

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: TAKING BACK THE PLAYGROUND:
STRATEGIES IN ARTISTIC OBJECTIVE

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The Graduate Research written in this document contains Dance Candidate Amber Daniels' investigation of the word *play* in artistic practice. Daniels is an artist who focuses her movement research on the unpredictable nature of improvisational play and the structural familiarity of narrative movement. Using improvisational, theatrical, and choreographic tactics, she creates small formulas and rules for the movement and collaborating artists to follow. To reevaluate the importance of *play* in her practice, *Taking Back the Playground* walks through the investigations of this tactic in multiple strategies of experimentation: movement, direction, teaching, and writing.

TAKING BACK THE PLAYGROUND: STRATEGIES IN ARTISTIC OBJECTIVE

by

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Dedication

This continued research is dedicated to those who have never felt welcomed into the dance world and in honor of my Grandparents, Godfather, and childhood neighbors who always invited play in the space. To those who are gone, I promise to continue your quests of finding individuality in creative spaces. To those still with us, let's reground ourselves with the permission of play.

James H. and Irene LaClair

Carl V. and June M. Daniels

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Bob and Shirley Watts

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Chapter 1: Who's Ready to Play

Gameplay: Where It All Begins

Have you ever played Cribbage?¹ It's a wonderful card game that involves two to three players, a board displaying three paths of colors, 121 holes per color, and miniature-colored pegs moved from hole to hole based on the number of points earned. It's based not only on strategy, but also on chance as the player has no control of the cards they are dealt. The game has become a favorite of my household, even displaying the highest scores on our calendar. It's a constant reminder of the heights of competition and laughs of disbelief when a hand of cards holds many points. We are fond of the game's organization; however, we find endless opportunities and combinations of receiving points to be the driving factor in asking the opponent, "Want to play again?". Every player has strategies based on probability, ingenuity, or experience. Every household has its own rules of the game entitled *House Rules*. For example, in our home, if a Cribbage player misses a set of points in their hand and the opponent notices their mistake, the observer can steal those points by calling out the hand. This rule heightens our competitive nature in every final count and brings a sense of risk to the game. In instances such as Cribbage, the act of playing is formed through the structures of gameplay.

¹ "How to Play Cribbage - How to Play," Bicycle Playing Cards, The United States Playing Card Company, Accessed 2022, <https://bicyclecards.com/how-to-play/cribbage/>.

In this research, gameplay is defined as fulfilling an objective through physical and mental manipulations of rules and procedures developed through a structural practice, for example, Tic-Tac-Toe, Crosswords, Connect the Dots, Football, Soccer, and the list goes on. These games require participants to play. You, as a player, must have first-hand knowledge of the rules of the game. To further understand the rules, you must repeat the game several times. In repeating the game, you will eventually create a strategy to succeed at the game's objective. The act of strategy is defined as a player's process of participating in a game.

This same pattern can be seen in the dancing world with professional dancers. Each dance artist has an artistic voice strategically utilized to benefit performance. In this writing, I am a dance artist who will explore two main questions: What does the word *play* mean to me as an artist, and how can I utilize the aspects of the term to create an invitation of dance to others. In this research, the idea of *invitation* stems from an individual being welcomed to participate in an event or activity. My movement research focuses on the unpredictable nature of improvisational play and the structural familiarity of narrative movement. This thesis observes and analyzes the word *play* used in teaching, performing, and creating dance.

Objectives in the Playground

I obsess with gameplay for its structure yet individualized strategies to get the game's objective: winning. The gameplay structure is determined by an organized set of rules a player is guided to follow to complete the objective successfully. In this research, winning is defined by a player achieving a decided objective. Losing is

defined by the player not meeting the objective. The overall objective of winning can be completed in various forms, such as kicking a ball in a goal, answering a trivia question correctly, and matching playing cards, all while gaining more points than your opponent.

When researching the etymology of *winning*, this term combines the Old English words *winnan*, meaning “to labor, toil, struggle for, work at, strive, fight”² and *gewinnan*, meaning “to gain or succeed by struggling, conquer, obtain.”³ The term *losing* is based on the Old English terms *losian* meaning “be lost, perish”⁴ and *los* meaning “destruction, loss.”⁵ The terms *winning* and *losing* derive from competitive, self-assessing behaviors and the evaluation of completing an intention. Success and failure are often associated with everyday practices. In some situations, the recognition of success and failure is clouded with an unreachable objective point. In these situations, the human psyche will come to play. Some may associate their definition of success with their moral consciousness. No matter the thoughts allying measures, humans strive for the better. They want to be the best person they can be. They want to win. Each human, however, has a choice within their strategy and ultimate objective.

² “Win,” Online Etymology Dictionary, Last modified 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/win#:~:text=1300%20fusion%20of%20Old%20English,gain%2C%20win%2C%22%20Danish%20vinde>.

³ “Win,” Online Etymology Dictionary, Last modified 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/win#:~:text=1300%20fusion%20of%20Old%20English,gain%2C%20win%2C%22%20Danish%20vinde>.

⁴ “Lose,” Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=lose>.

⁵ “Lose,” Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=lose>.

Throughout the experiments listed in this thesis, the objective will change based on what the project calls for. For instance, the objective of a Crossword Puzzle is to answer questions to fill a designed word puzzle correctly. The objective of Checkers is to collect your opponent's game pieces before they have the chance to do so. The facilitating authority decides the game's overall objective. In this research, the term *authority* references a person holding power to make decisions for others to complete an objective. This could be seen as the referee in football, soccer, and baseball games. In the performance world, this could be the choreographer, the director, or the teacher who under the performance or lesson takes place. The person of authority in decision-making holds ownership of the overall outcome. This research questions the term *ownership* in dance when involving the realms of *play* and improvisation-led products of performance. Usually, the term *ownership* references an individual's possession of physical property. In dance, this term refers to whether an individual contributed and created a substantial portion of a product. For example, the title Choreographer is given to an individual who made a significant portion of a dance being performed. Therefore, they hold ownership of the work. However, this thesis questions the term *ownership* in multiple instances where the player's decision-making facilitates the performative outcome.

Players should follow a set of rules, but the player decides to manipulate the directions given. In gameplay, this could be called *cheating*. The word is often clouded with negativity, especially in academia. However, for my writing, I would like to shine a light on the definition and move it towards manipulating the system for one's benefit. Canadian multidisciplinary artist and writer Jordan Tannahill reference

varying journeys in-game art objectives. “If we work too hard to make everything look like the thing we say it is, then we’re also removing any sense of the game of art.”⁶ The *work* during gameplay is learning the rules. Players take out the box, study the game's rules, and continue learning through the act of play. Most players will stick to these rules for fear of other older adults' recrimination. A child, however, will bend the rules in their favor, make up new ones, or even deny that some constraints exist. In these instances, adults roll their eyes, turn their cheek, and grant the child permission to cheat or redefine the system for their benefit. In thinking back on my childhood, I’ll never forget using this strategy to win Checkers or Battleship against my Pappy. He always knew I did this, smiled, and continued playing the game. However, there is a point when an adult begins to reprimand the child for not following the procedure, to no longer use their imagination to win the game, but to follow the plan and hope the odds are in the young adult’s favor. They are then expected to know all the answers to the game's rules.

Versions of the game can be experienced based on intensity levels, the number of players, props of the game available, and basic probabilities of actions occurring. A player may choose to use these obstacles to their advantage or allow the fear of losing to sike them out of the win. In dance, these variables can be seen through financial strain, space or participants' availability, rehearsal times, and many other obstacles that may affect the overall performance. When players allow themselves to explore, take risks in their decisions, and trust their choices, there is a

⁶ Jordan Tannahill, *Theatre of the Unimpressed: In Search of Vital Drama* (Toronto, Canada: Coach House Books, 2015), 95.

significant probability of winning the game. In my opinion, risk is one of the most intriguing attributes of art. The act of gameplay is a tool to entice moments of risk in a world where repetitious movement is expected.

My Game

The beginnings of this thesis were an evaluation of the writing and vocalization of my artistic practice. I noticed a repetitious use of the word *play* through previous versions of my teaching philosophies and artistic statements. In multiple conversations with colleagues concerning this word, I found avoidance and even slight arrogance in service of the term. I began creating a word web containing words I associated with the term *play*. As I am a very competitive person, most of these affiliations are with gameplay.

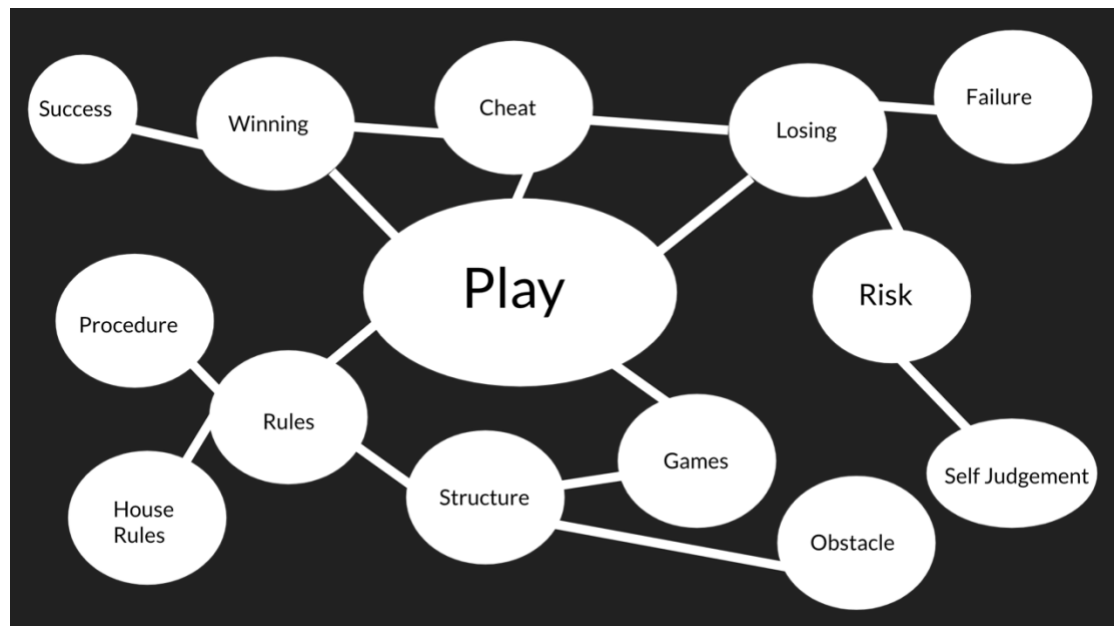


Figure 1 Word Web of Play

I created this list and challenged myself to not say these words while teaching or during the rehearsal processes of this research. If I was striving to find an in-depth vocabulary bank for the term *play*, I was interested in testing this theory in real-time. The same game will be utilized in this writing. I will strive not to use the word *play* to continue curating new vocabulary and definitions in my artistic practices throughout my writing. In this written examination, I foresee determining intersecting language that will define my choreographic and teaching methods. With this awareness of a heightened measure in the game of this writing, I will interrogate various terms to consider a new form of language around defining the use of *play* in the dance world. Once the writing is complete, I will count the number of times the word *play* was used and the moments the word alluded to. After evaluating my writing experience, I will determine how valuable the word *play* is in my artistic practice.

