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The Effects of External Elements on Choreographic Works

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Abstract

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The modern dance concept of movement for movement's sake brings to question whether or not movement has to have meaning associated with it. Can movement material be engaging and interesting simply by its physicality or aesthetic qualities, or is there something inherently meaningful about any choreographic work plainly because the human body is the medium being used? For my research I am questioning not only this idea of meaning and if and how it is created, but also the non-movement elements of a piece that can add a layer of context to work. Choreography in contemporary modern dance can include lighting, music, set design, and costuming that create an environment for and sometimes a relationship with the movement phrase material. With the tremendous amount of external elements in contemporary works, how much impact does the movement have? To investigate the weight of meaning, context, and vocabulary in a piece of choreography, I have created 6 dances from the same movement. A solo, quartet, and large ensemble piece were choreographed from the same core phrase material. Each dance was then duplicated, with only the music, costuming, and lighting elements being altered. The effects of such changes were explored and analyzed from the view of the choreographer, performers, and viewers. While movement can create its own tone and meaning, I have experienced the ability of contextual components and intention to dramatically transform a piece of choreography.

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Introduction

“Movement invention is a way to avoid making choreography.” – *Monica Bill Barnes, choreographer*¹

The role of music within choreography has always been interesting to me. Growing up in a studio setting, musicality and rhythm were a large part of my early dance training. My dance education consisted primarily of ballet, jazz, and tap techniques – all styles that generally adhered to performance as entertainment. We were taught to “dance to the music” and to show the music through our bodies. Music was a catalyst for choreography.

Upon entering college, I experienced and witnessed new ways in which music could be incorporated into choreography and in the field of dancing, in general. I began to be exposed to the work of post - modern dancers and choreographers like Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Yvonne Rainer, who rebelled against traditional and modern dance, as well as the classical use of elements like music, within choreography and performance. In my first modern dance concert at Emory, I performed in a piece, “Universal Joint: Coping” choreographed by Blake Beckham.² While there were musical markers that aligned with certain moments of the dance, the movement had its own rhythm, timing, and importance separate from the accompanying sound. The internal cues of the dance were based upon the dancers’ relationships to each other, not the music. This experience offered me a new understanding of the complexities of and potentials for music in choreography. I realized that the sounds that accompany a work can be a driving force for the dancers, but they do not have to be. Music can also be utilized to create an environment, foster an intended image, establish a basis for timing, or create a mood. Working

¹ Monica Bill Barnes, The American Dance Festival. [Composition class, Durham, North Carolina, June 2011].

² *Universal Joint: Coping*, choreographed by Blake Beckham performed by Alyssa Bruehlman, Joshua Gwynn, Daniel Liebskind, and Kala Seidenberg.

with choreographers in college who used music differently in their process helped me begin to grasp these greater possibilities for music in dance.

As I began choreographing and watching more modern dance in college, I started to question the reasoning behind musical accompaniments. Growing up I had made dances to pieces of music that I was drawn to. Movement was generally inspired by a song or musical piece that affected me in some way. The idea that dance could be something of its own, an independent entity, never before occurred to me. When watching Cedar Lake in 2010 perform “Minus 16” choreographed by Ohad Naharin, I became aware of these more dynamic music-movement relationships.³ The music in this piece connected closely with choreography; however, the movement could stand on its own. The accompanying Hebrew chants had layered text that matched the accumulated movement of the piece. Similarly, the crescendo of tension created by the profound drumming with brief calm moments in between aligned with the combination of full-bodied gestures and moments of stillness. The music had a constant beat, despite the overlapping dynamics of the voices and chants. Similarly, the spatial structure of the dancers stayed in an identical semi-circle formation throughout the piece. There was a clear connection between the music and the movement – a sense of unity and collaboration; however, the music did not dominate. At the crux of this piece seemed to be a central idea that the music and movement cooperatively supported.

I further explored the use of music in choreography during the summer of 2011, when I attended the American Dance Festival (ADF) in Durham, North Carolina. At this dance festival, I was immersed in dance from all perspectives: taking multiple classes a day, attending lectures, and watching professional concerts weekly. Having the opportunity to experience such high

³*Minus 16*, Choreographed by Ohad Naharin, performed by Cedar Lake Dance. February 2010, Emory University.

caliber performances regularly fostered my ability to articulate my ideas about movement and choreography. It also helped me for the first time to distinguish between strong dancing and meaningful choreography. There was one particular performance that struck me and further helped me dig deeper in my questioning of music. Tao Dance Theater, a modern dance company from China, presented a duet that left me disengaged. I was confused by my lack of connection with the work simply because the dancers were performing some of the most seamless and interesting floor material I had ever seen. I felt as if the choreographer had explored an idea - that the piece consisted of intentional movement; however, there was a lack of appeal for me. The more I thought about the work, the more I realized that it was the external elements of the dance that left me unsatisfied. The music and movement were monotonous. There were no counterpoints. The lighting also seemed to remain unchanging throughout. While watching this dance, all I could think about was how more dynamic music and different lighting could have drastically altered my experience of the piece. It was during this concert that I began to breakdown choreography into more than just movement, but also the external elements like music, lighting, and costuming that help shape a piece into its essence.

There was a class at ADF that further informed my thoughts on choreography. I was able to take a composition class from New York-based choreographer, Monica Bill Barnes. Barnes, known for her witty, theatrical choreography mentioned in composition class one day, “I think movement invention is a way to avoid making choreography.”⁴ This statement grabbed my attention and completely altered my understanding of dance making. It suggested that movement was not automatically choreography. Barnes’ assertion helped me to evaluate my own work, and led me to the realization that I had never truly made a piece of choreography, but instead simply

⁴ Monica Bill Barnes, The American Dance Festival. [lecture, Durham, North Carolina, June 2011].

strung movement phrases together. I had fallen into the trap of generating mass amounts of movement rather than structuring my material into a cohesive piece. The coupling of Barnes' statement and my experience watching Tao Dance Company fueled my interest in the relationship of music and movement to the larger scheme of choreography. I came to the realization that if a dance takes place in a setting comprised of particular elements, those components form a context for the piece to be perceived in and therefore, should be intentional. Lighting, costuming, music and set design are all such exterior components that can undeniably shape a dance.

My curiosity about music's varying roles, the effects of external elements, and the translation of movement vocabulary into choreography are what inspired this project. To evaluate the impact of external elements on a choreographic work, I decided to create a solo, duet, and quartet from the same phrase material, and then form a duplicate version of each dance with only the non-movement elements being different between the versions. In order to not fall into the trap of generating large quantities of movement and therefore evade making a piece like Barnes suggested, I decided that I would limit the amount of phrase material I could use in the formation of the dances. I choreographed 4 movement phrases that served as my lexicon for making all of the pieces. It was important for me to approach each dance with its own intent. The "meaning" or purpose of each dance varied in its formation and realization. I finally chose to further analyze the process of making the works and the perception of the pieces from the views of the maker (choreographer), the doer (performer), and the viewer (audience member). While individual differences were prevalent, the maker, doers, and viewers generally experienced differences between the two forms of each dance; therefore showing the potential impact of non-movement elements on the same dance, and highlighting the role of intent in dance making.

Chapter 1: The Maker

Quartets

The initial phase of my research began with the movement invention component. I created four phrases: one gestural, one floor work, one locomotor movement, and one phrase that consisted of various positions. In this beginning stage, my intent in making movement was to create simple, linear, and almost subdued phrase material. Recalling what I had learned in Monica Bill Barnes' class at ADF, I felt as if the only way I could test the impact of external elements adding meaning to a work, was to create movement that was free of content and decorative detail from the beginning.

The choreographic process began with teaching the quartet dancers the initial movement material. After teaching the 4 phrases, I manipulated the movement with the dancers, focusing primarily on time and spatial elements. In this phase, I had no intent or direction for the piece. I was trying to let the music I experimented with as well as the process yield meaning, and not impose an idea from the beginning. I discovered that the lack of direction and dynamic movement was more hindering than conducive to my process. In my efforts to not allow movement invention be a distraction from the construction of the piece, I actually created movement that was unworkable. I had avoided qualitative phrases because of the fear that such dynamics would be unnecessary and extraneous. What I found, however, was that because the movement was unnatural and uncomfortable for me, I could not connect to the material and fully explore it.

In October I started the entire process over again, throwing out all of the phrase material and inventing new movement. I realized that my movement tendencies are not necessarily

superfluous. I gravitate towards spatially driven movement, and such movement can have significance if I understand its intent and execution. I began to think about the quality of spatial phrase material and what it can potentially convey. I realized that spatially driven movement is communicative through action rather than telling. Gestural and more presentational movement can often feel like a discussion – as in a telling of a story or speaking one’s mind. A spatial dance, however, takes on a more demonstrational, action-based means of sharing. In spatially directed movement I feel like I am communicating through action since the relation to space is the prime focus, and not the audience.

