

Abstract

Title of Thesis: *WITH NEVER ENOUGH HAPPENING: THE PROCESS OF EMBODYING MATERIALS, CHOREOGRAPHING TEXTILES, AND DESIGNING COSTUMES THROUGH THE PROCESS OF DANCE MAKING AND PERFORMANCE*

Daniel Miramontes, Master of Fine Arts, 2025

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with never enough happening is a 30-minute interdisciplinary performance that explores the use of materials, textiles, and costumes and their ability to perform and be performed. This dance, alongside this paper, integrates theory and practice, embodiment and materiality, and costume and choreography while positioning identity and cultural perspective within the discourse. By embedding a cultural perspective, this research offers an expanded view of materiality, embodiment, and resourcefulness in choreographic practice.

Upon completing this paper and defending its contents, Daniel came to understand he had used Rasquachismo (a Chicano/a aesthetic) as a framework to gather and organize its content. Rasquachismo, a practice of resourcefulness and making the most from the least, shaped his approach. Not as a way to minimize the labor or significance of the work, but as a way of assembling and repurposing the writings, materials, and choreographies developed and co-created over the course of two and a half years. This realization provides both a foundation and direction for future creative and scholarly work.

WITH NEVER ENOUGH HAPPENING: THE PROCESS OF EMBODYING MATERIALS,
CHOREOGRAPHING TEXTILES, AND DESIGNING COSTUMES THROUGH THE
PROCESS OF DANCE MAKING AND PERFORMANCE

by

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Introduction

The original Judson concept was to have people to work with and some space to do it in. The performances were just an offshoot, never the intention.... A good Judson piece was really boring, usually too long with never enough happening. That was an important part of the Judson look. Tasks were also a nondance element which Judson invented. And that was it. It changed dance.... Now it's been all dressed up again. We need to flush the grace of movement out of dance again, because that's what made Judson so fresh. It's the perfect time for a new idea like that.¹

- Robert Rauschenberg²

I begin with these words from Robert Rauschenberg, a seminal figure in American art, to situate myself within the lineage and spirit of post-modern dance. This statement captures the spirit of experimentation and the stripping down of traditional expectations that marked the Judson Dance Theater era - a lineage I both draw from and respond to as a choreographer and maker.

The title of my thesis dance, *with never enough happening*, emerged directly from this Rauschenberg excerpt. As I neared the end of the research process, I searched for a title that could encapsulate the themes of excess, the intricacy of assembling and organizing this work, and a poetic resonance - something that suggests many things unfolding at once.

In creating *with never enough happening* and now, writing this paper, I find myself navigating a terrain that feels familiar and also something I can't fully articulate. Material explorations, choreographic processes, and costume design are not new concepts within the field of dance, but they feel newly significant to me, in this moment. My journey in dance has brought me here to a place where I am compelled to question, to explore, and to see why these things

¹ David Sears, *A Trisha Brown - Robert Rauschenberg Collage*. Ballet Review Fall 1982. 48.

² Robert Rauschenberg was an American Painter and Artist. A performer and collaborator with artists of the The Judson Dance Theater era of Post-Modern Dance. Regularly collaborated with Merce Cunningham, and Trisha Brown.

matter. Even if the ideas themselves are not wholly original, the work feels vital because of the lived experiences that inform it, and the impacts they have made.

In this paper, I explore how embodiment and performance studies are pertinent to material explorations, and use performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's theoretical framework of *The Archive and The Repertoire* to deepen my understanding. I emphasize the role of costumes and costume design and their relationship to dance and embodiment in search of expanding the limited discourse within the field of dance studies. I also place my own identity and culture in relation to aesthetics of Maximalism and Minimalism, and how these frameworks shape my creative perspective. Finally, I talk about how I integrate theory and practice and how it shows up in my choreography, creative practice, and the relationships I build and co-create with others.

This dance - which encompasses the performance of *with never enough happening*, and this paper - exists as an inquiry into what emerges when materiality, movement, and culture converge with connection, collaboration, and co-creation.

Chapter One: Costumes, Materials and Embodiment

Designing costumes

*Dance costuming is wedded to everyday dress, for it imitates or shows alternatives to fashion trends or helps envision alternative social realities. As with movement, the medium of dress becomes explicit in the imaginary space of the theatre to the extent that audiences are encouraged to see it anew.*³

- Eric Mullis⁴

I am both a choreographer and costume designer. I came to the University of Maryland, College Park because I was offered one of five Maya Brin graduate assistantships because of my interdisciplinary research perspectives. Therefore, costumes were always already at the forefront, I wanted them to be just as important as the dance making; to be considered. Due to the nature of the production process, budget, timelines, and the time it takes to construct costumes, the desire to have the costumes available during the rehearsal process was not possible. However, because I know through my own research that dress has an effect on embodiment, for rehearsals I would ask dancers to wear and dance in clothes that made them feel “cool” (in some ways that’s an arbitrary word, but the point was that they chose what that meant). Dancers should feel good in what they are wearing, if they feel good, their dancing will inherently make a positive impact in terms of embodiment. What you wear is important to embodiment and performance, this sentiment echoes in author and dance scholar Eric Mullis’ book *Instruments of Embodiment* which draws on fashion theory and the philosophy of embodiment to investigate costuming in contemporary dance: “In dance, the medium-specific view takes the analogous position that only the patterns of movement developed by a choreographer are fundamental for a work’s identity

³ Eric C. Mullis, *Instruments of Embodiment, Costuming in Contemporary Dance*. Routledge 2023. 9

⁴ Eric C. Mullis is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Queens University of Charlotte, USA. He has published essays on somaesthetics, dance technology, and dance ethics, as well as other books.

and that scenographic elements are just add-ons.” I consider costumes as fundamental for the work’s identity and not as scenographic elements, or add-ons, or after thoughts.

Historical Artistic Collaboration

In the second year of the three-year graduate program, I applied for, and received a competitive award from the Board of Visitors⁵ at the University of Maryland, College Park, to conduct self-directed scholarly and creative research in relation to costume design, artistic collaborations, and choreographic exploration. This research involved accessing the special collections at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts⁶. I wanted to enrich my understanding of dance history and the intersection between costume design and dance by learning about noteworthy collaborative relationships involving choreographer Martha Graham⁷ and fashion designer Halston, as well as choreographer Trisha Brown and painter and graphic artist Robert Rauschenberg. Within this examination of historical collaborations, seeking a path forward to envision my own trajectory within my creative interests as they relate to costume design, and dance making.

On July 9th, 2024 I was able to access four images of gala dresses for Martha Graham, all designed by Halston. I offer a description of each of the four drawings, and I include words that were written on the side of each drawing, all drawings were similar with slight differences in drape and color. The drawings were made and signed by American fashion illustrator, Joe Eula⁸.

⁵The Board of Visitors for the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (TDPS) serve as advisors and advocates for our students and the school’s programs.

⁶The Jerome Robbins Dance Division is the world’s largest dance archive and library with an international and extensive collection that spans seven centuries.

⁷ Martha Graham was an American modern dancer and choreographer, who’s style, the Graham technique, reshaped American modern dance.

⁸ Joe Eula was an American fashion illustrator and served as creative director of Halston. Embedded in the art and fashion world. A costume designer for choreographers George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins.



Figure 1, Drawings by Joe Eula 1975⁹

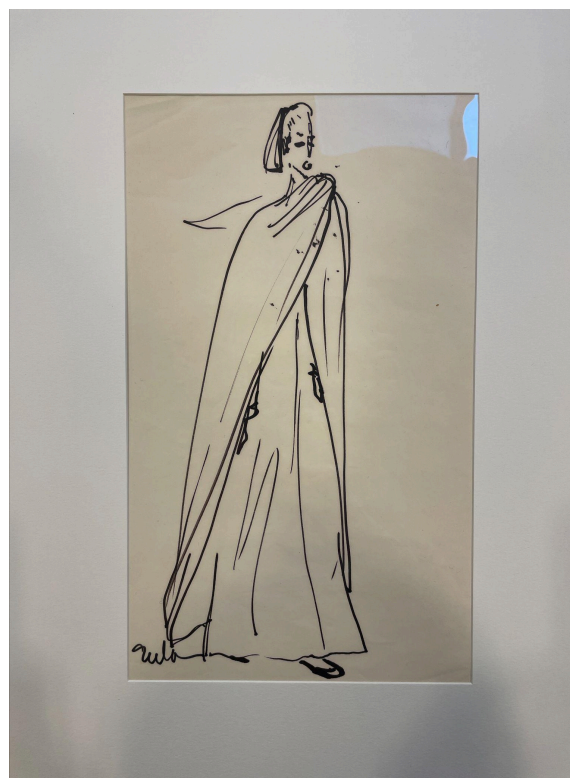


Figure 2, Drawings by Joe Eula 1975¹⁰

⁹ Figure 1. Joe Eula, *[Martha Graham Gala Dresses Designed by Halston / Drawings by Joe Eula]*, drawings, 1975, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.

¹⁰ Figure 2. Joe Eula, *[Martha Graham Gala Dresses Designed by Halston / Drawings by Joe Eula]*, drawings, 1975, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.



Figure 3, Drawings by Joe Eula 1975¹¹

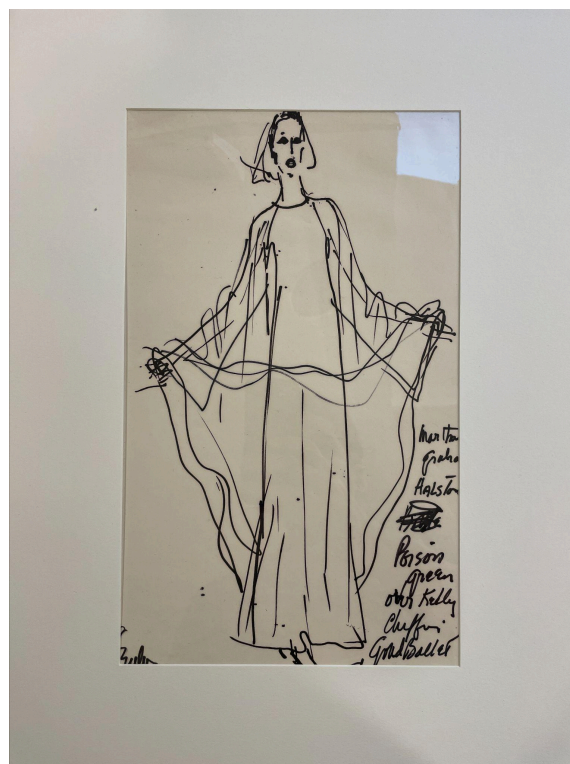


Figure 4, Drawings by Joe Eula 1975¹²

Drawing 1: Chinese, Red, 3 Layers, Chiffon, All In One.

Drawing 2: No words added, similar drawing to drawing 1.

Drawing 3: Purple Chiffon, 3 Layers, Gold Ballet Slippers.

Drawing 4: Poison Green Over Kelly Chiffon, Gold Ballet Slippers.

In these drawings, I chose words to describe what I was seeing: Glamour, Majestic, Decadent, Liberatory, Comfort, Heightened. The renderings although only in black marker offer a visual representation of these descriptors, especially in the way that a fabric like Chiffon¹³ gives an airy and elegant appearance in the way that it drapes over the body. I had questions about why chiffon, why the layering, and why those combinations of colors. I conclude that it is because of the elegant appearance that those combinations of fabric and color provide.

¹¹ Figure 3. Joe Eula, *[Martha Graham Gala Dresses Designed by Halston / Drawings by Joe Eula]*, drawings, 1975, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.

¹² Figure 4. Joe Eula, *[Martha Graham Gala Dresses Designed by Halston / Drawings by Joe Eula]*, drawings, 1975, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.

¹³ Chiffon is a delicate, lightweight, sheer fabric made from silk or synthetic fibers.

