuel Miranda's "love is love" rings through the intimacy of the music and dance that follow it. The end of the video lists the names and ages of the 49 victims under a heading that reads, "Honoring those lost, Orlando, 6.12.2016." More than bookending the video, the names make even more real the circumstances danced into the music through the duet.

The use of two male dancers in the heteronormative commercialized dance duet is one of the video's most powerful political moves. Where "The Greatest" used choreographic aesthetic to overturn norms, "Unsteady," instead, (re)occupies a traditionally heterosexist digital space with masculine homosexual intimacy. Their gendered, embodied intimacy reverberates in the music through choreomusical emphases of the underlying pulse (2:05, ~0:47, and 1:44, for example), rhythmic amplification (1:55–1:56 in the light-shirted dancer's feet and bass drum, for instance), and poignantly through each of their embraces on the choreomusically painted word "Hold" (1:17, 1:20, 1:23, 2:11, 2:22, 2:25, 2:44). The solo masculine voice (X Ambassadors' lead singer Sam Harris) with occasional harmonization by a second masculine voice (Casey Harris) amplifies the gender they embody. Viewer comments confirmed the noteworthiness of the same-sex duet and its empowering, political impact. Here is what some had to say:

I was weirded out at first..... but as I went on through the video, i recognized how much of a work of art this was. Love is love (Anna 2018)

I was wondering when we would see the LGBT community more represented in dance, where most of the time we see love stories between a boy and a girl. (Sassy Gee' 2016)

Finally! Same-sex dances. I've been waiting for this my whole life. Now to find females (Carissa T. 2016)

This is so, so beautiful! [...] I'm glad that the dance community is finally doing same sex pairings[.] I hope [...] one day that this will be considered normal for everyone, and I hope there will be no more shock when a same sex couple is seen. (Tia Pavo 2016)

I've always wanted to see a male same sex dance such as this. #beautiful (branden maestras 2016)

I'm starting to transition to being male and these are things that remind me that I don't need to be SO EXTREMELY masculine that men can dance and feel and cry and I don't need to feel self conscious about being a man AND having feelings. (Superfluous Greg 2019)

Tyce Diorio's choreography extends the political statement of the same-sex pairing by also challenging the power dynamics typical of heterosexual duets in this style. Male-female duets tend to place the male dancer in a position of power (who guides the poses of his partner) and the female dancer as a subject of manipulation (being lifted, spun, dipped, or pressed into poses that showcase her flexibility) (Foster 1996, 3). In Diorio's choreography, the two male dancers, instead, exchange control of each other's bodies almost equally. At 0:46 and 1:06, for example, the light-shirted dancer (Boyd) supports the dark-shirted dancer (Johnston) from behind to showcase the dark-shirted dancer's movement. Their roles are reversed at 0:57 and 1:34. At 0:53 and 1:58, they strike symmetrical poses that require them to share weight in order to balance one another. Viewers commented on the political significance of shared power in the same-sex duet:

I saw the girl+boy version of it and it was mainly the girl dancing and the male trailing behind but seeing these two work together to dance is beautiful. (Tear Drops 2018)

This is why I love two guys or two girls dancing together: there are no predetermined "roles" and both partners are equal. Come to think of it, that's also what I love about same sex relationships. (HailG3 2017)

In their duet, the video invites readings of death, desire, and oppression. Consider, for instance, a possible significance of Kent Boyd's white shirt: white is ghostly. Even Boyd's entrance is ghostly: the camera zooms in on Will Johnston sitting alone at the table and then rotates left to reveal Boyd, giving the impression that the camera's smooth, somewhat hovering approach to the table has been through Boyd's perspective. That Johnston often refuses eye contact with him suggests that Boyd may represent a lover lost in the shooting who is not physically present.³ Perhaps Boyd has been called here as a figment of Johnston's memory and their dance takes place in an interior psychological space that is primarily Johnston's. The music, after all, uses a simple, intimate instrumentation and features primarily Sam Harris' solo masculine voice with harmonic echoes of a second masculine voice (Casey Harris). Cast through this sonic world, Johnston often has his eyes closed and eyebrows furrowed, as though he is processing something very painful. A moment at 1:53 is particularly expressive of a troubled interiority, amplified by the camera's close-up on Johnston. Although both dancers push each other away

3 The reading of the white-shirted dancer (Kent Boyd) as a lover lost in the shooting was proposed to me by my colleague Neeka Safdari in Fall 2018.

at different times, Johnston pushing Boyd away is frequently made more visible. Perhaps Johnston pushes him away as a denial of a deep loss.

