

## ABSTRACT

Title of thesis:           THEY ARE OF THREADED GLASS.

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*they are of threaded glass.* is a full-length dance concert that was performed October 14-15, 2010 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of the M.F.A degree in Dance through University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies . Through multi-media design, text, and dance, *they are of threaded glass.* challenged concepts of private and public existence, presenting three women in a layered and multi-faceted architecture of space and perspective. This paper is a written account of the creative process for *threaded glass.* Included is a detailed account of the research and investigations that occurred in developing the thesis statement and choreography of the work as well as documentation of the creative process from genesis, casting, directing, design, and choreographic choices within the work. An assessment and discussion of audience response, strengths, weaknesses, and future directions of *threaded glass* are also considered.

THEY ARE OF THREADED GLASS.

by

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## INTRODUCTION

“Wall separates eye from body, body from materiality, just as it separates master from servant, husband from wife, bodies from themselves and from each other, from spontaneous pleasure, from inappropriate fecundity. The wall keeps you clean, keeps you in line, keeps you outside yourself by holding you inside the lines. Or, at least, it tries” (Solga 2008).

Leon Battista Alberti, in his opus *On the Art of Building*, poetically describes that when building a wall, or structure, “Every cavity must be filled and no pocket left empty; one of the reasons for this is to prevent any creature from gaining access and making nests there or accumulating filth and seeds, which might result in the wild fig sprouting from within the wall. I have seen an incredible weight, a whole mass of stone, disturbed by a single root” (Alberti 1988).

A girl grows up in a sheltered and protected environment. There are very tall walls around the home; she is not allowed to venture and explore. Her mother, the matriarch who sternly governs the family, has a secret. She is unhappy. She is an alcoholic. At 3:00pm, she starts to drink and when she drinks, she becomes abusive physically and verbally. She transforms into another woman. One day the mother breaks down and finds the proverbial bottom, repeatedly isolating and assaulting the family. The family is divided in this moment. This is the crack in the wall where the wild fig grows. In that moment, my father turned to me and said, “Do not tell anyone about this. This is just between our family and our walls.”

I was told that often. When we were outside our home, the family appeared perfect: the smiling, nuclear family with an actively involved mother, a providing father, and an achieving daughter. And this is how it remained: two separate families with only the house and hours of the day to define us. However, as would be expected, the walls became translucent and the cracks began to widen. The private incidences began happening in public. People began to see; there was no more hiding.

There are things that society dictates should remain private. There are situations and feelings that are expected to be hidden. There is delineation between public and private life. We are not supposed to bathe in public. We are not supposed to fight in public. We are not supposed to let people see our weaknesses. This leads to a dual existence: a wall that is built to house privacy. But this cognitive dissonance, this divide within us, can be the weakness of our architecture.

As technology and aesthetic drive humanity into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that line between public and private living is blurred. For example, “reality” television shows like CBS’s “Big Brother” and MTV’s “Real World” place video cameras inside a house, allowing the audience to voyeur into these otherwise private exchanges. The audience is given permission to view the lady bathing and grooming, a couple making love, or a hostile argument that would otherwise not be seen by the public outside the home. Granted in these examples, the characters being viewed are actors and there is some hyperbolic behavior being exhibited, but what would happen if our behaviors, thoughts, and interactions were visible for all to see? What if there was nothing truly private anymore? What would that mean? Would it create freedom, authenticity, or struggle and despair?

In *they are of threaded glass*, there is a feminist assertion. As an adult, I had to decide what kind of woman and matriarch I would become. This self actualization was pursued through joy and pain, both emotional and physical and was shaped by my childhood experiences. Speaking concretely, pain experienced during sexual intercourse is obviously extremely private and personal, and again I was asked to keep it within our walls. But I needed to express it somehow. Am I allowed? If I don't disclose or discuss, it festers and the pain that was once physical transforms into emotional. What if my struggle could help someone else? The choices we make about private versus public existence are fluid dances. What I discovered through personal reflection and the process of creating this work is that privacy versus publicity is not a binary relationship, but rather, it is a spectrum that often finds itself in multiple layers and manifested in different relativities.

Entering into this M.F.A. program, I wanted to deepen my creative voice, my unique voice as my stories have shaped me. I wanted to challenge my beliefs, explore my range, and find novel ways to clarify my artistry. I present *they are of threaded glass* as a true culmination of that journey. The work is a bold test of private and public existence, influenced by my path of feminine declaration. I value that this project is more than just a dance; it is a transformation of space and perspective. Through the abstraction and metaphor, it is my story. It is the home where the little girl was told that security is only within the walls, within the walls that were filled with hatred and fear, when all she wanted to do was to get out.

“Virtues of shelter are so simple, so deeply rooted in our unconscious that they may be recaptured through mere mention...a poet’s word, because it strikes true, moves the very depths of our being” (Bachelard 1969).

*they are of threaded glass.* is a multi-media experience where the audience is presented with an option of perspectives. The architecture of the space is as important as the movement within it. Each audience member has a different experience based on where they are in space. For some, the dancer will be outside while another may view the dancer through a layer of obstacle and glass. Some may hear while others have to guess what is said. While there is an ambiguous relationship among the women, there is a specific relationship of femininity to the architecture: the architecture of the body and psyche, the architecture of self to the environment. This project is an investigation, a dissection and layering of public versus private, periphery versus core, and revealing versus concealing of space and self.

## RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

There was not an ethnographic or scientific research method involved with creating *they are of threaded glass*. The source of the work originated from personal stories from the dancers and me, from observations and reflections among us. However, the imagery and sounds of the work were heavily supported and shaped through literary and visual influences.

In 2009, Simon Mawer wrote a novel titled *The Glass Room*. I had originally heard of the novel through a discussion on National Public Radio (NPR)'s "The Diane Rehm Show;" the broadcast provided a review of the book and caller responses to the novel. I was initially drawn solely to the title as I was in the early stages of scenic design conversations and parameters for the concert. However, as the discussion continued, I realized that the novel was a source of so much more. I immediately read the novel and was drawn to the imagery Mawer used to describe the environment. Most striking, though, was the way Mawer established the glass house as a character in the novel, and it was that component of his writing that was repeatedly highlighted by critics and readers. I knew that it was comparable to the care, specificity, and deliberation necessary for the development of, interaction with, and existence of our set, our environment, our glass room.

*The Glass Room* is a story of fiction; however, the house and its setting are not imagined. The home of the novel is architecturally based on the history of the villa Tugendhat in Czechoslovakia (see Appendix A). The novel takes the reader through six decades of European history, starting in the tumultuous 1930's. The beginning: a hopeful

and young, Jewish newlywed couple (Liesel and Viktor Landauer) dream of a home that is like no other known. Viktor commissions an architect to design a glass house in the hills of Czechoslovakia. This architect, Rainer von Abt, is a self-described poet: a poet of space and form and light. He designs this structure, where the top story is suspended into the garden. The great room is not separated by walls but rather glass panes that capture light to fill the space. A dividing wall, von Abt declares, must be made of onyx: the lucid, delicate color of honey and gold. As the day progresses and the seasons change, the light, the temperature, and the textures of the glass room change as well. The chemistry of glass reflects and refracts light in unique ways that blur the distinction between privacy and publicity.

As the novel continues, the house remains aesthetically daring and beautiful, quiet, and ineffably balanced and rational, but the world within and around it shifts. The originally idealistic marriage of Liesel and Viktor becomes tainted with secrets, affairs, and infidelities. The forces of World War II drive the Landauers to emigrate and leave their home, to flee from the anti-Semitic Nazis. The opposition takes possession of the house, removes it from the Jews' ownership and takes occupation in the glass home. This creates a new dynamic of the home: such strength from hatred inside the fragility of the glass. Within the structure, the German Nazis use the space as a laboratory; it is where they screen German citizens, measure and assess them in the nude, where they can be viewed from the outside world through the glass. This creates a sense of power and fear through the voyeurism and witnessing of such vulnerability. WWII wages closer and the glass house becomes an innocent victim to bombings and battle. The structure remains intact with only superficial damage. However, now the light does not shine brightly,

filling the space with warmth, but rather the light fractures through the fragments of dust and broken glass edges.

After the war, the novel shifts. There are new inhabitants of the glass house, a new function of the home. We do not know their history or where they came from, but the glass room is now a hospital for children with disabilities and illness. Again the glass room brings tranquility, peace, and quiet. It brings healing; the doctor, Tomas, explains that it demands openness and honesty. However, he uses this explanation to induce sexual risk and pleasure from his partner. The glass again becomes a window for voyeurism. He is not interested in the past of the home; it disrupts the sterility of the space. But his partner pursues researching the history of the home. It eventually becomes protected by a historical society and reunited with its original owner, Liesel. In her old age, Liesel is blind but can still feel the energy of the house, the light, the sounds, the textures.

Mawer's novel extends into 1990, where the house continues to exist, fixed in time and space like a fossil. It is now a museum. The story concludes with daughters of the original inhabitants: the Landauers and their nanny, touring the house together, unknown to each other, until they both recognize each other through salient memories and textures of the home. "And all around them is the Glass Room, a place of balance and reason, an ageless place held in a rectilinear frame that handles light like a substance and volume like a tangible material and denies the very existence of time" (Mawer 2009).

I feel a strong connection between this novel and the work of *they are of threaded glass*. The way Mawer illustrates and colors the subtle shifts within the glass room strongly lent itself to content and imagery used throughout not only the design of the set

itself, but also the choreographic process. In his writing, Mawer reflects and references the glass room. It becomes a character, an integral component of the storytelling. The structure's stability and rationality is balanced with its fragility. This is manifested not only in the architecture but in the inhabitants and their lives. "In chapter after chapter, era after era, the house miraculously continues, working as a talisman, 'its spirit of transparency percolating the human beings who stand within it, rendering them as translucent as the glass itself'" (Charles 2009). There is an element of trust for the characters: trust in the home's structure, trust in the home's transparency, and trust with each other, which is often challenged. The characters are truly connected to the architecture. They weep for the home, for the pure beauty of it, for the memories within it. The architecture evokes feeling. It is a living breathing entity. This was particularly striking for me as an artist as I contemplated the relationship that we, the performers, would have with our set design.

When asked if he believes we create living environments that are simply extensions of ourselves, Mawer responded, "...The main feature of the house, of the Glass Room in particular, is that it is transparent and filled with light. That's an ideal that modernism attempted to introduce to a world that was full of obscurity. Think how often we still hear demands or pleas for transparency in public life. And yet there is nothing less transparent than the human mind and therein lies the central conflict in *The Glass Room*: the contrast between the ideal transparency of the modernist movement and the awful, looming darkness of National Socialism; and the contract between the transparency of the Landauers' public life and the obscurity of their private lives" (Mawer, Simon Mawer on *The Glass Room* 2009).

The concept of architecture and space, how the performers and audience relate to the structure and each other was a prevalent theme in *they are of threaded glass*. In Briginshaw's *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*, I found a rich source of perspective. Her book is about "relations between bodies and space in dance and the role they play in constructing subjectivity" (Briginshaw 2009). Through different examples of post modern dance and film, Briginshaw analyzes the use of focus, space, and body tensions, highlighting the connotation and perspectives that they can evoke. This subjectivity can be created unbeknownst to the artist. Through this research, I was aware of such relationships and was able to make more conscious and deliberate choices concerning audience relationship to the performer, the performer's relationship to each other, and the performer's relationship to the set design.

When discussing subjectivity, Briginshaw argues that traditional Western culture dictates that being a subject is constructed and positioned by and through language and discourse, fixed in time and space; traditional Western culture tries to achieve a sameness or unification across subjects. Through representational art forms, like dance, the fixed perceptions of subjectivity can be challenged and questioned. Throughout *threaded glass*, there is a challenge of femininity and social expectation that is expressed through spatial concepts of proximity and distance, separation or exposure by glass walls, framing of the performers by the architecture, as well as with the women themselves in costume choices, movement vocabulary, and movement tensions.

