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Honors Thesis

May 1, 2017

A trilogy of dances for three

In 2009, Nicolas Bourriaud curated Tate Britain's Triennial exhibition. He titled it 'altermodern.' He coined this term to describe "a phenomenon belonging to the global era," which has given rise to the "discernible, insistent sensibility that has emerged in contemporary art in Britain" (Deuchar 8). The primary proposition is that "postmodernism is dead" and that "a new modernity is emerging" (Bourriaud).

I was introduced to this term as a first-year student at the University of the Arts (UArts), in a Contemporary Art Practices class taught by Donna Faye Burchfield. During the class, she directed us to webpage with a fictive cyber map that marked out continents using dense ideas including 'heterochronia,' 'docu-fiction,' 'viatorisation,' 'borders,' and 'archive' ("Explore Altermodern"). Even though the language used to illustrate this notion of altermodernity was novel to me, what it was being used to refer to felt familiar. Today, if I were to be asked, "what sort of dances do you make?" I would borrow Bourriaud's term, as a tongue-in-cheek response, but also in all seriousness. Even though the statement "I make altermodern dances" sounds reasonably pompous, this term provides me with leverage to identify my artistic work. The notion of altermodernity allows me to locate the lineage of my work in order to eliminate the cop-out definition of contemporary dance as "every dance you make in the now." It also attempts

to subvert the limited and limiting representation of “contemporary dance” popularized by the reality television show *So You Think You Can Dance*.

While I situate my work after the postmodern dance epoch, I am also acknowledging that “contemporary” to me is a composite of the things that have occurred (both inside and outside of dance), things I have studied (both inside and outside of dance) and things I have experienced first-hand (both inside and outside of dance). These are my resources for dance-making. Fast-forward to my fourth and last year as an undergraduate at UArts, as I write this thesis in reflection of the dances I have made, I see how the knowledge I have accumulated has informed my choreographic orientation. The choreographic inquiries that I have been occupied with over the last two semesters are encapsulated in three works: *The 10-minute Intermission* (2016), the reprise of *The 10-minute Intermission* (2017) and *Violets Are Blue* (2017). By expounding on the making of these three dances, I will discuss how my strategies for engaging with the choreographic landscape align with the notion of altermodernity.

***The 10-minute Intermission* (2016)**

A commentary on our()selves and the things we are a part of, created and performed by our()selves, as part of a thing we are a part of, and in which a game of self-reflexivity is adopted as a strategy for playing by the rules.

I started conceiving *The 10-minute Intermission* in the Fall of 2016. It stemmed from a cold, practical place of wanting to make a piece that was feasible within all the guidelines of a UArts School of Dance senior thesis. The parameters include: a runtime of ten minutes, a maximum of ten dancers, and four lighting cues with one black out. I also took into consideration that I would be presenting it as part of the Festival of Senior Dance Works. This meant that my piece would be a part of a larger show, with approximately 7 other relatively short works, and an intermission. These senior theses are typically performed in the Gershman Y Gym Dance

Theater, unless the choreographer has a good reason to present their piece at a different location. I created this piece with the understanding that my work would be shown under these circumstances and in the setting of the Gershman Y Gym Dance Theater. These limitations began to frame the creation of this work.

As I began to consider all these rules and requirements, I felt the need to treat this thesis like a game, in order for the choreographic process not to feel limiting. I started to ask myself, “how do I play the game of this senior thesis?” This question helped many elements of the dance fall into place. There is a Franz Kafka quote that goes, “I am free and that is why I am lost.” The converse became true for me. I started finding joy in the requirements of the thesis. The requirements became the rules of the game, and I became a willing player. A participant who would play by the rules and play hard.

One of the first decisions I had to make was how many dancers I wanted in this piece. For me, this was, and will continue to be, the most crucial decision when it comes to dance-making. This is because I value human labor and creativity as the most important resource. It is the people who make the piece. Following the thesis requirements, the choreographer is not supposed to perform in their own work. Since the solo research I have been invested in over the past few years is deeply personal to my own experiences, I did not want to choreograph a solo on someone else. Imposing that mode of research on someone else’s body is problematic to me. I also did not want to make a duet because when two bodies/people are present, relational narratives emerge a lot more spontaneously for the viewer. I did not find it necessary or appealing to choreograph such a relationship. Knowing that I did not want to make a solo or a duet, and that I did not want to use more than ten dancers to stay within the parameters, I started

pondering over a cast on the smaller size (three to five dancers) to minimize conflict when attempting to coordinate schedules.