An equally plausible reading—and the one most commonly mentioned by viewers—is that the two dancers represent gay lovers facing oppression in a heteronormative society. The dark-jacketed dancer (Johnston), for example, is the most hesitant to engage his partner when they are in the public café setting. Notably, the only other couple in the public café appears to be a heterosexual pairing (0:10). In this reading, their intimate duet is a conversation and a desire forbidden in the public space. The lovers' physical rejections of one another, and the dark-shirted dancer's pensively closed eyes, seem to revolve around the question of whether, despite deep desire, their relationship can survive the pressures of the outer world. This lack of stability is amplified in the title lyric "unsteady." The melody paints the word "unsteady" with a bumpy, lingering descent, in the rhythm of a weeping exhale. The rhythm rings through the dancer's bodies as they perform vulnerable inversions that in turn cast a suspended unrest into the music. Together, the music and dance reflect off the wood-paneled back wall that has the appearance of a floor rotated 90 degrees, disrupting the overall gravity of the choreomusical space. Some viewers commented that they felt a personally relatable representation of oppression in the video:

I'm in a long distance relationship with someone. we're both trans (ftm) but he hasn't come out to his parents. He lives in a trans phobic house and everyday I'm terrified if he's ok. I just want to be there for him, and know he's ok. [...] I want to be able to just care for him. But I can't, and it tears me apart. At the end of the video when they're just holding each other, I lost it. To most people it seems normal, but to me it's something I fear I may never get to experience. (Loki 2017)

Truly captures the idea of feeling but not being able to express it freely. Very beautiful (TheWasted TheWicked 2019)⁴

I'm bisexual, and this hit the feels on another level. [...] Only a few people in my family are not borderline homophobic. One day I hope to be able to come out without being judged and feeling disowned. (Gabby Edwards 2019)

It breaks my heart that humanity would rather see two men holding guns than two men holding hands. [...] I cried at the end, and I can't stop thinking about how lucky I am to still be alive today. [...] My name could have been on that list, just because of who I am. (Someone Anonymous 2019)

The lyrics resonate strongly in this reading and open its specific relationship with the Orlando Shooting. "Hold on to me, 'cuz I'm a little unsteady," and "if you love me, don't let go" are simultaneously a plea between the lovers and a cry from marginalized survivors and victims. "This house don't feel like home" describes at once oppression and grief. "Mother, I know that you're tired of being alone" is sympathetic to both the isolation felt in grief and in marginalization. "Dad, I know you're trying to fight when you feel like flying" acknowledges the specific traumatic burden on those most directly impacted by the shooting, as well as the broader queer socio-political struggle.

⁴ Sometime between February 14 and March 13, 2020, this comment appears to have been deleted from YouTube. Based on screenshots I took of the comment in early 2019, I estimate it to have been posted in late 2018 or early 2019.

The music and dance collide in gestures that might also read as references to the shooting's trauma. At around 0:37–0:38, for example, the light-shirted dancer (Boyd) throws his shoulders back percussively in time with the bass drum. Framed by the diffuse snare timbre, the rhythmic amplification carries tones of a visceral reaction to a gunshot. Fittingly, the dancer (Boyd) then slowly falls, catching himself on the floor-like, wood-paneled back wall. Similar choreomusical gunshots occur at around ~1:13–1:14 and at 1:34, both in connection with the white-shirted dancer. At 2:03, the dark-shirted dancer pushes the light-shirted dancer quickly flat on the floor and then dives sharply over him as though protecting him from an airborne threat. Simultaneously, the snare disappears from the choreomusical texture, creating a moment of relative silence and suspense akin to explosion or gunfire sequences in action films that use silence to express psychological and physiological shock (Kulezic-Wilson 2009). Whether read specifically as the dark-shirted dancer mourning the light-shirted dancer as a lost lover, or as a broader reference to the shooting's violence, the choreomusical shapes of violence course through the film powerfully.

These readings, which encompass death, desire, and oppression, are simultaneously possible not because the dance and music are ambiguous or generic but because together they tell the bigger story in which all of these readings exist: we continue to live in a society that tolerates hate.

