

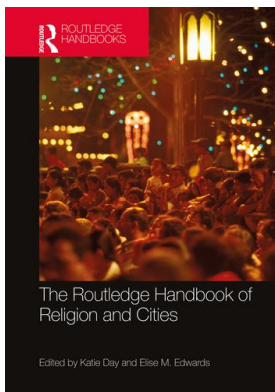
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16

THE INTERSECTION OF
IMMIGRATION, SOCIAL
CONFLICT, AND ART

Dance and identity in “East” Haifa

Amanda Furiasse

The Israeli city of Haifa is well known among global tourists and visitors for its pristine beaches, panoramic mountain views, liberal Arab culture, and robust Africana arts community. African art galleries, concert halls, theatres, and dance studios dot the city’s landscape, with the sounds of Amharic wafting out of local cafes and spilling over into the city’s narrow streets while the city’s residents sip *beso* in local Ethiopian cafés. While the city is home to many of the world’s well-known global Africana musicians, dancers, and artists, the Ethiopian-Israeli Beta Dance Troupe remains among the city’s most popular and famous artistic achievements.

However, the city’s boom in global Africana arts occurs simultaneously and contradictorily while the city’s divide between rich and poor reaches a historically unprecedented level. Every neighborhood in the city is classified colloquially according to its position on Mount Carmel’s slopes. At Mount Carmel’s apex sits luxurious multimillion-dollar condominiums where residents enjoy stunning views of the Mediterranean Sea and contemporary hi-tech amenities, including gates that open and close via advanced iris scanning technology. The neighborhood’s residents include global tech entrepreneurs with the recognizable American companies “IBM” and “Google” lofted high into the sky. In contrast to those living at the city’s hi-tech apex, those living at the mountain’s base close to the city’s port live in ethnically and economically segregated neighborhoods. Near the city’s port sits the Arab neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas, where tightly confined and dilapidated apartments expose the neighborhood’s predominantly Arab residents to toxic fumes from the nearby port and rotten sewage and trash.¹

Haifa’s growing economic stratification raises important questions about the city’s future. I propose that studying the Ethiopian-Israeli Beta Dance Troupe’s performances offers important insight into Haifa’s imminent, Afro-digital future. In short, I argue that, while the city’s hi-tech boom is facilitating stratification, it is also simultaneously providing financial, social, and geopolitical resources to Ethiopian Jewish communities living on Mount Carmel’s eastern slopes in “East” Haifa. On the mountain’s eastern slopes, Ethiopian Jews are successfully merging programming, African dance, and Jewish ritual to produce a unique East African constellation of Jewishness. As both a technology and ritual, this Afro-centric understanding of Jewish identity rebuffs Jewish immigrants’ systemic exclusion from the hi-tech industry and Israel’s central

institutions. Moreover, Ethiopian Jews are increasingly using hi-tech companies' global networks of communication to evangelize their African constellation of Jewishness to youth across the globe, thus reshaping the city of Haifa into their long-promised Zion.

“The Wedding”

In the 1990s, the city of Haifa was in the middle of an economic transformation that took shape on Mount Carmel's apex. The centerpiece of this historic transformation was the MTM Science Industries Center. The MTM is the largest single site of private hi-tech industries in Israel. Its local and international tenants include Google, IBM, Intel, Fibronics, Elbit, and Elscint.² Rounding out this transformation was the redevelopment of the Technion or Israel Institute of Technology and University of Haifa, which fundamentally reconfigured their college curriculum to provide these global companies with the labor force, research, and laboratories that they needed to successfully thrive in the city. By the 1990s, Israelis commonly began to refer to Haifa as a central hub in their “Silicon Wadi.” Recent statistics report that the overwhelming majority of Haifa's residents (over 70%) are employed in the hi-tech sector.³ Moreover, Haifa plays a fundamental role in facilitating Israel's global trade networks, since hi-tech exports—specifically products with high Research and Development density, such as computers, pharmaceuticals, scientific instruments, complex machinery, and aerospace—are Israel's largest combined export.⁴

At the very same time that the city was undergoing this hi-tech transformation, Dege Feder and a collection of Ethiopian Jewish youth living in Haifa founded “Eskesta,” later renamed the “Beta Dance Troupe,” in partnership with Ruth Eshel, who was an internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and professor at the University of Haifa. At the time, Feder and the troupe's founding Ethiopian Jewish members were studying at the University of Haifa. According to Eshel, she decided to start the dance troupe after she spent some time visiting, observing, and meeting Ethiopian Jewish communities living in what Israelis commonly refer to as “caravans,” collections of mobile homes located on the outskirts of the city in which the Israeli government settled Ethiopian Jewish communities when they first arrived in the country.⁵ As a trained professional dancer and academic, Eshel wanted to better understand how and why Ethiopian Jews integrated dance into their Jewish ritual traditions. Whether it was the Sabbath, a wedding, Yom Kippur, or Bar Mitzvah, Eshel noticed that dance was a fundamental element of Ethiopian Jews' daily lives and rituals. Moreover, while teaching dance courses at the University of Haifa, Eshel observed that Ethiopian Jewish students were interested in enrolling in her composition courses.