Briginshaw speaks specifically of gender, power, and space transparency. With transparency, as created with the set's plexiglass walls, there is "the claim to see all and therefore know all depends on assuming a vantage point far removed from the embodied

world, and this transcendent, distanced gaze reinforces the dominant Western masculine subjectivity in all its fear of embodied attachment and all its universal pretensions” (Briginshaw 2009). She continues to argue that transparency can only make sense if it is balanced with the notion of an unknown place, perhaps as is created in the ambiguity of what the set design is: a roller coaster, a chandelier, a home, a tank. “In other words, ‘space’ and ‘place’ constitute a dualism that can be aligned with others such as ‘mind’/’body’, ‘self’/’other’ and ‘male’/’female’” (Briginshaw 2009).

As discussed in more detail later in this paper, *they are of threaded glass*. sources sexual content throughout the work with text, imagery, and sound. Briginshaw addressed the performance of gender and sexuality with the reminder that the performance of gender is conducted all the time in everyday life. Performativity consists of embodiment of gender norms, but when theatrically performing gender, such as done in *threaded glass*, the subjectivity lies in the active seductive energy that exists in the spaces between the dancers. “Bodies are discursively constructed as gendered and sexed through repeated performative acts” (Briginshaw 2009). This consideration was informative when reflecting on who the characters were as women, what qualities they would be emoting, and how the movement vocabulary reflected and distorted normative femininity.

Briginshaw describes a technique of animating space that is, highlighting the importance of space through focus and specific attention. In *threaded glass*, the spaces between the performers themselves, the space between the performers and audience, as well as between the performers and architecture have been rendered special. There is continual blurring of interior/exterior and self/other oppositions in the work that is also described by Briginshaw as challenging private/public boundaries.

Finally, Briginshaw analyzes the use of architectural spaces and subject identity. She states that “there are parallels in dance and architecture which reveal the pervasive ways in which ideas about experiencing space and the visualization of space shape thought and affect subjectivity. Dance and architecture as spatial texts structure ways of seeing the world...seeing things from a particular perspective or viewpoint locates the viewer, affecting their sense of subjectivity” (Briginshaw 2009). The architecture can disrupt the logic of visualization by blurring the separation between insides and outsides of bodies and structures, working in “in-between” spaces, therefore suggesting alternative possibilities for subjectivity by disrupting the traditional single viewpoint of perspective.

While Briginshaw’s book dissects space and subjectivity based on specific examples of post modern dance works such as William Forsythe’s *Enemy in the Figure*, Victoria Marks’ *Outside/In*, and Emilyn Claid’s *Virginia Minx at Play*, I found the analyses informative in not only making choices within the choreographic process but also in reflecting on the audience responses. As will be discussed in chapter four, some audience members created strong connections and stories for the women as well as experienced an intense reaction to the set and its role in defining the subjectivity of the performers and their relationship to the performance.

As previously discussed, the set design, and environment it created, were integral components and characters of *they are of threaded glass*. There is significant research supporting the interrelationships among emotions, inhabitants, and their environment. These relationships and connections were felt strongly by the performers in *threaded glass*. In an article by L.A. McNeur titled “The intimate dance of Being, building, body and psychotherapy,” there is an intimacy of the body being in space; there are

relationships between the invisible and the visible, between emotions and environment. According to McNeur, the human body responds to the persona emitted by architecture; for example, the welcoming of a warm hearth, or the coldness and distance created by a skyscraper. Within architecture, there are boundaries and thresholds created and transitions that occur within the space. It is interesting to consider these concepts as the audience first encounters the set design as well as how the performers welcome the audience into the space: with the close proximity and delivery of a sexual secret. For some audience members, this created a sense of inclusion and of gesture welcoming over the threshold of the work; for others, it created immediate distance and inability to participate in the remainder of the piece.

As will be discussed in more detail later, I was surprised by the connectivity of my body to the architecture, not just physically but also emotionally. The architecture of *threaded glass* was so salient as to make an immediate and lasting impression on an audience, or observer. “When I am in a landscape, I become a part of it and it becomes a part of me, since the image is inside me as my memory of sight, smell, sound, temperature and touch recall the place long after I’ve been there” (McNeur 2008).

There is a section of *they are of threaded glass*. that is referred to as the “Architecture” section. In this section, the performers label the architecture of the female body and place them in specific rooms of the house, making statements that reference the traditional role of women, for example: “This is a breast. It is in the kitchen.” This section came to be through investigations of femininity and architecture.

In “The meanings of domesticity” by Bart Verschaffel, he discusses the role of the matriarch and the definition of domesticity, or home, using Dutch interior paintings as his evidence. While the arguments and referencing of the paintings were not necessarily impactful, it was his approach to presenting and defining the home/woman relationship that was most interesting to me. “The house is more than a place: the ‘domus’ is the principle of an order and a device for articulating differences and meanings one lives by. In many cultures domesticity – centrality, stability, continuity – is identified with woman. Yet, linking femininity and domesticity or house can only be reductive when one presupposes that the meaning of the house is simple – nothing more than ‘place’ and ‘centre’” (Verschaffel 2002). In other words, there is a false sense of simplicity or flatness that occurs when home and femininity are linked together. The parsimony of the “architecture section” and reading in between the lines of what was spoken brings this to light.

For the performers in *threaded glass*, we considered the set as our home. What happens to femininity when it is linked to domesticity? Verschaffel presents this question and responds with a poetic definition of femininity: “At first, femininity seems reduced: linking woman and house could be a means to simplify and control the feminine, out of fear or for whatever reason. Because, indeed, she does not stand just for home and hearth and Ithaca, woman is not just the name for what drives homewards, what brings movement and history to a stop, to rest and peace. Woman also lures into the woods and the sea and the night, she invites to danger and death” (Verschaffel 2002).

An article by Kim Solga also investigates the relationship between architecture theory and feminist theory and performance. Her article, “The Line, The Crack, and The Possibility of Architecture: Figure, Ground, Feminist Performance” defines what she calls the “guerrilla actress-architect” and discusses the way she uses her performing body to reshape the plastic spaces of her world, asking us to consider the possibility that feminist performance may, in fact, be a kind of living architectural practice (Solga 2008). Architecture has always already been about bodies – not bodies in isolation, but bodies in messy, intimate, historical relation with one another. In Solga’s considerations, architecture is both literal and metaphoric, the metaphor of containment and separation; architecture has a dividing function: things are built in between other things. Architecture started with the concept of line and wall. “To put up a wall is to put something between us; if the wall is glass, the ‘something between us’ is all the more longing and desire” (Solga 2008). In performance, there is the principle of the “fourth wall,” the divide between performer and audience. The “guerrilla architect” is the performer who “plays at the cracks in that wall, breaks them open, winks at the fall into, and surfaces to present us with the bodies; with the bodily practices that realism’s stage ‘magic’ walls off” (Solga 2008). The performers of *threaded glass* did just that.

As mentioned, *they are of threaded glass*. is driven by qualities of femininity, and the composition of the work is anchored by three female solos. In the early development of these solos, I was directed to specific female literary and visual artists by Dawn Springer, Artist-in-Residence to the University of Maryland’s School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. She was drawn my use of the male gaze as a tool to present the women’s femininity and paralleled the work to that of visual artist Vanessa Beecroft, an

Italian artist who specializes in the display of the female form and its relationship to space (see Appendix B). Vanessa Beecroft creates performative drawings using naked women adorned in samplings of high-fashion accessories. The large groups of women are given general rules by Beecroft, who then detaches herself from the work. The women stay in the space, trying to abide by the physical rules given to them but over time, there is attrition during the duration of the work, which often may last up to half an hour or longer. The audience response to Beecroft's work is often mixed as her work exudes a passive-aggressive approach to feminism. "Nudity was necessary in order to produce a certain unease, a feeling of defenselessness, an unpleasant feeling of being exposed to the mercy of the audience" (Kellein unknown). Her work has been described as presenting the women with an unsettling beauty and aloof sexuality as they disintegrate over time (Smith 1998). There is a mystery and opacity to the women that Beecroft finds compelling, where they occupy the same territory as the audience but not the same space (Hickey unknown).

There is a relationship to space and subjectivity in the work of Vanessa Beecroft. She is "interested in cold, detached, almost cinematic vision in which the stage is separate from the auditorium or arena housing the audience. She certainly seeks their complicity, but she wants it to be subtle and detached, so that the spectator can reflect his own idiosyncrasies and impulses (Celant 1994). Through the distance and detachment of the audience to the women's space, it creates an untouchable and voyeuristic relationship between the audience and performer. She prefers spaces composed with symmetries and a central axis where her audience is placed outside, generally on the fringe. This role as on-lookers emphasizes the central theme of observation and self-observation. The women

in their role function as both object and subject. The group of women should be seen like the sum of bodies pushed together to be of a single woman.

In *they are of threaded glass*, the women are both spectators and performers. At one point, I declare loudly, “Do not look at this. This is not for you to see.” as I remove my outer layer of clothing. But what is “this” referring to: the exposed body, the act of undressing, the space around me, the female figure behind me? This objectification of the female and space resonates to the concept of gaze, or specifically the male gaze.

The male gaze is a feminist concept designed by Laura Mulvey in 1973. Mulvey is a feminist film critic who coined the term in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” The male gaze relates to looking as an active male role, while the role of being looked at as a female role. It assumes a role of masculine power for the audience and of feminine passivity and objectivity to the performer; it results in the female being an object of desire. The term stemmed from the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan who defined gaze as how one views the presentation of other people. In feminist theory, gaze is how men look at women, how women look at themselves and other women, and the effects surrounding this (Jahsonic 2007). The male gaze is a concept incorporated into art and film theory and can easily be referenced when discussing the relationship of the performers and audience in *threaded glass*.

In creating Adrienne’s solo, we sourced feminist form, shapes, and iconic images from magazines, television, and media images. She exudes bound sexuality through these images and actions, at one point simulating sexual acts on the floor by rocking repeatedly on her stomach and hands. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, author Ariel Levy highlights the

force of female sexuality and questions the shifted feminist culture. There is now a female gaze: women are hyper-sexualizing themselves or choosing to view the sexualized female figure in the name of empowerment and feminism. However, as Levy argues, raunchy and liberated are not synonyms (Levy 2005). Adrienne's solo directly plays with the premise of the female/male gaze and the ambiguous boundary of raunch and liberation by her overt solo becoming contained and displayed within the plexiglass walls.

The research for *they are of threaded glass*, primarily included literary and visual resources that sparked conversations about femininity and architecture, the role of women as objects of desire, and the balance between being a performer and being a witness. The prose and the art triggered images of space, design, and movement. As for the content of *threaded glass*, the text, vocabulary, and connection of performers to each other and space could not have existed without the personal stories of the three women in the work: the 32-year-old married woman, the 25-year-old sexual creature, and the child-like 19-year-old on the cusp of her womanhood. In forming the work, deep investigations of our own personal woman-ness was present. Since we were all at different phases of our lives, we would have conversations about what that meant: what was different about being a married woman in her 30's versus being a young lady just 19 years old? What was it like to be a woman with many partners versus a woman who has only loved one man? As individuals, we would journal and share our writings. One directed journal entry asked for secrets that no one else knew. This was very enlightening as to where we were in our lives and what we had experienced as women. Another journal entry asked for us to write apology letters to ourselves and a forgiveness letter to someone who had hurt us deeply.

