

Between the Public and the Body: Costuming the dance

Reid Bartelme

Nick Mauss, Thinking Partner

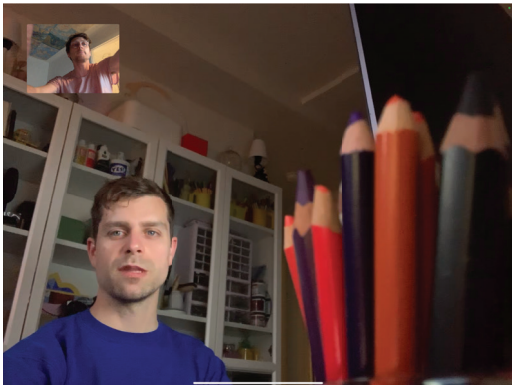
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Cast List: (In Order of Appearance)

Bronislava Nijinska was a Polish dancer and choreographer. She came into my life in the fall of 2020 through guidance from Linda Murray at the Library for the Performing Arts in NYC. I knew that she was the younger sister of Vaslav Nijinski, but I had no idea that she was trying to disrupt misogynist ballet culture over 100 years ago. Nijinska made works that are now considered to be some of the first feminist and queer ballets in history, and is not as well known as I feel she should be. I hope this book sends you searching into the archives to learn about her. She is very important.

Jeremy Jacob is an artist and filmmaker with whom I have collaborated on a number of occasions. I met Jeremy several years ago when he started dating Jack Ferver, who is another close friend and collaborator. Jeremy barely spoke back then, but now he has a ton to say and I consider him one of my most valuable thinking partners, and an artist with whom I am evolving in tandem.

Jack Ferver's name does not appear in the body of this text beyond appearing in other character's descriptions, but they are an important character in the history of my work and thought process. Jack is a performer, writer, and maker who I've worked with a lot. Jack likes to listen to me read my writing and they encourage me to lean into my instinct to write how I talk. This has been freeing for me but may be disorienting for the reader.

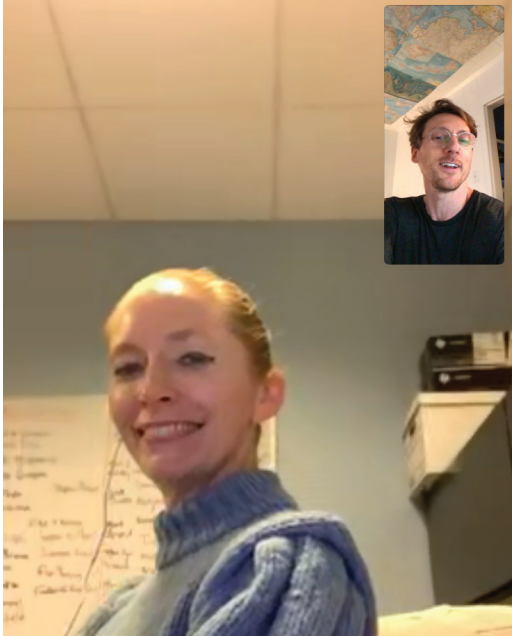
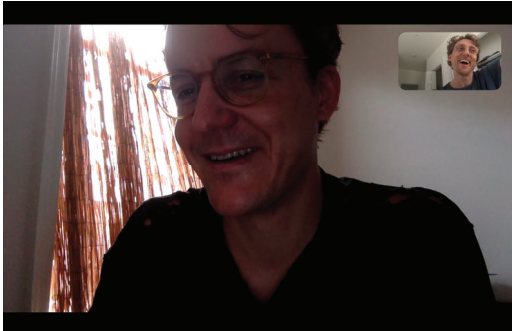
Alexandra Exter was a Russian/Ukrainian avant-garde artist and designer. She and Bronislava Nijinska, were collaborators and thinking partners. She had these gatherings of artists and thinkers at her studio in the early 20th century. Nijinska attended these salons prior to rejoining the Ballet Russes as a choreographer in the early 1920s. It was during this time that Nijinska began formulating futuristic ideologies for ballet, and the groundwork was laid for these two women to collaborate at Theatre Choréographique Nijinska¹ in 1925.

Pam Tanowitz

Pam is a choreographer living, working in and from New York. She grew up in Westchester but has been in New York City for a long time. Pam has been making dances for over 25 years, but not many people cared until a few years ago. I met Pam Tanowitz in 2013 when she asked me to design two pieces for an upcoming Joyce Theater season. Lar Lubovitch had been singing her praises to me since 2009, so I figured I should see what she was about. Both alone and in collaboration with Harriet I have designed over twenty five works for Pam since 2014. She is one of if not my favorite choreographer.

Harriet Jung

Harriet and I met in class at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 2009. Of all of our classmates, I respected her work the most and you can't imagine how unassuming she was. Harriet was 24 at the time and already had a degree in Molecular and Cell Biology from UC Berkeley. I was 28 and had dropped out of college so long ago that none of my credits transferred from SUNY Purchase. I suggested we start collaborating shortly after I started getting dance design commissions. We were both still in school and our first collaborative work was built in the classrooms at FIT. We have now designed close to 100 dance productions together. Our shared history of collaborative experience with dance artists is now vast and complex. Our insights are doubled by the fact that we are going through these experiences and conversations as individuals who digest and interpret differently.



Lynn Garafola is a dance historian and critic, the author of *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance*, and a regular contributor of articles and essays to both scholarly and general interest publications. She is nearing the end of a long period of work on a biography about Bronislava Nijinska. She very generously spoke with me for an hour and a half one afternoon over zoom, about Nijinska, Exter, collaboration, knife fights, volunteer museum archivists and so much more.

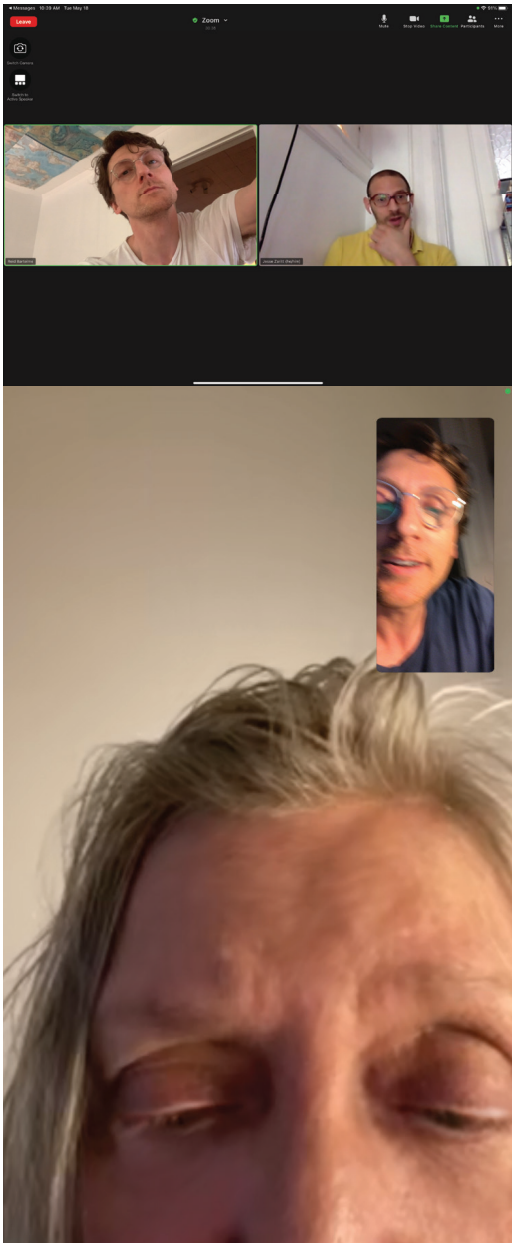
Nick Mauss is an artist and information collector who I first heard of when I was encouraged to audition for his show, *Transmissions* at the Whitney Museum in 2018. I sadly wasn't able to be involved with the show but I met Nick at The Center for Ballet and the Arts. I was doing a fellowship and he was stopping back in as a former fellow to meet with Andrea Salvatore² to arrange studio space for *Transmissions* rehearsals. After Nick left, Andrea gave Harriet and me a copy of Nick's book from *Designing Dreams, A Celebration of Leon Bakst*. This was a show Nick made for the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in 2017. It was an exhibition of Leon Bakst designs from the Ballet Russes, and Nick's own artwork. I'd never seen anything quite like it. Its impact resonates through my own work. Nick has been thinking through this thesis work with me for the past seven months.

Karen Young is an artist and costume designer based in New York. Like Harriet and me her schooling is in fashion design, and she is one of the few people who specialize in costuming dance. I came to her with a lot of questions early on in my costume work. I was rehearsal directing a project she designed in 2014 and conversations about how to finish the neckline of a dance dress would drift into the culture of costuming and garment workers. Karen is one of the few people with whom Harriet and I share collaborators.

Roberto Bolle is an Italian ballet dancer who is so classically beautiful that Bruce Weber made him the subject of an entire book of photos. Ballerinas love dancing with him, and he is frequently the partner they choose for their retirement performances. He looks like Superman and is a highly skilled ballet technician.

David Hallberg is a close friend of mine who is now the director of the Australian Ballet. He is also an extraordinary ballet dancer. I have known David for many years. When I was in my late teens I auditioned for ABT Studio Company and when I glanced over and saw him doing tendues at the adjacent barre I thought, "I'm not going to get this job." I didn't.

Linda Murray wears dresses. That was the mythology I had imagined for her before I saw her wearing a t-shirt on zoom at the beginning of COVID. Now I've even seen her wearing jeans when she'd walk out the Amsterdam Avenue entrance of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts to hand me tote bags full of books. The jeans were always paired with some fantastical hand knit sweater by an Irish knitwear artist. Those tote bags were full of books about Nijinska and feminist thought and Russian Constructivist stage design. Linda was guiding me through my research project in the fall which turned toward Nijinska and Alexandra Exter, and their groundbreaking collaborations no one knows about. I didn't anyways, and I know a lot about 20th century ballet. Linda Murray knows everything about everything it seems. Jack Ferver and I think she might be an international spy. We don't know what country she's working for. She speaks so many languages it's impossible to keep track. Linda is the curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, she wears black eyeliner, almost always keeps her strawberry blonde hair in a neat bun, and I am obsessed with her.