Your Game

I invite you to participate in a few games in this writing. In these experiences, I welcome you to be as physical as you want. Stay seated, stand up, walk around, enjoy the stillness, read aloud, or read to yourself. I invite you, the player, to manipulate the system for your benefit. The possibilities of the process are endless. Let's try one now.

I invite you to close your eyes and think of a friend. Imagine you are both grabbing coffee at your favorite coffee shop. Visualize what outfit they are wearing, what the coffee shop may look like, and hear the hustle and bustle of this busy space.

Please complete this exercise for at least 30 seconds, open your eyes, and answer the following questions.

What is the texture of the chair you are sitting on?

How does the coffee smell?

What did you order? How did it taste?

I will always ask you to record your findings. You may complete this task in several ways. I tell you this now so you may set up your game board or space.

Perhaps you want to grab a writing utensil and paper, open a note-taking app on your phone, or clear your mind of thoughts disassociated with the task at hand. If you find a process that works for you, you have succeeded in the exercise.

I once again remind you that I am obsessed with gameplay. It's no surprise to realize a game to complete an overall objective within this writing. It further diagnoses my attraction to the word *play* in my artistic practice. Observing this repetitious usage and analyzing its existence in my vocabulary will empower my strength as a player on the playgrounds of teaching, performing, and creating dance.

Chapter 2: The Player Within Me

The Repeating Game

I was bored. In the repertory dance world, this tends to happen to members of its community. We participate in the same company class, complete improvisational scores utilizing the same ideals, prepare ourselves within the same rigorous schedule depending on the company's needs, and... and... and. The excitement of always learning something new fades as time passes on. The invitation to personal artistic investigation is diminished. A structure of the learning is formed. Here, I remind you that the term structure in this research is organized rules developed by facilitating authority. I remind you that this facilitating authority is the one who decides a game's overall objective.

My experience of structured dance education in dance began at a young age. I was accepted to a Middle School Arts Magnet program in Jacksonville, FL. I followed the program through my high school years and later entered a Fine Arts program for my undergraduate degree. The schools followed curriculums of award-winning dance programs such as the American Ballet Theatre⁷ or the Ailey School.⁸ Students were placed in levels based on their dancing capabilities. The success of

⁷ "Dancer Training: American Ballet Theatre (ABT)," American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Theatre Foundation Inc, Last modified October 31, 2019, <https://www.abt.org/training/dancer-training/>.

⁸ "The Ailey School," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Inc, Last modified 2022, <https://www.alvinailey.org/school>.

moving from level to level was based on the instructor's (facilitator of authority) observance of the student in an audition process. There were many variables in these audition processes. If the dancer had past experiences with the instructors, the instructor might hold some sort of bias in the student's placement. A student's appearance in clothing, grooming, or physical demeanor would often make or break the student's reputation within the space. The rigor practice of perfection and even uniformity was carried throughout my time in the programs, not only in the classroom but in the overall curriculum.

As these Magnet programs were part of the Public School District, students must maintain a certain grade point average to succeed in the program. Therefore, a student's objective in this instance is determined by their teacher of record. The instructor evaluates the student's strategy in completing the objective and gives a letter grade. The student then earned a certain number of points added to their overall grade point average based on the letter received. These points are not only compared to the standards of the Public School System but every student in the program. Not only is competitive gameplay seen in the artistic realms of getting cast in a show, but in a point system alluding to a student's capabilities in their art form.

In multiple instances, grades would not only be calculated by your behavior and improvement of dance knowledge, but daily dress code rules to follow to receive complete daily participation points. Ballet days required pink tights, a black leotard, hair placed in a slick bun, ballet flats, and pointe shoes. Modern days required black tights, black leotards, and hair cleanly out of the face. Students needed to dress in these items, go to the dance studio, and warm up before the next class bell. If we did

not complete all these tasks within the eight minutes provided, the instructor would dock our grade for the day.

Visual uniformity was vital in my educational experience. There were reasons for these actions, such as the lesson of participation in an ensemble or an equal grounding for students in a classroom environment that often called for self-judgment as we stared at ourselves in the dance studio's wall-length mirrors. I followed the rules with no strategic method for most of my education. Completing the objectives meant succeeding in the next step of my dancing career by having a high level on my resume or failing the class and risking termination from the program. I followed these rules for many years, believing the system would lead me to find my artistic path.

I was asked to have a one-on-one meeting with my ballet instructor in my undergraduate career. In this meeting, I was told I would be receiving a lower grade despite completing all the objectives provided in the syllabus. The teacher stated that I did not have the body facility of a ballet dancer. My grade suffered due to an absence of flexibility and rotational mobility in my turnout. Despite the hours of Pilates, Yoga, gym work, years of trying to improve my flexibility in previous classes, and attendance of every class during the semester: my physical body and its movement capability was the reason for my failure. I later learned from other classmates who did not follow all the syllabus objectives that they received very high grades in the class. They could follow the uniformity of ballet and therefore won the game of the course. They completed the objectives of ballet determined by the facilitating authority of our instructor.

A Change in Structure

I performed with Jacksonville Dance Theatre⁹ (JDT) for seven seasons, touring, teaching, and choreographing for the company. Holding a mission “to educate the community on not only the value of modern dance as an important art form but the value of diverse dancing bodies. Strength comes in many forms.”¹⁰ This held true in every audition, rehearsal, and performance of JDT. Rather than looking for uniformity with the human body, the company invested in dancers who could synergistically perform work.

When the choreographer called for a particular dancer to stand out, the dancer knew how to make that happen through their performance. The same dancer needed to blend into the ensemble's work if needed. For example, if a taller dancer with long limbs performed next to a shorter dancer with a low extension, the taller dancer would know to lower their extensions for the larger ensemble's performance visuals. The idea of uniformity existed with the opportunities for synergistic practice in a performance product. The directors of JDT trust its dancers to take ownership in making decisions to complete the objective of the performance because they influence the agency for the dancers to do so. Again, we define *ownership* in this research as instances where the player's decision-making facilitates the performative outcome. In this research, *agency* is an individual's desire to complete gameplay actions.

⁹ For more information, visit jacksonvillednacettheatre.org.

¹⁰ Jacksonville Dance Theatre (@jdttheatre, Instagram, February 20, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/jdttheatre/>).

JDT is just one example of a modern repertoire-based company. Several others are very worthy and important to write about in terms of concerns of influencing agency and ownership of their dancers. I use this company as an example from personal experience. Looking back at my dance education in a Magnet Arts program, the terms *ownership* and *agency* were never discussed in the classroom. It was rare that I remember a teacher inviting any discussion in our physical practices. We were always taught movement and expected to complete it the way the teacher provided. If our physical body was incapable of meeting the movement, the grade suffered, or worse, if it was a performance event, the student was cut from the work. The directors and choreographers associated with JDT present movement, observe the movement of their dancers, and the product of the performance is formed based on what the dancers can offer to the movement. It was the first time I experienced the act of creating dance for the physical bodies of the dancers in the space, rather than creating dance for the physical bodies a choreographer or teacher wants in the space. This switch in the creative process is derived by a change of value, a change of objective, a change of structure, and a change of ideologies of what makes a dance.

Structured Language

I have juxtapositioned interests of sitting at a desk completing numerous writings of artistic, administrative duties while later in the studio creating new choreographic works. At first, I acquired the organizational appeal from what was paying more: running dance studios and dance departments in educational institutions. It's terrible to compare the life of a dancer to the overworked, underpaid,

corporate folk following the same daily pattern, attached to the time clock of what their job permits them to do. In my career, I find myself in this position often. In these moments, I notice an impetus in the influence of responsibility and economic safety in the survival of life. Over time, I see my faith in risk-taking disappear —the trust of my instinctual reactions to change within a pattern. Our instincts are presented from tactics of first thought best thought methods. These thoughts are formed due to previous outcomes of situations that may resemble the one in question. Precise formality is heightened, and my psyche irritates my consciousness, governing the correct ways to function in the rat race of life. My invitation to personal discovery diminishes.

Through my multiple days of attending numerous corporate meetings, writing many proposals, and leading or participating in vital conversations for the benefit of my program, I have found an attraction to specificity in language. From an early age, we are taught essential words of the human language. Through years of life, we are told to use these words and expand our horizons to synonyms, adjectives, compound words, and other various tools of languages. Extensive definitions can be simplified into one word. My constant goal in my personal growth is to find time to redefine certain words to get to the meat of the objective and evaluate their weight in my language practice.

I hold vulnerability from my childhood experience as a *Late Talker*, which speech therapists define as a child who shows good social, motor, and thinking skills.

However, the child finds trouble talking or expressing language.¹¹ As a child, this was only a minor issue in certain situations as I found movement and gesture to be a faster form of communication. There was no way for anyone to misinterpret a nod for yes, a smile for excitement, and pointing as a distinct choice. Adolescent problems are solved quickly because they must and often have few repercussions for a failed attempt. Wild structures of discovery, freedom within conceptualizing, and persistence in trying are the most valued attributes of a child. The invitation to progress is never diminished.

As I transitioned from childhood and am now squarely in adulthood, I still experience moments where I stumble to find the correct phrasing of what I am trying to express. My organized and overachieving-driven personality derives from my perfectionism in communication being hindered by the risk of being misunderstood. These are significant moments where my psyche takes over and slows the risky intuitions that my mind wants to make. In my fears of failure, my growth opportunities are stunned by my consciousness, forcing me to repeat systems my mind is used to.

