

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE MAKING OF *VISIBLE SEAMS*
Erin Rose Crawley-Woods, Master of Fine Arts,
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Directed By: Professor Patrik Widrig, Dance

Visible Seams is a roving tapestry of movement and sound that flows up staircases, rolls down hallways, perches in windows and poses in the courtyards of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Inspired by the films of Busby Berkeley and the expanse and elegance of the Center's common areas and corridors, I partnered architecture with choreography to create a journey of shifting perspectives for the audience. Sound and video installations displayed in the weeks preceding and following the performance foreshadowed and echoed the dance, encouraged a more fully sensual experience of the venue, and returned the ideas borrowed from Berkeley back to a recorded medium.

This document is a chronology of the creative process of this work and charts the course from inspiration to collaboration, performance, and reflection. It serves as a record of the ins and outs, ups and downs, why and wherefores of creating a site-specific performance event.

THE MAKING OF *VISIBLE SEAMS*

By

Erin Rose Crawley-Woods

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master's of Fine Arts
2014

Advisory Committee:
Professor Patrik Widrig, Chair
Professor Karen Kohn Bradley
Professor Sharon Mansur
Professor Sara Pearson

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Dedication

Visible Seams is the result of a collective “yes.”

It was created in, for, and with the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

It is a sensory play date with the architecture.

It is a celebration of the comings and goings, the creative risks and the whirring vacuum cleaners that co-mingle in this place.

It is dedicated to the faculty, staff, students, artists, and patrons that bring it to life both day and night.

It is my deepest gratitude for the privilege of spending three years at home here.

Acknowledgements

I wrote my Special Thanks first, even before I turned in the proposal for this project, even before it had a title. Why? Wishful thinking? Fantasizing that I was already at the end sweetly reminiscing about the journey? Perhaps. But it was also because I knew that if I could name those who I would be grateful to have had around me, I was half way there. If I could articulate what I would be thankful for at the end, I would have a better idea of what I would need during and that seemed like a good place to begin. Here's what I wrote in September 2012:

Thank you to my co-conspirator, Stephanie Miracle, without whom this idea would not have been born and with whom it has become all it needed and wanted to be.

Thank you to my cohort and dear friends Ana Patricia Farfan, Jessie Laurita-Spanglet and Stephanie Miracle. You amaze me, daily. I cannot imagine having gone on this ride without you. You have raised the bar for every ride yet to come.

Thank you to Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig. Your whole-hearted wisdom, enthusiasm and encouragement are infectious and invaluable. Each time our paths cross I know I'm on the right track. It may seem like I'm following you, but I'm not. (But really, where are we going next?)

Thank you to Karen Bradley, who on the first day said, "be fearless" and has held me to it every day since.

Thank you to composer Tomek Regulski for sharing your insight, and your sound.

Thank you to Emily Warheit, keeper of the theory and audience guide. You gave me the best gift possible when you said “don’t worry, I’ll do the overthinking.” I now understand dramaturgy.

Thank you to my family for your unwavering love, support, and confidence.

Thank you to the Center for taking a chance on me.

Thank you to the dancers. (I don’t know who you are yet, but I’m sure you’re amazing.)

Since this initial list my gratitude has grown by leaps and bounds. Here are the people who, whether they knew it or not, helped make *Visible Seams*:

My chair, Patrik Widrig. My committee, Sara Pearson, Sharon Mansur, Karen Bradley. My teachers, Adriane Fang, Miriam Phillips, Anne Warren, Alvin Mayes, Paul Jackson, Peter Noonan. My champion, Cary Gillett. My first cheerleader, Tomie Hahn. My intrepid site-manager, Tarythe Albrecht (the next piece stars you). My charismatic costume designer, Robert Croghan. My impeccable lighting and projection designer, Rob Denton. The crew: Rachel Barlaam, Brooke Friedman, Cindy King, Phyllis Liu, Chris Robeck, Kathryn Winkler. (Thanks for waving that fabric!) The custodial staff, who keep this place gleaming, vacuumed around me and were our first audience. And the dancers who ARE this piece. I knew you’d be amazing!

Spring 2012: Monica Blitzer, Lynda Cholvibul, Shannon Dooling, Yoko Feinman, Jessica Matta, Stephanie Miracle, Florian Rouiller, Claire Tills, Claire Weber, Kristen Yeung.

Fall 2013: Elizabeth Barton, Julia Bayer, Robin Neveu Brown, Cristina Camacho,
Emma Coyle, Katie Gundlach, Courtney Harris, Megan Morse Jans, Joanna Jones,
Nicole McClam, Stephanie Miracle, Christine Nwosu, Elissa Orescan, Annie Ponton,
Alberto Segarra, Julia Smith, Celeste White.

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Chapter 1: Beginnings

September 2011

As part of our first-year graduate choreography class with Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig we are assigned to set a short site-specific study on students from Alvin Mayes' technique class. We have two 20-minute periods and ten students to work with. I choose a staircase on the left side of the Grand Pavilion of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. I am drawn to its gentle curve as it sweeps up alongside the Gildenhorn Recital Hall. I like the brass railing that accompanies it and the fact that from the open balcony above, one can peer down on the staircase and look out over the pavilion. It's a good view. Ten dancers are the most bodies I've had to work with choreographically in a while. Years of immersing myself in musical films of the 1930's and 40's and a girl-hood spent dreaming of a career on the silver screen (never mind the fact that I was half a century too late) bubble up to the surface. Curved staircase + lots of dancers = Busby Berkeley! I realize I can use the levels of the staircase to choreograph not only the dancers' movement, but also a path for the audience. They can watch from the bottom of the stairs as the dancers slither down on their bellies. They can walk up the staircase passing closely beside the dancers as they are tucked up against the walls on either side. Then they can look down on the dancers from above as they move through symmetrical, synchronized swimming-like movements, forming patterns on the stairs and gazing up at the audience as if ready for their "close-ups". In this way I can mimic Berkeley's choreography for the camera with his tracking shots, top shots, and zooming in and out. The result is a

playful seven minutes set to “Dance Until the Dawn”, a song used in a Berkeley number in the 1931 film *Flying High*.



Illustration 1. The side staircase.

October 2011

I discover the cloister-like hallway on the second level of the building. Tucked beside the Gildenhorn and running the length of an outdoor courtyard to connect with another hallway in the School of Music, one seems to come upon the hallway, or it seems to come upon one, quite by surprise. It feels like a secret. It is a passageway and yet not highly trafficked. It is narrow, somehow longer than one expects, with pure, white walls and a gracious row of windows on one side that allow the whole space to be filled with natural light during the day. Evenly-spaced half arches rise up from the wall and slant across the ceiling to just above the illuminated sconces between each set of windows. The symmetry is elegant, the repetitiveness rhythmic and refined. It becomes my sanctuary.

One day while I'm perched in repose on one of the wide windowsills, a young man enters at the opposite end. He carries a violin. He stops and stares out a window, then tunes his instrument and begins to play. It feels like an invitation. I start dancing, improvising to the deep tones and drawn-out notes of the strings. I glide between one side of the hall and the other, exploring the nooks and crannies of the walls with my elbows, fingers, toes and hipbones. I press myself up on and launch off of the ledges of the windows. I roll up and down the carpeted length of the corridor and I discover that with my hands reaching overhead, my body just fits across the width of it. We are taking each other's measurements, this space and I. I have an impulse to roll all the way down the hall and curl up at the violinist's feet. I resist temptation. Instead I approach him in a more pedestrian manner. I confess that I have made him my unwitting accompanist. He seems unfazed by this and we have a conversation about his Baroque violin and upcoming dissertation defense before parting ways, he to his "music" end of the hallway and I to my "dance" end.



Illustration 2. The hallway.

December 2011

Stephanie Miracle, a fellow MFA candidate in my cohort, presents a duet on the main staircase of the Grand Pavilion as part of her research project on Pina Bausch. Bausch, one of the most significant figures in modern dance in the late 20th century, drew heavily from German *Tanztheater* to pioneer a style all her own. Through often elaborate stage settings and a robust mixture of movement and narrative elements she created works that are, in Stephanie's words, "visceral and sensual, full of emotional and psychological content, rich texture and human qualities." Stephanie pays homage to and embodies these qualities in her improvised dance in the Grand Pavilion. She wears a green evening gown. She spins and spills up and down and over the stairs and occasionally collides with her male counterpart who is simply walking down the stairs. She stops him in his tracks by leaping into his arms with abandon. He matter-of-factly carries her to a spot on the stairs where he carefully places her down face up and head first so that her body and long hair cascade down the steps. He then continues on his way down the main staircase and up the side staircase to loop around while she gathers herself up and resumes her spellbound dancing. This pattern repeats several times until he stays and they move through a swirling duet of lifts, turns, and slides down the railings. It is stunning.

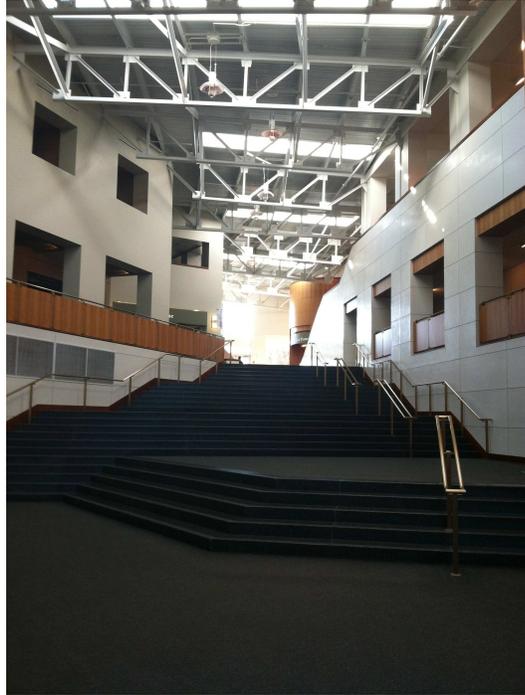


Illustration 3. The Grand Pavilion.

January 2012

While eating pancakes at Mark's Kitchen in Takoma Park I say to Stephanie, "You know, we should put our staircase pieces together."

She says "Yeah, let's do it!"

We decide to collaborate on weaving these two pieces together and then extending them into the upper hallway and outdoor courtyards. It will be my choreography project for the spring semester.



Illustrations 4 and 5. The courtyards.

March 2012

While passing by Applause Café I see glass tubes mounted on the ceiling and hear clear and haunting tones emanating from white boxes on the floor. This is the very sound I imagine “my hallway” would make. When I read the description plaque on the wall, I understand why.

Transposed Resonance

Kris Hauser - artist

Tomek Regulski - composer

Jon Verna – artist

The focal point of Transposed Resonance is the sunlight that comes through the windows of this hallway as the day moves from afternoon to

evening. It in itself is a beautiful experience, and it becomes intriguing from an artistic point of view. Aside from this, one may suggest that the two other defining characteristics of this hallway are glass, and the color white. These two elements were taken as the foundation to creating artwork that functions in this hallway on two levels. First, it draws a strong connection to the environment in which it has been placed, and second, it interacts with the sunlight that comes through on a clear day.

The musical component of Transposed Resonance, on the other hand, draws its material directly from the artwork. The work is composed entirely from recordings of the glass tubes being struck by the yarn head and wooden handle of a percussion mallet. These resonances and struck sounds have been sped up, slowed down, and subjected to effects such as reverb and granular synthesis.

Finally, there is the element of space to be considered. In the case of the artwork, there is a gradual ascent from the first window piece to the last of the hanging pieces. This works in contrast to the slope of the floor in the hallway and works in conjunction with the expanding space of the windows.

The sound also engages the full length of the hallway through three speakers, as well as expanding the space into the smaller hallway found two thirds of the way down toward the café. The contrasting ceiling height in this smaller hallway gives rise to a large contrast in the localization of sound in the space. While localization, except for the most percussive of sounds, is fairly ambiguous in the main hallway, all but the most ambient sounds localize very clearly in the smaller hallway. This contrast allowed for various degrees of direction in the gestures found in the music.

I inquire about Tomek at the front desk of the School of Music. He is a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate in Composition. The receptionist scrawls his name and a room number on a yellow post-it note.



Illustration 6. The post-it note.

It takes me two weeks of getting lost in the underground of the building to find him. When I do, I tell him about my project and ask if he is willing to transpose his *Transposed Resonance* to the other side of the building. He happily agrees.

During this time I also meet with Emily Warheit, a Theatre and Performance Studies PhD candidate in Faedra Carpenter's Dramaturgy class who I have been paired with to collaborate on a project of our choosing. My initial response is "what's dramaturgy?" and "why do they keep coming up with more stuff for us to do?" From our first meeting Emily and I hit it off and seem to have limitless topics of conversation. I have several project ideas but as the "staircase/hallway dance" is my main project for the spring, we decide to focus on that. Emily is enthusiastic and has a wealth of information and resources on themes from narrative cinema and film technique to gender issues and identity in performance. I immediately feel like a brat for complaining about this compulsory partnership.

April 2012

A cast has been assembled and rehearsals ensue. For Stephanie and me the collaboration is easy and natural. She focuses on the duet, I focus on the group, and we share the new section in the hallway and outdoor courtyard. I direct the overall flow of the piece but we both create movement material and offer ideas on timing and ways to relate to the space. By the end, it's impossible for either of us to take sole ownership of any one part, which I believe marks a true and successful collaboration.

Tomek and I enjoy an equally productive working relationship. Coming from different disciplines we speak different languages but easily find common ground as

his composition and my choreography are clearly a match in tone and sensibility. It helps that we are not starting from scratch. Any part of *Transposed Resonance* would create the atmosphere I am going for in the hallway so I give him complete freedom to re-work the piece as he sees fit. After attending several rehearsals he reconfigures his 25-minute composition down to 8 minutes and divides it into three parts based on the structure he sees in the choreography – introduction, main segment, and walking segment. It works. While we are not relying on the music for cues, it creates such a meditative soundscape that we find our runs always go more smoothly when we are accompanied by the music. It sets an internal tone for each dancer and collectively “puts us in the right place.”

Choreographically, I continue to pay particular attention to the migration of the audience and to devise a pathway for them through the architecture that allows for ever-shifting perspectives of the space and the dancers. My interest in this is twofold: to create an ambulatory progression for the audience that serves as a living, breathing thread through the compartmentalized spaces of the Center; and to partner architecture with choreography in order to capture the visual experience that Berkeley created with his choreography of and for the camera. How does one achieve the effect of cinematic techniques such as panning, framing, zooming in and out and cutting to new angles and perspectives without the cinematic instrument itself? What happens when the power of the lens of the camera (and the man with the camera) is given to the body and eyes of the audience? Does asking such questions automatically obligate me to a discussion of perpetuating or subverting the male gaze? Do I even want to go there? No, I do not. But I read Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema” anyway and with Emily’s reassurance that “sometimes asking the question is enough,” I keep going.

May 2012

Stephanie and I present our collaborative choreographic effort at our year-end showing. It does not have an official title, but unofficially we refer to it as *Busby Bausch*. It includes: her opening duet partnered by third-year MFA Dance candidate Florian Rouiller, my group piece on the side staircase danced by students from my DANC148 class, a new piece in the hallway performed by myself, Shannon Dooling, Yoko Feinman, and Kristen Yeung, and a coda to each section in the courtyard outside.