Acknowledging and embracing my movement affinities was enlightening for me. I allowed myself to construct new material that matched my own movement preferences. In this second attempt, I also approached the quartet rehearsals with clearer intent. In my early efforts of trying to be spontaneous, I had no direction for the piece I was trying to make; therefore, I used my second attempt to establish a point of view to inspire my process. I decided that I wanted this piece to explore the levels and layers of female friend relationships. I began more manipulations that dealt with proximity, space, and time. I created sections from each manipulation idea and then tried to piece them together. The dance still felt meaningless and incomplete. The construction of the piece as a whole felt segmented and lacked a through line. I had tacked sections together that had no clear connection. I ended the semester unsatisfied with the work, and planning to restart the quartet again following winter break.

During winter break, I was fortunate to attend the Doug Varone winter intensive, a dance workshop that helped me to reevaluate my process. Doug Varone is a renowned contemporary choreographer, and artistic director of Doug Varone and Dancers. Varone spoke about his own choreographic strategies. It was encouraging to hear a professional choreographer whom I

respect speak about the importance of editing movement in the dance making process.

Experiencing his different means of generating and manipulating material similarly helped give me a fresher outlook on movement making and my own process. Having the chance to think about and experience dance away from my project was extremely informative and helpful.

Through working with Varone, I finally grasped the importance of experimentation in the rehearsal process. In my past rehearsals, I would try an idea and then automatically stage it for the dance. I did not quite understand the process of making a significant amount of material, eliminating what did not work, and exhausting further the material that did. This winter intensive helped me understand the experimental component of choreographing.

Starting the quartet over the third time, I finally had a stronger intent and means for exploration. I knew that I wanted this piece to revolve around female relationships; however this time I planned movement experiments to try in rehearsals that related to this central idea. Since I was interested in female friendship, I decided to try and enter this topic through physical movement rather than qualitative choices that initially yielded emotion. I therefore thought about relationships in terms of weight and support. I started using movement metaphors, like the concept of weight, which could be both a physical practice (for e.g., giving one's weight) as well as an emotional idea (for e.g., the weight of burden). I listed numerous possibilities of how four people could physically relate (three people supporting one, one supporting three, two supporting or hindering two, etc.). I then attempted multiple experiments with the dancers based upon these ideas. I threw out sections that did not work and kept the few that did. Finally towards the end of the process, I found ways to mesh the movement sections together, which worked more successfully this time since a clearer thread line had formed.

The music was added after the dance had been completed, although multiple pieces were attempted and played with during the rehearsal process. I at first thought that I wanted to use classical music for the piece. I tried multiple scores and nothing seemed to create the type of curious and shy environment I was hoping for. Finally, I tried some female jazz vocals and narrowed my list down to the Nina Simone song “Trouble in Mind”⁵ and Billie Holiday’s “Foolin’ Myself.”⁶ The sense of effort and weight that I tried to emphasize in the construction and execution of the dance seemed to match the effortful qualities of the jazz pieces. I began to see jazz and blues music as a presentational and positive way of expressing failure and effort. The heaviness and weight of the music resonated well with the physical weighted imagery of the dance. Later entitled “Tend & Befriend,” this quartet crystallized into a dance about burden, support, and neediness. The music became an external component that emphasized the relationships and weighted qualities of the dance.

I originally planned for the dancers to be in navy dresses for this piece. I thought the dresses would give the piece an elegant, formal, and mature tone. Listening to the advice of my mentors, I changed this idea during tech week. The prevalent sense of weight and grounded qualities in the piece needed a less formal costume; therefore, sweats and cardigans were adapted during the week of the show.

I had a very limited role in determining the lighting for this dance. I communicated the importance of a spotlight during the solo section of the piece. I felt it was necessary to separate the individuals from each other as much as possible for this particular part. In general, I also felt that in order to emphasize the closeness of the four dancers, the amount of lit space needed to be

⁵ Nina Simone, “Trouble in Mind.” *Nina Simone Live* (2008).

⁶ Billie Holiday and Lester Young, “Foolin Myself.” *Musical Romance* (2002).

minimized. I did not want the four dancers to be seen in context of a larger space, but desired a more zoomed in glance. Limiting the space lit helped achieve a more intimate setting. Besides these few general ideas, the lighting designer created lighting plans that he saw fit.

The second version of this quartet titled, “Exchange & Rearrange,” was created late in the process. Like the original dance, it also went through several phases and attempts. With “Tend & Befriend,” the majority of the time was spent manipulating the movement, and then music was adapted to the dance. For the second rendition of the quartet, I was looking to more intensely manipulate the music for the premade work. Moving away from “Tend & Befriend” which focused on the support vs. hindering aspects of friendship, this piece was heading in the direction of exploring adolescent and more immature acquaintances. I had considered using a compilation of movie text excerpts for this second version. I found clips of movie scenes from movies that I felt commented on immature female friendships. I tried compiling several sections together, and while some of the text seemed to align well with certain movements, the piece lacked cohesion. From the beginning of this process I knew that each duplicate dance should be able to stand on its own as an independent piece. After multiple attempts, I decided to scrap the text idea.

I then explored the possibilities of popular music. I had anticipated that trendy music would literalize abstract moments. I assumed that youthful, present music would place the dance in a more current time as well as establish a sense of familiarity. The music that people associate as being pre-teen would therefore offer a completely different context than the vocals performed by the classic, well-renowned performers, Nina Simone and Billie Holiday in the first version. The trendy music served more as a distraction than as a unifying element for the different parts of the dance. I therefore threw out this idea as well.

In my final attempts of adapting external elements to fit the material and hence change the essence of the work, I experimented with various music options through simple trial and error. Using a video of the dance, I tested several pieces of music for separate sections. I found a composer, Abel Korzeniowski, whose classical work gave the piece a sadder tone, but seemed to complement the dynamics of the various parts of the dance. While creating this second version, the accompanying scores felt like they were soundtracks to a movie or story, adding a narrative tone to the work. Because there were clear distinctions of different parts of the dance, I found several musical pieces to match the different sections. In trying to impose music that would best fit each movement idea in the piece, this led to the presence of more musical cuts and shifts than in the original work. Modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey described the inconsistencies of adding music later in the process and how shaping music to fit an already completed dance will never “fit exactly” to the choreographer’s intention.⁷ I found this to be true with this version, as I had to make several musical edits to get in the ballpark of the type of sound I wanted. The multiple and abrupt musical shifts chopped up the piece, but were nevertheless necessary in order for the sections to have a somewhat appropriate sound environment. Eventually, I began to accept the rapid transitions as simply another device for manipulating the movement and the overall dance. I was interested in seeing if not only the musical qualities had an effect on the work, but also the impact of the musical structure.

The lighting for this piece was completely determined by the lighting designer. Lighting changes adhered to the various sections of the dance. Only the small amount of space occupied by the four dancers was lit at the beginning of the piece, helping to create a feeling of intimacy

⁷Doris Humphrey. *The Art of Making Dances*, ed. Barbara Pollack. Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 1959. 132 – 143.

and closeness between the dancers. As the piece continued and the relationships between the dancers expanded and transformed, the area of lit space also increased. At the end of the dance, the lighting zoomed in once again to the minimal area around the performers.

The navy dresses originally chosen for “Tend & Befriend” were used for this dance instead. The classical nature of the music seemed to match the elegance of the navy dresses. “Exchange & Rearrange” became the more formal dance with the classical music and traditional dresses, while “Tend & Befriend” had a sense of ease and comfort with the sweats and cardigans.

Solos

The next piece that I constructed was my solo “these things can explode.” I struggled with this dance in a different way from the quartet. I was faced with the challenge of not having other bodies to relate to. This piece forced me to push myself in regards to manipulating the movement and external elements, since they were the only aspects I had the means to affect. I could not play with relationships with other people or generate more innovative material. I was restricted to the core phrases and what I could individually impose upon them. After spending much time experimenting in the studio and reflecting upon my experience choreographing the quartets, I knew that I needed a clear intent and direction. I wanted the solo to explore the act of restarting/reinitiating a task and being in the midst of a process. My goal was to manipulate the pre-made material to convey these ideas.

The image of tangled yarn and the process of detangling were ideas that overflowed into the initial manipulation phase. In order to physicalize this detangling image, I used chance to assign directional facings to a movement phrase. I cut up pieces of paper and randomly drew a different facing arrow on each sheet. I then put the pieces of paper in a random order and applied the directional orientation of the arrows to the various movements in the phrase. This section essentially became the backbone of the dance. The focus of the pathway of the movement was linear and singular, while the performer’s focus was more dynamic and changing. I repeated this motif three times in each version of the solo.

