

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: TONIGHT WE MAY WIN: CHALLENGING
THE UNIVERSAL THROUGH QUEER
EMBODIMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Rebecca Anne Steinberg, Master of Fine Arts,
2024

Thesis Directed By: Dr. Maura Keefe, Director of the School of
Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies and
Clarice Smith Chair of Dance

I sit in this chair how I always do, snug to the left side. I feel the warm hum of my laptop resting on my thighs. I feel the external rotation of my hips that allows my legs to casually cross with my feet cradled by the ottoman. I feel the spiral of my spine supporting a slightly forward head that looks down at the computer screen as I simultaneously sense the weight of chronic pain pooling heavy in my tired bones. I come to write words on this page through a commitment to embodiment as a state of profound possibility. As dance scholar Susan Foster suggests in her essay *Choreographing History*, “I am a body writing, I am a bodily writing.” I write through, with, and from embodiment. I define embodiment as a state where one has a heightened consciousness of their sensorium through acknowledged sensation. This state of awareness through sensation grounds the “self” in the body. Through this lens, embodiment is a mobilization that has the power to redefine how queerness is enacted and perceived through the medium of live performance. My dance thesis work, *Tonight, we, may win*, wields the social commentary of this position of audience privilege as farce. In this work, the dancers engage in what I’ve named “performing performativity.” Performing performativity makes transparent the

exchange of currency between audience member and performer. Performing performativity functions in *Tonight, we, may win* as both a lens through which to view the performance and a performative state the dancers enact. The performers and the choreographer together have the power to enact possibility through this viable exchange. The potential of this enacted possibility is extensive, complex, nuanced, and political. It is an exchange that requires a book of its own to justly unpack. Although this is not the space for that unpacking, this is a space where I utilize my thesis choreography as a primary example where the power of possibility through embodiment is examined thoroughly through various theoretical lenses and multiple works of performance art. The epicenter of this physical and theoretical research revolves around the development and execution my thesis choreography, *Tonight, we, may win*, performed February 16-18, 2024 at University of Maryland, College Park. The enacted examples of a body first politic are constructed in this research through the vehicle of my choreographic work. I enact a body first politic in my work and I use the following chapters to bring in the choreographic voices of both my own work and dance makers and performers who succeed in challenging the impositions of the cisheteropatriarchy through queer embodiment. In the first chapter I provide an introduction the theoretical and choreographic groundwork of this world through the lens of queer embodied subjecthood. In Chapter 2, I use a solo work I created in 2022, titled *Soft Caution*, to activate choreography as feminist knowledge production through movement analysis and feminist theory. In the third chapter, I evoke failure as both a queer action and choreographic tool and argue for queerness as a technology in live performance. I bring in the choreographic works of *Age & Beauty: Part 3* by Miguel Gutierrez and *Black Hole* by Shamel Pitts as examples of live performances that make queerness as a technology visibly tangible. In Chapter 4, I closely analyze the lyrics of “I Don’t Care Much” from the musical *Cabaret* through black feminism,

performance studies, queer studies, and beyond to dissect the thin façade of queer apathy in its application to performance, queerness, communal grief, and more. In the final chapter, I excavate both the process and the product of my thesis choreography *Tonight, we, may win*. Through movement analysis and rehearsal reflections I endeavor to add depth and dimension to the ephemeral world created and left on stage during my thesis concert. This research privileges embodiment, communal care, and queerness through the vehicle of live performance to argue for the enactment of inclusive and equitable futures on the stage and beyond.

TONIGHT WE MAY WIN: CHALLENGING THE UNIVERSAL THROUGH
QUEER EMBODIMENT AND PERFORMANCE

by

Rebecca Anne Steinberg

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Maura Keefe, Chair
Kendra Portier
Sara Pearson
Alvin Mayes

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Chapter 1: Queerly Embodied Subjecthood

I sit in this chair how I always do, snug to the left side. I feel the warm hum of my laptop resting on my thighs. I feel the external rotation of my hips that allows my legs to casually cross with my feet cradled by the ottoman. I feel the spiral of my spine supporting a slightly forward head that looks down at the computer screen as I simultaneously sense the weight of chronic pain pooling heavy in my tired bones. I come to write words on this page through a commitment to embodiment as a state of profound possibility. As dance scholar Susan Foster suggests in her essay *Choreographing History*, “I am a body writing, I am a bodily writing.”¹ I write through, with, and from embodiment. I define embodiment as a state where one has a heightened consciousness of their sensorium through acknowledged sensation. This state of awareness through sensation grounds the “self” in the body. Through this lens, embodiment is a mobilization that has the power to redefine how queerness is enacted and perceived through the medium of live performance.

In this global moment, the spring of 2024, great violence and even greater fear overwhelms our world. It is easy to become immobilized. A practiced, studied, and enacted connection to the body is a connection to the extreme vulnerability and fragility of what it means to be in relationship both to oneself and to others. Embodiment is both presence and a present action enacted simultaneously. The

¹ Foster, Susan Leigh. *Choreographing history*, 3. Indiana University Press, 2006.

potential influence of this simultaneity is electrified by live performance. When one is witnessed in their embodiment, their self cannot be denied, it simply is.

As a dancer, choreographer, and scholar who studies the moving body, I invest in a career where I witness, experience, and research the daily impact embodiment has on individuals and communities through somatic knowledge. Somatic knowledge and its applications can mobilize both singular bodies and communities into action, connection, and healing. For the purpose of this research, the mobilization of bodies both singularly and in relationship cannot be separated from a dual lens of perception, both perception of self and how self is perceived by others. Perception is a physical reminder that as modern dance choreographer Bebe Miller astutely states, “we are always alone and we are always in relationship.”² I see Miller’s words as a call to the phenomenology of perception. In order to acknowledge that one is alone and in relationship, one must first perceive the difference between being alone and being in relationship. Once this acknowledgement is present as an understanding, one can recognize aloneness and relationality as simultaneously enacted.

In gender studies scholar Judith Butler’s seminal book, *Gender Trouble*, she examines the limits of both perception and representation as it extends to the non-exhaustive category of “women” inside the intersections of politics, race, gender, and class. Butler’s work dissects the constitution of subjecthood and how said constitution is informed by the impositions of the state.³ In speaking to subjecthood through both

² Miller, Bebe. “Solo/Duo Dancing.” *Bearnstow*. Lecture, August 2023.

³ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2006.

political and linguistic representation Butler states, “the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.”⁴ To recapitulate is to ask, who meets the hegemonic requirements for their humanity to be seen by the state and who does not. This linguistic imperative is political as said subjecthood, or lack thereof, plays out through marginalized bodies in an exchange of power and capital in this country. This chapter examines embodied subjecthood through its relationship to queerness and dance performance.

Butler’s argument makes salient the connection between marginalized identity and cultural value to the state. To expound this connection, I argue that the qualifications for being a subject, as defined by Butler, also contends with one’s ability to be perceived societally as a mind and not a body. To be perceived as a mind and not a body is to be seen as the dominant, ruling class. To be seen as a mind is to be seen as someone who is educated and “privileged” enough inside of western, white supremacist, and capitalist structures to publicly perform leaving the body behind.⁵ For performers enacting live dance performance, this “privilege” is physically overturned.⁶ The upending of this privilege can have profound ramifications. First, there is the irony that in a country where embodiment is often separated from one’s public performativity, spectators spend the currencies of both money and time to

⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2.

⁵ Public performance in this context refers to a person’s performance of the everyday. I refer to the masking and performance that takes effect in public space. Live performance in the context of art making is a structured, intentional version of public performance. I have a theoretical interest in dissecting the physical, social, and societal differences between these two locales of public performance but it is beyond the scope of this current research project.

⁶ I place privilege in quotes here because I use the word to encapsulate two opposing meanings. The first is the acknowledgement that there is immense privilege in being born with the positionality and/or sociopolitical circumstances to be able to be seen as a mind by North American society. Second, and just as importantly, it is not a privilege to leave the body behind. This research insists on embodiment through the process and enactment of live performance as an act of protest, futurism, and agency.

perceive the embodiment of others. This valuation as a way to witness embodiment, seen more widely across sports entertainment than the arts can result in one of two conclusions. The first is that the spectator utilizes their currencies of time and money as a way to observe the “other.” This observation keeps the audience member separate from those performing. In this first instance, the performers may be viewed as solely performing a service, and in doing so, the space between audience and performer bodies maintains an unembodied and unaltered separation.

My dance thesis work, *tonight, we, may win*, wields the social commentary of this position of audience privilege as farce. In this work, the dancers engage in what I’ve named “performing performativity.” Performing performativity makes transparent the exchange of currency between audience member and performer. Performing performativity functions in *Tonight, we, may win* as both a lens through which to view the performance and a performative state the dancers enact. The dancers are self-aware that they collectively are the “others” and that they are here to perform for the audience. In the first section of the work, the dancers square up to the audience and repeat the line of text, “I’m your host.” Not only do they deliver this text stating their positionality as hosts of the audience, but they do so in an overperformed manner that reads as slightly off kilter. The performers lean far into this charade. It is a goal of mine that through this relational exchange both audience and performers alike feasibly understand that they share a social responsibility. The direct implication of the audience breaks the fourth wall and allows the performers to say to the audience, *we both know we’re here to play the roles we’re enacting. We, the performers, know we are here to host you, the audience, to perform for you, and*

subsequently, to entertain you. Now that we've implicated you, the audience, we challenge you to perceive and ultimately acknowledge the metrics of this exchange.

The metrics of this exchange have created the conditions for the performers to perform performativity. I argue that Butler's definition of subject includes being seen societally as a mind and not a body. Furthermore, I deliberately built my thesis work to create a queerly liminal space where the work challenges the normative exchange of performer seen by the audience as "other." I endeavor for this challenge of the normative to allow the audience to see the performers concurrently as both minds and bodies. In *Tonight, we, may win* through the audience's potential perception and acknowledgement of this participatory performative exchange, a palpable tension builds that proves at various times humorous, uncomfortable, off putting, and charged.

A second potential conclusion of this participatory exchange is that the audience member uses their currencies of time and money to observe another person or people's embodiment as a way to access their own. Although there are multiple intricacies of power inside this exchange between audience and performer, live performance exposes audiences to embodiment. This exposure traditionally takes place in a stage space where the audience or recipients are not visible. The audience traditionally sits in the dark, a space where the lack of light aids in releasing social pressure to perceive themselves or each other. In many proscenium theater spaces, the house lights, or the lights that are meant to light the audience, are commonly turned off as the performance is set to begin. This action executes a contradictory privacy for audience members. Audience members can be transported to a place where they may

be surrounded by people in a physically similar social positioning to their own, yet simultaneously freed from the tyranny of constant perception. In this space, the darkness aids in allowing viewers to connect to the performer's embodiment as a bridge to accessing their own.

The performers and the choreographer together have the power to enact possibility through this viable exchange. The potential of this enacted possibility is extensive, complex, nuanced, and political. It is an exchange that requires a book of its own to justly unpack. Although this is not the space for that unpacking, this is a space where I utilize my thesis choreography as a primary example where the power of possibility through embodiment is examined thoroughly through various theoretical lenses and multiple works of performance art. The epicenter of this physical and theoretical research revolves around the development and execution my thesis choreography, *Tonight, we, may win*, performed February 16-18, 2024 at University of Maryland, College Park.

As dominant culture is seen to speak with the mind through the tyranny of the cisheteropatriarchy, why would the innate knowing of the body be trusted? this cultural fear of embodiment creates a falsely occupied space between one's body and one's mind. When the physical employment of the body beyond normative daily function (and by extension, the acknowledgement of the body through daily labor) becomes a choice, one meets the qualification, using Butler's language, to be granted subjecthood in this country and is therefore more readily represented.⁷ This placement of mind dominance is rooted in a history of racism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy

⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2.

in the United States. As Argentine philosopher and activist María Lugones states in her work, *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, “The European, bourgeois, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason.”⁸ A being of mind and reason states that one’s being is in service of one’s mind. I argue a queering of this lens is a mobilization, literally and figuratively, to validate subjecthood through the body first. Subjecthood validated through the body first could radically shift our culture’s relationship to embodiment as a generative tool.

In order to validate subjecthood through the body, it is consequential to identify how cisnormative-heteropatriarchy manipulates perceived subjecthood and as a result manipulates the amount of space one is able to take based on the gender presentation of their body. Gender, both as an identity and presentation, is one example of a construct that has a direct correlation to the public space one is granted from their body. I share an example below that illustrates the inherent adversity for any gender identity outside of the cisgendered male to gain physical, political, and social space from their bodies, altering the value of their perceived subjecthood by the power elite.