Another factor that I considered when deciding on the cast size was that the space in which the piece would be performed does not have wings. That meant that once the dancers entered the space, they would be visible for the duration of the piece. I knew that I did not want any of my dancers to exit the space during the course of the dance and be seen by the audience while they were waiting on the sides. I would only choreograph one entrance and one exit for the entire piece. As I tried to envision a dance where the entire cast would be in the space from start to end, I started settling on a cast of three over a quartet or a quintet. Why work with four or five dancers, when three persons are perfectly capable of communicating ideas effectively within the scope and scale of a UArts senior thesis? I found myself questioning how much difference an additional body would make in the dance/in the space, and whether that difference warranted taking up another person's time and effort. A trio seemed to be the most efficient mode of working for me. Marco Farroni, Elizabeth Dashiell, and Brandon Graf said yes.

During the initial conception and rehearsals, what slowly started becoming clear to me was that I was making a trio "about" a trio, and a senior thesis "about" a senior thesis. After all, these two elements (cast size and thesis requirements) had been the driving forces for my thought process up till that point. I soon came to identify self-reflexivity as the practice that was giving this piece its sense of direction.

In primary school and high school, I always had two best friends. In college, my first friend introduced me to her first friend and the three of us started hanging out together. I've always found myself in trios. Perhaps it is the inevitable grouping of the trio that always finds me. Or perhaps I have some kind of affinity for the inexplicable, peculiar dynamic that 'the third

person' creates. Two feels relatively straightforward: protagonist and antagonist; a classic binary; a rigid dichotomy; an even split. With three, situations become more opaque. This piece began to root itself in my fascination with threes and circumstances that arise when there are three: the odd one out, the mediator, the middle child, the middle seat, superlative adjectives (good/better/best), the Beyonce of a Destiny's Child, and having two roommates (my freshmen year on-campus living situation). I began to see moments of choreographic potential within the ambiguity embedded in threes. There was something about this state of vagueness and its fluidity that I was interested in examining and amplifying.

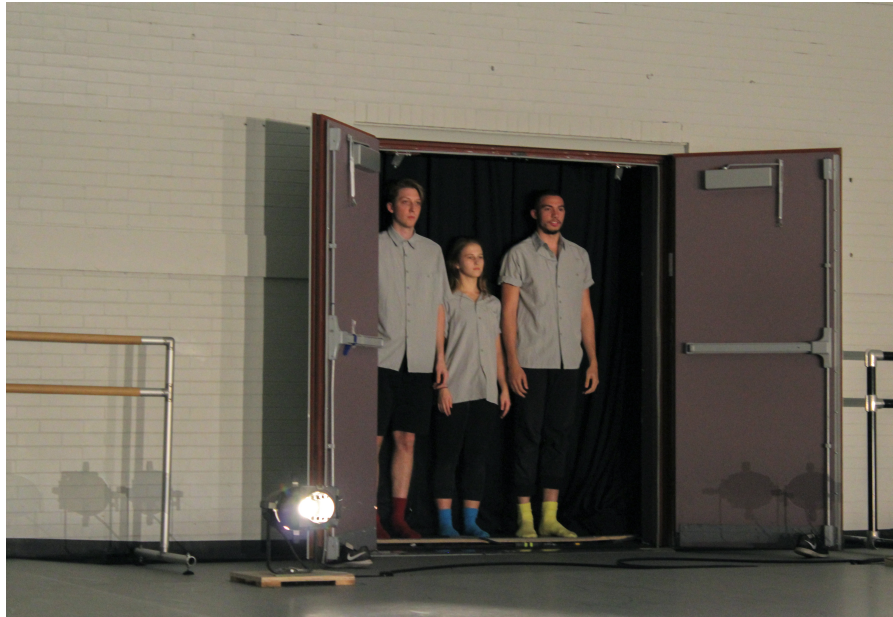
One strategy that I adopted to maximize the productivity of having three dancers was to organize three duets (where each dancer would have a duet with each of the two other dancers), and three solos. If I was essentially making three duets, I was interested in how the solo dancer who was not involved in the duet during that section would complicate the viewing of the duet. This informed the structure of the piece.