The solo construction was also informed by performance advice shared by Doug Varone and Dancers company members at the winter intensive. While at the workshop, I learned a solo repertory piece that was danced by company member, Julia Burrer. Burrer mentioned during the

repertory class that she did not think of the dance as necessarily a solo, but more so as “a duet with the space.”⁸ This statement was revolutionary for my personal perspective on choreographing and performing solos. I realized that my need for having a relationship with something in a solo could be alleviated through making space my partner. Carving and moving space therefore became my intent, and I purposefully varied such interactions.

Being spatially focused, an affinity of mine, felt action-based for me. I was not being affected by the space, but rather was actively being the one transforming my environment. As the piece developed and expanded, I played with dynamics, timing, and focus. Focus became an important part of establishing a relationship and expressing a sense of intent. Using my eyes indicated an energetic focal point of what I was “working on,” as well as detail to what was important. It personalized the piece and helped me better understand my own objective.

The music for the first version was found through a trial and error process. I attempted vocal music and more popular works, but they felt overly dramatic and unrelated to the experience I was having with the movement. Music with lyrics provided a great deal of content and context that I felt would too dramatically shape the construction of the dance. The piece that I finally decided upon, “Hellerau” by Swod, had an industrial, edgy sound that further perpetuated the idea of process and something brewing.⁹ Instead of imposing a story, I felt as if the music reinforced the intended drive of the choreography.

I had a very small role in the costume and lighting choices for this dance. I met with the costume designer and described the industrial tone of the piece. I decided upon a tunic shaped costume and the color charcoal. While the velvet like texture and gray-charcoal color of the

⁸ Julia Burter, *Doug Varone and Dancers Winter Workshop*. New York City, New York. January 2012.

⁹ Swod, “Hellerau” *Drei* (2011).

costume seemed to extend the mechanical feel I was hoping for, there were issues with the fitting of the costume. Important images from floor work sections were visually compromised because of the length of the dress, which covered the majority of my legs.

The lighting designer similarly had the liberty to create his own designs for this piece. The lighting was dim at the very beginning and expanded once I moved further into the space. The simple lighting structure remained intentionally unchanged. The lighting designer expressed a desire to keep the lighting consistent for the piece, which complimented the repeated pathways of the dance.

Creating the second version of the solo was an immense challenge. In trying to coordinate with my various casts and clean the group dances, the second solo was often neglected; therefore, the latter rendition of the solo was one of the last components of the concert to be decided upon. Like with the quartet, I had originally considered the idea of heading in a more literal direction. Since the first version of the solo was more abstract, I thought adding literal, popular music to the second dance could tremendously impact the perception of the work. I originally planned on creating a musical visualization of the song “Express Yourself” by Charles Wright.⁹ I find this song to be one of the most dynamic, percussive, and musically interesting funk pieces. Personally, I knew that performing to this song would be a vastly different experience. The role of the music would be intended to drive and control the dance, compared to the previous version where the music simply re-enforced the movement. I knew every accent of this piece of music very well, and therefore, thought this dance could be manipulated dynamically to match the song’s qualitative range. I would not be changing

⁹ Charles Wright and the Watts, “Express Yourself.” *Express Yourself* (1970).

anything about the order of the material, but more so how much time was given to each individual movement.

Like with past attempts, this first effort at this second version did not work. While I made certain movements match the musicality of “Express Yourself,” I felt like I was no longer making a dance, but more simply dancing to the music. I decided to cut this idea. Prior to the funk song, I had experimented with an opera piece, “Exsultate, Jubilate, K. 165 (158a) Motet for Soprano: I. Allegro” composed by Wolfgang Mozart and performed by Judith Blegen, Pinchas Zukerman & Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra.¹⁰ I decided to try and return to this piece of music. Originally, the opera piece had not worked because I simply imposed the opera music to my pre-existing dance. The passion and dynamics of the opera song were jarring at moments where similar dynamic shifts in the movement did not occur. I decided to reattempt this dance with this score. I realized again the importance of intent. That if I wanted the piece to be its own entity, then simply matching the qualities of the movement to the music would not be enough. I needed to frame a clearer objective and understanding of what this piece could be.

I revisited the first solo and its focus on process, re-starting/reinitiating, and being in the middle of a task. I decide that this second version, later titled “Relative Magnitude,” could be an exaggerated form of the first dance. My intention for this piece became about how we as individuals over dramatize our problems. The fullness of the opera music lent to this goal as well. The idea of an individual’s small problem or task seeming gigantic to that person was naturally felt with the intensity of the music. I became focused on manipulating the volume and size of the movement – trying to make everything fuller and bigger, which was in line with the

¹⁰ “Exsultate, Jubilate, K. 165 (158a) Motet for Soprano: I. Allegro” composed by Wolfgang Mozart and performed by Judith Blegen, Pinchas Zukerman & Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. *Soprano Arias* [1996].

inflated tone of the piece. My relationship with the music was a drastic change from the previous solo, as I modified the phrasing of the dance to purposefully compliment, and at times, contrast the music. There were places in this piece when the higher notes of the vocals were purposefully coupled with suspended movements, and more staccato sounds were paired with sharper phrasing. This solo became a trio with the space, the music, and myself.

My overall presence felt more calculated in this version as well. Compared to “these things can explode” where my attention was directed towards the movement and my kinesphere of space, “Relative Magnitude” was more presentational. I felt my back expand and my shoulders widen, naturally becoming more inviting. I similarly had moments where my focus was more frontal. In a way, the space that I was working with for this second solo had expanded.

The costume and lighting designers had complete control over their decisions for this piece. The costume designer selected a formal, black dress during the week of the show. Even though this decision was a last minute choice, the clean and proper fit of the dress perpetuated the elegant tone of the dance. The lighting designer used a gobo light, which created a pattern of leaves on the stage. This imagery choice put the dance in a familiar environment. For me as the performer, the lighting helped me recognize myself as a character in an environment, and not just a dancer executing abstract movement. The lighting in this piece fostered a more literal, human, and relatable image for the dance.

Large Group Ensembles

The large group piece was the final dance that I choreographed. Before I started rehearsals, I knew that I wanted to take advantage of the potential for space design that having a large number of dancers can yield. I was also interested in exploring the relationship of the individual to the calculated structure of the group. I had initially intended to create a youthful atmosphere with the music, costuming, and lighting.

Like with the other pieces, there were multiple drafts and attempts at creating this dance. I originally tried several line formation manipulations. During such experimentations, I realized the possibilities for meaning embedded simply in the arrangement and proximity of dancers. For example, a line extending from stage left to stage right can simultaneously present a unified group of equal individuals, as well as reflect individual differences due to the ease and accessibility of seeing everyone. An upstage to downstage line can accomplish the exact opposite. It can show a sense of unity, display a hierarchy, and hide the individual. Upstage to downstage lines also can imply waiting for something as well as a sense of order. I knew that I wanted to incorporate lines because they naturally comment on the group and the individual. Through experimenting with these formations, I found out that my interests lie not only in the structure of lines, but also the many ways in which these spatial arrangements can be broken and scattered. The piece essentially became about the moments in and out of the linear configurations. In playing with these relationships, I investigated ideas of order/linear quality and chaos. The piece, later entitled “Fractal” became about the clockwork and mathematical qualities of a group in relationship with organized chaos of the individuals that comprise the larger body.

Prohibiting physical contact was another intentional and crucial component of this dance.

The quartets “Tend & Befriend” and “Exchange and Rearrange” essentially became about touch. The different relationships between the dancers in the quartet centralized around themes of weight, support, and burden. I wanted to push myself to not allow any form of physical contact in the large group piece. The challenge became to explore in depth how the dancers could relate and connect without contact as a tool. I experimented with cause and effect in the rehearsal process.

This choice to refrain from any contact created interesting relationships between the dancers. The dancers utilized their focus as a means of connecting. Similarly, the fact that dancers were often in close proximity without any form of contact spoke of a more mechanical relationship that I was trying to convey. There became a sense of dependency between the dancers, as their cues were off of each other, but also a level of detachment in their lack of touch.

Different music choices were tried throughout the process. At the beginning, because I was intending on making this piece seem youthful, I experimented with a couple of indie songs and an older hit, “Be My Baby” by the Ronettes.¹¹ “Be My Baby” gave the material a child-like and almost loser-like feel. This element equalized the group, as they all seemed to be longing for something else, uniformly and together. While this piece of music did help convey both a sense of group unity and isolation between the dancers, it became too theatrical for the direction I was intending. The music contributed specific characterizations to the piece that would not have been easily maintained following the end of the song. I therefore decided to change the piece and start over.