However, one of the main problems that Eshel first encountered when trying to create a dance curriculum for Ethiopian Jewish students was that they were not necessarily interested in following a static or established program of education with set rules. As she explains, “While they paid little attention to my instructions in the course, rather doing whatever they pleased, what they did was wonderful. I suggested establishing a dance group. They did, and brought their friends, male and female, from the university.”⁶ Following Eshel's observations, the troupe's founding members were not necessarily aiming to prepare for a professional career in the arts. In fact, most were studying at the university to prepare for professional careers in Haifa's booming hi-tech economy.

Their desire to join the troupe was motivated by an underlying need to find a space for creative self-expression as they studied and trained to become young entrepreneurs and creators. As Minalu Degai, one of the troupe's founding members, explained, “I danced traditional dances with which I grew up and I was told how to dance them. Here (with the Beta Dance Troupe), I can create, and it is such a wonderful gift.”⁷ Creating a dance troupe at the very same

moment that the city transformed into a global hi-tech hub thus provided a way for Ethiopian Jewish youth to seize upon the growing promise of entrepreneurship as graduating students created tech startups and new creative hi-tech companies. Moreover, their creative performances attracted young tech entrepreneurs and artists from around the city as the group quickly became well known for their distinctive style of dance called “eskesta.” Simply put, eskesta is a distinctive Afro-centric style of dance which involves intense shoulder movements whereby movement originates in a dancer’s shoulders and descends down to the rest of the body.

For troupe members, eskesta is more than just a shoulder movement. It is a diverse and complex ritual practice that enables dancers to experiment with a wide range of sounds and movements, allowing them to discover somatic memories—memories which are stored within their bodies.⁸ The dance studio then operates as a laboratory where performers can experiment with sounds and movements to unlock memories of their pasts. Since dance is approached as a process of self-discovery, dancers are not necessarily rehearsing carefully prescribed movements in the studio, but practice consists of a dynamic process of experimentation whereby dancers use a vast array of different aesthetics to facilitate memory.

A diverse amalgamation of aesthetics gave the Beta Dance Troupe’s first public performances a distinctive feel. Their performances were playful, energetic, and spontaneous.⁹ Transforming the stage into a playground, troupe members acted like they were playing at a playground as they shimmed shoulders, bumped, slapped, and rambunctiously swung their limbs. In contrast to Classical European dance where dancers match or dance to the beat, troupe members established a rhythm that balanced the music, facilitating a sensation of swinging and conversing with the music. Audience members were in turn encouraged to play along with performers and join in the dance while drawing upon their own distinctive bodily sounds and movements. Troupe members did not reject this creative amalgamation of Ethiopian and Israeli aesthetics but actively encouraged it.

For example, in one of the troupe’s first dances, called “The Wedding,” troupe members playfully gathered onto the stage before the audience. A bridegroom and bride wearing colorful black and gold gowns leaped to the center of the stage while troupe members wearing white costumes with colorful belts tied around their waists danced around the couple. The audience added to the dance’s percussive sounds, clapping along with the dancers and thus enhancing the dancers’ high-energy movements on stage. In the end, the combination of music and movement spatially and temporally transported residents in Haifa to an Ethiopian Jewish wedding.

Their unique ability to transport audiences remained a defining feature of their early performances, with the primary audience composed of the residents working at the global hi-tech companies at Mount Carmel’s apex. The exuberance and energetic optimism from their public performances was infectious as it facilitated a kinesthetic lightness whereby Haifa’s tech professionals were invited to partake and participate in an Ethiopian Jewish ritual. Dancers facilitated emotive states of joy, celebration, and fun, which are the very same affective or emotive states one would feel at an Ethiopian Jewish wedding.¹⁰

The troupe’s integration of play into their performances might be a central rationale behind their ability to attract the city’s tech professionals. To understand why tech professionals, especially programmers, would be drawn in by play, it is crucial to understand a programmer’s role and responsibility. A programmer’s primary responsibility is to break a problem down into a set of commands to provide the machine with a set of clear tasks to follow. In the early days of programming, programmers worked in machinic languages and used the machine’s numeric-based language systems to create simple, numerical-based procedures. The creation of high-level alphanumeric programming languages (“high” refers to languages closer to human language)

automated programming by allowing the machine to compile and interpret computer code, ultimately changing programming from a numerical- to a problem-based task.

While this shift to abstraction freed programmers from the drudgery of having to repetitively write long lists of commands every time they programmed a machine, this shift to abstraction also separated programmers from the machine or computer's hardware, since they only needed to type their incantations onto their keyboard for millions of interfaces to spring to life.¹¹ However, the increasing prevalence of bugs or unforeseen machinic interpretations indicates that programmers are not necessarily commanding machines, but these machines are "talking back." Put differently, bugs expose the unavoidable reality that, as programmers shift more toward abstraction, they must give away their power to the machines with the expectation that abstraction will help increase the programmer's efficiency.