Christopher Wheeldon is a British choreographer who danced in both the Royal Ballet in London and the New York City Ballet. He was the first ever resident choreographer for the New York City Ballet. I learned of Chris when someone bought me a copy of the New York City Ballet Workout Book in 1997. I loved looking at photos of young Chris extending his supple legs in Jazz sneakers and booty shorts. Nearly 25 years later, Chris is a colleague who I sometimes get to watch extend his still supple legs in rehearsal. It seems the booty shorts have been retired.

Wendy Whelan is a big part of why I do this. When I was dancing for Shen Wei Dance Arts, she was a fan of his work and had commissioned a solo from him for a performance at the Joyce Theater. She would come to our performances and I was always star struck. When I was dancing for Lar Lubovitch we performed on the same program at the Chicago Dancing Festival in 2010. We got to know each other a little bit backstage and at meals in Chicago. She knew I was in design school through mutual friends and by the time I was graduating she wanted me to dress her for some reason. I designed three costumes for Wendy. The last one was a dress that Harriet and I designed for her final performance as a dancer with the New York City Ballet. Wendy's encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue this avenue of design. Wendy Whelan had a 30 year career at the New York City Ballet and is regarded as one of the greatest Ballerinas of her time. She is also one of the kindest people I know.

Kent Stowell was formerly the co director of Pacific Northwest Ballet along with his wife, Francia Russell. He is not famous for the many dances he made, but in New York he is well known by Ballet goers as the director who drunkenly ran down the aisle towards the orchestra pit at City Center screaming at the Conductor to slow down the music.

Jesse Zaritt and I met many years ago through mutual friends at Shen Wei Dance Arts. Several years later I joined Shen Wei Dance Arts, and Jesse returned to join us for a few performances. We also danced together in this Ryan McNamara piece wearing togas that I designed to have hoods and not show nipples. They looked like pillow cases with belts. Jesse is also my teacher and has guided me through writing this book.

Pontus Lidberg is a Swedish choreographer who now lives and works in Denmark. For a few years I worked for him as both a rehearsal assistant and a costume designer. Pontus believes unironically in beauty and I designed some of my most beautiful work with him.

Janet Lind is an exceptional costume engineer who lives and works in the Pacific Northwest.

Honey Wolters is my mother.

February 6 2021

I think about Nijinska every day. Some days I feel distant from her, but today we felt close. I told Jeremy about how some British writer in an old review made a point of calling her not beautiful before talking about her accomplishments.

I went hunting in the Library of Congress website today. They seem to have a pretty comprehensive collection of Alexandra Exter's costume sketches from Theatre Choregraphique Nijinska. The drawings are beautiful, and the figures and clothing are rendered incredibly flat. This makes the idea of bringing one or some of them to life really exciting. Some drawings tell you exactly what to do, but these leave space for imagination.



Alexandra Exter, Costume design for men in *Holy Etudes* (1925)

Pam Tanowitz and Harriet Jung are two of the most important people in my life. I make a lot of the work I love most alongside them. I've been documenting the work that we do together over the past several months to use as the material for this document.

I Recorded a lunch date with Pam Tanowitz and Harriet Jung on June 18, 2021 at Claudette on Fifth Avenue in New York City

P So let's talk about your project for school.

R Oh Nijinska.

P What am I supposed to do?

R So what I've realized about this thesis is that I'm not actually going to answer a question.

P Ok. Is that what you're supposed to do?

R No, I don't actually know. I'm really confused about it based on what I've seen from other people. People seem to be thinking through ideas. And that's it. That's all you can do.

P Right.

R So... Nijinska has been a part of this whole process ever since Linda turned me towards her in the Fall for my research project.

P Great. That makes sense.

R And then in my talks with Nick Mauss he said something like, I think this is actually about you and Harriet and Pam. And it's good that you see yourself reflected in Nijinska, but it also can't just be that. You might want to think about what you're doing now with your current collaborators, and what it's activating or doing in the world.

P I remember you telling me about that in Australia. Right? Or was that another conversation?

R No. It's all the same. So... In the research I found out about Alexandra Exter. Nijinska met her in Kiev where Exter was having these salons where she was engaged in conversation with all kinds of Russian artists. That's when Nijinska was like... I'm going to apply some of these avant garde concepts to dance. And she wrote that paper I sent you about movement.

P I read it.

R So that document called *On Movement and the School of Movement*.--

P I love it

R --was written and rewritten and rewritten, and she never published it. I learned a lot of this talking to Lynn Garafola last week.

P Oh! I was doing a little research and I started watching her on Youtube. There's a whole lecture she gives on Nijinska.

R She's the scholar. She has a big book coming out in the winter that's like THE Nijinska biography. But Lynn said that it seems as if sexism and misogyny kind of prevented Nijinska from having this place in dance history that you would expect for someone as innovative and revolutionary as she is. And yes that factors in because of Diaghilev and Balanchine and men who made sure that Nijinska didn't get her due. But Nijinska also made sure she didn't get her due by being kind of nuts and overly protective of her work. And her daughter who was also responsible for protecting the work and licencing the dances etc. was also so protective of the work that none of it ever got out. And Nijinska never published her writings. She couldn't pull it together to get the work out there.

P But don't you think that's because of the environment she was in?

H Ya...

R I think it's both. I think a lot of people were interested in her work and at a certain point she didn't make it as available as it could have been. And that's why so much of it is lost.

P But I feel like I don't know if I agree with that. I mean... Whatever. What do I know?

R Well, that wasn't my impression until I talked to Lynn.

H (to Pam) But I know what you're saying.

P She wouldn't be like that if the men weren't like that.

H Exactly!

R Of course.

P It's too easy and neat to say that she was crazy. I mean, look what they were doing to her.

H I totally agree. For sure.

P So that's where it's fucked up.

R She wasn't surrounded by people who were helping her like a Lincoln Kirstein.

P Right! That's what I'm saying.

R I mean... Frederick Ashton was an advocate for her and continually restaged her works at the Royal Ballet. And so there were people who cared about her. But it wasn't the right person with the right resources who could give her the things that Balanchine was given in America.

After her death it was assumed that everything was lost. But then they basically went into her attic and it was all there.

H Was it nice and neat?

R I'm sure not.

P It looked like my closet?

R Probably. There was all this writing and rewriting, and all the drawings from Exter. And this part came as a huge surprise to me. So.... There was this period of time where Nijinska returned to the Ballet Russes and made *Les Noces*, *Les Biches*, *Le Train Bleu* etc.

P What does that mean? "The Trembler"?

R The Blue Train

P Ahhhhhh.

H Right. With the Chanel costumes.

R Nijinska left the Ballet Russes after Balanchine started making ballets there. So he became the next main choreographer, and she was like, "This is my chance. I'm going to put together my own group. We're going to do a season in London. Alexandra Exter is going to design all the costumes, and I'm going to make a whole bunch of dances." So... they made this whole series of dances and they were prevented from performing in London basically by Diaghilev who was like, "No." So, they were relegated to seaside towns, so not as many people saw it or cared about it and it didn't last for very long.

P That's why she was crazy. Because of that.

R Ya. And also her family had a history of mental

illness.

P Well ya. Nijinski was crazy.

R Many people in their family were mentally ill.

P Was she Polish or Russian?

R They're Polish.

P That's what I thought.

R So. They made these dances. Some of them were restaged like *Holy Etudes* and *Night on Bald Mountain*.

P I've never heard of these dances.

R Of course not. I couldn't believe the costumes. The Exter drawings were unisex costumes and unconventional silhouettes. That's how I arrived at wanting to invest more deeply in looking at these costumes which I assumed were lost. But I found out from Lynn last week that they do exist. And they're probably in the collection of the V&A in London.

P Wow.

R At at this point I kind of don't want to see them.

H Ya. Too far.

R All I know of them are from the drawings and that one photo I showed you of Nijinska from the waist up.

P Ya.

R But whatever.

H You're too far into the process.

R I'm interpreting from the drawings and that's more interesting for me. So, I wanted to go through the process of making these *Holy Etudes* Costumes that I thought were really beautiful. And then I thought it would be nice if we went through the process of building a short dance. Not based on excavating archival material, but based on our thoughts around our own practice, Nijinska and what these costumes look like, as opposed to being like... It's about this, and what we know of the dance is that this happens in it.

P I couldn't do that.

R We don't want to do that. I'm not interested in that. □



"They didn't really collaborate until they were in the west. Nevertheless, one can say that there was a structure of comedy: of intellectual and I think personal comedy that allowed for the two of them to see eye to eye. I personally think, in terms of collaboration, that that is one of the things that is most important, that people sense this and feel that they are on the same page, just as all of Cunningham's collaborations, in a way, are sort of similar."

-Excerpt from a phone conversation with Lynn Garafola in May of 2021

In this passage she is speaking to the nature of the relationship between Bronislava Nijnska and Alexandra Exter

Designing is a feeling

How do you explain why you chose this shade of yellow rather than that shade of yellow? It's a feeling. I'm not saying it's arbitrary. Feelings have context. There is color theory and color science and memory is so colored by color.

I gather ideas from things I see, things I hear, things I remember, things I find etc. There is not a set of processes that I follow to arrive at a drawing of a clothed figure. Sometimes it's incredibly fast, and other times it's frustrating and arduous. I rely on logic and organization to feel safe and directed in my life. I find logic by looking to the various containers the work will exist in. Where will it be performed? What is the aesthetic history of the dance style with which we are engaging? What are the choreographic influences? Is the music significant to the meaning? Who are the dancers? What color is the dancing surface? Etc... At times I do not have logic to ground me in the design process. Harriet is more comfortable in the absence of logic. We have found a form of balance in her willingness to break rules and my reliance on them. We are in a continual process of learning how to co-create.