The lighting and costumes for this piece were centralized around ways to make the ensemble seem youthful. The lighting designer was given this simple instruction and had the liberty to make his own choices. For costumes, I decided upon skinny jeans and tank tops. I

¹¹ The Ronettes, “Be My Baby” *Be My Baby* [1963].

knew that I wanted blues, teals, and charcoals, as they would be the color scheme for the entire concert.

I was influenced more strongly by music when creating the second version of the large group. Using material and phrase work that had been created in past rehearsals, I listened to multiple musical scores while watching rehearsal footage. Finally, “Nouvelle Chance – Club Mix” by Eule:Nhaupt and Molle:Nhauer intuitively worked for me.¹² The French music had a metro, youthful quality, and the driving and repetitive rhythm suggested a systematic nature that I was trying to express within the group. The second piece chosen for “Fractal” was a calmer but still repetitive and driven piece entitled “I’m Trying” by Milosh.¹³ The second music aligned with the latter half of the dance, which was comprised of smaller groups on stage. The softer music helped facilitate a lighter tone and therefore bring about the individualized, subtler qualities I was trying to show. The constant beat within the second piece was still present, which helped to maintain the feeling that the individuals were still a part of an ongoing rhythm.

The second version of the large group, “Unquotable” was a challenge for me, as I was attempting to manipulate the external music to fit and reshape an existing dance. For this piece, I was inspired by the power of music in both silent and non-silent films to boldly communicate feelings, emotions, characters, etc. In *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, authors Sandra Marshall and Annabel Cohen noted, “Music and film complement each other in the type of information each can portray. Whereas music can provide specific emotional information, it lacks the ability of film to depict specific actions.”¹⁴ The ability of music in film, especially

¹² Eule:Nhaupt and Molle:Nhauer, “Nouvelle Chance – Club Mix.” *Wildkuhl – EP* [2010].

¹³ Milosh, “I’m Trying.” *Meme* [2006].

¹⁴ Sandra Marshall and Annabel Cohen, “Effects of Musical Soundtracks on Attitudes toward Animated Geometric Figures.” *Music Perception* Vol. 6 (Fall 1988).

silent film, to provide content is fascinating to me, and I believe that the same context for actions that music creates in movies, are also possible in dance. I therefore used the second large group as a means of exploring just how impactful cinematic music can be. I compiled several silent film scores to accompany this dance. While normally I make dances through manipulating the movement material, for this piece, I focused on manipulating the music.

This process involved compartmentalizing “Fractal” into more distinct sections that could each be assigned a more literal and dramatic theme. I asked myself, “If I were to attach a literal narrative to this section, what would it be?” The opening solo became internalized as a narration of a story, while the quartet became a battle scene. Attaching circumstances to the various sections helped me establish the type of mood and or story I was trying to emphasize with the music. I found multiple scores from silent films and watched rehearsal footage as I tried to match musical pieces with the movement. A movie reel sound effect played between film scores, cleansing the aural pallet and serving as a transition. The music was so dramatic that these brief moments of reel accomplished a sense of silence, while allowing the piece to still carry on the same movie-like tone. Dance pioneer Doris Humphrey once stated, “So the original point, that dancing can stand alone, has been proved over and over, but the main virtue of the silent dance is its power to simplify concentration and rest the ear. After a section or a whole dance with no music, sound is new again and fresher than if it had been continuous.”¹⁵

The costumes and lighting were designed to bring out the cinematic and visual qualities of the piece. Because the music scores were from silent film movies, I wanted the stage to be lit like a black and white film. I met with the lighting designer and asked if the lighting could be black and blue, using blue because of its constant color presence in the concert. The designer explained

¹⁵ Doris Humphrey. *The Art of Making Dances*, ed. Barbara Pollack. Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 1959. 132 – 143.

that the color red helps to create a black and white effect on stage; therefore, I decided simply to add red accents in accessories for this second piece. The dancers had red belts, tank tops, and scarves that added a hint of color to the costumes used in “Fractal.”

Chapter 2: The Doer

Solos

My experiences performing the two solos varied dramatically from each other. My overall presence, movement qualities, relationship with the music, and internal feelings during each dance were drastically different. I felt as if “Relative Magnitude” was far more presentational than “these things can explode.” “Relative Magnitude” began with me on stage as the opera music played, while in the previous version, my beginning stance was off stage and I was seen entering with movement. Opening with stillness with such bold accompanying music in “Relative Magnitude” triggered a regal presence from the initial seated position. In “these things can explode,” I was first seen doing the material. I did not have to form an automatic statement or presence like I felt in “Relative Magnitude.” I was also far more conscious of my face and the audience in “Relative Magnitude.” I acknowledged the audience more often in this version as well as felt my shoulders widen which also contributed to a sense of presentation. In “these things can explode,” I felt as if the viewer was entering and witnessing my world, where as in “Relative Magnitude” it seemed like I was exaggerating and communicating my story to a third party.

The qualities of movement also varied between the two. I aimed to make my movement spatially large for both versions; however, the reasoning behind this choice was different for each dance. In “these things can explode,” I intended on playing with the extremes of spatial use. My focus was relating to space as if it were my duet partner. This piece was essentially about the process of doing. In “Relative Magnitude,” I was still focused on a task; however, I was using space in order to be presentational.

My relationship to the music was another contrasting element between the dances. The

Swod piece of music entitled “Hellerau” used in “these things can explode” provided a driving force for a sense of continuity, repetition, and re-starting/reinitiating that was important in that piece. There were a few musical markers that aligned with certain broad sections, but no one movement matched a specific musical cue. The music in this piece for me was about establishing an environment and a pace. The typewriter sounds, piano, and driving pulse propelled and reinforced the rhythm of the choreography. The movement in “Relative Magnitude,” on the other hand, was completely affected by and more closely connected to the music. I did not necessarily mimic the intensity of the music with my movement, but I did make specific, qualitative choices based upon the music. Because the structure and choreography needed to remain constant, my manipulation rested in qualitative and timing choices. I had moments where I changed the phrasing of a piece of movement to match the music directly, like when executing suspended movements during high notes. I also had moments where I purposefully chose to counter the music – for example, the stillness used during some of the upbeat choral sections and the slow motion part during vocals. Whether I was countering or matching the music, I nevertheless stayed connected with it. Because this piece was so connected to the sound, I naturally felt more push from the music. I could feel the music at points initiating how I moved, which was not the case in “these things can explode.” Similarly, I also found that my timing and alignment with the music was far more consistent in “Relative Magnitude” because I had more musical markers. I was far more nervous performing “these things can explode” simply because my dancing would hit different musical cues every time I performed.

Finally, I had different character-driven and emotional experiences during the two solos. For “these things can explode,” I was not portraying a specific personality, but instead I felt like I was figuring something out while I was performing. There was a clear sense that I was in the

middle of something. “Relative Magnitude” also had a sense of process, however, in a more presentational way. This piece began to feel emotional at times, not so much in the movement, but more so in the pauses. The brief stops in “these things can explode” felt like moments of thought, while the pauses in “Relative Magnitude” were more about tentativeness and fear.

Perhaps these breaks were the only real and human moments in the piece. The grandness of the music and movement qualities in this dance often felt produced and presentational. The moments when I stopped are when I felt most human, and that meant something to me in context of the rest of the piece.

Quartets

The dancers in the quartets experienced less variance in their performance than I did in my solos. Because the dancers in “Tend & Befriend” & “Exchange and Rearrange” were instructed to approach the different dances with the same intent and qualities, the differences they experienced were related to focus, lighting, and costumes. Dancer Megan Sypher explained, “...Kala explained the intent of her thesis, relating to external elements. This explanation encouraged me to relish the similarities between the two versions, instead of emphasizing their differences. I believed the modification of external elements was a choice directed to affect the audience's perception of qualitatively similar movement, so I strove to try to keep the only consistent factor, the choreography, similar between the two pieces.”¹⁶

The dancers commonly reflected efforts to try and maintain the same movement qualities; therefore, what changed was not necessarily how they moved, but instead how certain external changes felt.

All of the quartet dancers described a heightened sense of awareness that was needed in “Exchange & Rearrange” that was not as prevalent in “Tend & Befriend.” Dancer Chelsea Spencer explained the music in regards to the beginning section of the piece (described as “the wall”), “The music was probably the biggest thing. Because of our issues with the timing of the first piece, I had to think about my pacing of the wall.”¹⁷ The music for “Tend & Befriend” had far more musical cuts and cues, therefore, it was more imperative that the dancers hit certain marks. The challenge was that there were musical cues for the beginning of new sections, but not any in the middle, so it was often a matter of luck if the dancers made their cues. This naturally caused the dancers to have an increased level of focus on the external elements, and not just each other. Ellen Lyle described that the pauses and stillness of the two pieces felt slightly different

¹⁶ Megan Sypher, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 4, 2012.