There was a level of trust among the cast and a deep exploration of our own personal femininity and identity. Rehearsals included conversations about sexuality, desire, body and our female experience. Some conversations were humorous and flippant while others were cavernous. And while the details of these explorations came later in the choreographic process, as discussed in the following section, our femininity was always present in each rehearsal, guiding and informing the work.

## PROCESS

Collaboration and trust were the driving forces in the creation of *they are of threaded glass*. Without the team effort of the cast, designers, and crew, *threaded glass* would not have grown to its magnitude. The designers facilitated my vision, held to the artistic integrity of the project, and helped to extend my vision. This section describes the creative process: from the initial concept, into the rehearsal process, and encompassing the technical demands of preparing for actualization, including lessons learned along the journey.

## GENESIS

As discussed in the introduction, I wanted my thesis to come from a very personal place, an investment of soul. I had a story that I wanted to tell about myself that, perhaps, would touch another. I wanted the audience to be moved; I wanted them to feel something through a very visceral experience.

When I first interviewed for the MFA candidacy, I was asked about my interests for a possible thesis proposal. I responded that I had a vision of a large, opened doll house and a family. This family could be viewed from the inside and outside of the doll house; and, as described in my introduction, this family, my family, would act very differently in public life than in private life. The proposal was met with nodding heads and a comment about fiscal restraint for such a project. At the end of my second year, I submitted a written proposal for the thesis concert where I represented this story but in a more abstracted form. I extracted the essence of what was interesting to me: private versus public life and the increasing ambiguity of that boundary. I retained the personal

story and the concept of a home life, but the family was no longer recognizable as such. I drew from the rich material of *Fragmentation of Femininity* and other composition studies in class. Not only was a movement vocabulary becoming evident in my studies, but there was a repeated construct of femininity and gaze that was prevalent in my work and interesting to me as an artist. Another compositional study, *From Where We Are*, a video and live dance work incorporating the visual art of Martin Puryear, developed an aesthetic for the relationship of part to whole, or micro to macro perspective. Somewhere along the way, the work shifted into a relationship between architecture/space and femininity. But I do not feel that it abandoned my original prospectus. My proposal was detailed enough that I had clarity in choreographic intent; however, it was open-ended enough that there was room for a journey. Different conversations, different choices, and different experiences within the two years of creating *threaded glass* allowed for increasing clarity, layering of constructs, and heightening of the initial premise a very personal way.

## CAST

The cast for *they are of threaded glass*. included Adrienne Latanishen, Rachel Wolfe, and me. Adrienne and I have been working together for almost five years. She was originally a student of mine, then a classmate as we both entered the University of Maryland, and now is a fellow artist. We have danced together in repertory and have worked with each other in our own works. *Fragmentation of Femininity* was a piece that was choreographed for Adrienne and carried through to *threaded glass* as her solo. Adrienne exudes a tension and bound flow in her movement. Her focus is direct and intense. She has a strength that is immeasurable, and it projects through her eyes, her

body, her hair, her being. She was the perfect woman to portray the sexuality and constricted nature of femininity, and our personal history allowed for a comfortable setting to disclose and trust.

Rachel, a sophomore in the dance program, was selected through the audition process, although I already knew she would be cast. Observing her in technique classes, she danced with a grounded-ness that was appealing for my technique, but she also had an ease and grace of the upper body. She works with an indirect focus that contrasted but complemented Adrienne's style. She also had formal theater training, which would support her through the performance work. She exhibited a mastery of commanding space with focus, voice, and presence. The most striking feature of Rachel is her beauty, and yes, her hair played a role in being selected. But her beauty, in contrast to Adrienne's, is subtle, youthful, pure, and naïve. I knew she was necessary to support the triad of women. She is thirteen years younger than me and brought to the discussions a different perspective on femininity, virginal femininity.

I chose to perform in my own work and while acting as both director and performer posed many challenges, it was necessary for me to be a part of the work – it was my capstone. But as mentioned before, it was not solely my story and my vision; we all contributed to the creation of *threaded glass*. My voice was that of the older, married woman; the matriarch, perhaps. In this cast, not one person was more important than another. I was unsure at first about having such a small cast, with initial concerns such as, “Could only three people fill the space enough? Can only three people, especially three solos, sustain an evening-length, thesis-oriented work choreographically?” As the project continued, I realized that a cast of three was the “right” decision for this work and the

triad revealed itself in other forms throughout the work, without deliberation by the designers.

Finally, who were we as a cast? It was a conscious choice to have ambiguous identities and relationships to each other. We could be a family. We could be lovers, sisters, friends. We could be layers of the same woman. For me, I found richness in the latter. Similarly to the way Vanessa Beecroft approached her women subjects, we were multiple women as one woman. But I do also find satisfaction in the universality of the ambiguous relationships. During the process, we did not use the word “character,” but rather “quality.” We focused our performative work on the different qualities and woman-ness we each contained, for that is why we were chosen as the cast of this project: who we are as feminine creatures. I chose for us to be recognized in the performance by name because we were presenting ourselves without characterization, without fiction.

## CHOREOGRAPHY

It is impossible for me to simply define my choreographic process, especially for *they are of threaded glass*. This was the first time I had ever undertaken a full-length production and the project grew beyond what I had initially conceptualized. It had many phases and utilized different choreographic techniques throughout and depending upon the section. The work revealed itself. At times I had to make choices immediately, for example when looking at the lighting and projections, a choreographic decision that would impact the entire project had to be made in the moment. Other times, I was able to allow time for the work to settle; I like to say that I would “live with it” for awhile and

see how it felt before I would edit or make a decision. I am able to say without a doubt that I am most comfortable with the latter strategy, and it was through this project that I learned that about myself. I would get anxious and self-doubting when a decision had to be made immediately. I prefer the time for the work to germinate and take the path that it wants to take.

With regards to the overarching process, the choreographic choices moved along a spectrum of concrete to abstract. As mentioned previously, I was satisfied that the work resulted in a more abstracted version of my original prospectus; I felt it lent a maturity to the artistry of this project. With regards to content of the work, the stories came from the performers. The choices in the use of space and architecture referenced the research and investigations. The movement vocabulary sourced from both the performers and me, and usually it was a true collaboration or migration of these vocabularies. Details of the choreographic process will be described for each “section” of the work. While *threaded glass* as a whole was not divided into sections for the audience, as the Director, I focused on different motifs which emerged into sections. The sections existed like puzzle pieces that I would often arrange and then rearrange. The final order of the concert was not decided upon until the month before the concert, and it was only after much repetition, observation, and feedback that the section order was confirmed, taking into consideration overall pacing of the work, transitions between sections, and overall mood and story.

There were certain things that I knew for sure: I wanted to start with a heightened state. I wanted to play with audience focus moving between being broad and narrow. I wanted to conclude with my solo. I wanted it to be a continuous work where my choreography and the guest artist’s choreography were truly merged. With these

overarching guidelines in mind, the detailed process came within and between each section.

*The Opening.* The “opening” section was the most troublesome to create and didn’t truly become its final form until the end of the process. Beginnings and endings are fragile. What was difficult about the opening section was the movement composition. The audience enters the space and then with the lights low, the dancers enter. As they walk through the crowd, they smile, welcoming and warming the audience to their environment. The performers approach an audience member and in a low voice, they tell a sexual secret. Adrienne and Rachel bring further proximity and place the audience’s hand on either their breast or crotch. This interaction is delivered while maintaining the warm and inviting persona. Rachel, navigating the edge of the circle, intermittently stops to face the audience and expose either Adrienne’s or my secret. I remain quiet and still, maintaining a warm gaze with my audience member. Then, because Rachel touches and passes through me, I circle the space, seeing the environment for the first time perhaps, seeing the audience, seeing the women with me.

The movement vocabulary of this section came through phrase work and improvisations generated by the dancers and me. There was a give and take among us as I edited the choreography. The phrase was initially part of a larger movement section called the “hair dance.” I was fickle about the movement, sometimes loving it and sometimes hating it. I couldn’t pinpoint exactly what wasn’t right about it. It existed in the middle of the thesis; it existed as a unison trio. The “hair dance” did not have an anchor to any of the work as it was purely organic movement that originated from the play of our hair: tossing, flitting, brushing, and the different textures of our hair.

I received feedback that the movement was interesting; it was helpful to hear what people saw and felt with the opening section, but sometimes the varying and often opposing comments were more confusing than facilitating. At this point in the process, I realized that each audience member would have a different experience, and these feedback sessions were early indications of just that. At this early point of the choreographic process, the different comments and perspectives were confusing because I didn't have a clear direction or focal moment for the work yet. I hadn't realized how differently an audience member may view the same work and how impactful that experience and response would be. Did I want to guide the work to solve specific issues raised by the feedback sessions or did I want to allow the dissonance to exist? The movement for me ended up serving as a prelude for the entirety of the work: a sampling of the movement vocabulary, phrasing, and focal connection of the performers. It was a tracing of the architecture and the first moment that the audience's choice in perspective was revealed. The result was a drastically edited version of the "hair dance" and an impactful opening to the work.

*"Running Bird."* This section was choreographed by Patrik Widrig and will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

*Adrienne's Solo.* Adrienne's solo was created in 2009 for another work called *Fragmentation of Femininity*. While choreographed for five women, the focus of the piece was Adrienne's solo. The impetus of *Fragmentation* was to show this female figure, displaying recognizable sexuality through iconic poses, body distortion, and flirtations. Over time, she becomes splintered manifested as the movements become more and more tantric, contorted, desperate. There was something interesting about the work

for me. I was not satisfied with the role of the other four ladies: they became shadow figures, too passive in their witnessing. They were unaffected, undisturbed by their participation. But Adrienne's presence in the space, her ownership of the role was captivating. I immediately wanted to constrict her, contain her in some way. I was interested in what would happen to her movement and her character if she was not given the freedom to fall and fly through the space. I was hoping that she would not lose the abandon and intensity, and I suspected that there would be a shift in her; the space restriction would affect her emotionally and give her a true purpose for becoming fragmented.

The movement vocabulary was originally developed through collaboration and improvising in the space together. We would share images of femininity and play to contort the body and movement. If there was a comfortable choice, we would work in the opposite direction. It was appealing and satisfying to work in this way, as I usually just accept the easier pathway of my body; this opened new and unique physical options. It was "correct" for Adrienne to be uncomfortable in the dance, or in her skin; the solo movements often resulted in actual physical pain or discomfort.

Once a part of the *threaded glass* process, we started to physically restrict the solo. While this was challenging because the set was not yet designed, we would find structures around us to use as containers, running her solo in small alcoves of the hallways. Initially, Adrienne was fearful and paralyzed by the shrinking space. She was unable to follow through on the movement fully due to a now very real physical obstacle, and she was unable to make other choices about how to navigate the obstacle. The presence of the architecture also disrupted her muscle memory, making it nearly

impossible for her to recreate the dance from the proscenium perspective. Through conversation, time, and rehearsal, she became desensitized to the space constraints. When she became too comfortable, I would change the architecture. It was important that she be fully present in her space and not be able to predict the effect of such containment. Some specific movements were modified due to pragmatic needs and ability to maximize the tension and rebound of the walls, but for the most part, the integrity of her solo remained. The result was a truly shifted, yet more complete portrayal of a sexual, sensual woman, plagued and doomed by her own strength and power as the architecture attempts to contain her.

Adrienne's solo was the anchor to *they are of threaded glass*. It was from her and the curiosity of *Fragmentation* that spilled forth the investigation of woman-ness, witnessing, participating, and containing by providing the movement vocabulary, the gaze, and the humanistic context to support my initial prospectus of private versus public existence.