Although this collaboration between Graham and Halston was not for a specific dance but instead a collaboration for what she would wear to a Gala (presumably of her own work). I found myself crafting a similar experience, I sent the dancers curated Pinterest boards for their post-show outfits, each night had a different theme: black and gold, monochrome/color block, and Carol Baskin wore a doily to brunch with grandma. The black and gold theme was to celebrate the opening of our show. The monochrome/color block aesthetic was meant to be functional and interchangeable since it was a two-show day. The “Carol Baskin wore a doily to brunch with grandma” look, as the title suggests, was about excess - prints, colors, and textures; particularly because our show closed on a Sunday. The purpose of these Pinterest boards was to add an extra layer of connection, to build excitement and celebrate together, and also as an extension of the artistic experience.

The Board of Visitors asks what the long-term impact of this research will be, and I believe that this project extends beyond the immediate creative outcomes. As I advance in my career as a dance artist, costume designer, and educator, the experiences gained from this project have the potential to inform my pedagogical approaches. Envisioning myself as a mentor, I aspire to offer future students a distinct perspective on the relationship between costumes and dance-making. This project illuminates the capacity for costumes to drive and influence the development of dance, and I aim to continually deepen this understanding through collaborative experiences and scholarly research. I believe that through the completion of this project, there is inherent innovation in the field by expanding the discourse between dance and costume.

Artistic Collaboration with Bailey Hammett

I had the great pleasure of collaborating with costume designer Bailey Hammett in the designing of costumes for *with never enough happening*. This collaboration began during a

fabric shopping trip to New York City that was funded by the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. I was invited to join the MFA costume design students while they shopped for fabrics for shows they were assigned. I learned about swatching fabrics to visually and physically examine color, texture, drape, and quality before making a final design. This process allowed me to see a variety of fabrics in close proximity to determine how they could function together or not.

Hammett was quick to notice the fabrics and materials that I was drawn to, and hearing an outside voice name those qualities clarified for me what I was and was not interested in. This also shifted my perspective to be open to considering other options. For example, combining a shiny fabric with a solid color, or using both sides of a textured fabric to create a contrasting or complimentary look. What I appreciated most about this collaboration was the openness in conversation and sharing of ideas.

During the research process of designing the costumes for this work, Hammett asked about my sources of inspiration and what I was envisioning. I discussed Trisha Brown and some of my favorite costumes from the company's repertoire, and admired the costumes in a new commission by Judith Sanchez Ruiz¹⁴ titled *Let's Talk About Bleeding*¹⁵, with costume design by Curious Orange¹⁶. These costumes featured a simple color palette of cream and black, but their combination of fabric manipulations and textures created an elevated look for the company that made them look like individuals that belonged in the same world together. When I saw those costumes as an audience member for the first time, it evoked a desire of belonging. I wanted to feel what it felt like to move in those costumes. I understand the impact that costumes have, not

¹⁴ Judith Sánchez Rúa is a Cuban artist based in Berlin, Germany. Former member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company.

¹⁵ *Let's Talk About Bleeding*, the first commission by the Trisha Brown Dance Company to continue the conversation and impact of Trisha Brown's Legacy.

¹⁶ Curious Orange is a director, designer, and performer with 25 years of experience in the performing arts.

only for the performers, but audience members as well. This instance allowed me as a viewer with embodied experiences to “envision alternate social realities”, and then figure out how to make that happen for myself and the cast of dancers I would later perform with by working collaboratively with a costume designer.

In our conversations, I also discussed other artists and areas of interest, and a variety of color palettes with Hammett. I was interested in color, texture, and layering with the possibility for removing and adding costume pieces. On one occasion she asked me to list words of how I wanted the costumes to feel and look, I responded with:

Soft, Powerful, Beautiful, Care, Absence, Presence, Transition, Attention, Rigor, Love, Grand, Expansion, Fantasy, Important, Detailed, Fucking cool.



Figure 5, Costume Rendering for *with never enough happening* by Bailey Hammett.

During a showing, I had shared a material exploration that involved using materials to manipulate a dancer’s movements. Seeing that prompted Hammett to invite me to consider

threading strips of fabrics that were being used in performance or those that were part of the scenic design through the costumes, she proposed adding grommets in various parts of the costumes to make this possible. I was initially unsure about the design choice, but I agreed to it because I trust the expertise that a costume designer brings to the process, a key aspect of working collaboratively. Ultimately, I was satisfied with the outcome. In production, when I was able to see all of the elements come together through video in terms of scenic, lighting, and costumes, there were references to all of the designs which felt very sophisticated to me. The grommet functioned as a metaphor for absence, the absence of the fabric that was there before it was removed, the absence of materials, the absence of people/performers, the absence of material in the scenic design of the portal. I also see this metaphor as something present in my work as a maker and performer – there's something about memory and potential, something that invites, an emotional depth that isn't necessarily spelt out, but it comes out / becomes transmitted. I don't know how to fully name it, but naming those aspects of it feel important.

The impression of the grommet detail during show week prompted me to write this poem:

Absence

of materials
of bodies

creating space

spaces that were filled
spaces to be filled

spaces surrounded by materials
bodies
memories
absence

End of poem, threading back to costumes:

Another design aspect in the costume that feels important relates to the scenic design. The scenic design was a collaboration between Sophia Tepermeister, a wall emulating a portal was built with strips of various colored fabrics entering through the portal into the dancing space. The process involved working together with Hammett to make sure that the fabric colors used for the portal complemented the colors in the costume. During our set dressing day, Tepermeister and I worked together by cutting strips of fabric that would come through the portal which was great in the sense that it was a moment of co-creation. Initially, strips of fabric would be embedded within the costume, and as the dance progressed they would be removed. During tech week, we decided that the strips of fabric should remain attached the entire time because of the way they reacted to the movement section at the end of the dance. It was beautiful to see the scenic design be integrated with the look of the costumes and to see them at different scales in size.

Dance scholar Mullis makes the distinction between the body and costume by saying: “Flesh and fabric are ontologically distinct, for flesh is sentient and animate while clothing is crafted from inanimate materials.”¹⁷ I agree with this statement, however, through my inquiry I have discovered that these inanimate materials have the potential to be sentient, and become animate, responsive, and extensions of the body through engagement, dancing, and performance. To expand on this notion further I connect theoretical frameworks in relation to materials, performance, and embodiment in the following chapter.

¹⁷ Mullis, 5.

Activating the Archive and the Repertoire: The Embodiment of Materials

*Making involves working with materials. It involves a knowing about materials.*¹⁸

- Cameron Tonkinwise¹⁹

This chapter focuses on engaging with materials in a way that brings both archival qualities and performative elements into play. In doing this I bridge theory with the practical embodiment of materials. American academic in performance studies Diana Taylor provides an understanding of the vital role of performance in her book *The Archive and The Repertoire*. To understand the simple definitions and “role” of the archive and the repertoire Taylor describes them as: “the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual).”²⁰ This example provides Taylor’s perspective on embodied knowledge in the repertoire versus static knowledge in the archive. This is important for thinking through my thesis because of my emphasis on working with materials that have meaning outside of dance. In *with never enough happening* both of these concepts are present in the way that materials are both “archived” (as in objects with inherent qualities) and “performed” (as in interactive, living participants in my dance-making process and ultimately in performance).

The materials I chose to include in the making of *with never enough happening* include: gold mylar blankets, burgundy quilts, and a bolt of blue cotton fabric. The mylar blankets are most commonly known as emergency blankets, also referred to as “space blankets”, and “foil blankets”. A material object given in times of crisis; at border sites, climate catastrophes, and forced displacement. The material is lightweight, portable, waterproof, and provides warmth. I

¹⁸Cameron Tonkinwise, *Knowing By Being There Making: Explicating The Tacit Post-Subject In Use*. Studies in Material Thinking. 2008. 5.

¹⁹ Cameron Tonkinwise is a Professor and International Expert in design studies with a focus on the importance of achieving sustainable and equitable futures.

²⁰ Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and The Repertoire*. Duke University Press. 2003. 19.

name this, to acknowledge that I am not dismissing the fact that this material object is socio-politically charged, I understand its presence within my work, and its complexity. Even more so now with ongoing and emerging wars, forced displacement, and an inhumane desire for mass deportation by the incoming administration in the United States.

This work reimagines the material. The mylar blanket has two sides, gold and silver. I emphasized the gold side of the blanket because I like the color, I find it visually striking. The color gold is symbolic and evokes qualities of value, nobility, and grandness; attributes that take on different shape and meanings throughout the making of this dance. Over the last seven years that I have worked with this material, I have developed a deep understanding of how to “be” with it. Each iteration is different because of where I am in my life, what has happened between the last time and this time, there is familiarity, and always newness. This deep care for the material has allowed me to guide others through material explorations, and invite them in. There is a need for connection with others, and this material functions as a bridge to create opportunities for connection. I have witnessed the coming together of people when they work together, when they experience magic and awe together. This tells me that this work is important. I felt this very clearly when I guest taught an Introduction to Dance course, an unnamed student shared in a post class reflection the following:

I found this class to be a much needed experience in the middle of a particularly challenging week/period in the semester. Being asked to collaborate with my classmates, to access playfulness, curiosity, and creativity, and to respond to unpredictable outcomes with grace shifted my focus from the noise of academic stressors, personal struggles, and the worrisome social landscape that is our wild world. The teacher clearly emphasized the need to be connected and responsive to both our peers and our materials.²¹

²¹ “*Post-Class Reflection*”, *unpublished manuscript*, Maryland, 2024.

The mylar blanket functions as a tool for belonging, bridging personal and collective experiences. While its socio-political implications cannot be ignored, within this work, the material transforms into a medium for connection, creativity, and shared humanity.

I have written elsewhere, my desire of working with organic and synthetic materials and textiles to explore their capabilities as objects - scenic - world - partner - costume - wearable. I explained my belief that materials hold information: texture - weight - temperature - meaning... questioning how we as dancers allow our imagination to listen to the information a material is offering, what is it (the mylar, the quilt, the cotton fabric) saying about its desires and fears, how does it want to move, how does it want to move the performer, what does it want to become?

Design studies scholar Cameron Tonkinwise has had a profound impact on my thinking both theoretically and creatively. In *Knowing by Being-There Making: Explicating the Tacit Post-Subject in Use*, I was particularly drawn to the statement, “when making there is a sense in which the material seems to be speaking to us about its capabilities.”²² I wanted to listen, because the materials were asking to be animated. In my experience, my dancing feels richer when I am in deep collaboration - conversation - practice - listening - downloading with materials. It requires in depth patience and imagination. There is a change that happens somatically, there is an altering, and a change in states of being. This exploration is inherently subjective; those who engage in it bring their lived experiences, which, in turn, shift how the materials are experienced.

I open this chapter with Tonkinwise’s quote: “Making involves working with materials. It involves a knowing about materials.”²³ This concept of “knowing” through making resonates deeply with performance as a way of knowing, as Taylor suggests in her discussion of the repertoire.

²² Tonkinwise, 7.

²³ Tonkinwise, 5.

Just as making requires an understanding of materials - how they respond, transform, interact - performance involves a similar engagement, where the body and its movements are both material and medium. In addition to the body's materials at play, there are gold mylar blankets, burgundy quilts, navy blue cotton fabric, and the golden nuggets.

If performance is a way of knowing, it is through the body's dialogue with objects, materials, space, and other bodies. In this sense, performing is not just an act; it is an embodied process of discovery, where knowledge emerges from the interplay between intention, materiality, and movement.

An activated material interlude

I was drawn to how choreographer Annie-B. Parson²⁴ activated objects with language in her book *Drawing the Surface of Dance, A Biography in Charts*²⁵:

The [object] sang. The [object] sat next to her facing the same direction. The [object] went on a daredevil ride. the [object] rotated like the dancer. the [object] fell and splattered all over the floor and made a mess. the [object] flirted with the [object]. the [object] sat still, meditating.²⁶

To me, Parson activated what Taylor theorizes as the archive to function as repertoire. I was curious about replacing the word object with words related to my process: blanket, costume, choreography, and performer to envision how they could come to life in a new way by changing the context.