¹¹ Lauren Lowrey, "How to Tell If Your Child is a Late Talker- And What to Do About It," The Hanen Centre, 2016. <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/How-to-Tell-if-Your-Child-is-a-Late-Talker---and-W.aspx>.
The Hanen Centre, 2016.
<http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/How-to-Tell-if-Your-Child-is-a-Late-Talker---and-W.aspx>.

A Shift in Strategy

I was born and raised in Jacksonville, FL. I directed multiple dance programs, independently choreographed musical theatre productions, and performed six seasons with the professional modern dance company Jacksonville Dance Theatre. While living and working in the same town for years is something I would never trade, I fell into a repetitious cycle of completing tasks just to complete tasks. I grew tired of the same schedule, the same curriculums, the same collaborations, the same influences... the same... the same... the same. I decided to make a drastic change, mainly because I was bored. I wanted to revisit the choreographer whose most potent form of communication was a gesture. This attribute encouraged me to attain my graduate degree to reignite my excitement for movement, regain my wild designs of discovery, freedom within conceptualizing, and persistence in trying.

Immediately there was a shift in practice. Previously my movement classes contained choreographed exercises fulfilling the technical steps of modern dance. Now, particularly in my Modern class,¹² I was asked to fulfill these actions through free-form improvisation tasks, often prompted to do what my body needed. My muscular system panicked, unsure how to complete the task given. After years of being told what my body required, it could now explore its own needs. With my body's state of shock, my mind was trying to catch up. I ask you to imagine driving a car in a new city versus roads in your neighborhood. The drive may be slower in a new city to not miss a turn or misjudge a lane that randomly changes into a turn-only.

¹² Fall 2019, Kendra Portier, University of Maryland at College Park

Most likely, you would follow every direction a GPS would give and blame the machine for running into time-consuming traffic. Now imagine driving in your neighborhood where you weave in and out of roads knowing which lane builds up with traffic during certain times of the day. Rather than sitting in traffic, you defy the machine of the GPS and take back roads only a member of the community would know. There is a rhythmic change in the body's reaction based on the situation occurring. The body reacts cautiously, creating tension in moments of relocation or unearthing new experiences, juxtaposing the mind to correctly analyze and complete the task. Depending on your destination or objective in this drive, time could be considered an obstacle. Once again, the psyche takes charge of what is right or wrong, and you are pressed to decide your strategy.

Juxtaposed inquiries engaged my body and mind in a game of tug of war. My spirit was elated with bursts of excitement in self-discovery. My movement was stiff, cautious, and precise; however, my mind wanted to catch up with the messy, fluid, trusting nature that fellow movers in my classes exhibited. I became an observer in the game of movement. I strategized effort, evaluated those strategies, and stole favored moments that the players made. I mentally began documenting the outcomes of every player's decision, studying every move as if evaluating a chess game: *Their momentum from point A to point C was incredible, but they skipped B. Wait. They cheated. Where is point B? Point B should matter. I'll make it count.*

When given specific choreography to be repeated every week, I was never bored. The constant change in the ending of the objective created a variable state in which I strived to win every class. I discovered I am my most competitive student, an

influencer of movement, and a sponge. I am not a solo player. I work best with a team of collaborators to offer another thought in the space and push me to be an investigating artist, rather than an artist completing the check box of getting the job done to move to the next task. The studio became my playground, and I was obsessed with the opportunity to play with a new set of house rules in a new environment. I found my interpretation of abiding by the directions and explored playing efficiently to win the games of my artistic craft.

Chapter 3: A Wrench in the Game

The Infinite Wrench

In 2018 my partner and I went to Chicago, Illinois, to visit his college friends. We jam-packed the weekend with various comedy, dance, and theatre shows. One show we were particularly interested in was *The Infinite Wrench* at the Neo-Futurists Theatre.¹³ We noticed something odd when researching show start times: it started at 10:30 pm. Not your usual theatre production start time. As we arrived at the theatre's doors, we were greeted by actors holding a marker and blank name tags. They asked for our names and wrote down a completely different names; for example, my name was "Cooooool."

The actors then instructed us to find a seat in the small black box theatre. The show consisted of multiple short plays written by the actors. Each short act was given a number from 38-84. The numbers were printed on paper and hung individually above the stage. The actors shared a sheet of paper listing the titles of the scenes correlating with their designated numbers and instructed them to yell a number at the end of every short act. The number would then be ripped from the hanging string and performed. When the word *Wrench* was written on the back of the paper, the audience would have to follow the instructions during the chosen scene. If the performance included all 50 acts by the hour mark, the theater would reward the audience with a

¹³ "The Infinite Wrench," The Neo-Futurist Theater, Accessed April 1, 2022, <https://neofuturists.org/events/theinfinetwrench/>.

pizza. It was an entertaining evening, but the sense of gameplay added multiple moments of risk.

About thirty minutes in, the audience yelled out the number 38: *The birthing of a baby blue whale on our stage*. “It’s the Wrench,” the actors yelled back and instructed the audience to get out of their seats and sit on the stage floor. A large set-piece resembling a whale’s vagina entered the stage space, and a solo voice began the scene. Water began to flow through the set piece onto the stage's floor. As the scene progressed, the quantity of water and flow intensity increased until the actor slid through the set piece onto the stage floor. Of course, being so close to the action made our experience of this scene very different from what it would have been having we stayed in our chairs. Despite the audience seeming to be in control for most of the show, there was always a sense that the Wrench would seize control at some point.

It was *The Infinite Wrench* that reignited my love of performance play. This research defines *performance play* as a presentation using improvisational strategies to complete the overall objective. The fact that neither the audience nor the actors knew what to expect helped reignite my passion for performance play. The theme of the unforeseen outcome fueled the objective of the show. The hope of being rewarded with a pizza party lent a sense of risk to the audience, motivated the actors to move briskly through the scenes, and invited the audience to get involved. It was a reminder that theatre can be fun. Theatre can be risky. Theatre can be witty. Even when there is a wrench within the plan of the objective, creators can make a new perspective or innovation. This critical lesson would appear many years later throughout my graduate career when the experience was thrown an enormous Wrench.

When Play is Forced to Stop

Just when Graduate school reignited my love of dance in a new space with endless new collaborators, the world took a left turn with the appearance of the COVID-19 Pandemic. I hope that one day, someone will read the words of the COVID-19 Pandemic and have questions about its existence. Therefore, I briefly explain my graduate thesis research's significant whirlwind. In March of 2020, government officials discovered a severe illness made its way to the United States. Hospitals began to overfill, medical officials begged everyone to stay home in isolation, and eventually, the United States government agreed to join the worldwide shutdown. Officials instructed everyone to stay home and only be in physical contact with those considered in their bubble.¹⁴ All forms of transportation were heavily monitored or canceled. Work and education were moved to an online platform. All feared the repercussions of the virus. It was as if the apocalypse was beginning, and we were the ones to experience it. The well-oiled machine of life's time clock was jammed. No one knew how to fix it, and no one knew when it would end.

After a week of isolation, I grew bored again with my creative self. The Pandemic shifted our movement classes online to Zoom, so I had to clear my living room space of possible collisions and dance on wood with concrete underneath. I missed the interactions of others, the jarring cheers, and claps during significant movement phrases, the sound of a dancer's breath when they moved next to me, and the energetic push needed as a mover. I missed my newly found game of movement

¹⁴ In times of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was highly recommended to encounter only physically those whom you live with. These individuals would be considered your bubble.

analysis in real-time rather than the delayed time of the internet—another reminder of my inner player’s need for collaborators.

The Crossword Experiment

Technology piqued my interest, especially an application that, at the time, I had never worked with before: Zoom. I was fascinated that the world mostly turned to this application to find their sense of community. I found the program's constant upgrades compelling, which allowed users to personalize their experience. Upgrades could be seen in privacy features such as the ability to mute your microphone or turn off your camera and the ability to change your screen name, create background images to either distract from or reduce interruptions, and even share your screen. The possibilities of this application were endless, and when I found a way for meetings to be live streamed on YouTube and Vimeo, I wondered if this platform could be used as a performance space. Could I choreograph dancers not just on their movement but their use of the application of Zoom? Is it possible to have dancers from various places seem to be dancing in a shared unit of space? Could an entire production be broadcast in my own home using my laptop? With these and several other questions in mind, *The Crossword Experiment* was born.

In this collaborative exploration, I created a series of vignettes based on a crossword puzzle I found in the *Baltimore Sun*.¹⁵ I asked ten dancers around the

¹⁵ Dan Rodricks, “Home Page,” baltimoresun.com (Baltimore Sun), accessed January 19, 2022, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/>.

United States to participate, collaborate, and explore using household items. Each dancer was isolated in a unique space to their personalities and needs. Some could only perform in their 20 X 20 apartment bedroom, others could move their living room furniture to maximize their area, and some could only use one half of a room as Pilates equipment too heavy to move filled the other side. We had to find common items in the spaces; otherwise, the viewer watched dancers move in their squares. At that point, the audience might as well watch one of the dance classes we were regularly taking. We had to meet the performance objective without the technical support we would have benefited from in-person. Using chairs, sunglasses, beds, and couches, we found a way to create a set design for this project. We created a unifying theme and aesthetic by coordinating the colors of our post-it notes, tape, clothes, and lighting. Investigating all participants' knowledge of their home and computer capabilities made the performance objective plausible.

We found ways of turning the camera off without the audience knowing and worked out how to best place the computer to get the ideal camera angle for each vignette. We even studied the order of dancers turning their cameras on and off to place them on the Zoom screen in a particular order. When the show moved to YouTube Live, however, the order of video squares wholly changed. Many hours of mapping and choreographing the dancers' cameras did not matter. However, the obstacles and limitations generated new opportunities to explore using choreographic play, which fed into the performance objective: to premiere a dance show during a Live Zoom Meeting.

