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Honors Thesis

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## A REFLECTION AND RECORD OF MAKING DANCE

In crafting a new choreography as a thesis, I found it necessary to review and analyze all of the other works I have developed over the past few years in order to find patterns, habits, or common themes threading throughout them. Since arriving at the University of the Arts, I have worked on five pieces, several cabarets, and two musicals, along with two small dances for a studio back home. Fascinated with change and experimentation, I tinkered with different processes in each of these projects, in hopes to provide distinct textures and structures unique to each piece. Here, I will break down my thoughts and experiences with each circumstance in an attempt to understand what “worked” and what did not, and where my interests tended to stick. Once I have described each work, I will discuss their commonalities and differences.

### *Carmen*



My first piece performed at the University of the Arts was created in the Spring 2013 semester through Student Composition. (This course was later renamed as Student Choreography Workshop. For the sake of consistency, I will use the name, Student Choreography Workshop for the remainder of this essay.) In making my first work here at school and in working with a larger group of dancers for my first time, I wanted to craft something that entertained and captured the audience—something with a little bit of flair. In searching for music, I found that the song, “Carmen Fantasie,” by David Garrett, provided this essence quite well. Thus, having chose this song, I gathered a cast of nine dancers—Alexis Acevedo, Jess Adams, Kessie Brawner, Jaylen Clay, Julie Degnan, Matthew Emig, Jera Miller, Abigail Stachnik, and Bridget Whitman—and began to craft the piece.

Before having entered the studio with any of the dancers, I planned and structured the entire piece, organizing its formations based on musical changes. One of the requirements I made for myself was that I wished to provide each of the dancers with a solo or moment to showcase their strengths. This, in turn, fell in line with my overall intention of the piece as a display or celebration of confidence and assuredness with oneself. Thus, in listening to the song on repeat for hours, I organized where in the music each of these solos would take place and who would perform each of these solo moments. Once this was decided, I started to craft a system of shapes, patterns, and transitions within in the formations of the dancers. I was interested in a constant shifting of space and thus had a myriad of formations—lines, circles, clumps, and scatters. One particular moment had two dancers partnering in the center of a rotating circle and was one of the first sections I “heard” in the music. Then it only became a matter of filling in the blanks—choreographing movement to fit within these structural pathways and finding the transitions from

place to place. This movement ended up borrowing from several techniques and vocabularies within ballet and modern.

One particular challenge I found in making *Carmen*, was that scheduling was often difficult. In fact, I did not have a run of the piece with all of the dancers until the day of the show. Thus, I had to plan accordingly what each dancer did throughout the piece and teach it to each one separately. This required me to have a very clear knowledge of the whole anatomy of the piece in a way that subsequent pieces did not require. In fact, there was only a total of eight counts that the dancers generated from task work. This occurred at the end where each dancer developed a short phrase based off of four different arm movements found throughout the piece.

### *As Memory Fades*



*As Memory Fades* was created during the fall of 2013 in Student Choreography Workshop and had a cast of nine dancers—Jess Adams, Emily Rose Cannon, Brittany Davis, Julie Degnan, Matt Emig, Julia Fisher, Stanley Glover, Casey Olejar, and Roderick Pitts-Phifer.

The idea for this piece originated with a desire to somehow incorporate the white wall in the YGym, in front of which the performances often took place. (This wall has since been removed during the renovations of the space.) I was interested in designing the space in a way that incorporated elements of the place into the piece in a way that changes the perceptions of the place. Though I originally pictured doing something closer to the lines of parkour against this wall, this concept changed once I fell upon the music of Philip Glass, particularly “Tearing Herself Away” from *The Hours*. I then began to picture the wall not so much as a thing to ricochet off of but rather as something to climb over—a symbolic fence of sorts. Thus, this led me to imagine this barrier in relationship to memory.

Specifically, I became interested in imagining what it might look like when a memory is lost. Thus I developed a narrative in the form of a three-act structure, which I had commonly seen in films such as *AI: Artificial Intelligence* or *Minority Report*. The first act introduces the dancers as embodiments of memory, all in their proper place, all organized. The second act then starts to disrupt this organization; the dancers begin to move away from their places and cross paths with one another though still in the same horizontal plane. The third act then introduces the fascination with what is on the other side of the wall. Each of the dancers/memories becomes enchanted with what is on the other side and one-by-one ventures over it. Meanwhile, only one dancer tries to convince the others to stay and eventually is the only memory left remaining. She then repeats the opening rotation, drawing attention to all that was lost.