Through embodiment, many trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks do laudable internal and external work to stop leaving their bodies behind. This is a culturally imposed labor made necessary to embody an identity outside of the socially constructed binary they were born into and assigned. As poet and scholar of

⁸ Lugones, María, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654>, 743.

trans theory Cameron Awkward-Rich defines transgender in *The Terrible We*, “it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place- rather than any particular destination or mode of transition that best characterizes the concept of transgender.”⁹ Beyond acknowledgement, it takes an intimate knowing of oneself to understand that one’s gender exists beyond the socially bound and imposed gender binary. How would one know their body is different without physically experiencing the sensation of those differences? This physical experiencing is important to acknowledge as a form of somatic or embodied knowledge. This accrued somatic knowledge is developed through embodiment. Said acknowledgement can be preceded by an experience of noticing or perceiving one’s body to be and/or feel different from peers. This embodied knowledge is inextricable from a person’s understanding of themselves in the world. Folks who identify across the gender spectrum exist in a world where they are often confronted by a performed binary that “others” their embodied knowledge. This othering does not grant the cisgendered privilege of leaving the body behind.

Butler speaks to the impossibility of separating gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is produced and maintained.¹⁰ I argue that it is the political and cultural intersections in and of themselves that aid in mobilizing gender. Gender is mobilized socially though politically encoded, interactive bodies. This mobilization replicates the culturally hegemonic privilege of being seen as a mind first and a body second. The construct of gender is already alive and in motion

⁹ Awkward-Rich, Cameron. “Introduction: On Staying with the Terrible We.” In *The Terrible We: Thinking with Trans Maladjustment*, 1–30. Duke University Press, 2022.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vr9cxt.4>, 23.

¹⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

through our sociality, therefore subsequent action is the acknowledgement of what can be learned from trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks' embodiment of gender. This argument adds to the impossibility for non-cisgendered folks to separate their subjecthood from their body inside the political and cultural constraints they confront daily in public life. The presence and present action of knowing one's transness is embodiment. Trans embodiment may not yet be culturally sanctioned, but that does not make it any less profound. Rather than a singular notion of identity, identity could be acknowledged through the infinite ways in which one can constitute, live in, and express subjecthood through embodied knowledge. Through this multiplicity, the somatic knowledge activated by trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary folks can be viewed as an effectual knowing, or a futuring to move towards. This "body first" politic lays the groundwork for all genders to learn more about their own sensorium through enacted examples of queer embodiment.

The enacted examples of this body first politic are constructed in this research through the vehicle of my choreographic work. I enact a body first politic in my work and I use the following chapters to bring in the choreographic voices of both my own work and dance makers and performers who succeed in challenging the impositions of the cisheteropatriarchy through queer embodiment. In Chapter 2, I use a solo work I created in 2022, titled *Soft Caution*, to activate choreography as feminist knowledge production through movement analysis and feminist theory. In the third chapter, I evoke failure as both a queer action and choreographic tool and argue for queerness as a technology in live performance. I bring in the choreographic works of *Age &*

Beauty: Part 3 by Miguel Gutierrez and *Black Hole* by Shamel Pitts as examples of live performances that make queerness as a technology visibly tangible. In Chapter 4, I closely analyze the lyrics of “I Don’t Care Much” from the musical *Cabaret* through black feminism, performance studies, queer studies, and beyond to dissect the thin façade of queer apathy in its application to performance, queerness, communal grief, and more. In the final chapter, I excavate both the process and the product of my thesis choreography *Tonight, we, may win*. Through movement analysis and rehearsal reflections I endeavor to add depth and dimension to the ephemeral world created and left on stage during my thesis concert. This research privileges embodiment, communal care, and queerness through the vehicle of live performance to argue for the enactment of inclusive and equitable futures on the stage and beyond.

Chapter 2: Choreography as Feminist Knowledge Production, Contradiction, and *Tableau Vivant*

An understandable subsequent question may be, why choreography as a place to theorize through the embodiment of queer subjecthood? The answer is because choreography can be a site for feminist knowledge production. In order to begin to answer this question, I choose to look to the body of my own choreographic history that cumulatively engendered my thesis work, *Tonight, we, may win*. Through this historical archive, I extract examples of how the visual and physical journeys of feminist knowledge production are embedded in the living tissue of my choreographic practice. In my desire to queer a comprehensive throughline between my choreographic and theoretical research, I choose to recount this archive non-linearly. I begin with a 2022 work titled *Soft Caution*, a solo work that served as the theoretical and physical preface for the building of *Tonight, we, may win*.

I created *Soft Caution* in 2022 through a collaboration with performer Emilia Bruno. This work is about queerness, it is about failure, it is about simplicity and excess, and it is about time. It is important to begin by noting that this dance work does not *represent* feminist knowledge production, but the living entity of the work is itself feminist knowledge production.¹¹ For the context of this work, I define feminist knowledge production as a produced entity that queers cisheteropatriarchy through its enactment. I specify between representation of feminist knowledge production and

¹¹ As an emerging scholar, I also produce written research that represents feminist knowledge production. This work has equal value to the process and production of a work of live performance. Furthermore, each have different audience, affects, and implications. For this work, I focus on the living entities of my work as a choreographer which is feminist knowledge production rather than being a representation of feminist knowledge production through written scholarly research alone.

embodiment of feminist knowledge production to emphasize embodiment as action. Representation of feminist knowledge production is essential, but it is not and cannot replace embodied action. In the creation of *Soft Caution*, I did not conceive of and then enact a work of feminist knowledge production. I created this work through a duet between my own body and a microphone stand. Through the refining of an improvised duet, an embodied act of feminist knowledge production was generated. This work is a comprehensive embodiment and performance of personal, conceptual, and theoretical beliefs in action.

The work begins with Bruno, a trans masc, non-binary human, entering the stage space to walk directly to a mini orange traffic cone that is on an island of its own in the furthest downstage right corner. This cone is a bright, erect sculptural figure that the dancer picks up in order to place the center of their pelvis exactly where the cone had stood moments before. The performer then relaxes back onto their elbows with their legs spread open, creating unobstructed space between their crotch and the audience members in front of them. They own this place of rest with their frog legs open wide, exuding autonomy and subverting heteropatriarchal gaze by asking in confidence for their trans, non-binary body to be seen.¹²

Theory lives both through writing calls to action on the page and through the physical expression of live performance. I utilize the italicized excerpts of movement analysis above and below to overlay said analysis upon my choreographic voice. This process of overlay efforts to provide a perspective of distillation; distillation that shines a light on the feminist knowledge production inside this solo. I respect the dance as living theory. As such, movement analysis aids in bringing the reader to the present moment, recounting the dance through its physicality as though it is being experienced in real time. This living theory will distill its own meanings through each

¹² *Soft Caution*, Vimeo, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/868103726/bd04f9360e>.

audience member's or reader's inception and active participation in its experience. I do not negate that process today by doing the labor of extraction from my singular, biased perspective, but simply wish to highlight one important aspect of this choreography's life, its embodied feminist knowledge production.

In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, feminist writer and independent scholar Sara Ahmed defines feminism as “how we survive the consequences of what we come up against by offering new way of understanding what we come up against.”¹³¹⁴ Creating choreography is offering a new way of understanding what I have come up against. Through Ahmed's words, feminism and choreography imbricate definitionally. I distinctly feel each body memory that shows up in the vocabulary of this choreography. The vulnerability of sharing these body memories with an audience is one constitution representative of both resistance and protest. Sharing these vulnerabilities physically is feminist knowledge production as both resistance and protest against normalizing inequities and violence toward queer bodies. These vulnerabilities are enacted through the relationship between the performer and the microphone stand. My initial improvisatory gravitation toward a microphone stand in relationship to my own body led to a multifaceted captivation toward researching task-based duets between microphone stands and queer, femme, and/or non-binary dancers. Microphone stands are sculptural and utilitarian. Their geometry quickly becomes visually harsh when partnered by the softness of the human form. As the body relates to the microphone stand inside of various tasks, it can slide between

¹³ Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, 22.

¹⁴ Ahmed, Sara. “Bio,” Sara Ahmed, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.sarahahmed.com/bio-cv>.

metaphor and abstraction. Its designed use is both mundane and excessive inside of differing contexts. These contradictions present endless physical possibility. They animate the inanimate and disturb the assumption that a microphone stand is a still, vertical object in relationship to a relatively still, vertical body.

Bruno hinges backward to meet the floor, attempting to keep the microphone stand in its triangular stature balancing on their sternum. In doing so, they are establishing a tenuous relationship to both risk and failure. A layered gender commentary quickly superimposes their relationship to risk and failure. The microphone stand morphs as Bruno erects the boom arm to rest on their pubic bone as they lie supine underneath it's weight. This nod to phallocentrism is a moment of clear and purposeful imagery that reclaims the gender neutrality of "big dick energy," a moment that queers a likely identifiable and subversive image. This moment of highlighting the gender in objects and the gender through objects is in and of itself is a contribution to feminist knowledge production.

Protest as performance; Performance as protest. This analogous relationship continues through Ahmed's statement, "I did not understand that feminism was a way of challenging the universal."¹⁵ Feminist knowledge production and choreography are both a way of challenging the universal. Choreography can be a site for world building. When the universal is not assumed, whether it's the gender associated with phallic imagery, or anything for that matter, the oppressive blanket of cisheteropatriarchy, rearing its harmful head of "isms," can be lifted. This action allows for the discovery of the queer and unknown richness of what lies underneath—fertile, expressive, nascent ground.

I place women and gender studies scholar AnaLouise Keating in support of my argument that both feminist knowledge production and choreography are ways of

¹⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017, 29.

challenging the universal. In her book, *Beyond Intersectionality*, she quotes Indigo Violet, “We’ve been inspired to mobilize an intuitive, practical, and intellectual knowledge that our togetherness can transport us to new worlds.”¹⁶ I respond to this call with choreography as a means of mobilized togetherness. The act of audience and performer meeting is communing for togetherness as assent to collective transportation. I am compelled to clarify that mobilized world building inside of choreographic process can include all or no interrogation of what the choreographer views as universal. Choreography can be a site for feminist knowledge production just as easily as it can be a site for sexism, racism, heteronormativity, and ableism. One of my primary criticisms of much contemporary dance performance today is a contradiction between its inherent progressive nature as a world builder and a lack of field-wide interrogation of white supremacy, cis-privilege, ableism, and heteronormativity as it is regularly enacted on stage. Dance making *can be both* an opportunity to interrogate the inherent inequities of being a marginalized society member and an opportunity to physicalize, or make real, the possibility of new futures. Just as theory can fail feminist knowledge production, choreography can fail feminist knowledge production. Each viewing of this dance, in all its imperfections, hopes to explode the universal into irreconcilable pieces.

This microphone stand, through its relationship to Bruno’s body straddles the space between a vehicle for liberation and one for demise. It has the power to both oppress and to set free. In the matter of a few seconds, Bruno has just used the boom arm as something that has the potential to hang them and just a moment later, as something they are hanging from.

¹⁶ Keating, AnaLouise “Beyond Intersectionality: Theorizing Interconnectivity with/in This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,” essay, in *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change* (University of Illinois Press 2013).

In gender studies scholar Grace Kyongwon Hong's book, *Neoliberal Disavowal and the Politics of the Impossible*, Hong expounds upon this life/death binary I've exemplified through the two neighboring actions detailed in the italicized movement analysis above, "These social movements of the post World War II period were so fundamentally concerned with the life/death binary because this binary was exactly what made racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference coterminous with social devaluation and vulnerability to physical death in the earlier era of racial capital."¹⁷

Hong's work speaks to this life/death binary and this solo embodies it in the momentary contrast of the imagery between one motion and the next. Hong details how minoritized bodies are more susceptible to premature death which creates a link between one's minoritized identities and death. Bruno's solo body as one of multiple minoritized identities theatricalizes the relationship between themselves and an object. This object, through its choreographic activation, in a single moment can either cause Bruno harm or give Bruno agency. I draw upon the embodiment of the heightened nature of this risk to physicalize Hong's theory. Hong continues, "The selective protection of certain racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects actually *further* obfuscates this mutually constitutive relationship between protectable life and ungrievable death."¹⁸

*Bruno catches the microphone stand on their back, assisting its weight toward the ground and then abruptly extracting their body from its weight to escape it. This paradoxical action harkens back to Hong's language of a "mutually constitutive relationship between protectable life and ungrievable death."*¹⁹ Bruno reclaims their

¹⁷ Hong, Grace Kyongwon *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 10.

¹⁸ Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference*, 12.

¹⁹ Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference*, 12.

autonomy in deciding how the weight and precarious nature of this sharply angular object will interact with the softness of their form. They both carry it and escape it in just one moment to the next.