"As a method through which performance can happen, costume embodies histories, states of being, and previously unimagined futures in the temporary space of the performance. It can guide movement, define place, and structure relationships, as well as of course reveal the character,"

-Donatella Barbieri, "Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture and the Body" 2017

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Costume design is not stuck being a secondary artform in the hierarchy of collaborative dance making. Sometimes costumes say very little and other times they demand a response.

In dance I have seen costumes do all of the things Barbieri is proposing. At times they fall short of achieving much, but the meeting of costume and dance can produce images of social possibility or social limitation. Dance is the language of the unlanguageable, and costume is the container of that transmission. The body moves the costume, and the costume shows us the movement.

Language is not my preferred mode of communication. As a child singer I was not concerned with text and was frequently told to enunciate. I was and continue to be more connected to the tone and movement of music. The words of a song are generally of no concern to me. I was drawn to dance for this reason, and designing costumes for dance is an extension of that same desire.

Wearing clothes is universal and the choices we make with them speak clearly to who we are, where we are, what we want, what we fear, and who we love. Costumes ask the audience to consider the dancer's clothes in relationship to their own desire and understanding of the body. My own understanding of the world has shifted through my work in costume de-

sign. I did not know the extent to which even very open minded people are so deeply entrenched in the gender binary until I was confronted by relentless resistance to costume ideas that step away from gender normativity.

Bronislava Nijinska and Alexandra Exter were thinking away from gender binaries 100 years ago.³ I was unaware that anyone in the ballet traditions of western concert dance was doing this so long ago. People are barely doing it now.

I recruited Linda Murray to help guide me through a research project in the Fall of 2020. In our first meeting I had questions about how to bring attention to the underserved artform of designing costumes for dance. I thought maybe the research would involve building a catalogue of twentieth century designers to lay the groundwork for a text that would house this group of people, but after Linda started bringing American and French feminist philosophers into the conversation, the topic of Alexandra Exter and Bronislava Nijinska came up quickly. I knew of Nijinska as the sister of Vaslav Nijinski and the choreographer of *Les Noces*, but I'd never heard of Alexandra Exter. After a little research it became clear that the focus of my inquiry would be uncovering how they accomplished bringing futurity and feminism to ballet. □





fig. 1- My version of the *Holy Etudes* (1925) head piece, based on the Exter drawings

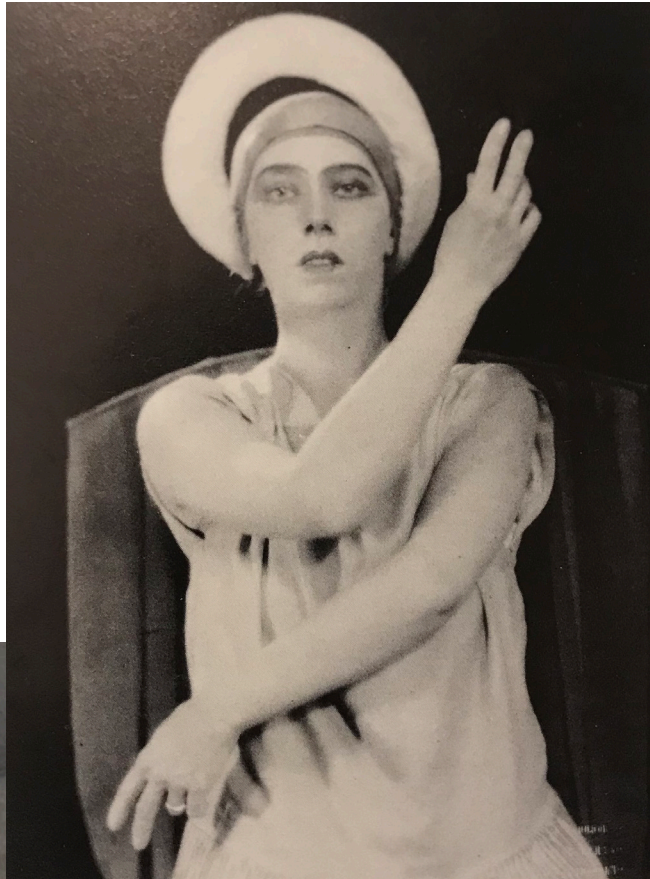


fig. 2 - *Holy Etudes*: Bronislava Nijinska, London, 1925. Photo: Claude Harris.

This project is both about and not really about Nijinska and Exter. How is it possible that in 1925 these women were making work that looks more socially progressive than dances you can see today on ballet stages? I'm speculating based on drawings, images and descriptions. I sadly can't see these dances, but in appearance they are engaged in what would have been transgressive acts of gender representation. I feel supported in my own work through this research. I want to continue expanding ideas in this lineage of feminist and queer art making, but it will be different because we live in a totally different world than the one they lived in.

I fixated on this idea that as long as I stayed close to Nijinska and Exter, something about my purpose would be revealed. I decided to get close to one of their dances by bringing one of Exter's designs back to life. I made a costume from Nijinska's 1925 work, *Holy Etudes*.⁴ It was a fascinating exercise in what it's like to interpret other people's designs. I have so rarely done that in my many years of costume making. I am always constructing my own designs. Being in the shoes of a production manager or cutter tasked with translating Alexandra Exter's drawing into three dimensions felt like an act of selflessness. I worked hard figuring out how to make these garments, but if they were to leave my

hands they would be evaluated as Exter's work. I felt pressure to honor a lost legacy while allowing other voices to weigh in with their interpretation of the drawings. □

There were questions about the skirt of the *Holy Etudes* costume. I thought the drawing indicated the skirt was to be made with gaps, like ribbons or fringe. Harriet thought that Exter was indicating pleats. In a group tableau with a rendering of the set it looks as if the skirts are knife pleated or sunburst pleated. In a conversation with Lynn Garafola she revealed to me that the costumes remain in existence and she saw them in exhibition in the 80s. She remembers them being softer than she expected them to be based on the drawings.

June 12, 2021

L When I actually saw those costumes I was astonished at how light they seemed.

R In color or in weight?

L In weight.

R Oh interesting. Do you mean in a photograph?

L ... No... Seeing the actual costumes. Because remember those costumes were shown at the Cooper Hewitt exhibition in the early 1980s.

R Really?

L Yes!! That's when everyone said, "Oh my GOD!" Because you had the photographs, you had the designs and there were the costumes.

R This is so confusing to me. I just assumed all of the physical costumes were gone.

L Many of the costumes are at the V&A now.

R Ah ha.

L I'm not sure if all the costumes are there, but they do collect costumes as you know.

R That's amazing to know. I've been operating under the assumption that these things were lost. It's been a fascinating exercise to interpret these costumes from Exter's very flat drawings which are amazing because they leave a lot of space for the imagination.

To hear that the fabric for the *Holy Etudes* costumes is light weight is interesting because you're right it looks very heavy in the drawings. But in my own creative choices I did also pick a light fabric. I don't know if you remember, but was the skirt of the costume a pleated fabric or was it some kind of ribbons or fringe or something?

L No... It was more pleated.

R OK.

L It was not Ribbons. Ribbons was not what those two women were about.

R Hahaha.

L They were not ribbons. □



Fig. 1 - Drawing by Alexandra Exter, Costume design for women in *Holy Etudes*, 1925. Library of Congress Website



Fig. 2 - I bought 100 yards of dove grey grosgrain ribbon only to be told, "Ribbons was not what these women were about" -Lynn Garafola

Alexandra Exter, Costume design for women and men in *Holy Etudes*, (1925)





Fig. 1 & 2 - I tried out the light weight crepe fabric for the top and the skirt. I decided to cut everything in rectangles to avoid fabric waste.



Questions for Designers with Karen Young

R Do you feel you are communicating explicit messages with your work?

K Sometimes. And it depends on the needs of the projects I work on. Sometimes it just needs to be something very simple. The choreographer wants my input but I don't need to make strong choices. I'm pretty tuned into the needs of the project.

R In projects where you feel you have more intellectual or emotional space, are there certain things that you value over other things in terms of trying to do something with costume design?

K Yes, but I have to say... I've noticed that people are not that open. Choreographers have a lot of limits which is why I spend a lot of time on my own creative practice to flesh out ideas and explore clothing and movement. So I feel like I have to explore ideas of my own so that they are at a place where I can figure out how to fit them into a dance project, because it takes a while to figure out where you're going with an idea.

R Are you ever trying to make cultural statements with your work?

K I don't know about cultural, but something that makes me crazy is when people will not let me use color. I can't use color in the costumes. So many of the choreographers I work with in New York are afraid of color and flamboyance, so I get limited pretty often. I sort of want to put in my contracts that I will not do clothes in grey or black and white anymore.

R What is your relationship to gender in costuming dance.

K You know, I think I kind of respond to where the choreographer is going with gender. A lot of people I work with it can be very unisex. But then some people are very fixed in... You know... I think that's often something I ask to begin with. I'm always open with whatever. If the choreographer is open to pushing things with aesthetics or gender, I'm happy to go there. But I'm always trying to feel

things out when I start a project.

R Do you feel celebrated as a costume designer?

K Ya. I do, I do. Do you?

R Ya. In fact sometimes I feel like I've had more than my fair share of attention. But at the same time there are moments when something will happen where I'm thrust back into feeling misunderstood or disregarded.

K Ya, definitely. That's often there. I'll never forget right after 9/11 I picked up some wardrobe work at City Center in New York to make some money, and I'll never forget the way the performers treated me when I was just their wardrobe person compared to the way they treated me when I was their designer. It was so different.