Having initially determined this structure, I then sought to fill this framework with movement. However, unlike *Carmen*, I decided to try a different approach in generating movement, opting to develop a task-based means of creating rather than setting all of the movement myself. Thus, the dancers were given several tasks based on the theme of memory,

some of which directly asked the dancers to pull gestures from different memories of their own based on emotion. For instance, one might have created five ideas based off of a time when one felt lonely. In another instance, I showed the dancers a phrase inspired by one of my childhood memories and had them view it in a variety of different ways through obstructed viewpoints. For instance, one dancer had to keep turning their head side to side while another watched the phrase upside down. Another then would alternate their eyes open and closed for two seconds at a time. The other catch was that they would only get to watch the phrase once and then develop their own rendition based off of all they could remember. This, in turn, created material that was similar yet different among all of the dancers. The piece was then formulated in the form of an improvisational score. In rehearsals, I would give commands to which the dancers would respond and eventually this structure was set based on what worked. Though some musical cues were set, the majority of the piece remained open for the dancers to make choices based off of the memory-inspired tasks.

### *Hairspray* and Other Musical Theater Works



Throughout my time at the University of the Arts, I have choreographed several cabarets and musicals along with a *Hairspray*-themed piece for Student Choreography Workshop. In each of these instances, I have tried to find different concepts on which to work with the given genre of musical theatre. Within this genre, there is a certain necessary adherence to era, narrative, and style. However, I tried to find ways to navigate this field with a sense of risk-taking and exploration, such as how could I transfer different ideas I have learned in modern dance to musical theatre?

With *Hairspray*, I felt a certain amount of risk in choosing to create a piece filled with voice and movement for the Student Choreography Workshop showing. Prior to this piece, I had not seen any student composition that incorporated live singing or other majors into its performance. With this dance, I chose to work with nine other performers—Dexter Carter, Wendell Gray II, Chris Kubat, Jenna Lorson, Alex Manalo, Elexis Morton, Audrey Simmons, Solice Surles, and Adam Wedesky (I also performed in the piece as it was missing another male)—four of which were majoring in musical theatre as opposed to dance. This collaboration was both exciting and rewarding as it blended both performers strong in singing and performers strong in dancing. I also felt aware as to how delicate the piece could fall apart. Nothing but sheer commitment and excitement would be able to pull it off without it being embarrassingly flat. Therefore, I focused on ways in which to add surprises to the choreography. In addition to constantly maneuvering the dancers through different formations in space, I also paid attention to the repetitive nature of the movement.

Often in musical theatre choreography, in its most basic form, repetition of a movement is a tool that is used to provide clarity and simplicity (consider the step-touch and how often one

sees variations of it.) Therefore, I gave myself a rule to follow in crafting the movement: if I repeated something upwards of four times, then the fourth time would need to be different somehow. This idea actually stemmed from a music composition teacher I had in high school. Though he said this suggestion in reference to composing music, I found it useful in constructing dance as well. In this way, I was able to break expectations within the musical phrases of the piece. For example, instead of step-touching four times, the last one became two hops. The same thought process also translated into the arms at different points.

With *Hairspray* and with most of musical theater musicals and numbers I have choreographed, I set most of the movement without much or any collaboration. This, however, changed when I choreographed *Godspell*. Within the story of *Godspell*, the characters craft and tell stories with whatever resources they can find; there is a feeling of collaboration, individuality, and then combined effort. Thus, I employed tasks and used the performers' involvement to help craft the material in hopes that their influence would show in the dancing—a certain essence of the performers come out when they makes the movement themselves. Thus, like *As Memory Fades*, I hoped that the process would mirror the meaning.

Above all though, I wished to maintain this sense of fear or risk with works I choreographed in the musical theatre genre. How can I continue push my creativity, even if my choices are possibly unconventional. One time, in particular, struck me as a clear example of this experimentation. Working with Blurring Edges, a cabaret group on campus, I was given the task of creating movement to “It’s a Hard Knock Life” from *Annie*. In the context of the cabaret, however, the song took on a more mature connotation. Therefore, I wanted to enhance this juxtaposition further by giving the performers movement far less childlike than is typically seen with that particular song. Inspired by the second section of Anne Theresa de Keersmaecker’s

*Rosas Danst Rosas*, I placed the dancers in chairs and gave them rhythmic and heavy gestures to complete. This movement, accompanied by the tinny children's song, provided the scene with tension and more symbolic meaning than if the performers had buckets and rags. This juxtaposition was something I had to push slightly to defend.