Emily takes on the key role as “audience guide” in order to help the audience transition from one vantage point to the next, although I try to have these cues built into the piece itself as much as possible. For example, after the first two sections (the duet and group piece), the audience is on the second level balcony, looking down on the side staircase. Stephanie reappears and sweeps along the wall behind them. The audience follows her to the long hallway where they stop while she continues a swirling pathway down the hall passing by four women spaced evenly along the wall, standing on a slight diagonal with their backs turned toward the audience. Once Stephanie exits, the four begin a composed sculptural dance that slips between unison and canon. They lilt towards and away from the wall, drop to the floor, tuck themselves into the windowsills with only lower limbs exposed and move through precise leg gestures that echo the synchronized motions of the women on the side

staircase. Eventually they climb up into the windows, hang on to the upper ledges and lean back, creating long curves with their bodies from head to toe that mirror the arches above. The audience then takes the long walk down to the opposite end of the hallway, passing within inches of the dancers perched in the windows, and turns around to look back from whence they came. The four women have now re-positioned themselves along the wall and begin the sequence again, this time looking more directly at the audience who now have a 180 degree flipped perspective of the action. Stephanie and Florian reappear for a brief moment at the far end of the hall. Florian exits leaving Stephanie and the four women to begin a walking sequence up and down the hallway, retreating and advancing, moving closer and further from the audience. Stephanie then walks all the way forward and passes through the audience prompting them to follow her through the doors to the courtyard outside. Once again, the audience looks back to where they've been, this time through the windows of the hallway to have a horizontal view of the structure and the experience of being on the outside looking in. The four women left inside begin a frenzied phase that involves one dancing a sweeping, spinning phrase as the other three women sprint back and forth from one end of the hallway to the other creating streaks of color and speed. From the audience's perspective the windows reveal action even as the walls obstruct it so that the movement is both framed and cut into by the architecture. The section resolves when all four women sprint to one end of the hallway in a collective rush and disappear. At this point the women who had been on the staircase and meanwhile have been posed along one wall in the courtyard begin a quick rhythmic stepping phrase that carries them into the passageway that runs perpendicular to the long

hallway and separates the two outdoor courtyards. The audience remains where they are but follows with their eyes as the dancers sit on the interior windowsill, then split off to the sides like a curtain being pulled apart to reveal Stephanie and the four women from the hallway in a staggered line between the trees on the opposite side of the passageway. The audience now watches them through two sets of windows, further achieving the effect of zooming out. The dancers move through a simple and repetitive standing sequence of arms reaching upward, collapsing at the joints, crumbling over from the center of their bodies and then bursting up again like geysers. Eventually the four peel off one by one to the side and walk away leaving only Stephanie who completes the movement. She then stops to gaze back at the audience through the panes of glass, turns and walks in the opposite direction, disappearing into the trees and bushes behind her. It feels like an ending and a beginning. Afterwards Sara whispers, “this could be your thesis.” I laugh it off because 1.) I’m just feeling lucky to have survived the first year and I cannot even entertain the thought of year two right now and 2.) I actually love the idea but don’t think I could get off so easy as to have already begun what seems like such a daunting task.

June 2012

I’m on the train from NYC to Washington, DC. I have just seen Wim Wender’s documentary *Pina*. I have already forgotten Sara’s gentle hint and am obsessing about the fact that I have no idea what to do for my thesis project. I scribble this in my journal in response to the film and as a wish list:

*I want to see sky and windows,
mud and trains.*

*I want to feel wind and sand,
stone and silk.*

*I want speed and space
- raum für bewegung.*

I want whispers and ahas!

I want laughter and water

I want to roll and spin and spiral

*I want wise bones, ticklish joints,
curious skin.*

*I want to move like honey, like rivulets,
like needles.*

*I want to explode and glitter down in
a million pieces.*

I want to land in a million places.

*I want to come together again like a
shiny black stone.*

Chapter 2: Somewhere in the Middle

September 2012

Back at school. Year two. Thesis proposals are due in three months. I am completely uninspired in the studio. I've got nothing. All I can think of is dancing on staircases, in hallways, under arches, through windows, up walls. I just want to keep working on the piece from the spring but I know it could be a logistical nightmare getting permission to rehearse and perform in those sites, contending with all the other activity and interests in the building and going through what can be an awkward rehearsal process right out in the open. But then I realize that's *exactly* what I want to do! What if I consider these negotiations as much a part of the creative process as the choreography? What if instead of feeling thwarted by limitations, I embrace them as fuel for resourceful problem solving. What if instead of tucking myself into a studio and making a dance with a handful of dancers, I work with people on every level, literally and figuratively, of the building? What if I'm not the only one who has a stake in this? In answer to my own questions, I write my artist's statement:

As an artist I am inspired by the intersection of built and natural environments and the expression of the human experience within them. In crafting site-specific performance I seek to: create opportunities for people to tune in and connect with the world around them; design experiences that are accessible to a broad range of audience in a diverse array of settings; and put a twist on everyday occurrences in order to shift people's perception of space, place and their role within it. I am motivated by the unpredictable challenges and surprises of creating work in public/semi-public spaces. This involves a broader community than might usually take part in making a dance possible and therefore engages social structures as well as spatial, has the potential to mobilize communities, and gives more individuals a stake in the creative process.

October 2012

I divulge my desire to Sara, Patrik and Karen Bradley. They say, “go for it.” Then I tell Cary Gillett, production manager for the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (TDPS). She is encouraging and realistic. “Have a Plan B,” she says, “And here’s what we need to do for Plan A.” She explains that as this project will take place out of the traditional theatre venues and will have such limited audience capacity (because it travels through narrow spaces, only 15-20 people can comfortably view the piece at a time), it will need not only the approval of the dance faculty but also the Center Council, comprised of the Directors of the Center, the School of Music, TDPS and the Head of the Performing Arts Library. I should form my committee and get faculty support, and then she and I will pull together the application. We will need to be as specific as possible about venues requested, all rehearsal and performance dates and times, technical requirements, budget, description of the production’s content, justification of request for nontraditional venue, the relationship of the production to the curriculum or mission of the school, and a statement of any benefits that we anticipate will accrue to the School or to the Center. It is called “Request for an Exception to or Expansion of the Center Norms.” Basically this means I have to have my entire project figured out, at least in my head and on paper, now. I remind myself of the motivation and manifesto I so enthusiastically penned down in September. I thank my lucky stars for Cary who is methodical, diplomatic and able to see all sides of a situation, which is exactly what it will take to expand the norms.

16.November.2012

I meet with Emily to re-visit our conversations from the spring during the first version of the piece and to discuss how I want to continue the development. We also clarify what her involvement will be from here on. She will continue her role as audience guide, be available as a sounding board, and provide outside context research to help fuel the writing process.

We talk about my interest in dance as a live visual art and that I am not as concerned with a narrative arc as much as an atmospheric through-line. By working with a particular palette of sound, movement, color, light, form, style and mood that relates to and travels through the site, I hope to create a living, breathing installation. Emily and I talk about how in visual art the act of installation is usually not seen, but in this case it is this very act that is on display. Certainly in cinema, a vast amount of what goes into the production of the film is never revealed to the viewer. Berkeley's films were created on huge soundstages and disguised all the technical aspects of production in order to create illusions of grandeur and continuity. Cables, dollies, lighting equipment, and the transitions of performers from one formation to the next are hidden from the spectator. What happens if this is brought out of the virtual into the real world? By installing this in real time with all the surroundings of the action and instruments of production in plain view, the "in-betweens" are revealed. As the audience travels through the action they are not only aware of the transitions, they *are* the transitions. They themselves become the continuity and the body of the camera. It is a simultaneous reference to and undoing of film technique.

"It has visible seams," says Emily.

Ah, visible seams! I like how that sounds. I scribble the words in my notebook to remember for later.

I go on to talk about how I want to explore blurring the boundaries of time and sensory experience of the performance. Again we can link this back to early cinema and the development of sound for motion pictures in which the sound and image were created separately and then synchronized. It took some time for the sound technology to catch up to the camera technology,¹ therefore sound followed image. What if for this project I play with separating sound and image again, but the sound arrives first? This could come in the form of a sound installation in the lobby some weeks before the performance. Clips of music from the piece would hint at what was to come. The sound would permeate and prepare the space; it would provide a “sonic foreshadowing.” And then what if silent image created a bookend to this afterwards? A video projected in the space following the performance run could provide a lingering effect of shadowy, ghostlike images clinging to and seeping out of the walls. It would be the building’s memory of the event, as if it is replaying its past until it fades, a “visual echo.” And it would complete a circle by returning the techniques borrowed from Berkeley back to a recorded medium.

Ah! It’s all coming together. But then it falls apart a little when we touch on gender issues again. What is the relationship between Stephanie and her male counterpart? What about the fact that he is the only man in a cast of 16? Is borrowing

¹ It should be noted, however, that important experiments and innovations in sound for cinema were being made long before “talkies” were commercially released in the 1920’s. I have not conducted thorough research on the topic but have found the Wikipedia.com “Sound film” page as well as historical articles provided on Filmsound.org to be helpful resources.

from Berkeley also borrowing objectification, innuendo and the whole history of the male gaze? I don't want to leave these questions unexamined. I don't want to be accused of ignorance or neglect of these issues. But it is also clear to me that I do not want to create a piece about these issues. I'm not out to answer these questions or send a message. But I don't want the work to be superficial or devoid of depth and meaning. Emily reminds me that art can have meaning without having a message and that her role is to be the "keeper of the theory" while mine is to follow my creative instincts, intuition, impulse and inspiration. It is in this moment that my entire mindset shifts from "I have to make a dance" to "I get to make a dance."

26.November.2012

Performer and choreographer Raja Feather Kelly is a guest in our choreography class. He leads us through a series of questions to help us clarify and articulate our projects in preparation for the proposal. Here is a sampling:

- What is your thesis in...*
- ...a prop?..... gold thread*
- ...10 words?traveling dance up stairs, down halls, in windows and passageways*
- ...10-50 words?..... a site-specific work in a grand performing arts center inspired by the films of Busby Berkeley and the sensory fields and architectural elements of the building*
- ...a synonym?..... echo or stream*
- ...an antonym?..... aggressive*
- ...a metaphor?..... like going down a path you've always known but have never seen*
- ...a movie title?.....Busby's Lost Girls or Lost Girls of Berkeley*
- ...an already titled book?.....A Moveable Feast*
- ...an already titled song?.....Dance me to the End of Love*
- What do you need to complete this?.....permission*

When I return to my office later there is a folded piece of paper taped on my door. I open it to find one word written in Raja's hand, "permission."



Illustration 7. The permission slip.

12.December.2012

Another form of permission is granted when I propose my thesis to my committee, Patrik, Sara, Karen and Sharon Mansur, and the rest of the dance faculty. It is approved and they agree to fully support my proposal to the Center Council.

20.December.12

Tomek is on board to once again contribute his re-worked *Transposed Resonance* as well as to compose the "sonic foreshadowing" installation based on *Buena Vista Social Club* and *Dance Until the Dawn*, the two other musical pieces in the project. We meet to talk about how to approach this new phase of our collaboration. He suggests that I give him starting points in the music, time marks in the songs of parts that I am drawn to and want to highlight in some way. He asks that I be as descriptive as possible about the sentiment I am trying to evoke with the sound. He will then pull out these specific clips of the songs and begin manipulating

them in various ways, send to me so I can listen and give feedback, and we'll go back and forth like that until we've arrived at something we're both pleased with. We also talk about the technical reality of the installation. My ideal would be to have the sound linked to motion sensors on the stairs so that it is triggered by people as they ascend and descend. This would give it an interactive feature as well as an irregular and random quality. He informs me the equipment for this could be expensive and the set up rather involved. An alternative, which would lose the interaction but retain the irregularity, would be to create a playlist of many different clips of the manipulated music interspersed with silent tracks. By playing this on a randomized loop, it would be continuous but never repetitive.

19. February. 2013

Hello Dear Committee,

Welcome to the first installment of "Erin's Thesis Update."

As you know, we submitted a proposal to the Center Council several weeks ago. As you may also know, they respectfully asked that we withdraw it in order to answer some more questions, fill in some more detail and then re-submit. Cary, Patrik, Anne Warren and I met today to discuss this. According to Cary the overall response has been positive and it's just a matter of ironing out the particulars. So, hot irons in hand, here are the main concerns:

Schedule

This needs to be performed when the Dekelboum Concert Hall is empty. Cary has identified six such dates between October 7-20 so it is looking like that might be

the best time period for this run. That would mean the sound installation would be in place for two weeks starting mid-September and the video installation would play during the last two weeks of October. The actual time of the performance needs to be determined as well. Some considerations: with this number of performances, a sense of consistency is important rather than performances at all different times. During the week it would need to be late enough that people could get there from work, but it also needs to be early enough to happen before other performances. So 6:30? 7:00pm? I've always liked the idea of it being at dusk to make use of the natural light outside but since the sun has set by 6:30 in October it doesn't quite work out that way. Rehearsals also need to be scheduled and my main concern with that is actually finding enough dancers who are available at the potentially very particular times we are able to rehearse in the space. I'm not even sure where to begin in unraveling this but Cary and I will meet again to look more closely at the availability and we can go from there.

Accessibility

How will patrons who are not able to take the stairs, see the performance? I am going to explore this, write a paragraph about the solution and send it to Cary.

Physical Use of the Space

They want to know what this will look like - where is the sound equipment located as well as lighting, projections...etc. This basically means we need to design the show now. Luckily, I have learned that my lighting and projections designer is Rob Denton and I couldn't be happier about it! I just sent him an email about setting up an initial meeting. I will also meet with Tomek on Sunday to listen to samples and

talk about how exactly the sound will be installed in the space in the most invisible way possible.

Any input you all have on ANY of this would be most gratefully accepted and taken into consideration.

In other news, I'm totally in over my head in this Architecture course but am loving every minute of it. I'm learning about space and place theory, attempting to summarize Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, making collages about the psychology of the house and ruminating on the symbolism of the staircase. I'm also spending unspeakable amounts of time trying to figure out Photoshop. It's very satisfying to work on something so tangible where all the pieces are right in front of you. You can save it and when you come back to it, it's just as you left it! No one has fractured their foot, or forgotten what happens on count eight or had to leave early...etc. But it also doesn't move or breathe or sound or get inspired. So I think it's good to immerse myself in this for now and by the end of it I will be really ready to put it on its feet and to see how it moves, breathes, sounds and feels.

have a good night,

~erin

Chapter 3: A Pause for Architecture

I see architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage.
-Maya Lin

And now, dear readers, we will take a pause from our thrilling timeline of events in *The Making of Visible Seams*, for a brief explanation of how I came to be “in over my head in this Architecture course” and why it was perhaps one of the best decisions I made during my graduate career and thesis project.

By the second year in the MFA program I realized it would be possible to spend the entirety of three years on campus wholly consumed by the world of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. While this world was indeed the very muse of my project, I was determined to not spend every waking hour there and to benefit from the other resources available at this immense institution. I had always been interested in architecture, an interest that was now aligning itself directly with my dancing life as I was becoming more influenced and inspired by site-specific choreography, so that’s where I started my search. Browsing through the course catalog I found this:

ARCH678Z Sensing Architecture: Body and Place
A graduate level seminar that investigates issues of perception, the senses, and a phenomenological approach to the built environment.

Bingo! I emailed Professor Peter Noonan to express my interest in the course, explain my thesis project, and ask if a complete novice in architecture would be allowed into the seminar. He responded that I was welcome to join and that the group discussion often benefited from the perspectives of those coming from other fields.

So I registered for the Spring 2013 course along with 10 other graduate students in architecture.

In addition to the aforementioned adventures summarizing Bachelard and teaching myself Photoshop, the course was a revelation in a number of ways. The readings and discussions centered around themes ranging from philosophies of body, space, place, and perception, to approaches in design and construction, to our understanding of the senses, and ultimately how we as humans continue to negotiate our relationship with built and natural environments. As Karsten Harries succinctly summarizes in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*: “Our experience of buildings is inseparably tied to the experience we have of ourselves, of our bodies, just as our experience of our bodies is affected by the spaces we inhabit” (215). As a dancer who has spent a lifetime tuning into bodily experience and spatial awareness, this was not news to me, but I was excited to now explore the theme from the perspective of those who design these “spaces we inhabit.”