¹⁷ Chelsea Spencer, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1, 2012.

for her – whether the initiation back into movement was signaled by her choice to move, or cued by the music.¹⁸

The lighting subtleties of the two dances similarly changed the experience of the movers, as well. Like with the music, slight changes in lighting caused some of the dancers to have to think in the moment and adapt to differences. Dancer Hannah Frankel described,

There were different moments that I was nervous about in each piece (in one version there was a music cue that I was always worried we would miss- in the other version I had to cross behind a wing differently because the lighting had changed) so the external element changes did slightly alter my thoughts during the piece. In particular it was very different to dance in a spotlight in one version and not in the other.¹⁹

The lighting in “Tend & Befriend” seemed to require a greater sense of external focus as some of the lights were disorienting, making it difficult to see the edges of the stage. Because of lighting in this piece, the dancers had to be hyper aware of their environment. Ellen Lyle explained, “My awareness of my body was heightened though in ‘Exchange & Rearrange,’ since the spotlight was less cut-and-dry, and we could be seen more on the edges.”²⁰ One dancer, Megan Sypher explained that the lighting for the two did not feel different from her perspective but instead, the lighting variances simply emphasized certain parts of the dance more than others, therefore having a greater effect on the viewer than the doers.²¹

The dancers unanimously commented on the variances of costumes for the two pieces. The dresses worn in “Exchange & Rearrange” felt more formal and presentational to the dancers than the rehearsal clothes worn in “Tend & Befriend.” Despite the distinct tones of the two costumes as well as the external differences being evident to the dancers, they all tried to approach both

¹⁸ Ellen Lyle, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 3, 2012.

¹⁹ Hannah Frankel, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 4, 2012.

²⁰ Ellen Lyle, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 3, 2012.

²¹ Megan Sypher, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 4, 2012.

versions with the same intent and qualities.

Large Group Ensembles

The dancers in “Fractal” and “Unquotable” had more variation among each other in regards to their experiences performing the two dances. Musically, some of the dancers expressed natural qualitative changes that occurred because of shifts in the energy level of the sound. Several dancers noted the inevitability of the more upbeat and cartoon like music in “Unquotable” to dramatize and increase energy in that piece. Dancer Sarah Freeman explained, “In the original my movement felt naturally fluid and at times languorous but in the cartoon version I felt much more piecey and spiky in terms of energy.”²² Similarly, Arielle Hoffman noticed qualitative shifts between the two works as she mentioned, “...in the first version because there were only two main songs used I felt more obliged to connect my moves and make my quality of movement more sequential as opposed to the numerous musical changes in the second version that made me feel more animated and choppy to think of the version in sectional pieces.”²³

The greater amount of music involved also seemed to affect the dancers from an organizational perspective as well. “Unquotable” had several more musical cuts that required the dancers to be attentive to the music. The dancers did not need the same level of outward concentration in “Fractal” because their timing was taken off of each other. Sarah Beach described,

However, the first piece was easier in some aspects because cues were taken off of other dancers, and were not musically based like in the second piece. When it came time to learn the second piece it was a challenge to make the cues fit with the music when we were so used to doing things one way with a specific timing.²⁴

²² Sarah Freeman, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, March 30, 2012.

²³ Arielle Hoffman, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1, 2012.

²⁴ Sarah Beach, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1, 2012.

The music change alone therefore not only affected the quality of the movement for some of the dancers, making the second version more energetic at times, but it also forced many of the dancers to switch their focus for timing. Unlike “Fractal,” every music change in “Unquotable” aligned with a specific movement idea. The dancers had to constantly alternate their timing cues.

Several of the dancers also commented on a sense of character change between the two works. Emily Hammond reflected on how her experience with the more playful music in “Unquotable” shifted her internal dialogue. She noted,

I had a hard time holding character the first few rehearsals with the new music because a lot of the cues were comical and it felt like it gave the piece a new lightheartedness... In the first piece I viewed this trio as just movement, but in the second piece I felt like I was portraying a comical character.²⁵

Christina Ludgood also explained, “I had a story going in my mind for each [dance] but the story with the second ‘cartoon’ version was far clearer so I felt that my movement was clearer.”²⁶

There seemed to be an exaggerated quality to the music in “Unquotable” that affected many dancers’ internal dialogues.

Two of the ten dancers reported that they did not feel any differences between the two works. Kirsten Cooper commented, “It felt less like a different dance and more like we were doing the same dance, but the environment had changed. I was aware of the new environment but it didn't affect my mindset or my emotional state.”²⁷ Lauren Kaplan similarly noted, “I was aware of the different intentions between them [the dances], but I didn't feel that this caused my

²⁵ Emily Hammond e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 4, 2012.

²⁶ Christina Ludgood, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1, 2012.

²⁷ Kirsten Cooper, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 4, 2012.

movement to change.”²⁸ There seemed to be an overall awareness and attempt by the dancers to try and maintain a similar movement style throughout both pieces; however, there were differences in the degrees to which the dancers were either intentionally or unintentionally affected by the external elements.

²⁸ Lauren Kaplan, e-mail message to author Kala Seidenberg, Atlanta, Georgia, April 3, 2012.

Chapter 3: The Viewer

In addition to the maker and doer, I was also interested in the perspective of the viewer. The audience members were asked to complete a survey following the performance.²⁹ The survey asked questions regarding the similarities and or differences between the two solos, the two quartets, and the two large group ensembles. While the audience varied in what differences mattered to them and which versions they were more drawn to, the majority of the surveys provided some form of description showing an understanding that the movement was the common factor between the paired dances. 83 surveys were completed in total and such questionnaires were further analyzed by piece.

²⁹ All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Solo

One of the most obvious changes noticed by the audience members were the contrasting pieces of music used in the two solo dances. Many viewers commented on the different musical choices and their effects on the general tone of the pieces. Overall, several audience members noted the opera's ability to transform the solo into one of elegance and presentation, while the first accompanying music attributed to a more serious, intense, and inward focused piece. One audience member explained, "I felt a very big contrast from the first piece and the last. The latter seemed much more regal with the classical music and more intense in the first." Another viewer similarly noted, "The erratic, fragmented music during the first performance created a more mechanic, anxious feeling in the dance, but the same movements paired with the opera number became more symphonic and classical." One audience member commented not only on the impact of the music on the environment of the solo material, but also on the phrasing and quality of the movement as (s)he described, "I felt that the difference...was the longevity of the movements. In "These Things Can Explode," the movement was more staccato due to the rhythm and tempo of the music, vice versa for the other piece." Many viewers attributed the musical change as contributing a new mood to the work. Audience members often described "these things can explode" as being "intense," "pensive," "anxious," "mechanic," and "strict." "Relative Magnitude," on the other hand, was expressed as being "energetic," "graceful," "regal," "happy," "symphonic," "classical," "free," "delicate," and "classy."

Several audience members also experienced the effects of lighting differences on the material. One viewer explained, "The difference that had the most effect was by far the lighting. It took the original subdued and more abstract 'these things can explode' and transformed it to a theatrical piece more fitting of a ballet. The music had a very similar effect." Another audience

member commented on the coloring of the lights and its impact on the mood of the piece as (s)he mentioned, “The first one seemed to have a sadder feel. I think it was the use of the blue.”

The audience as a whole reflected on the lighting, costuming, and music elements changing the overall feeling of the choreography. Many viewers mentioned the costume affecting the work, but none explained why. Several people described the feeling of the solo changing as a result of the overall image and experience being affected. One person noted, “...the second piece lent a sense of formality and high sensibility with the lighting pattern on the floor, the costumes, and the music.” Similarly, another mentioned, “The lighting, music, and costume design of ‘these things can explode’ gave me a feeling Kala was timid, as if waiting for something to explode. ‘Relative Magnitude’ was regal and commanding.”

Quartets

The audience varied in their reflections of the quartets as well. One individual mentioned that (s)he thought the differences between these two versions were the most drastic while another stated the opposite. People differed on which components worked, some preferring one music or costume choice with the movement to another. By in large, however, the majority of the survey takers expressed a feeling that the two pieces were quite distinct from each other. Interestingly, people commented most on the external elements of the piece affecting the type of relationship between the dancers, the relatable quality of the second music, and the ability of the outer elements to create a time and setting for the piece.