The material that was placed into this structure was generated in a number of ways. The dance is reflective of my choreographic impulses, which I tried not to filter in making this piece. These choices were driven by spatial design that I find visually, kinesthetically, and relationally intriguing, my sense of humor, and my concept of time/pacing. A lot of the choreography emerged from sitting in my room with my writing utensils while brainstorming and visualizing ideas inspired by the dancers' physicalities and personalities. After recording these ideas in writing, I would get into the studio with the dancers to discover whether or not these ideas were feasible. Developing the dance from pen and paper helped me to envision the dance and track its trajectory as it was being actualized. While I allowed myself to give in to my inclinations, all of

these compositional elements were informed by the knowledge that this dance was going to be presented in a performance space, for an audience.

The space, the Gershman Y Gym Dance Theater, was another key factor that informed the making of this dance. Site-specific dances burgeoned during the postmodern dance epoch in the 1960s and 1970s, when choreographers began to seek out unconventional locations for their work (Au 172). For example, Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece* (1971) took place in lower Manhattan, stationed on rooftops over twelve blocks (Au 172). The dancers had to relay movements to each other, and attempt to replicate them as accurately as possible (Au 172). While the term "site-specific" is most commonly used to refer to work that is created for a non-traditional performance space, I would consider *The 10-minute Intermission* a site-specific dance created for the Gershman Y Gym Dance Theater. Just as in the site-specific works of the postmodern era, "where the location had real effects upon the choreography and the audience's perceptions," (Au 172) I had to make and evaluate my choreographic decisions for *The 10-minute Intermission* based on the peculiarities of the space.

The way I tailored the dance for the space is evident in the opening sequence. This is how it begins: dancers on standby inside the blackbox, lights go, dancers enter from the blackbox door on stage right which is the one main entrance for the performers. Their gray shirts are cohesive with the color of the marley. The dancers secure the doors with stoppers, and wait in the doorway for the music to begin. Working with these limitations made the characteristics of the space visible in the dance.



The opening sequence. Photo by Audrey Simmons.

The opening section, which I named the weaving section, is an open score based on a structured list of directives. When the dancers are standing in the doorway, Chopin's *Waltz No. 6 in D-Flat Major, Op. 64, No. 1*, "Minute" plays. The dancers tip forward, allowing the weight of the fall to propel them into the space. They scurry across the stage, making one and a half passes along the horizontal plane. They begin to perform the score: grab a partner, don't leave anyone out, Destiny's child, Beyonce, fourteen-hour flight (avoid the middle seat), situate yourself in relation to the other two, situate yourself in relation to the audience, balance the space. The proposal of "performing ourselves," which emerges from the self-reflexive orientation of the piece, is intrinsic to the score. Their decisions are reflective of their relationships with each other as their quotidian selves, and as performers who have the responsibility and agency to exercise choice-making. I decided to use the Waltz when I first heard it because it presented itself to me as

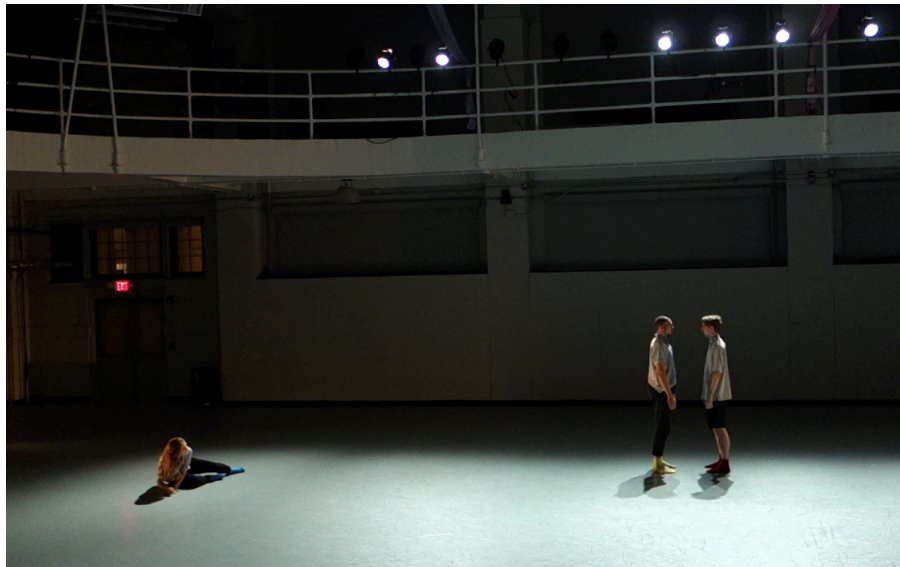
something that would set up the piece with its energetic quality and playfulness. I also enjoyed the way it mirrored my incessant fixation on threes.