Choreography as a site of feminist knowledge production is not a question nor an answer but a practice. I learn from scholar, intersectional feminist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde as she described her work as posing “a question that can never be addressed, but that must be continually addressed, enacting a temporality of suspension rather than resolution.”²⁰ *Soft Caution* is a temporality of suspension. The performer and audience enter into an agreement that allows a suspension of time where motion, action, multitudes, centuries, lineages, communities, and more move together inside coterminous time. The act and labor of continual address is feminist knowledge production. Feminist knowledge production is defined in of the places, people, histories, and action where it is found. Feminist knowledge production is found in this chapter in a relationship between a dancer, a microphone stand, and a small orange traffic cone.

To further contextualize my present research, I continue back almost a decade. It is through my last three years immersed in graduate study that I am able to denote the beginning of this thesis research in 2015 with a duet I choreographed titled *Old Houses*. The very first physical action of this duet involves performer James Barrett figuring out how to mold his soft flesh in relationship to the sharpness of a four-legged chair. This task is a clear beginning to my fascination with the juxtaposition between the human body and hard, mechanical, sculptural, physically utilitarian objects. Animate and inanimate, hard and soft, alive and manmade, this juxtaposition

²⁰ Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference*, 15.

ignites added risk and vulnerability to the human body as it is perceived by an audience. The sharp and angular materiality of a microphone stand and a four-legged chair alike visually emphasize the humanity of the body they interact with. In both instances, the dancer wades between agency and the reality of physics, the physicality captures the slippery nature between control and submission.²¹

Through the depth of my graduate study, I now see the momentum of these ideas having spilled forward into my 2017 work for nine dancers titled *Next Door/At the Same Time*. This work originated through an inquiry questioning the physicalization of contradiction. In *Next Door/At the Same Time* an important physical theme first appeared in my research, *Tableau Vivant*. *Tableau Vivant* is defined as “A silent and motionless person or group of people posed and attired to represent a well-known character, event, or work of art. In extended use: a person or group of people forming a striking or picturesque scene.”²² At that time I called this compilation of bodies in mundane frontal facing poses “family portraits.” I took inspiration from the conceptualization of mundanity. Specifically, these “family portraits” were developed from the image of a department store photo center in the middle of a small town in the suburban United States. I don’t have to imagine this scene as there was one such department store photo center in the suburb I grew up in. This setting is a place where performing performativity takes to the thin façade of a cheap photo backdrop and the forced smiles of a family on a small photographable stage.

²¹ See [Appendix 1](#) for photo of James Barrett in *Old Houses*.

²² Oxford English Dictionary, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.oed.com/>.

Inserting the non-reality of this scene on stage in a very different context and setting produces both an irreverence toward mundane cultural imagery and a vulnerability in being seen that is of interest to me as a director. *Tableau vivant* stems back to contradiction, it is the act of almost moving, or almost being still. I am moved by how multiple, sculptural, meaning-making bodies can fail at stillness. I am simultaneously moved by how multiple, sculptural, virtuosic, meaning-making bodies can actively resist said virtuosity. Both failed stillness and virtuosic resistance can choreographically warp an audiences' perception of time. It is an ongoing choreographic and conceptual interest of mine for the audience to actively perceive what's being held back through virtual stillness. This audience work exists contrary to sitting back and receiving what's being given away through a common understanding of time.

Restraint in its relationship to time harkens back to feminism and feminist knowledge production. People who are AFAB (assigned female at birth) are often socialized to be virtually still. Those socialized in this heteronormative manner may be praised for being greatly unheard and unseen. Numerous contradictions exist in this destructive gender narrative. One of these contradictions is the relationship between the embedded social expectation to hold back, not show too much, not talk too much, not take up too much space, but somehow maintain one's humanity. How can a queer and/or AFAB person be their full agentic self inside of *tableau vivant* without stripping themselves of the space they take up? This presents a physically and visually compelling contradiction that foregrounded the work of *Tonight, we, may win*. I thoroughly researched and explored this contradiction in *Next Door/At the*

Same Time in 2017, in *Tonight, we, may win* in 2023, and I predict this contraction of time, gender, and socialization will continue to haunt and compel me as a director and choreographer for decades to come.

Chapter 3: Failure, and Queerness as a Technology

I have failed both at the creation of this thesis dance and this research project. Failing is a necessary step in the refusal to subscribe to what has come before and the audacity to imagine a new path forward. Failure is a rebellion against what is, in order to imagine what could be. Failure is a contradiction that creates a throughline between *Old Houses*, *Next Door/At the Same Time*, *Soft Caution*, and *Tonight, we, may win*. This throughline begins with the effort and subsequent failure in trying to create a sustainable relationship between the human form and the harshness of material objects. Using the language of my 2017 title, *Next Door/At the Same Time*, what is physically “next door” to contradiction is the ideology of failure. Failure is present in all my work. Live physical problem solving can lead to failure. Embodying contradictions can lead to failure. Testing one’s relationship to physics and gravity can lead to failure. In this chapter I look at the following questions, what is the relationship between failure and queerness? How can queer failure map futurity in live performance?

Queerness has an intimate relationship to failure. To live queerly is to powerfully fail at dominant, heteronormative society. With the support of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and his book, *Cruising Utopia*, I have chosen failure, specifically queer failure, as a grounding theoretical lens for this choreographic and theoretical research. Failure supports me in wielding queerness as a technology. Queer as a verb, an action, is ceaselessly innovating. Queerness is the carving of new pathways because they are both necessary and possible. As Muñoz asserts, queerness

can be defined as imagining new futures.²³ Acceptance of failure creates an opening where imagination can sit boldly in the driver's seat, moving forward into an unknown full of potentiality.

I employ queerness in its relationship to live performance as a technology. I define queerness as a technology as the wielding of queer theory and/or practice as a framework to analyze existing work, an existing system, or existing ideologies. This wielding is to be utilized as a tool to innovate inside of said existing structures. Queerness as a technology can be exercised to create new futures. This methodology builds on foundational queer theories by queer theorist Sara Ahmed, dance theorist Clare Croft, and queer and performance studies theorists José Muñoz and Jack Halberstam, among others. I place these queer theorists in dialogue, through movement analysis, with two choreographers whom I assert practice queerness as a technology in contemporary dance performance, Miguel Gutierrez and Shamel Pitts.²⁴²⁵ I begin with a movement analysis of Gutierrez's *Age & Beauty: Part 3* and

²³ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 11.

²⁴“Miguel Gutierrez is a multi-disciplinary dance artist living between Lenapehoking/Brooklyn, NY and Tovaangar/Los Angeles. He makes emotional work about epic and existential themes and is committed to creating space for qtbipoc folks to dream and express complexity. Recent work includes *I as another*, which looks at the virtual architecture of memory, and *sueño*, a bilingual music project of melancholy songs. His work has been presented internationally for over twenty years. He received a 2016 Doris Duke Artist Award. He is currently making a new work through the Randjelovic/Stryker Resident Commissioned Artist program at Live Arts, with additional support from On the Boards/Seattle, CAP/UCLA, MCA Chicago, ADF, MANCC, and Jacob's Pillow. He is an Associate Professor of Choreography and Vice Chair of the MFA program in UCLA's department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance.” Miguel Gutierrez, “About,” Miguel Gutierrez, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.miguelgutierrez.org/about>.

²⁵ “2020 Guggenheim Fellow Shamel Pitts is a performance artist, choreographer, conceptual artist, dancer, spoken word artist, and teacher. Born in Brooklyn New York, Shamel began his dance training at LaGuardia High School for Music & Art and the Performing Arts and, simultaneously, at The Ailey School. He is 2003 YoungArts Finalist and a first prize (level 1) winner of the YoungArts competition. Shamel then went on to receive his BFA in Dance from The Juilliard School and was awarded the Martha Hill Award for excellence in dance. He began his dance career in Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance and BJM_Danse Montreal. Shamel danced with Batsheva Dance Company for 7 years,

continue with Pitts' *Black Hole*, utilizing the conversation between these dance scholars and queer theorists as a map and a bridge.²⁶²⁷ Their works carve a map for queerness as a technology. Simultaneously, their practices construct a bridge between their performance works, queer theory, and a more inclusive and equitable future for contemporary dance performance.

Why queer dance? How can queer dance carve a new pathway of futurity for contemporary performance? Muñoz succinctly proposes what can be learned from the “queer aesthetic” which, for the purpose of this argument, I synonymize with queer dance:

Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is

under the artistic direction of Ohad Naharin and is a certified teacher of Gaga movement language. Shamel has created a triptych of award winning multidisciplinary performance art works known as his “BLACK series” which has been performed and toured extensively to many festivals around the world since 2016. He is an adjunct at The Juilliard School and has been an artist in residence at Harvard University. Shamel is the choreographer of the play “Help” by acclaimed poet and playwright Claudia Rankine, directed by Taibi Magar, and commissioned at The Shed in New York. He is the recipient of a 2018 Princess Grace Award in Choreography, a 2019 NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellowship Award winner in Choreography, and a 2020 Jacob’s Pillow artist in residence. Shamel is the artistic director/founder of TRIBE, a New York based multidisciplinary arts collective. TRIBE is a 92Y Harkness Dance Center’s Artist In Residence for the 2020-2021 season.” Shamel Pitts, “About Shamel,” Shamel Pitts, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://shamelpitts.com/bio/>.

²⁶ “*Age & Beauty Part 3: DANCER...* is the third and culminating chapter of the series. Performed by Gutierrez along with an intergenerational cast whose immediate physical representation is not “dancer,” the piece is an opportunity to envision a new future dripping with lamentation, aspiration, melancholy, fantasy and doubt - a choreography for the end of the world.” 1. Miguel Gutierrez, “Age & Beauty Part 3: Dancer or You Can Make Whatever the Fuck You Want but You’ll Only Tour Solos...,” Gutierrez, Miguel, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.miguelgutierrez.org/age-beauty-part-3-dancer-or-you-can-make-whatever-the-fuck-you-want-but-youll-only-tour-solos-or-the-powerful-people-or-we-are-strong/we-are-powerful/we-are-beautiful/we-are-divine-or->.

²⁷ “BLACK HOLE is a kaleidoscopic performance art experience using movement, light, and visual art. Although the title is derived from the cosmic phenomenon of a Black Hole, it is not a work on explaining/sharing the science of it. More so, it proposes to use the idea of the transformational environment of a Black Hole to create an atmosphere of mystery towards what it encompasses. What it can contain in it. BLACK HOLE proposes to engage an audience in a way that it condenses the experience deeply into a colorfully hypnotic journey, without exit. The work researches and shares a performance art odyssey, in which three gifted black artists (all of african diaspora) unite to create a trinity of vigor, afro-futurism, and embrace.” Shamel Pitts, “Black Hole – Trilogy and Triathlon,” Shamel Pitts, January 1, 2019, <https://shamelpitts.com/blackhole/>.

queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.²⁸

I synonymize Muñoz's eloquent statement on the "queer aesthetic" with queer dance as two acts of doing that exist as both protest and resistance to create new futures.

With the support of Muñoz and Halberstam, I look to these two performances as blueprints. Queerness is a doing, and as such, the queer performative doings of Gutierrez and Pitts bolster failure and queerness as a technology as means toward futurity in contemporary dance performance. These works have skillfully accessed queer failure as a viable path toward queer futurity. The work of Gutierrez and Pitts operates inside queer failure lineages that imbricate *Tonight, we, may win*. Through a shared queer history, my thesis work is in relationship to both *Age & Beauty: Part 3* and *Black Hole*.

Halberstam unpack the lineages of queer failure through stating, "We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities."²⁹ I engage movement analysis in this chapter as a vehicle to claim the queer failures of Gutierrez and Pitts. Through this analysis of their works, I argue that their queer failures are not only necessary but generative as a mode to illuminate their

²⁸ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

²⁹ Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

proposed queer futurities. Just as queerness is an action, a verb, so is this critical analysis. This analysis both acknowledges and honors the analytical lens of failure as a practice of futuring which in turn substantiates queerness as a technology and leaves space for the research of *Tonight, we, may win*, to do the same.

This recording of Miguel Gutierrez's *Age & Beauty: Part 3* begins with multiple titles on the screen being slowly presented one by one with the word "or" separating each. As one appears, the title before vanishes.³⁰ Before bodies are even visible, Gutierrez enacts multiplicity as a conceptual and performative value through the presented action of this title sequence. The multiplicitous nature of this beginning creates space for the messy, overlapping identities of the performers, the audience, and his queer work. The work is not singular, nor is the title. The audience is not singular, multiple titles invite multiple meanings, multiple translations, and multiple histories into the communal stage space.³¹ Multiple titles enact queer theory in that there is not just one way to be, there is not one way to make a dance, there is not just one composition of words that encapsulate the full life of a work. Dance historian and theorist Clare Croft defines queer dance in her book titled *Queer Dance* as "The pleasure and difficulties of moving between multiple, layered identities."³² Through beginning his work engaged with multiplicity, Gutierrez not only invites in the

³⁰ Gutierrez, Miguel. "Age & Beauty: Part 3," Vimeo, March 3, 2017. <https://vimeo.com/miguelgutierrez71>. My analysis of Gutierrez's work is based upon the public video on his Vimeo page from the premiere of the work on September 10, 2015 at The Fisher Center at Bard College. Retrieved in September, 2023.