### *Look/Inside*



*Look/Inside*, created in the fall semester of 2014 for Student Choreography Workshop, was a scrapbook of many ideas. It started first with the music. Entranced by the rhythmic complexity of Michael Giacchino's score for *The Incredibles*, I chose to work with the final song in the movie's soundtrack, "The Incredits." Constantly changing time signatures from being in five to six to five to four, the music was explosive with a big band feel and layers of sound. By itself, the music is sufficient and can stand alone. Therefore, I provided myself with the challenge of somehow making the choreography rise to the level of the music: how can I make the dancing as interesting and engaging as the music already is? How can the dance compliment



the music as much as the music compliments the dance?

In order to move forward in crafting the movement, I felt a need to have some sort of topic in which to draw material. Partly influenced by the “spy” sound of the song, I decided to study the nature of trust as a means to generate the movement. Thus, I interviewed each of the dancers to discuss their definitions of and experiences with trust: how they trust, who they trust, what happens when trust is broken, and what would trust look like if it were tangible? Through these questions and others, I organized several phrases to teach the dancers: Jess Adams, Cameron Birts, Emily Rose Cannon, Julie Degnan, Deanna Drago, Matt Emig, and Abigail Stachnik. From here, the dancers then worked on tasks to create duets and other material from this movement all around the concept of trust. In a way, this piece combined all of the previous processes I had tried into one experience. Rather than planning everything beforehand, I also allowed myself to make choreographic decisions in the moment, something I had been afraid to try.

What this all created in the end was a piece that feels sporadic and excitable, theatrical and absurd. So many ideas seemed shoved into it, but in a way that feels quick and witty in its brisk quality. The dance does not try to be too serious, which gives the piece a lightness that is necessary to counteract its density. Though it perhaps loses its momentum towards the end, this piece maintains a level of inventiveness of which I am interested in rediscovering with the current piece on which I am working.

*Curious, I've never seen all of you before*



*Curious, I've never seen all of you before*, created as part of my senior dance requirements in the fall of 2015, explored a process similar to *Look/Inside*, but ripe with its own challenges. Of all the pieces I have done up to this point, this was the first piece in which I worked without set music for the majority of the process. Thus I taught phrases to music with the same feeling that I was looking for the dancers to embody—which ended up including songs by Sia. The piece, which clothes each dancer in a long fur coat, is designed to research confidence as a consequence of shielding or overcompensation. It asks what parts of our personality do we enhance to hide other parts or what are the shields that provide us the comforts to exist. The coats are then a symbolic metaphor for these shields, luxuries, and privileges. It then becomes a question of what happens when these comforts are removed, revealing one's bare self. How can one exist with the same confidence and fullness without the shields?

Researching this concept with me were seven dancers—Aleixa Freire, Matt Emig, Chanel Howard, Catie Leasca, Gabby Marques, Haleigh Nelson, and Antonio Wright—most with which

I had not worked before. With a combination between set and task-based movement, the piece operated on a narrative structure, starting first in near darkness as the dancers completed phrases based on their shields to loud horn blasts. The following section introduces music with a driving beat layered with the horns from the prologue. The movement stays mostly in forms of unison to lower the projection of identity and individuality. As this section climaxes into disarray, the coats are stripped off of the bodies to expose skin and flesh. The performers then navigate this new feeling in silence, slowly breaking away from unison to explore solo territory. As a final song weaves its way into the space, the performers find care and empathy for each other in their new acceptance of themselves. One, however, is left gathering the skinned coats in a pile, allowing herself to be swallowed among them.

With this process, I allowed myself to work in the studio based on instinct rather than planning everything out ahead of time. However, this takes far more time to do and thus, by the end I was rushed to finish. I also found the formations were not necessarily as adventurous or exciting as some of my past work, partly due to my determination to use a large amount of unison. How then can I choreograph exciting formations without extensive planning? Is it possible? This was also my first piece designed initially without music. Is that a factor in this affectation? Due to a lack of time, the ending also became an improvisational score, one which I could have spent the whole semester working to perfect. This is because it mattered less what the dancers did and more on how they did it. The gentle vulnerability is hard to perform to its fullest simplicity and thus could have been practiced far longer than I was able to.