The dancers' reactions clearly showed their trust in my direction during the work's opening section. Chelsea Hilding,¹⁶ a graduate candidate at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, completed a solo as the other castmates turned their cameras on and off. They would perform selections from future vignettes to indicate what was coming next, such as jumping on their chairs, turning their heads profile as if they were looking at the square next to them, creating gestures with their hands and forearms on the screen, and much more. "It's been really interesting to watch rehearsal videos afterward," Hilding stated in an advertisement interview for the show's premiere. "It does look like we're dancing together. It does look like we are dancing as an ensemble. There's a moment in the opening where Amber tells me to look a certain way, and she says it looks like I am looking at other people and I'm not. I'm looking at someone mowing their lawn outside of my window."¹⁷ These dancers became technicians in technology, and they also had to create their relationships with the other dancers through endless imagination. The dancers' perspective would never be the same as what the audience witnessed on the screen. In other words, although they appeared to be looking at one another on-screen, the dancers were viewing something completely different. The audiences' eye was manipulated, thus allowing the audience to focus on specific details concerning space and relationships with the other dancers of the vignette.

¹⁶ Chelsea Hilding, "Chelsea Hilding," 2020, <https://www.chelseahilding.com/>.

¹⁷ Amber Daniels, "Behind the Scenes: Part 1," YouTube (YouTube, August 4, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tBaouCROag&list=PLdNqDfuX_gp4XM8ji1gfqqJuv8lDqwS0k&index=4.

The *Crossword Experiment* was successful due to the infinite obstacles we had to address. When dancing in an ensemble seemed impossible at the height of COVID-19, we explored an application designed to connect people using the internet. The focus of this project was experimenting with *yes and* rather than creating a storyline or narrative for the overall work. Historically, musical theatre was built on the phrase *yes and* in its roots of Vaudeville, particularly in the later parts of 1918 and early 1920. These shows would include animal acts, comedic acts, female and male impersonators, acrobats, clowns, singers, dancers, and the list goes on. Although the shows would never hold an overall storyline, they always kept the same theme: entertainment or, in other words, *spectacle*. The idea of *yes and* in a rehearsal or performative space entails that there is no wrong answer in the decisions performers may make due to an improvised objective. This era of performance has always been of interest to me. The Vaudeville circuit contained some of history's most well-known performers such as Louis Armstrong, Judy Garland, Josephine Baker, Harry Houdini, Bill Bojangles Robinson, Fred Astaire, and many more. Many of these artists would move on to create or collaborate with Musical Theatre, Modern dance, Films, and much more. All hold very different strategies and gifts within the arts, but this group of performers was always known for their contributions, the main spectacle of the overall performance.

My dancers and collaborators knew our titles of musician, lighting designer, filmmaker, and choreographer had to be interchangeable from one artist to the next due to our forced isolation. We could not travel to each other's homes to help spike the space, adjust the music volume, or check props before beginning the show. We all

had to trust one another, our technology, and leave the rest to chance during our live performances. Changing the use of the word obstacle to invite opportunity rather than prevent progress was vital. Taking this time as an invitation to rethink my artistic journey and find ways to connect even during isolation opened the possibility of metamorphism in my work. This project was instigated by an imposed Wrench that suddenly appeared out of nowhere, the COVID-19 Pandemic. My curiosity then directed itself to create a Wrench on my terms to invite new challenges, keep things fresh, and prepare for unexpected Wrenches of the future.

Artistic Strategies in Isolation

I was proud of the work my collaborators and I had done; however, this was one of the first full-length experimental productions that I had created with no narrative whatsoever but strictly theme. In my past choreographic experiences, I had always utilized my love for story and narrative. Starting my choreographic process with a storyline was my strategy in curating. The themes of the *Crossword Experiment* simply came out of my boredom and yearning for artistic collaboration. It was created with chance-based investigations of what each dancer had in their homes, what their computers could do, and trust in my collaborators' decisions made within the ever-changing production.

This artistic exploration differed from what other artists did during the Covid-19 Pandemic. American Comedian Bo Burnham created his Netflix original *Inside*,¹⁸

¹⁸ Bo Burnham, "Inside," Netflix, 2021, <https://www.netflix.com/title/81289483>.

commemorating his thoughts and experiences through the year 2020. In his isolation, Burnham had to become his own multi-versed artist, just as our members of the *Crossword Experiment*. Burnham sings, dances, plays musical instruments, creates lighting designs, edits the film, and explores his artistic expressions through isolation in a series of vignettes. Each vignette was vastly different from the next but always shared the common theme of how he was dealing with the pressures of 2020 in his home completely alone. The only nod to building a relationship with another person was made by either portraying another person himself, using a sock puppet, or editing a copied version of himself on top of the original film. Burnham chose to lean into the loneliness of isolation to create a filmed and edited production.

Award-winning choreographer Brian Brooks decided to utilize Instagram by posting a short new dance film every day of July in collaboration with 31 piano works by Michael Gordon, creator of *Bang on a Can*.¹⁹ The parameters of the explorations included Brooks hearing the musical work at noon for the first time and then responding to it through a mini dance film by the end of the evening. These videos included site-specific improvisations and explorations of editing techniques, such as his video posted on July 2, 2020,²⁰ using overlay and short jump cuts. I noticed we had some common interests, filming angles to fragment the body and draw focus to intimate moments such as Brook's post on July 9, 2020, when he films his forearms manipulating sand.²¹ Brooks then edited the film in reverse to engage the audience's

¹⁹ Brian Brooks (@brianbrooks_), Instagram video, July 8, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CCHwGrrl_Z7/.

²⁰ Brian Brooks (@brianbrooks_), Instagram video, July 2, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCKMZGhlMnh/>.

²¹ Brian Brooks (@brianbrooks_), Instagram video, July 9, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCcgsaRFL1L/>.

eye in newly created patterns in the sand. The project continued through July, and so did the clever investigation tools such as the use of balls falling downstairs on July 13, 2020,²² or the movement of colorful post-it notes on a table.²³

Brook's *July* experiment, Burnham's *Inside*, and my *Crossword Experiment* explore what can happen in isolation. The main difference is that *Crossword Experiment* was presented live. In contrast, Brooks and Burnham edited the other films to manipulate the movement's visuals and explore an entirely isolated project. Each project used small vignettes to investigate new subjects worth exploring. None of them followed a particular narrative, but all followed the themes of artistic exploration in COVID-19. "To you, the audience," I wrote in my welcome notes of the *Cross Word Experiment*, "I thank you. In times when Broadway, dance festivals, dance companies, and studios worldwide have been forced to empty their spaces: we as artists crave movement. We long for your eyes to witness what we have to say, yearn to feel the heat of the lights on stage, and we ache for the sound of your reactions. We miss your physical presence."²⁴ Knowing this fact created an invitation to the audience to witness these works. There was an absence of narrative and storyline to follow, but we all had a theme or objective in common: navigating our way back to a sense of normality.

²² Brian Brooks (@brianbrooks_), Instagram video, July 13, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCmimdbU9/>

²³ Brian Brooks (@brianbrooks_), Instagram video, July 19, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CC1d_mnlTtf/

²⁴ Amber Daniels, "The Crossword Experiment," Sign PDF documents, 2020, <https://dochub.com/amberdanielsfa671e7f/Noek8bMwxgj3a5rV17d2qm/the-crossword-experiment-program-pdf?dt=9ySsm9sJ-SEdQ3wyLXCr>.

Chapter 4: Embracing New Rules of the Game

Checking In

How are you doing? I would like to invite you to participate in a physical exercise²⁵ to give an example of self-discovery. First, I'd like you to close your eyes and imagine you are sitting in front of a piano. Think of a song you would like to play and begin manipulating the keys in front of you. As you create the glorious sounds that collaborate in designing your chosen music, I invite you to ask yourself the following questions. You may think of the answers or physically take notes.

What color is the piano?

What material is it made of? Plastic, wood?

How old is the material?

Complete this for at least 30 seconds and record your explorations. We will now repeat the same exercise. However, this time, I would like you to think of the following questions:

How is my upper body reacting to the manipulation of the keys?

Is my lower body initiated in the manipulation of the keys?

Where is my focus while manipulating the keys?

²⁵ Please refer to *Your Game* in Chapter One as a reminder of these games.

Complete this for at least 30 seconds and record your observations. We will now repeat the same exercise. However, this time, I would like you to examine the following questions:

Did I hear the imaginary music I was composing?

What is my relationship to this piece of music?

What is my relationship to playing this piece of music?

We could continue with the multiple steps of this exercise, but I want to pause here. Regardless of your status in the art world, you could complete the objective of this exercise. It's not until you dissect the decisions made to achieve the objective that exploration of character begins. The character's narrative will come forth when this discovery is in progress. Noticing what your body wants to do gives valuable information about age, comfortability within a situation, level of exhaustion, or fatigue. Investigating the visuals of the situation reveals the space around the character. Listening to your composition gives a perspective of the current situation within the act, explicitly noticing what musical notes, keys, and tempos you mostly heard. This structure will eventually lead to your exploration of the movement objective.

Veiled

I was introduced to percussionist dancer Rebecca Hill at the beginning of graduate school. We immediately began collaborating and eventually proposed a 2020 Second Season Production project. Using vignettes, we planned to touch on the entertainment industry's dark side of the vaudeville era: how audiences viewed it then

versus society's transformation of what is now deemed acceptable today. The question of duality would shade these vignettes, sound & silence, improvisation & fixation, light & dark, and reality & expectation. In this highly staged and collaborative show, we intended to keep the element of variety while stringing vignettes together to question the dynamic of gender today. The proposal was selected, and we began connecting with various artists from the University of Maryland at College Park and our artistic colleagues outside of the walls of UMD. We strategized to build a schedule of rehearsals, costume fittings, music recordings, and scriptwriting sessions. Then, in March of 2020, the unthinkable happened. The world shut down due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

As the University created new rules restricting the number of personnel on campus and in contact with one another, Hill and I gathered our artistic team to discuss moving the project to a Dance Film. We explored the many halls, studios, closets, and theaters of the Clarice Performing Arts Center.²⁶ This new possibility would give the audience a different perspective of the theatre's performance space, such as recording from the lighting rig for multiple aerial shots. The team was ecstatic about the strategies we were creating, and we were willing to exhaust all efforts to make it happen.

Filming during the height of COVID-19, the theory of *yes and* was met with complications. Hill and I were fascinated with a Vaudevillian partnering dance known

²⁶ "The Clarice Performing Arts Center," The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Last modified 2021, <https://theclarice.umd.edu/>.

as the *Bowery Waltz*.²⁷ Gathering video footage from the Library of Congress, we observed the partners in their dance. We noticed a distinct difference in roles between the person who led the dance versus the person who followed. Notably, we were interested in the flailing and rag doll-like motions of the following dancer. We presented the idea to the board of our project, and they reminded us of the college's COVID-19 precautions, stating that no one would be within six feet of one another. We ran into a significant obstacle in completing this very physical dance without touching one another.