Play offers a potential resolution to this problem, since it encourages programmers to understand that they are not commanding machines but facilitating exchanges between machines and humans. As Christian Ulrik Andersen explains, the creation of the computer game, as a play-based type of software, helped programmers redress this disjuncture with computer games developing alongside the use of abstraction or high-level programming languages.¹² According to Anderson, computer games dissolve the boundary between the computer and player's body, and allow the player's body to become an element within the computer system. For example, a player's embodied movements on a game controller literally facilitate movements within the computer screen. Gaming's capacity to dissolve the boundaries between the human body and the machine ultimately facilitates humanity's "symbiosis" with computer systems, while transforming humans into what Brian Holmes describes as info-mechanical beings.¹³

However, play in computer games remains rigidly defined around the notion of a game, with the player ultimately in competition with the machine. Situating the player into competition with the machine hinders a complete symbiosis between human and machine, since the game encourages the player to dominate the machine. But dancers in the Beta Dance Troupe reveal that play can happen without competition. For the Beta Dance Troupe, the sole purpose of play is to cultivate affective states of being which act as the glue binding social relationships together. Play, then, is pointless in a way, because the goal is not to win or defeat others. Inviting tech professionals sitting in the audience to dance with the troupe onstage is relational.

By accepting the troupe's invitation to play, tech professionals are given the opportunity to facilitate a symbiosis with Ethiopian Jews in the same way computer games might facilitate a symbiosis between machines and humans. In the process, dancers operate in much the same way as programmers at Google's headquarters on Mount Carmel—with one key exception. Dancers are not playing to compete and win at a game with a clear set of rigidly defined rules, but they are playing to have fun, relax, and invigorate their bodies and the bodies of their audience members while enabling audience members to change them in the process.

The music plays a crucial role in facilitating this process of playful exchange. As a basic machine or tool, the drums that create the beat in the troupe's dances issue commands to the dancers, and the dancers in turn converse with the beat as they compile and interpret the music's instructions like a computer compiles and interprets a programmer's instructions. The dancers' playful exchange with the music creates the conditions for their playful exchange with their audience, since their facilitation of a dialogue with the music allows audience members to join them on stage. Since dancers do not assume control over this complex exchange, they welcome others onto the stage. This lack of control is not a source of frustration for dancers but instead a source of fun and joy that allows dancers to call other Jewish bodies onto the stage. Furthermore, the troupe's facilitation of this symbiosis of flesh and machine on stage is not just a manifestation of the troupe's Afro-diasporic aesthetics but a specific Jewish ritual with historic roots in the Oral Law.

“What the Shoulders Remember”

Ethiopian Jews’ relationship to the Oral Law remains a fundamental point of contention since their arrival in Israel. In the mid-1980s, as the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin began to plan Ethiopian Jews’ planned resettlement to Israel, known as “Operation Moses” and “Operation Solomon,” he kept the plan a secret from the Chief Rabbinate, the central authority in Israel responsible for deciding who can emigrate to Israel under the Law of Return. Begin’s decision to keep their resettlement a secret from the Chief Rabbinate created various problems for Ethiopian Jewish communities, many of which were forced to walk hundreds of miles on foot through Sudan where they languished in Sudanese refugee camps.¹⁴ When Ethiopian Jewish families finally arrived in Israel, the Israeli Rabbinate halted their entry into Israeli society.¹⁵ Although Ethiopian Jewish communities maintained the Written Law or Tanakh, the Rabbinate questioned whether they understood and integrated the Oral Law (which the Rabbinate defined as synonymous with Talmudic texts) into their ritual practices.¹⁶ In the end, the Rabbinate decided that Ethiopian Jews needed to submit to a comprehensive program of re-education before they could settle within Israeli society.¹⁷ Ethiopian Jewish families were consequently forced into what the Israeli government called “absorption centers,” where they were taught the Rabbinate’s interpretation of the Oral Law. In addition to the Oral Law, absorption centers were intended to equip Ethiopian Jewish communities with the requisite skills to work in Israel’s booming hi-tech cities.¹⁸ Thus, the process of learning the Oral Law also involved learning the requisite skills that they would need to one day study at Haifa’s technical universities and work at Google’s global headquarters.¹⁹

The city of Haifa also offered Ethiopian Jewish communities the opportunity to resettle alongside Israel’s other marginalized Jewish communities, specifically Mizrahi Jews or Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, who have historically made a home for themselves on Mount Carmel’s eastern slopes. Like Ethiopian Jews, Mizrahi Jews were denied the right to representation in the Israeli Rabbinate and, as a result, have historically grappled with systemic racism and discrimination.²⁰ Mizrahi Jews’ resettled to the city’s east in the aftermath of violent protests, called the Wadi Salib riots.²¹ In response to this crisis, the Israeli government promised to build affordable housing for Mizrahi communities on Mount Carmel’s eastern slopes.²² As government officials started to create housing blocks in East Haifa, they also simultaneously started to build art and cultural centers in the area, which they assumed would facilitate Mizrahi Jews’ integration into Israeli society. Thus, the tension between Haifa’s Ashkenazi establishment and Jews from the Global South over the Oral Law remains etched onto the geography of Mount Carmel’s eastern slopes.