Iterations with blanket, costume, choreography, and performer inserted:

The [blanket] sang. The [blanket] sat next to her facing the same direction. The [blanket] went on a daredevil ride. the [blanket] rotated like the dancer. the [blanket] fell and splattered all over

²⁴ Annie-B. Parson is an American choreographer, dancer, and director. Parson is notable for her work in dance/theater, post-modern dance, and art pop music.

²⁵ Annie-B Parson rethinks choreography as dance on paper in her book *Drawing the Surface of Dance, A Biography in Charts*.

²⁶ Annie-B. Parson, *Drawing the Surface of Dance, A Biography in Charts*. Wesleyan University Press. 2019.

the floor and made a mess. the [blanket] flirted with the [blanket]. the [blanket] sat still, meditating.

The [costume] sang. The [costume] sat next to her facing the same direction. The [costume] went on a daredevil ride. the [costume] rotated like the dancer. the [costume] fell and splattered all over the floor and made a mess. the [costume] flirted with the [costume]. the [costume] sat still, meditating.

The [choreography] sang. The [choreography] sat next to her facing the same direction. The [choreography] went on a daredevil ride. the [choreography] rotated like the dancer. the [choreography] fell and splattered all over the floor and made a mess. the [choreography] flirted with the [choreography]. the [choreography] sat still, meditating.

The [blanket] sang. The [choreography] sat next to her facing the same direction. The [materials] went on a daredevil ride. the [costume] rotated like the dancer. the [choreography] fell and splattered all over the floor and made a mess. the [blanket] flirted with the [costume]. the [performer] sat still, meditating.

End of material interlude, threading back to:

The archive and the repertoire are significant aspects of this research because they reveal how materials operate on multiple levels in *with never enough happening*. As archival objects, these materials contain a history and a physicality that shape their potential uses, meanings, and limitations. This “archival” aspect acknowledges the textures, weights, and origins of each material - their pasts, and multiple uses. However, it is through performance “the repertoire” that these materials are continuously activated and transformed. In collaboration with the dancers, the materials transcend their static forms and become animated while also responding to and influencing the movements and choices made in real-time.

Both the archive and the repertoire allow the materials to be something known and something constantly discovered, aligning with Taylor’s notion of the repertoire as a “live”

knowledge that “shifts, breathes, and refuses to be pinned down.”²⁷ By engaging with these materials in an embodied way, we not only encounter their pasts but also allow for new meanings to emerge, creating a kind of living archive that exists within the dancers, within the materials, and within each moment of performance. This process is inherently cultural, as mentioned previously, those who engage in this work bring a multitude of lived experiences which in turn shift how the materials are experienced and utilized within the group.

I am fascinated by the interplay between these cultures and the materials, and by how this interaction fosters the emergence of a distinct culture within the group. Due to the long-term nature of my rehearsal and building process, I see a parallel with Taylor’s sentiment: “Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural influences offers a way of knowing.”²⁸ And so, working with materials in this way becomes a dialogue between individual cultural influences and collective exploration, where distinct perspectives interact to form a shared understanding.

This dynamic highlights how culture shapes how each dancer approached the materials and the materials facilitate a new collective culture within the group. For example, the cast of six dancers in this work comes from varied backgrounds, which perhaps explains why Alondra Torres Negron was particularly drawn to the quilts, while Emma Vanderlinde gravitated toward the golden nuggets. I think of my own inclination/orientation towards working with these materials. This way of engaging contributes to the culture of the ensemble, through embodiment and cultural influence as a way of knowing and creating together.

I continue the conversation on culture in a more personal way in the following chapter where I discuss aesthetics of Maximalism and Minimalism as they relate to aesthetics in contemporary dance through a Latinx perspective.

²⁷ Niki Tulk. *Performing the wound : practicing a feminist theatre of becoming. Advances in theatre and performance studies*. Routledge. 11.

²⁸ Taylor, 3.

Chapter Two: Aesthetics of Excess and Minimalism

“Primitive man had to differentiate themselves by various colours, modern man wears his clothes as a mask... The lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power”

- Adolf Loos²⁹

Arriving at Maximalism through Minimalism // Aesthetics in Contemporary Dance from a Latinx Perspective

This research project explores the relationship between my Mexican-American dance experience and creative process, in conversation with the aesthetics of Minimalism and Maximalism and their presence and intersection within contemporary dance. I draw examples from choreographers Rosie Herrera, Miguel Gutierrez, and Trisha Brown whose work, I argue, encompass the aesthetics of minimalism and Maximalism. In the context of this paper I use those terms in this way: Minimalism emphasizes simplicity and clarity, and Maximalism emphasizes excess and abundance.³⁰ This exploration involves several scholars within the field of dance, including Danielle Goldman, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Amanda Hamp, Celeste Fraser Delgado and Juanita Suarez. Additionally, I include scholar of U.S. Latino and Latin American arts and culture Tomás Ybarra-Frausto to support my ideas and research. The more that I delve into this research the more I am aware of the intersection of aesthetics in choreographies, theories, and within myself, and that aesthetics cannot be singular, rigid ideas.

²⁹ Adolf Loos was an Austrian and Czechoslovak architect, influential European theorist, and a polemicist of modern architecture. This quote is from his design manifesto *Ornament and Crime* (1913).

³⁰ I arrived at these definitions through a variety of searches on Google, as they relate to visual art, as well as reading *Aesthetics of Excess* by Jillian Hernandez. This inquiry has led me to learn more deeply about the respective art movements of Minimalism and Maximalism, and their distinct qualities and aesthetics. Through this viewpoint, Minimalism is about distilling and arriving at simple and direct engagement with the viewer, while Maximalism embraces intricacy and abundance, it invites complexity.

My Perspective

For now, I want to make the distinction that although I am using the identifier Latinx in my title and throughout this paper, when I am talking about myself I use Mexican-American. Latinx applies to people who come from Latin countries such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central and South America, and Cuba, and because I write and talk about other Latinx people, it seems appropriate to do so.

In writing about and critiquing dance, there is an emphasis (and value) on how contemporary dance relates to Minimalism. An example of Minimalism in contemporary dance is Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A (1966)*, this choreography incorporates no music and features a seamless flow of everyday movements like toe tapping, walking, and kneeling. As one of the co-creators of the Judson Dance Theater, this work exemplifies the stripped down, Minimalist approach to choreography (from footnote 68).

In thinking about my own cultural identity, and my dance lineage, a question I keep returning to is how Maximalism in contemporary dance can serve as an expression of culture. I already know that Minimalism in contemporary dance is an expression of culture because I experience it, and am drawn to it. This connection to culture is illuminated by an interview response from performer Sid Bobb in dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy's *Lesson's in Dance*, He says: "The way you do things always changes – throughout your personal life, as well as your cultural life. Your culture has a history and it's still changing, it's going somewhere, same as your personal history is changing and going somewhere."³¹ For me, there is something special about seeing my culture on the concert dance stage, even if it's just music; there's a sense of "ah, THIS is for me", a sense of belonging and resonance. As I attempt to better understand

³¹ Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *Lessons in Dance (as) History in Dancing Bodies, Living Histories*. The Banff Centre Press. (September 15, 2000) 143.

and integrate various aspects of my Mexican American modern dance experience and lineage, and what they mean to me and the work I create, I find myself exploring the concept of Maximalism as it relates to materials and excess, and their role in cultural expression.

I want to highlight that I also utilize the aesthetics of Minimalism to achieve Maximalism, and vice versa. The particular mode of excess I take up in this thesis research is what I term “material-aesthetic excess.” I offer material-aesthetic excess as a concept for theorizing modes of material utilization within choreography. Too many events happening at once, too many materials on stage, too many mylar blankets (or not enough). I make the deliberate choice to overuse mylar blankets to find a multitude of ways for them to be utilized, experienced, and seen. I return to this material-aesthetic excess in a later chapter, where I discuss how this concept is present *with never enough happening*.

In her dance theater works, choreographer Rosie Herrera integrates her Latinx culture with her choices in music including Juan Gabriel and Rocio Jurado, extravagant costumes and sets, and religious iconography. In Herrera’s work *Pity Party* (2011)³² exemplifies Maximalism through the use of gold streamers, candy spilled on the floor, or slices of bread placed and held onto a dancer’s body. There is a moment in the choreography where a female dancer is made to represent a piñata, is lifted upside down by two male dancers and as pieces of candies fall out a crowd of dancers fight for the scattered candy. While this moment resembles an exciting moment for partygoers to reach for the best candy, it’s impossible to deny the potential problem presented by this imagery which I discuss later in this paper. It invites me as a viewer with cultural understanding to think deeply about how these moments are perceived by me, or how the Latinx community is presented in concert dance or society.

³² Rosie Herrera. *Pity Party*, Commissioned by the American Dance Festival, 2010.

Cultural representation in dance matters. In her essay, "Spectres of the Dark: The Dance Making Manifesto of Latina/Chicana Choreographies" dance writer Juanita Suarez delves into how choreographies of Latinas/Chicanas challenge traditional dance forms and cultural stereotypes, often addressing complex issues, and she argues that Latina/Chicana choreographers create works that reflect their lived experiences, incorporating elements of darkness and struggle alongside resilience and empowerment.³³ Suarez says:

I did not know if there were other dancemakers who made dances by drawing from the Mexican-American experience. If there were others like myself—I assumed there were or would be—how do they speak through dance and how do their dances voice a cultural aesthetic particular to the Mexican-American experience?³⁴

I reflect on how my lived experiences as a Mexican-American influence my own dance-making. I think about the music that I listened to at home or on car rides to Mexico when I was growing up, I think about when my dad would say "No quiero que sean unos buenos para nada" meaning "I don't want you to be a good for nothing," So I strive to excel at many things; there's that Maximalist attitude. I think about the ingrained sense of improvisation through growing up in an immigrant household. I know that these aspects show up in my choreographies, but they also show up in my choreographies in a particular aesthetic because of the artists, dances, and lineages that I am influenced by through a modern and post-modern dance context within the United States. Later in this paper, I discuss the sensibility of Rasquachismo that has been embedded in my life which sheds light on making due with what is available.

³³ Juanita Suarez. *Spectres of the Dark: The Dance Making Manifesto of Latina/Chicana Choreographies*, *Fields in Motion*, Sep 06 2011.

³⁴ Suarez, 404.

Minimalism/Maximalism

As I was preparing to go into a rehearsal for *with never enough happening*, I was thinking about how to deepen material explorations in order to get at the center of an idea, to distill and arrive at the thing that is most important. I envisioned that moment as a minimalist postmodern dance phrase, with complications of course. What is strange to me about this moment is that an attempt at arriving at Minimalism was going to require an excess of work. So I proceeded to ask my cast the following questions as they navigated explorations with quilts to access the collaborative intelligence of the group, so that the information could come from a variety of sources instead of a singular one (my own). Those questions were: “how do we continue to go deeper within our material explorations?”, “can we write down words or feelings that came up during the exploration?”, and “how do you take this information to make phrase material?”, “what about this exploration is drawing you in?”. Ultimately the material excavated wasn’t as interesting (to me) as discussing the ideas and being in conversation about the discoveries that were being made, but at least now there is more material available to me/us that I/we can access. For me the strategies of using Maximalism to arrive at Minimalism come from a postmodern perspective in dance making and studies.