## Habits and Commonalities

Why I took the time to go back and review all of these pieces is to attempt to construct a map of habits, threads, and themes that permeate throughout all of the work. This mapping can then help to discover the territories I have yet to explore. It is important, however, to remember that these noticed reoccurrences are not necessarily “bad,” but rather are the result of an objective observation. Thus, I should attempt not to have a negative reaction to their existence, but rather a curiosity to explore the spaces around them and to ask what elements of my past have placed them there as subjective choices.

Thus, what are some of these creative habits that I have collected over the years? One that sticks out to me in particular is that I have a much easier time crafting the space with music as a guide. With music, I am able to better hear the possible shapes and transitions that can accompany the score. Thus, for a majority of the work I have done, I have relied on music as a tool to structure the piece. *Carmen*, *Hairspray*, and *Look/Inside*, in particular, were all very musical—with both movement and formations coinciding rather specifically to the sound and rhythms. However, I always attempted to vary what rhythms I would emphasize or what instrument part I would follow for different sections. This added some layers to the visual score and at times created strong visual effects. What I find interesting, then, is that in working with Netta Yerushalmy, I have often heard her say that dance that is always on the music is “boring, comfortable to watch but boring”—and that she finds movement that goes against this at certain times to be intriguing. Thus I have considered this now when I choreograph, particularly after realizing how much I do rely on the music.

Finding other threads throughout the piece then becomes a little bit harder. Since each of

the processes have been different and specific to each individual work, the movement has also been fairly specific to each piece, especially that which was generated by the dancers. However, some movements have crept up in many of the pieces—chugs in particular seem to be a go-to for me. Also, I noticed that much of my choreography would stay on the middle plane of the body without much inversion or extension. In thinking back to each of these pieces, I do remember needing to remind myself to include elements in both the low and high spaces. I have also almost always used seven or more dancers and thus was able to energize the space with less attention to the movement and more to the repositioning of bodies.

Movement aside, a common thread weaves between the works in terms of theme. Almost all of the pieces (with perhaps the exclusion of *Hairspray*) deal with a human's inner workings. Confidence, trust, and memory are all subjects that I have used as a grounds for inspiration and generation. Why though? What is it that draws me towards discussing intangible concepts rather than reacting to specific events or people? I believe one reason is that these ideas are more approachable for me—I am able to investigate these inner structures more personally and more intimately. Especially given the limited time to create these short works (often, rehearsals would only last for two hours for once a week), I believe that these topics could be sufficiently touched upon and given justice. Otherwise, some more intense or involved subjects would require much more time to fully dive into.

I also believe that I tend to lean towards more reflective topics, because I am at quite a transitional period of my life. Here I am, approaching what might possibly be one of the greatest transitions of my life—graduating from college and venturing out into a world not necessarily defined by a school system. College has also been an opportunity for me grow as a person while I was coming into and realizing my own identity. Part of me, in creating work,

might feel a need to understand the inner workings of myself more clearly before I am able to approach discussions farther removed from me. In other words, I am only tackling what I know or have related to—things with which I am familiar. Thus, the more I experience in life, the more I will be able to apply those experiences into my work.

With that being said, I have also found that I have another particular habit when it comes to crafting a piece. With essentially all of the works I have choreographed (slightly excluding *Look/Inside*), the main structure of the piece was imagined long before any movement was generated—I had a clear idea of what each section should feel and look like and thus it just became a matter of creating movement that matched that essence that could fill the frame. For example, with both *As Memory Fades* and *Curious, I've never seen all of you before*, I knew I wanted three sections in the form of a narrative arc. Thus the movement and its textures filled in the space of this already established structure. Consequently, this structure did not have much ability to morph or change.

### *By the Time*

This then leads me to my current work. Here I will attempt to document the process with which I have experimented thus far and the pathway in which this work has evolved. Therefore, let us start at the beginning. What were my intentions with the work? What did I want to accomplish? Of all of my intentions, one of the greatest motivations to make this piece was to keep up the habit of making. Like with the art of writing, I find that choreographing is more efficient when one keeps up its practice. I choose to equate this to writing, because it often takes me longer to maneuver through language when I have been out of its practice. Similarly the

language of dance is harder to formulate when it is not constantly being molded. Just for the sake of another metaphor, it is similar to sculpting clay—the longer the clay is allowed to dry the harder it is to reshape.