*Rachel's Solo.* One day, I walked into the studio, turned on the camera, and just started moving. I gave myself the task of placing and replacing body parts, being contained within my space and self. I just moved within these parameters. What resulted was a rich phrase of repetition, subtlety and complexity of detail. I put it aside for almost six months. Another day, I walked into the studio and just looked at myself in the mirror. I studied myself: what were the details of my skin, my body. I outlined myself and took inventory. Another day, I walked into the studio, turned on the camera, and just started moving. No parameters, no story, just how the moment felt. I was dancing by myself to myself. What resulted was a personal and private portrait through movement.

I immediately worked with Adrienne to put this latter phrase on another body. I stepped outside of my own personal and private portrait, becoming a witness to myself. This phrase seemed to grow as a separate seed from *threaded glass*. I played with different music, juxtaposing with the calm and “pretty” movement. I then put it aside for a few months.

Working with Rachel was a very different experience than working with Adrienne. With Rachel, there was no personal history; we were strangers. At first, she was petrified. She would shyly come into the studio for rehearsal, taking each task I gave her with hesitation and ambiguity. She apologized a lot. My role as Director became clarified nearly immediately, as she required more direction in a gentle and nurturing way. We initially worked less collaboratively; Rachel did not have the experience or confidence to work in an improvisational setting, so I pulled out the videos of my earlier improvisations and asked her to learn them. She worked on her own to extract the movements from video and I would come in to watch her bring new life to the phrases. Over time, I could see that she lent tenderness, a naive approach to the movement that was refreshing from what Adrienne interpreted. She seemed to truly embody what I felt when creating the work initially and over time, new purpose came to those phrases.

What I learned through the creation of Rachel’s solo is that creating art requires a daily practice but sometimes that daily practice is quiet time away. The development of her solo was not magical or instant. I grew frustrated with the flatness of the work and couldn’t find a place for her solo within the larger composition. I again shelved the work for several months. It was not until much later when we began working with text and transitions that her solo received life and clarity. Rachel had grown to become

comfortable in the process. With clarity of her femininity and role within the work, the solo reached actualization; it found richness and necessity.

“*Architecture.*” I knew that I wanted to create a multi-media project, incorporating text and video; I had, however, very little experience working within these media. The development and use of text and video will be discussed in later sections. The “architecture” section refers to the section of *threaded glass* where we are walking, pointing, identifying. I refer to it as the architecture section because, for me, this section acted as a significant shift. Not only was there a shift in mood and pacing, but a shift in intention. During this section, we walk around the space, following the boundaries of the architecture. Intermittently, we identified a body part and a room of the house. For example, I would say, “This is a breast.” (point to breast). “It is in the kitchen.” (point to corner of the set). Adrienne would deliver an apology and then whisper her secret into the kitchen walls. This continued for each woman. Again, the final product of this section did not come until much later in the process. The process of creating this section resulted in much trial and error, audience feedback, and review of what my purpose was for using the text – what did I want to say and why did I want to say it this way?

The score of the text was essential. This section was a mixture of matter-of-fact, objective delivery with passionate and emotional confession. I wanted to remind the audience that this architecture is our home, that these were our female bodies. There was ownership but also an indication of expectation and connotation: “The thigh *better* be in the bedroom.” The apologies were personal and delivered into the space with no clear direction to a recipient; the apologies were to ourselves, to a reflection of ourselves in the

architecture that only we could see. As will be discussed, the words were personal and each choice in delivery had specificity.

While there was play and experimentation in voice inflection, focus, and spatial relationships, the purpose of this section became clear. The composition, once “right” just felt “right.” This section was for us, not the audience. I originally talked about this section as a break, or opportunity to release intensity of viewing for the audience. I realize that it probably was unsuccessful in that purpose, as it created more intensity for the audience because they now had to pay attention to what we were saying. They tried to draw relationships and conclusions with these exchanges. I now realize that the architecture section was for us, not the audience. It was for us to define our constellations, to cathartically reveal within the safety of our architecture. It was the only time I felt truly cocooned. It was when I felt the most connected to Adrienne and Rachel. When pointing outward to the kitchen, I could see the audience, but I saw through the audience, as if they were as transparent as the plexiglass wall. It was for us.

*Duet.* Similarly to Adrienne’s solo, the duet section appeared in previous work, titled [///]. The duet was created in collaboration with composer Keith Kramer as part of the annual Baltimore Composer’s Forum “Sound in Motion” collaborative event in October, 2009. Created and performed by Adrienne and me, it included a live flute and original score. The score could be described as spacious and is a study of symmetry. The movement, too, is simply a study of space: proximity, distance, and unison of the two dancers. They appear as truly connected, breathing as one unit, moving apart and coming together between the notes of the flute.

For *they are of threaded glass.*, I planned a duet section for Adrienne and Rachel. It did not have intention or purpose, but I was curious to have such different energies (almost a yin/yang relationship) dancing together. [///] was relatively fresh for Adrienne and me, so instead of creating new movement, I simply inserted it into *threaded glass* and had Rachel replace me as Adrienne's partner. To increase the richness and texture of the duet, I edited it to include samplings of the "hair dance" and each of the solos. It became separated from the parameters of the original score, and with Rachel bringing her movement qualities and character aesthetic, it adopted a new identity. However, within this new identity, it retained its sensitivity to space and relationship. Rachel and Adrienne had moments of being focused across the set to each other, moving in and out of unison, coming close together and propelling apart. Physical interactions between them now had purpose.

*Lauren's Solo.* Choreographed by Patrik Widrig, the process of creating and integrating my solo will be discussed in a later section.

*Finale.* At first I wanted the thesis performance to begin with my solo but after studying the arc and overall composition of the work, it seemed more appropriate to end with my solo. Since Patrik choreographed my solo section, he and I batted the ball back and forth about who would make decisions about the end. Endings are precious. We both envisioned the glass structure to shatter from the strength, passion, and sorrow of my solo and story. When one is in captivity, one has to break free. We brainstormed on methods that were safe, cost effective, and pragmatic to achieve the same result. I worked with video, illustrating shattering glass. Suggestions for using lights and artificial sounds supported the existence of such destruction. I had reservations about using artificial

strategies; I wanted to remain authentic. The finale resulted from a collaboration of ideas. I envisioned glass spilling from the sky, like a rain storm. Patrik could see us shaking and disrupting the stability of the set, causing the glass to break from above. It would be as if the structure was imploding from the inside downwards. The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center administration required experiments to make sure the falling glass would remain within the boundaries of the set, not risking injury to performers or audience members. Once this was demonstrated as a viable option, only days before the performance, it became the finale. In my mind, I had a plan B through plan E in case the falling glass was not approved, but none of them were as appropriate or necessary as the raining glass.

Regarding movement vocabulary, there were two options: either create a sense of the structure imploding from the inside outwards by having the dancers build the energy, rapidly moving without inhibition, or control, or rather have the impetus come from contained, quiet energy. Referencing the energy and pacing of the entire work, I decided on the latter. We would begin with subtle shifts, remnants of the first “hair dance,” sprinkled with explosions upwards that would melt down along the architecture. A trembling that built from within us as we found security in the architecture, our touches and bodies traveled through the structure, causing it to quake and break apart from above. Glass rained down among us and the “exploration ended when the stage, the venue of (our) communication, literally became too unsafe for the dancers to continue” (Lake 2010).

*Transitions and Framings.* Within *threaded glass*, there are very few times when the performers are actually dancing in unison or as a trio. Brief encounters do occur in the work, but the emphasis is on connection through focus and framing. The lack of traditional ensemble work was not a conscious choice necessarily but rather a result from the basis of the work being three solos. Larger ensemble sections were created within the process of generating movement phrases, but were often deleted or significantly edited. For me, as the Director, they didn't feel authentic or essential to the work; they seemed forced into existence or superfluous. The sustenance of the three solos, and lack of physical connection among all three dancers, lent itself to a separation of the women. In hindsight, I can appreciate and assess the separation as spatial or emotional; it supported the ambiguous identities and relationships of them.

An important role of the performer was to frame the soloist. During a solo, the other two women would be still in the periphery of the space. They served as extensions of the architecture. During Adrienne's solo, Rachel witnessed from close proximity but on the other side of the wall. I watched from afar. During Rachel's solo, neither Adrienne nor I were focused on Rachel, but rather lying along the edge of the walls, a shadowing of the previous solo's sexuality lingering. During my solo, the other two women sat poised at different structural supports, watching with empathy. The soloists would see the witnesses and there would be an exchange with just the connection of the eyes.

The moments of unison and ensemble dancing served as transitions between the solo sections. These were moments when we would come together, either in physical connection to each other or through some invisible connection across the space. These moments served to support our co-existence and dependency in the world that we created.

To summarize the choreographic process, multiple strategies were used across the different sections of *threaded glass*. Certain parameters were developed early in the process which helped to guide certain choices in the work. Other parameters were realized through gradual development over time. This process included repetition, observation, and meditation about the work, arranging and rearranging sections, and experimentation with details of text and movement. An example of this investigative process is when describing how the audience's focus became an important construct of the work. A pattern emerged, without conscious guiding, where the audience's focus was being led by the work; the sections would require the audience to have a broad lens perspective and then a narrow, focused lens perspective. This moving in and out of broad to narrow is exemplified by the transition between the opening section, when all performers are moving along the periphery of the structure, into Adrienne's solo in the middle of the spiral. Her solo incorporated subtle detail of the body that required the audience to zoom in with their attention, only to have to zoom back out with Rachel's solo as she moved throughout the entire space with more full-bodied movement. The notice of this composition was discovered through observation and exploration of the different sections. While storytelling played a minimal role in choreographic choices, the connection, energy, and flow of the women within the architecture was the heart of the work.

## AUDIENCE

It's hard to pinpoint when and how the decision was made to put the audience in-the-round. The fact that the Kogod Theater has a black box design lent itself to a non-traditional use of the space. Early in the process, I knew that the traditional proscenium,

frontal performance-audience relationship would not be as effective, or appropriate. I wanted to create a sense of home and environment where the audience was a part of the space. What was striking “about the piece was its cohesiveness from any angle. Like a statue, this dance performance could be viewed from all sides” (Lake 2010).

As the audience members arrived in the space, they were met with the enormous presence of the set. They were able to walk around and explore the environment from all sides. They were instructed to feel free to move about the space’s perimeter during the performance. I wanted the audience to have the opportunity to change their perspective at any time, and was curious to see what the audience’s actions would be. Assessment of audience choice and interaction with the set is described in more detail later in this paper. Depending on where they were located in the space, they would view the work with no obstacles, through a plexiglass wall, or possibly with some architectural and bodily obstacle. Each audience member would have a uniquely different experience from another audience member.

As an early construct of *threaded glass*, the investigation of private versus public existence lead to a relationship of voyeur, or witness and object being viewed. Successfully, the ambiguous delineation between privacy and publicity was supported by the audience’s relationship with the performers. At times, the audience served as active witnesses, while other times, they were the objects being viewed by the performers. For some, they became the background as they were viewed from across the room by audience members and others just blended into the perimeter of the architecture. There is a difference between voyeurism and witnessing. The act of voyeurism is defined as “the sexual interest in or practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviors, such as

undressing, sexual activity, or other activity usually considered to be of a private nature” (Dictionary.com, LLC 2010). Witnessing is to testify to, to have personal or direct cognizance of something (Merriam-Webster 2010). While one is no more passive or active than the other, voyeurism indicates a more malicious, or intrusive relationship, while witnessing can be more empathic or validating. Initially, the direction was to establish the audience as voyeurs, peeking in on private lives without permission; however, because of the choreographic choices of the opening section, the audience may have shifted into the role of witnesses. Because the performers approached, talked, and made a physical connection with audience, the piece may have broken the fourth wall enough to serve as an invitation and welcome into the performers’ world.