I thought of the concept of intersectionality within the physical dancing space and the dimensions of editing film. We explored the possibility of mirroring film tactics to encompass an emotional tie to the intertwining and weight-sharing elements inspired by the original films of the *Bowery Waltz*. The only issue occurred with the location of the filming. I was not satisfied with a rectangle room when testing the camera angle against the wall (which would help with the touching imagery in post-editing). The images were flat, missing the intertwining and manipulation senses the duet called for. Hill and I later found a hallway where the wall was diagonal, which proved beneficial in our filming experiments. Our movements melted into one another when close to the border. They created a sense of partnership in proximity when further away. When presenting this idea of the location to our scenic designer Sarah Beth Hall, she was attracted to the diagonal hallway with her design. She not only tested the boundaries of this scene with props of chairs, coat-standing racks,

²⁷ "Bowery Waltz," YouTube, Library of Congress, March 26, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYkIBhNSVVs>.

picture frames, and straw laundry baskets; but engulfed the space with theatre curtains and various forms of fabric, thus hinting towards our final image of the film with the Dance Theatre.²⁸

Embracing “Yes And”

This moment of *yes and* could have diminished without the interest of exploration on all joint accounts. The moment one collaborator refuses to lean into the problems brought forth is when the project stops being art and begins to be a filler of the assignment. The evident yearning for touch in the film made *The Bowery* vignette the most relatable to an audience currently under the safety of seclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Veiled* is a beautiful example of knowing an inspiration of character and frolicking against the border of revealing the exact narrative of the works to the audience. Our goal was to “have the audience get something emotional out of it- to experience something that carries them to another place,” so we as creators had to “get out of the way and let them decide what they should be feeling.”²⁹ This emotional pull is often defined as inspiration, innovation, or creativity. Filming in the space, wearing costumes designed by my collaborator Rebecca Hill and larval masks created by Baltimore, MD artist Tara Carias,³⁰ the energy of filming was welcoming and invigorating towards the ideas each character

²⁸ “Dance Theatre,” The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Last modified February 2021, <https://theclarice.umd.edu/venues/dance-theatre>.

²⁹ Jordan Tannahill, *Theatre of the Unimpressed: In Search of Vital Drama* (Toronto, Canada: Coach House Books, 2015), 99.

³⁰ Paul Reisman, “Waxing Moon Masks,” Waxing Moon Masks, Last modified 2022, <http://www.waxingmoonmasks.com/home>.

could bring within the space. Through our choreography, Hill and I deepened our characters' quirks, relationships, and narrative in the short vignette by never giving specific directions for getting to the characters' ending goal. This is unlike what we observed in Bowery Waltz's original films, with a clear constant objective of the leader versus a follower. As audiences could only define the characters of *Veiled* by the colors of their costumes, this section allowed the personalities of Pink and Yellow to step forth. The unpredictability of each character's choice was entertaining and engaged the viewing audience.

Veiled was based on exercises of *yes and* because it had to be. Influenced by the Vaudeville era and ciphering through the historic vaudeville repertoire to extract inspiration, Hill and I created a series of vignettes fueled by the participants' choices in character. With the following influence from vaudeville artists such as the Dolly Sisters, Bessie Bonehill, and Eugene Sandow, we created a variety of vignettes showcasing different characters with a new goal and talent showcase. Layered costumes hid our performers' identities, each only identifiable by the color of fabric they were covered in.

Using the historical vignettes of the Vaudeville era, Hill and I could have easily just repeated the same tricks as the artists did. We could have used the same songs the Dolly Sisters sang, placed our dancers in costumes utilizing the “magic of a makeup kit,”³¹ filmed in the same room settings, and edited the film to look precisely like our inspiring artists' creations.³² However, this is not 1945. As dance artists in

³¹ “Dolly Sisters - YouTube,” YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJ2IXwTd1o8>.

³² Referencing “Don’t be Too Old-Fashioned Powder Lipstick and Rouge”. Dolly Sisters

the 20th century, we are responsible for creating new innovative works and seeking out the latest and cutting-edge elements various art genres can bring forth.

Understanding complicated settings artists worked in the many years before us and researching their stories and narratives ingeniously for those who wish to test their artistic realms. Although the storylines of these influencers were never explicitly explained in the work, their historical position, combined with the revolutions of our collaborators and what was made available to us, created a stunning piece of art.

My contributions to this project would not have been possible without my love of theatre and the investigations of *The Crossword Experiment*. My newly found experience with a movement for film and embracing the use of what the spaces offered proved very beneficial. For instance, UMD's mask mandate was the true inspiration to use larval masks. Hill and I made it clear that our intention of using diverse artists was inviting moments of individuality to an ensemble. When a large part of their physical features needed to be covered, we decided to lean wholly towards the idea of character play in the costume design. My training in theatre seemed to influence questions of directional intention and relationship-building tools. As this was a dance film, a relationship was not only considered for the characters and their space but the building of a connection to the viewing audience. Now that I was finding comfort to experiment with multiple versions of Wrenches, my subsequent interest was finding discomfort within the comfort. To defy Wrenches' repetitions by adding another layer to the obstacle: finding the risks of exploring the objective.

Chapter 5: Inviting the Wrench to the Game

The Dancer's Objective

My recent choreographic work, *Risk of Play*, was inspired by movement created through gameplay and instinctual impulses layered with character analysis. The idea of the overall objective was led by my interest in chance-based performance and narrative storylines. The invention of this work stemmed from a choreographic game *Bella Ciao*³³ developed initially with University of Maryland Dance Graduate Christina Robson. I made ten gestures that Robson memorized and placed in an order she felt was efficient. The basis of the game was to complete the ten gestures before the singer exclaimed the repetitious chorus. If she did not complete the gestures before the calling, she would reset and start over. After a week of rehearsal, Robson grew comfortable with the movement.

I decided to add a new rule to the game. I asked Robson to create ten gestures, which added to my gestures. After another week of rehearsals, Robson was able to get through the 20 motions once within the three-minute and forty-three-second song. We continued adding rules each week to expand the game, inviting props and vocals to the dance. Robson was constantly tested on her movement and cognitive processes as a mover. I was interested in reactions to completing the game and following the rules.

³³ Astronautalis. MP3. "Bella Ciao (Theme from "Women's War)." 2020.
<https://astronautalis.bandcamp.com/track/bella-ciao-theme-from-womens-war>.

Generally, in a game such as this, the game would stop once the player lost. Due to the call of performance, Robson pushed to continue through the work, inventing new ways to return to the set rules and eventually falling to the floor as the last note of *Bella Ciao* occurred.

The investigation continued with a series of vignettes inspired by games such as connect the dots. Working with three University of Maryland undergraduates, I choreographed a traveling phrase. Toward the end of every rehearsal, I asked the dancers to draw 10X10 dots on a sheet of paper and find ten ways to connect the dots. They would then perform the traveling movements in this floor pattern. The connect dots game refreshed with every rehearsal to train the dancers to complete the series of actions in multiple floor patterns. The dancers' rule was to follow their coordinating colors within the design, whether they intersect, form a shape, or are not continuous. With multiple points of intersection, dancers must choose which direction to go, how to manipulate the choreography to move in that direction, and how to react to the pathways of other dancers in real-time. They had to be aware of their relationships with other dancers through these decisions and build throughout the performance. Some risks were possible collisions and miscalculations of where the lines begin or end. I was curating a training process for the performers of this vignette and was excited by the dancer's experimentation of their movement patterns. I was engaged in repetitive movements and witnessed the mover problem solved in a fast-paced environment. In competitive efforts, each player found their tactics to participate.

A Theme to Play

Curious about the song *Bella Ciao*'s history, I researched the origins of *Bella Ciao* and found striking images of the women of the Italian Resistance. In this research, I found the theme of *Risk of Play*. Originating in Northern Italy as a folk protest song of the mondina workers, the music was revisited forty years later by anti-fascists of the Italian Resistance. I watched a documentary, *Women of the Italian Resistance*³⁴ discovering their massive role in the war against Nazi invasions. Many of these women led military personnel to conduct attacks, map strategies, trade valuable information to troops, and hide Jewish people from Nazi invasions.

The Italian Resistance movement began in Italy in 1943 when the German Nazi government invaded the land under the leadership of the Former Prime Minister of Italy, Benito Mussolini. To combat the fascists' invasion and murders of Jewish citizens of Italy, a group of people called themselves *partisans* and formed the Italian Resistance. Before this time, women were seen as obsolete in the workforce, always told to stay at home because the men had work. In World War II, this identity drastically changed, and women were vital workers and fighters.

In my research, I was especially fond of three women of the Italian Resistance: Ada Gobetti, Frida Malan, and Silvia Pons. Ada Gobetti was known as “never at rest, never allowing one single minute, single idea or project go to waste”³⁵ is now known as a writer, female activist, and leader of the political party Partito

³⁴ “Women of the Italian Resistance - 1965.” YouTube. YouTube, December 6, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moghN4nj7rQ&t=135s>.

³⁵ Caroline Moorehead, *A House in the Mountains: The Women Who Liberated Italy from Fascism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2021), 82.

d'Azione, an anti-fascist Republican party.³⁶ She was a leader in multiple feminist movements during the Italian Resistance and often spearheaded numerous invasions against the Germans. Frida Malan was a teacher, fighter in the resistance, and a Partito d'Azione. She would later become a counselor three times, becoming one of Italy's first female councilors.³⁷ As an advocate of women's rights, she claimed she "did not know how to be a woman but wanted to try."³⁸ Silvia Pons was a doctor who tended to wounded partisans and trained others to assist. She was known to "be bold, full of resolve, but there was something uncertain and unhappy in her manner as if she was constantly looking for something she couldn't find."³⁹

The Production Team's Objective

Through the vignettes created with the dancers, I knew I was making a work that needed a high collaboration process with my lighting, scenic, and projection designer. Instead of revealing the game investigations to the designers, I wanted to see what they would create through the research of Italian Resistance. Ideas swirled through the conversations of designers and me. The designers immediately filled the

³⁶ Jomarie Alano, "A Life of Resistance: Ada Prospero Marchesini Gobetti (1902-1968)," Coordinating Council for Women in History, April 4, 2017, <https://theccwh.org/life-resistance-ada-prospiero-marchesini-gobetti-1902-1968/>.