Countering hate with empathy, director David Javier frames and amplifies the video's political energy with a dynamic and intimate filming style that invites the viewer into an empathetic, participatory perspective. To understand the significance of this filming style, it is useful to compare Javier's cinematography with Daniel Askill's camera movement in "The Greatest." Askill framed Maddie Ziegler almost always at eye-level in direct address of the viewer. This created the sense not only that Ziegler was inviting the viewer to a conversation, but also that the relative positions of the viewer and Ziegler were fixed. If ever we were dancing with Ziegler, it was from a distance. In contrast, Javier's camera moves dynamically through "Unsteady." It participates in the dancers' prolonged moments of contact with close-up shots (0:47, 1:10, 1:28, 2:19, 2:48). It floats subtly toward and away from the dancers. It accelerates around their movements, as though it is an extension of their movement. The shot of the jump is a good example of the interactive relationship between the camera's movement and the movements of the dancers. At 1:44, the camera holds a medium close-up of the two dancers in an embrace. It zooms out and up slightly to catch the light-shirted dancer (Boyd) sharply extending his arm on the word "fight" (1:46). Rotating approximately 90 degrees clockwise around the dancers, the camera then zooms dramatically back alongside the dark-shirted dancer (Johnston) as both prepare to catch the light-shirted dancer's jump on the word "flying" (1:48–1:49). Several such moments of dynamic camera movement evoke an amplified empathy. Adding to the listener-viewer's visceral inner mimesis, the camera casts the dance, at moments, from the perspective of these socio-politically situated dancers in an act of political power: it asks the spectator to dance in the footsteps of the marginalized. One viewer comment, particularly, shows the impact of the video's empathetic message:

Mercedes was my friend. We went to Pulse all the time together, since I lived a block down on Kaley. A month after everything happened, I moved out of my place. Having to drive past there everyday was too much. I love this video, and the first time I saw it and saw her name I cried for hours. I'm so glad that the message that we are people too is staying. (Laney Labelle 2017)⁵

5 Sometime between February 14 and March 13, 2020, this comment appears to have been deleted from YouTube. Based on screenshots I took of the comment in late 2018, I estimate it to have been posted in late 2016 or early 2017.

In “the third listening,” “Unsteady” becomes inseparable from the shooting’s violence, but also inseparable from the empathetic, political message “love is love.” Consider the following viewer comment regarding how the dance video transformed the music politically:

I know this isn’t the meaning of the song, considering it’s been out for a couple years, but I can’t think of anything other than Orlando when listening to this now. The fear that one day down the road I, or anyone else like me, could so easily be killed simply for loving is one of the strongest things I’ve felt. [...] It was so easy for that man to kill all of those innocent people, and it feels like nothing is being done. Nothing has ever made me feel so unsteady. (Cam C 2016)

Near the anniversary of the shooting, another viewer described the continuing power of X Ambassadors’ song:

I saw XAmbassador in concert for the universal Mardigras celebration. They dedicated this song to Orlando and I couldn’t hold back my tears. So many of my friends went to Pulse. One even worked there. She didn’t make it out. This song sums up Orlando this time last year. We were all in so much pain the only thing we could do was hold on to each other for strength. [...] We are still hurting but we still have eachother and we struggle everyday to keep dancing and spreading as much love as we can. I will never forget the blood stains on our sidewalks, [...] the pain, the numbness, the anger, the fear, the screaming, the tears, but also the hugs, the flags going up, the candles being lit, the songs sung by thousands, and hands held so tight I thought they would never let go. I will never forget their names. I will never forget all of the love and I will always remember her smile. [...] We will not let hate win. OrlandoUnited Loveislove (Morbid Mizzy 2017)⁶

Listen to the song again, without watching the video. Do you find that it is transformed? In my own listening, it reverberates with choreomusically amplified words, bodies, sounds, actions, and empathy that converge immutably in a powerful political activism.

Conclusion

On June 12, 2019, the three-year anniversary of the Orlando Shooting, churches and organizations around the world joined in a unison tolling of 49 bells to honor the shooting’s victims (One Orlando Alliance 2019). On the same day in Ecuador, the country’s highest court approved same-sex marriage (BBC 2019). Admittedly, “The Greatest” and “Unsteady” had very little to do with the court’s decision or with the organized tolling of 49 bells, but activism rarely travels so narrow a path. What all of these together tell us is that the broader LGBTQIA+ rights movement, with its long and hard-fought history, is making a difference.