I've always tried to treat everyone as equals and be respectful to everyone, and it was really shocking to me that when you're washing the clothes you're the help. But when you do costumes you can also wash the clothes to make the work happen. It's not a big deal. But how I was treated on that job was when I absorbed what I told you about how people still treat this as women's work. I've always been tuned into people not respecting the seamstresses because they are women. And often they are women in third world countries not being paid very much. I'm always aware and trying to bring up the skill it takes, and what it is to make clothes.

R Do you feel respected as a costume designer?

K I do, I do. I think when I was in my late 20s early 30s when I was starting out I didn't feel so respected. I still run into this every now and then but at that time there were still people in dance and theater who expected stuff to happen for nothing. But otherwise, in general I definitely feel respected. I feel like with experience I quickly gained a lot of respect.

R Do you feel exploited as a costume designer?

K I don't know. I'm not sure? Do you?

R Not so much anymore. I think people come into conversation with us understanding what we've

done before so there is a level of respect. But I do feel like the system of artistic hierarchy exploits costume designers.

K Meaning?

R Well... I was reading this article about the exploitation of costume designers in film whose intellectual property gets used and they receive nothing.

K I know, and they've created an image that explodes.

R I don't know the breakdown of how all the collaborators are paid. I know that lighting designers are also not paid much but I do think there is an expectation that costume designers will work for whatever.

K Ya. Ya. I think so. Gosh. I'm not sure what to say. Do I feel exploited?

R Well I guess it's a choice. You can choose to be exploited at a certain point.

K It's true. I know sometimes something will come up where I choose to help someone else and I'm fine with that because I know if I help them it will come back to me. So... I don't often feel exploited. It's been a while. But I do feel taken for granted.

R Do you feel understood as a costume designer?

K I have a separate creative artistic practice, and when I work with people I kind of have to put that work aside and create something that works for them and their needs. So in that respect maybe I don't feel understood, but that's ok because I look to my costume jobs as serving a certain need. I don't expect them to satisfy everything for me artistically.

R Is the scope of your goals with design beyond the aesthetic? If so, what are some things you are trying to do with design?

K I'm very into and I did this a lot early on... but exploring clothing and movement, which is what you do. Just seeing what could happen with clothing and movement. That's why I've been setting aside time in recent years for my own personal practice.

R It's helpful to hear you say that you have to channel your creative self into this personal practice be-

cause you know that the work won't fulfill that.

K Ya. I saw that though some people were open to it, I needed to make a living. And the stuff you do to make a living had to be a bit more mainstream and I found a way to do it well. So I realized I needed to spend my personal energy exploring clothing and movement on my own.

R What is the production you are most proud of?

K Some of the work I do that's the most meaningful to me is the work I do in the art world. I've had some relationships with visual artists where I feel like the role of the clothing is really valued.

R So... not dance.

K Ya... Even though I make a living at dance. With video artists like Eve Sussman and Mathew Barney there is an ongoing creative dialogue and you spend time on work. I've seen this with choreographers like Pam Tanowitz and Kyle Abraham, but in the art world they are really trying to explore something.

R What is a production you greatly admire?

K In a general sense all of the Pina Bausch performances I saw in the early 90s when I moved to New York at BAM with all the amazing sets and production design. And the other stuff that blew me away was a lot of Butoh performances that I just love aesthetically like Kazuo Ohno.

R That makes a lot of sense when I think about your work. I think those references have really seeped in.

K Oh ya. You're right. You're right

R Well, we like what we like. □



Fittings for Pam Tanowitz' *Watermark* (2021) in Melbourne in March.

April 24, 2021

Last night I went to the movies in NYC for the first time since before. My friend Scott asked an amazing question while we were standing in the lobby of Film Forum.

"What happens in a fitting?"

It seems like a simple question, but as I started explaining the various tasks that occur in a fitting, I realized that this topic is a whole book.

"My Life in the Fitting Room: Navigating Disordered Minds."



What happens in a fitting? Fittings take on many forms. I've had fittings with dancers in dance studios, hallways, public bathrooms, cafes, my apartment, my aunt's house, countless dancer's homes, parks, and under the best circumstances in the Reid & Harriet studio or in a proper fitting room.

A fitting room is a curtained off area or a room in a costume shop where there is usually one mirrored wall, and racks for hanging costumes that await a body. There is often something soft to stand on, like a rug or a cushioned mat, to protect the dancer's bare feet. There will be an assortment of small tables with boxes of safety pins, marking chalk and various other pens and pencils for note taking and drawing on fabric. There is usually a chair or two for waiting around between fittings and New York City Ballet has a sofa in one of the 2 side by side fitting rooms where you can lounge under a rack of upside down tutus when a dancer cancels and you have an hour to kill between fittings. New York City Ballet also has track lighting that faces away from the mir-

ror and toward the dancer to imitate stage lights. That way you can see if the flecks of metallic in the grey fabric you chose will show. They won't. They never do. Broad strokes are key in costume design. Sometimes you have to learn the hard way. There is almost never a window. This is a private place.

Dancers are notified that they will be needed in fittings on the company schedule. There is usually a little side area on the excel spreadsheet that is designated for fittings. I was very irresponsible about remembering fittings when I was in ballet companies. I generally had to be hunted down by costume shop staff or reminded by another dancer that I was late to or had missed a fitting entirely. It's not because I dreaded fittings. I actually liked them. They were a welcome break from the abusive rehearsal studio, and I would often stay long after the actual fitting was over to ask questions and avoid going back to rehearsal. The costume shop was clearly a much more civilized place than the dance studio. Cos-

tume shops are frequently an assemblage of obsessive compulsive women who either work silently at their stations or gossip about dancers in the company. There is almost never verbal abuse or inappropriate behavior in the costume shop. It's an entirely different vibe from the sweaty infantilizing culture of the dance studio just next door or just downstairs.

So, now that you can sort of visualize the space, this is a generic rundown of what happens.

- The dancer enters the shop usually slightly sweaty from rehearsal or sleepy from lunch.
- The cutter who is responsible for their costume joins them in the fitting room and helps them into the costume. At this point we (the designers) are patiently waiting outside the fitting room. We sometimes pass the time by chatting with a costume shop manager or looking at some other costumes that we didn't design.
- After 2 minutes or so we are invited into the room.
- The dancer usually gives you a "what do you think?" Look through the mirror.
- This is when you have to cut through the tension in the room coming from the cutter and the dancer and maybe even the costume shop manager who are all waiting to see if you like it. You do this by addressing things that need changing.
- We address the neck line, the hem lengths, the volumes, the proportions, the construction etc.
- The cutter follows closely with safety pins or other forms of marking implements taking note of the corrections and pinning out fabric where it is not wanted.
- Then we ask the dancer to move around.

We want to see how the costumes move and if they function well.

-At that point there is generally a discussion about the immediate future of the costume. What steps will be taken to correct it and what state it should be in for the next fitting. Photos are taken from multiple angles and we leave the room so the cutter can help the dancer out of the costume.

And there you have it. A great deal of energy gets leached out during the part where everyone is waiting for you to make decisions on the spot.

I sometimes forget that a day of fittings is incredibly exhausting because it involves very little moving around, though it is mentally and emotionally draining.

The emotional drain is the most interesting part of the whole affair. Dancers, designers, cutters, and management all have to cooperate and agree at a million junctures on the journey to a finished costume.

Someone is bound to be upset along the way. Designers get sad when they are told they cannot use the fabrics they originally wanted. Management gets furious when designers ask to make a big revision late in the process. Cutters get upset when they've constructed the garment in the way that the designer drew it but it somehow "feels" wrong. And dancers are upset because they are entering into the room with years of emotional trauma and disordered thinking about their own body which is the subject of extreme scrutiny in a costume fitting.

Dancers will let you know when they don't like the costume. They won't say it. That

would be rude. They slouch and pout and squirm and pull at the costume as if it is irritating their skin. This generally happens with more experienced dancers who have reached their limit of being skilled lab rats for choreographers and designers. And it's OK. It's really hard to verbally express concern, dislike, and discomfort when you've never been invited to participate in a discussion about what will be happening to your body.

We once tried to gender queer a costume by putting a male dancer in what would normally be a woman's leotard and we were met with an immediate outburst of straight male insecurity. It was painful to watch and we immediately shifted course so that this dancer would not have a complete nervous breakdown. It's usually not worth it to torture a dancer into something that makes them feel ugly or scared or sad. It's hard to dance in a costume that you don't believe in.

Some dancers will create problems that don't exist because it shifts the power dynamic. It is one time where how they feel will have an effect. There is one famous dancer who does this regularly, seemingly to torture the people who make her clothes. Her performance of discomfort in fittings is iconic. She will become fitful over the tightness of a leotard leg or the width of a strap. She gets away with it because of her star status, and I think it gives her a sense of control in a field where her career is still controlled by artistic management.

Dancers are generally polite in fittings. They tiredly gaze at their almost nude reflection while a team of people make decisions re-

garding the next to nothing garment on their body. Sometimes that will involve long periods of standing still while we draw lines onto their body to indicate a seam line or the placement of a print. The only thing separating the pen and our hands from their bodies is a sheath of Lycra or stretch mesh. I feel very sensitive to this especially when I have to draw over a breast or a genital. I ask permission and generally apologize for such actions before they happen. It's important to warn someone before you draw on their balls.

I think people imagine that fittings are a sexy affair. They almost never are. They are sometimes fun, but generally it's all business. When you have ten to fifteen minutes to shape your work and direct multiple minds helping to execute this kind of editing, there really isn't much time for fun and flirting. I was once on my own for a fitting with Roberto Bolle, and though I will never forget safety pinning lycra out of the very upper part of his tights inseam, it was not a sexy moment. I struggled to pinch out fabric from very close to his crotch because his thigh flesh was rock hard and made grasping the slippery fabric close to impossible. The reference photos would elude to it having been a far less embarrassing experience than it actually was.