³⁷ Comune di Torino MuseoTorino, "Frida Malan (1917-2002)," MuseoTorino, accessed February 17, 2022, https://www.museotorino.it.translate.google/view/s/6c97d64061af41c19c2f1035df652142?_x_tr_sl=it&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc.

³⁸ Caroline Moorehead, *A House in the Mountains: The Women Who Liberated Italy from Fascism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2021), 46.

³⁹ Caroline Moorehead, *A House in the Mountains: The Women Who Liberated Italy from Fascism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2021), 50.

collaborative storyboard. These ideas, however, were quite literal to the stories and research of the Italian Resistance, such as sizeable hanging fabric to represent tents and maps of Italy to be projected at certain moments in the tech production. The only element we kept through this process was research conducted by our multi-media designer Taylor Verrett⁴⁰ of an accurate star map to commemorate the evening of a diary entry from one of our focused women of the Italian Resistance. This would be seen in the second vignette of *Risk of Play* in a solo dance occurring to the reading of the diary entry.

A few months before the performance, I switched gears with the production team. The dancers and I created the movement for visual context; I asked how the production team could curate games within their designs. I was curious if their produced mediums would affect the decision makings of the dancers in real-time. This collaborative process led to multiple innovations of our original plans, such as manipulating ideas with set design. At first, our designer Andrés Poch⁴¹ had thought of building a set with blankets, rope, and newspaper, which could be used as props throughout the work. When given another gameplay mindset, we collaboratively created the idea of pons on a chessboard. Our lighting designer Eric Pitney⁴² used the influence of the childhood game of Lite Brite⁴³ to add LED bars to the pons. Our

⁴⁰ Taylor Verrett, “Taylor Verrett Art”, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://taylorverrett.wixsite.com/taylorverrettart/about>.

⁴¹ Andrés Poch, “Risk of Play,” Andrés Poch, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.andrespoch.com/risk-of-play>.

⁴² Eric Pitney, “Risk of Play,” Eric Pitney, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.ericpitney.com/copy-of-ghost-bride>.

⁴³ “Lite Brite Ultimate Classic,” Shop.hasbro.com, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://shop.hasbro.com/en-us/product/lite-brite-ultimate-classic:A0579FDA-BDE1-4888-840A-1862576A318E>.

multi-media designer Taylor Verrett used her influence of Chutes and Ladders⁴⁴ to negotiate the movement patterns of the dancers in real-time. Lead costume designer Channing Tucker⁴⁵ mentioned her fascination with Cats Cradle, which ended up being a considerable influence on a section of an art installation in *Risk of Play*. By beginning the process with the theme of the Italian Resistance and later incorporating gameplay elements, we began abstracting the dancers' world. The playground was evolving, revealing opportunities for the character, relationship, and movement transformations.

Influence of Character

I later gave the dancers character cards for Gobetti, Malan, and Pons as inspiration during their explorations in the game vignettes. As the dancers had curated their reactions to conflicts given within the vignettes, I wondered if those decisions would change concerning the given character. I wanted to investigate if these changes affected the movement provided for the dancers as individuals and working as a team to complete the overall objective. When one dancer received the character card of Pons, she felt herself and Pons “creating our plan. The string (during the Cat’s Cradle section) is the construction of what we are all in on. It’s like a montage in a musical. Everyone has their job here”.⁴⁶ The same thought was mentioned when another

⁴⁴ “Chutes and Ladders,” Shop.hasbro.com, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://shop.hasbro.com/en-us/product/chutes-and-ladders-game:1095F835-5056-9047-F548-2F4D0AEF4ACC>.

⁴⁵ Channing Tucker, “Risk of Play,” Channing Tucker, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.ctuckerdesigns.com/risk-of-play>.

⁴⁶ Anonymous. “Risk of Play” Character Reactions. Personal, October 16, 2022.

dancer tried on the character of Pons. She claimed she was trying to notice every detail or action occurring around her and consistently trying to “defy the rules (she) set for herself.”⁴⁷ The character card of Gobetti heavily influenced a soloist dancer. “The main thing that stuck with me was the *soul of fire* component to her descriptor. It became the Mantra that I used for the whole show last night. If the nerves started to get away from me, I used it to anchor me back into the world. I would say “soul of fire,” and I loved the imagery. I thought about it as someone who doesn't waste a moment or a second. That impacted how I used my focus and relationship with the pawns and everything I was doing. Everything has an impact for her, it also gave me some space to work with the layer of perfectionism and competition with myself that I always have.”⁴⁸ These self-reflections further enticed the dancers to investigate the movement conducted in *Risk of Play*. The layer of character analysis manipulated their movement qualities, intentions, focus, and themes through each performance. In the words of one of theater's most influential teachers Konstantin Stanislavski, “The verbal text of a play, especially one by a genius, is the manifestation of the clarity, the subtlety, the concrete power to express invisible thoughts and feelings of the author himself. Inside each word, there is an emotion, a thought, that produced the word and justified it's being there.”⁴⁹ The character creates an anchor for the performer through abstraction. The dancers' interest grew in every performance when adding another objective to the overall game. The repertoire work is never dull because the dance

⁴⁷ Anonymous. “Risk of Play” Character Reactions. Personal, October 16, 2022.

⁴⁸ Anonymous. “Risk of Play” Character Reactions. Personal, October 16, 2022.

⁴⁹ Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Creating a Role* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 94.

game never ends. I fueled the dancers' agency⁵⁰ to create their own unseen objective to conquer.

Lifting the Veil of Risk

Risk of Play has served as a counterpart to the research conducted in *Veiled*, inspired by videos of vignettes performed within the Vaudeville era. Rebecca Hill and I could see the movement, try it on, and experiment with elements used in the vignette. We created movements and layered questions of perspective for our dancers to influence their decisions captured in the film. In opposition, *Risk of Play* was first created by observing decision-making during gameplay and layered narrative contexts.

For example, let's repeat the previous exercise with a new set of questions to investigate. First, I'd like you to close your eyes and imagine you are sitting in front of an old wooden piano. I would like you to imagine an American during the Great Depression. Think of a song you would like to play and begin manipulating the keys in front of you. As you create the glorious sounds that collaborate in designing your chosen song, I invite you to ask yourself the following questions. Again, you may think of your answers or physically write them down.

How old are you currently?

Where are you currently?

Are you hot, cold, or comfortable within this setting?

⁵⁰ In this research, *agency* is an individual's desire to complete gameplay actions.

Complete this for at least 30 seconds and record your explorations. We will now repeat the same exercise. However, this time, I would like you to think of the following questions:

What is your relationship with this piano? Does it belong to you, someone you know, or someone you have never met before?

How is your relationship with this person?

When was the last time you saw this person?

Complete this for at least 30 seconds and record your observations. We will now repeat the same exercise. However, this time, I would like you to imagine a picture of the person appearing on the top of the piano.

Has your choice of the song changed?

Do you want to look at the picture or focus on the keys in front of you?

What are your impulses with this new item in your imaginative world?

Complete this for at least 30 seconds and record your thoughts. We will repeat the same exercise once again; however, I would like you to imagine the person sitting next to you.

Are you interacting with this person?

What is the goal of this form of communication?

What is the objective of this action?

You completed the exercise observing what you decided to accomplish as a game played last time. This time, we layered a character of an American in the Great Depression into your choice making. You have many choices within this narrative, such as age, location, and relationship with an imaginary person. However, the

objective of the first action of playing a song on the piano is tested by conflicts that slowly arise throughout the exercise.

In *Risk of Play*, the layer of a historical reference engaged the players to find a relationship with the character to fulfill the objective. Whether the dancer chose to complete her research or just acknowledge what was printed on their character cards, they found at least one character trait to draw their decision-making. In *Veiled*, our dancers and actors were invited to create their characters who lived in the mysterious world of the Vaudeville Era. Although we used historical influences to develop ideas for the vignettes, the participants needed to find their character traits and fulfill the objective of the vignette. The repertoire work was never dull because the game never ended. By changing the focus of each participant at certain moments in the creative process, I witnessed the dancers and production team members find an agency to succeed in the game constantly. There was a positive sense of never feeling settled in the work because the playground constantly changed its intentions.

Chapter 6: Fear of Owning: The Absence of Play

The Gift of Permission

Throughout my final year of Graduate school and in the intense studies of my thesis, I asked myself how I could invite artistic ownership in my classroom and rehearsal spaces. In *Crossword Experiment*, *Veiled*, and *Risk of Play*, my dancers constantly voiced their appreciation for the words “there is no wrong answer” and my strive to keep that rule alive in the process. They felt they were permitted to explore the boundaries of the projects' action, themes, and objectives with these invitations. Once again, I remind you that this thesis concerns the term play in dance performance, choreography, and teaching methods. Through this research, I gave myself the task to allow others to play in the spaces I facilitated. In these three dance modes, I formed my strategies to forgo moments of authority and encouraged the dancers and students to investigate their decision-making patterns.

I often questioned the word permission in my quest for a new language surrounding the word *play*. We've discussed the choreographer or director's role, explicitly asking the participants to utilize their knowledge to complete a given objective regarding the rehearsal space. In a classroom setting where students may not have this previous knowledge, I found the word *permission* essential to associate in the classroom environment. In this research, the term *permission* references an individual allowing and empowering another individual to participate.

Beer and Ballet

Before graduate school, I frequented a brewery close to my house in Jacksonville, FL. There would be tourists arriving at peak evening hours interested in what they should explore while in the city. The brewers knew I was willing to assist in these situations as I was very involved with Jacksonville's art and event scenes. A conversation would affect my pedagogy, choreographic intuitions, and advocacy for dance for years to come.