As discussed earlier, the audience was asked soften their focus into a wide perspective and then narrow into a detailed focus, cycling between the two throughout the work. This was supported through the placement of performers within the space: broad perspective utilizing the perimeter and entire space, narrow focus keeping the dancers localized within the inner core of the spiraling structure. It was also supported through the movement choices: broad perspective was generally during larger, full-bodied, sweeping phrases while narrow focused moments brought the audience’s eye into subtle, detailed gestures, close to the body.

Within the rehearsal process, I utilized a camera to facilitate choreographic choices. I would set the camera up in different areas of the room, allowing for me to step into the role of an audience member and evaluate the choreography from different perspectives. This was extremely helpful since we were choreographing and rehearsing in a square studio, very different from the openness of the round set. Additionally, having

guests come in and watch the work-in-progress from different perspectives provided feedback to particularly neglected areas of audience viewpoints.

## MUSIC AND TEXT

Originally, *they are of threaded glass*. was to be accompanied by an original score. Because the work was so layered and unique in its identity and textures, I felt that finding a sound score that was not recognizable and that truly supported the women's qualities would be nearly impossible. Additionally, the project had become extremely collaborative and I wanted to have the same collaborative relationship with the composer as well. I have a long history of working with the Baltimore Composer's Forum, a group of professional composers of varying expertise and interests. I approached them initially to hire a composer. Only one composer expressed interest in the project, John Belkot. After first meeting with him, I was excited that he was young and truly interested in the project's constructs. His sound samples were ambient, open, abstract, appealing to me as a choreographer. He asked good questions that were thought-provoking and clarifying. The problem was that he was asking these questions too early in the process. He wanted to know who the women were, what timbre they were, and what they were trying to say; but I didn't even know yet.

There were many red flags that emerged early in the process of working with Mr. Belkot. He was unwilling to create sound samples and drafts of his ideas for *threaded glass*. We would have circular conversations that did not result in a tangible product for me to work with in the studio. Very early in the process, he required deadlines to be defined. While I understood that creating and recording a large score was time consuming

and tedious, the deadlines he demanded were too early. He required section order and duration about six months prior to performance date. While Mr. Belkot was requiring me to focus in and create the work from a broad to narrow focus, my thesis committee and process were broadening outward. Each rehearsal brought more choices and options to experiment with, not more specific decisions. In actuality, I did not have a section order finalized until the month before opening night. My creative process was one of journey and open-ended explorations, while his creative process was one of decisiveness and order. Because *threaded glass* was a work in the spirit of collaboration, there was another challenge that was posed. Patrik Widrig choreographed my solo sections and had decided on music: Cecilia Bartoli and the songs of castrati. Because I wanted my solo sections to be threaded into the concert, Mr. Belkot had to compose music that would support the opera. The composer was concerned that his work would compete with the castrato and not be clearly credited as his original score. He requested that his work not be blended in with the opera as to taint the integrity of his composition. After a couple of months, it seemed clear that the composer was not able to collaborate in a way to support my artistic vision and so we mutually decided to end the relationship.

Once the composer was no longer working on the project, I felt freed to truly explore and create with no boundaries. However, I also felt anxiety because now I had to find music to support the roles of the other women and complement the opera of my solos. This did not happen until late in the process, once I had clarity about what was needed to support who the soloists had become, what they were trying to state. I had a cello score, *Songs and Poems for the Solo Cello* written by Phillip Glass and recorded by Wendy Sutter that was originally used for Adrienne's solo in *Fragmentation*. It had

worked for her in that version and after listening again I discovered that there was richness to the timbre of the cello that was appealing. The cello, for me, has a feminine texture to it. This solo cello work, particularly, utilized a large range of tempo and sound. It was repetitive and simple in its melodies so that it did not conflict and contract with the opera. Again, it was like a stripping away of the layers of the opera to reveal the one cello song. Because of its timbre, the cello also created an air of somber and dark intensity for some of the audience, which may or may not have been helpful in the overall mood of the work. I was concerned at times that the cello was too repetitive as to become hypnotic, but when supported by the bursts and range of movement by the performers, that did not seem to be a valid concern. I also used opportunities for silence and breathing between sections and songs to allow the audience to resonate with what they just heard and shift to what would be heard next.

For my solo work, Patrik was drawn to the story and songs of the castrati. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, castrati were young male singers who were castrated to maintain their singing pitch and range. Because they were castrated, they maintained their young, boyish look and sound into adulthood. They were the superstars of the opera and revered by audiences for their skills in evoking tremendous emotional impacts through their singing that was able to extend beyond the soprano range. Patrik heard an interview on NPR about Cecilia Bartoli and her new album *Sacrificium*, an homage to the virtuosic castrati. The discussion and the music centered on the pain and sacrifice in the name of art. Varying from fast and furious to hauntingly beautiful, the arias spoke to my story of pain and femininity. When I first worked in the studio to the songs, my body responded

immediately and connected to the challenge and depth of the singing, to the emotion and story of the song (Bartoli 2009).

There was one track in the sound score that I composed. The duet section was not only the final opportunity for Adrienne and Rachel to dance together, but it was a significant transition and shift in the work. It required more than just the cello instrumentation from their solos. Adrienne and Rachel were transferring their energies between them; the energy of the space was building, eventually affecting my character. By the end of the duet section, the energy and bodies in space built to a point where all three women were moving in unison; this short phrase work is the only time that there is unison in the entire work. Following this section, the energy halts and transitions into my solo with the Bartoli aria. I utilized tracks of cello, tracks of Bartoli, supplemented them with additional ambient sounds, mixed them together and created an original score for this section. The sounds became layered; sometimes the cello was at the forefront while at other times the aria became more dominant. As was true in the movement, the sounds fell away, leaving a long ambient note. There was a level of skill acquisition that was required for me to do this composition, since I had never done music editing before. I used the Audacity computer program to change levels of sound, pitch, and elongate the tracks, resulting in the layered and shifting quality of the composition.

Later in the process of creating *threaded glass*, I started to work with text and spoken word. The spoken word emerged from casual and structured conversations among the cast, observations, as well as written exercises. The spoken word dramatically impacted the choreography in a way where context was overtly assigned to the characters and story. There was much experimentation, trial and error to developing the composition

of the text within the work. This experimentation began with concrete, well-known choices, but later replaced with abstracted, personal choices.

During rehearsals, Adrienne, Rachel, and I would talk about our own thoughts on femininity. We would share private stories about our lives; somewhere along the way, these stories became the text of the work. I do not usually work with text and choreography, so the process was challenging. Initially I was looking for text that would provide more information about who we were as women, our connection to family as originally envisioned. One day in rehearsal, I tried singing “I love you. You love me. We’re a happy family...” from the Barney show; however, it immediately became clear that this was too concrete and too artificial. Through conversations in the rehearsal process, the text eventually developed more organically.

One day we would start talking about our sexual history or an encounter with someone the night before. We would talk about our observations of other women and interpretations of our developing characters. We talked quite openly to each other within the confines of the rehearsal studio. What would happen if we presented these extremely personal and private stories in a very public way? Something very exciting emerged from this idea. With their permission, we surged ahead with this experiment. It was enlightening the first time we shared the text in front of an audience. It was uncomfortable, scary, and embarrassing. It took strength and trust which, even with repetition and rehearsal, did not subside, resulting in a truly authentic exchange.

About halfway through the process, I encountered choreographer's block in developing new movement ideas and incorporating text within the larger work. To find solutions, I used writing exercises to generate movement conversations. I asked each of us to write an apology letter to ourselves and a forgiveness letter to someone who hurt us. Again with permission, I edited, rearranged, and combined text resulting in a non-specific declaration of sorrow and forgiveness. The text became a source from which to pull content, draw connection, and support the choreographic transitions and solos. The text framed the sections and provided some clarification to the definition of and relationship of the women.

“Oh yes. We're here. She knew, even after all these years. Something about the slope of the road, the way the trajectory of the car began to curve upwards, a perception of shape and motion that, despite being unused for thirty years, was still engraved on her mind, to be reawakened by the subtle coincidence of movement and inclination. We're here” (Mawer 2009). This opening paragraph of Simon Mawer's *The Glass Room* became the words we hear in the finale of *threaded glass*, just before the glass starts to fall. The use of this text was in response to feedback questioning the journey of the women. What has happened to them? Where have they gone? Have they changed because of the experience? My response was, “We're here.” This prose beautifully represented how I felt about the women. We were just here, in this space, in this moment. For me, thirty-two years into my adulthood, I have these memories, these histories that have shaped who I am as a woman, but I am present in the moment to be accepted as I am. The words bring to mind the shape and curve of the set design, recall references to the architecture of the space and bodies. The words bring purpose to the movement and

inclination of the dancers' bodies. It framed time. I chose to have this text pre-recorded, as it is the only text not performed live, because for me it was a shadow voice, an inner voice perhaps emoted by the home itself. It was narration from the environment, not a personal declaration of one woman.

The final comment on music and text refers to the environmental sounds that were created by the bodies and the set. I was not aware of this connection until I received audience responses. Multiple times, people commented on the sounds of the skin against the architecture. There were the creaking and cracking sounds of the structure as it adjusted to support our body weight. There was the skin scraping against the glass and floor as we slid and flung our bodies along the space. There was the bang of body against the metal as we intersected with the architecture. There were the beads tangling and clinking as the structure swayed or Adrienne thrust through the beads. The sounds drew some to the sensation of pain and desperate containment. For me, I feel it made the environment come to life and provided support to a more visceral experience for the audience (and performers).

## PHOTOGRAPHY

When *Fragmentation of Femininity* was performed in 2009, there was an audience member who fell in love with the work. Zachary Handler is a photographer and visual artist who was immediately drawn to the use of the gaze in Adrienne's solo. He approached me about taking still pictures of Adrienne's solo from different rooms in a house, using the lens to provide another perspective of her feminine postures. When he talked to me about his visions, he described the use of architecture to give clarity and

support to her femininity. He described the use of private, recognizable home settings to provide juxtaposition to her sexuality. He described my thesis.

Early in the process, within the first few months, each woman was photographed in different rooms of a house with movement recalled from the solos. Adrienne was photographed in a dining room, Rachel in a living room, and I was photographed in a kitchen. Each home was unique and quirky with bold colors, unusual architectural anomalies, and dated design. We each wore dresses reminiscent of the 1950's. Zachary photographed us from different angles and perspectives, shifting the relationship of the space created by our bodies' shapes and the architecture of the rooms. He and I discussed who the women were as characters in the work, which he tried to reflect through the focus of the camera lens (See Appendix C).

His photography was so special and interesting that I wanted to use the images in the work. I decided to incorporate them into the architecture section. I felt they provided additional visual information and context to the purpose of that section: to talk about the body in objective terms and relate the woman to rooms of a house. I had been previously viewing and working with videos of "Leave it to Beaver" episodes and 1950's public service announcements that defined the expectations of the nuclear family and the role of the woman within this unit. However, Zachary's images provided similar information in a more abstract, purposeful, and artistic way.

## COSTUME DESIGN

The costumes for *they are of threaded glass*. were designed by Adriana Diaz, an MFA candidate in the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. She took her initial inspiration from the dresses we wore for our photo shoots with Zachary and from the 1950's videos. She also drew information from our conversations about choreographic intent and constructs of the work. She was influenced by ideas of layering, revealing and concealing (see Appendix D).