Things generally go to plan, but on occasion fittings are full chaos. Those are the ones I remember most. The first time we worked with the shop of a famous American ballet company that I won't name, we were happy to walk into a space that looked very professionally managed. The workshop was immaculate and the construction technicians were in lab coats. It was a little over the top, but it seemed like we were in good hands.

The shop manager was beyond dramatic. She brought herself to tears recounting past projects and describing her extensive collection of sewing machines.

The first fitting for the new work was scheduled for several dancers. This is unusual but we were happy to accommodate the requests of an unfamiliar shop. We were suddenly confronted with six dancers dressed in varying levels of horrible. It was a really scary moment for Harriet and me. It was the first time we had worked with this company and we were surrounded by the choreographer, the shop manager, various costume technicians and six principal dancers dressed in some frightening home sewing disaster. Where to begin?! One very kind dancer looked across to her fellow female principal and said, "Oooo... you look amazing!", to which I immediately said "No." To be confronted by one badly executed costume is scary, so to be looking at six at once was a total nightmare. We had to demonstrate the urgency of our concern without being rude, while also reassuring the choreographer that this was not how the costumes would look.

This was not the last confusing fitting we would have for this production. What are very simple symmetrical designs would be presented at second fittings with glaring asymmetries, and our last round of fittings for this large group dance was essentially a cattle call. We were stationed in the green room of some strange theater, and dancers were lined up and paraded in front of us for a final round of corrections. It was truly crazy and I have a headache just thinking about it.

There are many more stories to tell of strange and chaotic fittings, but the vast majority have been rote and forgettable. I have learned a lot of the secrets of dance construction from cutters and shop managers during my time in fittings, but mostly I've learned about navigating groups of people feeling vulnerable for different reasons all at once. That is the real work of a fitting. A day of fittings is a physically and mentally taxing affair. I try to keep myself from letting it be emotionally taxing, but that is usually unavoidable. Fittings are a demonstration of care for all parties involved. Caring for the people who've given their time and skill to bring the designs to life, caring for the person wearing that garment, and caring for Harriet, the work and myself. □



In a fitting with Sara Mearns and Harriet Jung for Justin Peck's *Bright* (2018) at New York City Ballet

Harriet is in the middle of a design project with a ballet choreographer. We occasionally take on projects on our own, which can feel a little weird, but as much as we have woven our voices together to become Reid & Harriet Design, we do still exist as individuals.

I saw some images of the one legged unitards Harriet is working on for this piece. I sent her words of praise via Instagram and we talked through some construction issues together. One of the dancers is a famous straight male principal dancer from a big ballet company who has put up a fuss over our costumes in the past. Time has not opened up this person's ideas about gender it would seem.

July 20, 2021

(Names of dancers have been changed)

R I had this conversation with Karen Young the other day where she was basically like, "Choreographers are really resistant to new ideas, so I've poured my energy into things that matter to me. So in terms of dance costuming work I'm not going to put up a fight. I'm just going to be involved in the conversation and do what makes the most sense for them." I thought, that seems like a very zen approach to the whole thing... but unfortunately for me or for us it really is the practice we pour our energy into.

H Ya. It is. It's our main thing. It's where we express thoughts and feelings.

R After that conversation I did think about this situation with Cody.

H My Cody?

R Ya.

H Ya. He's refusing.

R Right, and then I thought about that thing with Damien and the Camisole leotard and I remember him being so visibly upset, and I thought back to times when I've had to wear certain costumes that have made me feel physically vulnerable. Where people have been like "you have to wear these harem pants and no top" and I feel like, "I hate this. This makes me

so uncomfortable. I don't want to wear this at all." And so in a way it's a reverse of what happened with Damien and what is happening with Cody... When those things were happening to me it felt like this kind of heterosexual aggression towards me. I don't want to be forced into this situation... and even though with Cody and Damien it's pushing against progress it doesn't make it any less real that they feel uncomfortable.

H Oh ya... It's not that it's not real. It's that they are not exploring why they feel that way. Because why they feel that way is kind of steeped in heteronormative, misogynistic toxic masculinity.

R Right.

H But instead they get to be like "I refuse to do that" and they get away with it. There's no introspection about "Why do I feel this way?" You were kind of doing that. The reason you didn't want to wear the thing was because it was regressive.

R I know. It is a different situation. But the physical sensation....

H Their feelings are so real.

R Ya. It's real. To be in that room with Damien I remember being like. "Oh, of course we're not going to make you wear this. It's too upsetting."

H Ya... he was like, "I will not."

R What is going to happen with Cody?

H I already talked with the choreographer and she was like "I've learned in the past that when you push back with Cody it creates a terrible process so it's not worth it."

R Ya.... I was also thinking about the Cody situation.... And this should be taken with a grain of salt because Cody is engaging in something that is backwards. But dancers, in the same way that we don't have a voice, almost never have a voice in controlling how they get to appear on stage. There's so much that happens to them that they have no control over. So in that way I also understand a situation where Cody is like "I. Dont. Want. To. Wear. This. Costume."

H Right.... The thing is though, he does have a lot of say. He's not someone who's dealt with lots of oppression. People weren't like, "SI-

LENCE!"

R Ya. He hasn't been super restricted his whole life.

H Right. And it's like, here we go again. The same old story. A white man is like "I don't wanna do that," and everyone gets in line because we don't wanna fight this.

R Right Right Right.... Interesting. It's really complicated.

H Oh ya. Context matters right? Why you felt bad, Why Damien felt bad. Why Cody feels bad. Who is refusing to do what depends on other things surrounding the situation.

R Ughhhhh. What are you gonna do for Cody?

H I'm rethinking right now, but I'm not letting go of the idea because the choreographer and I really love it.

R You should put him in a black handed, hooded, footed unitard and make sure the whole space is black.

H hahahahhah. Just him by himself.

R To disappear him.

H Ya... that's really good. Trust me I already considered a subversive way of being mean about this and pushing back. But no. I'm already over it. Moving on to make this look fun and interesting. □

May 12, 2021

I had a dream that I was rooming with David Hallberg in a high rise hotel and then I jumped off the roof or out of a window and was swept around by the wind. I moved so fast around some Australian city. I remember asking David the name of the city but he was half asleep and I couldn't understand what he was saying.

Anyways, I flew around and descended until I landed and rolled softly like a dancer. I got up and was fine.

I then walked back to the hotel through the early morning commuters.

March 5 2021

(In Australian Quarantine Hotel)

I just did ballet class.

It's not in me at the moment.

It may never be.

I'll take ballet again, I may never revive the torque
that used to be in me.

The ability to spiral and lift and swing out.

I can think it and see it when I watch others but I
can't feel it in myself in action anymore.

July 13, 2021

The performance is over. Harriet and I came up with something beautiful for the show at Bard. Translucent bright yellow and blue jumpsuits. They are all the same shape. We opted to not underdress the jumpsuit beyond nude colored bras and trunks. Above the waist they are sideless so you can see the flesh of the dancer's rib cages. It felt right to have some skin for an outdoor summer dance.

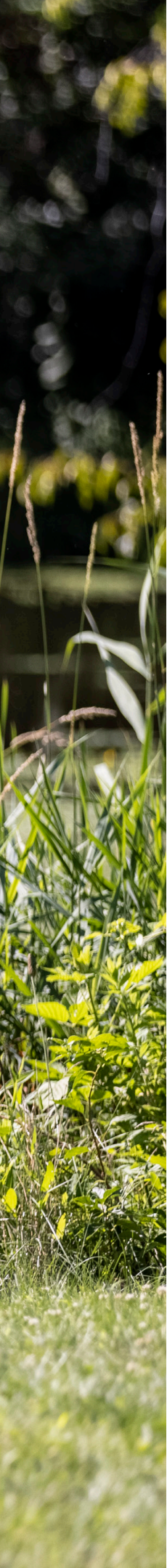
I wasn't able to see the show but last night I looked through photographs of the performance. I felt proud and I felt love for this group of dancers I know and care for. Even in images I felt moved by their performance.

The *New York Times* review was glowing and effusive towards the choreography, music and performers. The critic went so far as to say "I can think of few dance experiences as thrilling as this one since the pandemic began." We were not mentioned. The costumes were described by color only.