A decade after the troupe’s founding, this conflict over the Oral Law became a dominant theme in their performances. Originally performed in 2005 before a packed audience in East Haifa, “What the Shoulders Remember” vividly captures this tension.²³ The dance begins with a male dancer, holding a *chera*, a carved stick used by Ethiopian Jewish priests, to guide other female dancers across the stage. The other female dancers follow him, walking hunched over across the stage as if carrying a huge burden on their backs. The male dancer hands the *chera* off to other female dancers. The female dancers then move in sweeping motions to the stage’s center, each holding their own *chera*. The music blends modern instrumentals, specifically the violin, flute, and bells, with Amharic vocals. The combination of modern instrumentals with Amharic chanting facilitates the feeling of the sacred as dancers move like ghosts across the stage. Their shoulder movements add to this effect as they move in seemingly painful, disjointed movements.

In contrast to the troupe’s earlier performances, “What the Shoulders Remember,” evokes feelings of sorrow and tragedy. The music facilitates this emotive state as it blends Hebrew

chants of Talmudic passages with Amharic vocals. Commonly associated with Ashkenazi rituals, the blending of Hebrew chanting with Amharic vocals effect not only blends Ashkenazi and Ethiopian aesthetics but “sacralizes” the performance of African music and movements. Put differently, the addition of Hebrew chants and specific instruments, such as the violin, which the audience associates with Ashkenazi Jewish rituals evokes the Jewish sacred while simultaneously telling a story about Ethiopian Jews.²⁴

The troupe’s integration of Ashkenazi Jewish rituals into their performance establishes an emotive connection between audience members and dancers as the use of Hebrew chanting triggers audience members’ memories of their own personal tragedies. More specifically, the ritual practice of Hebrew chanting commonly became associated with the Holocaust as liturgical chanting and Holocaust poetry became an emblem of Ashkenazi Jews’ suffering during the Holocaust.²⁵ According to Adesola Akinleye, this is ultimately what makes dance such an effective mechanism for cultivating relationships. As she explains, dance is “an embodied knowing that ‘speaks’ the somatic language of movement and sensation rather than verbal words.”²⁶ In the case of the Beta Dance Troupe, these relationships are ultimately forged through the sharing of memory. Moreover, members of the Beta Dance Troupe imagine this memory-making process as one that is deeply connected to Jewish ritual. As Ruth Eshel explains, when the dancers walk into the dance studio, they imagine that they are entering a river to purify themselves just as priests purify themselves before the Sabbath.²⁷

In “What the Shoulders Remember,” dancers’ association with Ethiopian Jewish ritual is made fully apparent as they incorporate the *chera*, a ritual instrument once reserved for Ethiopian Jewish priests, into their performance. After the male dancer leads the other dancers onto the stage with the *chera*, he then hands it over to the other female dancers who follow behind him. When the female dancers use the *chera*, they are not necessarily using it to lead other dancers but instead draw the audience’s gaze to their legs and feet. With their backs hunched over, each time they pick up their foot to take a step, they simultaneously lift the *chera* up to mark each step of their long and pained journey. In effect, the dancers’ use of the *chera* sacralizes each step of Ethiopian Jewish communities’ migratory journey. The ritual space of the dance stage thus creates a symbiosis of black and Jewish bodies, which in turn facilitates a symbiosis of Jewish memory. Moreover, by facilitating this symbiosis of memory, the troupe is performing the very work reserved for the Oral Law.

As a repository of Jewish diasporic communities’ collective memory, Talmudic texts ultimately preserve the chief rabbinic debates that defined the daily lives of Jewish communities living in the diaspora.²⁸ These rabbinic debates do not just preserve the history of diasporic Jewish communities but break down Jewish ritual into small, discrete units. For example, in the infamous debate between the Schools or Houses of Hillel and Shammai over the ritual blessing of the Seder, each rabbi breaks down each component of the prescribed ritual and proceeds to debate the order of each step of this banquet ritual (*Mishnah Pesachim* 10:2). The School of Shammai argues that one must first bless the day, then the wine. The School of Hillel argues for the reverse and explains why one must bless the wine first, then the day. In the end, neither side comes to an agreement. The reader is thus left wondering why these rabbinic schools would debate these seemingly inane procedures.

According to Jacob Neusner, debating these details enhances Jewish communities’ feelings of control: “The claims of Torah were important precisely because they extended to the humble things which one actually can control.”²⁹ However, Neusner’s assumption completely negates the fact that these rabbinic debates about the processes involved when executing the Tanakh ultimately demonstrate that Jewish ritual is created and reproduced through playful exchange with God’s commands. Thus, rabbinic debates or interpretations occur in the space

in between the text's command and the community's execution as each rabbinic school playfully exchanges with the Tanakh's text-based commands in different ways. Rather than reduce Jewish ritual to control, the Oral Law instead encourages communities to playfully exchange with God's commands.