Naturally I was drawn to anything that touched on this relationship of the human body to architecture, or as Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore describe it in their book *Body, Memory, Architecture*, architecture as a “sensual, social art” and a “body-centered art”(x). Through writing and pictures they examine the significance of the human body in architecture, body-image theory and the influence of architecture on our “repertoire of movement” (72).

Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa has also written books on the topic. *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* is rich in both text and images exploring the connection of mind, body, craftsmanship, artistry and the

current human condition. On page 20 he states, “We dwell in the landscape and the landscape dwells in us.” This echoes what I have internally always believed to be true and encountering this poetic articulation of the idea prompted me to explore it further with my Improvisation students by developing movement exercises about “inner and outer landscapes.” Pallasmaa also takes his exploration into the realm of movement in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, when he writes:

There is an inherent suggestion of action in images of architecture, the moment of active encounter, or a ‘promise of function’ and purpose. ‘The objects which surround my body reflect its possible action upon them,’ writes Henri Bergson. It is this possibility of action that separates architecture from other forms of art (67).

He goes on to describe how our experience of a place is structured by our activities in that place for example at home - cooking, sleeping, socializing...etc.

Architecture initiates, directs and organizes behavior and movement. A building is not an end in itself; it frames, articulates, structures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits. Consequently, basic architectural experiences have a verb form rather than being nouns (68).

Harries finds action words in how we speak of architecture as well, using temporal metaphors or metaphors that suggest motion such as “swelling domes and soaring spires”(215).

I like this “verb form” idea and associating action and movement with what are generally considered static structures. It also calls attention to how much our movement is influenced by the walls, floors, ceilings, and pathways around us. In many ways this is the starting point of a place-based performance project. One is not starting from scratch – there is already a structure there that invites and even dictates a certain movement vocabulary. My interest with *Visible Seams* was in embracing

this but also toppling it by using those same structures to inspire and enable movement outside of the lexicon that it was “built” for. This was true not only in the choreography for the dancers, but also in how I was thinking about the audience experience, designing their journey through the building to be one that offered ever-shifting points of view of the architecture and the action. Architects, it turns out, work with a similar desired effect in mind. “While the architect may work with one dominant point of view, he or she may also invite us to explore a sequence of shifting points of view” (Harries 218). According to Harries part of our pleasure in experiencing architecture lies in how, as we walk through the structure, “changing points of view yield new pictures”(218). We are invited to stop and contemplate the “picturesque” and yet this is counteracted “by the pull of other points of view that beckon to be explored, beckon us forward” (219). Upon reading this I realized this was precisely the impulse I wanted to instill in the audience and that Stephanie’s role was perhaps to serve as this beckoning force.

Harries’ discussion of Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History* also influenced what I hoped to achieve by creating a dance that played off the architecture. He employs Wölfflin’s principles of painterly versus linear composition to demonstrate how architecture is an “art of time” (220), being that the painterly is a “play of an apparent constant movement” (221) and appears to embrace time, whereas the linear is “definite, solid, enduring... reaches beyond time” (221). In the case of *Visible Seams*, I saw the halls, walls, and staircases of the Center as the linear, enduring, timeless canvas and the movement, sound, color, light and dancers as the

painterly strokes that not only invited contemplation of the picturesque, but inspired awareness of the passage of time.

Just as Harries gave me ways to think about the composition of the piece and Stephanie's role in particular, Norman Crowe's *Nature and the Idea of a Man-Made World* articulate the role of the other performers. First he references the Greek concept of "theoria", which he describes as "experiencing a place as a whole through feeling, imagination and memory together with intellect and the senses" (74). For me this captures the very essence of what it is to create a site-specific work. He also explains the Roman term "genius loci" which are the spirits manifested by certain places that reflect its uniqueness, protect it and imbue it with meaning. This is exactly how I thought of the dancers, not only the performers themselves acting as stewards for the Center, but if I had to assign them characters in the work, if someone was to ask, "who are they?" I would say, "the genius loci of CSPAC."

Along these same lines of honoring and protecting a place, W.G. Clark writes in Richard Jensen's *Clark and Menefee*, about how architecture is in a sense a destructive act. As a place must be destroyed in order for the building to be constructed, these sites have, in his words, "a scent of sacrifice" (14). He seeks to assuage this sacrifice by designing buildings that are truly part of the place where they are built, that have a sense of understanding and adoring the place rather than merely being situated upon it, and that ultimately the place "will gain strength and meaning from the alliance" (14). He goes on to explain that:

Every site contains three places: the physical place with its earth, sunlight, and view; a cultural place, the locus of tradition of human intervention; and a spiritual place, or that which we could call an evocative presence which stirs our imaginations and sends us in search of images,

memories and analogues. These three aspects of place roughly correspond to body, mind, and spirit (14).

I find his words to be a poignant reflection on the cycle of destruction and creation and appreciate this multi-dimensional consideration of a site that links back to the body, mind, and spirit. His perspective has expanded and enriched my own in my daily encounters with various sites and certainly with any in which I would consider creating a site-specific performance.

Another perspective I was happy to gain during this semester of moonlighting in the School of Architecture was by attending a panel discussion on *Public Arts and Placemaking* at the School's Kibel Gallery. The discussion was part of the exhibit *Reston: The Art of Community* that depicted the history of the planned community there and their ongoing development of public art. My interest in this was two-fold, if not three- and four-fold: architecture, art, community, and the fact that dance faculty member Sharon Mansur and architecture faculty member Ronit Eisenbach had collaborated on a site-specific project there the year before. The panel included Anne Delaney, Executive Director, Initiative for Public Art- Reston ([IPAR](#)); Angela Adams, Public Art Administrator, [Arlington Arts](#); Liesel Fenner, Public Art Manager, [Americans for the Arts](#); and Mary Konsoulis, Curator. I scribbled notes devotedly throughout the entire talk as it all revolved around what I find most exciting about art-making: art as a tool for place-making, how art defines place and the place defines art, how public art invites interaction and is understood through experiencing it, how art and design can serve a community, how this endeavor brings players from multiple fields to the table. I was thinking about dance as a public art

and wondering what the panelists would have to say about it when Ronit started to describe a bit of what she and Sharon did in Reston. She explained that public art installations are often more permanent whereas dance is temporal. Therefore, it can be challenging to get full support behind such projects. However, places still need these “acupunctural,² strategic, temporal” projects to keep things moving and to reinvigorate the life and culture there. Yes! Thank you Ronit for articulating the kind of work I would like to make: dance as acupunctural, strategic, temporal, public art.

By participating in this course, I also learned that I want to make dance as my fellow seminar students made haptic boards. Let me explain for those of you who, like myself before taking this course, have no idea what a “haptic board” is. The assignment was to select a specific material or class of materials and present them in a variety of processed states in a textural composition to be both seen and touched. This was to be made on a 2’x2’x1/2” plywood base and could be presented either horizontally or vertically. I chose wood, specifically from the high desert of New Mexico. I collected bark and twigs and pinecones during my Spring Break there. I also bought puzzle pieces to mimic the shape of Ponderosa Pine bark. I arranged them on the board to look like pathways and coyote fences and I even brought in a little dish of water so people could wet their fingers before touching the wood to see how that changed the sensation as well as leave a disappearing mark. My idea was that this would reflect the dryness of the desert but also the way our touch alters the object we are touching. I was rather pleased with this whole scheme until the pin-up/critique of

² I take this to mean specific, intentional and “to the point” as in the use of acupuncture needles. Patrik suggests it could also refer to the medicinal benefits of acupuncture as a treatment that balances and re-tunes the system. Both of these interpretations serve my understanding of Ronit’s comment.

the boards. There was no time for disclaimers and verbal explication, we simply put all the boards on the table and traveled around looking at and touching each one. I immediately realized mine was only effective if I got to explain everything about it. Otherwise it was rather flat, monochrome and sparse and no one knew what they were supposed to do with the water. The others, however, were brilliant. They chose materials from metal to yarn to paper to tea. Their compositions burst with color and texture as the materials looped and coiled and climbed and spilled around the boards. They were fascinating to look at and a playground for the fingers to touch. No explanation was necessary. The creators didn't have to say a thing. It was all right there in how they had cut, carved, and shaped every piece, in the colors they chose, in the arrangement on the board, in the look and the *feel* of it. I'm sure there are things they *could've* said, but they didn't need to for the viewer/toucher to have a full experience of their creation. The lesson I took from that was, "Whatever you have to say, put it in the work. Then let the work speak for itself."

Speaking of which, let's see how that's going...

We now return to our regularly scheduled programming, *The Making of Visible Seams*.

Chapter 4: Back in the Middle

22.February.2013

Rob Denton and I meet in the lobby to begin our discussions about the lighting and projections for the piece. This includes the “visual echo” video installation. We agree that we’re not interested in altering the space with light, but rather using it to highlight what’s already there and to draw the eye to the dancers. He suggests that light and projections cast on the floor and staircase could be useful guides for the audience by creating pathways and cues for where and when they are supposed to move. In the hallway, wireless lighting units could be used to eliminate cables. My concern is their placement since I would like the windowsills to be clear for the dancers and we’ll have sound speakers to contend with as well. The piece was originally created and performed in daylight but as it will now be an evening performance we agree that we’ll need to come back at night to get a better sense of the lighting we’ll want for hallway and courtyard.

For the visual echo I suggest the big blank wall space on the third-level balcony beside the elevator. Rob points out that this looks like a screen and it might be more interesting to have the images projected on less likely surfaces, perhaps the panels on wall over the entrance of the Kay Theatre, maybe one over the Dekelboun entrance and one on the side staircase. I immediately like the idea.

Later in the day Stephanie and I meet over lunch at Capital Cheesecake in Takoma Park. We brainstorm about rehearsal schedule and casting since much of the original cast has left the University. We talk about how to collaborate from this point forward. As it is now my thesis project, I will take on full direction of the entire piece

and we will share the development of her duet. We make a list of ways to begin this investigation. As much of her solo material in the piece was originally improvised, we will set the choreography hopefully without losing the lushness and spontaneity of her improvisation. We will more clearly define the timing in this section not just in relation to the music but in relation to the specific attention paid to timing throughout the entire work. We will more intentionally focus this duet as the opening for the entire piece; how will it hint at what is to come? How will this section draw the audience in and prepare them for the experience of not just watching but physically following the piece as it unfolds? We also begin to question Stephanie's role in particular: who is she? How is she related to the other women in the piece? What is her relationship to her partner in this duet? How and when does he appear again? What is the theme or feeling that is at the heart of their interactions and their presence and how do we carry this through?

24.February.2013

Tomek and I meet in the lobby to determine best speaker placement for the installation. We need to decide where we would like to have the sound centralized; where is it coming from and where is it leading? Since the dance travels up the side staircase and into the hallway, I would like the sound to pull that way in order to carry through the "foreshadowing" idea. Speakers on both sides of the lobby could achieve this but would require extra equipment and cable. Another option is to have speakers tucked by the railings of the second floor balcony overlooking the lobby, with one pointed out toward the main staircase and the other pointed toward the top of the side

staircase. Tomek has priced out two budget options, high and low end, and will pass the information on to Cary.

The biggest foreseeable challenge for both the installation and performances is how to mount and secure the equipment. Can we drill elbow brackets in to the wall if we pay for the repairs? In the hallway, could we build white boxes to cover the speakers? Could these be placed on the floor to blend in with heaters? Would the speakers be too big to mount in upper windowsills? We will need to consult with Cary and Paul Jackson.

We listen to and talk about the clips Tomek has made so far. I particularly like the ones that have a “tremor and shimmer” quality, play with the chords that sound like they’re “falling up and down stairs” and riff off of the repetitive themes in both songs. In the *Buena Vista* piece I want to hear more of the slide guitar section as it has a warm, transportive quality that seems like it’s coming from or bringing one to a different time and place. I want the sound to imbue the space with this feeling, add some color and flavor, hint at the mood, but not in an abrupt or obtrusive way. That doesn’t mean it has to all be soft and pretty, in fact I wouldn’t want that either. There can be an edge, just not one that hits people over the head. Tomek agrees and says he will start making groups of related sounds from both songs and weaving them together to give it a blended texture. He will also create longer versions of some of the clips to give fuller context and then pull bits and pieces from those for shorter clips that will act more like punctuation points. We will listen to what he comes up with and test out the sound in the lobby when he returns to the area in late April/early May.

15.March.2013

Dearest Committee,

Welcome to Part Deux!

Scheduling

Cary has mapped out possible sound installation, tech/performance, and video installation times. Sound installation: September 20-October 4, Performance Tech: October 5-6, Performance Dress: October 7-8 (we will try to have these be invited dresses for TDPS so that performances can just be for public), Performances: October 9-11, 13-16, Video installation: October 23-November 3, Strike: November 4.

We're going with 6:30pm for the performance time. Cary thinks 6:00pm is too early and 7:00pm starts to run into *Matchmaker* which starts at 7:30pm. This way marketing could potentially "package" the two shows.

Rehearsals (this is all pending Center Council approval but this is pretty much what I envisioned when writing the proposal so if this works out - i.e. it's approved and I have dancers - I will be a very happy camper!):

April 15, 22 + 29, 7-9pm - Stephanie and I work on the opening.

May 21-24, 5-9pm - Intensive I

August 12-24, 5-9pm - Intensive II

September 11-October 2 Wednesdays from 7-9pm.

We will also need to figure out when the video will be made. Costumes won't be ready in August. So maybe it happens during tech? Cary, Rob and I will need to talk about this.

Accessibility

After walking through a potential route with Patrik and Cary, this is what I wrote to be sent to Center Council:

While this work involves the migration of the audience and use of the staircase, it is fully accessible to patrons who are unable to climb stairs. The piece is choreographed from two vantage points, allowing for different but equal viewing experiences. Prior to the start of the performance, Front of House will determine the needs of the audience assembled. If there are non-stair going patrons, the audience will be split in two groups. The "high road" group will take the elevator to the second floor and will view the first two sections of the dance from the top of the main staircase on the side closest to Applause Café. They can either stand behind the railing or, if in a wheelchair, be seated beside it. As the second section of the dance draws to a close, they will travel along the ramp running beside the Dekelboum to rejoin the other half of the audience (the "low road" group who has viewed the first two sections from the first level and climbed the stairs) to journey towards the hallway. The audience will remain as one group for the duration of the piece, which travels only on flat and accessible surfaces.

Physical Use of the Space

I had productive meetings with both Tomek and Rob. We are getting a clearer idea of the sound equipment involved and where it will be but we need to figure out how it can be mounted and secured in the space. Rob and Cary are in communication about lighting/projections equipment. Cary is also determining what we have, what we need to rent/buy and also how best to present it to the council (perhaps setting up mock equipment and photographing.)

Cast (confirmed)

Stephanie Miracle

Megan Morse Jans

Nicole McClam

Julia Smith

Cristina Camacho

Courtney Harris

Annie Ponton

I am awaiting responses from several others and attempting to woo enough undergrads. My main concern is whether enough of them will be available during those intensive summer times since dorms won't be open. If any of you have students you think would be a good fit for this project, please let me know.

Fantasy

So I have this idea for the end but it would involve even more dancers and lighting and sound and I haven't even confessed it to Cary yet. Imagine this... As the audience watches Stephanie disappear into the night on the other side of the passageway, the trees in the courtyard light up, music spills out from the hallway doors and a caravan of tango dancers sweeps up the outside staircase, along the sidewalk between the audience and hallway and out the passageway doors. I would need to try it in order to figure out how exactly that would resolve but I like the idea of there being a final wave of color, motion, sound and light that comes over the audience from every direction. I also like the clarity and flavor of the form, the idea of seeing couples (wouldn't have to be all man/woman, could be a mix), and the element of surprise and multiplicity (another tie-in to the Berkeley films). I also see it as something that could potentially connect what now feels like two separate casts (those in the hallway and those on the staircase) through the shared experience of learning tango together and could possibly reach across campus by getting members of the UMD Argentine Tango club involved.