Another goal was to explore the spaces unoccupied by my habits. The first commonality I wished to break was my use of large groups of over seven or more. I have found a comfort in arranging groups of people in space and thus would find it challenging to strip myself of this tool. Therefore, I chose to work with only three dancers—Emily Rose Cannon, Marisa Illingworth, and Libby Rush. Another reason I chose these three women is that their movement qualities compliment each other nicely. They are all inspiring performers and friends of mine, and I definitely wanted to work with them prior to graduation. Somehow then, in thinking about these three women, I became interested in the image or the idea of the Three Fates of Greek Mythology and how this myth would be relevant today.

Then I wondered what I even meant by that. For some reason, I was interested in the image of the Fates as these women trapped in a sort of limbo assigned to an endless job of determining the lengths of people's lives. In the myths, the Three Fates each have different tasks: one spins the thread, one measures its length, and one cuts the string. Initially, I imagined what this scene would look like if it were treated like a job—if the string was a receipt and the performers were clothed in business suits. I also imagined there being a television set that would play films depicting the ends of people's lives as the receipts/strings were cut. Thus, I believed this would bring the story of the Fates to a more updated context. This initial image is still a relevant part of the project, though it has undergone several changes over the past few months.

The question still remained of why? Why was it that I was arrested by this image? Thus I began to analyze what about this subject captured me. Was it the use of three women and their

symbolic recurrence in not just this myth but several other ancient stories? Was it mythology itself as a means to cope with the unknown? What are mythologies we tell ourselves? Sifting through these questions, I found I always returned to one topic in particular: endings. What are the meanings we place on endings? What is their prescribed relevance? Why is it that one craves closure? Thus, I wished to explore these questions through the characters of the Three Fates. For me, I imagined the world in which they work onstage is a sort of timeless space, a place that moves in and out of time with both many endings and no ends. If these characters' jobs are based on making ends (deciding fates), what is it like when they abandon this task? How does time operate around them as a character in and of itself? I was interested in presenting time as a sort of unreliable narrator, witnessing and describing the events of these three characters, but in a disjointed order or in a way that disrupts one's concept of chronology. Within this, I also wished to present a series of stereotypical endings in order to question the meaning one places on them as well as to further complicate the viewer's relationship with time in this space.

Thus, how did I go about approaching these ideas? With the intention of avoiding my habits, I wanted to operate in a way that allowed for the work to evolve naturally. In other words, I did not want to plan the scope of the entire work prior to starting. Therefore, instead of starting with the structure, I started with the movement. Working alone in the studio initially, I compiled a series of phrases and improvisations on video that focused on the tasks/jobs of the Fates—threading, measuring, and cutting. Another element I introduced into this movement research was disruption. How could movements or ideas be interrupted before they are finished? In other words, how can there be unsatisfactory endings? I am interested in this feeling of dissatisfaction, because I believe that unlike the common endings crafted in films, theater, and dance, life does not present ends with as much gratification. Therefore, I wished to explore these unexpectations



in the dancing as well as the structure. In order to achieve this feeling in my improvisations, I had a friend of mine clap at random intervals while I was moving to spark changes in thought, dynamics, and texture.

From here, I then taught the set material to the dancers, as well as had them improvise to the same tasks I had myself do—namely embodying threading, measuring, and cutting with interruptions. I also compiled a phase edited on film software that played with the idea of interruption through the use of film editing. This material, for me, acted as a reference for motifs or resonating gestures. During the majority of our first rehearsals, much of the time was spent working and learning this material. Additionally, we also took on the task of another generation technique. We did this by taking a list of parts of the body (ear, knee, back of neck) and shaping them in spirals or lines in reference to the creation of thread (Libby), finding a sliced intersection point similar to scissors (Marisa), or relating these parts in correlation with the measuring of space (Emily Rose).