The dancers performing “Beyonce” in the weaving section. Photo by Audrey Simmons.

The organization of the dance was directly influenced by the four permissible lighting cues. I imagined the four cues and one black out as dividers that separated one section from the other. If the whole dance were a cake, the lighting cues were the slices that segmented one part from the other. The weaving section ends with a musical chairs-type situation where I assigned Elizabeth the task of being the first chair. Marco arrives on Elizabeth before Brandon does. He pushes Brandon off. Brandon runs stage right and becomes the second chair. The scene makes a transition into the next section, when Elizabeth gets up from being the chair and runs ahead of Marco to throw herself at Brandon. Brandon catches her, then shrugs her off, signaling the second light cue and the beginning of the second section.

Kiss/kill, which was what I titled the second section, transpired from my desire to use the cool blue lights that would illuminate the dancers from the back of the space. In this section, I wanted to play out my fascination with what I call kiss/kill moments, where the space between two bodies creates an energy that is ripe with potential. The moment is both ambiguous and mercurial. The stark lighting cue created an immediate shift in the atmosphere which I felt was appropriate for how I wanted this section to unfold. I decided to take advantage of Brandon and Marco's similar stature to set up kiss/kill because their likeness provided a tabula rasa from which to work. Elizabeth took on the role of the third person here, disrupting the intensity of the moment and instigating a new train of thought.



Kiss/kill

Looking for sound to fill this second section of the dance was the most challenging. I first began on Spotify, browsing new playlists and getting enticed by new rhythms and grooves. After trying several options out in the studio and feeling like none of them were quite right, I returned to my iTunes library. This catalog of music that I built has remained rather unchanged since

2012. I felt that there were so many sonic options out there, that combing the internet would only lead me further and further away. Perhaps it was intuition that that led me to believe that I would already have had what I needed. In retrospect, this mode of sourcing material reflected my inclination towards a self-reflexive inquiry. Perusing my iTunes library, I hovered over Nosfell's "Le Signe Et Le Hasard" for a long time. I was very attracted to this song but also hesitant to use it, because I liked it so much that I had used it before in a solo I choreographed at UArts. I decided to put the track into GarageBand to manipulate the quality of the sound. The new track that emerged was a warped electronic sound with a heavy reverberation. It created an environment that I could imagine the section taking place in, and it sounded distant enough from the original for me to feel comfortable about "reusing" it.

I also sourced the sound for the third section from my iTunes library. The main requirement I had when looking for sound to fill this section was a suitable tempo for the side step phrase I had choreographed. Somewhat by chance, I arrived at Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)" because it was on one of my favorite playlists. I started referring to this section by the title of the song. Continuing with the proposal of "performing ourselves" in different way from the weaving section, it begins with a sequence that involves a "tender duet" between Elizabeth and Brandon, and Marco's "asshole solo." The stage is warmly lit with a pink hue, setting up a different tone from the kiss/kill section. In the "asshole" sequence, Marco stands at the tip of the downstage center mark, with his back to the audience. Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Brandon perform a duet that developed from a structure I wrote out. Marco's only task is to stand still for the whole duration, obscuring parts of the duet that is unfolding upstage. I was interested in playing with depth to exaggerate the counterpoint. This was probably the boldest compositional choice I made in the piece.



The tender duet/asshole solo. Photo by Ian Douglas.

When “tender duet” concludes, Elizabeth and Brandon begin the side step sequence. I had built this gestural movement phrase in the Spring of 2016 on my own body. In my mind, the gestures flow from one to the next as assertive non-sequiturs. I choreographed it with the intention of using it for my senior thesis, even though at that point I had not yet assembled my cast. I had no ideas on who, when, where, and how I would use this phrase in my dance, but I felt compelled to make it anyway. I taught this phrase to Elizabeth, Marco and Brandon during the first rehearsal we had, still unsure about how I would insert it into the dance. Performing this phrase in my senior seminar class, and receiving feedback from the showing helped shed some light. Some of my classmates said they saw the essence of the trio within this solo material, because the gestures were often directed laterally, as if I was indicating to a person on my left, and another on my right. This influenced my decision to ask Elizabeth to perform the phrase as a

solo. I gave Brandon and Marco the task of transposing the phrase into an improvised partnering sequence. In this duet, they flip to face each other and adopt a slow dance grip (one hand in a clasp, one hand on the other person's waist). They perform the gestures from the movement phrase for each other, to each other, with each other and away from each other.