The Oral Law uses playful exchanges between rabbinic schools to facilitate a symbiosis of flesh and text in the same way software achieves a symbiosis between flesh and machine. Like the programmer's code, the Tanakh is issuing commands, but those commands are ultimately subject to rabbinic interpretation. The Oral Law does not conceal this messy process but instead transforms it into an opportunity for play between the community's rabbinic authorities. Like software, the Oral Law is a specific technology that enables diasporic Jewish communities to facilitate relationships among diasporic communities living in different geopolitical locations who might retain different interpretations of God's commands.

As a collective memory bank for the Jewish people, the Oral Law thus grounds Jewish memory in difference in that diasporic communities' differing interpretations of God's commands are respected and given expression in the texts of the Talmud. Fulfilling the Talmud's central commitment to play, the Beta Dance Troupe uses movement, specifically kinesthetic empathy, to invoke the memories of audience members on stage while simultaneously drawing on their own collective memories of migration. It is a playful exchange of memory, which ultimately makes audience members feel as though Ethiopian Jewish memories of migration are their own. The troupe also opens themselves up to be changed in the process, actively remembering their memories of migration in ways that their white, upper-class audience would understand, thus injecting their memories into the minds of their upper-class audience memories. This commitment to play is not at odds with the Oral Law but fulfills the Oral Law's fundamental commitment to play as the central hallmark of Jewishness. Moreover, the Beta Dance Troupe and Oral Law share this important similarity as technologies that root diasporic Jewish communities' collective memory around the shared respect for difference.

However, the Beta Dance Troupe's commitment to Jewish memory situates them in direct conflict with the Israeli Knesset and Rabbinat. The Rabbinat mistakenly conflates the technology of text with the Oral Law itself and as a result redefines Jewish identity around a set of rigidly controlled and regulated texts. As a result, difference is not only strongly discouraged but also being systematically surveyed and eliminated in Israel's cities.

“BUG”

The troupe's performances are a complex technology that enable the troupe to redress the Rabbinat's increasingly narrow definition of Jewish identity and Haifa's increasing stratification. Thus, their effort to rebuff the Rabbinat's understanding of the Oral Law in Israeli society has geopolitical consequences for the city of Haifa. These geopolitical consequences are nowhere more evident than in the troupe's changing racial and ethnic dynamics. Today, the troupe is as diverse as Neve Yosef, the neighborhood where the Beta Dance Troupe practices and performs.

The neighborhood of Neve Yosef mostly consists of low-rent apartments, small stores called “pitsusias,” highways, and run-down construction storage facilities. As construction trucks pass on the nearby highways, an amalgamation of Arabic, Amharic, Hebrew, and English words fill the neighborhood's streets with a buzz of human activity. This diverse mixture of diasporic cultures has not necessarily given the neighborhood a positive representation among locals who refer to it simply as “Neve Jzo-Jzo,” a slur intended to denigrate the neighborhood's African population.

However, while locals might denigrate the neighborhood's diverse amalgamation of cultures, Neve Yosef's geographic location on Mount Carmel's eastern slopes offers dancers the

strategic advantage of being geographically close to Haifa's flagship universities. The Technion or Israel Institute of Technology is located fewer than four kilometers away from Neve Yosef. The University of Haifa is also located about seven kilometers away from the neighborhood. Although the universities are not integrated into the surrounding neighborhoods, researchers and graduate students often rent apartments in Neve Yosef, since the neighborhood is not only close in proximity to the universities but also one of the few neighborhoods where researchers and students can find affordable housing options.

The neighborhood's arts-based nonprofit facilities add to this distinctive educational and academic feel. Founded in the aftermath of Mizrahi communities' relocation to East Haifa, they remain a major attraction, drawing visiting researchers and tourists to the neighborhood. Among the most popular arts-based nonprofits in the neighborhood include the Neve Yosef Community Center (NYCC) where the Beta Dance Troupe has practiced and performed for more than a decade. The NYCC offers a diverse combination of computer programming and tech courses alongside arts-based programming, including classes in hip-hop, jazz, and Latin dance.

In this diverse milieu of computer programming and hip-hop classes, the Beta Dance Troupe has been able to recruit a wide range of Israelis and Palestinians from different backgrounds and cultivate a diverse amalgamation of aesthetics. Cybernetic aesthetics or aesthetics of the digital are becoming particularly prominent in the troupe's performances with the troupe's increasing integration of control systems and automata. In their most recent performance, "BUG," dancers integrated the digital camera and sophisticated digital editing techniques into their performance.³⁰

The use of digital editing in post-production makes the dancers appear and disappear on screen in quick, unexpected, and sudden movements. The effect on the viewer is at first jarring, disorientating, and even nauseating. This effect is created by the constant flashes and cuts which are akin to a strobe light. Quick flashes of different sounds and images intercut the performance at seemingly random and spontaneous moments. The use of slow motion and other digital editing techniques enhance this effect.