Initial responses? Dare I make this confession to Cary?

But, first... must finish Graham's show and then I will go to New Mexico and sit in a hot spring for about a week.

Have a wonderful and well-deserved Spring Break!

~erin

25.March.2013

I make my “fantasy ending confession” to Cary. She has concerns about presenting it to Center Council because it could send the message that we’re going to keep changing or adding things in which case they might be less likely to approve the project. The more we talk, the more we realize that my idea could pretty much work with the equipment that we’ve already accounted for, at least with sound. What might not be feasible is to put strings of lights in the trees. The trees are under the jurisdiction of campus facilities, not the Center, so she would need to take the request to them first. If they say it’s a long, complicated conversation, then it might not be worth it. If they think it’s easy, then we could add it to the Center proposal. I agree. I would love the lights but they’re the icing on the cake and if it complicates other aspects of the project I’d rather just let that part of the idea go and dream up something else.

28.March.2013

After months of tightening and revising, my proposal is sent back to Center Council.

2.April.2013

An email arrives from Cary. It says, “APPROVED!!”

5.April.2013

Robert Croghan has been assigned as my costume designer. We begin our meeting with him asking how I like to work, whether that’s collaboratively or already with a strong idea in mind that I want him to execute. I’m relieved because in fact I do already have a strong idea and I was concerned that the designer would be disappointed not to be making something from scratch. This is not the case with Robert and he is more than happy to hear about what Stephanie and I came up with for our Spring 2012 version. The costumes were all pulled from personal closets or thrift stores so there is definitely room for improvement and refinement but the idea is there. Inspired by dresses used in many of Pina Bausch’s works, Stephanie and the four women in the hallway are all in floor length, satin evening gowns. They should be simple, but elegant with low cut backs and enough material to swirl around the legs but not so much that it is unwieldy to dance in. Similarly formal but not fussy, the man is in a plain black suit. For the dancers that begin on the side staircase, the section now referred to as BUSBY, the attire is inspired by the uniformity of the costumes in the Berkeley films. Each performer should be dressed exactly the same in white button-down shirts and black pants. The design should be androgynous but with enough tailoring to still show the line of their bodies. The one splash of color, individuality and a hint at the period (1930’s) comes with a headdress. In the spring we tied colorful, floppy scarfs around their pulled-up hair. Robert asks if this particular era carries through the entire piece. I realize I’ve never even considered this

before. I think I'd always considered the duet and the hallway to be more contemporary but I'd actually be interested to see where he takes it if we use that period as a design inspiration throughout. I don't necessarily want it to turn into a "period piece" though. But where and how do I want to establish the piece in time? I realize I've been so focused on the where, the place and space in which this is set, that I really haven't thought much about the when. This is good food for thought.

Robert also asks about the colors. I liked the colors we used last time, earthy tones but not too heavy. They picked up on the green in the carpet, the brown in the woodwork, and the warm natural light streaming through the windows in the hallway. This will change now that the performance is in the evening and we'll have to adjust the color palette to fit the light in the building at that time. Especially with the women in the hallway, I want it to seem as if they emerged out of the building, but they need to stand out too. Anything too neutral and they will just get lost against the wall. Robert will start pulling images and get back to me.

8.April.2013

I've been meeting with Patrik every other week to give him updates on my progress, brainstorm, vent and muse. At this point it's still mostly about casting and rehearsal scheduling. Today I tell him about going to the recent Terrapin Tango Festival on campus, organized by the UMD Argentine Tango Club, to scope out potential couples for the "fantasy ending." There weren't as many people there as I had hoped and while it was fun to take classes and see people trying tango and in some cases dancing for the very first time, I couldn't identify a group of dancers who

could pull off what I'm thinking of for the ending. Patrik asks, "Well, do you want a lot of couples doing an imperfect tango or one really fantastic couple?" Well of course, I want a lot of couples doing a really fantastic tango! But I think what I'm going for here is the numbers and the repetition of seeing one couple appear and then another and then another. This would incorporate the theme of multiplicity that is so prevalent in Berkeley's numbers and it would achieve that sweep of movement and surprise effect I'm going for. However, just one couple could be a nice bookend to Stephanie and her partner at the beginning. Theirs is more of a connect/disconnect, crash together/split apart relationship whereas this couple would be in step with each other, still working with dynamics of push and pull, follow and lead, but with a synchronicity that establishes the sense of a strong unspoken pact between them.

Patrik and I talk about how I don't yet know why tango and this piece are connected and he assures me that I don't have to know yet. I'm reminded of a quote I read recently by architect/composer Christopher Janney:

... To access more of the brain, you can't look it 'straight in the eye'; you have to sneak around it, you have to 'dance with the unconscious' (139).

Chapter 5: Stuck in the Middle

15.April.2013 *morning*

Last night I was about to send an email to the cast I have assembled thus far asking if instead of one two-hour rehearsal a week in September, we could have two one-hour rehearsals. That would give us more opportunities to run the work and invite audience, which is crucial since much of the timing in the piece is based on the flow of the audience. I panicked before I sent it. One hour?! How is that enough time to get anything done?! Sure, we could get a run in if we start right away but surely there will be notes, costume glitches, technical things to be worked out, people late, people sick...etc. How will two hours a week be enough time to deal with any of that? So I didn't send the email. I talked to Sara and Patrik about it today. Sara suggested having a half hour in a studio beforehand to address all the odds and ends and then an hour in the space to run. Good idea. I emailed Cary to ask if it was possible to adjust the schedule in that way. I also find myself worrying about asking for too much more time from the dancers than what I initially sent them in the schedule.

In general, some anxiety has set in. How will all of this come together? I guess I know it will, but I want it to grow. What if all I can manage is the same thing I did last time? I feel like I'm at a standstill with this tango idea at the end. I'm not sure how or where to start on that. Do I contact the tango club and see what kind of response I get? But then if I get people, what do I do with them? I guess it wouldn't hurt to put the feelers out there. Then at least I'll know if I can go with the group idea or start visualizing it with one couple at the end instead.

We've set the first showing for Wednesday, May 8. Since I won't even have started rehearsals with all my dancers by then, I've decided to make a trailer for the piece out of the Spring 2012 video and show that instead. I've only worked on it for a few hours but I have already realized: 1.) iMovie is really tedious and frustrating and makes my head and neck ache, 2.) I can learn an immense amount about this piece – what needs to be developed, cut, refined, unrefined and so on– by editing the video of it. One thing I already noticed while watching and hearing the opening duet over and over and over again, is that I love the elevator dings as part of the soundscape in the lobby. But of course that is something I have no control over and it will happen differently every time, which is also part of the appeal. But how do I get the audience to notice this too? Or maybe I don't. That would be forced. Maybe it's just about giving them an opportunity to be in a place *where* and at a time *when* they can notice it if they so choose. It's about bringing the elements together and then letting them make the seams themselves.

15.April.2013 evening

Stephanie and I have our first rehearsal in the lobby. We begin by talking about how to begin. We agree that she'll learn the material from the videos of the first two versions, which were highly improvised, and then we'll set the material with me as a guiding outside eye. We want to take on a more specific investigation of the physicality. We want to discover more ways of going up and down the stairs and of folding into the nooks and crannies. We want to incorporate not just the levels and vertical rise of the staircase but also the horizontal breadth of it. We want to more

clearly define her role in the private solo moments of the duet as well as develop the interactions between her and her partner that collide, evolve, spin, collect momentum and redirect force. We talk about the repetition and cycle of his role: he is on his way somewhere, they collide, he places her in a new position and continues on his way, the cycle repeats. We both view this manipulation (the way he “arranges” her) not as aggression or a domineering act, but as a display of expertise. It has a mechanical quality, precision, and what Stephanie describes as a “Charlie Chaplin-esque facility with object”. This attention to detail is also important as it establishes the clarity of action and precision of timing I am working with through the rest of the piece. This leads us to discuss the fact that this duet is the opening of a larger work. How does it connect to the rest of the piece? How does it bring the audience in and set them up for what is about to come? One theme we want to establish early on is “following” as this is what the audience will be asked to do throughout the performance. How can we introduce this idea on various scales in this first duet, e.g., one body part follows another, eyes trail across the space, games of leading and following between Stephanie and her partner, and ultimately drawing the audience in so that they follow Stephanie to the next site?

While Stephanie and I are in the lobby we see and talk to a variety of people. This is a good reminder of what it will be like to rehearse in such a thoroughfare. It could be quite distracting at times but also an opportunity for connections. Tonight, for example, Emily passed by. I haven’t been able to get in touch with her recently and was wondering if she was still interested in being dramaturg for the project. We will meet for tea on Wednesday.

17.April.2013 morning

Ack! Casting! I can see why “casting director” is a full-time position. I feel like I could spend all my time just looking for dancers right now. I have observed some classes and rehearsals and contacted a number of undergraduates, both dance majors and non-majors, but still have only three out of the ten that I would like for the BUSBY section. And then there’s the issue of Stephanie’s partner. Due to not being able to find one man who is available for all the May and August rehearsals, I am considering splitting the role between Matt and David, both theatre majors who will graduate this spring. As they will no longer be students in the fall, they will be paid as guest artists. But then I realize the only two dancers being paid in this entire production would be the only two men and they’d be doing the least because they’re splitting the role! This doesn’t seem right, does it? The only other person being paid is Tomek, as he should be, but he’s a man too. This does not sit right with me. I start pacing. I bump into Sara in the hallway and in a bit of a panic explain my feminist crisis of conscience. “Oh that’s perfectly awful!” she agrees. We acknowledge that the awfulness, obviously, is not that they’re men, but that they are the *only* participants being paid. “Could you figure out a way to pay *all* the dancers?” she asks, “An under-the-table fundraiser of some kind?” I immediately have visions of staging a big bake sale where everything is actually sold under the table. Luckily, I just as immediately realize this is insane. The solution is not always to do more, but to simplify what you already have. Sara has reached the same realization and we gently talk ourselves back from the bake sale ledge. I need to find a male performer who I do not have to pay, preferably just one in order to avoid the complications of a split

role and preferably someone who is already in this building who can easily get to all the rehearsals and performances. “What about Alberto?” Sara suggests. As soon as she says it, I say “yes!” Alberto Segarra is a first year MFA candidate in lighting design from Puerto Rico. He has a friendly, sweet, masculine presence, his wife is a dancer so he is familiar with the field, and he seems open to trying new things. Later I see Stephanie and ask, “What about Alberto?” She has the same response, “Yes!” Now we just need to ask Alberto. Hopefully he’ll have the same response too.

17.April.2013 afternoon

Emily and I meet at Applause Café. I fill her in on the casting ups and downs as well as my search for the “fantasy ending.” She has some of the same questions as Patrik: do you want lots of watered down tango-like dancing, or purity of the form? What is the feel you are going for? Are there other forms of Latin dance that could also achieve this?

The majority of our conversation revolves around several other conversations I’ve recently had about the interpretation of the relationship between Stephanie and her partner in the duet. The topic came up when I was telling the two other women in my co-hort, Ana Patricia Farfan and Jessie Laurita-Spanglet, about my casting woes and agony over the male role, the payment situation and the questions it brought up for me. A discussion of the economics led to talk of the man’s role within the piece. Ana said that this “glorifying the man” was in fact what I was doing in the piece, at least in the opening duet. She perceives Stephanie’s character as flinging herself at the man, praising him and then just getting dropped again and again. I know that

neither Stephanie nor I see it this way and that is certainly not our intent, but I was curious how this was coming across to others. I asked Jessie. She said she reads it more as Stephanie and I do but that I could probably find others who see it more as Ana does. I am reminded by a phrase from my teacher Dan Hurlin that has stuck with me for years. “There will be as many interpretations as there are people in the audience.” And of course, this is what I’m repeating to my students all the time now too. When we see art, we are not just looking at the experience of the artist and cultural context of the work, but we bring our own culture to it as well, we look through the lens of our own very particular world-view. Meaning is made where these worlds meet. So while it is not my intention to create a dance about a woman flinging herself at a man, is it wrong if someone interprets it that way? Or maybe right and wrong isn’t really the way to put it. I mean that’s not ultimately what I’m going for but I can’t pretend it’s not there. To try to create something where the power is entirely balanced and equal wouldn’t be telling the truth about human interactions. We push and pull, lead and follow. We wait and chase, collide, cling, release and do it all again. And it’s not always clear who is doing what. That, to me, is a more honest portrayal of relationship. I’m willing for some of that ambiguity to live within this piece and in the interpretations of it, that’s inevitable. But I also want to stay true to the original intention, which is not about “glorifying the man.” Emily agrees and says that she doesn’t see anything structurally that needs to be addressed in this way but maybe it’s something to keep an eye out for in rehearsal and in how the duet is performed. I admit that I have actually always thought of this as a solo for Stephanie so it’s good that I am now confronting its reality as a duet. To me this is clearly

Stephanie's story and I think of the man as an instrument for her. But do we see her more because of him and because of how she is in relation to him? Isn't that an effect of the male gaze as well, that she is only seen in relation to him? But then he barely even looks at her. He is distant, an almost non-character, an every-debonaire man. Ultimately it's not him we follow, it's her. She leads us and we follow.

19.April.2013

Design Meeting #1

Attendance: Erin Crawley-Woods, Robert Croghan, Rob Denton, Cary Gillett, Misha Kachmann, Patrik Widrig

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about today's meeting was that I got to hear my vision for the piece reflected back to me through the discussions. Patrik described it to Misha as a "visual art installation through movement." Rob used some great words and phrases to describe what we had talked about for the lights, projections and video installation: twilight feel, dancers and lights cascading down stairs, hugging walls, using nothing artificial or anything that feels like it doesn't belong in the place, using wireless units to eliminate cables, lighting the bodies and ceilings of the archways in the hallway, having the dancers silhouetted in the tree grove at the end, natural and incandescent light. The "visual echo" video installation will be like memory flashes on the walls and tiles of the lobby as if dance is seeping out of the history of the building. "Exactly!" I thought. "He gets it!"

As for costumes, Misha asked how the Busby Berkeley films influence the look of the piece. I explained that we talked about elements of the costumes evoking

the time period but not overdoing it. Robert introduced the idea of the first couple being the essence of 1930s, the staircase having hints of it in the headresses, and the hallway being a more contemporary expression of the time – “simple elegance” blending in with the colors of hallway. Patrik suggested bringing large pieces of fabric into the space to see how the colors work. Robert said he could do that as well as draw up two different design sketches, one that plays up the period more and one that’s more contemporary the whole way through. He keeps asking me about the “visual thread” through the piece. It’s a great question and one I don’t have an answer for yet. Maybe once I see some of his sketches I’ll have a better idea of what I want that to be. I asked him what he thought of the green dress that Stephanie originally wore. He said the silhouette was nice but he thought the fabric was too heavy. He will send me an example of another dress made with more diaphanous material so I can see what he means. Misha asked how the gowns, if we really do want them Pina-style, which is highly designed and very sophisticated, would be constructed. He expressed doubt that we even have the resources and skills available to do that in this building. I said they don’t need to be replicas of Tanztheater Wuppertal’s costumes. Something more refined than the Value Village dresses we used last time would be nice and I do want them to look sophisticated but ultimately simpler is better. I said this because I was not brave enough to say what I thought which was, “If we don’t have the resources ‘to do that in this building’, then we don’t do that. This piece is about this building. It’s about using the resources that are available right here.”

22.April.2013

Alberto agreed to be in the piece! His “yes” was not as immediate as Stephanie’s and mine had been. His was more of a shocked and confused “Who?! What?!” followed by a curious and tentative “How? When?” and finally a humble and maybe even slightly pleased “Sure.”