Shortly after this experience, I began reading Ryan M. Davis’ article “All the Possible Variations and Positions: The Intimate Maximalism of Miguel Gutierrez”, and was struck by the following passage:

At one point, amid numerous false starts and non sequiturs, Gutierrez scatters coins from a plastic grocery bag around the floor. “This, dramaturgically, has nothing to do with the piece,” he announces. It is just ordinary loose change and a clear-cut action. Yet this shower of glimmering silver is also gratuitous ornament; it is exuberant expression, an impulse in excess of function or meaning. “I didn’t become an artist to ‘make sense,’ ” he

scoffs. “My theory is, like, you can start with everything. You don’t have to fucking erase yourself. You don’t have to boil it down.”³⁵

While my dance and Gutierrez’s dance are obviously different, this description of his work offers an example of excess, and having all of the material available and present in the work. There is already so much labor that goes into creating, I think that this desire to extract and distill comes from my postmodern values and aesthetics. I tend to do an excessive amount of research in order to share the clearest possible outcome. I think it would be a good challenge for me to share a variety of outcomes and not worry so much about boiling it down. It brings me back to Minimalism’s emphasis on simplicity and clarity, and Maximalism’s emphasis on excess and abundance; how do I play the two or negotiate with them.

I often revisit Trisha Brown’s solo *Watermotor* (1978)³⁶, in large part because I like seeing her dance, and because her movement vocabulary is a part of my history/lineage. That said, I also find something new each time. But I also ask myself how this was made, how was this choreographed when it can appear improvisational, the movement doesn’t appear like it can be contained. French cinematographer and director Babette Mangolte visited Brown twice a week to familiarize herself with the solo in order to get the best shot during filming.³⁷ In Brown’s biography, her movement is described as “extraordinary, idiosyncratic virtuosity...”³⁸ I see that extraordinary, idiosyncratic virtuosity in *Watermotor* (1978). I see many centers moving at once and multiple rhythms happening at once. I see the coolness, relaxation, looseness, and laidback energy, and it’s so crisp and clear. Yes, it’s postmodern and “Minimal”, but the attitude, energy, and execution of movement is Maximalist? If Maximalism is an aesthetic of excess, “more is

³⁵ Ryan M. Davis. *All the Possible Variations and Positions: The Intimate Maximalism of Miguel Gutierrez*, *Theater* (2015) 45 (1): 14.

³⁶ Trisha Brown, *Watermotor*, 1978, New York City.

³⁷ Babette Mangolte, On the Making of Water Motor, a dance by Trisha Brown filmed by Babette Mangolte, accessed November 20, 2024..

³⁸ Trisha Brown Dance Company. Biography. trishabrowncompany.org. Accessed April 23, 2025.

more,” can this aesthetic of excess also be about the attitude, the ways in which something is performed? I make the argument that yes, it is. With that being said, Trisha Brown is a Maximalist. This is perhaps most evident in her solo titled *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor* (1979)³⁹. This solo is a display of Trisha Brown’s virtuosity and genius. *Accumulation*⁴⁰ uses a mathematical structure, a structure visible to the viewer, the opposite happens in *Watermotor*, the structure masked by the virtuosic display of the dancing. In this work, she dances between two dances and two stories, and to put it simply, it’s hard to dance and talk at the same time. The edges are soft enough that it’s hard to tell when one ends and the other begins, or the way she interrupts herself without it feeling like an interruption. A sort of “I was just there, and now I’m here” that keeps me leaning forward.

This makes me think about an intersection of ideas, how they inform one another, or even how to integrate ideas so that they do not remain compartmentalized. I’m pulling from here, and here, and here to make sense of who I am, and also to be able to share and be in conversation with others. This, in relation to my personal histories and experiences, and as an improviser; is what can I access in this moment, how can I be available in this moment. This approach to navigating my artistic and creative life feels empowering, especially as I deepen my understanding of improvisation’s potential through the lens of dance artist and author Danielle Goldman. In Goldman’s book *I Want To Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* she states that improvisation’s power is: “A full-bodied critical engagement with the world, characterized by both flexibility and perpetual readiness.”⁴¹ I think that’s also an aspect of Maximalism, I accumulate knowledge and experiences that I can access. This full-bodied critical

³⁹ Trisha Brown, *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor*, New York. 1979.

⁴⁰ Trisha Brown, *Accumulation*, New York, 1971.

⁴¹ Danielle Goldman, *I Want To Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (The University of Michigan Press, 2010) 5.

engagement with the world is part of how I access information that informs my dance making, and my way of being as a performer and collaborator.

difficult aesthetics: an interlude

How are the aesthetics of Maximalism perceived? Contemporary dance is a site for innovation and experimentation, offering artists the freedom to express themselves and engage in interdisciplinary collaborations. It is meant to celebrate individuality and provides a space for social and political commentary. When choreographers like Miguel Gutierrez and Rosie Herrera embrace these principles, critics often recognize the significance of their work yet grapple with their choreographic choices and aesthetics.

Drawing on the insights of dance scholars Amanda Hamp and Celeste Fraser Delgado, this interlude explores the critical analysis of Gutierrez and Herrera's choreographic works. Hamp's article, "I want to understand (what Is happening to me)! Miguel Gutierrez Performs How to Be Okay in a Non-Utopia", and Delgado's article, "Cruel Exuberance: Choreographers Rosie Herrera and Octavio Campos Challenge the Imperatives of Latin Popular Performance", shed light on the similarities and differences in the reception of their works.

The Maximalist aesthetics present in Gutierrez's work are labeled as difficult when discussed in Hamp's article. She uses the term 'difficult aesthetics' to encompass choreographic choices she perceives in his choreographies. Hamp says: "difficult aesthetics - I discern qualities of fatigue, off-kilter embodiment, shadowiness, crowdedness, and incoherence - which perform ways to be in and move through lived complexities of the here-and-now."⁴² I do not discuss each of these qualities in depth because Hamp does so in her article, however, since she uses them to analyze Gutierrez's work, it's important to name these qualities. Hamp also discusses how

⁴² Amanda Hamp, *I want to understand (what Is happening to me)! Miguel Gutierrez Performs How to Be Okay in a Non-Utopia*, *The Drama Review* 60:2, New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016. 15-28.

Gutierrez emphasizes subjecthood within his work, where performers actively participate in embodying and engaging in the difficult aesthetics present in his choreography. For Instance, when Hamp is expanding her own definition of off-kilter embodiment in *dAMNATION rOAD* (2004) dancer Michelle Boule's "actions transgress the traditional lexicon of American concert dance, they provoke audience members to look at her not just as a dancer, but to also consider her as a person inscribed by history and experience."⁴³ This example offers insight into how performers may be perceived in his work, and can allow audience members to relate to the performer at a human level.

I agree with Hamp's assertions of difficult aesthetics, I also agree with her and believe that Gutierrez's approach to dance making is significant in the way in which he expresses himself, innovates and experiments through his work. As Hamp writes, doing so by actively challenging contemporary dance aesthetics:

Gutierrez turns to strategies for queering how dance is made. He resists traditional, hierarchical practices by granting dancers and other collaborators authority in creative decision-making. Extremely aware of dance's capacity for spectacle, he both refuses and hyperbolizes it. And while highly tuned to how things appear, he gives primacy to interiority and experience. He focuses on sensations and psychosomatic states. He asks dancers what they think. He allows things to be chaotic and nonsensical.⁴⁴

This offers a powerful insight into his choreographic process and that he is intentional about his choice making, and also that he cares about his collaborators and isn't engaging in reckless pedagogies to make social and political commentaries. Reckless pedagogies, defined as a lack of care, caution, consideration for consequences that could negatively impact his performers' well-being, would be contrary to his approach. I believe that being in dialogue with his

⁴³ Hamp, 19.

⁴⁴ Hamp, 24.

collaborators during the building process of his work is crucial given that they are tasked with embodying difficult aesthetics not just in performance but the rehearsal process as well.

Celeste Fraser Delgado discusses the aesthetics of cruel exuberance and coerced consent present in Rosie Herrera's choreographic work. Delgado focuses her critique on Herrera's work in relation to the social and cultural landscape of Miami, Florida. Delgado states:

In Miami, the cruel exuberance of Latin popular performance is made more acute by the demands of the tourist economy and the city's status as a center for transnational Latin entertainment. Latin exuberance is overlaid on the eternal happy face of hospitality, which is an imperative for low-wage workers from the hotel industry to the sex industry to the entertainment industry and the arts.⁴⁵

Her company, the Rosie Herrera Dance Theater, from my observations unveils the pain behind the glittering smiles of drag queens, divas, and showgirls. The examples used in Delgado's article reflect moments from *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret* (2010) and *Pity Party* (2011) which display cruel exuberance and coerced consent.

In *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret* (2010) coerced consent is exposed when performer Ana Mendez is dipped into a series of birthday cakes by male performers in tuxedos. "At first, she giggles and coos, but as the men dip her into cake after cake, despite her growing protests, she grows distraught and sobs."⁴⁶ This scenario reflects what scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms "the empathetically and sexually hyperavailable female figure," regardless of whether that figure is biologically female or otherwise.⁴⁷ This aspect of hyperavailability reinforces 'the eternal happy face of hospitality' mentioned earlier, and the way female latinidad—used here to discuss latino communities and cultural practices outside of latin america—must abide by the expectations of eternal happiness. Presenting this difficult aesthetic

⁴⁵ Celeste Fraser Delgado, *Cruel Exuberance: Choreographers Rosie Herrera and Octavio Campos Challenge the Imperatives of Latin Popular Performance*, *Conversations Across The Field of Dance Studies*, 2014. 13-14.

⁴⁶ Fraser-Delgado, 13-14.

⁴⁷ Fraser-Delgado, 13-14.

on stage means shedding light on the issue and inviting viewers to grapple with that reality within the context of concert dance. It challenges the audience to question societal norms around gendered expectations and hospitality, particularly as they relate to Latinx femininity, and to feel the discomfort that arises from such a display. By exposing these challenging themes, Herrera pushes audiences not only to recognize but to reckon with the endurance and resilience masked behind the hyperavailability imposed on women, suggesting that these constructs demand both critical awareness and change. As Fraser-Delgado describes it:

In *Pity Party* (2011) by Rosie Herrera, the choreography presents an example of coerced consent to display a forced joy involving performers Liony Garcia and Octavio Campos: Standing behind him in an elegant suit, Octavio Campos pulls a roll of Scotch tape from his jacket pocket, yanks Garcia up by the hair, then tapes the sobbing man's eyelid and eye brow into a raised position. ... while Campos sticks a finger in Garcia's mouth, then applies another strip of tape from the corner of his mouth, across his ear, to his opposite cheek. Soon Garcia's face is a grotesque smiley face wracked in pain.⁴⁸

This instance highlights an ongoing choreographic choice present in Herrera's work to convey dark realities. It prompts me to consider how often we hide behind fake smiles in uncomfortable situations to make others feel at ease. Delgado also notes, "Herrera's works regularly erupt into a dance party, reveling in the very exuberance they challenge elsewhere."⁴⁹

These examples display extreme states embodied by performers, challenging traditional notions of contemporary dance to make social commentary. Herrera's ability to integrate difficult aesthetics into moments of joyful eruption makes a powerful statement about resilience within the Latinx community. While Delgado makes these assertions of Herrera's work in the context of Miami, Florida - and I have previously emphasized the importance of Miami's social and cultural landscape - I believe that the themes and examples extend beyond the specific location and, in

⁴⁸ Fraser-Delgado, 13-14.

⁴⁹ Fraser-Delgado, 13-14.

some cases, beyond the Latinx community. This opens up a broader topic of discussion and critical inquiry best explored and discussed in another paper.

The works of Gutierrez and Herrera ask their audiences to witness the complexities and oftentimes difficulties of human existence with a Latinx perspective on the concert stage through contemporary dance. Hamp quotes American author on sexuality studies and feminist theory Jill Dolan within her discussion and argues for performance's social efficacy, suggesting that "the experience of performance, the pleasure of a utopian performative, even if it doesn't change the world, certainly changes the people who feel it"⁵⁰ These choreographic choices and aesthetics are necessary regardless of their difficulty in viewership. Maximalism can't just encompass the excess of "nice and beautiful things" Maximalism is about aesthetics in complexity, cruel exuberance, fatigue, extravagance, incoherence, it can be messy and not perfect; unveiling all aspects of humanity. Both Gutierrez and Herrera emphasize subjecthood in their work, to make visible what we (audiences) wish to hide from, and then name it as a difficult aesthetic.