28 Survey takers explicitly stated that overall tone and relationship of the dancers changed between the two dances. Many viewers seemed to experience a sense of conflict in the “Exchange & Rearrange” and then a greater feeling of mutual support in “Tend & Befriend.” One audience member noted, “Exchange & Rearrange was quick and the dress was more formal. The dancers seemed more conflicted, moving against each other in their pairs. Tend & Befriend – lighting was very warm and the music was more playful. The dancers seemed to be more friends than foe.” Another person similarly commented, “‘Exchange & Rearrange’ felt like the pairs were struggling against each other. ‘Tend & Befriend’ felt more like they were helping each other.” Several viewers noted a feeling of helping in one dance and hindering in the other. “Exchange & Rearranged” was described more so as being “hostile,” “sad,” “serious,” “solemn,” and “somber” while “Tend & Befriend” was characterized as “playful” and “relaxed,” and more about “compassion,” “helpfulness,” and “empathy.”

The lighting, music, and costuming played a large role in affecting such perceptions as described by the viewers. The different costumes were seen as having an impact on the two

pieces. One viewer explained, “Both felt a sense of understanding between the girls, but the second felt like empathy. I think the costuming helped with this – created a sense of comfort.” Another audience member described, “The costumes for ‘Tend & Befriend’ worked much better at making the piece feel approachable – it made sense because they were in normal clothes.” The costumes seemed to take the piece from a more distant and formal relationship to a closer and more comfortable bond.

The subtleties in lighting also had a role in highlighting differences between the two works. One person described, “The lyrics and use of the spotlight use in ‘Tend & Befriend’ contributed immensely to my understanding of the work. ‘Exchange and Rearrange’ although again the same choreography, felt less intentional and more abstract.” Another individual noted, “The lighting design also drastically influenced each piece and the concert as a whole. I noticed the distinctiveness of the spotlight and the strong pink in the 2nd quartet piece. Also, the direction of the side light for the final image seemed to change from the 1st to the 2nd quartet piece.”

Like the costuming and lighting, the music similarly contributed to the different tones of the work for many viewers. Some noted the presence of the lyrics as affecting their experience – causing some to form an internal story or narration. Interestingly, for a few individuals, it was more so the familiarity and relatable traits of the Nina Simone and Billie Holiday music in “Tend & Befriend” that struck them and made them feel something different from the first quartet. One audience member explained, “The first had a somber and intense feel and I felt like it was too abstract for my mind to understand. But with the light oldies music, I felt like I could relate more.” Similarly, another audience member described, “Darker and more solemn for the first, the second had more relatable music so seemed more happy.” Both of these responses comment on another element that can affect one’s interpretation and value of something – familiarity and

personal history.

Finally, a third topic that I found interesting amongst the surveys was the acknowledgement of the external elements creating a context of either a time or place for the dances. One individual commented that, “I enjoyed the opening of these two pieces, especially the dresses the first time. It made the piece seem like it was from the romantic era.” Another individual explained, “First – strength in numbers (what holds us together). Second – the music took me to the era.” Some audience members experienced the ability of music, lighting, and costumes to create a distinct time and place.

Large Group Ensembles

“Fractal” and “Unquotable” instilled different experiences for the majority of the viewers. The hint of red in the costumes, the silent film music, and the lighting effects in “Unquotable” seemed to bring about a different feel from “Fractal” for most viewers. The audience commented most frequently on there being a change in overall mood between the two, as well as a shift from the abstract to the theatrical.

Many audience members commented on “Unquotable” being livelier with the hint of red in the costumes and the more energetic music. One person described, “(The) first one was ‘colder’ whereas the second one was really more passionate, almost aggressively so. It also was more lively.” Similarly, one viewer discussed how, “Fractal felt complete. The added red in ‘Unquotable’ bounced your eye among different people, which I found distracting. The use of light and shadows in ‘Fractal’ set a mood of awareness and distrust.” The overall environment seemed different for some viewers. One person noted the different means in which music worked to set the tone as (s)he explained, “I felt that the music revealed the sharpest contrast in the 2 large ensemble pieces. ‘Unquotable’ seemed to really play with the music, matching the movement to specific moments in the music while the music in ‘Fractal’ did more to lay mood and create atmosphere.” The musical elements had a different role in each piece – in one serving as an initiator of the movement, and in the other, an environment for the audience to perceive the movement.

Several individuals commented on the transition of “Fractal” to “Unquotable” as being a shift from the abstract to theatrical and more imagistic/cinematic. An audience member explained, “Music and costuming played the greatest effect. We once again went from abstract and subdued to theatrical, big (carnival-like in this piece).” Many audience members described

“Unquotable” as being like a carnival or feeling like a film. There was an overall sense of presentation and story. Some individuals similarly commented on the film music being more accessible and understandable. One person described, “I liked the 2nd one more because the music made me feel like I understood it more.” In regards to accessibility and familiarity, for this viewer, the environment affected not only his/her perception of the dance, but also his/her level of connection to the work.

Conclusion

This experience has enriched my understanding of the choreographic process and elements, as well as fueled the arrival of deeper and more developed questions. It was only through the active component of this project of constantly making work that I was able to understand choreographic concepts that I have been reading and hearing about over the past few years. Through this research, I was able to thoughtfully analyze the importance of external element choices within choreography, the significance of intention, the additional factors that affect people's perception of work, and maybe most importantly, begin to understand and shape my own voice as a choreographer.

I realize in retrospect that in an effort to investigate the effects of external elements on the overall meaning of a choreographic work, I failed to truly experiment with the possibilities of such elements. I got so enthralled with the choreographic component that I ironically neglected the big picture and importance of external elements within the process. I understand now that I did make basic intentional choices regarding an external mood I desired for each piece, but I did not take bold risks in how I affected such components. Many observers commented on the impact of the lighting on the three pieces, an external element created by the lighting designer that I did not truly consider and play a part of. Like-wise, while I met with the costume designer and gave her vague descriptions of what I wanted, I was not an active part of the process with her. I had the most dynamic role with the music manipulation, but I still could have tried more options.

It is only now after having completed the performance component that I realize how many more risks I could have at least attempted. I could have drastically changed the space – perhaps by putting one of the dances on a small platform or had the performance space be limited to the

carpet area in front of the stage. I could have similarly made specific choices regarding the costumes that had more meaning. I never before thought about how purposeful costumes could be until now. I picked clothing based upon initial intuitive ideas, without thinking about the overall intent of each piece. The way a costume fits (snug vs. loose) could be a meaningful choice. I am only now aware of how many more decisions I could have potentially made.

This brings out one of the most crucial lessons I learned from this process – the importance of intention. Intention is meaningful for us as humans and affects our perception of the world. I realized through the process of making dances this year that meaning for me arrived when I made specific choices. The little moments of purposeful focus points, pauses, and contact were the places in all of the pieces that had the most choreographic weight for me. The significance of detail in the choreographic process became central to my work. External elements or lack thereof can potentially assist in creating intention and forming purposeful choices. Take for example the quartet pieces “Tend & Befriend” and “Exchange & Rearrange.” Had I made specific choices to have two people lit and two people in the dark, I predict that would have changed the meaning of the work. Choosing to have the dancers’ hair down would have made a specific statement. I think this focus on external elements made me realize how infinite the choices and possibilities are within choreography. I failed to contemplate the big picture, and only now in retrospect, do I realize how many more intentional decisions I could have considered.

My understanding of the perception of choreography was similarly informed through this process. The feedback forms from the audience were invaluable to my research. People’s comments brought about questions and ideas that I never before considered. One topic that surfaced for the viewers was familiarity. Some audience members noted that they connected to certain pieces because they were familiar with the music or they felt that they could understand

the piece more clearly than other dances. In all of my questioning regarding the arrival of meaning in choreographic work, I failed to think about the importance of accessibility, experience, and personal history. In particular, people noted that they felt more drawn to “Tend & Befriend” because the music was recognizable. It is important to realize that one’s personal history with a piece of music can have an impact on the viewer’s experience. This recognition was crucial to me.

This idea of accessibility and familiarity of choreography has led me to think about my own work. Do I make dances for others or for myself? I think perhaps, right now it is a little of both. Choreography in the present moment serves as a means for me to work through, tackle, communicate and externalize my thoughts and questions about dance and life. During this project I had to constantly remind myself that my job was not to make movement that people liked, but instead, to invest and develop an idea. Being able to put aside others’ concerns and expectations during the process was helpful; however, I now realize that there is a part of me that does care about the audience, and dare I say it, actually even wants them to be entertained to some degree.

As I move forward with deepening and honing my choreographic work, I am interested in thinking about the audience and its critical role in the broad scheme of choreography and performance. People talk about “high art” and “low art” and entertainment as being in the latter of the two. I am interested in further analyzing this categorization, and questioning such labels. Perhaps, I would assume, external elements play a large role in this branding of art.