³¹ The audience is seated in the round, on all sides of the stage space, literally enclosing this community through the barrier that their seats create. This barrier both protects and encloses the performance space. I name this stage and seating structure as a deliberate community construct that Gutierrez activates as a part of the world he creates.

³² Croft, Clare. *Queer Dance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017, 1.

audience through a diverse array of entry points but ignites the possibility of imagined futures before the dance has even begun. Gutierrez expertly equips the viewer with multiple lens in which to view this work. He invites our participation through multiple ways in--multiple grounding points for engaged imagination within the layered identities of queer dance. Expanding possibility is a queer act and Gutierrez eloquently expands possibility in the first moments of his work.

The physical action begins by a child, Ezra Azrieli Holzman, entering and walking with purpose around the perimeter of the stage.³³ The audience, seated on all sides, smile as Holzman passes. It is non normative to see a child performer in a professional dance performance. Many queer theorists utilize non-normativity as a pillar of queer theory. As Croft simply and powerfully states, “Queerness recognizes non-normativity.”³⁴ I recognize the audience’s smiles as an acknowledgement that their assumptions of what they were going to see and how they were going to see it is already thwarted.

The stage is bare aside from a handful of deflated disco balls that look like the life has just been beaten out of them hugging a corner of the stage space. The disco ball is queer iconography, imbued with queer history, and they lay poetically limp. These sculptures have been deflated and physically altered from their plump, circular, “gay” homeostatic state.³⁵ After Holzman’s initial lap around the space, they sit cross

³³ Gutierrez, Miguel, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.miguelgutierrez.org/age-beauty-part-3-dancer-or-you-can-make-whatever-the-fuck-you-want-but-youll-only-tour-solos-or-the-powerful-people-or-we-are-strong/we-are-powerful/we-are-beautiful/we-are-divine-or->.

³⁴ Croft, Clare. *Queer Dance*, 9.

³⁵ I put gay in quotes in this instance as a nod to the dated Oxford Languages definition of the word, “brightly colored, showy, brilliant.” Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed April 7, 2024. <https://www.oed.com/>.

legged, aligned with the disco balls across the deep diagonal of the stage space.³⁶ Gutierrez brings the audience's attention to these sculptures, their multitude of possible meanings, and allows the audience to "sit with" these imaginations while Gutierrez and Holzman do the same. Croft outlines the emergence of "queer" in queer dance as "...a force of disruption that simultaneously draws on historical genealogies of queer and freshly imagines 'queer' in the contemporary moment."³⁷ The opening of this performance has already achieved this trifecta Croft delineates-- disruption, drawing on historical genealogies of queer, and fresh imaginations rooted in the present.

Holzman eventually finds their way to the opposing corner of the space, standing outside of the disco balls on a sharp diagonal. They come to stillness and the four remaining performers enter one by one, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Alex Rodabaugh, Jennifer Rosenblit, and Gutierrez himself. The performers range in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and body type. Their costumes adorn and expose different parts of their bodies- midsections, buttocks, shoulders, and more. They wear tulle, lace, and mesh. They have paint, makeup, and stick-on gemstones asymmetrically embellishing their facial structures. They are a queer family.³⁸ They commune in various sculptural postures, seated, laying, and leaning as they begin singing one line repetitively, "Do you worry about the future?" The group primarily sings as a chorus and Holzman echoes the group call repeatedly by responding with the same line

³⁶ I am using they/them pronouns for any theorist, performer, or choreographer I speak about whose pronouns I do not know or whose pronouns are not clearly stated in their work.

³⁷ Croft, Clare. *Queer Dance*, 2.

³⁸ Coan, Jaime Shearn. "The Evolution of the Queer Dancer," *The Brooklyn Rail*, November 5, 2015, <https://brooklynrail.org/2015/11/dance/the-evolution-of-the-queer-dancer>. Accessed April 7, 2024.

directly afterward as a soloist. The group is allowing themselves to be unabashedly seen, perceived, and absorbed as they repeatedly ask this poignant question about the future, their queer future. This moment is quite literally a calling forward of queer futurity.

Holzman is both integrated with the cast and a soloist in this section, a dichotomy that bridges this performative moment and the link between childhood and queerness that both Halberstam and Muñoz address in their work. Muñoz constructs their argument for queerness as a “stage” by bringing forth the way some parents try to protect themselves from their child’s queerness by deeming it a “stage” that they will grow out of.³⁹ Halberstam uses children’s movies as a theoretical frame to unpack failure. This frame reminds the reader that failure, awkwardness, and otherness, is not only acceptable, but celebrated in children’s media. Popular children’s media in the United States relays and engrains the message that failure is something to learn from and subsequently grow out of as an adult.⁴⁰ The single question presented in song by the dancers puts forth multiple futures to question worrying about: the future of the queer adults on stage, the future of the child, and the future of the audience members who are both viewing these performers and able to view each other.

I call attention to these distinctive details in Gutierrez’s evening length work to illustrate a few moments of both the queer now and queer futures Gutierrez has constructed and proposed. As the cast carries these questions about queer futures with

³⁹ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia*, 98.

⁴⁰ Halberstam, Jack. *Queer Failure*, 27.

them, they roll, bask, bathe, tangle, clap, lift, spin, and fall as they move through the remainder of the dance. Finally, Holzman and Houston-Jones are hooked into harnesses and suspended from the ceiling. The work ends with a recorded dialogue between the two. They begin with colloquial conversation then expand outward to dreams, death, and reflections on life. The two are literally suspended in a place neither of the world that just unfolded nor somewhere entirely new. Gutierrez skillfully finishes this work in the place where it started, a space of multiple meanings and multiple imaginations. This is a place that is neither here nor there but is at the same time grounded in exactly where and what it is.

In *Tonight, we, may win* possibility for another world, non-normativity, and failure are rendered both compositionally and collaboratively. I made it clear to the dancers from the first day of rehearsal both with words and through actions that we were crafting a new world together. To this day, I have not shared most details about the conceptual development of the world with the performers. This is an intentional compositional tool to promote their world building to happen (as I detail in chapter two), as a “body first” politic. As a choreographer and director, I scaffold conceptual information throughout the process to promote the dancer’s translating information through embodiment first. This pedagogical action promotes collective listening and allowed me to shape many *Tonight, we, may win* rehearsals around an ethos of non-judgmental experimentation. In rehearsal, non-judgmental experimentation looked physically like many hours spent improvising and engaging in scene building. Non-judgmental experimentation looked pedagogically like allowing these sessions to be lengthy with minimal verbal intervention. Over time, as the world building got

stronger, I decided when to intervene as a directorial voice by crafting improvisatory offerings with great attention to specificity and minutiae. My own specificity of attention functioned as a tool to amplify and celebrate sparks of non-normativity and failure. In chapter five, I chronicle in great detail the process and the product that unearthed the possibility for another world, celebrated non-normativity, and engaged compassionately with failure.

Gutierrez describes *Age & Beauty: Part 3* work on his website as “A choreography for the end of the world.”⁴¹ I place this statement in conversation with Muñoz who states queerness as a utopia that is yet to come.⁴² Are the end of the world and a queer future that has yet to come any different? The end of the world is an unknown place that many artists fantasize about in their work. This is a place where the “straightness” of space and time is deconstructed, societal rules don’t apply, and messiness is accepted. Ahmed, in her book *Queer Phenomenology* addresses the “straightness” of time and space by stating, “The normative dimension can be redescribed in terms of the straight body, a body that appears ‘in line.’”⁴³ Gutierrez’s work honors non-normativity from the title sequence to the very last moment. Whether it’s called the end of the world, or queer futurity, the models of *Age & Beauty: Part 3* and *Tonight, we, may win*, mobilize queerness as a technology. Far

⁴¹ Gutierrez, Miguel. “Age & Beauty Part 3: Dancer or You Can Make Whatever the Fuck You Want but You’ll Only Tour Solos...,” Miguel Gutierrez, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.miguelgutierrez.org/age-beauty-part-3-dancer-or-you-can-make-whatever-the-fuck-you-want-but-youll-only-tour-solos-or-the-powerful-people-or-we-are-strong/we-are-powerful/we-are-beautiful/we-are-divine-or->.

⁴² Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia*, 185.

⁴³ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, 66.

beyond my own research, queerness as a technology provides endless potential for inclusive futures both on and beyond the stage through its naming and enactment.

Analogous to Gutierrez in concept but vastly different in form is Shamel Pitts' performance art experience titled *Black Hole*. In Pitts' work, the end of the world is a place of both potentiality and futurity. *Black Hole* premiered in 2018 and is the final work of a trilogy called the *Black Series*.⁴⁴ The work begins from a place of unknown, a darkness that is fertile with possibility. Pitts bolsters literal and metaphorical darkness as a place of potentiality in his description of the work, "More so, it proposes to use the idea of the transformational environment of a Black Hole to create an atmosphere of mystery towards what is encompasses."⁴⁵ The creature like movement of an undefinable yet expressive black mass dances first. This non-human form is illuminated by light, as if being seen under a pitch black, moonlit sky.

Black Hole begins from a place of queer futurity and non-normativity. From the first moment, Pitts sets up the viewer to privilege the unknown. Furthermore, the first dancing seen is not from dancers but from an object that cannot be defined. From the darkness of this object, the back of Pitts' torso emerges, his dark skin painted in a bronzed finish that does not distinguish costume from skin. Soon after, Pitts is joined on either side by Brazilian performer Marcella Lewis and South African performer Tushrik Fredricks. All three dancers share the same bronzing and camouflage costuming as Pitts, at once both sculptural and of Pitts' world he creates in real time.

⁴⁴ Pitts, Shamel. "Black Hole – Trilogy and Triathlon," Shamel Pitts, January 1, 2019, <https://shamelpitts.com/blackhole/>. Accessed April 7, 2024.

⁴⁵ Pitts, Shamel. "Black Hole – Trilogy and Triathlon," Shamel Pitts, January 1, 2019, <https://shamelpitts.com/blackhole/>. Accessed April 7, 2024.

Lewis and Fredricks emerge headfirst, as if birthed by this sentient creature into a new world, a new future that is just beginning.

Although Pitts makes it evident from this work's beginning that it's future has yet to be defined, he simultaneously affirms with resounding clarity that the future is Black, and it is queer. As Muñoz states, "the queerness of queer futurity, like the blackness of a black radical tradition, is a relational and collective modality of endurance and support."⁴⁶ Endurance and support are two foundational modalities of this work. The three dancers never leave the performative space. It is clear that their physical excavating is a relentless search, moving into the unknown together, as an intertwined unit. Furthermore, I argue Muñoz would frame Pitts' work as minoritarian performance,

Minoritarian performance— performances both theatrical and quotidian— transports us across symbolic space, inserting us in a coterminous time when we witness new formations within the present and the future. The coterminous temporality of such performance exists within the future and the present, surpassing relegation to one temporality (the present) and insisting on the minoritarian subject's status as world-historical entity.⁴⁷

It is clear from the first moment we see the three dancers that they are supporting each other in this world of both present and future. *Black Hole* is a world that surpasses relegation to one temporality. Akin to that transcendence, this is also a place beyond a gender binary. The dancers' bodies are painted bronze and framed by a wrestler singlet inspired costume, where skin and fabric are hardly distinguishable from one another. The dancers could be viewed singularly or as one of the same, depending on the viewer's discretion moment to moment. As Croft calls to mind,

⁴⁶ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia*, 91.

⁴⁷ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia*, 56.

“queerness has to challenge the entrenchment of the gender binary.”⁴⁸ Inside this elegant, futuristic introduction to the dancers one thing is clear, they are not entrenched nor limited by anything, least of which the restriction of performing gender.

The restriction of performing cis gender roles is conjointly lacking presence in *Tonight, we, may win*. As a choreographer and director, it is fundamental to my leadership that I act every rehearsal to honor each dancer’s gender identity. As I spoke to queer embodied subjecthood in chapter one, trans and gender non-conforming folks often spend tremendous time and energy masking their identities and/or surveying public spaces to gauge their safety. At least half of my cast identify as non-binary.⁴⁹ It is my responsibility, whether I am making queer dance or not, to uphold spaces where gender non-conforming folks can exist as themselves.