The "Alone Again" section also features a musical interlude that functions as a recap of the dance thus far. This recap sequence draws an arc through the seemingly separate sections by returning to earlier parts of the dance from the weaving section and the kiss/kill section. As the dance felt like it was approaching its end, I wanted to match the sentiment of the eight sets of eight allotted by the track with cinematic flashbacks of the piece. Instead of arriving at a conclusion after restating these ideas, they introduce new material at the end of the recap. The dancers move into a sequence known as the "potato phrase" which was constructed in a highly arbitrary manner. The "potato phrase" was devised with a game akin to Simon Says, where I would provide a verbal stimulus for the dancers to act upon. These cues included "it's a horse," "a big potato in a soup bowl," "sing for me," and "three's a crowd."

They then transition into the "family portraits" which is a series of seven poses that travel from stage right to the center mark, along the most downstage panel. All three dancers come into contact with one another when they arrive in the pose. The first pose recalls the first rehearsal we had together, when Elizabeth, Brandon and Marco huddled up and asked me to take a picture of them for Instagram. The next few in the series were put together as instantaneous compositions that have the essence of candid group shots. They arrive at the downstage center mark, with Brandon and Marco embodying Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, while Elizabeth draws attention to the negative space between Brandon and Marco's pointer fingers. The last pose in the family portraits borrows from a balletic finale, in which the woman is hoisted triumphantly into

the air for the closing spectacle. Immediately after this partnered lift, the three dancers begin to separate, dismantling what they have built together. The scene is over just when it begins to culminate, much like the timeline of working on a senior thesis.

As the distance between each person gets wider, Chopin's, *Prelude No. 7 in A Major, Op. 28, No. 7* plays. This was actually the first decision I made when I was building the sonic environment for the entire piece. I wanted to use Chopin for this thesis because I felt the need for something that sounded "academic-sounding" to my elementary-level musically-educated self, since I was making this dance in an academic setting, as part of a degree requirement. The Prelude was the first track I listened to when searching for music because it was the shortest track in that Best of Chopin album. With the way the tempo gets suspended and starts to trail off towards the end, it presented itself to me as something that would bring the dance to a close, instead of something that preceded all the action. I enjoyed this contradiction and felt that it contributed to the narrative arc I was trying to create with the dance. In a cheesy way, the making of this thesis felt like a beginning for me.

The 10-minute Intermission (2017/reprise)

I returned to *The 10-minute Intermission* in 2017, with an opportunity presented to me by Donna Faye Burchfield, the director of the School of Dance at UArts. The piece was selected to represent the university at the American College Dance Association (ACDA) Conference in Tampa, Florida. I was thrilled about the prospect of showing my work to a non-UArts audience, and also about spending Spring Break in Florida. To my dismay, Brandon had already made Spring Break plans prior to finding out that the piece had been selected for the ACDA. Marco, Elizabeth and I were also unsuccessful with convincing him to drop his other plans. In true trio

fashion, the situation was complicated by the “third person.” After much deliberation, I had to accept the fact that I would have to make significant alterations to the piece. I had to look for someone to take Brandon’s place. I decided to ask James Mertz to be in the work.

Looking for someone to replace Brandon was difficult because Brandon and Marco are the same height and very close in built. I was initially hesitant about asking James because he is shorter than Brandon. With the height discrepancy, the piece would not have worked with James simply standing in as a substitute and learning the exact material that Brandon performed. Casting the original three, Brandon, Elizabeth and Marco, was a compositional choice. These three dancers visually register as two tall men, one small woman, creating a sense of imbalance. This composition could not be replicated with James, Elizabeth and Marco, who read as petite, average, tall or small, medium, large. Since the difference between all three of them is more evenly distributed, it altered the conditions for the dance. Naturally, James’ presence also changed the dynamics of the trio.