The outer layers of the dresses were made of permeable fabric such as a georgette fabric in a muted color. The outer layers had detailed embroidery and dainty decoration, formed from the shape, or outer shell of the dresses in Zachary's photos. They maintained texture and shape but the outer layer had permeability under certain light. The inner layers of the dresses were sexy lingerie in bold colors. Each woman had a different color: Adrienne was green, Rachel was pink, and I was blue. The color was necessary to support the vacancy of color in the set design and to bring focus to the private areas of our bodies. There was a relationship between light and revelation of privacy, paralleling descriptive prose from Mawer's *The Glass Room*, "Refraction of the daytime become reflection of the night" (Mawer 2009). At times, the colorful lingerie was only a shadow or inclination; under different light, the inner layers were boldly brought to the forefront. The costumes also met choreographic needs and were incorporated in the work. Adrienne would slide her hands up her leg to slyly expose a hint of her panties. Rachel would have her bustier peek from under her blouse. When I flung backwards or rotated my leg outwards, my petticoat and lace tights would surface.

I had initially requested that all the undergarments be of the same color. I needed the costumes to support a unity of the women, give the hint that perhaps we were layers of the same woman. Adriana proposed that the costumes and undergarments be of different colors to support the textures of each woman's solo and instead decided to use pearl necklaces as our through line. The flounce of the dresses, the colors and textures of the fabrics, and the detail of the pearls and undergarments transformed us.

### SET DESIGN

The set was designed by Collin Ranney, an MFA candidate in the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. Originally, all I wanted was a long plexiglass wall and a plexiglass box. What I received was a magical, visceral sculpture that shaped, defined, and challenged the perspectives of the audience and performers. Collin's design transformed the theatre and elevated the integrity of *threaded glass*, pushed the boundary of my creativity and my budget.

Collin's inspiration for the set design came from conversations about the feeling I was trying to evoke with my work: the feeling of voyeurism, perspective, fragility, but strength within architecture and femininity. I needed a wall to bisect the space and a box with which to contain Adrienne. Collin brought images of spiraling sculptures made of light, glass, and metal. When I first saw the sketches and model, I was speechless; it was grander than I could have imagined. I expressed reservation about the stability. I was nervous that it had too much texture and beading. I was nervous that it would look like something from outer space. I had to trust Collin because my reservations were coming from a place of fear and insecurity; I had never worked with a set so complex. What if the

choreography could not match the enormity of the spatial design? But I had said that the architecture was as much of a character as the women, and he designed it so that it was.

To make the set design come to fruition, there were many pragmatic obstacles that included: the ability of the shop to actually build the structure, safety considerations of the audience and performers, stability of the set, and financial considerations. Before the set design could be approved, the shop needed to know they could build it. At one point, the design was scratched completely because the shop said they did not have the skill or tools to spiral, twist, and ascend the metal per Collin's plans. However, after several brainstorming sessions, the shop had some success with sample materials. The metal was heated and formed using clamps and wood pieces to guide the frame into shape. Now that the shop could build it, would it be stable enough to withstand the physicality of the work?

Stability was somewhat addressed with the choice to use the Kogod Theater versus the Dance Theater. The year before, I was given the choice of the two spaces with pros and cons to each: the Dance Theater does not have elephant doors, so there would be a height restriction to the set and the set could not be attached to the floor, so there would be a stability restriction as well. However, in using the Dance Theater, I would be able to have access a few weeks before the concert to work with the set. In the Kogod, the set could be as high as the grid and exceed the 6' height restriction of the Dance Theater. The set could be attached directly to the floor. The downfall would be that I would not be able to work with the set ahead of time because load-in would only be 3 days prior to technical rehearsals. Again, having to put trust in the process and collaborators, I chose the Kogod Theater, risking the time to work with the set. Stability of the set design was

made by bolting the brackets of the wall and spiral to the floor. However, this still did not provide enough safety and stability for using the 10' walls as surfaces for the dance.

Triangle brackets were added to the design plans. At first both Collin and I were concerned for the aesthetic integrity of the set, but the brackets confirmed stability and in reality provided additional framing and support surfaces for the performers.

The final obstacle was that of money. The set design absorbed approximately 68 % of the budget. With each new modification and pragmatic need, it required financial support. Certain compromises were made; for example, the stage was only ¼" high and bracketed directly into the floor instead of having a platform and clamps underneath the platform. The latter would be more stable and would not require the added triangle support; however, it was too expensive. Other choices regarding set design were also made by finding the balance of aesthetic desires and fiscal needs. For example, Collin did not want to use the stock risers for audience seating as he felt they would detract from the beauty and flow of the set design. Specialized seating for the audience was not affordable. What resulted was the opportunity for the audience to be in-the-round and mobile within the space, which then allowed me to have more choreographic choices within the work.

Collin's work was extremely detailed and thorough but some discoveries were accidental. The draping of the beads created a triad within the space, reflective of the three women. Collin created the architecture to contain different textures. The mixture of reflective painted floor, plexiglass walls, metal beams, and threaded glass beading allowed for light to be reflected and refracted in unique ways, framing the performers,

and providing a unique experience for the audience. For us, the set was our home. It reminded me of an imploded chandelier: grace, elegance, fragility, disruption.

The process of rehearsing with a set that did not yet exist was extremely challenging for choreographic and performance development, especially since the architecture was such an integral component of the work. For the rehearsal process, the obstacles were taped on the rehearsal floor: pink tape representing metal framing and plexiglass walls, blue tape representing draped glass beads, and yellow tape representing the large metal I-beam that bisected the spiral. Having the skeleton of the set design on the floor was helpful and provided a kind of map; however, there was no way to illustrate the z-axis of the set. We had no awareness of height or depth. During rehearsals, especially “Running Bird” section, we often decapitated ourselves with imaginary walls and metal brackets.

The Saturday before performance week, we met the set for the first time; it was a whole new world. Rachel and Adrienne were incredibly focused as we spent the day getting to know our new dance partner. We started with just touching it: the textures, the temperature, the joints of its skeleton. Then we slowly started to introduce ourselves to the set with weight. Easing my body weight, I was hesitant with the shifts and adjustments of the set but realized it was just speaking back to me. Our conversations and negotiations continued in this manner, building trust and attachment with the set. By the end of the day, it had truly become ours, we belonged.

As the set was birthed in the shop and clarity came to choreography, there were additional aspects to the set design that were negotiated later in the progress. In

incorporating the text into the work, I was experimenting with visual display of the words as well as oral expression. Collin and I brainstormed with different ways to allow the text to be read by the audience. The need for the visual support stemmed, in part, from feedback about the need for additional exposure to the sexual secrets. Ideas included painting the sexual secrets onto the six seating pods, displaying them through projections, painting words onto the walls of the set, and on other glass panes displayed in the space. We ultimately agreed to not display the sexual secrets because I felt it would put too much attention to sexuality and I addressed that feedback through choreography. However, we did put the quote “Refraction of the daytime become reflection of the night” onto a piece of glass and propped it outside the hallway. I feel that it provided a prelude and opportunity of reference for the audience. Placing the quotes on the seats or set would not allow for much exposure as people would immediately be sitting on the seats or make seating choices based on the words on the set. I didn’t want to give such parameters to choices made by the audience.

Collin’s vision, eye and perspective were extremely collaborative and an essential voice in choices made in presenting the space. Together we negotiated the choreographic needs and performer’s needs with the aesthetic choices of his design. He developed a balance of fragility and strength and framed the space with the architecture (see Appendix E).

## LIGHTING AND PROJECTIONS

Jedidiah Roe, an MFA candidate in lighting design, created the color palette for *threaded glass*. In reiteration, our artistic relationship was extremely collaborative and stemmed from conversations about the flow of the space and the intentions of the work. The lighting design was critical in supporting the framing and transitions of the performers. At one point, I was struggling to choreographically solve a difficult transition until I realized that the lighting was a pivotal player that could visually facilitate.

Jedidiah requested music samples and video of rehearsals in order to support the evoked mood and spatial tracking of the choreography. We talked about the images that my research had conjured, most saliently the prose of Mawer in describing how the glass house shifts through day and night just by the natural light against the glass and onyx. We discussed how the lighting can support the intention of private vs. public life by concealing and revealing different parts of the set design, providing another layer of visual play for the audience. Finally, the lighting design was especially significant in supporting my choreographic intention of wide focus to narrow focus. During the ensemble sections, or wider-viewed sections, the lighting spilled across the entire set; during the solos, or more focused sections, he was able to focus the lighting down into just one section of the set. Jedidiah arranged the lighting so that the spiral of the set design was in three radials: an outer ring, middle ring, and inner most core, coinciding with the placement of the women: myself on the periphery, Rachel in the middle, and Adrienne in the core and as well as supporting the psychological layering of the women.

Particular attention was paid to the way the lighting refracted through the textures of the set. The reflective nature of the paint presented specific challenges for Jedidiah. In the original design, there were small globe lights within the I-beam to give it a semblance of being lit from the inside outwards. However, when the lights were in place, it was agreed that they made the set look more like a circus spectacle and were removed.

During the “Architecture” section, the lighting was delivered through the projections. The presence of projections was an initial tool that I wanted to use from the beginning. I wanted to use projections to present a multi-media component to *threaded glass*. In the end, though, did the projections contribute to and support the work? I do not think so. Did they detract from the work? I also do not think so. Posthumously, I think that the use of the projections were neutral to the work. The images being projected were the still photos that Zachary had taken of each woman, described in the “Photography” section of this paper. The purpose of displaying those images, particularly during that section was to provide the additional visual support of body and architecture in a more concrete context, paralleling the text of “This is a breast. It is in the kitchen.” However, the color images against the black masking and curtains were not visible. Through many edits, the images were changed to black and white portraits. The saturation, contrast, and exposure were heightened and enhanced. Putting the images on the walls did not fill the space as hoped. They were square within a circular world and were distorted by the sculpture of the set design so much that they were not readable. While abstraction and splintering of the images could have been a valid choice creatively, it was important to maintain the integrity of purpose which was that of architecture. If the architecture was so splintered as to not be recognizable, I felt it did not meet the purpose. After considering

the different options, I decided to project the images onto the floor. While the images were now less distorted by the obstacle of the set, only certain images were clear and cohesive and then, only from one particular view point in the audience. In vein of supporting the artistic purpose of the projections and work overall, I believe they were unsuccessful. This lack of success is, perhaps, due to the lack of my clarity in the projection's function and purpose. However, the way that the projections lit the space allowed for permeability and shifting of the set design in a novel and rich way. I also decided to hang the color portraits in the foyer as to give a reference for the projections and act a prelude to the construct of female body and architecture for the work.

## PATRIK WIDRIG

As an MFA candidate in the areas of performance and choreography, not only was this thesis project about developing my choreographic voice but it was also an opportunity to sculpt my performative skills. I knew that I wanted to perform choreography of another artist in addition to, or instead of, my own work. I felt that the perspective of another artist could bring richness to the work in addition to challenging my physical and artistic aesthetic. I also knew that I wanted the guest choreography to be woven into the project instead of a separate entity, or idea. Patrik Widrig is an Associate Professor of Dance in the University of Maryland's School of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies and co-Director of PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER. As a member of my committee, he had insight and a mentorship role in the support of my artistic vision. As a guest artist for the work, he was able to physically embody that insight and mentorship into two solo works created for me. In working with Patrik, I knew that I would be challenged physically, moving in ways that were outside of my comfort zone. I also knew that his aesthetic was different enough from mine that it would contribute a new layer to the project, but similar enough to supplement and support instead of contrast and oppose. Again, the relationship of collaboration and trust entered into yet another aspect of *threaded glass*, inviting the opportunity for guest artistry within my thesis work.