One legibly visual result of my responsibility as a choreographer and director is the dancers’ costuming and their physical and relational roles on stage. I spoke extensively to the dancers throughout the rehearsal process not only about how they identify but about how they wish to be perceived on stage. It is culturally common in this country for folks to believe they know another person’s gender by the way they look. Although my cast and I do not believe or practice this commonality, I am aware of the public presentation of the work. A level of communal care toward the dancers (addressed more extensively in the next two chapters) is providing them with as much agency as possible in controlling how they wish to be perceived. Furthermore, I am

⁴⁸ Croft, Clare. *Queer Dance*, 3.

⁴⁹ It is necessary for me to clarify that half of my cast is publicly gender non-conforming. Part of the essential care taken in working with this team or any team for that matter is not commenting on dancers’ gender identities who are not publicly transparent themselves about how they identify.

aware that dancers may wish to be perceived off stage as one gender identity and onstage as another. Although it is not a part of these current chapters, I look forward to embarking upon an extensive, in-depth analysis of gender performance on and off stage in my future research. In *tonight, we, may win* costume designer Bailey Hammett and I worked closely to provide great care around each dancer's costuming and appearance on stage. Whether the collaboration between Bailey, the dancers, and myself is transparent to the audience is nominal in comparison to their safety. Although self-evident, it bears repeating that genuine collective listening and embodiment cannot take place in spaces where dancers are functioning under the weight of their own unrecognized humanity.

In Pitts' *Black Hole*, even as the stage remains in seeming darkness, I recognize the humanity of the dancers beyond the construct of gender. Space cannot be seen around or beyond the three bodies that continue to move in and through the blackness that stretches beyond them. Sound steadily pours into the space, an ethereal sci-fi landscape full of wonder. The lights gently flicker around the dancers' languid spines as they move away from the audience. It is as if this world being created in real time could flash off in an instant, like a faulty television set, leaving the audience back in a single temporality once again. This does not happen, and the dancers persist, using the full sixty minutes to reveal that the stage space continues solely because their bodies locomote forward into it. They create the space; the space is not creating them. They chart new territory. They would build and innovate. They are futuring. They are a queer technology.

Black Hole and *Tonight, we, may win* forge worlds that embody and performatively exemplify queerness as a technology. Both worlds are places of multiple temporalities, the audience invited to take up space imagining alongside the works. Both works create space for collective imagining of queer futurity. The audience has space to imagine both the dancers' immediate future and the future these two worlds have persuasively outlined. *Black Hole* creates a world of minoritarian performance where Blackness and queerness are predominant, a gender binary is an idea of the past, and the future has yet to come.

I distill moments, actions, and processes in *Age & Beauty: Part 3, Black Hole*, and *Tonight, we, may win* as testimonies to a future outside of reductive understandings of the expressive body. Moreover, I distill to extract and examine the labor of the physical imagination in dance performance and its tangible possibilities toward more equitable and inclusive futures. My movement analyses of Gutierrez's and Pitts' works employ queerness as a technology to uncover what is not yet here. Imagining new futures becomes real, and representation can become a reality when it is danced. Muñoz speaks to the non-ephemerality of performance, "At performance's end, if it is situated historically and materially, it is never just the duration of the event. Reading for potentiality is scouting for a "not here" or "not now" in the performance that suggests a futurity."⁵⁰ I engage in critical analyses of the work of Gutierrez, Pitts', and myself to suggest, or might I add, insist upon queer futures. These works imagine queer futures as blueprints for educational and performance spaces alike in their inclusivity, multiplicities, non-normativity, and production of

⁵⁰ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia*, 99.

new worlds. These works are reminders of the power of putting queer failure and queer futurity in conversation.

Gutierrez, Pitts, Muñoz, Croft, Ahmed, Halberstam, and I champion each other in the fortitude to imagine queer futures out loud and in the bravery of sharing the possibilities for those futures with audiences. Queerness ceaselessly innovates. I place these theorists and choreographers in conversation to carve a map for queerness as a technology. This technology can be wielded to create new futures in performance. These new futures may not yet be here and now, but the work can be done here and now to bolster those futures to include anyone who has the audacity to imagine them.

Chapter 4: Cabaret, A Case Study: I Don't Care Much

There was a cabaret, and there was a master of ceremonies and there was a city called Berlin, in a country called Germany—and it was the end of the world...

—Christopher Isherwood, *Cabaret*, Act II⁵¹

Traveling back approximately half a century and halfway across the world, queer futuring is alive and present in the heart wrenching story told by the musical *Cabaret*. *Cabaret* opened in New York, NY on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theatre on November 20, 1996.⁵² *Cabaret* creates a world of aesthetic decadence with a thin façade, a theatre of the “almost” absurd. Said absurdity is embodied to mirror the absurdity in the breakdown of humanity that the Kit Kat Club (where the musical is primarily set and its queer inhabitants worked) experienced. This break down was a direct result of the rise of the Nazi regime and the beginning of World War II. Drama critic for the *New York Times* Walter Kerr described the production as having: “elected to wrap its arms around all that was troubling and all that was intolerable with a demonic grin, an insidious slink, and the painted-on charm that keeps revelers up until midnight making false faces at the hangman.”⁵³ Long before I dove deeply into the world of *Cabaret* as an encapsulation of queer liminality (which would become a conceptual, theoretical, and environmental through line of *Tonight, we, may*

⁵¹ Masteroff, Joe, Van Druten, John, and Isherwood, Christopher. *Harold Prince's Cabaret: Based on the Play*. New York: Random House, 1967.

⁵² Carter, Gerrard. “Willkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome: The Emcee and the Master of Metaphors in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*,” *Miranda*, no. 19 (October 7, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.21233>.

⁵³ Carter, Gerrard. “Willkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome: The Emcee and the Master of Metaphors in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*,” *Miranda*, no. 19.

win,) I could not move past the song “I Don’t Care Much” sung by the master of ceremonies, phonetically known as the Emcee in the musical.⁵⁴ Years ago, I was working as a choreographer on an immersive opera recital project in which one of the selections for the baritone was “I Don’t Care Much.” Inside of our research for the project, the director sent me a YouTube video of a low-quality recording of Alan Cumming performing “I Don’t Care Much” from *Cabaret*’s 1998 Broadway revival. Several years later, and long after this opera project’s life, Cumming’s performance catalyzes the building of *Tonight, we, may win* and guides how I organize the theoretical world of the dance, as a performance of queer futurity and liminality.

Alan Cumming’s embodiment of the Emcee exists expertly on a scale from the mundane to maximalism. His performance traverses the ribald, the devastating, the matter of fact, and the seemingly apathetic. “I Don’t Care Much” pulls the rug out from under the floor of the Kit Kat Club as a space of queer liminality. I question whether the Emcee is an apparition, an embodiment of the entire queer community that the club let flourish only after dark, or somewhere in between. Cumming’s interpretation of the song places him exactly at the center of the neither here nor there of Muñoz’s theorizing on queer futures.⁵⁵ His interpretation is a mix of sad drag queen post performance, a genderqueer person between two worlds—one who doesn’t care but cares the most, and a queer vestige of my eastern European Jewish maternal lineage. His throaty, guttural projection and physicality brings forth the haunting of

⁵⁴ “I Don’t Care Much - Cabaret -- Alan Cumming,” YouTube, August 28, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDS3ONRgi58>. Accessed April 7, 2024.

⁵⁵ Muñoz, José. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

all the queer elders that came before him. I locate Alan Cumming, the actor and performer, as a young, queer artist in his approximation to New York City at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. I think about him debuting the role of the Emcee in Sam Mendes' *Cabaret* revival in 1993 in London's West End and later taking the role to Broadway for the 1998 revival.⁵⁶ I wonder what it must have felt like to sing a song about the imminent destruction of one's love and subsequently one's world in a physical space where the dust from the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in New York had hardly settled. I think about the community of performers in this work and the audiences in the direct aftermath of the plague that killed so many young lives. I consider the overlapping horrors of these two queer histories and how the corporeality of that resonance lives in the guttural projection of his nuanced and deeply affected physicality.

The Emcee takes a soft breath; their shoulders rise only enough for air to travel northbound from the expanse of their lungs toward their mouth to deliver trepidatious first words.⁵⁷ They stabilize their lithe limbs from the ground through the extended branches of their arms by holding on to the erected stature of the microphone stand, utilizing it as a stability aid and an added limb. They hold on to this structure with both clarity and necessity, allowing it to be a subtle shield. This structure acts as a stable materiality that grants them slight separation between their vulnerable body and the vulnerable audience body before them. The expression of the

⁵⁶ Higginbotham, Adam. "Cumming out on top," *The Guardian*, February 16, 2003.

⁵⁷ Krupitzer, Tracy. "Drama Desk Awards- I Don't Care Much." Alancumming.com, January 13, 2021. <http://www.alancumming.com/1998-a/2015/10/27/drama-desk-award>. This video is a recording of Alan Cumming's performance at the 1998 Drama Desk Awards. Accessed April 7, 2024.

first four words “I Don’t Care Much” externalize the depth of traveling emotionality through the transparency of their embodied performativity. The word “I” begins on their exhale, their shoulders travel subtly back down toward their winged resting place as their gaze doesn’t falter from a far away, stable fixture in the distance. Their neck lengthens, they expand up and back toward the posteriority of their skull for “don’t” as their ears and eyebrows perk up in tandem with this directional sensing. The unlocking of space up and back initiates a steady traveling of their gaze from left to right, leaving this place of fixed intentionality to subtly invite more spectators into their performative view. They emphasize the sour punctuality of the word “much” to end this short and poignant sentence with a slight tilt of their head toward their left shoulder and a refined hairline lean toward the microphone, adding faint but energetically clear pressure to the grasp of their left hand on the stabilizing objectivity of the microphone stand.

I engage both movement analysis of Cumming’s performance and the lyrics of “I Don’t Care Much” as a body of queer political text. It is Cumming’s embodied performance, his complex and brilliantly subtly physicality that makes this analysis possible. I wield this body of text to apply a contextual and theoretical lens to the lyrics of this song through its intersections with queer studies, Black feminism, and performance studies. This analysis is both an expansion and intervention upon this character’s world view as exemplified through these lyrics. I use the text as amplification and intervention of this character’s political and queer apathy by putting the Emcee in conversation with various scholars whom I call care activists. This

intervention utilizes these texts to dissect various dimensions of care: Why care? How to care? What does care look like? How does personal care impact communal care?

I don't care much
Go or stay
I don't care very much
Either way
Hearts grow hard
On a windy street
Lips grow cold

Queer theorist Hil Malatino speaks to care and its relationship to queer and trans life,

...care is necessary in the wake of profound recalibrations of subjectivity and dependency. We need care in order to heal from transformative physical and emotional experiences. We need it when the milieu we inhabit becomes radically reorganized. We need it especially when our lives fall in the gaps between institutions and conventional familial structures. Those gaps are worlds, and those worlds don't function without care work.⁵⁸

Malatino's eloquent call to care is a metonym for the Emcee's lyrics above. The Kit Kat Club represents a world that falls between the gaps of institutions and conventional familial structures. This queerly liminal world, illuminated through the Emcee's plea and despair in the lyrics has already proven its disfunction from a lack of resources and care work. The Kit Kat Club and the folks whose lives and income

⁵⁸ Malatino, Hil. *Trans Care*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

revolve around it exist in a liminal space. They exist in a space physically and emotionally underground, not sanctioned by the government, and not resourced through an institutional structure. This space necessitates its liminality in order to exist as a place of refuge for queer folks. As the institution of the German State becomes more and more volatile in the wake of World War II, the queer and minoritized inhabitants of the Kit Kat Club experience such profound recalibration, such radical reorganization that the lack of necessary basic governmental care could no longer be masked through the care of communal safety the Kit Kat Club provided. The communal instability and incomprehensible magnitude of this recalibration resulted in queer and political apathy that wraps around each word expressed through the Emcee's corporeality.

In *We Will Not Cancel Us*, writer and activist adrienne marie brown speaks to collective responsibility, how we must become responsible for each other in order to envision a reality beyond the oppression of the present, "We in movement must learn to choose life even in conflict, even when seeking accountability, composting the tensions and bad behaviors while holding the beating hearts."⁵⁹⁶⁰ brown's work could have been a catalyst for the Emcee. The call to action invites an opening to accountability toward human life as communal future. brown offers tools toward dismantling systems of oppression to elicit action in response to those of the oppressor. brown's call addresses the inherent contradictions inside of the statement "choosing life" when the oppressor has not done the same. She utilizes the metaphor

⁵⁹ brown, adrienne marie. *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*. Emergent Strategy Series. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2020.