End of interlude, threading back to:

Rasquachismo

While attending the inaugural Latinx Dance Educators Alliance Convivencia, I had a conversation with fellow attendee Roxanne Gray. We shared our current research, and I began discussing this paper and its relationship to my creative process. During our conversation, she mentioned the word *Rasquachismo*—a term I had never encountered before. Little did I know that she was about to introduce me to an aesthetic deeply embedded in my cultural upbringing as a Mexican-American.

⁵⁰ Hamp, 29.

In Spanish, *rasquache* means ‘leftover’ or ‘of no value.’ The term *Rasquachismo* was coined by scholar Tomas Ybarra Frausto and describes it as an attitude, the taste or lifestyle of the underdog.⁵¹ This attitude is rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability, survival and inventiveness, and resilience. It is an aesthetic expression that comes from discards, fragments, and recycling, of everyday items to be given a new purpose/meaning. Learning about *Rasquachismo* has allowed me to embrace my heritage in new ways and has fostered a deeper understanding of my bicultural identity⁵².

So how do the sensibilities of *Rasquachismo* show up in my work? As an improviser, the words resourcefulness and access come to mind; what can I access in this moment, how can I be available in this moment, how do I pull from everything that I know. Which brings me to a few experiences I had during my dance thesis process, as they relate to costume and props. Costume: I decided to build a pair of pants for one of the dancers. I used a fabric manipulation technique called pleating, and added a pleat on each side of over 200 4 x 4 square pieces of muslin fabric, creating a mountain like shape on each square. After sewing the squares into panels, I was able to sew them together to create a pair of pants. These pants were worn by dancer Alondra Torres Negrón in rehearsal and during thesis proposal presentations. I wanted to emphasize to the design teams that there were specific costume related looks I was after. During initial production meetings, Costume Shop Manager Jen Daszczyszak⁵³ requested that I bring the pants in so the shop could look at them so they could figure out a way to build them. I was nervous. Although I have a background in costume design, and have worked as a technician, my experience does not compare to that of a fully staffed costume shop. I made them by identifying a texture that was interesting to me and figured it out. A similar situation occurred with the

⁵¹ Tomas Ybarra Frausto, *Rasquachismo A Chicano Sensibility*, Duke University Press. 2019.

⁵² Growing up in an immigrant household, and the complexities of living and assimilating in this country.

⁵³ There is a professional staff who work in the costume shop for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

properties manager, Timothy Jones⁵⁴ in relation to the golden nuggets that I was using in my dance. Jones, expressed frustration that he had not built/made the golden nuggets. Perhaps aesthetically he believed that they should look better. What he did not know was that the golden nuggets were the result of overused, ripped, smelly mylar blankets; holding memories of the dancers who used them. Instead of throwing the material away, I thought about how I could repurpose the material and give it a new life. So, I made the pieces of mylar into small rock-like objects and held them together with rubber bands. In this act of repurposing I was expanding the materials that were accessible to us in the dance with every new nugget. More on golden nuggets in the following chapter with additional imagery in figure 6 and figure 7. Not only is Rasquachismo at play, so is improvisation, and as mentioned previously I once again quote Danielle Goldman's definition of improvisation's power "A full-bodied critical engagement with the world, characterized by both flexibility and perpetual readiness."⁵⁵

I also think about instances when I would help my dad, and he would make a funnel by cutting a water bottle, or when I would reach into the refrigerator for butter but am surprised with salsa or refried beans. Finding different ways to use things, to give them a different life or purpose, to not waste. It reminds me of the way I reuse the gold mylar blankets and turn them into small golden nuggets to try different choreographic experiments to figure out what else might be there. How can I create a different purpose for it after the initial purpose has lapsed? I like the way Rasquachismo intersects with aspects of Maximalism, because it's about using and reusing everything, and I also see how Rasquachismo intersects with Minimalism because it's about making the most from the least.

⁵⁴ There is a professional staff who work in the properties shop for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

⁵⁵ Goldman, 5.

Similar to Brown's iconic *Watermotor* (1978) solo; in only two and a half minutes⁵⁶ Brown highlights the complexity of her dancing. She showcases the most in the least amount of time, from my perspective that's Rasquachismo, she's a Maximalist. I make the assumption that an outsider perspective would describe Rasquachismo as a difficult aesthetic due to its fragmented, recycled, held together by a string nature. But I hope that this speculative outsider perspective can appreciate Rasquachismo's spontaneous, resilient, survival and persevering attitude.

Lingering thoughts

I am reminded of the importance of embracing complexity and interconnectedness, embracing the intersection of Minimalism, Maximalism, Rasquachismo and cultural identity, and personal expression. And like Rosie Herrera, Miguel Gutierrez, and Trisha Brown, I too draw from various inspirations to shape my own creative voice. The works of Gutierrez and Herrera ask their audiences to witness the complexities and oftentimes difficulties of human existence on the concert stage through Latinx contemporary dance. Hamp quotes Jill Dolan within her discussion and argues for performance's social efficacy, suggesting that "the experience of performance, the pleasure of a utopian performative, even if it doesn't change the world, certainly changes the people who feel it"⁵⁷ These choreographic choices and aesthetics are necessary regardless of their difficulty in viewership. Maximalism can't just encompass the excess of "nice things" Maximalism is about aesthetics in complexity, cruel exuberance, fatigue, extravagance, incoherence, it can be messy and not perfect; unveiling all aspects of humanity.

My hope is that terms and aesthetics can remain porous because they often intersect and inform one another. Why not just play it all? - This thinking is further evidence of Maximalism. I

⁵⁶ Wendy Perron, Dance Magazine. <https://www.dancemagazine.com/short-form-choreography/#gsc.tab=0>

⁵⁷ Hamp, 29.

think that ways of being/engaging with a multitude of aesthetics don't have to look the same for everyone - There can be many ways of being and expressing those aesthetics.

A choreographer's note, translating, and Maximalism

The following choreographer's note was included in the program for the Fall M.F.A. Thesis Dance Concert where I premiered *with never enough happening*. I wrote this note to frame the performance as an invitation to witness, rather than the expectation to be entertained. A choreographer's note, from my perspective, allows the choreographer to share additional insight about the work with their audience. I included one because some things can be said in words, that can't be said with movement, and some things can be said with movement, that can't be said in words.

The version of the work that you will see tonight, *with never enough happening*, exists because of a deep investigation into the relationship between the body and the materials that surround us. - this dance also exists and is informed by my experiences with alexx shilling, Hana Van Der Kolk, Lea Keifer, Laurel Jenkins and Madison Clark as a performer, collaborator, conspirator and participant; through the seen and felt.

Throughout this process, my collaborators and I explored how fabric, texture, and space could extend beyond the tangible, becoming intertwined with the experience of dancing itself. In this dancing something new emerges, something familiar and strange, organic and fantastical.

The materials are not "just" props, *they* are active participants, reshaping how we move, how we see, how we feel, how we dance. In turn reshaping how *they* move, how *they* see, how *they* feel, how *they* dance.

This work is also about connection - something that feels simultaneously personal and collective. It is a love letter to the people I have had the privilege of dancing with, a celebration of the power of community, creation, of being, and dancing together.

Thank *you* for being here to witness this dance unfold.

In Spanish:

La versión del baile que verán ésta noche, *with never enough happening*, existe a través de la profunda investigación de la relación entre el cuerpo y los materiales que nos rodean. -éste baile existe y ha sido informado por mis experiencias con alexx shilling, Hana Van Der Kolk, Lea Kroger, Laura Jenkins and Madison Clark como performer (artista), colaborador, conspirador y participante; al ser visto y sentido.

Durante éste proceso, mis colaboradores y yo hemos explorado cómo telas, textura, y el espacio que nos rodea sobrepasan lo tangible, entrelazándose dentro del mismo baile como su propia experiencia. En éste baile algo nuevo surge, algo familiar y extraño, de una forma fantástica y orgánica.

Los materiales no son "solo" piezas escénicas, *ellos* también son participantes activos, reordenando la manera en que nos movemos, como vemos, como sentimos, como bailamos. Y en cambio reordenándose, como *ellos* se mueven, como *ellos* ven, como *ellos* sienten, como *ellos* bailan.

Ésta pieza de baile también se basa en conexión- algo que simultáneamente se siente de forma personal y colectiva. Es una carta de amor a las personas con quienes he tenido el privilegio de bailar. Es una celebración hacia la fuerza que existe en comunidad, creando y bailando juntos.

Gracias *a ti* por estar aquí para presenciar el desarrollo de esta danza.

Con apoyo de traducción de Rosario López⁵⁸ (with translation support by Rosario López).

After writing my choreographer's note, I thought about my parents, as well as one of the dancer's parents, who are also Spanish speakers. I wanted them to be able to read about the thoughts and processes behind creating a project of this scale. I felt it was important to begin translating the note, but I quickly realized that some of the words didn't carry the same weight in Spanish.

Initially, my attempt was only partially successful—I knew that some of the language had lost its original gravitas. I reached out to my friend Rosario Lopez, with whom I had worked on translations in the past. Lopez has a deeper understanding of Mexican Spanish, shaped by her

⁵⁸ Rosario Lopez is a Mexican-American dance artist and longtime friend.

lived experiences. I sent her my attempt and said, "Hey, I tried. I think it's close, but it's kind of bad." She assured me it wasn't too bad, which was encouraging.

Working with her to fill in the gaps was exciting, as it highlighted not just differences in wording, but also nuances and accents within the language. It was a process of discovering how to bridge the spaces between English and Spanish, and by doing so, make my work more accessible to those who mean the most to me.

This act of translating is another form of labor, one that parallels my research into Maximalism. It's not just about language, but about the work, time, and care that goes into ensuring every layer of my project reaches the people I care about. Translating the note was an act of layering meaning across languages, preserving the richness of the original while adapting it to a new context. It is a way of acknowledging and honoring the diverse cultural backgrounds of those involved, inviting a broader community into the experience. Through this translation, I aim to make the work not just accessible, but also reflective of the multilingual, multifaceted realities of the people who inspire and support it. It is an extension of the care, effort, and intention that inform my artistic practice, striving to bridge gaps and create connections across language and culture.

Chapter Three: Choreography of with never enough happening

This chapter continues and deepens the exploration of Maximalism and Minimalism, not only by integrating these theoretical frameworks into choreographic practice but by explicitly highlighting their significance within the process.

Early Research

The events leading up to *with never enough happening* came about from exploration and research with gold mylar blankets, quilts, and cotton fabric in the following dances and choreographic studies: *slow thaw*, *drops of gold*, *golden nuggets*, *a potential goodbye*, *untitled purple quilt solo*, and *Triple Spell*. Noticing and naming the trend of lowercase titles, there is a sense of highlighting the understated. In each of these studies, I have been drawn to how the body/the dancer becomes changed or affected when working with materials. There are times when the blanket is the blanket, and there are times when it becomes something else, turning the ordinary into something extraordinary. What is happening within the body - within the dancer? How is this material relationship changing the body, therefore, changing the person? When talking about the process with the dancers I have been working with, I hear them say how much they love the process and how much they love being in the work, and while I take that as a huge compliment I also wonder what it is about the material (if it even is about the material, textile, phrasework, or something else.) This curiosity has led me to seek answers through the study of phenomenology, and I provide a definition by media studies scholar David Guignon⁵⁹:

the study of appearances and how people interact with things in the world as they come in contact with us through our senses, through our ability to touch, see, smell them, how they appear to us through all of these different senses, the study of those interactions.

⁵⁹ David Guignon is a media studies scholar, professor, and podcast host of Theory & Philosophy.