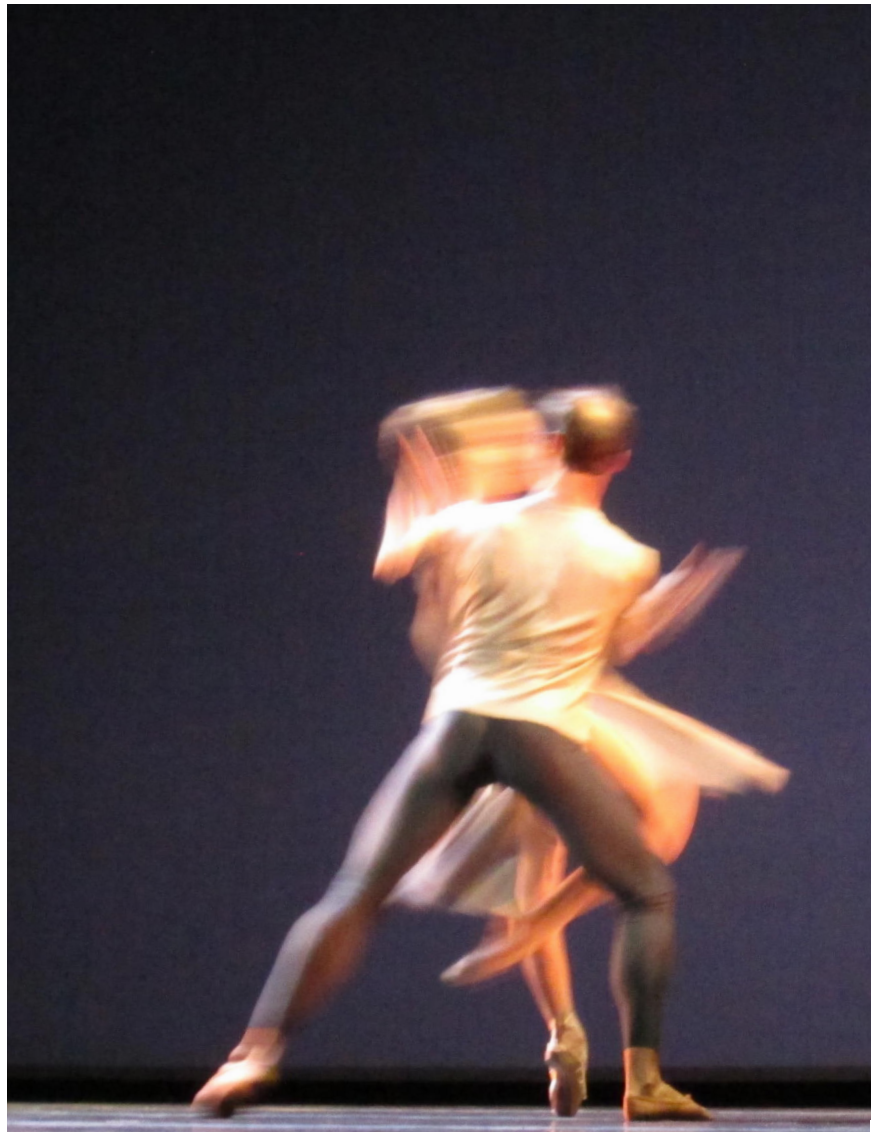
Several weeks ago I pulled quotes from the many times I've been mentioned in the *Times* for a portfolio document. These mentions are rarely more than a sentence. That's Ok. I don't expect dance writers to engage deeply with costume design. However, costumes are the entryway between the public and the body. They transmit their messages in time and space with the dance. Not alongside it, but literally wrapped around it. When costumes are not mentioned in a review it's not because they have not been seen and considered. It is a calculated omission. Reviews may or may not "matter," but to disappear us from the history of this work by not writing our names is a force that propels me to say more, and learn more.







Wendy Whelan and Tiler Angle rehearsing Christopher Wheeldon's *5 Movements, 3 Repeats* at City Center in 2012



"One must not begin a dance by conceiving it's form, and then forcing movement into this predetermined (improper lifeless) form"

-Bronislava Nijinska from *On movement and the School of Movement*



for the two female dancers out of a variety of cotton and rayon jerseys. All of these choices were bad, but they were based on how beautiful the fabric looked up close. What I did not know then, is that I have to look at everything as if I am in the audience. The men's tops had huge holes under the arms and through the upper back by the time they got back to New York from Colorado and the women's costumes never really sat beautifully on their bodies. Wendy had tied a scrap of jersey around her waist as some gesture of a skirt for the performances to distract from the strange construction of the leotard.

Everything had to be changed for the New York City Premiere at Fall for Dance. I chose beautiful slippery rayon knits to make new tops for the men and a dress for Wendy. In the dress rehearsal at City Center I watched all of the intricate partnering become impossible because the fabric of Wendy's dress had no traction with her leotard underneath, and paired with her partner's slippery sleeves they didn't stand a chance. Wendy patiently stood in the wardrobe room on the second floor with me for a long while as I cut the top off of her dress and pinned the skirt onto her leotard to shape a flattering waistline. I sewed the skirt into place once Wendy had returned to her dressing room and prayed for this whole thing to come to an end without further mishap.

I don't know why, but both Wendy and Christopher continued hiring me. They were patient and understanding through the whole process. I'm very moved by their generosity when I think back on that harrowing job. □

As a young designer I wasted a lot of time manipulating fabric into shapes it resisted. On more than one occasion costumes came back to me shredded because the fabric could not accommodate the movement. My first job after graduating from FIT was a Vail Dance Festival commission for Christopher Wheeldon. He was creating a dance for Martha Graham principal dancer, Feng Yi Sheu⁵, and three leading dancers of New York City Ballet including Wendy Whelan. It was by far the highest profile clients I had worked with up until then.

I found a beautiful raw silk fabric in a straw color and a sage color. The weave was very open, and I thought it would make beautiful tops for the men. I opted to make leotards

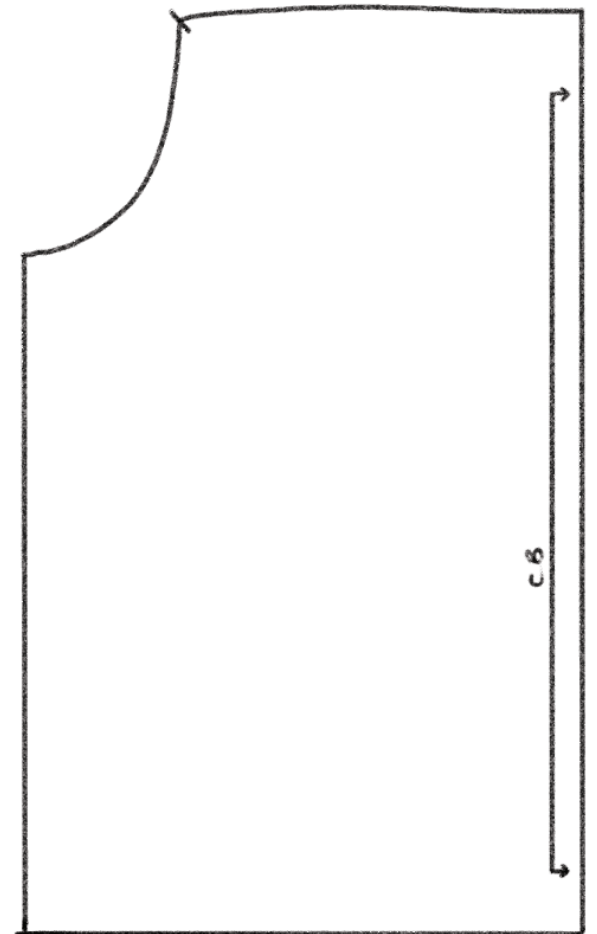
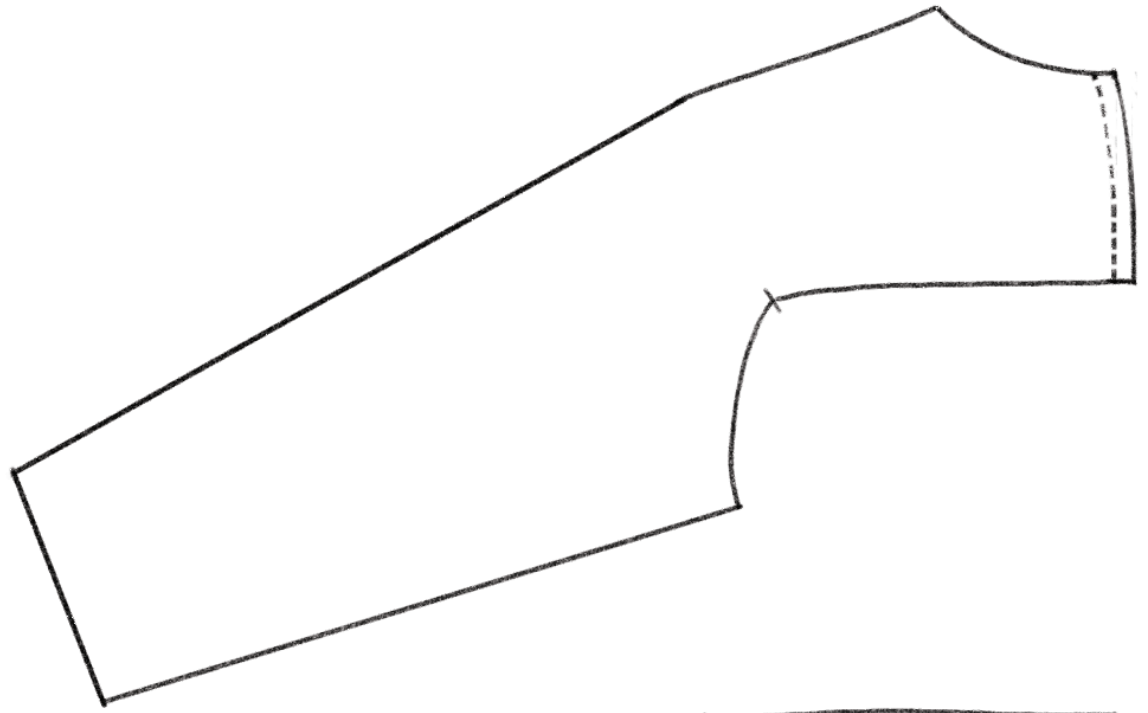
Sometimes I'll lay in bed and visualize how I'm going to put a garment together. Usually the broad strokes of construction are pretty straight forward, but occasionally there is a small area that poses a puzzle that is almost impossible to imagine through without actually holding the materials. I'll often fall asleep before I can unlock the 3 dimensional fabric conundrum that awaits me the following day. I frequently see the solution on my walk and subway ride to the studio. It takes about 20 minutes to get from my apartment to my studio at Abrons Arts Center. In that 20 minutes I can do anything. The tasks ahead of me feel possible and I can imagine being wildly productive. The trip back home is frequently spent adjusting expectations and altering plans based on the day's lack of productivity.

Making clothes can take a very long time. Especially when done well. Look at your clothes. Even your inexpensive clothes that were certainly produced in a mega factory somewhere in Asia are expertly constructed. They know what they are doing. Large production systems produce complicated

garments where nearly every stitch is perfect and garment consistency is astonishing. This makes the task of making clothes all the more frustrating. The many hours spent drafting patterns, cutting samples and stitching pieces together only to have to make adjustments several times before the proportions and cut are right, can feel maddeningly arduous. I often think.... "Why bother?! Go to Uniqlo and get a really decent blouse or trousers for \$25."