Appendix A: Leitmotif Program

thank you

Anna Leo, thank you for your positivity, encouragement, and guidance throughout this entire project as my thesis advisor. Your enthusiasm and excitement fueled my engagement and investment towards this research. **Greg Catellier**, thank you for creating both the technical and stage environments that this concert called for, as well as for being a choreographic mentor. Your constant encouragement helped me begin to trust my instincts. **George Staib**, **Kathleen Wessel** and **Blake Beckham**, thank you so much for taking time to provide thoughtful and enriching feedback for me. All of your advice helped me think about this process in new ways and dig deeper. You helped me to question and define the choices I make as a movement arranger. **Lori Teague**, thank you so much for contributing both your photographic expertise and your keen choreographic eye. You helped me understand the fullness and multi-layered aspects of choreography. **Kendall Simpson**, thank you for being my musical guru. The multiple hours we spent shaping and manipulating the music were instrumental to this process, and your patience and willingness to help was tremendous. **Anne Walker**, thank you for helping me with the administrative components of this concert. Without your knowledge, patience, and assistance, this performance would not have been possible. **Cyndi Church**, thank you for helping craft an on-stage image as well as a tone for my choreography. Your costume designs were an essential layer to the work. To **my dancers**, thank you for being a part of this process with me. Your creativity and personal choices helped craft and redesign the movement vocabulary to become what it is now. Thank you all for being versatile and adaptable dancers, and more importantly dependable and caring people. **Dr. Carol Anderson**, thank you for enthusiastically committing to being a part of this experience with me. **Family and friends**, thank you for your constant support and generosity. To **you**, the audience, thank you for having an interest in my process and discoveries. Thank you for being here!



Design

Costume Design: Cynthia Church
Lighting Design: Gregory Catellier
Sound Design: Kendall Simpson

Production Staff

Technical Director: Gregory Catellier
Stage Manager: Jennifer Kimball
Assistant Stage Managers: Holly Bennett, Virginia Broyles
Light and Sound Technician: Ari Shaw-Faber
Electricians: Richard Burnett, Robert Jenkins, Sharon Sibley
Costume Coordinator: Cynthia Church
Music Coordinator: Kendall Simpson
Dance Program Director: Lori Teague
Dance Program Office Manager: Anne Walker
Promotional Assistance: Jessica Cook and Nick Surbey
Program Design: Chelsea Spencer
House Management: Nina Vestal and Brandon Bedford
Videographer: Bob Berens

This project is generously sponsored in part by grants from the Emory College Center for Creativity & Arts and SIRE Undergraduate Research Program, as well as in-kind donations made by the Emory Dance Program.

These Things Can Explode

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg
Music: "Hellerau" by Swod
Performer: Kala Seidenberg

Exchange & Rearrange

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg with dancers
Music: "Satin Birds," "Duchess of Windsor," "Amalia" by Abel Korzeniowski
Performers: Hannah Frankel, Ellen Lyle, Chelsea Spencer, Megan Sypher

Fractal

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg with dancers
Music: "Nouvelle Chance (Club Mix)" by Eule:nhaupt & Molle:nhauer, "I'm Trying" by Milosh
Performers: Sarah Beach, Alice Chen, Kirsten Cooper, Natalie Eggert, Sarah Freeman, Emily Hammond, Arielle Hoffman, Lauren Kaplan, Christina Ludgood, Aneyn Mara O'Grady

Tend & Befriend

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg with dancers
Music: "Trouble In Mind (Live)" by Nina Simone, "Foolin' Myself" by Billie Holiday & Lester Young
Performers: Hannah Frankel, Ellen Lyle, Chelsea Spencer, Megan Sypher

Unquotable

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg with dancers
Music: "A King in New York: Mandolin Serenade," "The Real Chaplin: A Symphonic Adventure, Pt. 2 (The Chaplin Revue, Modern Times, Including 'Smile!)," "Monsieur Verdoux: Bitter Tango," "The Pawnshop," "The Great Dictator" by Carl Davis and The City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra; "Silent Rumble" by Ludovic Bourque
Performers: Sarah Beach, Alice Chen, Kirsten Cooper, Natalie Eggert, Sarah Freeman, Emily Hammond, Arielle Hoffman, Lauren Kaplan, Christina Ludgood, Aneyn Mara O'Grady

Relative Magnitude

Choreography: Kala Seidenberg
Music: "Exsultate, Jubilate, K. 165 (158a) Motet for Soprano: I. Allegro" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and performed by Judith Blegen, Pinchas Zukerman and Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra
Performer: Kala Seidenberg

Appendix B: Promotional Flyer

LEITMOTIF
a dance honors thesis by Kala Seidenberg

March 28 – 29, 2012
8pm
Dance Studio
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts
FREE
dance@emory.edu | (404) 727-7266 | dance.emory.edu

This project is generously sponsored in part by grants from the Emory College Center for Creativity & Arts, the SIRE Undergraduate Research Program, and in-kind donations made by the Emory Dance Program.

Appendix C: Sample Audience Questionnaire

LEITMOTIF

March 28-29, 2012

Questionnaire: Use the back of this page if necessary.

There were 2 solos, 2 quartets, and 2 large group works performed in this evening's concert. Please comment on the similarities and/or differences you noticed or experienced in the dances listed below. Feel free to reflect upon the interplay of design elements like music, movement, and lighting, on the overall tone of the works.

Solos ("These Things Can Explode" & "Relative Magnitude"):

Quartets ("Exchange and Rearrange" & "Tend & Befriend"):

Large Ensemble ("Fractal" & "Unquotable"):

General comments, questions, or thoughts regarding tonight's performance:

Appendix D: SIRE Budget

The Effects of External Elements on Choreographic Works

Budget

Backstage Assistants

\$600 for two backstage crew members during rehearsal/tech week and two performances

Programs

\$50 for performance program materials.

The Emory Dance Program will fund printing costs.

Costumes

\$420 for costumes for 12 dancers at \$35 each

The Emory Dance Program will provide some costume components.

Theater space, light gels, stage tape

The Emory Dance Company Program will provide all of these production elements in-kind.

Stage Manager, Light, and Sound Board Operators

The Emory Dance Program has helped secure volunteers to provide these services free of charge.

TOTAL: \$1070

Appendix E: Center for Creativity & Arts (CCA) Grant Application - Narrative

My honors thesis project explores how the outer, contextual elements of a choreographic work (space, lighting, costumes, set design, music, dancers, etc.) affect the meaning of a piece. While attending the American Dance Festival last summer, Monica Bill Barnes, a well-known New York –based choreographer, stated in a composition class, “I think movement invention is a way to avoid making choreography.” This statement forced me to question the weight that movement vocabulary can possess as a separate element. As a choreographer, it is easy to become consumed with the process of creating material or movement phrases – the bare steps. Barnes’ bold statement, however, forced me to question how much of a role the actual movement of a piece can play, and to contemplate the impact of the other existing contextual elements on the tone and meaning of a work.

This exploration of where and how the meaning of dances originates also builds upon the “movement for movement’s sake” question that is often debated in the modern dance arena. This concept takes the position that movement can be interpreted at face value – not all movement has meaning. I question this idea simply on the grounds of the medium used in dance – people. Even if there is no intent behind the movement vocabulary, is there not something intrinsically meaningful and human by the mere fact that people are performing? The goal of my project is to determine what kind of work will result if I focus less of my choreographic intent on movement invention, and concentrate more on the implementation and placement of the movement with regards to these outer elements.

To investigate the effect of contextual components on a piece of choreography, I am creating three distinct dances from the same movement vocabulary. Through the formation of a solo and 2 group dances using identical movement, I will be challenged to solely alter the outer contextual elements. This project forces me to make specific, intended choices for non-movement factors. My goal is to create three pieces that can both share movement vocabulary and simultaneously explore completely different themes.

I have met with my advisor to create a timeline of how this process will unfold. By the end of the fall semester, I will have choreographed, documented, and journaled a quartet and a solo piece. In addition, I will have researched the processes of choreographers like Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp, Monica Bill Barnes, Bill T. Jones, etc., as well as their choreographic points of view/practices regarding movement invention and movement intent. Second semester will include the creation of a final group piece, the continued written portion of my thesis, continued analysis of works by well-known and less known choreographers/dance journals, and a final performance in March. Including the performance component enables me to explore the choreographic effects of my project, in conjunction with the business side of production such as meeting with lighting designers, creating programs, submitting a press-release, etc., that are similarly meaningful and a large part of the choreographer’s experience. The final performances will take place in the Schwartz Dance space on March 28 – March 29, with tech and dress rehearsals the week prior.