And how we think about them and how they become meaningful to us. The capacity to engage with things and others.⁶⁰

Because phenomenology is about the individual experience, I seek to be in conversation with my collaborators to hear and learn how they are experiencing the process, and what that exploration is bringing up to the surface for them. So, from a phenomenological standpoint I can only write about how I am experiencing those interactions. In my body I feel a leaning towards, like a craving to discover what else is there and how that leads to dance making, and the kind of dances that can be made. In addition to Guignon's definition, the orientation towards material embodiment guides me towards British-Australian writer and scholar Sara Ahmed.⁶¹ Ahmed says in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*:

I might perceive an object as beautiful, for instance. Such a perception affects what I do: If I have this impression then I might pick up the object, or get closer to it, and even press it nearer to me. Orientations involve directions towards objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space. We move toward and away from objects depending on how we are moved by them.⁶²

The gold mylar blankets, quilts, fabrics - they are beautiful, and so much more than that, they have oriented me towards them because I have been moved by them. This orientation has informed my choreographic studies and choice making where the exploration feels endless. This perspective asks me to invite and remind my collaborators to be very intentional about what they are doing, how they are relating to one another, the space we inhabit, the materials, the movement. This way of working highlights the collective without removing the individual by being individuals within a group enhancing the capacity to engage and attune to one another while dancing. I think of my role, and I facilitate a space that allows for things to emerge, I let

⁶⁰ David Guignon, *What is Queer Phenomenology*, Theory and Philosophy Podcast. 2021.

⁶¹ Sara Ahmed is a British-Australian writer and scholar whose area of study includes the intersection of feminist theory, lesbian feminism, queer theory, affect theory, critical race theory and postcolonialism.

⁶² Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, and Others*. Duke University Press. 2006. 28.

things take their time without fixing because this research isn't meant to function as a standalone or predetermined product. Instead serving as a launching point, and allowing for the opportunity to follow the thread of creativity and curiosity.

In the process of creating *slow thaw*, the initial explorations of *golden nuggets*, the activation of materials through puppetry in *drops of gold* with support from the Jim Henson Award, and *Triple Spell* with Laurel Jenkins set the groundwork of events that would later occur in *with never enough happening*. I'd like to share some writings from these processes that helped me identify the potential directions this dance could take.

slow thaw: This dance was made using mylar blankets in collaboration with five dancers. There is something about mylar blankets that keeps me coming back, this is my third process where I use this material to build a dance. Visually, it's beautiful; at times it becomes a sea of gold, a structure like a mountain, or a dense rock. Audibly, it sounds like the static of a television or radio, and sometimes like waves of the ocean. The more I play and encounter this material, the more I continue to distill and extract information from it. More ideas for improvisational scores, information to develop phrase work by moving with or being moved by the material, thinking about how the materials are placed on the body, or how the materials are organized in space.

There are contrasting ideas that appear during the events of *slow thaw*, being aware of the silence and noise, of presence and absence, the play with building and releasing those tensions. There are moments where these ideas are extremely clear and feel powerful. The phenomenological experience of the slowing down of time, how seconds expand creating space for hearing and feeling. I think about how to become one with the material, attempting to track when the blanket is a blanket and when it becomes something else. Transforming the ordinary into something extraordinary. Thinking about the visual landscape that these materials can create

in the performance space. Seeing a dancer covering themselves with a blanket to become a mountain, having the ability to see through and out to navigate safely through the space. Hearing an audience member say to me that the imagery of mountains reminded them that they were born by the mountains in another country, transporting them back in time. This experience ignited a curiosity within me to consider how to invite audience members in.

golden nuggets: As discussed in a previous chapter, I want to make the distinction that when I am talking about the objects, I will refer to them as golden nuggets which is different from the title written in italics. The golden nuggets were used in a group improvisation called “The Rocks Game” as discussed in Author Misha Glouberman’s book *The Chairs Are Where The People Go*⁶³.

These are the instructions for the game:

“Everyone gets some rocks. You take turns either placing a rock on the floor somewhere or moving a rock that’s already there. No communication, no talking or facial expressions or pointing. Only the movement and placement of the rocks.”⁶⁴

I explored this game on three different occasions; as a duet, with my cohort, and then in rehearsal with my collaborators. Each was a different group and setting which produced different outcomes, another variable was that there may have been slight variations in the way it was presented to each group. During the exploration with my cohort I said that the exploration would be over once the bag that was filled with the golden nuggets was empty the game would be over. So the awareness and intention shifted from patterns emerging and disappearing to emptying the bag. This direction of the game did not seem interesting to me. When I decided to bring the nuggets into rehearsals I explained the directives plainly without offering how the exploration

⁶³ Misha Glouberman, with Sheila Heti. *The Chairs Are Where The People Go*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2011.

⁶⁴ Glouberman, Heti. 67.

would end. It was MAGICAL. Everyone was buzzing with excitement to share all that emerged.



Figure 6, Charlotte “C” Macko, Alondra Torres Negrón, and Emily Adams in rehearsal for *with never enough happening* with Golden Nuggets at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in 2024. Photo: Daniel Miramontes.

This task remained improvisational in performance, because it was intended as a game and allowed performers the ability to find something new for themselves and the group during each performance. Exploring what it means to participate in a pattern and what it means to break a pattern. There was also the addition of self-adornment, and the adornment of others by placing nuggets on the body, on someone else, filling in empty spaces, and organizing around the body. This exploration led to an embodied practice of moving and shifting like the weight of the rocks that the nuggets represented.



Figure 7, Emily Adams, Miriam Hermina, Emma Vanderlinde in *golden nuggets* section of *with never enough happening*. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

Golden Nuggets function both as archival artifacts and as part of a living repertoire. Interdisciplinary artist Niki Tulk integrates Diana Taylor’s framework of the *Archive and the Repertoire* in her own book *Performing the Wound*, where she examines artists who engage in multi-media, or “combination” performance practices. She states “The repertoire, Taylor explains, “requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there.” ... the repertoire “both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning””⁶⁵ Similarly, the golden nuggets serve as an archive in the sense that their general shape remains consistent. Yet, they also operate as repertoire because they respond dynamically to gravity and their surroundings, embodying a kind of performative presence. Tulk further elaborates, “the

⁶⁵ Tulk, 11.

repertoire is something that shifts, breathes, refuses to be pinned down. The repertoire is, in short, alive - and as such can live in different ways inside, and in spite of, archiving.”⁶⁶ Which I believe to be true, because I've experienced it in my own material research, these static forms come alive through interaction and embodied practice.



Figure 8, Emma Vanderlinde and Daniel Miramontes performing in *drops of gold*, for the Jim Henson Award presentations. Photo: David Andrews.

Drops of Gold: Through the Jim Henson Award for Puppetry⁶⁷ I was able to create three marionettes made of gold mylar blankets. These three marionettes were in partnership with three dance puppeteers, Alondra Torres Negrón, Emma Vanderlinde, and myself. These three duets were enacted simultaneously, exploring the felt sensations of sensing and listening across multiple manifestations of size and scale. This exploration integrated the improvisational task of

⁶⁶ Tulk, 11.

⁶⁷ Jim Henson was an American puppeteer, creator of The Muppets and alumni of the University of Maryland.

mirroring and the game of telephone, a combination of individual and ensemble play to find ourselves in and out of unison. Although the marionettes were not physically present in the performance, what we learned through the animation of them was present in the performance through deep and thoughtful sensing, listening, and the animation of materials.

Triple Spell: Through funding from the Board of Visitors, as discussed in an earlier chapter, I was able to conduct scholarly and choreographic research based on costumes, materials, and artistic collaborations in dance. I packed my suitcase with bolts of bright colored fabric, a couple mylar blankets, and macrame cord and traveled to Middlebury Vermont, for a choreographic residency and performance opportunity with choreographer and former Trisha Brown dancer Laurel Jenkins.⁶⁸ This choreographic and material exploration introduced aspects of materiality that hadn't been explored or hadn't come up in rehearsals with my collaborators. Jenkins and I experimented with a duet practice that involved one person being covered or underneath the material while the other was visible (without material). We discussed how the person who was fully covered by fabric disguised the person's identity, a losing of self, and blurring of boundaries - it highlighted messy relationships by hiding the mess. This act of hiding complexity through covering and reduction reflects aspects of Minimalism, because the fabric "simplifies" the interaction. In contrast, the uncovered, fully visible person offers a juxtaposition, emphasizing the tension between the concealed and the revealed. The other person who was not covered had a different experience, they could choose to hide behind or underneath the material, moving in relation to the other, and there was also a sense of being held by the material (even though there was a person underneath doing the holding).

⁶⁸ Laurel Jenkins - Laurel Jenkins is a dancer, choreographer, educator, and mother. Her choreography emerges from rigorous experimentation and interdisciplinary dialogues in the realms of contemporary dance, opera, music, and theater. Former dancer with the Trisha Brown Dance Company.

This led directly into the section called ghost duets in *with never enough happening*. The process in rehearsal took a shape that made sense for the dancers who performed them. As rehearsals progressed, I learned how to guide the dancers in a direction that encouraged specificity and curiosity in approaching a duet of this nature while also prioritizing their well-being and safety.

These choreographic experiences over the course of two years allowed me to care deeply about the materials and the people who I researched with. The echoes and memories of these experiences and people felt present as the dance continued to take shape.

Choreographic and Creative Process

*Makers do not so much see what is there physically in front of them, but rather see what might be there, what could become of what is there before them. This subjunctive mode of perception is thoroughly interactive. It comes not from analysis of a material, from decomposition, but from experiments in synthesising something new with that material, from attempted compositions.*⁶⁹

- Cameron Tonkinwise

The making of this dance involved countless attempted compositions and material explorations; each of which had the potential to stand on their own, to make a single dance. One of the most exciting rehearsals was the day I asked the dancers to create their own order⁷⁰ while I was trying to create an order using chance operations⁷¹. I was distracted as I heard excitement from them about listing all of the attempted compositions and material explorations we had worked with over the course of a year. I heard as they made intentional choices in organizing sections, and how one event would lead to another. This was an important day for me because it aligned with my intention to work co-creatively with my collaborators. This not only created the

⁶⁹ Tonkinwise, 6.

⁷⁰ The dancers started by listing sixteen prompts that had been explored over the course of 1 year. They made groupings of sections that might work together, and highly considered transitions, “this section would look cool/make sense, after this section”.

⁷¹ Chance operations, popularized by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, are artistic techniques designed to remove intentional choice-making from the creative process. These methods involve the use of randomness or unpredictability to generate art, allowing outcomes to emerge without the direct control of the artist.

order that we kept for performance but it also allowed me to not overthink the ramifications of the decisions of the newly formed order of events, it invited me to be available. This moment in rehearsal echoes an interview with former Trisha Brown dancer, Laurel Jenkins, as she was answering what had stayed with her about Brown's work "the Early Works within *Line Up* have a revolutionary intention—the genius role of the choreographer gives way to the intelligence of the group. I see the dancers as one thinking body—and the dance being the organizing principle."⁷² Similarly, the genius role of my collaborators, the dancers; and accessing the intelligence of the group to organize a series of events. The dancers were so deeply involved in the research that they were also experts and not just replicators of a task. This event in and of itself produced the following reactions by Emily Adams and Alondra Torres Negrón.

Emily: I felt like there was less down time/transition time ... I felt like I was involved throughout this order.⁷³

Alondra: I felt like the energetic shifts were varied, more highs and lows, and still arrives at a build up that feels satisfying.⁷⁴

This feedback captures my approach to dance making as an invitation to see what emerges from the group, and leaning towards what feels organic, to follow the thread of creativity. This also does what American academic in performance studies Diana Taylor describes in *The Archive and The Repertoire*: "Humans do not simply adapt to systems. They shape them. How do we recognize elements such as choice, timing, and self-presentation except through the ways in which individuals and groups perform them?"⁷⁵

⁷² Interview with Laurel Jenkins, *Trisha Brown In The New Body Blog*, 2015.