All of these methods, however, focused the movement on the individual body, not really in relation to the others in space. Therefore, I decided to find a way to create a system that connected the three dancers in their actions and crafted this tool based off what I learned in a class with Moya Michael. In this class, we created connected shapes with each other and navigated transitions between these shapes without disconnecting. In turn, this created very specific movement pathways for the body. Taking this concept and introducing the idea of string, I had the dancers work with a scarf that connected them while they moved. From here, they improvised spirals and lines, wrapping and unwrapping themselves in the scarf. After a certain time, they would then go back and repeat all that they had done. This created an assembly of causes and effects so that once the scarf was removed, a very clear system still existed. Then, I

asked the dancers to apply arm gestures based on material we have already created. This manipulated the body in a way that hid the echo of the scarf in their movement, allowing the system to have a less visible origin. In other words, it hid the pantomime of the missing scarf.

Along with these experiments, we tried even more tasks as well. One required the dancers to physically react to the patter of the song, “At the Bottom of Everything” by Bright Eyes, which discusses passengers aboard a crashing plane. Yet another asked the dancers to determine the most efficient pathway between two points or poses. Both of these tasks have foundations in the topic of fate within the work. In the first instance, the song required the dancers to contemplate death and endings. Before the song ended, I stopped it and had the dancers continue to research in this space, eventually asking them to repeat the essence of what they had just moved. In this instance, all three approached this task differently. Marisa stayed true to the exact positions of the body, Emily Rose re-explored the emotional qualities, and Libby did a combination of the two. On the other hand, the other task reflects more about the interpretation of life or life’s fate as a line (or string) and how one’s decisions may deviate from this line. Thus, the dancers would explore these deviations through subtle movement away from the efficient pathway between two positions.

All of these task, phrases, and experiments were ways for me to sample and see what visually worked and what did not. Through all of these attempts, I had tried to avoid habits of mine—reliance on music and excessive amount of chugs for example—and thus, not all of the generated material was interesting. Therefore, I then needed to sift through and find the movement that worked and set aside that which did not. It then became a question of how to arrange and organize the good material. For this, I returned to the idea of creating multiple endings. What would it be like if the piece continually ends so that it feels as if one doesn’t know

where or when the start or finish occurs? (Initially, I thought of controlling when the audience would enter and exit the space as a way to represent the ideas of birth and death, but due to that complexity, I decided to just have the audience enter the theater with the piece already in progress.) Therefore, I set about creating sections separated by fades or blackouts, starting first with the scene of the Three Fates cutting the string.

By this point, I had already altered my idea for this event of the Fates making and cutting the thread. No longer did I picture having receipts as strings or depicting scenes of deaths on the television screen. Rather, I became interested in the movement that arises from just the pantomime of making and cutting string, as well as what it would be like if the television showcased just the time on it. I was curious what it would be like to be constantly aware of how time is passing, and then what would happen when that constant was altered. In other words, I intend to eventually stop the clock, reverse it, or change its speed as a means to disrupt the viewer's senses. This refers back to time as an unreliable narrator as a means to have the audience contemplate how time works in their own lives. All of these endings and disruptions in the flow of the piece are all intended to question one's experiences and expectations regarding how time feels and how one perceives an ending. What meanings do we expect to take away from the end of something?

As I continued to work on these sections (always receiving feedback from my mentor Meredith Glisson), a greater sense of what the piece needed slowly developed. At the start of one section, Marisa enters from downstage right and stops center-center. As her solo progresses, she stops again in the same spot and repeats the movement that follows as a way to show the origin of where she had come. With Meredith's suggestion, I realized this cyclical pattern was important in creating a sense of cohesiveness while also maintaining a feeling of time as non-

linear. Thus I am working to connect these sections in a way that feels close to a disassembled abstract narrative, complete with numerous endings. My hope then is that an emphasis is placed on the concept of endings and time in a way that makes the viewers contemplate these elements in their own lives.

### Originality and Appropriation

With all art, I have always felt a pressure to be original or creative with my projects. I challenge myself to think outside of the box and to make adventurous choices. I have often opted to take a more difficult route or unconventional one to make this happen. I try to ask what else is possible? What is another side or possibility? In art class in high school, we were painting a newspaper box for a contest on the theme of superheroes. I had chosen to depict Batman and Joker for my section of the box, but rather than having them in a physical fight, I was more interested in how I could show a psychological one. Thus, I painted a larger image of Joker's laughing head surrounded by rippling cards with a smaller image of Batman facing this mirage with his fists curled. With this example, I wanted to show my desire to avoid what I think might be a common instinct to do. This challenge to think creatively is something I apply to all of the arts I do, as I am sure most artists do as well. Even in a film class where I was asked to create and film a chase, I crafted a scene where one never sees the chase actually happening but rather only hears the sound of it in relationship to the environment depicted on the screen. Sometimes I might have limited resources or skills and must find a way that that highlights them as effectively as possible. For instance, with this film, I knew I would not be able to assemble a crew or cast; therefore, having no actors onscreen allowed me to film the whole project with only me and one

other actor.