Patrik immediately said, "Yes" when asked to create a solo for me. The only parameters given to him were that of the set design and constructs within *threaded glass*. In the beginning, we didn't speak much; he would walk in, turn on a video camera, sit down and give some general thoughts for a movement improvisation. I have to admit that

I was initially paralyzed with fear and insecurity. I would move, but the entire time I was moving, I was thinking, “Is this good enough? Is this what he’s looking for?” In fact, this psychological wall did not dissolve until well into the editing and rehearsal process. But as we worked and moved together, I became more comfortable taking risks. Some rehearsals we would improvise together (those were my favorites), some he would watch and record as I improvised alone, and some rehearsals I worked in solitude, either gathering information from the video footage or exploring on my own. Early in the process of creating movement, he asked me to do a daily movement journal with the idea of containment in mind. One particular entry, where I was doing small pelvic shifts while clawing the edge of the bathroom sink, was particularly salient for Patrik, becoming the impetus for the wall dance. The process of working together created an intimate relationship of mentorship, respect, and admiration. Our rehearsals began to involve longer conversations about my sexual health, my femininity, and the pain of it all. Those conversations directed Patrik to the music of the castrati, as discussed in an earlier section. The relationship with Patrik also brought another layer into our choreographies.

The “Running Bird” section, imagined and directed by Patrik, was based on structured improvisation and a general vocabulary of “comets flying by,” “machine gun fire,” diving, running, rolling, being dazed, and imagery of a caged bird that keeps flying into the clear walls. Originally intended to be a solo for me, Adrienne and Rachel were incorporated into the section, adding more energy, risk, and chaos to contained space. The energy within the core of the set was as if creatures were contained and desperate to escape. It was frantic, risky, and dangerously beautiful. The title of the song “In Braccio A Mille Furie” translates to “In Arm a Million Furies” which is exactly what we felt. It

was the longest 2 minutes and 50 seconds of my life as I trained cardiovascularly for the work. The movement required that I let go in my body, but not so much as to not be in control of oneself through space. If total abandon was achieved, I believe I could have been seriously injured. I needed to be aware enough of my space and architectural obstacles, but still experience tantric release through the body. The movement was core to distal and it was easy to get stuck just thrusting about the arms and legs; the movement had to come from deep within, exploding outwards.

Patrik also choreographed the final solo for me. This solo was developed in two phrases: a wall phrase and a large movement phrase through the space. The wall work was by far my favorite part of the entire work. I felt completely transformed and moved to another realm when truly connected to the wall, the movement, and the music. It took me a long time to find that connection. Patrik would tell me to stop dancing from a place of “rightness” and to just feel the moment. When that happened, it changed everything. The movement vocabulary came from the improvisation at the bathroom sink, with initiations coming from subtle shifts of the pelvis. From these pelvic shifts and pressing of the feet through the floor, my spine would lift upwards and open outwards to reveal pain, beauty, and core. The expression didn’t come from the face or acting, but from expressivity of the spine. I really struggled to find the range of movement through my spine and the depth of the twisting and shifting diagonals, but breath work, Bartenieff work, and release work outside of rehearsals facilitated the access and deepening of the choreography on my body. In addition to the physical demand, the phrase was performed against the clear wall. I had to trust the fragile wall to provide support for the entirety of my body weight.

Because the wall was clear, the phrase could now be seen from both sides and became two separate dances based on the audience's line of sight.

In the larger moving phrase, there was a revisiting of twisting, falling, and rolling as I moved through Adrienne, Rachel, and the set. There were moments of sheer strength and struggle exhibited, and I was invited to let the struggle be visible. I was allowed to soften and would feel the air of the space on my skin as I passed through it. In moments of contortion or physical tension, there would be a revealing of my lace tights, and then a sudden release of the head and spine as I moved through the moments. The challenge of this solo was to define, or clarify my relationship to the architecture. I had begun with an extremely intimate and supportive relationship with the wall. Why did I move away? What was my relationship now with the wall? What's my relationship with the rest of the space? I did not find resolution with those questions probably until opening night. In the moment, I made choices about focus, momentum, stillness, and intension based on my salient experience in that heightened state. As I moved away from the wall, I would turn my face to see it again. I still had a relationship to the wall but now I was vertical and steady on my own two feet. I made eye contact with Adrienne and Rachel; we had an unspoken conversation that informed the way I would approach the rest of the phrase away from the wall. During my solo, I felt the most disconnected from the audience. It was not meant for them to see. It was meant for me to experience. Because of the lighting, this solo was the only time that I could not see the audience. I never felt more fulfilled and inspired than at the beginning of the solo when I curved around the outer edge of the wall to begin the wall phrase. I felt as if my spine spilled upward and outward and my face turned into the warmth of the amber light. It was as if I were breathing in the

vacuum of light and space through my spine. I existed in each moment fully, touching the floor with my hands, seeing each detail of the set and my dance partners, feeling my feet in the floor; these visceral experiences shaped my intention for the solo phrase. This intention was quite different opening night than closing night, as my journey and relationship with the architecture and work were different in those moments. I only hope and do believe that this mindfulness approach to the work during performance addressed the questions of my relationship with the architecture that could not have been realized in the rehearsal process, when my world was not yet existent.

## DIRECTING

Working with Patrik resulted in a truly symbiotic relationship where my explorations with him informed my work with Adrienne and Rachel. What helped me in embodying Patrik's choreography was having him as a technique teacher. In addition, I spend much focused time outside of rehearsals on somatic work to help access diagonals and core in my own body. As a director, part of my role was to coach the performers and provide them with the skills to master the materials given. Within our process, we only focused on the necessary components of the repertory. I do wish that I had given them more general skills through technique work or somatic practice. The performance skills we developed were detail-specific for *threaded glass*. For example, the text delivery required much coaching and feedback. In a call and response manner, we would toss the words back and forth until the inflections fell into exactness. Rachel really struggled to find the quality needed for her solo: the softness and youthfulness of character balanced with the groundedness and strength of the movement vocabulary. I used imagery, colors, story, and textures to assist with quality clarification. For Adrienne, it was a challenge for her to not overly act facially. The strength and power needed to come from the body but not the intensity of the face. We used the mirror as a tool for this during her solo rehearsals. While this work was helpful in addressing the specific needs of *threaded glass*, ideally providing more generalized sessions on these techniques and approaches may have helped them acquire the skills more easily within the different sections or supported the performers for future projects.

## AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

*they are of threaded glass.* was billed to be a thought-provoking experience where each audience member would have a unique and different perspective from the other. I knew that not everyone would be able to hear the text or see the dancing unobstructed. There was a Gestalt experience within *threaded glass*; it was non linear with disconnected parts that some audience members would need to make linear and whole. This was a specific intention that became revealed through the creative process and guided many of the choreographic choices within the work.

I received a sample of audience response to the work through undergraduate dance students' critique papers, conversations immediately after the performance as well as some time after the shows, conducting a question-and-answer session with undergraduate students in the University's Women's Studies department, and structured response sessions in the graduate-level composition classes. I also reviewed anonymous blog posts from the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center's website. In reflecting on these responses to the work, I expected a significant difference in the way men and women related to the work. What I discovered was that the experience was universally salient and visceral for the audience members I encountered, independent of their sexual orientation, gender, age, or experience. It was my intention for the audience to feel something, anything – that is how I define successful art – and many did, in a big way. I received such strong, passionate, and intense audience responses, positively and negatively, with each perspective being a completely valid experience for that viewer.

“...But when the performance was over, I didn't walk out of the theatre wondering, ‘What just happened?’ I felt that I had followed the idea, more or less, though I don't know if I could really describe it accurately. It would be as barbarous as trying to summarize a good poem - Withhart's treatment of the pain, passion, and conflict involved in confronting sexuality was already as concise and exact as it could be, if one can call a dance ‘concise’” (Lake 2010).

“The set, music, lighting were beautiful. The dancing and the piece as a whole was a little disconnected for me. There were solid moments of beauty and clarity throughout, but I felt that the piece in its entirety could have been more developed” (unknown 2010).

These two critiques illustrate the dichotomous perspectives of the audience. I was surprised by the feelings of disconnection that were expressed by several audience members. I'm not sure whether or not the disconnection occurred through the transitions between sections, the musical scores, or content to context. I wonder if the feeling of disconnection would more accurately be described as feelings of discomfort. The audience was in a unique and vulnerable seating arrangement, immediately confronted with extremely risky and dangerous language which could either draw an audience member into the work or cause them to look away.

A repeated comment from some audience members was the inability to extrapolate clear meaning from the work, again, another aspect of feeling discomfort and a common response to contemporary modern dance. The viewer may feel uncomfortable and dissonant if they are not able to understand what they are viewing. Many tried to

create a story that wasn't necessarily there in order to make it a complete experience for them. Some paralleled the women to the hysterics of women in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Others simply stated the work was about rape or sex. Some interpreted the work as a grand manifesto on feminism and female expression. My offer to the audience was to present an abstract experience without specific context and linear frames of reference with which to anchor a storyline, a poetic narrative utilizing layering and multiplicity of text, visual imagery, architectural design, and movement.

The relationship of the women to each other was not concisely and clearly defined but rather again a manifestation of the multiplicity of the work. I feel there was great clarity in the constructs of the work. Within abstract artistry and contemporary dance context, the explorations of privacy and publicity, core and periphery, and concealing and revealing were presented through a layered, complete, and thoughtful work of art. What made me feel accomplished as an artist was meeting the viewer who was moved to tears and asking to see more, hearing the need to see the work again and again in order to experience something new, seeing the viewers who were speechless and overwhelmed by the beauty and unexpectedness of it all, hearing of the other artists who were moved to action, having the need to respond to what they had just witnessed.

I expected a level of audience interaction by inviting the audience to move about the space during the performance. This invitation was delivered through a line in the program copy as well as the open-ended invitation extended through the design of the set: offering options of viewing the work through and around the space. I was interested to see if any would want to change their perspective or just settle into their places. Thursday night, several people actively moved about the space. I felt as if they were almost trying

to anticipate or race me to the next location in space. Because they were in constant motion and zoomed in closely to the “action,” they missed out on the opportunity to view the wide scope and breadth of the work. Other audience members expressed distraction by the mobile audience and frustration when the mobile bodies would stop in front of another person’s vantage point. For some, the moving observers became another focus of the dance. But even with this superfluous choreography occurring outside the performer’s existence, it lent validity to audience choice-making and the radiating-layer role of object/observer: me seeing them through the glass, them seeing me through the other side of the glass, and the larger audience seeing them observing me.

In addition, a few audience members were approached and touched by the performers a couple of different times within the work. For us, it was an opportunity to remind the audience that they are a part of the work. It was an invitation and opportunity for them to have physical sensation of what we were experiencing within our space. Adrienne and Rachel talked about their different interactions with their audience member each night. One woman refused to let Adrienne guide her hand to her bosom, requiring Adrienne to make a different choice of maintaining the contact and then touching herself with her other hand. Rachel’s partner one night truly gave into the exchange and was equally committed to Rachel while on the subsequent night, the partner giggled uncomfortably and refused eye contact with Rachel.

As mentioned, there was a strong sexual component to *threaded glass*. In the very beginning of the work, we declare our sexual secrets: Rachel is still a virgin because her boyfriend is a Catholic; Adrienne was raped when she was 15 and it turned her on, and my vagina is too tight, causing me to cry in pain when I have sex with my husband. I

imagine this was uncomfortable for much of the audience to experience; it was uncomfortable for us to perform! I remember the surprise and overwhelming fear I felt walking out opening night, standing there, realizing how close everyone was to us. The proximity was incredibly daunting and unexpected. I had not considered the different feelings that would be experienced when delivering potent text and movement throughout the space. For example, the different barriers between us and the audience made for a different internal experience when performing. It was frighteningly exposing when talking to an audience member right in front of them versus when whispering or gesturing through the protection of a glass wall. The number of bodies surrounding us was startling and unsettling. The delivery of such sexually explicit and personal information in a casual manner set such a potentially salient experience for both the performer and the audience member that it may have overshadowed the rest of the work. I was concerned that the overt sexuality of the work would be too strong and overpower the other constructs of the work. Some found the sexual content disrespectful and careless. In creating *threaded glass* and developing the text, I had not considered who would be my audience. One audience member described the delivery of sexual content disrespectful and careless, not taking in consideration of how the performers would feel having someone “gossip” about their sexuality, for example, when Adrienne tells the other side of the room about Rachel’s virginity. The audience member also felt that as a viewer, she was not supported in feelings of sexuality or abuse that may arise from the content of the work. I had not considered the need to protect or support the audience in that fashion; I had not defined what the culture of my audience may be, but I had attended to the needs of the performers. I believe that the words were relevant and our delivery of them established

that we were committed to exposing our most personal secrets; this would not be an ordinary performance. If we had been protective of our words, the end result would have been different and a separation from my original intent. As we revisited those words and secrets in the “Architecture” section, we were less strong, splintered somehow by unspecified forces within us, or by the words themselves.