But I know why I have to do it. I know why I repeat the process again and again. With enough care and enough time, I can bring volume to something flat. The first time I watched a draping teacher shape a sleeve cap and fit it into an arms eye, I gasped. It was astonishing to me. It was like magic watching a flat piece of muslin go through a series of manipulations and suddenly take on the shape of a shoulder. Sleeves remain one of the greatest wonders of clothing construction for me. There are so many ways a sleeve can join the body of a garment, and when it's a beautiful and well executed union it is a thing of wonder.

As I waited in line at the grocery store a few days ago I saw a very tall woman in a long shearling coat. The coat had a seam running across the shoulder blades and then turned down at the arm joint and curved down to create a standard under arm curve. The yoke fabric that ran across the upper back extended into the sleeve with no seam to interrupt it at the shoulder. This semi mounted sleeve construction turned on the pattern maker in me and the rest of the way home I drew the pattern for that coat in my head until I felt I had unlocked its mysteries. □



February 17, 2021

I'm starting to figure out how to collate my desires and what is expected of me.

Is anything expected of me?

I'm not really sure right now.

It's easier when there are tasks and expectations to complete things.

To venture out into an open sea of creative possibility is oddly crippling.

We looked at Jack Halberstam talking about Wildness⁶ and read through *Where the Wild Things Are* (1984) in Jesse Zaritt's class recently.

Max may have felt the same way I'm feeling at the moment.

He got to the land of the wild things and immediately demanded order and established a hierarchy.

He couldn't even let a land of his own imagining exist in the unknown. Exist in queerness.

I still can't believe that in the early 2000s his costumes from Kent Stowell's *Nutcracker* at Pacific Northwest Ballet were still allowed. It's outrageous.

Kent Stowell choreographed a production of "The Nutcracker" at Pacific Northwest Ballet in 1983 with Sets and costumes by Maurice Sendak. The Ballet ran annually until 2014 when it was replaced by George Balanchine's version with sets and costumes by another children's book author and illustrator, Ian Falconer. The Stowell / Sendak production was full of problematic racist cliches. In my time as a trainee at Pacific Northwest Ballet I played a role in the second act of the ballet called "Slaves." I was quite literally wearing a brown hooded unitard intended to make me look mostly nude, with my face painted a shade of brown to match the unitard. My job was to carry around a woman dressed as a pea-

cock in a large cage.

I was 19 years old and hoping to be hired into the main company. I was not really thinking about culture and politics and the implications of this crazy costume. I raised no objection to the costume. I was operating in a system where objection was not an option, and for that reason I didn't digest how incredibly problematic the whole situation was. I struggle to know how to language my experience with this memory. When I see photos of the production I am embarrassed and shocked. I feel sad for a much younger me who was so desperate for validation, and I feel terrible for the people this undoubtedly confused and hurt. □

July 9, 2021

Harriet and I quit a job yesterday. We decided to “amicably disengage” from the project. I think that was the language I used in the email. Harriet said I should be a politician after she read that. I wrote the draft for her to review following our conversation to discuss why it would be degrading and impossible to continue doing this job. The choreographer offered to send us a sketch of a leotard leg line to explain what she meant by her already aggravatingly precise verbal description. She also pointed at some grey metallic jersey we chose to evoke the moon and said, “This isn’t the color of the moon”. She then offered up a suggestion for an entirely different design than the one the dancer was wearing in a fitting for a show that happens in two weeks.

Not the color of the moon



In 2013 I designed a piece for Pontus Lidberg Dance called "Stream." Oregon Ballet Theater was producing the piece and I arrived two weeks prior to the premiere to oversee fittings and finishing. The costume shop is in the basement of the dance center and has windows to a hallway, but none to the outside world. The costume staff had done prep work prior to my arrival. They hired in a freelance cutter from Seattle named Janet Lind. Cutter is a strange name for a job that involves translating a drawing into a garment. Clothing engineer is probably a more fitting title for this job, and the quality of this person's work can make or break a design.

Janet is an exceptional cutter. I had seen photographs of a sample she had mocked up in scrap fabric and was initially nervous if these costumes were going to be possible. In hindsight, the designs were somewhat impractical for dance and very tricky to construct in a way that would keep them laying beautifully in movement.

The pants were overlaid by a two piece wrap skirt that crossed over itself in the front and back. They were made of silk chiffon. Chiffon is a very light translucent fabric that is fluid, and strong but difficult to cut

because the very open weave has a life of its own.

The tops were a sort of Möbius strip, where straps extending over the shoulders, crisscrossed over and down the back and then wrapped back to the front to seamlessly rejoin over the abdomen. Those were made of silk organza. Organza is even more translucent, and has a very light crispness. It's like very lightweight tracing paper but less crinkly. It is also tricky to cut because the fibers tend to be very wobbly.



Once the silks were dyed to the five watery colors I had chosen, Janet and her team of assistants began carefully cutting the pattern pieces. Prior to this job, New York City Ballet was the only other work I had done with a designated costume production team. All of the other work I was making was coming out of my apartment.

At New York City Ballet we are not so close to the actual making of the clothes. We are brought in for scheduled fittings where we consult with the cutters, but when I was in Oregon my only job for two weeks was to assist this group of women towards materializing my designs. I learned so much from this experience. They shared how to draw patterns onto organza without disrupting

the grain. Janet showed me that transparent fabrics require nude colored interfacing in places like waistbands so that you avoid interrupting the flow of color. They let me copy their one piece unitard pattern which is a bizarre amoeba looking thing that has been passed from ballet cutter to ballet cutter. Oregon ballet Theaters' pattern had come from Seattle, and theirs had likely come from New York or Seattle. And so from Oregon to me this unitard pattern lives on over time and space.

The costumes were exquisite once cut in the silks. The ten dancers had first and second fittings and as the premiere was fast approaching the ten costumes were nearly done but required finishing. Janet called in her crew for overtime work on a Saturday to accomplish what seems very simple but is actually a tedious and time consuming task. All of the pants required three separate sets of closures. I was shocked at all the snaps, hooks & bars and trouser hooks needed to keep these feather weight pants on.

Labels were sewn in and hems were secured to prevent fraying. I sat at Janet's table for several hours that Saturday sewing on trouser hooks and snaps while we talked. I am always looking to recreate the experience I had in Portland. I was the student to this group of expert women and they were allowing me to both guide and work alongside them. We were together in the basement waxing our threads, hand sewing tiny pieces of metal onto silk, telling stories and listening to the sound of students jumping above us. □





My mother's name is Honey Wolters

She values the quality of a pair of stockings or bed sheets over fitness, and savings accounts. In phone conversations I have listened to her extoll the virtues of the blank pages at the end of old atlases, and how this is the only paper that can be seamlessly decoupage'd onto round forms. I have had long conversations with her about the quality of Belgian loafers and the unparalleled perfection of Ted Meuling earrings and silver chains from Mexico.

She sleeps on a sofa in Brooks Brothers menswear pajamas or vintage painting smocks from France. Her nails are generally painted a grey shade of mauve or periwinkle depending on what concoction she has blended from her collection of polishes. In recent years she has taken to using white mascara so it looks like her eyelashes are frozen.

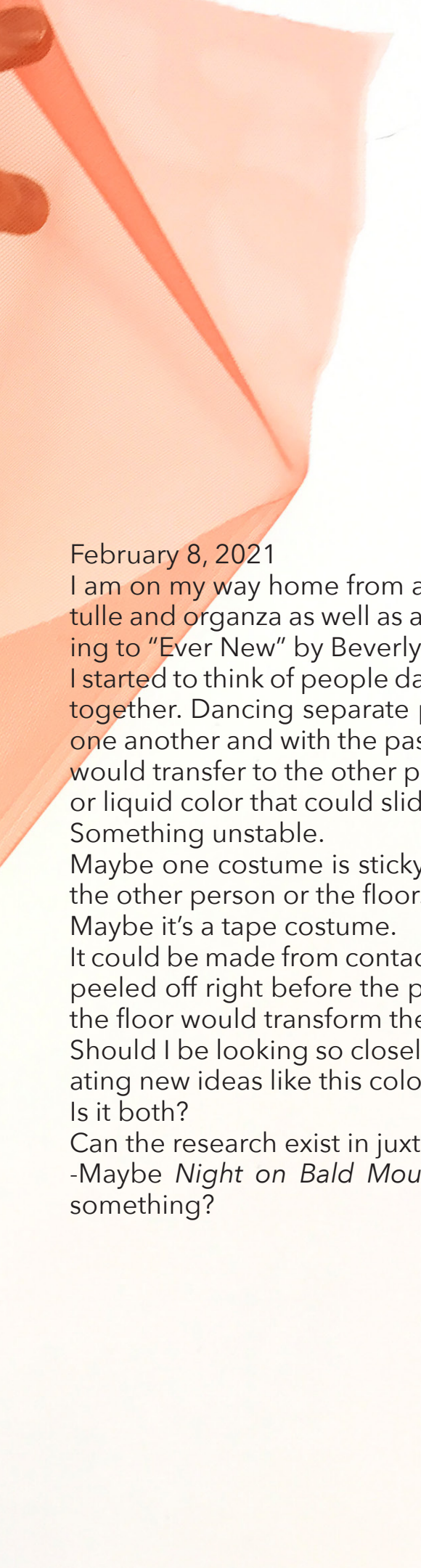
It is these peculiarities and her attention paid to craft and beauty that is at the heart of my own desire. My mother is not limited by societal expectation. Her concerns are with what is right rather than what is normal. This is regarding both matters of aesthetics and behavior. I'm trying, like my mother, to make choices that are both beautiful and right.

June 12, 2021

I saw the Trisha Brown Dance Company at Wave Hill. It was also an instance where I think, if the dance is good enough, costumes become pointless. The Trisha Brown company was wearing bluish slate colored old navy T-shirts and matching cotton drawstring pants. It's a real nothing costume. It's also perfect in its simplicity. So, maybe it's not nothing. The restraint of the design gives it power. And wow are the dances heaven. They are perfect as they are.