Factoring all of this into the equation, I made significant edits to certain sections of the piece so that this version would have a similar tone to the original, even if it was impossible to recreate the same effect the original had. The biggest alteration I made was choreographing an entirely new kiss/kill for Elizabeth and Marco with a choreographic device that I would call “bad narrative.” As I read out the line of the bad narrative I had written, Elizabeth and Marco would respond with an action, physicalizing and abstracting the language. I asked James to improvise a solo based on the directive that he was the narrator either foreshadowing or revisiting the series of events. The other change I had to make was to reset the piece for a proscenium stage with wings. This primarily affected their entrance and their relationship to the audience in the weaving section. Since there was no blackbox door for them to come out from, which I considered an

important factor for setting up the piece, the best solution was for them to simply walk on stage in performative pedestrian mode, arriving adjacent to one another.



Kiss/kill 2.0

Showing this piece at the ACDA was helpful because it allowed me to receive feedback on my work from people outside of the community that I have been making work in, in both immediate and mediated ways. The adjudicators at the conference were not given any more information apart from the title and length of the work when they were seeing it. The panel, consisting of Charles Anderson, Loretta Livingston, and Shani Collins, specifically spoke about the titling of my work during the feedback session, commenting that it was appropriately titled *The 10-minute Intermission* because they needed a break from all of the serious modern dance. This was refreshing for me to hear because prior to that, I had been thinking about the title of the work in reference to being part of a larger show within the UArts Festival of Senior Dance Works, and as a way of reimagining the 10-minute limit for the senior thesis.

It was also interesting to see my work on a proscenium stage, as an experiment on whether the sense of humor crafted into this piece would translate. I was thrilled to know that it registered with the audience, who chuckled a lot more than I expected them to, and who chuckled a lot louder than the UArts audience who had seen the work. Charles Anderson mentioned during the feedback session that he had a smile on his face for almost the entire duration of the piece. Shani Collins seconded that and commented that making funny work is serious business.

***Violets Are Blue* (2017)**

A dance that reflects my subscription to academia
 A dance that is truthfully dishonest and genuinely pretentious
 A dance that makes fun of itself and celebrates melodrama

I decided to choreograph a new dance for the honors thesis presentation. This process overlapped with rehearsals for the reprise of *The 10-minute Intermission*. Even though I chose to depart from *The 10-minute Intermission*, this latest work shares a similar sensibility. This piece, *Violets Are Blue*, reflects my ongoing interest in the trio form, and in examining ideas including self-reflexivity, artificiality, contrivance, selves, and choices. I became interested in creating a dance that simultaneously reveals and conceals the ‘magic’ of the theatre/the stage/performance. In addition to composing the dance material and structure of the piece, this work allowed me to deepen my curiosity about the relationship between the choreographic and the performative i.e. how do I direct the dancers to inhabit the work/material? How does the ‘liveness’ of performance interact with compositional elements that begin to solidify during the rehearsal process?

The first point of entrance into this inquiry was through the selection of music. Soon after I presented *The 10-minute Intermission* at the Festival of Senior Dance Works, I decided that I wanted to choreograph a new dance to Tchaikovsky's "Waltz of the Flowers." This Nutcracker classic initially appealed to me as a beautiful and highly dramatic piece of music. Its grandeur and status of being 1) a Tchaikovsky masterpiece, and 2) an unmistakable Nutcracker composition, forced me to reconsider the decision to use it. Despite these factors operating against me using the song, I could not get it out of my head. Its structure demonstrated a constructive way of reiterating compositional ideas, and its character inspired the play and pretense that I wanted to activate in this new dance. Moving in threes, it would begin to gather momentum in places, then relinquish what it had accumulated, before re-igniting its engine and establishing a greater intensity. It outlined a dance in my imagination. This was where I began to build dance material for this piece.

I tried out the gestural side step phrase I had made for *The 10-minute Intermission* to the "Waltz of the Flowers" as an experiment. I liked the way this tempo created space between the gestures, and in turn created room to insert dramatics. I decided to use this opportunity to extend the lifespan of this gestural side step phrase, henceforth known as the onion phrase. I wanted to be able to make fun of my own material, so that I could find a way to preserve the thing I had created without being overly precious about it. Thinking back to my rehearsals with Elizabeth, Marco and Brandon, and my decision to only have Elizabeth do the onion phrase, I began to think that there was something about this phrase that allowed women to inhabit the material in the way that I wanted it to be embodied. I asked Catie Leasca, Haleigh Nelson, and Sophie Tibiletti to form this new trio.