Today is our first rehearsal in the lobby. Just as last week there is a whole cast of characters parading through. This week is even more extreme as the UMD Terp mascot roams the building and is more than happy to regale us with his antics. He does a little dance on the stairs, adds his own gestures to our conversations and pesters Stephanie and Alberto while they practice some lifts. It’s funny for a time but also awkward. How do you kindly tell a giant stuffed turtle to leave you alone? This is not a question one often confronts when rehearsing in a studio.

I start rehearsal by asking Alberto about his first impressions and reactions to the version of the duet he watched on video. He says he liked how tenderly the man left Stephanie on the steps, being careful even in the way he places her hair. He’s curious about their story and relationship but in fact doesn’t see it so much as a relationship as that this man is some kind of safety net that she flings herself at and then he catches her and gently places her down as if to say “you’re okay, stay there.” Stephanie adds that for her there is a sense of indulgent desperation in the solo choreography that then sparks into some chemical reaction and energy when she meets this other person – they are two separate people on two different orbits. We talk about orbiting. Alberto says he finds it was kind of heartbreaking how this guy just keeps looping, doing the same thing over and over. I agree and add that we only ever

see the edge of his orbit and we don't really get his full story. There's a little mystery there as to who he is and who the couple is together. I fill them in on my discussions with Ana, Jessie and Emily over the past week and how everyone will have their own interpretation of this, which is fine and inevitable. As long as we three are on the same page and focus on clarifying and developing the elements we feel are important, it can be multi-faceted without being too jumbled.

We decide we want to keep the structure of the piece essentially the same. Stephanie wants to play more with the idea of "private moment in a public space" in her solo parts and we want to develop the spiraling, colliding qualities in the parts where they're dancing together. We spend the rest of rehearsal working on some lifts, sliding down the banisters and exploring different ways of relating to the stairs, both in how she is placed on them and in traveling up and down them. We discover that for some reason it is not as strong to see her descending the stairs, at least not walking or running with her front towards the audience. But walking or running up the stairs, as long as it never looks like she is running to him, is fine. I am reminded of a presentation Professor Noonan gave in February on the "poetics of the staircase" in which he employed examples from art, film, and religious imagery to demonstrate how the staircase is often used to create hierarchy, confusion, or as a metaphor for deeper psychological meaning. In film in particular it is used to situate the character's state and status. The act of ascension and descension is key for mediating levels of public and private life, the everyday world and the privileged, the earthly and the celestial. It is interesting to see this play out in Stephanie and Alberto's duet. Not only does the staircase hold symbolic meaning, it obviously also has the very particular

function in moving us between physical levels, or better yet, enabling us to move *ourselves*. This is an example of what Professor Noonan calls, “architectural encounters that engage our organs” and it’s why I’m excited to be creating a piece in which the audience travels up staircases, down hallways and out of doors. In so doing they will have a more active encounter of the architecture and the performance, not just in how they view it, but in how it engages their insides, their heartbeat, their breath.

6.May.2013

Tomek sent me sound clips of what he’s been working on for the “sonic foreshadowing” and they are right on the mark – recognizable as clips from the *Buena Vista* and *Dance Until the Dawn* songs but also manipulated enough to have their own haunting quality. Today we meet in the lobby with Cary and Jamie O’Connell from the audio shop to explore equipment and rigging options for the installation. The little wireless speaker they brought isn’t strong enough so we’ll have two speakers (that they already have in the shop) placed on the second level behind the railing over the side staircase. This will be set up for the installation and stay for the performances to serve as the speakers for the first two sections of the dance. Power will be sourced from an outlet on the wall and wires will need to be covered by rubber stripping or something that meets the approval of the fire safety marshall. A cheap MP3 player can provide the playback source but needs to have a display screen so that the sound operator can operate cues for the performance. For the installation, Tomek will create a 30-minute loop of his clips interspersed with silences, which will then be played on

repeat on a randomized playlist. In the hallway we will use three speakers from the shop that can sit in the windowsills or on the floor and either have boxes built around them, as in Tomek's *Transposed Resonance*, or be covered in white muslin to hide them a little. The whole set up - MP3 player and light board- will live on a rack together and be housed behind the wall in front of the door to the Dekelboum. As for sound outside for the ending, the speaker at the near end of the hallway will be repositioned at the doors as they open so the sound can be directed towards the audience in the courtyard. Cary will schedule a time during my intensive rehearsals in August when we can set this equipment up to test it out.

6.May.2013 *a little later*

I meet briefly with Robert so he can show me some images he has collected. Drawing on details from the space and the idea of seams, he has pulled some beautiful images of 1930's bias-cut gowns made of light, silky material. He also has photographs of costumes from Pina Bausch works, 1930's-40's headdresses, and a Marlene Dietrich-esque black and white suit that we both like as inspiration for the "Busby" section dancers.



Visible Seams
Fall 2013

Illustration 8. Robert's research.



Visible Seams
Fall 2013



Illustration 9. Robert's research.

8.May.2013

Showing #1

I did not manage to complete the “trailer” for the piece that I intended to show but as Stephanie, Alberto and I already had several rehearsals they are able to show their duet. They are already working very fluidly together and everyone is impressed by Alberto’s presence and apparent ease in stepping into a performer role. As always, it’s helpful to watch in the presence of others. I want to work with Alberto on breath support and lengthening/relaxing the back of his neck. I want to work with Stephanie more on phrasing and with both of them how we are framing them in the space. For example, Stephanie improvised tucking herself behind one of the walls and slowly re-emerging which nicely foreshadows some of the action in the upper hallway. I also realize in watching this run that it’s really important for Alberto to keep walking on the same trajectory until he is interrupted/intercepted by Stephanie. This makes it clear that the only reason he does any movement other than walking on his loop is because of her. His action can then include moving her or being moved by her, but it’s always initiated by her in some way.

In other news, the cast is confirmed and we are set to begin our first four-day intensive in just a few weeks. The section names and cast list are as follows:

BUENA- Stephanie Miracle, Alberto Segarra

BUSBY - Elizabeth Barton, Julie Bayer, Cristina Camacho, Emma Coyle, Katie Gundlach, Courtney Harris, Elissa Orescan, Annie Ponton, Celeste White, Joanna Jones (understudy), Christine Nwosu (understudy)

BAUSCH- Robin Brown, Megan Morse Jans, Nicole McClam, Julia Smith

30.May.13

Dear Committee,

Welcome to the fourth installment of Erin's Thesis Update or "How to Make a Site-Specific Dance When Your Heart is Broken, Your Sinuses are Infected and the Weather is Not Cooperating."

I. Lie in the grass and eat strawberries

This is how we began. I brought a picnic and we spread out on the lawn between the rows of trees next to the School of Music passageway. This piece will be created and usually rehearsed in sections so I wanted to start it as a whole and give everyone a chance to meet and get a sense of the bigger picture they are part of. I told them about the history of the piece, my interest in continuing to work on it, the sound installation and video components and our goal for the week which was to basically get it back to where it had been when it was performed in the Spring 2012, giving us common material from which to build.

We also talked about the particulars of rehearsing in a semi-public and open place - the whole process will be visible and therefore accessible to more people, which is, I think, a benefit of working in a site like this but also brings challenges - i.e. the Terp mascot might try to dance with you, friends will try to get your attention and want to talk, the ubiquitous and diligent vacuum cleaners will be running, and there will be a host of other distractions we can't possibly predict. So we talked about

ways of handling this. They were also curious about the approval process so I told them a little about that and the importance of making respectful and valuable use of the time we have in the space. Then we watched a run of the opening duet after which everyone was free to go and Stephanie, Alberto and I stayed to work.

Areas of focus: We tightened the overall timing so that it only lasts about 60-90 seconds past the end of the music. With Stephanie we worked on spatial orientation and phrasing. I took some time to work with Alberto on breath support, lengthening the back of his neck and becoming aware of unnecessary tension and extra movements in what he is doing. We are also making a conscious effort to have the only moves he makes, besides walking, be the result of interaction with Stephanie.

II. Roll down stairs, linger in hallways

On day two I focused on BUSBY and day 3 was devoted to the hallway BAUSCH. I talked to each group about *genius loci*, protective spirits of a place, since that's how I see their roles - that they belong here and are part of this place, emerging from the floors, the walls, the woodwork. I wanted to give time for them to feel really at home and at ease in their respective locales, to find that sense of belonging, to sense the architecture and have an embodied experience of place (thank you Professor Noonan), and to explore what it means to inhabit (thank you Professor Mansur.)

We began with 15 minutes of doing just this - just be in the space, explore different spots and perspectives, what does it mean to make yourself at home here, this is not about making compositional choices, but to notice the choices you make. Then we took 15 minutes to warm up in the space - what fixed features can you use,

what can you do differently here that you would not be able to do in a studio? Then we let this build into an improvisation that was about exploring more ways of moving - how does this particular place inspire or limit you? I encouraged them to start making compositional choices based on what they saw those around them doing. I played music that was in some way tied to the themes of the work. Some people danced while others watched, when the song stopped everyone would freeze and one person would go in and tap another person out, taking their place. Everyone agreed they had a feeling of being more at home in the space, in their bodies and/or with each other after all of this. So I am glad we took the time to do it.

BUSBY- they learned all the material and we explored different dynamics, timing and adding in some material for the "aerial" section based on things I saw them playing around with in the improvisation. They already have questions about facial expressions throughout. I told them that one of my interests in this is to see what starts to emerge from them as they are doing it over and over, so to just do what feels natural to each of them for now. We talked about how their movement is very uniform and synchronized but that their individual presence and facial expression is key. For example, don't just act like you're running up and down the stairs, you are really running up and down the stairs, don't hide the effects of that - maybe you are excited the whole time, maybe you get really tired, maybe you are annoyed. I'm curious to see how this plays out the further we go.

BAUSCH - we also got through all the movement. I was hesitant to go too deeply into the nitty-gritty details since we will have such a big break before we rehearse

again and those things are more productive with consistency but I was pleased they were already asking questions about it and clearly got that the little things are the biggest factors, the glue, of this section. Timing is definitely going to be the trickiest part of this. We can't rely on the sound because it is so ambiguous but also because it will be in a different spot in the composition every time based on how quickly the audience is traveling. And because the dancers are often not able to see each other there is very little to go on. I need to figure out the best way to rehearse this so that the timing becomes second nature.

III. Listen to Bessie Smith (lots)

It's raiiiinnin' and it's stormin' on the sea

It's raiiiinnin' and it's stormin' on the sea

I feel like somebody has shipwrecked for me

On Friday I intended to work on the outdoor sections but it was a truly nasty day - cold, gray, windy and wet. This will be a “come rain or shine” performance but being out in the elements for 10-15 minutes of a performance is very different than being out there for hours of rehearsal, so I decided to spare everyone from going home with the same sniffles I had and we focused inside again.

We did a full run of the opening, into the staircase, into the hallway up until the audience goes outside. Emily was there to film and everyone pitched in being a practice audience for each other so they could get a sense of being that close to people and how long it takes them to travel. Then I went through notes and tightened up parts of each section and we called it a wrap until we meet again in August. yikes!

I was disappointed not to get to the outdoor part. I was hoping to get through what is now the current ending so that I could start to get a sense of where to take it next - if my tango fantasy still fits in some way or if something else is asking to be danced.

As Bessie says, *oh me, oh my, wonder what will my end be.*

But there's time. It will come. The time is also something I'm a little concerned about though. We have this big break until August and even for that first week we're back, I won't have all the dancers. But this was a good start. And in the meantime I will continue to meet with Emily, communicate with Rob and Robert, collaborate with Tomek.

I am also going to hide out on the west coast for a bit, swim in the salty sea, let life seep back in and God willing, come August, maybe some art will seep back out.

yours truly,

~erin

Chapter 6: Begin Again

4.september.2013

Dear Committee,

Oy. Where do I even begin?

I'll make a list, in no particular order...

Sound

On August 14 Cary, Tomek, several technicians from the audio shop, the fire marshall and I met to finalize the placement of the speakers and cables and check volume levels to make sure sound would be audible in the lobby but not in the other theatre spaces. We were able to listen to Tomek's final clips and give a test run of the randomized playlist. Everything is in order for the "sonic foreshadowing" to begin in just a couple of weeks!

Dance

We had our two-week intensive August.12-24, meeting from 5-9pm each day with the exception of August 18. I mostly worked in sections but we did manage to have some full cast rehearsals and runs towards the end of the second week. It is exciting to finally have the full cast assembled and to now have Tarythe Albrecht, our "site-manager" on the job. She has already helped me immensely by video recording, orchestrating the schedule with the cast and being an excellent sounding board for me to talk through creative and logistical questions with at the end of each night. Now that the natural light is getting closer to what it will actually be for the performances in October, it has been good to have the evening rehearsals to see how the changing light changes the mood, but also the visibility of the outdoor sections. The weather

was lovely all week so we got to spend a lot of time working on these sections outside. This requires an inordinate amount of bug spray. Here are some more specifics about each section:

- BUENA - Stephanie, Alberto and I focused on getting the duet back to where it was in May then developing it by working details of spacing, efficiency of movement, timing, and playing with Stephanie's focus – how can she be in her own world but also open to the space in order to draw the audience into her and their surroundings? We have also continued to explore how this opening section relates to the broader context of the piece by pulling in movement references to other sections, primarily BAUSCH in the hallway.
- BUSBY – We worked on finding more musicality in their first dance on the staircase and also played a lot with focus and facial expression. While I want the movement to be highly synchronized, I want their individuality to play across their faces. I've asked them to tune into their experience while they're dancing - Are you enjoying this? Are you confused? Do you get bored? Annoyed?- and to use what they notice to build on as a character throughout the piece. As for the choreography, we have a good base on the staircase but I now want to add some intricacy in details and timing, make it a little more nuanced and dense. In the outdoor section we're playing with quick, rhythmic footwork. It feels like a mess right now. Patrik described it as “square and predictable compared to what came before” and I agree with him.

I'm not sure yet where I'm going with it. During the last rehearsal we played in the windowsills and that opened up some new possibilities so I'll continue to follow that thread.

- BAUSCH – I am so lucky to be working with these ladies. They have embraced the subtlety and spirit I'm going for in most of this section but are also up for busting it open and trying new things. I want there to be a shift in this world once the audience ventures outside and looks back at the dancers through the windows. I want them to see a burst of light and movement from within, something wild and unhinged but silent. I hope it will have a similar effect to watching an explosion on TV with the sound off. But it's also so peaceful outside with the slight breeze in the trees and summer evening symphony of crickets that I'm not sure the intensity comes across. But maybe this juxtaposition is good? Not sure. Need to work on it more.
- I'm also struggling with the transition moments (ah! the seams!) from one section to the next. How do I direct/re-direct the audience's attention and, once these separate sections (Buena, Busby, Bausch) start mingling more, how do I weave them together yet keep them distinct?

Audience

In addition to getting some great notes from Sara, Patrik and other audience members after the August 23rd showing, I learned another valuable lesson about the audience – 20 is definitely the limit. I have become accustomed to and spoiled by

getting to watch this piece all by myself. We had 15 adults and 3 kids at the showing and it's not just the extra bodies, it's that they all have minds of their own! I need to figure out a better way to "corral" them, which sounds kind of awful but really it's just another part of the choreography. It was especially clear once we got outside that people weren't sure where to stand. Throughout the piece they need to know when and where to move, when to sit or crouch down so that those behind them can see... and so on. I have also realized that even if each cast member had just one person come watch them, that's a full audience! In talking through some of this with Sara, Patrik and Tarythe, I have developed the following strategy: in addition to Emily, we should have one or two audience guides at each performance, one to be the leader and one to be the herder that follows behind and makes sure everyone has gotten where they need to be; we will make an announcement before each show introducing the audience to these guides so they know whom to follow and what to expect; during our Wednesday rehearsals in September we will do two runs a night which will be open for cast members to invite friends and family so that more people can see the piece and so that we can get more practice with a real audience. The thing I'm still not sure about is how the ticketing for the October performances is happening. Are there tickets? How will we know who has one? Obviously anyone can watch the duet in the lobby but once we go upstairs it gets very tight. How will we control who comes along? How much Front of House support do we have? All good questions for Cary.