A piece of orange fabric, possibly tulle or organza, is draped in the upper left corner of the page. It has several small, dark, circular sequins or beads attached to it. The fabric is partially folded, creating a sense of depth and texture.

February 8, 2021

I am on my way home from a trip up to B&J ⁷to look at orange tulle and organza as well as a book return to Linda. I was listening to "Ever New" by Beverly Glenn Copeland⁸.

I started to think of people dancing repetitiously and very close together. Dancing separate phrases but rubbing as they pass one another and with the passings the color on their costumes would transfer to the other person.... Either powdered color... or liquid color that could slide.

Something unstable.

Maybe one costume is sticky and pulls sequins or feathers off the other person or the floor.

Maybe it's a tape costume.

It could be made from contact paper and the backing could be peeled off right before the performance and then the stuff on the floor would transform the costume.

Should I be looking so closely at old stuff or should I be generating new ideas like this color tape stuff?

Is it both?

Can the research exist in juxtaposition to new stuff?

-Maybe *Night on Bald Mountain*⁹ (1925) is a companion to something?

Images

- Front and Back Cover - Photo by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 3: Film Still from a short film by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 11: Exter, Alexandra. Holy Etudes 1. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200154561/>.
- pg. 14: Film still from a short film by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 16: Photo of Reid Bartelme by Kersten Jauer
- pg. 18-19: Maggie Cloud and Burr Johnson in Burr Johnson's *Tropopause* (2018). Wearing costumes by Harriet Jung and Reid Bartelme. Photo by Kersten Jauer
- pg. 20: Fig. 1 Photo by Reid Bartelme
Fig. 2 *Holy Etudes*: Bronislava Nijinska, London, 1925. Photo: Claude Harris.
- pg. 23: Fig 1 Exter, Alexandra. Holy Etudes 2. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200154577/>.
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- pg. 24: Exter, Alexandra. Holy Etudes 3. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200154643/>.
- pg. 25: Fig. 1&2 Film stills from a short film by Reid Bartelme
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- pg. 33: Photo by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 39-40: Photo by Maria Baranova of Pam Tanowitz Dance in *I was Trying to Hear the Echo of a Better Day* (2021)
dancers (left to right) pg. 39: Christine Flores, Melissa Toogood, Lindsey Jones. pg 40: Jason Collins & Victor Lozano
- pg. 42-43: Photo by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 45: Sketch by Reid Bartelme
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- pg. 50: Costume Sketch for Pontus Lidberg's *Stream* (2014) by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 51: Photo by Reid Bartelme
- pg. 52: Photo of Honey Wolters. Photographer unknown
- pg. 55: Cecily Campbell, Amanda Kmett Pendry and Patrick McGrath in Trisha Brown's *Solo Olos* (1976).Credit...loulex for The New York Times
- pg. 56-57: Photo by Reid Bartelme

Endnotes

1 Theatre Chorégraphique Nijinska came to my attention in the Nancy Van Norman Bayer, *Bronislava Nijinska, A Dancer's Legacy* (1986). There is a whole chapter about this period of collaboration between Aleandra Exter and Bronislava Nijinska starting on pg. 49.

2 Andrea Salvatore is the Associate Director of The Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU in New York City.

3 I first encountered this idea when reading Lynn Garafola's essay from *The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 29, no. 2 (Winter) , "An Amazon of the Avant-Garde Bronislava Nijinska in Revolutionary Russia"(2011).

4 Holy Etudes is one of the 6 works described in the chapter on Theatre Chorégraphique Nijinska in Van Norman Bayer's, *Bronislava Nijinska, A Dancer's Legacy* (1986).

5 Feng Yi Sheu was a principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company who continues to dance as a freelance performer.

6 This was a talk called *Jack Halberstam Wild Things: An Aesthetics of Bewilderment* (2020) on the RIBOCA (Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art) Youtube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la5CmrzTqw4>.

7 B&J Fabrics is a high end fabric retailer on the corner of 38th street and 7th Avenue. They have devised a system for making fabric browsing very easy, and all of their fabrics can be reordered.

8 *Ever New* is a track from Beverly Glenn-Copeland's album, *Keyboard Fantasies* (1986) .

9 Like *Holy Etudes*, *Night on Bald Mountain* (1925) is another Nijinska / Exter collaboration from Theatre Chorégraphique Nijinska with unisex costumes, as I learned from Van Norman Bayer's, *Bronislava Nijinska, A Dancer's Legacy* (1986).

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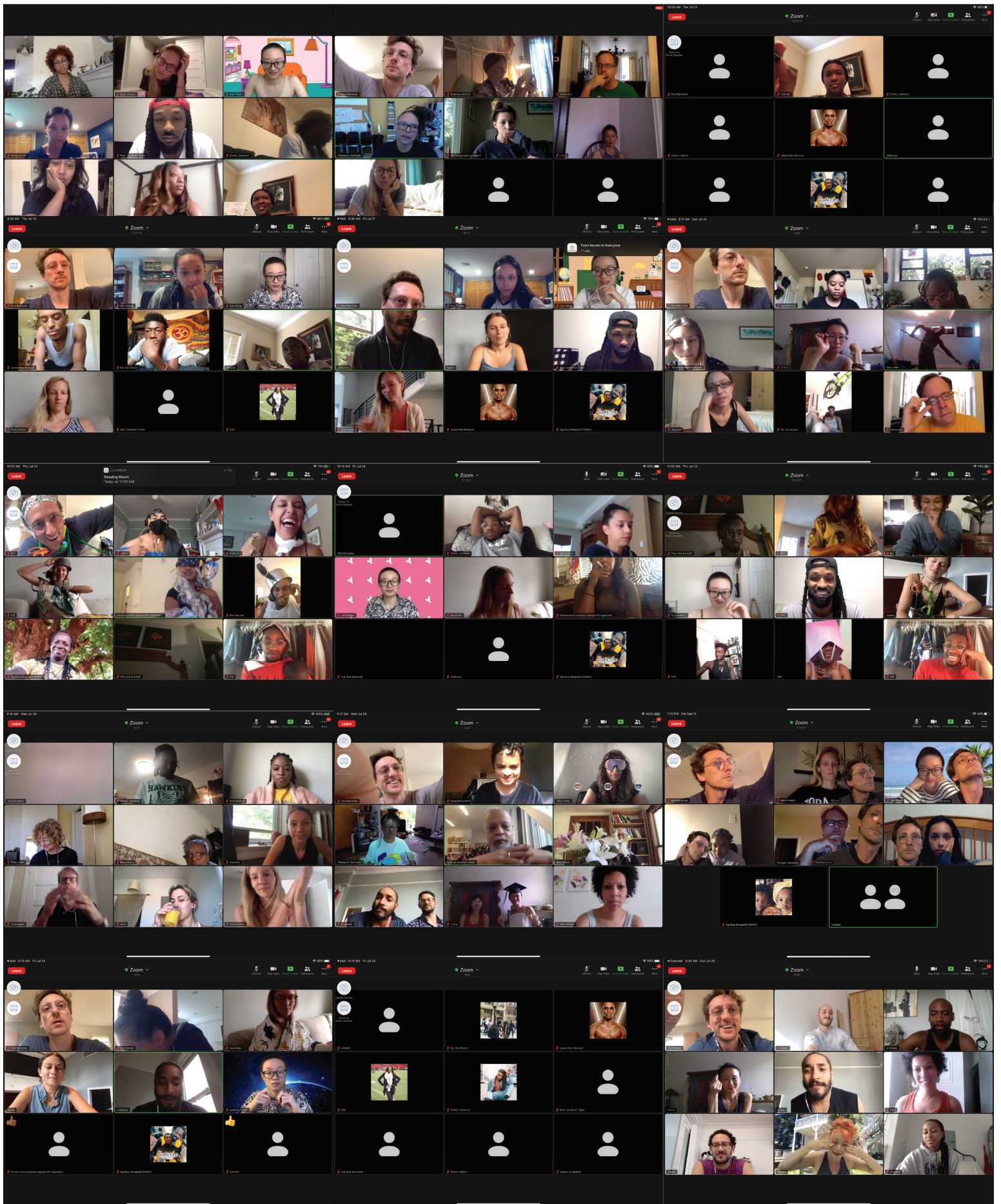
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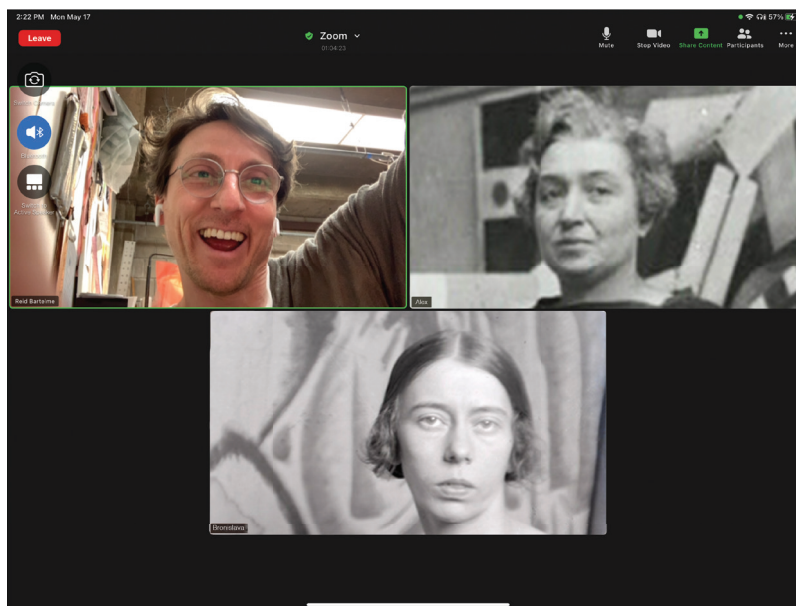
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zoom zoom zoom. Our UArts family learning to learn in boxes.



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