⁷³ Emily Adams, "Post-Performance Reflection", unpublished manuscript, 2024.

⁷⁴ Alondra Torres Negrón, "Post-Performance Reflection", unpublished manuscript, 2024.

⁷⁵ Taylor, 7.

Order of Events:

- Gold Solo
- Nuggets/Burrito/Rock Improvisation/Vague (real) Flocking
- Trio A⁷⁶ + Trio E(xit) & E(entrance)
- ToysRus
- Opening Sequence - layered with vip, unison, glacial solo, fast solo, stretch trio, and gold tumbleweed
- Remy Charlip⁷⁷ Solo - derived from American artist and writer Remy Charlip's Air Mail Dances⁷⁸
- Coolest Moves - A duet that came out of improvisation. I asked C to follow me. I may have only shown the first move, just so she knew what was happening first.
- Ghost Duets + Rumba -
- A series of layered endings - Procession + Portal + Finale Section - the 7th dancer (mylar), solos, unison, adorned shape

Maximalism and the complexity of layering events

By layering multiple events, the choreography disrupts conventional linear expectations of viewing dance. It was an invitation to viewers to seek new ways of viewing, to allow their attention to guide their experience. Creating in this nonlinear and multilayered way so that the dance itself demands attention, requiring an active form of engagement. The audience had to negotiate. They had to pick and choose what they watched in certain sections of the dance. I don't have control over what an audience member is going to make sense of or walk away with, but I think it's important to consider the audience regardless of the outcome.

In structuring this dance, I came to the realization that I was using a similar structure to one used by Merce Cunningham⁷⁹ "He took a modular approach to material in his own

⁷⁶ This Trio A shares the same name as *Trio A* (1966) choreographed by American dancer, choreographer, and filmmaker, Yvonne Rainer. Rainer's trio incorporates no music and features a seamless flow of everyday movements like toe tapping, walking, and kneeling. As one of the co-creators of the Judson Dance Theater, this work exemplifies the stripped down, Minimalist approach to choreography. Using this name in *with never enough happening* was a way to conjure the spirit of Rainer and post-modern dance into the work.

⁷⁷ Remy Charlip was an American artist, writer, choreographer, theatre director, theatrical designer, and teacher.

⁷⁸ Remy Charlip invented a new form of choreography called Air Mail Dances, in which dancers interpret 20-40 illustrated figures he would draw on paper and mail to them.

⁷⁹ Merce Cunningham, considered the most influential choreographer of the 20th century, was a many-sided artist. He was a dance-maker, a fierce collaborator, a chance taker, a boundless innovator, a film producer, and a teacher.

repertoire; in the “Event” format, phrases from different dances were collaged together.”⁸⁰ I found myself collaging a series of events. Although the final version was not a (full) product of chance, I was trying to flip the dance on its head by reorganizing events. The complexity of layering a series of events to create a dance required choreographic problem solving that was one of the most challenging that I had encountered. These challenges were coming up in the transitions from one event to the next – in the progression of the dance, I did not want these moments to be noticeable to the viewer, there was always something happening so that there weren’t “hard” transitions. As a collective we would identify “problem” areas, and when we would identify solutions, it would create “problems” elsewhere. After rehearsal one night, choreographic and rehearsal assistant Zoe Cushman Walders shared an observation that resonated with me, she said, “even if it feels like by pulling on one thread you’re unraveling lots of others - it’s very clearly coming together from the outside”. The Maximalism, excess, and complexity were becoming too much for me to handle, and make sense of. It was really helpful for me to hear Zoe say that because it made me feel grounded, and that the work was, in fact, coming together.

In the previous chapter, I explored the theoretical foundations of material embodiment, aesthetics of Maximalism, Minimalism, and Material-Aesthetic Excess. Here I focus on how these ideas manifest practically through the multifaceted utilization of materials in this choreography. However, because the word “material” in this work has many meanings in relation to the movement sections, scenic, costumes, fabric, and lighting; I’ll start with some definitions to have a clearer understanding. The Oxford Dictionary defines material as “denoting or

During his 70 years of creative practice, Cunningham's exploration forever changed the landscape of dance, music, and contemporary art.

⁸⁰ Mullis, 14.

consisting of physical objects rather than the mind or spirit.”⁸¹ While this definition aligns with a conventional understanding, in visual art and costume it does not fully take into consideration what it means in the context of choreography. Material in choreography relates to the body and the body’s ability to improvise or replicate movement. Dance writer and movement researcher Melinda Buckwalter states that “a dance isn’t a dance without a moving body.” In a visual art and costume context: “Materials are what things are made from”⁸² and in a costume context material means the natural and synthetic fabrics, embellishments, and objects used to make the garment.

I define material as anything tangible that I can work with - objects, obviously, but also something that has been physicalized from a concept or an idea, something that is learned, replicated, or re-experienced. I think of material as both a noun and a verb, particularly in the way they are used in this choreography, because they are not always static.

This expanded definition of material allows me to delve deeper into the concept of material-aesthetic excess. The abundance of materials in this work: conceptual, spatial, and textural, creates a density that could make dance viewing more challenging. It is not just about movement but about the interplay between all these forms of material. This abundance invites the audience to navigate the work actively, choosing what to focus on and participating in their own meaning-making. Materials become the bridge between imagination and reality, the tangible with the intangible. This approach celebrates a material’s multiplicity, and its capacity to embody complexity and excess. It thrives by being interacted with.

⁸¹ Oxford Dictionary. 2024.

⁸² Regina De Con Cossío, *The Importance of Materials in Contemporary Art*. Sybaris. 2024.

Here are all of the materials in the dance:

Movement Sections:

- Gold Solo,
- Nuggets, Burrito, Rock Improvisation, Vague (real) Flocking
- Trio A + Trio E(xit) & E(entrance)
- ToysRus
- Opening Sequence - layered with vip, unison, glacial solo, fast solo, stretch trio, and gold tumbleweeds
- Remy Solo
- Coolest Moves, Re-entrances
- Ghost Duets, Rumba
- Procession, Portal, Finale Section, the 7th dancer (mylar), solos, unison, adorned shape.

Scenic: The portal wall, the chandelier, strips of fabric.

Costumes: Individual costumes constructed with various fabrics, the use of skirts, and ribbons.

Fabrics: Gold mylar blankets, burgundy quilts, navy blue cotton fabric

Lighting: Framing and reframing the space. Lighting used to emphasize and orient viewers to events.

The structure of layering multiple movement material events that occur simultaneously, and making choreographic choices that set up for an event that will occur, creates a dynamic experience for the audience. What is the purpose of the layering? I am working to fit in as much of the research as possible within a 30 (ish) minute timeframe, and do it in a way that is seamless; I am trying to be Maximalist by making it look easy (Minimalist), it's a little bit of both. Below, in figures 9 and 10, display two distinct visual landscapes with material utilization. The first, intended to allow the viewer to arrive at the world we created. The second, occurs mid dance, where the materials are both activated and animated.



Figure 9, Gold mylar blankets layered, scattered, and held vertically, burgundy quilts folded and spread out, strips of various colored fabrics coming through the portal, and performers. Photo: Taneen Momeni.



Figure 10, from left to right, Alondra Torres Negrón, Miriam Hermina, Emily Adams, Emma Vanderlinde, Charlotte “C” Macko, Daniel Miramontes. Scattered, animated, floating gold and silver mylar, navy blue cotton fabric stretched, burgundy quilt being carried, scattered golden nuggets. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

This is how the materials are utilized: the gold mylar blankets, the burgundy quilts, and navy blue cotton fabric are either placed in space, embedded within the scenic design and in relation to the costumes we wore. The various colors that were integrated within the scenic design shared a similar color palette to the gold, burgundy, navy blue, and those seen in the costumes such as green and orange, in addition to the range in tone of those colors. The colors of the materials along with their textures and shapes created a vibrant, warm, and sophisticated landscape. The use of color in this work is a way to push back against Minimalism, it is also a response to Loo's ignorant assertion that "primitive man had to differentiate themselves by various colours, modern man wears his clothes as a mask... The lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power"⁸³ which is a part of a much larger conversation about the negative and harmful impacts of colonization which often get masked by the illusion of "clean" and "perfection" that Minimalism often exudes. The use of color was an act of reclaiming, challenging these narratives and celebrating vibrancy and complexity.

Moments in Performance:

After discussing at length the significance of the materials and the theoretical backing behind using them, I now shift the attention towards the people, the dancing, and the choreography of *with never enough happening*. For me, there were significant events that exemplify and signify integral aspects of material research and embodiment. I also cannot negate the fact that a significant aspect of this choreographic process - values and highlights the importance of the collective. Establishing and building trust, deepening relationships, and increasing our individual capacity for agency and how it relates to choice making that not only informs, but inspires the growth of the collective. To continue the co-creative aspect of the

⁸³ Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Empowerment*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 9.

choreography, I also include anecdotes by the performers because their voice and perspective is necessary to provide full context of the performance experience. In this section I make the deliberate choice to include multiple images because having the visual is important in this writing process.

The dance begins with gold solo (see figure 9 above), a choreographic choice to exemplify the protagonist of the work, the gold mylar blanket. A vertically stretched mylar blanket, that slowly collapses to invite the audience to settle into the image they are seeing. I made the deliberate choice to set the tone and to inform the audience on how to see the unfolding of the work. In this solo, I was behind, underneath, enveloped, emerged from, and decorated by the material. I wanted to emphasize the use of illusion and magic to make an attempt at playing with perception, to challenge how viewers identify, interpret, and make sense of the world they are experiencing. Questions emerged in rehearsal that guided this exploration: *Am I seeing two people? Where is the rest of the body? What if you only ever saw one face?* - The *I* and *you*, refer to a hypothetical audience member's perspective. These inquiries informed the choreography and engagement with the material.



Figure 11, Daniel Miramontes performing gold solo. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

This gold solo exemplifies the integration of Maximalism and Minimalism. By showcasing the shimmering and grandness of the gold mylar blanket, it demonstrates aesthetics of Maximalism. By folding and reducing the size of the blanket highlights the simplicity of Minimalism.

The final moments of this solo signifies the sensibilities of Rasquachismo by making the most out of an ordinary object, using a rubber band to create a golden nugget. Exemplifying ingenuity and resourcefulness. By performing this transformation in front of the audience, I invite them into the process. This act is not just functional, it's symbolic, offering a viewpoint into how material, movement, and meaning are threaded within the work.

The burrito section is one of my favorites. The title of this section is named burrito because of the burrito-like shape that is formed at the end which resembles a burrito wrapped in aluminum. I remember that the first time I saw it happen, I couldn't think of a word that described how it made me feel. This event emerged from the improvisational task of “mirroring”⁸⁴ between dancers C Macko⁸⁵ and Alondra Torres Negrón, where the instructions were: “C, you improvise with the mylar blanket, and Alondra, you improvise with the quilt - just start next to each other and we’ll see where it goes”. It was MAGICAL.

This duet exemplifies material embodiment, the choice to use two different materials was intentional and had different functions; the mylar blanket made of synthetic material and the quilt a blend of organic and synthetic, each with their own distinct properties and physical potential/limits. As discussed previously, the materials are not passive, they shape and are shaped by the movement of the dancers. The visual and tactile tension between materials mirrors human relationships. The visual representation of doing the same movement with their respective materials highlights their distinct qualities. This double duet calls attention to porous boundaries between material and dancer, separately and together, demonstrating their interconnectedness. Performer C Macko, shares the following reflection on the experience of working with materials and in this section specifically:

C: The use of materials within these processes allowed me to further expand my creativity and attend not only to the presentation of my body but the aesthetic sculptural elements of the materials. ... The burrito score allows for a demonstration of process, which takes the audience on a journey with us in discovering the new form that materials, our bodies, and the space can take.