Lights/Camera

Rob and I met the other night to look at some lighting outside. We're going for "moonglow." He had a great suggestion for corralling the audience in the

courtyard, which is to line the grassy area where I want them to stand with small battery operated candles. Yes! If it's in the budget, I really like this idea. It will create an inviting space for the audience to step into and it brings in that festive, ritual feel I was going for with the idea for the little lights in the trees. Speaking of which, there will be no little lights in the trees. Center Council gave Cary permission to pursue the idea but ultimately Campus Facilities determined it would be too much labor, not only to put the lights up, but also to take them down since there's no other reason for them to be up there. (Alas and alack. But I have another idea! Just keep reading.) We also talked about the "visual echo." I've already been taking some notes during the runs on different angles and perspectives I'd like us to play with in the video. It looks like all of the filming will happen on one of our tech days which makes me nervous but since the costumes and lighting need to be in place, it's really the only way. Rob seems confident we will have plenty of time so I'm just going to trust him on that. Originally we had talked about the projections being on two walls in the lobby, over the entrances of the Kay and the Dekelboum. I liked this because it would seem like the images were bouncing off of each other, almost having a conversation. Rob said we could still do this but also asked me to consider projecting just over the Kay entrance, that way it could be bigger and fill up the entire wall. He also thought that people would be more likely to stop and really watch it if it was in one concentrated location as opposed to spread out. I considered it overnight and ultimately agreed with him. I'm curious to see the images taken to a broad scale and to match the expanse of the lobby itself. Honestly I think either way would be great but maybe this

way will be a little more focused. Just like the sound installation, the video will run on a randomized playlist so the two will truly act as bookends to the piece.

Costumes

Robert and I met a couple times over the summer mostly to look at colors for the BAUSCH gowns. I'm torn between going with earthy tones that pull in colors from the hallway or more jewel tones, like the ones we'll use for the BUSBY headdresses. Robert assures me that color is actually one of the last things we have to make a final decision about as we could always dye the garments. The one we are certain about is Stephanie's, which will be a deep royal blue. In Robert's research on costumes in the Busby Berkeley era this color was often used for how it showed up in the black and white film. It's still hard for me not to imagine her in the green dress but I'm willing to try something new. Hers is the only piece being built and is in its second round of a mock-up so she will be able to rehearse in it from now on. Robert has also pulled some other rehearsal gowns that we can start using tonight in the hallway. For BUSBY, we're still looking at different headdress options and have determined they need shoes outside and ponchos if it rains. Likewise, 20 clear umbrellas have been ordered for our "singin' in the rain" version as well. The BUSBY dancers will hand these out to the audience on their way outside if it is indeed raining. The dancers will just have to get wet so hopefully it won't rain too hard!

Beginning of the End

I *still* need to figure this out. As I said, there will be no little lights in the trees and it looks like I will not have a caravan of tango dancers either. I have gone back

and forth with the president of the tango club on campus but we have still not managed to meet and time is of the essence. I think adding a whole new group at this point is asking for trouble so here's my new idea. As Stephanie is trailing off into the distance at the end, large swaths of gold fabric will billow up in the passageway and hallway and then spill out the doors creating a cascade effect for the audience to follow down the outside stairs to the main entrance and back to the lobby. I need to play with the fabric though to know how much this "cascade effect" is even possible. Tim Jones from the prop shop has ordered some that might work and in the meantime we can use some old muslin in rehearsal. While I've given up on the caravan of tango dancers I am still hoping for the "one fabulous couple" but I haven't found them yet. I would want them to make some very brief cameo appearances throughout the piece and then be seen dancing a tango, either in the courtyard or back in the lobby, at the very end. So, my to-do list for the start of my third year of graduate school looks something like this...

- Add intricacy
- Create explosion
- Work the seams
- Play with fabric
- Learn to juggle (this is for my Alexander Technique class but it fits here too)
- Find an ending

Chapter 7: Finding the End

September 2013

We rehearse twice a week. Mondays are for working each section separately. Wednesdays are for full runs with invited audience. Overall my goals are to fine-tune the timing, add some detail and intricacy in the movement, give more attention to performance quality for the dancers and continue smoothing out the seams, i.e., how one sections flows into the next and how to guide the audience's focus and movement between locations. Final decisions need to be made and whenever I'm stuck or unsure which way to go, Emily reminds me to bring it back to the architecture and cinematic impulse of the piece. These become my anchor points: how can I relate this moment to the architecture? Where is the camera? What would a filmmaker do? This is particularly helpful in developing the outdoor BUSBY section. I have always been uncertain about the purpose of this section, other than it serving as an interlude between the two BAUSCH sections. Once we make it about playing on the windowsills and define each moment in terms of where the camera is so that the dancers have a specific focal point and object, albeit an imaginary one, to relate to it becomes much more clear.

Another section that gets special attention during this time is in BAUSCH once the audience has exited to the courtyard and is looking back at the dancers through the windows. This is where I want the world inside the hallway to explode, as if the whole container has been toppled upside down. We approach this in a few different ways: from simply running wildly back and forth, to going through the phrase material as if caught in a windstorm, to improvising as if they are creating

their own wind tunnel with their breath as a force of nature, to working from an entirely emotional place moving through fits of rage. In the end it is a combination of all these that seems to work the best but it still feels disjointed. Emily is helpful in bringing clarity and specificity to this section by offering some Laban Movement Analysis language, “Right now I’m seeing *flick*, but it seems like it needs to be more *wring* with moments of *slash*.” They all get it. Even after taking a course in movement observation and analysis, this is the first time I have seen this method applied so effectively. “Rage” means something different for everyone and manifests itself differently in each body. *Wring* and *slash* have specific actions associated with them so while the dancers improvised this part and were able to retain their individual expression of it, these terms brought a cohesiveness to the group that was hard to find otherwise.

We continue to develop Stephanie and Alberto’s roles as well. We have tightened the duet so much that now we can loosen it up again and allow their experience of it to evolve. For Stephanie it’s about regaining some of the abandon and lushness of the first few times she performed this when it was mostly improvised and still so raw. I encourage her to let herself get lost in it again, be vulnerable. For Alberto it’s about some background character development: Who are you? Why are you here? Who is this woman? I tell him I don’t need to know the answers to these questions but answering them for himself gives him a more solid presence. We also add in a couple more appearances for him throughout the rest of the piece, for example, he is seen walking down the hallway or passageway while the audience watches the dancers from outside.

Emily and I have started to assemble and make a plan for our additional audience guides and writing a “curtain speech” that will serve as a brief orientation for the audience. Twenty clear umbrellas have been delivered and I choreograph the “singin’ in the rain” version in which the BUSBY dancers pass out umbrellas to the audience as they exit to the courtyard. Swaths of gold fabric have also arrived and we have it cut into three 7-yard sections so we can begin playing with it in different configurations for the ending.

But guess what... there’s still no ending! I have decided that it is too late to work with the tango club and add in that many additional cast members. I’m going with the one fantastic couple idea. I’m even willing to jump in as the woman in the duo. But the problem remains that the right man is hard to come by.

23.September.2013

What *is* this ending?! What do I want to leave people with? *Where* do I want to leave them? How do we find a sense of closure but keep the loop and sense of continuity? Is there a mingling of the worlds (BUENA, BUSBY, BAUSCH, audience) or do they stay separate? Does the separation between the performers and audience dissolve into some kind of social dance cocktail reception-esque ending or does the “magic” world just fade into the night leaving the audience alone again? What do I do?!

25.September.2013

The Final Showing

We show the full piece and I explain the two possible versions of an ending that I have devised.

One: It ends in the courtyard where it did before with Stephanie trailing off into the darkness. Perhaps the Leonard Cohen song *Dance Me to the End of Love* will still play, the gold fabric will still billow up in the passageway and then die down as the music fades leaving the audience outside in a peaceful little courtyard, surrounded by tea lights and serenaded by crickets. They can mingle and then find their way back inside.

Two: I have asked Sinclair Emoghene Ogaga, a first-year student in the MFA dance program, to be my partner. As Stephanie walks away from the audience, the Leonard Cohen song will spill out of the doors at the other end of the courtyard. The audience will be led by Emily and other guides onto the sidewalk and begin walking towards those doors, at which point they will get a glimpse of Sinclair and I dancing a slow dance on the patio area. It should have the feel of the end of the night, lights being turned off, empty beer bottles scattered on tables, one couple remaining on the floor. Before the audience reaches us we slip inside. They follow and go back to the balcony where they watched the first section of BUSBY from above. By the time they arrive, Sinclair and I are on one of the landings of the main staircase continuing our slow dance. The rest of the cast is scattered up, down and across the staircase gradually making their way up the stairs in a casual, swaying triplet step in time with the music. Emily and I determined it was best not to have a full cast bow in order to

keep the art installation feel of the piece so this trail up the stairs lets the audience see all the dancers once more. I imagine it like the credits rolling up the screen at the end of a film. Sinclair and I are either consumed by the group and follow along with them or stay dancing until they have all gone and then walk off on our own once the music ends.

Feedback from my committee and cast is divided on which version to go with. Some feel that the piece really ends in the courtyard and that to introduce this couple is confusing. It adds a new idea too late in the game and goes off in a different direction. I can see that, but I also kind of like that. Sinclair and I will have made some very brief cameo appearances separately throughout the piece either by walking up or down the staircase during the opening duet or perhaps down the hallway or passageway during the outdoor sections. These will just be glimpses of us but hopefully it will be enough of a suggestion for the audience that when we are seen together at the end there is some recognition. I like the idea of intertwined, overlapping narratives. In this case it's that everyone has been watching a relationship between Stephanie and Alberto unfold, thinking the story is about them. But in the end it is the couple that was on the periphery that remains at the center. It shifts the plot and perhaps makes one question everything that has come before. Whose story is this? This also relates it back to the place where this piece was created, this building where multiple stories (and yes the pun is intended here to mean both narratives and levels) are being played out, intersecting, and passing over, under and around each other. This twist also makes it so that there is not such a linear narrative arc to the work, which was never my intention to begin with. It has always been more episodic

and I like this sense that it could just keep going, circling around on itself. Some of my team are with me on this idea but agree that it would need a lot of work in order to pull it off. Ultimately, I feel like I could make a strong case for either ending so in some ways there's no wrong answer. But then why does neither one feel quite right?

4.October.2013

It's the night before tech begins. Sara meets with Sinclair and me to offer an outside eye and give us some direction, but I go home feeling uneasy. Right on cue, I have an email from Patrik:

If it feels like the ending with Sinclair is just not working out, don't force it now.

Let it go if you need to, without feeling bad in any way.

The "right" ending will come to you – maybe not even tomorrow, but it will come.

Allow it to come when it comes and make people deal with it.

Sara calls to debrief from rehearsal and we agree that it's just not working. Sinclair and I would have to spend a lot more time together to get the feel I am going for with this couple. But I love this idea! I don't want to let it go (even though Patrik told me I could)! I've had this image in my mind from the beginning and I really want it to work! Sara brainstorms about who else we could fly in or get to come down from New York. Who could jump in and just do this? How could we get them here? How many rehearsals would they have to be here for? Where could they stay during performances? How could we pay them? While she's talking I'm realizing this is all too forced. Patrik is right, I'm pushing and grasping instead of accepting and allowing. There is definitely something to be said for the path of least resistance in

situations like this. It's not giving up, but it is giving in. It's not that this isn't a good idea, it's just not the right time. Sara sits with me on the phone for over an hour while I recite platitudes and affirmations, pull out my hair, moan and groan, roll around on the floor and slowly let it go. I remind myself that creation is a cycle of destruction and transformation and is as much about emptying as it is about filling. You have to make space and get out of the way. And as any writer will tell you, sometimes you have to murder your darlings. I don't think I'll murder this one, just put it in a box for later. We close the lid and sit quietly. And then as if in a cartoon demonstrating the definition of "Eureka!" I leap up and exclaim "OH! What if as Stephanie is trailing off in one direction, Alberto walks out the doors facing the other direction so the audience sees both of them at once but they don't see each other? Then he walks down the sidewalk and the audience follows him inside. They go the balcony, he goes down the side staircase and up the main staircase while the cast is doing their rolling credits step up the stairs. Then as he disappears, Stephanie comes running in through the front doors and up the stairs like she does in the beginning. She stops half way up but then instead of going into her dance as she does earlier, she too begins this slow step ascending the stairs and follows the rest of the cast out as the music fades!"

"That's it," Sara says. "You got it."

We hang up and I collapse into bed exhausted. Eight hours later tech begins and we have an ending.

5-8.October.2013

Tech and Dress Rehearsals

Our two days of tech and two dress rehearsals are remarkably smooth. Rob has plenty of time to get footage from multiple vantage points for the video. Paul also takes a couple of archival videos, one with a handheld camera following along with the audience and one setting up at each location with a tripod. Jared Schaubert, the videographer for the Center, takes a video and Zachary Handler photographs a dress rehearsal. Patrik watches multiple runs and gives the cast encouraging and instructive feedback on their performances. Sara, Patrik and I test out the alternate seating arrangement where half of the audience will be placed in the event that there are members who cannot go up the stairs. We agree that it works and it is thrilling to see the piece from an entirely different perspective. This becomes my new game, to find different spots from which to watch each section. Every time I do I am amazed at what I see primarily in the different ways the architecture frames the action. It gives me more ideas about a film version of the piece. But first, let's finish this one. All systems go for the opening!

9.October.2013

The Opening

It's raining. Are you kidding me? We have logged 91 hours of rehearsal for this piece since August and it has never rained. Not once. Tonight is the first public performance, and it rains?! Of course this is what the twenty umbrellas, nine ponchos and singin' in the rain choreography are for so it's really okay but I can't help but feel

a little picked on. Although I guess if I'm going to feel picked on by natural elements, outdoor site-specific choreography is not for me. So I get over it. The dancers are game, even the four ladies who will be out in their evening gowns without ponchos, and reassure me it will just make it more exciting. Indeed the rain does add a lovely, mysterious atmosphere - the sound of raindrops falling from the trees to the umbrellas, the slight chill and damp, earthy smell in the air, the wet golden leaves pressed to the sidewalk. I spend the performances spying from various vantage points and sometimes just wandering through the rest of the building to hear the music float through the halls. I feel lonely for some reason. But I also know that choosing not to be in the piece was a very good decision. I had never created and directed something without also performing in it. While I miss the satisfaction of performing and the sensation of all that movement living in my bones, it has been a gift not to have to shift my focus and to struggle with the duality of being a choreographer and performer. My sole focus was to bring this piece into being. Now my job is to let it go and to let it take on a life of its own.

10-16.October.2013

The Performances

It continues to rain for the next two performances. Aesthetically, it works. Logistically, it's getting soggy. The ponchos have ripped and Robert has to go to three different stores to find more. The gowns have water stains on them. The grassy area in the courtyard where the audience stands is riddled with puddles. It stops

raining on Saturday so by our Sunday evening performance everything has dried out and it remains clear for the final four evenings.