While dancers perform in a lush garden, the camera disrupts this clear sense of time and place with the incessant flashes of other images and noises. The music titled *Music for Pieces of Wood*, adds to this feeling and creates an almost ghostly and ethereal feeling. Created by beating various pieces and types of wood, the music features the work of Steve Reich who is an American Jewish composer well known for his minimal music or "relaxing sonic technologies" which rely on a diverse amalgamation of aesthetics.³¹ In "BUG," Reich's *Music for Pieces of Wood* captures a symbiosis of African, Jewish, and Latin aesthetics with Reich combining the African and Latin claves to create different pitch variations which the dancers in turn heighten with their sparring and abrupt movements across the computer screen.

At one point, the use of a strobe effect makes it look as though a dancer has been cut and pasted to a different location. Other dancers move as though they are following a mouse across the screen while others move as though they are a file that has been moved to the trash. At another point, dancers gather together in two straight lines and collectively shout "wow" and then scatter across the screen. It is as if the user has turned on their computer screen to see their home screen giving them a warm welcome. Moments later, dancers gather around one dancer and seemingly imprison her with their bodies as she desperately tries in vain to find something that she has lost. The performance again emphasizes a feeling of imprisonment as dancers reach up to the sky as if trying to free themselves from the forest's dense network of branches.

In the end, dancers look as though they are moving and acting like software that remains trapped in between the computer, programmer, and user's dense network of exchange. Their

costumes, which consist of dull colors and rudimentary shapes, enhance this effect by making the dancers look like the basic visual foundations of software. Furthermore, the music's repetitive loops make it sound as though troupe members are dancing to signals passing through fiber optic cables. This mixture of Reich's soundscape and heavily edited visuals delivers an eerie and tense performance that looks and sounds like the inside of the computer.

Although the troupe's aesthetics might look vastly different from their earlier performances, the troupe continues to facilitate a playful exchange with both the music and audience. In the case of "BUG," this playful exchange relies on digital editing mechanisms in post-production. In this case, interlacing the performance with digital editing in post-production impacts the audience's physical and emotional state of being, literally facilitating a general feeling of confusion, nausea, and a general feeling of being lost or trapped.

The troupe facilitates this feeling of confusion in the very same way interactions or exchanges with computer interfaces facilitate confusion in computer users. As Chun explains, confusion is generated by the user's inability to map out the complex networks of exchange between the machine, programmer, and user with the interface concealing these networks.³² This process of concealment is intended to help the user more easily navigate the software, but it also simultaneously hinders the user's ability to see and understand the exchanges behind the screen. The interface thus conceals from the user that they have very little freedom but are merely at the mercy of these exchanges.

However, the emergence of the bug, as an unforeseen circumstance of this exchange, reveals to the user their complete lack of control as the bug breaks down the interface's mapping processes. Bugs have increasingly become more of a problem and more prevalent as programmers continue to use more abstraction to get machines to automate more. In effect, a bug reveals that the interface's mapping was concealing the playful exchange between the programmer's commands, the machine's interpretation, and the user's engagement. Thus, the user, machine, and programmer remain entangled in a thick network of play, with each dependent on the other. This thick entanglement of play is increasingly becoming more of a problem for programmers, who cannot even identify a bug's location within this dynamic and ever-changing network of exchanges, obscuring their vision and ability to recognize where and how the computer has interpreted their command in ways in which they could not foretell.

In "BUG," *esketa* provides dancers with a technology to redress this growing problem in computer programming. The bugs are not hiding nor lost somewhere behind the interface, but they routinely surface in brief moments to the audience with the troupe using the strobe effect to intercut this bug or unforeseen action into the performance. In effect, the bugs are the dancers' spontaneous and erratic movements that occur seemingly without a reason or pattern. However, bugs, unforeseen circumstances, do not disrupt dancers' movements, but dancers instead alter their bodily movements to make this bug seem as though it fits within their performance. Their movements are thus disjointed, random, yet repetitive with slight alterations, and thus as random and strange as the bug. As a result, the bug or random, unforeseen action is not a problem but serves as the catalyst and definitive aesthetic that guides the troupe's playful interactions.

The troupe's diverse membership with their dynamic amalgamation of aesthetics scales the heights of Mount Carmel's slopes to achieve something that Google's programmers cannot. Ethiopian Jews are acutely aware of and understand the bug, since they themselves are a bug or unforeseen circumstance in Jewish history that Israel's Ashkenazi-centric institutions did not predict. Absent from the biblical and Talmudic record, Ethiopian Jews emerged as a seemingly random or spontaneous consequence of God's playful exchange with humanity. However, their random or spontaneous emergence in Jewish history is not a weakness but in fact their

greatest strength, since it is what allows them to not only cultivate difference but understand how it facilitates innovation and more advanced technologies and societies.

This is a crucial insight that could benefit computational thinking as computational thinking is increasingly used to design and regulate cities. Every major innovation in programming is the result of a bug. Building upon this point, Warren Sack argues that the systematic exclusion and fear of bugs is not just an intellectual or theoretical exercise but has consequences for the systemic marginalization of minorities and women from the hi-tech sector. According to Sack, computer science, as the central pillar of the tech boom, has ultimately failed in its efforts at inclusion and diversity because of programming's exclusion and fear of difference and subjectivity.³³ Sack's solution is to approach programming as an art as opposed to a science, since this shift would integrate the notion of difference into programming and thus facilitate both innovation and women and minorities' integration into programming.