This drive of mine to be original, though, is rather futile. One can say that everything to be done has been done before or is already happening. I found this to be the case quite often with my choreography. A year after creating *As Memory Fades* (which I have come to nickname The Wall Piece) I went to see Batsheva Dance Company perform *Sadeh 21* at BAM in New York City. Having never seen the work before, I was surprised to find the piece ended with the dancers falling and jumping off a wall placed across the expanse of the upstage space. Then, last year, while I was creating *Curious, I've never seen all of you before* (which I have come to nickname The Coat Piece) I was told that Helen Simoneau, a choreographer with whom I have worked, was also currently working on a piece with fur coats, and that another student in the school was making her own piece with winter coats in a similar way. Though none of us have had any contact with the others, similar ideas nevertheless appeared in several places at once.

This phenomenon is not an uncommon event. Multiple or simultaneous discoveries have happened throughout history on numerous occasions. Often, we tend to equate the creation of inventions or theories to one discoverer, when in actuality, their fruitions are made by several inventors. One example includes the invention of the telephone. Though its creation is often attributed to Alexander Graham Bell, the telephone was also presented at the Philadelphia Exhibition by another inventor at the same time—Elisha Gray. Gray, however—who is even said to have created the better phone—is not often credited with the discovery of this device, despite having filed the patent on the same day as Graham Bell (Gladwell np). This example of multiple discovery is not just found in this instance, but in countless others as well. Both Newton and Leibniz discovered calculus simultaneously, two inventors in France both invented color photography at the same time, and sunspots were discovered in four different countries all in the

year, 1611 (Gladwell np).

For some reason (perhaps simplicity), history tends to assign these inventions and discoveries to only one person, and thus other inventors might have been viewed as fraudulent copiers in their time. This is what happened to Leibniz when he published his discovery of calculus; Newton blatantly accused the other mathematician of stealing his work, saying he, himself, had discovered these theories years earlier but never published them. Malcolm Gladwell writes that “We’re reluctant to believe that great discoveries are in the air. We want to believe that great discoveries are in our heads” (Gladwell np). This is true in the case of calculus as it is for the telephone and photography and many other inventions. In almost all of these cases, the foundations for these discoveries had already been established—for example, Pascal and Descartes had already laid the groundwork that Newton and Leibniz used to make their own findings. Thus, these inventions would likely have been discovered even if these feuding thinkers never existed. It might have just occurred a little while later (Gladwell np).

Gladwell, however, separates art from these scientific discoveries, saying that these simultaneous events do not happen in the case of artistic genius (Gladwell np). I, on the contrary, do not believe this is entirely true. If it were, I imagine that art movements would not exist—all of which build off the foundations of what came before them, whether in continuation or rebellion. Thus, it is important not to view these simultaneous discoveries by their visual similarities but rather by their conceptual connections. For instance, at the birth of what would be called modern dance, creators such as Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis both sought a means of movement expression separate from the Western aesthetics and techniques focused heavily around ballet (Martin 138-141). This viewpoint on dance can be intrinsically linked to the surge of independence among people and particularly women around and following the first World

War (Anderson 167). Then, more makers emerged of the likes of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, who in fact were both students of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn that rebelled against Denishawn's focus on commercial success (Anderson 171). Though Humphrey researched the bodies relationship to gravity and Graham focused on breath, both women returned dance to basic elements of movement (Anderson 175).

I mention these examples as a means to illustrate how all of these inventors and creators come in part as a reaction to something that came before them. As a painter's style initially reflects his or her master's, young artists often have a touch that continues "to ghost the teacher's hand" (Eyland np). For instance, one might say that Picasso's early work developed from a style similar to Cézanne (Eyland np). Thus, in a way very similar to that of multiple discovery and universal consciousness, art also seems to develop simultaneously from different people. Much of this partly has to do with the idea of influence and appropriation. Especially in dance, everything we experience through movement becomes archived in our bodies. Thus, in a way, we are constantly appropriating our past experiences unless there is a defiant research to counteract these histories. Even then there is a clear form that comes from this reaction that, like those that 'rebelled' before, resembles someone else's rebellion as well.