⁶⁰ brown writes their name in all lower-case letters and so I honor brown's practice is my writing, footnotes, and bibliography.

of composting to repurpose violence and damage toward action. “Holding the beating hearts” is an imagistic representation of choosing life whereas “hearts grow hard on a windy street” is a declaration of the opposite. In the first, brown speaks to taking action toward the rehabilitation of the oppressor’s damage whereas the Emcee expresses a lack of protection from the elements of oppression surrounding them as an obstruction toward their ability to commune with care. In the spirit of queer liminality and non-linearity I utilize this writing to evoke time travel. I am traveling through time and the dimensions of storytelling to bring brown to the Emcee to support them in composting their pain into a communal movement.

With the rent to meet

So if you kiss me

I bring The Combahee River Collective into conversation with brown as a community that composted pain into a communal movement a generation prior. The Combahee River Collective was a Black feminist organization active in Boston, Massachusetts from 1974-1980.⁶¹ The Combahee Next River Collective statement was written in 1977 in the United States, about four and a half decades away from the setting of Cabaret and “I Don’t Care Much.” The collective statement provides a generative map the Emcee could have retroactively applied to the hopeless political and queer apathy they articulate. The Combahee River Collective statement employs

⁶¹ Harris, Duchess. “‘All of Who I Am in the Same Place’: The Combahee River Collective ,” New Page 2, March 15, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080315192601/http://www.uga.edu/~womanist/harris3.1.htm>. Accessed April 7, 2024.

the personal to speak to coalition through interlocking oppressions, "...we see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives."⁶² The Combahee River Collective statement is developed from an understanding that Black women are inherently valuable. No other movement had considered the specific oppression of Black women to be foundational to their work, hence the creation of the Collective and this statement. I translate the Emcee's character to be vocalizing as both themselves and a representative of shared communal oppression. They sing from a first-person perspective, but their oppression is one shared with those they sing to in their community. Through their performance, presentation, and textual evidence, I read this character's identity markers to include white, German, poor, queer-coded, genderqueer, and non-Jewish although none of those markers are explicitly stated. The Emcee could learn from the Combahee River Collective that their oppression is enmeshed with those of other marginalized identities targeted at this time, namely, the Jewish people. If they were to engage their community politically around their personal oppressions, that in turn would be positive political action for the oppressed Jews and queer people alike who at this time are in the beginning stages of what would lead to their attempted genocide.

⁶² Collective, The Combahee River. "A Black Feminist Statement." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2014): 271-280.

If we touch
Warning's fair
I don't care very much

Three words, “if we touch,” become an intimate invitation to continue traveling through time. The conditionality of the first word ascends the Emcee’s body skyward. Lead by the willful longing of their gaze, it’s expanse lifts above the audience, a moment of suspending reality by seeing above, beyond, and through air that is thickened with impassivity. The second short word is delivered with an almost imperceivable shake of the head as their right hand unwittingly leaves the grip of the microphone stand to stay afloat, shortening the space between their reach and the audience. The final word marks the weight of this sensory filled sentence as the float of their arm away from them just as quickly retracts back, as if stung by the vulnerable memory of touch.

I don't care much
Go or stay
I don't care very much
Either way

Next, I activate scholar, composer, and activist Bernice Johnson Reagon’s *HOME GIRLS: A Black Feminist Anthology*, to speak to the importance of the longevity of one’s principled commitment to communal political action, “None of this matters at all very much if you die tomorrow—that won’t even be cute. It only

matters if you make a commitment to be around for another fifty more years...try to figure out what it will be like if you are a raging radical fifty years from today.”⁶³

Reagon speaks to the care and coalitional community necessary to engage in political activism for decades as a marginalized society member. “I Don’t Care Much,” as excerpted from the full musical, represents a moment in time that is antithetical to Reagon’s call. *Cabaret* is set at the turn of the decade from 1929-1930 in which a shift from the twilight of the jazz age in Berlin quickly pivoted to the Nazi’s rise to power. Much of the musical takes place in the Kit Kat Club, a quintessential representation of the jazz age in Berlin.⁶⁴ The Jazz age in Berlin was a time of queer prosperity. This song represents how some Berliners, as represented by the Emcee, sustained a level of dissociation as a strategy for survival as they felt helpless watching their world implode around them. Reagon’s first sentence quoted above “None of this matters at all very much if you die tomorrow” could have been lifted from the lyrics of the song. The difference between Reagon’s message and that of the song is what happens next in both instances. In the song, the message continues that because they might die tomorrow, the Emcee attempts to shield themselves from imminent loss through the statement that their love doesn’t matter and therefore no action they take could possibly make a difference. Although Reagon begins with the above sentiment that appears to be in textual agreement to the message of the song, she uses this statement to turn her message toward active, abiding political commitment. The possibility of death, both personal and communal, hangs in the air

⁶³ Smith, Barbara, and Reagon, Bernice Johnson. “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century.” Essay. In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, 356–68. Rutgers University Press, 2023.

⁶⁴ “Cabaret (Musical) Plot & Characters,” StageAgent, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://stageagent.com/shows/musical/323/cabaret>.

for both the Emcee and Reagon. The weight of this possibility turns the Emcee toward submission and apathy and Reagon toward pledged resistance.

The Emcee exhibits through the lyrics and performance of this song a location of personal, professional, and communal queer liminality. Their location, the precipice of the closing of the life they've known held by this club leads them to an expression of what can be topically read as ambivalence. The mask of this precipice leads me across seas once again and forward approximately five decades in time to an adjacent location of queer liminality through state abandonment amid crisis. This adjacency is exemplified in the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 80s, specifically as it ravaged through communities of performing artists in New York City.

adrienne marie brown's work was built upon the movement and advocacy of both Bernice Johnson Reagon and The Combahee River Collective, and my work as an artist is built upon the generation of performing artists and creators who were lost during the AIDS epidemic. My thesis work is a direct product of this queer lineage. Harkening back to earlier in this chapter, I think of this work's revival on Broadway in 1998 and the meta narrative of those grieving extraordinary loss, embodying characters grieving extraordinary loss, in a parallel dimension of queer space and time. I would imagine part of Alan Cumming's brilliance as a performer through this character is his personal connection to the loss of his community members and likely loved ones as he prepared for and performed this role. In "Lost and Found: Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, Then and Now" edited by Jaime Shearn Coan, Ishmael Houston Jones, and Will Rawls, contributor Michael Stiller speaks to his relationship

with late choreographer John Bernd, “To say that John was ambivalent in his relationship to his disease would be an understatement. Thankfully, he couldn’t just succumb; but nor would he acknowledge his condition enough to make a conscious, measured effort to fight it. The result was sometimes maddening, but it probably helped keep him alive.”⁶⁵ Stiller’s account adds dimension and nuance to how I view the Emcee’s relationship to care as an affect of one’s proximity to death. This lens shapes the vital nature of the care work that I have privileged throughout this writing as a foreground to the rehearsal process of *Tonight, we, may win*. This history is both my generational history and the history of my thesis work.

Bernd and the Emcee both employ dissociation and ambivalence as a strategy for survival. “I Don’t Care Much” embodies that contradiction as the Emcee sings to ambivalence and apathy in order to survive. Their desire to survive is due to the inherent care they have for their own life and the lives of those around them, namely the loved one they address as the audience for this song. Increasingly powerful repetitions of the words “I don’t care very much” reinforce the Emcee’s expression of care through the thin façade of apathy.

Through viewing the Emcee as an inheritor of their familial (biological and chosen) generational history, I view them as an embodied agent of said histories. Therefore, the Emcee has generationally inherited an embodied familiarity or knowing of said political and queer despair. Through this argument, *Tonight, we, may win*, has inherited a similar embodied familiarity. The thin façade of performing

⁶⁵ Houston-Jones, Ishmael, Rawls, Will, and Coan, Jaime Shearn. *Lost and found: Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, then and now*. New York, NY: Danspace Project, 2016.

performativity in *Tonight, we, may win* is both a mask and a response to this political and queer despair. The Emcee's decision to succumb to their embodied knowing of this despair has resulted in their statements of queer apathy, an attempt to reject the pain of potential loss due to the risk of vulnerability in relationship. *Tonight, we, may win* is built in protest and refusal of queer apathy. The protest of the work is the refusal to succumb to queer apathy and instead wield its queer world as a technology and tool to promote reflection, non-normativity, and communal care.

In gender studies scholar Jack Halberstam's book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam speaks to the mother-daughter dynamic as an ironic representation of patriarchal systems, "...and the daughter as the inheritor of a static system, which she must either accept without changing or reject completely"⁶⁶. The Emcee is the "daughter" or inheritor of their embodied positionality both personally and structurally. They have inherited the dual, intertwining patriarchal systems of both their familial histories and that of the State. In contrast to Halberstam's "either or" charge of acceptance without change or complete rejection, I argue the Emcee has embodied and sings to both acceptance without change and complete rejection of the burdensome position their dually oppressive inheritance has left them. The repeated call of "I don't care much, go or stay" is the performative suppression of care as illustrated through both these lyrics and their performance.

Alan Cumming's performance is so compelling in part due to his ability to embody and perform this nuanced contradictory state through his physicality.⁶⁷ There

⁶⁶ Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*, 125.

⁶⁷ I use he/him pronouns for Cumming and they/them for the Emcee. Published writing on Cumming uses he/him pronouns and I perceive and relate to the Emcee in this writing as gender queer.

are numerous overlapping exemplifications of care locomoting through his body as he sings. Care is exemplified in his gaze, a clarifying intensity of power mixed with pain and tenderness. Care locomotes from his feet on the floor traveling upwards to exit from his mouth in the energetic effort to project his voice. This projection is to be understood more than heard. Cumming performs an elongated emphasis of certain words for his body to feel the energetic affect of his emotionality. Lastly, care locomotes through the tenuous stability of his stance. This stance fuses the punctuality of his lyrical delivery woven with the desperation of performing care due to the unmet necessity that the Emcee himself needs to be cared for. Through this lens, the contradiction of care in language and performance moves away from a simplistic understanding of apathy toward one that includes deep expressivity. This expressivity can't be fully captured by the set dimensionality of language should it be theoretically extracted from the soma.

To contextualize Alan Cumming's embodied affect through his performance of the Emcee, I turn to queer performance and culture scholar Sara Warner and her book, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBTQ Performance and the Politics of Pleasure*. Warner embeds embodiment in the structural integrity of how she defines affect.

Contemporary scholars across a broad range of research disciplines from the social and life sciences to cultural theory are discussing affect and embodiment as a side-by-side descriptive pair, or two theoretical ideations amongst a list of neighboring claims. For Warner, her definition of embodiment is integrated inside the webbing of her definition of affect, unable to be cleanly separated or parsed out linguistically, theoretically, or conceptually.

Warner uses affect as both a comprehensive and a mobilized synonym for embodiment. I use the qualifiers “comprehensive” and “mobilized” to pinpoint the differentiations in how Warner utilizes the relationship between embodiment and affect. A comprehensive synonym denotes any time the word embodiment can be replaced by the word affect. By assigning the language of mobilized synonym, I argue affect is additionally synonymous with embodiment in a “yes, and” relationship to its situational context. It is the “and” of the “yes, and” that differentiates a mobilized synonym from a comprehensive synonym in my argument. For example, Warner may use affect to describe embodiment *and* political experimentation, or embodiment *and* social critique. This “yes, and” relationship does not diminish the corporeal power of affect as always embodied but rather strengthens this argument to demonstrate the mobilization of embodiment inside acts of historicization, critique, and protest.

I define embodiment as a state where one has a heightened consciousness of their sensorium through acknowledged sensation. Said embodiment, embedded in affect, in the context of a group dance requires collective listening. Collective listening is one of the pillars that *Tonight, we, may win* is built upon. As a choreographer, I spent a lot of rehearsal and creative process time composing warmups, scores, and compositions to practice and enact collective listening. The opening of both part one and part two of *Tonight, we, may win* were built from the scaffolding of these scores and compositions. It is through Warner’s definition of affect and its enactment in my thesis work that embodiment becomes a vehicle for sociopolitical action, critique, and futuring.

My definition of embodiment is enacted throughout the process and product of my thesis work. Furthermore, my definition of embodiment is a comprehensive synonym in its analogous relationship to Warner's definition of affective histories as "ways of knowing and showing that are lived in and through moments of acute corporeal sensation."⁶⁸ Therefore, Warner defines affective histories inside of one's corporeality. This placement embeds embodiment inside her definition of affect. Both Warner and I centralize the sensory information that the body takes in and subsequently processes physically.