Since the “Waltz of the Flowers” feels feminine to me (perhaps because it is traditionally performed in the Nutcracker by the women in the *corps de ballet*), and I had selected an all-girl cast, I felt the need to pull apart from the music in places. I also did not want this dance to be viewed simply as a reinterpretation of the music. In the piece, there are times when the dance is preceded by the music, and times when the dance departs from the music either temporally or performatively. We worked with directives to slip in and out of “performance mode” and the various modes within performance (i.e. in a high stakes situation versus something that allows more room for error) as a means of going with and against the current of the music. This seemed to exert a tensile force on the music and created a dynamism that fueled the piece.

A key shared idea between *The 10-minute Intermission* and *Violets Are Blue* is the treatment of the intermission. For both of these works, I was interested in using the idea of the intermission as a non-space or non-event, because the absence of expectation and/or spectacle gave me the permission to consider it as an imaginative space. As I was making these pieces in the spirit of the intermission, I would also recall Jesse Zaritt’s famous words “no big deal” as a constant reminder to myself.

The dance begins with lights illuminating a single mason jar that sits on the center stage mark of the space. Sophie enters the space with a popsicle. She takes a bite out of it then places it in the mason jar. As Sophie exits, the sound of Chopin’s “Prelude in A Major” (which *The 10-minute Intermission* had ended with) enters. It segues into the next track, a song titled “Lying Has To Stop” by a band called Soft Hair. As the song begins to fill the space, the lights build up gradually. The automated blinds are rolled up. When the blinds complete, the stage hand, Kayla Castellon, gestures to the dancers to enter the space. The dancers begin to set up a patch of fake grass, placing objects including Sophie’s popsicle and mason jar, a white onion, fake red flowers,

a pink jump rope, and two compact mirrors on the grass carpet. I asked the dancers to perform this set-up by embodying a stage crew. It is only when they hear a musical cue in “Lying Has To Stop” that they exit, stand visible in the wings, and re-enter as performers.



A scene from the “bad music video.” Photo by Jiyon Song.

In *Violets Are Blue*, the spirit of the intermission is most evident in the prelude I have just detailed. I began to refer to this as the “bad music video” section. Knowing that this showing would consist of just two works, Audrey Simmon’s, and mine, I saw this section as an intermission of sorts. Even though we eventually decided on a program order, the bad music video section allowed for flexibility with how I wanted my work to be seen. Whether my piece was going to be performed first or last, this prelude would have helped to function as a point of entry into the section for “The Waltz of the Flowers.” I decided to add the “bad music video” section because I felt the need to set up an environment for the Waltz to be perceived. Whether

that meant taking the audience from the lobby of the Gershman Y into a theatrical space, or creating a transitional space between Audrey's piece and mine. I think the bad music video section helped to establish the tone for the next section, in spite of their separate natures.



The beginning of the waltz section. Photo by Jiyon Song.

Niall Jones, who provided choreographic mentorship for this piece as well as for *The 10-minute Intermission*, commented on the way I had organized the sections. More specifically, he highlighted the fact that I had placed the “bad music video” section and the subsequent waltz section, which feel like two separate entities, in such close proximity. He talked about the idea of an awkward orbit between these two sections, which made me consider the awkward orbit between the dancers and the material, i.e. their role as performers versus the performance of their quotidian selves. For example, there is a sequence during “bad music video” where I gave Catie, Sophie and Haleigh the directive to interact with the objects, each other, and the audience without providing any locomotive material. I merely told them “to play with 1) being inside it

and showing it, 2) being inside it and not showing it, and 3) dropping out of it.” I was interested in observing the subtle shifts that occur in the performer when they know they are performing, when they know they are being watched, and when they perform the state of being “in their own world” i.e. dramatically gazing into the distance.

During rehearsals, I would also refrain from saying anything when I liked something that happened. I felt that it was necessary for the moment to be shaped spontaneously rather than choreographed, because the former allows more space for the dancers to negotiate between performance mode and real time/real life mode. From being in classes with my cast over the past four years, and watching all their recent performances in the Spring Dance Series, it is no doubt that they are incredible dancers. However, what I did not see in those concert dances was what I have witnessed from hanging out with them as friends—their brilliant acting abilities which enable them to switch from silly to serious on demand. I wanted to showcase these under utilized skills in *Violets Are Blue*.