In effect, the troupe fulfills Sack's proposal and combines programming, African dance, and Jewish ritual to reprogram Haifa's Jewish bodies. Doing so enables the troupe to facilitate innovation and produce complex performances, attracting audiences from across the globe for close to three decades. Jewish youth do not just flock to their performances but associate their performances with their own future. Moreover, the troupe is aware that they are not the only bugs in Israeli society; Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians have been actively integrated into the troupe's membership and into their diasporic amalgamation of aesthetics. Rather than reject their status as a bug in Israeli society, the troupe instead embraces the spontaneous and randomness of the bug as the solution to Haifa's increasing stratification and answer to Haifa's continued transformation into a global, Afro-centric, hi-tech capital.

Conclusion

Eskesta is not just a technology, but it is one which exposes the growing power and influence of the bug to Haifa and hi-tech cities like it across the globe. As Haifa's bug, this Afro-centric, diasporic amalgamation of aesthetics facilitates connection with Haifa's hi-tech executives, data specialists, and programmers. In the process, the troupe reshapes Haifa's tech professionals into their own image and creates an Afro-centric aesthetic that continues to attract the city's youth who associate it with their future. In the end, eskesta enables the bug, this unforeseen circumstance, to not only exist in Haifa but to scale Mount Carmel's slopes and facilitate connection with those who view difference as a systemic problem that needs to be erased. Moreover, eskesta is also a ritual that enables the troupe to facilitate relationships with those who might seek their erasure.

As cities become more dependent on software, they become more invested in the programmer's promise of absolute control over employees and customers. However, the promise of absolute control only facilitates the bug's dominance in cities. Thus, cities' growing anxiety over the bug only enhances the bug's imminent take-over. This is a crucially important insight for religion scholars to understand, since it exposes that the troupe's performances are not an attempt to soften Ethiopian and Mizrahi Jews' demand for redistributive action against Israel's systemic racism and militarism. Rather, cross-cultural encounter and pluralistic discourse is providing the troupe with the mechanisms to undertake the most radical act in society today. The troupe uses religious ritual and the arts as a tool to integrate difference into programming, which in turn redresses their economic, political, and religious exclusion from Israel's central institutions.

However, the trend among religion scholars to treat pluralism as immaterial and disconnected from the historical shift from the analog to the digital in turn reflects a larger academic trend to approach software as immaterial and disconnected from global economic forces. For example, the notion that computer programming relies upon a great deal of low-skilled human labor is

often overlooked in global tech conferences. More specifically, hi-tech companies' dependency on African child miners to mine rare earth elements for computer hard drives and lithium-ion batteries is rarely a topic of scholarly debate at international conferences.³⁴ Programmers' value to society depends on concealing their dependency upon the impoverished and marginalized communities that make their products possible, since it exposes that programmers are not magicians who can merely create through a single keystroke. Programming is not immaterial but depends upon the material labor of hundreds of millions of low-paid workers across the globe.

Of course, the prevalence of bugs jeopardizes this process of concealment and with it software's promise of control to the universities, governments, companies, and hospitals which purchase it. Nearly every major institution in every city across the globe now relies on the programmer's hollow promise of sovereignty. Thus, as global hi-tech companies continue to use their glossy interfaces to conceal users from the systemic racism and militarism that make software possible, cities will only continue to be infested with more and more bugs, which in turn threaten to bring down this entire artifice. While surveillance mechanisms may hunt for the increasing yet elusive bugs—subversive practices like *eskesta*, which challenge a surveillance system's ability to understand and anticipate the future—and the search for them only facilitates their growing power over cities.

However, *eskesta* enables the troupe to escape and even dismantle the city of Haifa's investment in the bug's eradication from contemporary life. The primary way that they achieve this is through language: the troupe categorizes their performances as purely "artistic" or "cultural." Doing so allows the troupe to apply for financial grants reserved for the cultural integration of recently immigrated Jewish communities. It also allows them to escape the Israeli Knesset and Rabbinat's gaze, which assumes that art is neither religious nor political and therefore not worthy of surveillance and regulation. Furthermore, the troupe's categorization as politically docile or passive ultimately enables Ethiopian and Mizrahi Jews to bring Israeli society's Ashkenazi-dominant establishment into their playground while simultaneously avoiding their surveillance mechanisms that seek their eradication.

In effect, categorizing their performances as arts- or cultural-based as opposed to a religious or political institution enables troupe members to create a space in the Israeli city of Haifa where the bug can not only exist but create a vast and interconnected global network of influence. The Beta Dance Troupe is thus using the city's unique geopolitical, social, and cultural resources to transform Mount Carmel's apex into their long-promised, hi-tech, Afro-digital, global Zion. Moreover, as this network becomes ever-more intertwined with the unforeseen circumstances which challenge advanced surveillance system's ability to predict the future, the future of Haifa is not only one where the bug is increasingly dominating, but cities across the globe are rapidly transforming into the bug's playground.