As with any live performance, there are always surprises and something different happens every night. There's one performance where an elderly gentleman does not leave with the audience when they exit the hallway to the courtyard. One of the audience guides prompts him multiple times but he does not respond. She leaves so as not to be in the way of the dancers as they start the next section but he remains in the hallway, seated against a wall for the entire section we now call the "wind tunnel" when they are going through their exploding, raging, wringing, slashing and sprinting. Viewed from the outside this is purely a visual effect with the soft nighttime noises as the background sound. From the inside however it is quite violent as the dancers are breathlessly counting aloud, yelling cues to each other, gasping for air, body parts crashing against each other and sometimes into the wall, feet pounding as they run down the hall. Eventually the gentleman did exit the hallway to rejoin the rest of the audience. I so wish I could have spoken to him afterwards. Why didn't he leave when everyone else did? What was it like to be caught in the midst of these fierce, thrashing women? While I definitely intended this section to be viewed from the exterior and hoped that everyone would follow the herd, I kind of like that he took the liberty of staying where he was. Unfortunately it wasn't the safest choice for him or the dancers but since no one was harmed I can say that this is one reason I am interested in creating dances that travel and that ask the audience to do the same. I like that rather than holding a captive audience in the seats of a theatre, it sets up the possibility for spectators to move through the work of art as in a gallery and decide

for how long and from where they take it in. Not only that, it seemed to inspire audience members to “play” with the architecture in a way that most of us haven’t since we were kids. Often this was out of necessity as sightlines, particularly in the narrow hallway, were limited. People would solve the problem by perching in a windowsill or fit themselves into a nook or cranny that usually goes unnoticed and unused. At other times I saw adults skipping up the stairs, waltzing down the sidewalk or twirling ‘round a tree.

Similarly, I loved the unexpected encounters that continually transpired during the section when the audience is in the courtyard watching the BAUSCH dancers on the other side of the passageway. The passageway is in the band wing of the School of Music and has fairly steady foot traffic through it, often of people carrying large instrument cases. I had always enjoyed watching this little parade of casual and oblivious pedestrians passing between myself and the five elegant, statuesque dancers moving through a ritualistic, repetitive flow of movement on the other side. The juxtaposition of these two worlds was fascinating to me - seeing them exist perpendicular to each other, so close and yet also so separate. And as the passers-by often didn’t see me standing there, there was a heightened sense of voyeurism to be the only one witnessing them, the dancers, and their occasional reaction to the dancers if they noticed them. Once we had full audiences watching I realized I wasn’t the only one delighted by this. Every night I got reports of some man lugging a tuba; or another on his cell phone doing a double take at the dancers, then another when he noticed the audience watching him watching them; and finally of the young woman who also noticed the dancers and the audience but instead of scurrying by so as not to

be in the way as most people did, promptly sat down on the windowsill, took a yogurt out of her bag and proceeded to eat it while watching the dance. This illuminated another aspect of this type of work that intrigues me and is a theme that I want to continue to explore. It's about creating work that sets up the right conditions for the art to emerge on its own. In this case it was making something to watch (the dance), assembling a group of people to watch it (the audience) and then putting enough space between the two where other things beyond one's control can and will happen (band wing passageway.) For me, it's that in-between place where the art happens, literally and figuratively. Here it was the literal space between the dance and the audience where these chance encounters occurred, adding both drama and comedy that could not have been achieved otherwise. But it's also the figurative space between the work and the viewer where energy is exchanged, where the culture of one meets the culture of the other, where intention meets interpretation, and where meaning is made. And that, it seems, is why we create. Or at least it's why making a dance is interesting to me – it's not art for art's sake, but art for the sake of these encounters, meaningful or absurd as they may be, between people and environments. Perhaps it would now be appropriate to paraphrase 19th-century French poet Lautréamont's comment adopted by the Surrealists about the beauty of the "chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and umbrella" (Comte de Lautréamont, *Wikipedia.com*). Here the ingredients would be: hallway, evening gowns, tuba player. Or perhaps even more to the point is John Dewey's statement in *Art as Experience* that, "the artistic dimension arises from the encounter of the work and its reader/viewer. The artistic experience is a collaborative effort of the writer and

the reader, the painter and the viewer, the architect and the occupant” (qtd. in Pallasmaa 2: 145). Sartre argues along these same lines that, “It is the joint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others” (qtd. in Pallasmaa 2: 145).



Illustration 10. BUSBY.



Illustration 11. Wind Tunnel.



Illustration 12. BAUSCH.



Illustration 13. BUENA and BAUSCH.

22.October – 3. November.2013

The Visual Echo

On Tuesday evening Rob and I meet so he can show me the video he has compiled and how he plans to project it on to the wall over the Kay Theatre. The blend of various angles of each section, close-ups capturing both the dancers and the architecture, and layering of images of the stones and leaves outside is exactly what I had imagined. It provides haunting visual fragments of the dance and it is exciting to see it on such a large scale. I particularly like that the cut out spaces in the wall that provide “windows” for the hallway running along the second story of the Kay, act as separate screens. As the virtual image is being projected, one can see people passing through these “real-life” screens. For example, while I am there one night capturing the installation on my own camera I witness people waving at friends below, pacing back and forth talking on the phone and a man rocking a baby to sleep - all of this

framed by the large moving image of the dance. It all circles back to the themes Emily and I discussed in the very beginning of this process about past and present, virtual vs. reality.

The installation is on display in the Grand Pavilion from October 24 – November 1, 5-10pm, November 2, 3-8pm and November 3, 12-5pm. Rob and I write the following description to accompany it:

This video installation is the final phase of Erin Crawley-Woods' MFA Thesis Project Visible Seams, a site-specific work created for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center and inspired by the films of Busby Berkeley. Throughout rehearsals lighting designer Rob Denton collected footage of the dancers and crafted a video that reveals the dance and architecture from varying viewpoints and perspectives. Projected onto the walls of the Grand Pavilion, these moving images create a "visual echo" of the performance and bring the work full circle by returning the techniques borrowed from Berkeley back to a recorded medium.

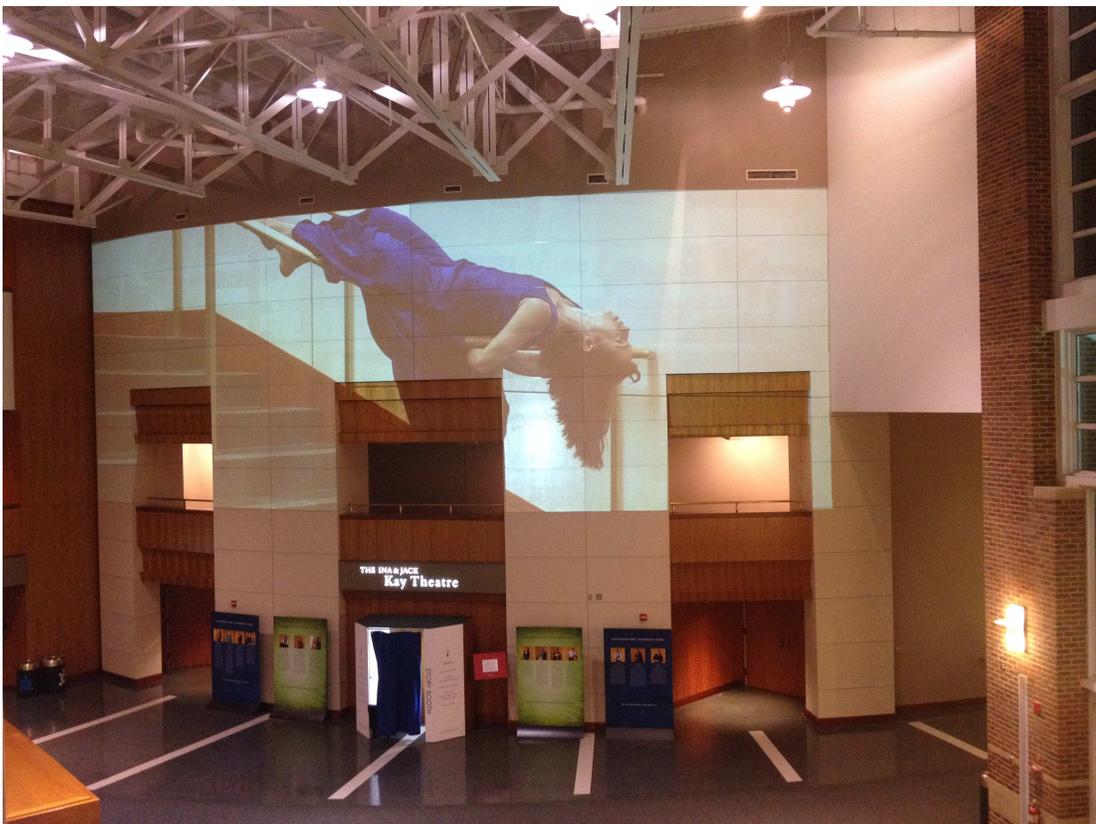


Illustration 14. The visual echo.

Chapter 8: Looking Back: Responses and Reflections

I think I did see it. I was walking into CSPAC last night with my giant umbrella in a steady rain when a beautiful woman walked by me. Black hair, blue dress, movement like a dancer. But I couldn't see her face. She seemed to float by me in bare feet in what was quickly becoming a downpour. Was she a performer, a ghost? As our paths came together she hiked her gown to her high-ankle and started to sprint. Was she a confused musician (most are) about to miss her base drum solo? Gong? I couldn't figure it out so I turned left - I had been planning to turn right. Or was it right and I had been planning left. She was running. I was walking. Did she go into the PG County Suite? Such a pretty blue dress and by now beautifully drenched black hair. It won't hurt to continue around to the front of the building to try to figure out the mystery. I enter CSPAC and suddenly the whole building erupts in applause. Is that for me? Yes. Yes it is. Thank you. Thank you. There she is. Black hair. Blue dress. Basking in my applause. Beautiful. I'm happy to share my moment.

Was that you?

- Adam Nixon, PhD Performance Studies, in an email to Stephanie Miracle

This passage, written by a passer-by entering the building unaware of the performance inside, is perhaps all the response I need about the piece to consider it a success. Within it is everything that inspires me about making site-specific work: the chance encounter, the mystery, the slight bewilderment, the theme of intersecting stories and realities, the co-mingling of the lives and events that continually come and go from this space and make it a place. The fact that this encounter on the periphery of the performance prompted a little burst of creative writing is also exciting to me and perhaps brings me closer to my own definition of successful artwork - when one act of creation inspires another.

I am tempted to just leave it at that. Enough said. But I was also fortunate enough to receive a wealth of feedback from audience members, including students whose comments and papers were thoughtfully passed on to me by faculty and fellow

graduate students. It was enlightening, reaffirming, humbling and surprising to see the work reflected back to me through the outpouring of response and so in honor of everyone who shared their words with me, I am including some of them here.

Visible Seams is creative, entertaining, and made exceptional use of a beautiful space. The dancers were enthusiastic and well rehearsed. Your audience was completely engaged from beginning to end. I liked not knowing what and where was coming next - literally a surprise around every corner.

- Doug Barton
Father of cast member Elizabeth Barton

Just wanted to let you know how much I totally enjoyed Visible Seams. It's a piece full of whimsy, amazing creativity, beauty and wit. I'm hoping we will see more of it and/or more of your work very soon!

- Jane Hirshberg
Community Engagement Manager
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

I wanted to once again congratulate you on a beautiful performance last night. Visible Seams made me laugh, smile, think, and wonder/wander— isn't that what great art does?

- Douglas Brandt Byerly
Chair of Performing Arts Department
Anne Arundel Community College

I enjoyed your MFA thesis performance in CSPAC. I was fortunate enough to see the first "dry" performance and the setting was perfect. I have always enjoyed the "abby" area (as I call it) and often go out of my way to go through there. I hope that others will follow and do the moving setting idea that you used in your performance.

- Craig R. Carignan, Sc.D.
Associate Research Scientist, University of Maryland
Aerospace Engineering Space Systems Laboratory

Patrik gave me pages and pages of insightful commentary written by his Creative Process and Modern Dance Technique classes and Anne shared several papers from students in her Creative Process Honors class. Two themes that I was pleased to see emerge from the students' descriptions and analyses were: attention to time and space in choreography that relates directly to the architecture, and the engaging experience of being an audience member actively traveling through the piece. The result of both of these elements seemed to be an altered perception of the building and the heightened awareness of relating to a familiar place in a new way. I find this encouraging, as if I had to name one "take-away" that I would want to give the audience that would be it!

Now when walking through CSPAC, I see Stephanie sitting up in the window with her dress draping down, I see the undergrads piled at the bottom of the staircase, and I see the lobby filled with sophisticated, swaying dancers.
- Chelsea Brown

I felt as though I went to watch a black and white movie and I got to see it live and in color... The space changed the movement, and the movement has absolutely changed the space.
- Emily Heller

The performance brought life to the Center in a way that now walking to class I want to dance on the stairs in a flowy dress like Stephanie and hang from the windows in the long hallway like the grads... [Erin's] piece will be remembered or the life brought to the inanimate and the surprise picture moments in space.
- Kayla Coutts

I feel Erin's motive was to bring the things that we neglect to focus our attention on to the forefront, like the seams of clothing. We notice the "big picture" (the clothing) before we notice the seams. While the grad students are performing, we can see the other dancers "waiting backstage" (outside of the window), reiterating all that the audience would not typically get to see has now become visible.
- Unissa Cruse-Ferguson

I think that the perception of CSPAC as a building will be forever different for those who saw the show. Also, I feel people will think differently about the idea of performance as well. You can do it anywhere, and be inspired by anything! It will be one of the more memorable performances; walking around and being actively engaged in the performance enhanced the feeling of experiencing something and not just watching something.

- Vaughn Midder

Erin's thesis changed my outlook on the center. I began to see the center as a playground full of hidden spaces and crevices that can be manipulated to fit all kinds of movement. I really appreciated how Erin had the audience view the dancers' on the staircase by looking down, rather than sitting before the staircase. This artistic choice directly corresponds to the idea of perspective. Perspective is all about an individual's unique point of view. If there was a "top 10 words of life" list, I am pretty confident that "perspective" would be on this list. It's the diversity within perspective that makes life so rich – the differences amongst viewpoint. Perspective and dance go hand in hand, from the position of the audience to the dance itself.

- Sydney Parker

And perhaps my personal favorite...

It's as if the building was built for Visible Seams!

- Moriamo Akibu

A number of students commented that the explosive scene in the "wind tunnel" was one of the strongest and most memorable moments for them. One student described it as the part when "the seams of the piece seemed to burst or rip." I have to say it was heartening to read these responses because it was the part I felt the least sure of– not because I didn't believe in it or feel strongly that it needed to be there, but maybe it was because I *did* feel so strongly about it. I was working from a more emotional place than I have before and could feel myself craving the catharsis, rawness and release of it while at the same time doubting that I could pull it off. What if it flopped? What if none of the intensity on the inside comes across to the outside? What if no one else finds it as fascinating as I do to watch a silent explosion?

One of the most striking scenes was when the grad students were going crazy in the long hallway with their hair just flying everywhere! I'm not sure if they were actually making noise or not, but because the audience couldn't hear anything, that made it all the more powerful.

- Sydney Parker

Good answer! Thank you, Sydney.

[The graduate dancers] were soft in quality, yet rigid, direct, and well-put-together at the beginning. Their change to becoming more wild and crazy was intriguing. But, how long could I have watched this? Would this have evolved into something bigger, deeper, and darker?

- Unissa Cruse-Ferguson

Good question! Thank you, Unissa. I wonder about that too. This section was tucked into the middle of this dance, protected by borders of more composed, controlled explorations of form. It felt full for what it was. It served its purpose. But in some ways it was also just hinting at something. What if I started with the explosion next time? Where would it go?

Another comment that got me thinking about the nature of my work was from Vaughn Midder:

I'm not sure if there was a "message" outside of exploring different spaces though. If there was another message she intended to get across, e.g. historical, political, etc., I think it got a bit lost for me personally because I focused more on the fact that the piece was experimenting with space. I focused more on the format of the work rather than the content. If that's what it was primarily "about" however, and the content and form of the piece are one and the same, then I think she hit it out of the park!

As Emily and I discussed early on, something can have “meaning” without having a “message.” I want to make meaningful dances. I want them to have substance. But I have always had trouble with the question “what is it about?” or “what are you trying to say?” When I have something to say, I say it. I write it. This is about dance.