While *Violets Are Blue* can stand alone as a separate entity from *The 10-minute Intermission*, a lot of my choreographic decisions were influenced by the first choreographic process. I am consciously and unconsciously making references to that dance. I would like to think that the dances were made in conversation with each other. For example, there is a jump rope sequence in *Violets Are Blue* that echoes the sound of a ticking clock that I used in between “kiss/kill” and “Alone Again” in *The 10-minute Intermission*. The jump rope sequence also carries the memory of kiss/kill, with Haleigh and Sophie in place of Marco and Brandon. These elements are both mirrored and displaced in *Violets Are Blue*.

Within the first few weeks of working on this piece, I decided that the color scheme would be reds, whites and pinks. I envisioned this clearly, without a justified explanation for this

image. It was not until two weeks before we started searching for costume options that I realized why I had been so sure about sticking to this color palette. While these are hardly colors that dominate, let alone occupy my closet, they had been occupying my visual brain because they were the colors of the gifts Elizabeth, Marco and Brandon had given me after the premiere of *The 10-minute Intermission*. The cast gift included hot pink socks, and the white onion, and artificial red flowers that were placed into the “bad music video” section. Not only had I been referencing the dance I choreographed, I had also been alluding to the residue of that dance.



The jump rope sequence in rehearsal, featuring the costumes and props.

Since so much of *Violets Are Blue* seemed to be reflecting *The 10-minute Intermission*, I was surprised by how differently the trio functioned in this dance as compared to the trio in *The*

10-minute Intermission. In that first piece, the trio could be read/viewed as a series of solos and duets layered on top of each other. I think that rendering resulted from the specific intention for the third person to complicate the ongoing duet. In contrast, the trio in *Violets Are Blue* move together as a unit for the bulk of the dance. I was not sure that I liked this at first, mainly because this was not how *The 10-minute Intermission* materialized. However, over time, I began to see new ways in which the unison was operating in *Violets Are Blue*. I began to see how this unison functioned as a way of challenging the notion of centrality. As Catie, Haleigh and Sophie cover the vast space of the Gershman Y Gym Dance Theater, avoiding the actual “center stage” area covered by the fake grass, they are constantly orbiting around their own nucleus. This traveling, decentralized nucleus constantly subverts the importance of the center stage mark. They seemed to be echoing a Donna Faye Burchfield phrase, “center is everywhere.”

Violets Are Blue definitely feels more like a work in progress/process than *The 10-minute Intermission*. I wanted to make this apparent in the way I constructed the final scene of this dance. As the music approaches its final hurrah, the dancers dissolve the unit. Taking advantage of having three dancers in the piece, the dance concludes with three alternate endings. Sophie walks off to where the fake grass is set up to get the popsicle, Catie takes four large formidable strides upstage, while Haleigh returns to the gestural side step phrase and keeps going until the lights fade out. These alternate endings reflected my desire to refrain from making this dance a ‘complete’ thing that matches the brilliance of the music.

It feels appropriate to be ending my choreographic career at the University of the Arts with a work of this nature—something that strays from feeling entirely finalized; something with multiple endings and varied possibilities. As I write this sentence, I am waiting on the status of my visa application to remain in the States for another year. I am simultaneously applying for

internships that I am unsure I will be able to undertake, depending on whether the visa gets approved. I am also expected to be home in Singapore in two months to serve a bond in exchange for the scholarship I received to attend university here, as stated on the deed that I signed when I was eighteen. I am simultaneously trying to convince the organization that awarded the scholarship to allow me to gain a year of working experience in New York before returning home. Rebecca Solnit offers some concluding words in an article around hope, history and unpredictability:

I don't know what's coming. I do know that, whatever it is, some of it will be terrible, but some of it will be miraculous, that term we reserve for the utterly unanticipated, the seeds we didn't know the soil held. And I know that we don't know what we do does. As Shane Bauer points out, the doing is the crucial thing.

Amidst this post-graduation uncertainty and anxiety, I feel strangely comforted by the knowledge that I have unfinished work. I have things to keep working on, and things to keep doing, across time zones, and intersecting timelines. I identify my work as altermodern because it is not divorced from the multiple realities and histories that I am either directly or indirectly a part of. These are the resources that fuel my work. This is how my dance-making will continue to sustain itself.

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