⁸⁴ Mirroring is an improvisational task where one person mirrors what another person is doing. Typically there is a leader, and a follower, and as the task progresses lines blur between who is leading and who is following.

⁸⁵ C, refers to performer Charlotte “C” Macko, and not dancer A, B, and C.



Figure 12, C Macko and Alondra Torres Negrón performing burrito, mirroring one another on a mylar blanket and quilt. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

This aspect of expanding creativity through material embodiment demonstrates the impact of the research, the spirit of co-creation and collaboration alongside materials. This reflection is another example of acknowledging and inviting the audience member into the experience. In a similar, yet different vein, I share Alondra's reflection of this section because it highlights not only the embodiment aspect, but also the importance of cultural representation in dance.

Alondra: Every time I did this section, it felt like I was completing a very important task. I approached this section with a very gentle, precise touch. There was a deep awareness of everything going on around me. I was hyper aware about how C was moving, about how the materials felt under my hand and feet. And when we were making the "burrito", it was very important to me to be solely focused on that. That is the moment where all of a sudden I was only aware of that, I wasn't aware of anything around me. The music at

this section was also very special to me because I think it really represented the "ghost"⁸⁶ of Juan Gabriel with how the final song was hidden behind all the other layers of sound.



Figure 13, performers C and Alondra replicating an X shape that was performed on the blankets, now on top of one another, both blankets which are underneath "C" and are unseen. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

The duet nears its ending when Macko and Negrón hide the gold blanket underneath the quilt, and the magic trick here is that the silver side of the mylar is revealed by enveloping the quilt, (a sparse moment within the entirety of the dance). Design choices further enrich this section. The costumes accentuate and compliment the material: Negrón with gold, partnered with the burgundy quilt, and Macko with dark orange partnering the gold mylar; enhancing the visual cohesiveness of the event.

⁸⁶ This refers to the sound accompaniment of the burrito section. Composer Zaq Kenefick integrated a distorted version of Juan Gabriel's voice to an ethereal organ soundscape. This mention of "ghost" is also described in a later reflection by Alondra's father, and is different from the "ghost duets" performed in the dance.

Trio A⁸⁷ is performed by Emily Adams, C Macko, and Alondra Torres Negrón, a trio that highlights the importance of friendship, and what it means to dance with friends, and what emerges from that kind of dancing. This event reflects the collective success of diverse, individual contributions within a shared framework. I see this as an example of choreography functioning as a strategy for building, and fostering culture through dance making and performance. I believe this can happen when there is a level of trust amongst the group. Below I share a few anecdotes from Performers Emily, C, and Alondra on their experiences in navigating the improvisational aspect of this trio and how it not only exemplified trust but developed trust amongst the performers:

Emily: “We worked on improvisation techniques for over a year, and all of that hard work meant that he could trust us to make decisions about movement during our performances. We committed ourselves to Trio A each time we performed it, and that showed me how much trust Daniel had in Alondra, C, and myself to faithfully execute his ideas and connect with each other throughout the Trio each time we lined up to start that section.”

C: “I had never worked with a choreographer who both allowed and was interested in letting us develop part of a work. This demonstrates a deep level of trust, especially with the improvisational aspect of this trio. Daniel shows his commitment to process, and he believed in us and our ability to access more by deepening our relationships with the movement material and each other.”⁸⁸

Alondra: “This was the part of the piece where I approached the movement with a bit of recklessness. I tried to embody the movement of a cooler, much more confident version of myself. This whole section was fueled by the energy of all of us dancing together. The harder one of us went, the harder we all went. It was really cool in that way.”

⁸⁷ Noting here that I am not talking about Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* (1966), see footnote 68.

⁸⁸ Charlotte “C” Macko, “Post-Performance Reflection”, unpublished manuscript, 2024.



Figure 14, Alondra Torres Negrón, C Macko, and Emily Adams performing Trio A. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

Performing improvisation is hard. In rehearsal, after the first attempt they expressed how much they liked dancing together. That was enough information to know that there was something to deepen. And for me, as the choreographer it goes beyond having trust in them, because I do, and I did during the performance. How cool is it to have the space to dance with your friends and grow as an artist and performer. In seeing them navigate this structure, I learned about how to guide them, how to challenge themselves, how to listen, and how to trust their individual and collective decision making.

The structure uses an ABC format. Negrón was A, Adams was B, and Macko was C. The instructions I gave were: “The premise is that you wait for the person before you to end before you begin. Emphasized dancing like yourself, but allowing yourself to be inspired by how the

person/s around you are moving.” The guiding premise is simple yet it allows for complexity to emerge, and how that can create a sense of belonging, which is beautiful to witness. This trio juxtaposes a Minimalist structure of waiting, listening, and responding with the Maximalist quality of the dancer’s individuality and dynamic movements.

The Remy Charlip solo was inspired by and pays homage to choreographer Remy Charlip’s *Airmail Dances*, specifically drawing inspiration from *250 Dancers On A Diagonal with 250 Guest Towels*⁸⁹ and *The Red Towel Dance*.⁹⁰ I brought in images of Charlip’s work to share with dancer Miriam Hermina, and I described the correlation I saw between those dances and the shape and size of the mylar blankets. So, this solo was derived from Miriam choosing ten images at random and grouping them together to create a sequence of movements alongside the blanket. The only additional choreographic parameter that I offered was to repeat five of the gestures, everything else in terms of performativity and movement quality was decided by Hermina.

⁸⁹ *250 Dancers on a Diagonal with 250 Guest Towels* (1979) Air Mail Dance originally created for The American Dance Guild National Conference.

⁹⁰ *The Red Towel Dance/The Wet Towel Dance* (1980) Air Mail Dance originally created for Barbara Roan.



Figure 15, Miriam Hermina performing Remy Solo. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

Hermina's ability to take ownership of the solo was compelling, she commanded the space with her presence and demanded the audience's attention. This solo is actually a duet with the mylar blanket, the material becomes elevated and becomes an active participant. Hermina offers a detailed exploration of how meaning emerges through lived practice:

I was particularly fascinated by how this solo evolved in shape over time. It began as several flat, individual pictures on a piece of paper. As instructed by Daniel, I selected the visuals I found most interesting and strung them together into a sequence. Daniel gave me artistic freedom to explore the transitions between poses. In the beginning, the movement felt dry - I was just focused on getting the positions in my body and holding them long enough to make them distinct from each other. As rehearsals progressed along with my muscle memory, I allowed myself to dwell in the spaces between poses and let the gold mylar influence how I move through the sequence. Each time I performed the solo (or rather duet with the mylar), I breathed more life into it and a sense of character

organically began to shine through. I'm really inspired by this "build the shape" then "fill in with character" later.⁹¹



Figure 16, Miriam Hermina performing Remy Solo. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

A striking moment that occurs is towards the end of her solo, the entire space is silent, and Miriam has laid the mylar blanket in front of her. The crinkling sound of the mylar under her feet draw's the audience's attention to the material itself, transforming the mylar into an embodied presence. The focus on texture and sound echoes what I have described earlier in the paper about material embodiment. Once again, highlighting in a different way how the mylar blanket becomes the repertoire, while offering the audience a new way of witnessing its possibilities.

⁹¹ Miriam Hermina, "Post-Performance Reflection", unpublished manuscript, 2024.

In the final moments of *with never enough happening*, we performed the gold mylar blanket. It takes a solo by being tossed and released into the air by the performers. The moment it is tossed signals the performers to go to their places and perform stillness while the mylar flounces and descends to the ground. Its arrival signals us to then witness the audience, and then the blanket before erupting into movement. Over the course of the work, the mylar has transformed, taking on various shapes and meanings through its interactions with performers. In this final airborne moment, it becomes more than material, it becomes the repertoire. This moment in the dance showcases two distinct ways in which the archive and the repertoire coexist within material and song, to create an impactful and meaningful moment.

It is important for me to include that this ending section of *with never enough happening* is also structured around Mexican singer and songwriter Juan Gabriel's iconic song, *Asi Fue*.⁹² Gabriel is a monumental figure, not just for the Mexican community, but amongst Latinx identifying people, and beyond. Using this song for me was symbolic on many levels, for one, to share a part of my cultural identity in this concert dance context, and that as a Mexican-American, I can create abstract dance too.

In this abstraction, I was excited to hear from Alondra what her father had shared after seeing the dance:

When the "ghost" section came about and the Juan Gabriel song came in, he felt like something suddenly became clear. He believed the dance was about the life of Juan Gabriel ... He felt the last section of the piece was bringing back Juan Gabriel and honoring his memory, through the music he made and how it made listeners feel.

⁹² Juan Gabriel is a Mexican singer-songwriter, an icon, the king of broken hearts, known for his flamboyant style which broke norms and stereotypes and helped normalize both femininity and fluidity amongst males in Mexico.

This reinforces an earlier argument I made about how representation in dance matters. I see that reflection of someone who saw parts of their lived experience on stage through dance with music that he recognized.

The use of this song further reinforces the presence of the archive and the repertoire. The song is an archive with a historical significance. The song also becomes a repertoire because of the performed act of dancing to it, we bring it to life, we bring Juan Gabriel to life. This recognition highlights the power of the repertoire to evoke personal and collective histories in ways that static archives cannot.



Figure 17, the gold mylar blanket takes a solo, surrounded by Emily Adams, Emma Vanderlinde, C Macko, Miriam Hermina, Daniel Miramontes, and Alondra Torres Negrón. Photo: Taneen Momeni.

A simple - collective - toss, an ordinary movement, created an extraordinary moment of awe. It functions as a metaphor for what collective work has the potential to create.

Conclusion: A series of endings

Ending 1

Working, dancing, and performing with materials brings a sense of reality to the process. Engaging with something tangible, especially alongside others, makes change feel possible. The actions and choices made together with materials makes a particular thing happen, it transforms abstract ideas into physical ideas, creating something specific and meaningful. These material studies create a sense of possibility where futurity feels not only imaginable but attainable.

Ending 2

The inquiry into what emerges when materiality, movement, and culture converge with connection, collaboration, and co-creation has led me to reinforce my belief in the significance of working with materials in dance. The exploration of embodiment and performance studies through theoretical frameworks emphasize the important and necessary role of materials, and costumes within dance. The process of building and performing *with never enough happening* highlighted the interconnectedness between materials and costumes, and their ability to function as a bridge to connect people. In deepening my understanding of the aesthetics of Maximalism and Minimalism and how these frameworks shape and have clarified my creative perspective, I've identified the need for culturally representative work, because representation in dance matters. The culmination of this research is that there's more. More to learn from materials, and more to learn from one another in collaboration and co-creation.

Ending 3: Epilogue

The performance is over, and as I work on this paper, I am currently in process as a performer with Mexican choreographer Claudia Lavista⁹³ on the restaging of her work *Óxido* (2023). She is someone who I share a cultural affinity with, who also works with materials, similar to me. In this creative process I see how simple tasks allow for complexity to emerge. I see echoes of Trisha Brown's *Line Up*⁹⁴, through improvisational scores that Lavista asks us to perform to generate choreographic aspects of the work. *Óxido* involves the use of paper, and it's so exciting to be in the room with Lavista who values material engagement and embodiment to inform how we as performers interact with each other and the material itself. Lavista invites us to think about how paper is functioning as a metaphor for structures of power, structures that look indestructible but are actually easily destructible when working together as a community. This was the perfect scenario, to feel represented culturally, and to be a part of someone else's material studies through choreography.

⁹³ Claudia Lavista is a Mexican choreographer, dancer, teacher, and interdisciplinary creator. Co-founder of Delfos Danza Contemporánea and La Escuela Profesional de Danza de Mazatlán, both considered Latin American Pillars of Modern dance.

⁹⁴ Trisha Brown's *Line Up* (1976) is a dance about the continuous forming and reforming of lines causing the dance to hover between order and disorder.

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