One evening, I decided to ask a curious tourist if they had ever attended a full-length dance production. They said no because they never felt included in a dance show. The only dance show they had seen in its entirety was *The Nutcracker* after reading the holiday story in elementary school. If they didn't know the story being told, they didn't understand dance and never felt an invitation to try. Several questions that guide my professional career have stemmed from this conversation, the most important of which is: *What is the invitation to a performance?*

Shortly after that stirring conversation, I was named the Community Outreach Coordinator of *Jacksonville Dance Theatre*. Through this opportunity, I created *Beer and Ballet*⁵¹ to bridge the gap between dance and those who may never consider themselves part of the dance community by joining the worlds of dance and brewing. Participants of all backgrounds join a ballet class at a brewery and then are invited to a Brew Hangout. They can purchase a brew, meet those who participated in class and have conversations. I created a world where ballet structures were a constant subject in question, and by simply changing the scenery of class, I invited all levels of

⁵¹ For more information, visit <https://www.amberdaniels.net/beer-and-ballet>.

movers to explore the outlines of ballet techniques. “The atmosphere was much less intimidating for the inexperienced dancer,” states frequent Jacksonville participants Kevin and Rebecca Rhymes. “This, coupled with non-classical music, makes ballet feel approachable and that anyone can do it.”⁵² By changing the class location from a studio with an unforgiving mirror to a brewery using the bar as the ballet barre, I created an invitation for a new community to experience movement because I decided to change the playground of the form. By teaching and facilitating a space to explore movement, I began answering my question concerning the invitation to dance.

The Institutional Playground

In my six years of teaching in elementary school, middle school, and high school, I have experienced moments where I questioned who the absolute authority of the course is. Typically, my syllabus and curriculum would have followed my Magnet Arts training of constantly organized movement. I would choreograph warm-up, across the floor, and center combinations. My online discussion posts would derive from dance history and questions directed towards the student's absorption of the material. I created a classroom environment of a well-oiled machine. This is an attribute that my employers loved. The design was simple and easy to explain to parents and Board Members. However, I always noticed moments of boredom in the space. Not just from my dancers, but myself as an educator.

⁵² Amber Daniels, “Beer and Ballet,” 2020. <https://www.amberdaniels.net/beer-and-ballet>

Moving from teaching high school to a collegiate level, I wanted to take charge of the playground I was given. As an MFA Teaching Assistant, it is always recommended to follow the course description and previous ideas of a syllabus. We are allowed to restructure the lessons of the course for our research. With this mindset, I constantly found myself questioning the playground of the classroom. I reevaluated moments where I felt bored as an educator and reminded myself of my teaching mantra: To invite people to the world of dance.

In my Introduction to Modern class, which occurred Fall of 2021, I wanted to discover what would happen when I stripped some of the structural walls of my curriculum and allowed students a chance to question their relationship to the modern dance movement. One of the only rules I had for the studio space was to leave the mirrors covered. I was curious if a studio mirror is needed for an Introduction class and the benefits of its use in the curriculum. Instead of beginning every class with a set floor X series, I led the students through multiple improvisational expeditions. The course was divided into the following four categories of movement and observation: yourself (individual work), one another (partner work), community (group work), and the other (the observation of full-length choreographic works). Each concept was focused on for three weeks. Students then participated in two online discussion posts per concept. The course included vocal and writing observation, evaluation, and analysis of ideas and dances within the professional modern dance field.

For their Mid-Term Assignment, students were required to write a two-page self-analysis of their work and goals for the rest of the semester. I was shocked to receive at least four pages from every student. The students filled every page with

comments on how confident they felt in class, how improvisation helped the choreographic elements of the course, concepts of observational studies we conducted in class, and the joy of never being forced to look at themselves in the mirror. The absence of visual self-judgment seemed to ignite collaboration in the class and negate the feeling of fear in taking risks of trying on new movements. Many wrote of previous dance teachers who either scolded them for their non-perfection or pushed them in a direction they wanted no part of. They were thankful to know that dance could be enjoyed and disappointed it took this long to find the gift of permission to enjoy it. I had given them the chance to establish their own rules and subtracted a central authority of judgment in the space: the mirror.

In their final presentations, students were split into four groups. Each group was assigned a full-length modern work to view and lead a discussion of the analysis of the work. Using tactics absorbed in their online discussion writings, the groups' moderator would ask questions and ensure the groups did not exceed the 20-minute limit (I must admit many wanted to go over this limit). The passion of these discussions would make any instructor's heart sore.

I heard differing opinions of what certain modern pieces meant to each student and how they took their observations and later analyzed the work. One student asked if they got the point right, and I remember replying with a straightforward answer. "There is no wrong answer in the observation of dance. You will have a different relationship with this work than the person sitting next to you. Perspectives change through various walks of life. And that's how you will see the dance. This project gave you the courage to talk about it." They were all shocked by my answer. In a

world where most of them were scared to step foot in a theatre for fear of being wrong, they were now being told they could never have the wrong answer. They could now participate in artistic conversation with simple tools to describe their thoughts and continue the conversation past “It was good” or “It was weird.” By owning their participation of *yes and* in dance discussions, they gained physical and cognitive tools to have deeper conversations involving modern dance. By changing the vocabulary from what is right versus wrong and permitting the tool *yes and* to the classroom vocabulary, students became confident in completing and talking about movement.

Inviting Others to Play

I call back to the question at the beginning of this chapter: *What is the invitation to a performance?* The COVID-19 Pandemic was a rigorous reminder that performers strive for audience attendance. On the business side of the artist-performing world, we also must remember that most of our performance efforts wouldn’t be possible without the financial support of our audience. It’s here that I recall many times performing on various occasions and asking myself why are there so many empty seats? I’ve realized it stems from the audience’s perception of dance through this research. Our initial question now evolves to: *What is the invitation to dance?*

It all starts in the classroom. Whether a teacher is providing education at a local studio or an institutional school, the memories created from an early age derive the potential perceptions supporters of dance will have in adulthood. While the

integrities of dance are important to stress in these environments, moments of discussion are vital. Allowing students to ask what they think are silly questions and having these conversations engage continuous curiosity. It will enable students to find agency in dance, even if it's a career they do not want to pursue.

I am an authoritative facilitator in the case of institutional learning. Due to my title as Instructor of Record, I am responsible for teaching the histories and techniques found in the dance world. This research has led to my realization that students need moments of permission to be the leader in their education of the craft. They need the opportunity to figure out where and how they can aid the art they are fueled to support. Although an Introductory level dance course student may not be the next Mikhail Baryshnikov⁵³ or Anna Pavlova⁵⁴ of our generation, they are folks who will introduce their friends, family, and children to the world of dance. As a dance artist, I hope to invite their interest in my field, understanding of its performance, and a yearning to support its efforts.

⁵³ Mikhail Baryshnikov is a well-known male-identifying ballet dancer.

⁵⁴ Anna Pavlova is a historical female figure in ballet history.

Chapter 7: The Gift of Play: The Art of Strategy

Enjoying the Playground

I began this thesis journey with two main questions: What does the word *play* mean to me as an artist, and how can I utilize the aspects of the term to create an invitation of dance to others. Through more profound exploration of my artistic practice and experimentation with multiple projects, I feel as if I have scratched the surface of my original quest. I remind myself that there is no wrong answer and no failing determination of what these questions mean in my artistic practices. The only moment of failure would stem from quick reactions to try and solve a creative problem. Without thoroughly evaluating my first thought responses, I forget to give myself permission to reform, investigate, explore, play, and...and...and.

Some of my favorite memories of life stem from gameplay. I have always participated in activities that call for a competitive framework, from board games to football. This interest lies the basis of inspiration for my artistic practice. General rules will rarely change, but subsections to the overall directive might. For instance, in baseball, there is a common theme. There are three bases and a home plate. The pitcher of an opposing team throws the ball to the batter of another team. If the batter hits the ball, their team's objective is to run the bases until all players make it back Home. The pitcher team aims to either catch the ball or tag running players. Whichever team has the most runs after nine innings is the winner. These are the basic rules of the game. However, a subsection rule that changed in 2021 has shortened game times. If two teams tie in the ninth inning, they usually would just

play another entire inning, and this would continue until the score revealed a winning team at the end of the inning. Games would last many hours and sometimes go into multiple days.⁵⁵ Noticing a considerable drop in audience viewership after the ninth inning, MLB officials decided to add the *Runner on the Second* rule, automatically placing a runner on first base to begin the tenth inning. This new rule allowed games to end in the tenth inning 69% more often than 46% in previous years.⁵⁶ The MLB noticed a higher viewership of the entire game because of this rule.

Audiences don't want to be bored, just as players want to enjoy the game they are playing. The same should be said for the dancing world. The moment an audience is bored is when they decide to withdraw their support. As a player in the field of dance, I value community outreach strategies to entice new audiences and invite the curiosity of outside perspectives. The National Football League (NFL) franchise is a multi-billion-dollar corporation derived from devoted fans who are only divided by the team they associate with. The spirit of the game is fueled and supported by its community. The same could happen for the dance world if we are willing to share the objectives of our team with our audience.

⁵⁵ David Adler, "The Longest Games in MLB History," MLB, Last modified, February 24, 2022, <https://www.mlb.com/news/longest-games-in-baseball-history-c275773542>.

⁵⁶ Tom Verducci, "All the Changes Coming to Baseball in 2021," Sports Illustrated, Last modified "April 1, 2021, <https://www.si.com/mlb/2021/04/01/mlb-rule-changes-2021-shift-pitch-clock-extra-innings>.

American Utopia

The term *spectacle* is seen repeatedly in the language of today's Musical Theatre. American singer and songwriter David Byrne challenges this term in the Broadway show *American Utopia*. "What if we could eliminate everything from the stage, except the stuff we care about most? Without cables or wires, what would be left? Well, it would be us and you. And that's what this show is."⁵⁷ Using his musical works with the band *Talking Heads*, Byrne leads two dancers and nine musicians (or more depending on the evening) to explore a musical without spectacle and storyline. Just a theme of the title to "not be told" to an audience, "but experienced."⁵⁸

Annie-B Parson, the choreographer of the production, was interested in working with the musicians to use the entire stage space and participate in movements just as the dancers. Prop masters created special harnesses to secure their instruments to their bodies to make this possible. These harnesses may resemble those you see used in marching bands with changes of capabilities to match each performer and instrument's needs. Not only did Parson need to coordinate the movement of the physical bodies, but she needed to organize players efficiently based on the song's needs. "I hope that the show can influence the way people can look at theatre and movement in theatre as larger than the way we typically think of choreography," Parson says. "Normally, we think of choreography as steps, but it is an organization

⁵⁷ "David Byrne's American Utopia (2020): Official Trailer HBO," 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg4hcgjDPc>.

⁵⁸ David Byrne, "A Note from David," Accessed April 1, 2021, <https://americanutopiabroadway.com/david-letter>.

of bodies in space.”⁵⁹ With this change in perspective, Parson explores the very definition of theatre movement and choreography.

Where is Theatrical Play in Dance?