In addition to this compound definition, Warner names an "affective turn" in numerous fields of scholarly research where she denotes a shift away from epistemological modes of knowledge production and toward phenomenology and feeling.⁶⁹ Her provocation toward this affective turn is an example of her "yes, and" mobilization of the embodiment inside of affect toward an activist end. Warner speaks to her desire to utilize this affective turn as a way to rediscover LGBTQ activist histories as "felt dimensions and missed opportunities of our unrealized past."⁷⁰ Through the activation of the embodiment inside affect, Warner speaks to the potential of supplementing current historical knowledge through this mode of somatic knowing. She utilizes her recurrent and expansive definitions of affect to suggest that there is another dimension of historical knowledge that can be utilized and mobilized by LGBTQ+ activists today to understand the relationship between their bodies and the bodies of those who have fought for gay rights from decades past. This claim

⁶⁸ Warner, Sara. Introduction. *Acts of Gaiety: LGBTQ Performance and the Politics of Pleasure*, 1–30. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013, 5.

⁶⁹ Warner, Sara. *Acts of Gaiety*, 3.

⁷⁰ Warner, Sara. *Acts of Gaiety*, 5.

harkens back to my connection of lineage between the queer artists of a generation prior who suffered immensely from the AIDS epidemic and the current generation of queer artists who are a product of those who fought for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Warner argues that affective histories can be continually encountered in the “traces, signs, gestures, and actions” of those who carry them.⁷¹ Through these continual encounters, bodies are presently enacted historical archives.

In anthropologist Naisargi N. Davé’s book *Indifference: On the Praxis of Interspecies Being* they speak to this depth through their defining and dissection of the word indifference, “Indifference is not a lack but a stance, a cultivated demeanor, that is born of the queer desire and the queer belief in an otherwise way of being.”⁷². Davé physicalizes the definition of indifference by placing it in the body, as a stance. A cultivated demeanor that is active, purposeful, and conscious. The lyrics of “I Don’t Care Much,” expertly physicalized by Cumming, embody Davé’s stance of queer desire and belief in an otherwise way of being. The otherwise way of being is a queering of the Emcee’s here and now, the possibility to stand firmly in and perform through the location of contradiction. This location exists inside of their desperate care. The audience witnesses said care circulate through their body, into the space shared between performer and audience, and back again to the location of contradiction, the Emcee’s body.

This turn to affective histories as modes of knowledge production is exemplified by Warner, Davé, Gutierrez, Pitts, Cumming, and myself in my work

⁷¹ Warner, *Acts of Gaiety*, 5.

⁷² Davé, Naisargi N. Introduction, in *Indifference: On the Praxis of Interspecies Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), 1–11.

Tonight, we, may win. This opens a new realm of possibility for LGBTQ+ history to not only be studied but simultaneously enacted in the present and mobilized toward the future. By furthering Warner's claim, identifying and subsequently privileging the embodiment inside of affect can allow for transcendence through time. I can only begin to dream of the ways LGBTQ+ activism can advance a multidimensional orientation toward the future by historicizing the corporeality of the lived histories inside embodied historians of the past and present.

Words sound false

When your coat's too thin

Feet don't waltz

When the roof caves in

So if you kiss me

If we touch

Warning's fair

I don't care very much

Chapter 5: The Process and the Product: Tonight, we, may win

The sound score for my thesis work *Tonight, we, may win* composed by professional sound designer Ryan Alexander MacDonald subtly diffuses through the space as the audience settles in. The high pitched, singsong voice of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center recorded welcome speech performs performativity before the curtain opens. There is an omnipotence in the air left by the stain of the sound score and welcome speech that breaks the fourth wall before it's been formally established. The subtle oddities of this world immediately implicate the audience. The sound intensifies, the curtain slowly and continuously slips open to reveal an onstage world already well underway. The thick, heavy, luxurious red fabric of the main drape is the only physical and metaphorical barrier between the audience and the performers. The curtain fully opens to reveal a saturated red space.⁷³ The hard-line geometry of the traditional stage space softens into roundness. A round semicircular shape encompasses and gently encloses the dancers. The space is hugged by draped fabric. This fabric, the floor, and the dancers don shades of crimson, cranberry, maroon, and wine. The fabric drapes over a topography of large, sculpturally protruding objects. These sculptural objects define the semi-circular enclosure of the space and the fabric lays both limp and somehow still alive on top.

Downstage of the set design, the six performers, Brit Falcon, Daniel Miramontes, Peter Pattengill, Zoe Cushman Walders, Emilia Bruno, and Bree Breeden fill the space. The dancers wear red separates that vary in size, drape,

⁷³ Lighting design by Mike Riggs, Lighting MFA student University of Maryland, 2024.

texture, and movement. Each dancer has the same fifth limb—a long, straight, cranberry wig that waves through space in response to every cervical movement. The space is alive, queer, and slightly off-kilter. The dancers are deeply engaged in both their own and collective group momentum. They engage in a score that establishes three fundamental themes to the work and the world that the dancers are living in and creating simultaneously: collective listening, tableau vivant, and queerness.

To fully contextualize these three fundamental themes, I need to go back to their inception, the beginning of the rehearsal process. I intersperse movement analysis of the dance below with italicized rehearsal reflections to encompass both the here and now of the dance and the history and process that composed it. Our first rehearsal took place on August 23, 2023, just before the fall semester at University of Maryland began. My primary reflection from this first rehearsal was “The structure is unstable and has a permeable membrane.”⁷⁴ This observation in and of itself became a singular sentence that encompassed both the logistical difficulties of the rehearsal process and the queer potency of the world of the dance itself.

Rehearsal reflections 8/23/23: The structure is unstable and has a permeable membrane. The structure whose stability I didn't question, is unstable. I was prepared for the instability and permeable membrane of the physical part of the creative process but did not account for the administrative part to unravel. Preparation is a value that I hold with care. I took all the measures I knew of to be prepared for this process administratively—I asked folks far in advance if they would be interested in being a performer in the project, I booked studio space the first moment I was able to, and I considered every performer's schedule in planning rehearsals. In the last two weeks, four out of the seven dancers I asked to participate either pulled out from performing or told me they are overwhelmed and can't commit right now. Another dancer is using the beginning of the semester rehearsals as a trial period to see if they had the capacity to commit. The final two that round out the seven are still fully committed. A group that made sense to me as seven makes no sense to me with the only two who are fully

⁷⁴ Steinberg Rebecca. Personal rehearsal notes. August 23, 2023.

committed. In this moment, I see two options: 1. Completely reimagine the number of dancers and the construct of how they will share performative space together with the two that can fully commit 2. Give the three overwhelmed humans space and time to figure out what is healthy for them and work with whatever that results in. I am more comfortable with choosing the former, because it gives me the illusion of having more control but in this moment, I am choosing discomfort. The later may look like folks who don't come to every rehearsal, who are in sometimes and out sometimes, and/or folks who say they can't be in the performance at all. I am a detail-oriented maker and relying on the stability of how many folks you are working with feels like a very base level standard that many other details depend on. I am both curious and nervous moving toward what can be built by leaning heavily on improvisation. Improvisation as both a tool to build a vocabulary and communal space with performers and as a tool of permeability while folks seem to need a space that provides flexibility and agency.

The dancers enliven their sensorium to engage fully and responsively to their collective listening practice score. From the beginning of this work, it is the collective listening that make them an inseparable community. The membrane they have developed breathes through expansion and contraction in space. Periodically, the contraction allows the dancers to find physical contact with each other. Physical contact connects body surface to body surface so that through relationship, each dancer connects energetically to the entire group. These contracted membranes settle and thereupon burst back out into space as dancers reattune to the surfaces of their own body while maintaining deep listening to the group. As this process continues, MacDonald's rich sound score continually layers and fills the space with aural dimension. A glitched repetition of the three words "maybe this time" from the song of that tile, from the musical *Cabaret*, prefaces an intensifying of fracture, performing performativity, queerness, and oddity. The fracture intensifies as a progressive glitching spreads from the sound score to the dancer's physicality and relationality and back again.

Pattengill breaks the continuity of the score by engaging in a slow-motion head bang, their cranberry wig echoing the exhale of their spine as their wig dips in and out of imaginary water. This gesture of slow motion headbanging clarifies a locality of queerness that the rest of the dancers then physically accumulate toward. Pattengill is a non-binary human dressed in a long skirt and a form fitting vest. Their slow-motion head banging is an explicit invitation to the physicality of queer camp. The long red wig each dancer sports exists somewhere muddy between natural hair and drag. This simultaneous emphasis and slowing down of the spatial arc of Pattengill's wig draws attention to said element of camp. This motion lives woven between images of drag queen hairgraphy mid performance, Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*'s whipping her long red hair out of the water, and a rock star head banging in the heat of performative bliss.⁷⁵ The rest of the group slowly attach themselves to the weight and momentum of Pattengill's motion, riding the wave that invites them all to break the established rhythmicity they've agreed upon thus far. After the full group has connected to either Pattengill or one another, the headbanging dissipates like a ripple through water and the dancers utilize the energy Pattengill engineered to stretch their interconnected bodies outward to the point of breakage.

I came into the first rehearsal with scores to propose as a way to generate material to begin our creative process.⁷⁶ I verbally proposed the first score out of the guided improvisation warm up I led. I responded improvisationally to the first score by creating an impromptu second score that I mapped out in my notebook to share with the group. This second score shaped the rest of the rehearsal. I conceive of my role in the beginning of a creative process as one of pinpointing and then amplifying. I am

⁷⁵ Hairgraphy is a queer term that I define as a combination between hair and choreography to denote choreography that is happening through the utilization and enlivening of the movement of the hair one performs with.

⁷⁶ I define scores as improvisatory happenings that structure a space of dancer agency with clear rules, parameters, and goals.

zeroing in my attention on moments, relationships, and shapes that spark my interest and then utilizing structures to compose the visual interest. In the first score that spilled out of the warmup I saw each dancer embodying a particular role in relationship to the group. In addition to the awareness and curiosity toward these roles, I wanted to provide a more specific construct for the dancers to see each other, and get to know each other through seeing. Lastly, I wanted to provide a more specific compositional structure for them to begin to build intentional community.⁷⁷ With these desires and responses in mind I gave the dancers this score:

You will create a collective circle by spreading out to the outer most perimeter of the room. As a group you will make your circle smaller and smaller until it is the smallest that you all (non-verbally) decide and agree it will be. At this smallest loci, any of the larger circles are now available to spatially vacillate in and out of. In addition to this geometrical and spacial constraint, I gave each of them a secret role within the score. I created these roles for the dancers based on either the roles I perceived they were embodying in the first score or a role that I desired for them to embody more fully from their participation in the first score. These five assigned secret roles were: two disrupters, one desire-er, one space-eater, and one connector.

As a synchronous physical and metaphorical breakage of time and space, the dancers break out of the first score and enter a series of six tableaux. They hold these engagements of tableau vivant for what feels like just a hair too long.⁷⁸ The dancers walk in and out of both odd and normative shapes and poses. For the first time, various dancers hold a visual address toward the audience. This visual address is an invitation and appeal to be seen in their oddity and queerness.⁷⁹ The audience is

⁷⁷ I am theoretically, practically, and socially interested in how community is built in rehearsal processes. How is this community distinct from but also necessitated by the dance everyone has agreed to collaborate on together? I am interested in what the communing inside of dance spaces is doing as a necessary act of “being together” separate from the dance making. This community is separate from the dance making and can exist outside of it but also has a clear influence on the depth of relationality, bravery, and trust in the dance that is being crafted. I hold a similar pedagogical belief about classroom spaces, both physical practice and non-physical classes. I make this statement through my heightened awareness and value toward how community is built in both rehearsal and learning spaces. I look forward to continuing this theoretical and practical research in future projects.

⁷⁸ See [Appendix 1](#) for photos of moments of tableau vivant from the rehearsal process

⁷⁹ In future research, I will break down the complicated identity relationality that queer work contends with. This relationality exists between the perceived identities of the performers, the way they self-identify, and the way the work employs queerness as an action, an identity, and/or an environment. In stating above that the dancers are inviting themselves to be seen in their queerness, I am not making a comment on the gender and/or sexual identity of any of the performers in this work. I am instead stating queerness as a theme and environment that connects the stage space, the performers, and the space they inhabit and build together.

brought forward to lean in and engage with the almost still bodies of the performers. Through a measured relationship to time, the audience is asked to see in more detail. This choreographic moment brings attention to the precariousness of a dancer's weight standing on one leg or the expansion and contraction of a dancer's shirt as their heart rate slows from the section prior. The tableaux begin to contradictorily complexify and break down as the sound score reflects a sparseness and suspension of space and time.

The break down leads the dancers to physically engage with the topography of objects and the draped fabric for the first time. They climb on top of, drape alongside, and position themselves along the curved perimeter that the set design defines. The performers forge a new relationality to the world through their activation of the set design. Their camouflage among the design and their variance in verticality and positionality add dimension to the postures of tableau vivant we've seen up until this point and foreshadow a continued relationship to the set that has been untouched until now. It is in this place of agentic interactivity that the dancer's voices are heard for the first time.