## CONCLUSIONS

In evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of *threaded glass*, I feel that the weakest link in the work was the “Architecture” section, or the transition from Rachel’s solo into that section. I feel as if that section is still unfinished, needing clarity in terms of its purpose and intention within the work. I would reexamine the use of projections in this section, clarify their purpose and need. The moments of apology and connection between the dancers in this section are very important, and there is opportunity to explore the need and vulnerability of those private and personal exchanges.

The strength of the work overall was the commitment of the dancers, the dexterity of technique and artistry required to execute not only the choreography, but the performance as well. The connection of the fluid elements within *threaded glass* came from the collaboration of the designers, performers, crew, and Center administration. Each member of the project was fully invested in the project which helped to overcome the many pragmatic challenges. For example, this was an expensive concert and a lesson learned about the true fiscal need of all aspects of producing a concert. Some artistic choices were decided by financial limitations; however, the committee advocated and invested their time to find solutions that would sustain the artistic integrity and not bankrupt the project. Another example is with regards to the ending section: the stunning conclusion of raining and falling glass shards from the ceiling down onto the floor between the dancers. The crew was just as invested as the choreographers in making the ending a success, spending many days researching and testing the falling glass before approving its use. I never felt my vision was compromised, but rather it was supported and enhanced through participation and investment of all involved.

*they are of threaded glass.* is an investigation of moments where we witness three women as they navigate through their architecture of body, space, and self. Through explorations of private versus public relationships, there is a deepening investigation of core versus periphery existence. These constructs are supported by the layering of lighting, costuming, and architectural design. It is a true capstone of my graduate studies work: revisiting works from previous compositions, challenging the physicality and expressivity of my body and self, and showcasing my discovered artistry. As a director, I began with feelings of insecurity and doubt, but through this process, developed and realized ownership of my artistic voice.

When considering the future of *threaded glass*, I feel that I am met with all new challenges. The set design was dismantled and recycled for other projects. Even if the set was reconstructed for another venue, it would not and could not be identical, partly due to fiscal restraints and partly due to the transcendent nature of space and time of the work. The solos can be presented mutually exclusive of each other, but I struggle with how to translate the work from in-the-round perspective to the restriction of a proscenium setting, especially when the architecture and audience relationship to space were such pivotal partners to the work. Because of the relationship of bodies to architecture and the universality of public and private existence, I could see *threaded glass* becoming a site specific, or rather site *generalized* work; it does not need to be contained to the theater setting. I am interested in the breath and permeability of the work as it is introduced to new architectural and sculptural designs.

I believe there is a lot of play and exploration to continue within the work. For example, can the exploration extend beyond the three of us and incorporate more secrets? What if the audience's private life was revealed instead of the performers? Within the process of creating and reflecting on the work, there was polarity between public/private, vulnerable/protected, "right"/"wrong." There are now more questions about how to navigate these layers. Do we shift and gravitate towards one end of the spectrum? In this work, I often described the process as just "feeling right;" however, feeling "right" did not always feel comfortable. What can be shown through transitions and in-between moments of time and being? I can only hope that *they are of threaded glass*. does not retire after this moment, but what will surely continue forward is the way the project has shaped and defined me as an artist.

"Quality of environment is essential to human existence and the experience of *being* in the world. [I] have tried to reveal the extraordinary and inextricably linked relationships in the spatiality of being, building, and bodies. Together, they illustrate the interconnectedness of psychic, spiritual, physical, architectural and emotional spaces; the body moving in the sacred dance of *being*. When the outside places reflect the inside spaces, then one can feel a sense of harmony within oneself and experience the continuity of the internal and external environment" (McNeur 2008).

## APPENDIX A



Villa Tugendhat

## APPENDIX B



Vanessa Beecroft's *vb16: Deitch Projects*



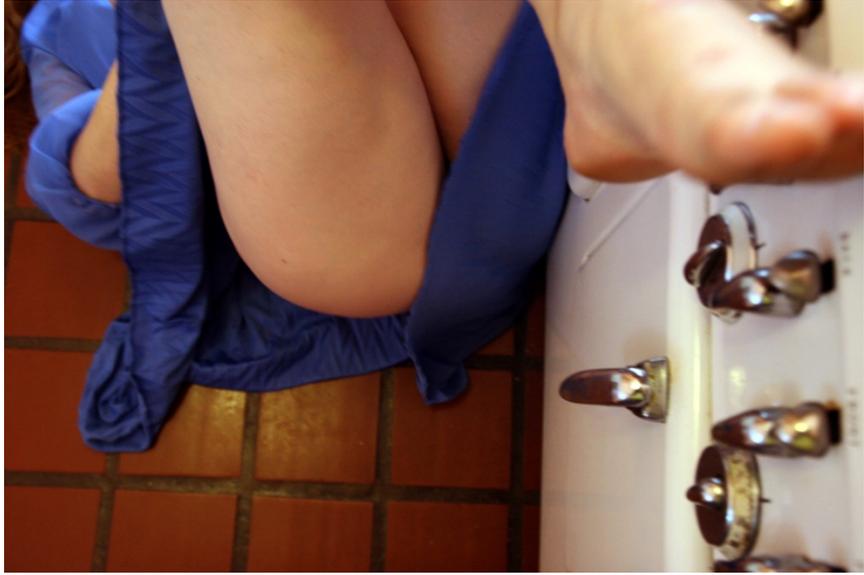
Vanessa Beecroft's *vb45: Kunsthalle Wien*

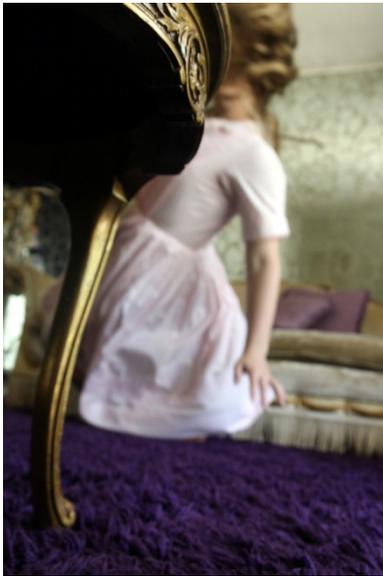
## APPENDIX C

Photography by Zachary Z. Handler

Performers: Adrienne Latanishen, Lauren Withhart, and Rachel Wolfe

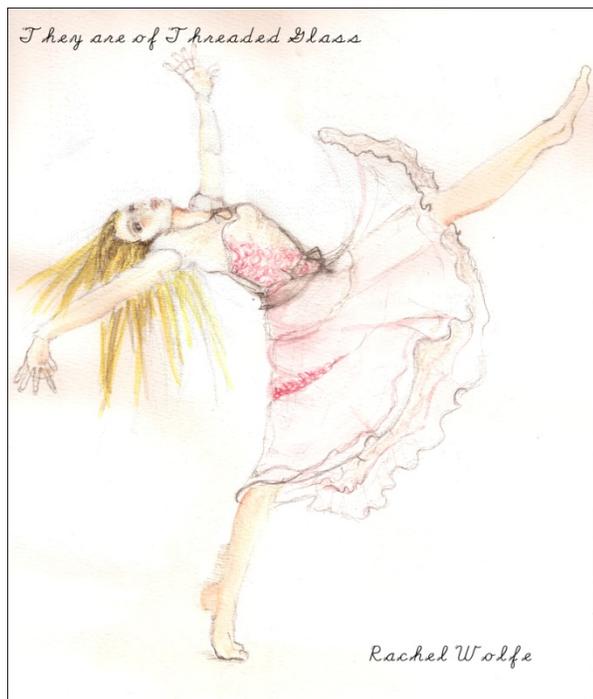






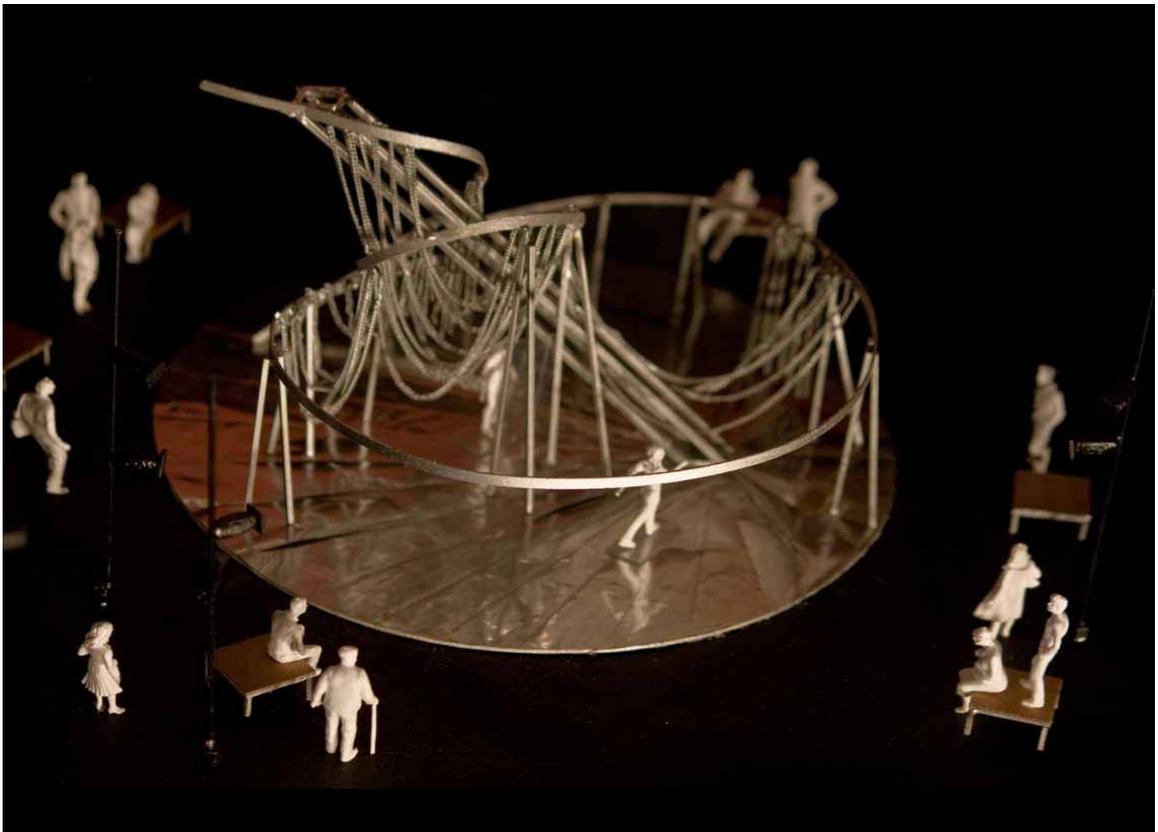
## APPENDIX D

Preliminary costume sketches by Adriana Diaz



## APPENDIX E

Set design by Collin Ranney  
¼ inch scale model



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