In 2012, I assisted in the choreography of my very first musical for Florida State College at Jacksonville’s *Summer Musical Theatre Experience*.⁶⁰ It was the first time I was given a physical script to influence my movement. The characters, songs, and contexts were already made. I was given a structure to guide my strategic planning to obtain the objectives of the musical’s storyline. My job was to instigate ways to make it happen through choreography. Never before this experience did, I realize how much the theatre and dance world intersect with one another.

Choreographers, directors, vocal directors, sound designers, set designers, stage managers, and even more folks of a production team use their crafts to portray themes of plot points, character analysis, character relationships with both humans and objects, and stories written in a single script. This collaborative player found a world of collaboration, and I invested time to experience and learn more about it.

Through the years, I have continued my love of choreographing for theatre in multiple musicals, plays, workshops, and Thespian Festivals. There is comfort in the lyrics, scripts, and direction notes. There is excitement in expressing these ideas

⁵⁹ Dan Meyer, “Why Choreographer Annie B-Parson Needed Harnesses for Broadway’s American Utopia,” Playbill, September 21, 2021, <https://playbill.com/article/why-choreographer-annie-b-parson-needed-harnesses-to-complete-her-vision-for-broadways-american-utopia>.

⁶⁰ “Summer Musical Theatre Experience,” Florida State College at Jacksonville, 2021, <https://www.fscj.edu/campuses/south-campus/nathan-h-wilson-center-for-the-arts/summer-musical-theatre-experience>.

through various realms of movement. As an artist, the gameplay in this genre is vital. Musical Theatre brought moments where I could be clever with my thoughts and sassy choices while abiding by the rules I was invited to follow. The phrase *yes and* is permitted and often praised in its practice. This, along with several other skills found in theatre, was never explained to me in my dance education, or at least no one ever expressed the phrase was a possibility in the space. Through this knowledge and practice, I gained the confidence to create strategies in the game of movement. The game of movement can be defined as fulfilling an objective through physical manipulations of rules and procedures. I am invested in further investigating the relationship between theatre and dance. While these two worlds seem to go hand in hand, education is absent on how to utilize their toolsets to benefit the other.

I go back to my question: *What is the invitation to dance?* I think of the world of musical theatre and my attendance at Broadway musicals. They sell tickets. I think of musical concerts. They sell tickets. While some companies in the dance world sell a decent number of tickets, we must recognize that our craft draws a very definitive audience. While audiences will watch musical classics such as *West Side Story*, *Wicked*, and *Hamilton*, I question how many of those audience members have witnessed a version of *Giselle* or Twyla Tharp's *Upper Room*. It's collaborative artists such as the team of *American Utopia* that are not only holding high standards of performance for their art but the mission to engage multiple types of audience members. *American Utopia* questions what is defined as a musical as it contains no storyline narrative. However, in its first weeks of running on Broadway, it was a front

runner at the box office, grossing approximately \$1,163,218 in a week.⁶¹ Of course, there are various reasons why this may have happened, especially holding such a famous name as David Byrne and a fantastic marketing campaign. This research must recognize *American Utopia*'s efforts in a call for change: through its movement, its themed performance mission, and its definition of what classical musical theatre could be. I'm curious if the dance world followed suit to performance strategies such as this and what changes could be made for the continued efforts of our artistic craft.

Who Owns the Playground?

This thesis raises questions surrounding the term ownership in the multiple instances where the player's made decisions to reach the performative objective. Although I was the facilitating authority by creating rules and games for the players to follow, the works were visually comprehended as they were by using movement patterns the dancers made through improvisational games. In the research process of this thesis, I have questioned putting my name in the program as Choreographer. Am I genuinely creating the movement witnessed when I provide a movement composition and allow the dancers to disassemble the structure? We mentioned Annie B Parson's exploration of the term *choreography* involving physical embodiment and the overall movement of multiple people, props, set design, and lighting design on

⁶¹ Ryan McPhee, "Grosses Analysis: American Utopia Continues Euphoric Broadway Run," Playbill, Last modified February 3, 2020, <https://playbill.com/article/grosses-analysis-american-utopia-continues-euphoric-broadway-run>.

stage. Before this writing process, I considered *choreography* to be defined as an individual's organized movement patterns in collaboration with other moving bodies.

If there is a desire to revisit the work, who holds the authority to restructure the work? In the dance world, if a piece is to be reformed with new dancers, questions of Intellectual Property come into play when the performance's objective is financially profitable to a company. Cornell Law School defines Intellectual Property as "any product of the human intellect that the law protects from unauthorized use by others".⁶² This is when documenting and copyrighting the work is imperative not only for the integrity of the work itself but to give proper credit where credit is due and potentially a paycheck. However, when the dancer's decisions may affect the developing structure of a work, how should this be adequately documented to be listed as work with Copyright? Choreographic Copyright law includes a section describing "a work that is based on or derived from one or more preexisting works, regardless of whether the preexisting work is a choreographic work, pantomime, or any other type of work listed in section 102 (a) of the Copyright Act" is called a Derivative Choreography.⁶³ Would choreographic works that involve moments of play need to fall under this category constantly?

There is a great pride to have your name as Choreographer of work and much debate about including mentions in programs such as *In Collaboration with Dancers*. *In my later research, I would like to place a call of action on this dilemma.* In some

⁶² "Intellectual Property," Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, Accessed April 10, 2022, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/intellectual_property.

⁶³ "Copyright Registration of Choreography and Pantomime," US Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Last modified March 2021, <https://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ52.pdf>.

instances, should we (as in creators of movement ideas) have a different title, such as *Under Directorship*, *Lead Movement Collaborator*, *Facilitator*, etc., or should we allow previous traditions to continue for the sake of continuity? In moments where the choreographer may forgo entire decision-making in the rehearsal process, where does ownership of the work itself lie? Here, I reference this research's previous definition of *ownership* as a product that an individual contributed and created substantial portions of. I will reveal that at this moment, I am considering what this change of title could be concerning the new works I am forming.

An Equation of Structure

Throughout this research, various forms of play are added or subtracted to an organized assembly of rules to equate to a specific objective. Reevaluating the fundamental structures of *The Crossword Experiment*, *Veiled*, and *Risk of Play*, I thought of a basic equation to document the outcomes.

$$\textit{Play} + \textit{Structure} = \textit{Objective}$$

The equation was formed because of my interest in wordplay, a new form of gameplay observing and evaluating the use of terms to fulfill a desired outcome. This form of equation making is defined as a construction of wordplay to consider terms of *play*, *structure*, and *objective* in performance. Revisiting basic mathematical expressions, we must remember that a term in addition or subtraction of another term equals a constant. In this case, the term *play*, in addition to a *structure*, equals a constant *objective* of the performance. The terms will change for various obstacles, objectives needed to be completed, or other variables the performance world runs into

through its creative practice. For example, when creating an equation to represent my educational history, I formed:

$$\textit{Curriculum Structure} - \textit{Individual Play} = \textit{Visual Uniformity Objective}$$

This equation morphed again when describing my experience performing with Jacksonville Dance Theatre, which promoted individual artistic missions.

$$\textit{Individual Play} + \textit{Performance Structure} = \textit{Visual Uniformity Objective}$$

This evaluation practice is a visual representation of what constructs performance values. The visual noticing of the changes in this equation may call for change in performative, creative, and teaching practices. In future research, I am curious about what these formulas may display.

Taking Charge of the Playground

As a reminder, the terms *winning* and *losing* derive from the competition. They are associated with the success or failure of completing an objective. Each human has a choice within their strategy (process) and a selection of the final purpose (objective). They have a choice in how to better themselves: in how to play the game. In my choreographic process, I value the invitation of theme and choice-making. Once I solidify rules, I invite various movement strategies to complete the objective, voicing my permission to the dancers to make decisions while strategizing patterns of inquiry to the overall work. My work holds honesty and vulnerability. My movement research focuses on the unpredictable nature of objective driving improvisation while following structural familiarity. The structure derives from rules for the movement that artists are guided to follow to complete an objective. I practice testing the body's

physical ability and knowledge to solve problems. This often results in athletic, quirky, and engaging work. I am ignited by the more minor intricacies of gestural meaning to invite possibilities of narration or relation for my dancers, audience, and collaborators.

I have prompted new strategies in my art of play through my competitive practice in the classroom, rehearsal space, and studio. In this thesis investigation of just one word, *play*, I have found new vocabulary strategies to fulfill the objectives of my artistic practice.



Figure 2: Developed Word Web of Play

My competitive self will continually reevaluate my strategies in creative play, just if I permit myself to do so. Let's not forget our internal game of this paper. In the 16,837 words of this writing, I only used the word *play* 33 times, most of which were in this closing chapter and excluding moments mentioning players and stating the titled investigation of *Risk of Play*. I have found deeper instigations of my artistic and pedagogical practice by constantly practicing changes in strategies. I've created an

invitation to evaluate my role in the innovations of the dance world and discover an objective to obtain. The words objective, strategy, permission, and ownership are now primarily utilized in my artistic practice. It's time to redefine those words and their intention in my approach to reach a new definition of the terms for myself. I'm no longer bored and now take charge of the playground.

Glossary

Agency: This references an individual's desire to complete gameplay actions.

Authority: Often referencing a person holding power to make decisions for others to complete an objective.

Body: This references an individual's physical facility used to complete the movement.

Equations: The construction of wordplay to evaluate terms of play, structure, and objective in performance.

Gameplay: This references a process of fulfilling an objective through physical and mental manipulations of rules and procedures developed through a structural practice.

Instinct: This references an individual's first thought best-thought decision making influenced by previous experiences.

Invitation: This term stems from an individual being requested to participate in an event or activity in this research.

Losing: The evaluation of a player failing to complete an objective.

Ownership: This research questions this term in dance. Typically, this references an individual's possession of physical property. In dance, this term refers to whether an individual contributed and created a substantial portion of a product. For example, the title Choreographer is given to an individual who made a significant portion of a dance being performed. Therefore, they hold ownership of the work.

Performance Play: This references a presentation using improvisational strategies to complete the overall objective.

Permission: This references an individual allowing and empowering another individual to participate.

Strategy: This references a player's process of participation in the game.

Structure: This references an organized set of rules a player is guided to follow to complete the objective successfully.

Winning: The evaluation of a player successfully completing an objective.

Wordplay: This references a new form of gameplay, observing and evaluating terms used to fulfill a desired outcome.

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