Quantifying the videos’ political impact is potentially an impossible task, and it is certainly not as simple as translating numbers of views or categorizing viewer comments. At the same time, these massive digital platforms and their many revelatory viewer comments cannot be dismissed. To date (February 2020), “Unsteady” has been viewed 3.8 million times and “The Greatest,” which topped charts internationally (Lescharts 2016), has been viewed over 646 million times. In these millions of views, as evidenced by viewer comments, listeners and viewers

6 Sometime between February 14 and March 13, 2020, this comment appears to have been deleted from YouTube. Based on screenshots I took of the comment in early 2018, and based on its reference to the shootings’ one-year anniversary, I estimate it to have been posted in mid June, 2017.

engaged messages that validate queer expression immutably. For many viewers, these messages continued to resonate in the music beyond the frame in “the third listening.”

Through its choreomusicality, “The Greatest” became a song about the shooting’s specific violence, a larger history of queer oppression, and a celebration of bodies dancing beyond convention. Dancers opened their mouths widely and produced snare-drum gunshots. Their bodies dissipated with splash cymbals against dark, dominating walls. But their bodies also joined one another in the escalated choreomusical energy of the chorus, projecting an unquestionable unity and diversity in which the spectator viscerally participates. And although the video ends with tears, collapsed bodies, and an ear-ringing sine tone, the dance is immutable. Long after the video, the music continues to pulse with the dance’s energy. “The Greatest,” in other words, dances into its music a political activism.

Through its choreomusicality, “Unsteady” became an empathetic song about two male lovers facing the violent structures of a heteronormative society. The video cast the dancer’s bodies into the contemporary commercial duet, a space dominated by heterosexual dance pairings. Its masculine bodies took up the tones of the music’s masculine voices. The intimacy of their movements resounded in the thinly scored musical texture. The imploring phrase “hold on to me” spilled into the choreography as a broader political plea. This video, too, sent choreomusical gunshots ringing through its music and dance. And even so, its intimate message that love is love rang louder. Long after the video, the music continues to project an empathetic validation of homosexual intimacy. “Unsteady,” in other words, dances into its music a political activism. Powerfully, both “Unsteady” and “The Greatest” used the very materials silenced in the shooting—people dancing to music together—to amplify an enduring political response.

So what is to be done? You have watched the videos, danced to the music, and listened more deeply. You have engaged political power in movement and sound. You have viscerally contemplated a tragedy and imagined ways beyond it. But what is to be done?

I will close by offering a few thoughts. First, we must all listen more deeply. We must be willing to hear bodies in sounds. We must be willing to hear stories in bodies. We must be willing to hear hate in violence and empathy in love. Second, we must dance. We must dance to understand new ways of being and knowing. We must dance more loudly than our Western academic chairs and desks would have us dance. We must dance outside the lines of limited conceptions of beauty. We must dance our truths and cast them against the structures we know must change. Above all, we must dance and listen together. Our bodies and our music are powerful, and in their convergence lies the possibility of a more empathetic world.

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Chelsea Oden is a Ph.D. candidate in Music Theory at the University of Oregon. Her research on dance as a musical and political agent in film and popular media is part of a larger research interest that explores embodiment in the overlap of film, music, and dance. She has presented her work regionally, nationally, and internationally, including at conferences in music theory, musicology, film studies, popular music, and interdisciplinary studies.

Abstract (English)

The violence perpetrated against queer persons of color in the 2016 Orlando Shooting was met with many collaborative artistic responses. This article considers how the relationship between music and dance amplified the political power of two such responses. The music video for Sia's "The Greatest" (2016) and the dance video for X Ambassadors' "Unsteady" (2016) each address the shooting through intricately correlated musical and choreographic structures. Exploring this correlation through a proposed system of choreomusical analysis, the article argues that it is in the overlap of dance and music that each imbues the other with new political power.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Die Gewalt gegenüber Schwarzen queeren Menschen beim Attentat von Orlando im Jahr 2016 hat eine Vielzahl an kollaborativen **künstlerischen** Reaktionen hervorgerufen. Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie die Beziehung zwischen Musik und Tanz die politische Aussagekraft (political power) zweier solcher Beispiele verstärkt. Das Musikvideo für Sia's "The Greatest" (2016) und das Tanzvideo für X Ambassadors' "Unsteady" (2016) nehmen beide mittels komplexer Wechselbeziehungen von musikalischen und choreografischen Strukturen Bezug auf das Attentat. In diesem Artikel wird ein System choreomusikalischer Analyse für die Untersuchung dieser Beziehungen vorgeschlagen. Dabei wird deutlich, dass durch die Überschneidung von Tanz und Musik beide Elemente mit neuer politischer Aussagekraft erfüllt werden.

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