How then do we navigate a space that feels as if everything has been done before? Perhaps one way to cope with this is to accept that one's ideas are the results of one's experiences, and that if another had similar experiences then one might also have similar ideas. Another method is to research. Cliff Eyland, a writer, curator, and painter stresses the importance of not being ignorant as to what one appropriates. However, he also warns his students that one's "heroes are [one's] major influences, so beware of their influence" (Eyland np). I found this definitely to be an important thought in my last two choreographic processes. In the movement

of *Curious, I've never seen all of you before*, I had felt the presence of qualities I have acquired through Katie Swords' studio practice classes. In *By the Time*, I definitely feel heavily influenced by the movements and processes of both Netta Yerushalmy and Beth Gill. Both are artists by which I have performed works in the past year and who have greatly inspired me. Additionally, both have aesthetics that fit well with the concept I am trying to achieve. Thus, their ideals—such as movement that goes from down to down or an attention to posture—have unintentionally crept into my work. Or rather, my fascination with these concepts has produced a similar feeling in my own movement.

This being said, the movement that Libby, Emily Rose, and Marisa do still has a distinct look of its own. Though it has qualities similar to that which Yerushalmy uses, it does not incorporate any of the same moves or anything directly resembling her work. Nevertheless, the influence is still apparent. Thus, as I am completing this piece, I have an attention on how I could break or re-explore this influence. As I step around my habits in this process, I am now exploring what they look like from the other side. For instance, how does my attraction to theatricality juxtapose against the dry nature of the movement material? What risks can I still take that can surprise both the audience and myself as a choreographer.

I then must return to why I make dances in the first place. I make dances as a means to engage and affect an audience—to get them to experience something or to get them to think. This is important to remind myself as I go about a process. Particularly with this piece, I felt at times I might have gotten a little lost trying to find what worked when I needed to focus on what I was trying to make work in the first place. What exactly did I want the audience to experience? If I wanted them to think about how they perceive endings, how can I make them actually feel them? Thus, instead of solely focusing on how the individual movement operates in the system,



how can I create emotional images and affecting circumstances as well. It is important to note that not every dance piece needs to involve emotional depth, but in this case, I feel it might be necessary. I am interested in the placing the dry movement material next to events that spark reactions in the viewer.

In an interview for TimesTalks, Ivo Van Hove discusses what draws him to the theatre. He says he does not necessarily look for clarity—rather he relishes when things are not as clear, when lines between good and bad are blurred, and when the audience is mesmerized or perhaps even shocked (“Mark” np). This is something that works well with my intentions for this work and other works I plan to do. I do not want it to be easy. Ohad Naharin, the Artistic Director of Batsheva Dance Company also said something similar at the Montpellier Danse Festival—how it is important for him to leave the audience some mystery and room for interpretation, to not give them everything (“Festival” np). It is sometimes necessary to remember that the audience can almost always pick up more than we might expect; therefore, it is not necessary to spoon them information. How can a choreographer make the audience work to figure the dance out?

All of the questions in this essay, I will grapple with for some time. They are not questions with simple solutions or right answers. Rather, their interpretations may even change with each project. Dance is something that one never fully figures out. Something always exists that feels wrong or unfinished. Maguy Marin spoke at the American Dance Festival: “Dance is bent on eluding us. We cannot make it ours. It keeps reminding us that we are owners of nothing. It drives us to search for the meaning of life” (Marin np). Perhaps why Ivo Van Hove and Ohad Naharin do not want to watch dances that are easy to figure out is because that is not how life works. Dance is as difficult to understand as life is—one is constantly working to figure it out. This “search for the meaning of life” is perhaps what all of my choreography is really about and

is perhaps what all art is really about. "There is nothing new in saying this," Marin continues. "So has Charles Péguy written; others before me have said it or not, or may have or could have. It is of no importance. But it does seem important to state and to repeat that dance" (Marin np). Thus we all continue to make, to continue to form habits and break them, to continue to influence and be influenced. How can our art be relevant? This is the beginning of a lifetime of research, a lifetime of questions, and a lifetime of making. How can I keep accepting the challenge?

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