This question of meaning within choreography that I am trying to explore is essential to my understanding and personal growth as a choreographer. I am questioning intent, motivation, meaning, and process – components that all artists confront in their efforts to

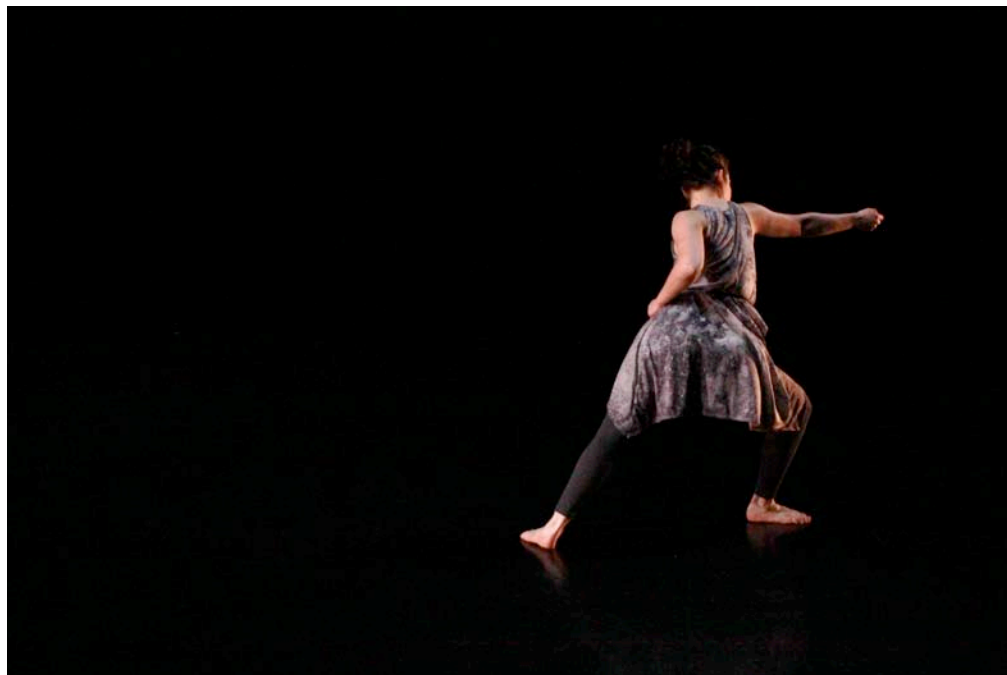
make and define work. My investigation will help me to establish my own voice and means of conveying my ideas through movement. Through this project I am hoping to grasp the fullness and depth that movement can potentially have, and further use this understanding to create work that has more substance than my past creations.

Appendix F: Performance Photographs

All photographs by Lori Teague

“these things can explode”

Choreography by Kala Seidenberg



“Relative Magnitude”

Choreography by Kala Seidenberg



“Exchange & Rearrange”
Choreography by Kala Seidenberg

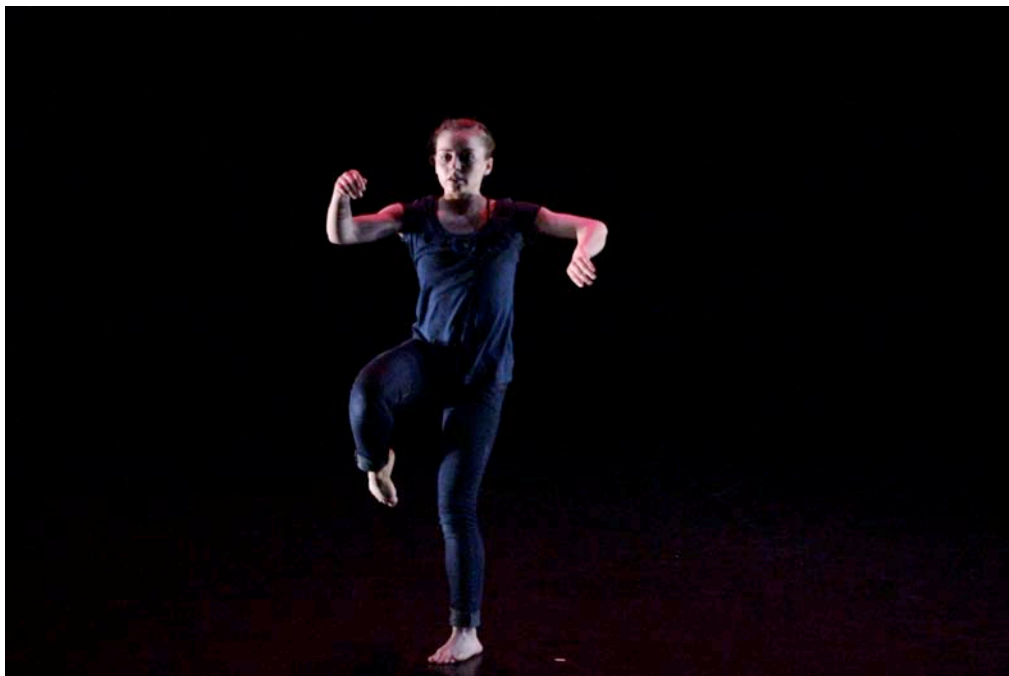


“Tend & Befriend”
Choreography by Kala Seidenberg



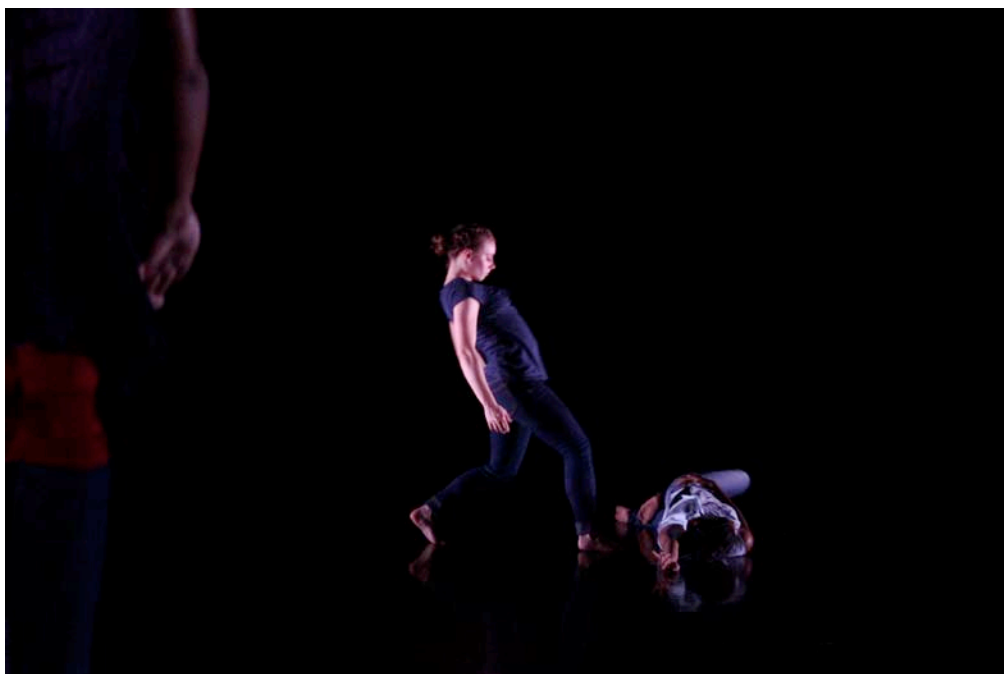
“Fractal”

Choreography by Kala Seidenberg



“Unquotable”

Choreography by Kala Seidenberg



Appendix G: Adjudicators' Comments From 2012 American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA)

*Paraphrased Comments

James Martin

- Appreciated exploration in movement invention
- Detailed
- Enjoyed dynamic variation
- Had feeling of space carved around kinesphere
- Lighting was distracting from solo, could have changed
- After a point, movement maintained density, could have developed more choreographically/spatially

Gesel Mason

- Well-performed, embodied, precision
- More room for dynamic possibility
- Nice in and out of the floor
- Appreciated intention and detail of focus
- Wasn't sure how the world had changed with the music shift – wasn't enough of a change
- Dark dress and background – night look?

JoAnna Mendi Shaw

- Strong performance, use of space, spatial intent so clear, beautifully executed
- Solo is to tell us what to pay attention to
- Felt we were looking at a dancer
- Music change was jarring
- Intent needed to be clearer for switch of music

- Is the piece about relentlessness?
- Morphing but not going anywhere – let use of space be a progression
- Alluding to walking getting longer and longer
- Pay attention to the character of the walk

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