Dancers dancing, people moving, bodies in time and space in relation to each other

and to their surroundings. This is not to say it is devoid of emotion, drama, tension, humor, plot. But as mentioned earlier, my interest is in bringing the elements together and letting the viewer make the connections. In this case I think Vaughn made the connections beautifully, for me this piece was absolutely about the content and the form being one and the same. A student in Anne's class, Cierra O'Keefe also summed it up nicely:

I think the choreographer's piece was created to leave the audience with a sense of mystery and longing to find out more.

There were also some surprises in the responses that I read. Quite a few people commented on the dark, supernatural, or ominous feel of parts of the piece, particularly the first BAUSCH section in the long hallway. I think the evening performance time gave it this aura more than the daytime version because of the lighting. But I also think the deliberate, bound quality of some of the movement combined with Tomek's score added an element of suspense.

An even greater surprise was that after all the concern in the beginning stages about how Stephanie and Alberto's relationship would be interpreted, very few people even mentioned it. Those that did made their own sense of it. One student said it reminded her of a girl waiting for her prom date. Another said she saw a woman longing for a man who wants nothing to do with her. Both completely reasonable interpretations! But I found it interesting that the relationship between the man and woman was not the primary focus of the majority of responses I read. I hope, and am inclined to believe, that this indicates that the piece was well-rounded enough to absorb whatever concerns I had about how the dynamic between them would be construed. I think that Stephanie and Alberto's skillful performances of their roles, as

well as our commitment to remain clear in our choices and intentions for their partnership, meant that viewers were free to question and draw their own conclusions about their story but that ultimately that did not dominate the piece or the experience of watching it.

And what about the experience of *doing* it? In preparation for writing this chapter I sent a request out to the performers and collaborators asking if they could say a line or two about the process from their perspective. I asked that they share with me whatever they felt inspired to but also gave them the following prompts: how was the rehearsal process for you? What was it like performing multiple nights in a row? What was it like performing with audience so close and passing beside/over/under/ around you? Did the experience change your perception of the Center, of architecture, of choreography, of performance, of yourself...etc? If so, how? What was your favorite part of the process/your least favorite?

Here are some of their responses:

The rehearsal process for Visible Seams was very different than anything I've done before. I felt very involved in the process and close to all of the other dancers. At first I thought I would get sick of performing the same thing every night, but because we were performing in such a unique space with different audience members each night, each time felt new and exciting. Even when we performed back to back and I was tired, I would get an energy boost from running down the stairs and seeing the audience's faces right in front of me. Seeing their excitement made me excited.

Ever since Visible Seams, I walk around the Center, as well as the campus in general, and think about the potential of each window and bench.

-Julie Bayer, BUSBY

This was not only my first performance in Maryland's dance department, but also my first experience performing in a site-specific work. Though the rehearsals were long and sometimes hot in the summer heat, I am very happy to have been part of this project. It was great working with the other MFA students who are all gorgeous dancers that I look up to, and it was also fun experiencing the audience's reaction to the thesis, especially the part

I was in. Working in Erin's thesis has made me into a more versatile dancer. Now I can not only perform on a stage, but also on a staircase, or outside in all weather conditions, and that is a great feeling.

-Annie Ponton, BUSBY

My experience being a cast member of Visible Seams, was visceral, emotional, and transformative. The thing [Erin] did, that was most effective for me, was to create a metaphorical creative space. [She] gave us the movement, she gave us information about the concept we were to embody, and then allowed us the space to ask ourselves questions. The section of the piece that I performed, the hallway section, embodied the idea of Genius Loci or the protective spirit of the space. It was the perfect amount of information for me, not too specific but far from general at the same time. I felt, as a performer, that each run of the piece revealed something new about myself and my fellow performers as the protective spirits of this space. Also, because of our proximity to the audience, sometimes within touching distance, I experienced performing in a whole new way. It was a unique challenge as a performer and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience my artistic practice through Erin's lens.

-Megan Morse Jans, BAUSCH

Having the audience so close added an improvisational element to the experience. I enjoyed performing multiple nights in a row. It is not something I'm accustomed to and I noticed a shift throughout that experience, like waves or cycles. First there was nervousness, which passed into an ease, which cycled again. I also experienced a sense of loss when the run came to an end. Usually I am not sad to come to an end of a rehearsal/performance process, but I was sad to end this one.

-Nicole McClam, BAUSCH

In addition to this being the first project I ever directed without also performing in, this was the first time I collaborated with a composer, lighting and costume designer. What a gift! I was extremely lucky that all three of these individuals were people I connected with easily and that our communication was clear and open from the beginning. I have always been more inspired choreographically when working with a partner and my experience with Tomek, Rob and Robert proved that this extends to other aspects of production as well. I love the brainstorming, the back and forth of ideas, and feeding off of each other's skills and

momentum. I think this particular project was aided by the fact that I already had a clear vision of the look and feel I was going for and had articulated that in writing for the proposal process before even meeting with Rob and Robert. They were both quick to understand the overall spirit of the piece, but also to offer their own interpretations and “what if...” inquiry to further define it. My challenge was to remain true to my original vision and at the same time open to new ideas as I was genuinely interested in both their artistic voices and where they might lead. Being a “possibilities person”, making decisions can be daunting as I hate to take options off the table and, perhaps more accurately in this case, don’t want to hurt feelings or let people down or say no or come across as rigid or close-minded. But that’s clearly a psychological discussion for another time. The point is this process was good practice in going with my gut, keeping things personable but not personal, and trusting my own integrity and that of those with whom I was working. In so doing I learned that often my instinct is “simpler is better” (black suit for Alberto instead of gray pinstripes) and usually decisions do not have to be made right away, so sleep on it (yes, let’s do the projection just on the wall over the Kay instead of also over the Dekelboum).

In conversations with Tomek, Rob and Robert during and after the project they echoed my satisfaction with the ease and outcome of our collaborations. Rob kindly wrote the following:

Erin was always open and happy to talk about her work; she sought perfection and in doing so, she asked for critique, she asked how moments read as an audience. Throughout the process Erin followed her vision, led the team and as a result she was able to create a work that moved everyone who saw it and transformed what people thought of as dance and art in the lobby.

Tomek offered some friendly criticism that I was very grateful for. Because we had performed the BAUSCH hallway section in Spring 2012 with his re-worked *Transposed Resonance*, I had assumed this part would not change and was more focused on the sound installation in working with him on the Fall 2013 version. Tomek graduated in Fall 2012 and moved out of the area so he was not around for most of our rehearsals. When he arrived for tech rehearsals he was shocked by how much the BAUSCH section had changed, not in tone but in the development and duration of the movement. I had always relied on the music in this section as a generator of atmosphere and had not linked specific parts of it to specific parts of choreography. It turns out that Tomek had. He composed three sections of music to correspond with what he saw as the three distinct sections of the dance and now these parts were no longer lining up. I was so embarrassed and ashamed that I hadn't even considered this and so glad that Tomek brought it to my attention in such a kind and matter-of-fact way. It was not hard to fix. We added in some silence and had the sound operator repeat one of the sections. It may not have been perceptible to anyone else but whenever the music came to this extended, dramatic pause and then picked up again, Tomek and I shared a knowing smile.

Writing this paper and reading audience and participant responses has been most helpful in prompting my reflections on the artistic process. As the logistics of working outside of the traditional theatre setting were also a crucial part of this project, I have tried to take a critical backwards glance at that process as well. What worked? What would I do differently next time?

By all reports from those involved in the approval proceedings with Center Council to the technical aspects of production in the Grand Pavilion, this process was remarkably smooth. It was work, it was compromise, it was uncharted territory, and it had its ups and downs, but I think I can safely say no one regretted taking the risk and all parties were satisfied with the outcome. So what made it work? For me personally it was having made the decision early on to embrace whatever negotiations, limitations and surprises came my way as part of the creative stew and to make what I could from that while staying true to the heart of what I was doing. I continually asked myself, what really matters? Does having little twinkle lights in the trees really matter? It would be nice, but it's just icing. The heart is to find an ending that has an element of surprise, feels festive, and leaves the audience transported while at the same time more fully present. There's more than one way to do that so no, little twinkle lights in the trees don't really matter.

What else worked? The answer to that is *who* else worked, namely, Cary Gillett and Patrik Widrig. I hope it is evident by now, if you've made it through the first seven chapters, that this would not have been possible without them. Cary was thorough, steady and masterful in bridging the worlds of TDPS, the Center, and all the production in between. Patrik as my committee chair was a true support every step of the way from talking through casting tribulations, to encouraging my choreographic questions and intuitive decisions, to being an advocate for me and the piece in production and design meetings. I also chose well in my committee. Sara gave invaluable insight, humor, and commiseration during our impromptu hallway meetings and late-night phone fests. Karen kindly reminded me throughout the

process that yes, I would have to eventually write about this and yes, I should definitely be keeping that journal. And Sharon offered extremely thoughtful and concise feedback in the crucial stage of the final showings and tech rehearsals.

I will also say that timing is of the utmost importance in getting a project like this off the ground and I think I must have had that on my side here too. I do not know the inner workings of the Center but my perception is that the tide is turning a bit and I was lucky enough to catch a wave. Just as with people, there are stages of development for places and organizations. The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, built in 2001, is perhaps leaving its protected infancy and precious childhood and entering a more daring adolescence. This is coupled with a change in the Executive Directorship, which inevitably brings new energy to a place and perhaps inspires people to take new chances.

So, what I have gathered from this that I will take with me into my next site-specific endeavor is: have a clear vision but remain flexible; be willing and ready to answer lots of questions and make sure you can follow through and stand behind your answers; surround yourself with a strong support system of mentors and peers; really get to know the place where you're working i.e., what and who makes it tick; don't be afraid of paperwork; remember that timing matters; and create a contagious culture of openness and respect with everyone involved. The energy you bring to it is the energy it will have.

Here's what I would do differently...

Given that there was such a limited audience capacity for this work, it presented some challenges with ticketing and Front of House (FOH) management. All

things considered, I think we handled it relatively well but when it came to the performances, it was the thing I was the most stressed about and least prepared for. In reality there's probably little we could have done to be more prepared since we didn't know how having a full audience of 20 would be until the opening. The performance was free of charge and patrons were asked to call or go on-line the day of the show they wanted to see to reserve tickets. Upon arriving they would give their name to a FOH usher who would check it off a list. They would then be directed to one of our audience guides who would tie a gold ribbon around their wrist as an indication that they could go along for the whole ride – meaning up the stairs, into the lobby, out in the courtyard. It was an okay plan but I heard from many people that “tickets” were gone almost immediately each day. This was particularly frustrating for cast members who were trying to get family and friends, some from out of town, to see a performance. The wrist band idea was okay, but even so it was hard to control the flow of people since anyone could watch the opening duet in the lobby and it felt awkward to do a “wrist check” and turn people away when heading up the stairs.

Also, due to scheduling conflicts, my audience guides were not as consistent as I had hoped. Rather than using the same four people, with at least three guiding at each performance, I ended up having five different guides and only two each night. While they all graciously volunteered their time and were very helpful, I would give much more attention to this aspect next time and bring in guides earlier in the process, perhaps doing more to incorporate them into the piece. I would also hope to work with FOH earlier. In this case, we did not really talk about how things would go until tech rehearsals. Again, I'm not sure there's much planning that could have been done

ahead of time but I think it would be useful to have them at the table earlier in the production schedule. For my own part, I would think twice about creating a piece with such limited audience in the future. Or I would figure out how to get it to run for a month! If I were to mount *Visible Seams* again, I would create more of an overflow strategy. For example, towards the end of this run, Patrik started taking extra audience members out to the courtyard when the rest of the audience walked down the long hallway. As a result, half of the audience saw the hallway section inside, half watched them through the windows and then everyone eventually met up in the hallway. I liked this divided audience solution and it gave me the idea to craft the piece more intentionally for that in the future so it would be balanced for each half of the audience.

The other thing I would pay more attention to next time is getting the piece photographed. Zachary Handler was hired to take photos at one of the dress rehearsals but due to a miscommunication about the time was only able to stay for one run and we never did any set shots. After seeing the photos he took I realized how important it is to have multiple runs photographed and to schedule a time to set up shots as well. It was also a good lesson in describing to the photographer what is essential about the piece. I mentioned to Zachary that the architecture of the building was as much part of the work as the choreography so I wanted that included in the photographs. The result however was that the expanse of the space overwhelmed the dancers, especially in Stephanie and Alberto's duet. If budget did not allow multiple shoots, I think in the future I would take photographs myself throughout the rehearsal process so I would

have a clearer image in mind of what was coming across on camera and have a more articulate description ready to give a photographer.

Chapter 9: Full Circle

The day I sat down to officially start writing this paper I received an email from Sara. She had been cleaning out files and came across a reflection paper about our choreography class with her and Patrik that I had written at the end of my very first semester. She attached the document, which I opened and read for the first time since I had written it exactly two years ago. In it I grapple to answer “why I make dances” and I question if I even want to. I admit that it interests me but I don’t feel compelled to do it or seem to need it the way I perceive other friends and choreographers do. I go on to talk about what does compel me.

...the curve of an arm, the curl of a toe, the slant of light, the sound of water, the subtleties that make up our world but that we are often too busy, too fast, too loud, too self-absorbed or too concerned with what others think to notice.

...dances that give people an opportunity to see something differently than they have before. Or perhaps to more clearly see what they already see.

...studies in and of space- big, little and everything in between.

...exploring how we relate to the space around us and how that informs our movement consciously and sub-consciously.

...segments, chapters, pieces that could form a greater whole but are also complete on their own.

...how the camera can hone in on detail, focus the lens and the eye in a very particular way. What would it be like to make movement this way? What would it mean to zoom in and out of movement? Or when is it better to use a wide-angle?

At one point I write about how of all the assignments we did over the semester, the site-specific study I did with Alvin’s class was still on my mind and I could see linking this with something in the hallway but I didn’t know how or when I could bring this to fruition. Throughout reading this I kept looking back again and

again at the date. Did I really write this two years ago? This was a full year before I even proposed my thesis project! And did I really forget that I had written these words? It was like opening one of those “by the time you read this I’ll be gone” letters in which the person reveals to his or her audience all sorts of uncanny predictions and explanations or helps solve the devilish mystery of their own disappearance from beyond the grave. Except in this case the person writing from the beyond was myself... to myself! It re-iterated once again Janney’s notion to “dance with the subconscious.” Never had this felt truer than when reading this premonitory reflection. In this instant the journey ended right where it began, yet another circle found completion and I finally realized the role of tango within this project.

“Looping” was a theme I had identified in my mini-ethnographic study of tango in Miriam Phillips’ *Dance in Global Context* course. I found this theme represented in the way couples circled the floor, in the energy exchange between partners and the symbiotic role of lead and follow as well as in the relationship between Europe and Argentina as the music and dance forms that created tango were passed back and forth across the Atlantic by immigrants and travelers. I was aware of this theme within *Visible Seams* as well: in Alberto’s looping around the staircase and lobby and repetitive encounters with Stephanie; in the role of cinematic techniques as an inspiration for the creation of the piece but also as the final destination in the “visual echo” video installation; and finally the ending, which felt so right to me because it ended in the lobby where it began and while it was a finale for the people who had been journeying through the piece, it was merely the prelude of something else for the patrons who were just entering the Center for the 7:30pm performances.

But now I could more clearly see how my brief encounters with the tango had not only seeped into the sensibilities of the piece, but provided a metaphor for how I learned to partner myself throughout the creative process - the pull of instinct and the push of reason, leading the group and following the flow, and ultimately the deep listening required to not go chasing, but to let the next step come to you and through you. This can take you far. This can take you wide. But ultimately I find this *brings* you to be truly, fully and unapologetically right where you are.

Eliot says it best.

Take us out, T.S.

*We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

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