Notes

- 1 Ian Black, "'Haifa Is Essentially Segregated': Cracks Appear in Israel's Capital of Coexistence," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2018, www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/apr/19/haifa-is-essentially-segregated-cracks-appear-in-israels-capital-of-coexistence.
- 2 Yehuda Gradus, Shaal Krakover, and Eran Razin, *The Industrial Geography of Israel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 115.
- 3 Yair Assaf-Shapira, "Hi-Tech Employees Who Really Do Tech—Diaspora—Jerusalem Post," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 27, 2018, www.jpost.com/In-Jerusalem/Hi-tech-employees-who-really-do-tech-575539.
- 4 Eytan Halon, "Israeli Exports Break Record in 2018," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 8, 2019, www.jpost.com/Jpost-Tech/Business-and-Innovation/Israeli-exports-break-record-in-2018-576685.

- 5 Ruth Eshel, "A Creative Process in Ethiopian-Israeli Dance: Esketa Dance Theater and Beta Dance Troupe," *Dance Chronicle* 34, No. 3 (September 2011): p. 359.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 363.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 353–7.
- 9 For an example of the atmosphere, style, and feel of their early performances see Amos Shacham, "Beta Dance Troupe," YouTube Video, 15:38, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xniqbmcYyLg.
- 10 J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 21.
- 11 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), p. 42.
- 12 Christian Ulrik Anderson, "Monopoly and the Logic of Sensation in Spacewar!," in *Fun and Software: Exploring Pleasure, Paradox and Pain in Computing*, ed., Olga Goriunova (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), pp. 197–212.
- 13 Brian Holmes, "Future Map Or: How the Cyborgs Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Surveillance," accessed October 3, 2019, <https://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2007/09/09/future-map/>.
- 14 Israel's prime minister, Menachem Begin, decided to arrange an arms deal to Ethiopia in exchange for Ethiopian Jews' migration to Israel. In Operation Moses, 8,000 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel. An additional 14,000 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel under Operation Solomon. Alexander De Waal details the lasting political, economic, and social consequences of war, famine, and migration on Ethiopian communities in Alexander De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991).
- 15 Steven H. Resnicoff, "Autonomy in Jewish Law—In Theory and in Practice," *Journal of Law and Religion* 24, No. 2 (2009): pp. 519–23.
- 16 David S Ribner and Ruben Schindler, "The Crisis of Religious Identity Among Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, No. 1 (September 1996): pp. 105–9.
- 17 In 1973, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was already declaring, "I have come to the conclusion that Falashas are Jews who must be saved from absorption and assimilation. We are obliged to speed up their immigration to Israel and educate them in the spirit of the Torah, making them partners in the building of the Holy Land." Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is said to have declared this in response to a question from the Ethiopian Jewish activist in Israel, Hezi Ovadia. However, the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, Shlomo Goren, flat out rejected the idea that Ethiopian Jews were in fact Jews. Ethiopian Jewish communities' assumed relationship to the Oral Law thus emerged as a fundamental site of political contestation with their claim to Jewishness ultimately resting on their perceived relationship to the Oral Law. For events surrounding the ruling see Bard, *From Tragedy to Triumph*, pp. 20–50.
- 18 Jeff Halper, "The Absorption of Ethiopian Immigrants: A Return to the Fifties," ed., Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1987), pp. 104–12.
- 19 Adi Binhas, "'Are You Being Served?' The Jewish Agency and the Absorption of Ethiopian Immigration," *Israel Affairs* 22, No. 2 (April 4, 2016): pp. 459–78.
- 20 Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization on the Religious Kibbutz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 54
- 21 Lev Luis Grinberg, "1959—Wadi Salib Riots: Culminating a Decade of Ethnic Discrimination," in *Mo(ve)Ments of Resistance*, Politics, Economy and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931–2013 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), p. 94.
- 22 Daniel Lefkowitz, *Words and Stones: The Politics of Language and Identity in Israel* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 23 For a video recording of the performance see Ruth Eshel, "What the Shoulders Remember," YouTube Video, 18:05, 2006. www.youtube.com/watch?v=UktKfWtqisE.
- 24 Eshel, "A Creative Process in Ethiopian-Israeli Dance," p. 90.
- 25 J. Adams, *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (New York: Macmillan, 2011), p. 142.
- 26 Adesola Akinleye, "An Introduction," in *Narratives in Black British Dance: Embodied Practices*, ed., Adesola Akinleye (New York: Springer, 2018), p. 6.
- 27 Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 21.
- 28 Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, n.d.), p. 68.
- 29 Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 81.

- 30 Dege Feder, "BUG," Youtube Video, 3:16, September 12, 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLRcxzQ21hg.
- 31 Sumanth Gopinath and Pwyll ap Siôn, *Rethinking Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 3.
- 32 Chun, *Programmed Visions*, 47.
- 33 Warren Sack, *The Software Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), p. 7.
- 34 Siddharth Kara, "Is Your Phone Tainted by the Misery of 35,000 Children in Congo's Mines?" *The Guardian*, October 12, 2018, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/12/phone-misery-children-congo-cobalt-mines-drc.

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