In reflecting on the first week of rehearsals, I am very aware my intention and attention is split about half and half between wanting to lay the groundwork for a transparent, non-harmful, community centric space, and the laser focus it takes to be in a continuous decision-making place to start to make a dance. First and foremost, I care about the humans I am sharing space with. It is imperative that as a leader and person of power in the room that I do not perpetuate normative harmful practices in the field. In addition to this necessity of safety, it is also a value of mine that they enjoy being in the process. Within the inherent intensity and exhaustion of graduate school it will not benefit anyone or the final work if the cast members are relating to these rehearsals as something else to check off their list. This setting is an inherently challenging place to work from. Classes haven't even begun yet and the cast was overwhelmingly exhausted in our Friday, 8/25/23 rehearsal. In an effort to forefront care, I take on the creative problem-solving role of generating tasks and research

*where the dancers aren't pushing into a space of exhaustion or injury but that I can coincide these care measures with the necessary physical research to move the world forward.*⁸⁰

Each dancer, poised in a forced *contrapposto* repeat a varied delivery of the three words “I’m your host.” I developed all of the text in this section based on a composite reworking of potent lines from various *Cabaret* songs including *Willkommen*, *I Don’t Care Much*, and *Maybe This Time*.⁸¹ This text is multifunctional. I intend to give the performers both an individual and collective voice. It functions to physicalize the conceptual theme of performing performativity. I gave the dancers direction to “overperform.” I directed them to think about images of game show hosts, masters of ceremonies, and children’s show characters. I endeavored for their bodies, sounds, and related imagery to pixelate, warp, and stretch. Stage mics hang from above and add a reverb of echo to their words, further warping time and space. They start the text once and then begin again from the beginning with the declaration, “I’m your host.” This second round is amplified in volume, urgency, and peculiarity. Their delivery is somewhere between comedy and darkness where the audience may laugh and/or digest the underlying reflective layers of what performing performativity insinuates. These layers include a masking of identity, a necessary performance to exist in public space, and a strain that said masking and performance takes on the physical and emotional body.

I make a loose plan coming into each rehearsal. I am actively practicing a deep listening to the space, to the dancers, and to myself. I model this deep listening in how

⁸⁰ See [Appendix 2](#) for rehearsal notes from 8/25/23 detailing the scores enacted that day.

⁸¹ See [Appendix 3](#) for original text created November 9, 2023.

I conduct and hold the space as I ask the dancers to do the same. I (usually) trust my improvisatory and creative skills enough to let the rehearsal develop through reaction, delight, care, and instinct.

Toward the end of this first section of text, the dancers return back to the set design. As their speech become increasingly affected and warped, they begin to remove the many layers of fabric from their draped homeostatic setting over the objects. This action allows the objects underneath to be revealed as identifiable and commonplace. Until now, these objects have been visually perceived through their elusive shapes in relationship to the bumpy topography of the constructed set design. As the objects are uncovered by performers, pieces of furniture and everyday objects are revealed including a table, chaise lounge, desk chair, exercise ball, lamp, and more. After the dancers work together to uncover the objects, they begin to further deconstruct the stage space. They interrupt themselves in the first moments of this deconstruction to engage on, inside of, and around the now partially revealed set. It is in this place that their last line of text (for the moment) reaches toward the audience, “Go ahead, try, I’ll wait.” The dancers look directly at the audience in this delivery. They once again implicate the audience by directing their energy, attention, and text toward them as shared community members inside of this experience. This line is delivered as a subdued challenge.

As soon as the words “I’ll wait” travel through the air, Macdonald’s sound cuts out abruptly and is replaced by a wash of white noise. The lighting darkens significantly on the dancers and the set, and all dancers are still but one. Bruno remains in motion as they gently bounce up and down on the chaise lounge that they

stand on. This is a salient moment of suspension—almost silent, almost still, audience and performers alike in a shared holding pattern.

A practice I've developed as a choreographer/director over the past five years is beginning each process by asking the collaborators "how do you like to work?" This question is often met with a long silence and/or confusion. I have heard many times from dancers that they've never been asked this before. Although the query often begins awkwardly, I find that it opens the door for the type of process I endeavor to lead. This is a process where each dancer is an expert of their own body and experience and we get to meet each other to create a work from that place. A more normative practice in the field is that whenever you enter a rehearsal space you are expected to work the way that the person leading the room works. This is not inherently negative; it can forge a great deal of mental and physical agility in dancers. It can also lead to hierarchical spaces where dancers are either explicitly or implicitly encouraged to stay silent. This silence has the potential to be damaging. I am aware that I have a way of working that feels generative, safe, and productive to me and that I will not and cannot change my way of working to appease each member of my collaborative team. This question is not about that. One goal of this question is to set up a space where each person in the room is aware that they have varying preferences in how they wish to work and that a large part of our work together is to constantly meet each other close and/or far from those preferences. It is not closeness to preference that creates safety, it is the communication and comfortability the dancers have in stating their needs and agency throughout. I've observed that collaborators who are provided space to state their preferences from the beginning are more likely to speak up along the way.

Macdonald's sound initiates change out of this holding pattern. An instrumental accompanist track of *I Don't Care Much* begins to fill the staticky stage space.⁸² This transition prompts Breedon to leave their stationary spot and begin a solo that Bruno quickly adds to as a means of physical support for Breedon. The rest of the cast slowly exits, tapering off stage. Their pedestrian exits leave this duet amongst the unraveling set to be seen without them. This duet is a *pas de deux* of weighted reliance, caring support, and relational navigation. The unsettling waltzing chords of *I Don't Care Much* relentlessly repeat as the duet continues. The duet, and

⁸² "I Don't Care Much - Cabaret - Piano Accompaniment/Rehearsal Track," YouTube, June 11, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=J_Qv57uO7V4. Accessed April 7, 2024.

the first part of this dance, conclude with Bruno left alone, balancing precariously on the balls of their feet and picking up each foot to step in place both unsteady and convicted as the scene begins to drastically change.

Conceiving of the dance in two parts has been a vehicle of mental organization, a way to pretend separation exists before being cognitively ready to embrace the messy middle. The differences of these two parts are all contained within the same universe. Both hereness and futurity now. The here and the now and the future both include masking, drapery, and presentation. Both are messy and hard but positively skewed due to their insistence on relationality. How can messy, non-performative togetherness exist in the wild queer aesthetic dreaming of the future? Dance as relationality practices the future of togetherness, coalition, and community. Dance as a way of being together needs to continue to explain, describe, re-describe, and align these actions through performance. It is important to insist on these actions in performance because performances disappear as quickly as communal belief in each other does.

Bruno continues stepping as the physical world changes around them. As though a director had just called “cut” the crew members and performers come on stage to entirely deconstruct and reform the stage space and set design. The difference between this liminal space and that of a director calling “cut” is that nothing has stopped. The sound score picks up in discordant ferocity, there is constant movement of objects, dancers, and text. I intend for the “magic of theatre” to work differently in this space. The transparency of making visible what is not usually visible is a bridge between these two worlds. In the first section, the oddity of over performing and masking makes visible the effort of performing performativity. This bridge makes the labor of transition visible. The labor of moving the set design, changing costumes, and the backstage crew’s role in the stage space and performance all as visible as performing performativity was just a few minutes prior. This is a moment of exposing the thin façade the mask of the set provided. The part one set provided a functional mask to compliment the masking of the dancer’s performing performativity.

The upstage black traveler concealing the cyclorama opens, and immediately crew and dancers flood the stage. They are utilitarian in their communal task, to deconstruct and reconstruct the set. As this transpires, deconstruction and reconstruction are mirrored in the costuming of the dancers. The soft goods, the stage right and left wings, have been pulled back revealing the lighting booms and a pile of clothing for each dancer to change into. Through my direction, each dancer allows their task of changing clothes to be secondary to the importance of reconfiguring the set. Dancers come through the space mid change of shirt, taking their wigs off, jumping into their pants, etcetera. A sheen of oddity persists in this transition. One crew member comes on with a high-powered leaf blower and irreverently creates motion in the fabric though their directing of air. A word wash of text begins traveling from the top of the cyclorama to the floor. This text contains unedited lyrical prose that dramaturg Kris Kareem Quarles Pourzal took as notes during three rehearsals in the fall of 2023.⁸³⁸⁴ The group operation continues until the once revealed objects are draped by the fabric once more. This time, in an incongruous architecture upstage right resembling something between a cluttered storage space, a fort made by children, and an omnipresent glowing red sculpture.

The first world is happening in the second, and the second in the first. The casual clothing, messy interrelationality of the second world is happening inside the drapery and pristine aesthetics of the first world. Perhaps the only difference is a thin façade of physical, textural, and performative masking. The pristine aesthetics of the first world become swallowed and embodied by the dancers. Said aesthetics that were outwardly visible in the first section become reflected in their movement, individuality, and casual costuming in the second world. Two seemingly opposing world physically implode to expose that there has only ever been one all along.

⁸³ See full text from Fall 2023 in [Appendix 4](#).

⁸⁴ See media designer Leo Greirson's edit of the text as it appeared in the performance in [Appendix 5](#). Media Design MFA University of Maryland, 2024.

After the dancers and the crew successfully construct the sculpture to be self-sustaining, the crew members exit and the dancers reorganize in a seated, lounging group tableau on the upstage left diagonal. Their reposed physicality is marked in stark contrast to the towering stature of the sculpture that they split the upstage space with. Just as their moment of rest settles in, the dancers push themselves to a deep squat and slowly rise to standing. After a moment of vertical pause, the lights bump on as though flicking a switch when entering a room, the text disappears, and the dancers begin speaking at the same time and moving on the downstage diagonal. Only bits and pieces of their overlapping chatter is detectable from the audience as they make real the remnants of performing performativity from the first section, this time accompanied by their own solo actions. Pattengill once again breaks the score first, going back to their slow motion headbanging from part one. Pattengill's reprise settles like *déjà vu*, a present memory, something that belongs both in the now and from the history the dancers have just physically and socially inscribed.

This idea of present memory, or abstracted memory perhaps, continues as the dancers whip their heads through space now with only the memory of the wigs. They flaunt, flail, create tonal resonance, and glitch as they compositionally weave through the expanse of the stage space. Moments of the bizarre come and go in a flash, relating to time in an opposing nature to much of part one. The dancers are on a train of their own and the transparency of the design elements give the audience access to the realism of this bizarre yet palpably understandable world. They cycle through tableaux, this time without the façade of performing performativity as it appeared in part one. These tableaux sink, stretch, and breathe in their humanity in contrast to the rigid structures

of the first world. These differences are noticeable in the calm nature of the dancer's comportment, the stark atmospheric shift reflected in the ambience of the sound, and the un-hurriedness in their practical approach from one task to the next.

This work is a non-narrative, experimental, slightly abstracted reality. The rehearsal process encompassed putting all of these multifaceted elements and options in the room with the fullness, messiness, and relationality that is being human. Inside this sensorially rich space, I composed happenings. I didn't place these in a chronology or even challenge myself to decide whether they all lived in the same world until the end of the fall semester 2023. I had a steady, cyclical trust in myself and the community created that these happenings would crystalize and present themselves in an order as time passed. This is not stated to describe a release of responsibility but quite the opposite, I engaged in hyper responsibility toward crafting each rehearsal and composition in the moment so that I could release concern about the end product or the future. While working in this way, I honestly didn't know if this would produce primarily a way of working, primarily a dance, or both.

Before long Walders, Miramontes, and Pattengill leave the stage space and a trio of Bruno, Breeden, and Falcon remain. The three dancers who exit visibly observe the onstage trio as they construct another present memory of what has come before. They reprise their score that catalyzed this section, this time without half of their group and without the chatter of collective voice. Bruno, Breeden, and Falcon move with a dissipated softness in comparison to the previous full group enactment of this score. They embody a contradictory, unfinished languid fluidity whilst seeing each other with care. Falcon stays behind near the center of the stage as Bruno and Breeden continue toward the upstage diagonal. The three dancers who exited reenter to softly catch Bruno and Breeden in the upstage left corner of the space, where this section began. The catch is a gentle moment of imbrication as the now quintet slowly molds and morphs into each other's negative space. They stay connected and travel toward the floor until they

end up as a pile of resting bodies, a very different sculpture from the stationary one across from them.

Falcon begins a solo as the final section of the work. The collective listening, tableau vivant, and queerness that encompassed the work up until this point are now part of the air that Falcon works within. She works steadily, with great effort. Falcon takes her time in each tableau she rests in for moments of reflection and synthesis. She strives, stumbles, and pushes her physicality to a breaking point all whilst maintaining a temporal oddity in timing and execution of the movements she embodies. Falcon is left alone in a conceptual space that has yet to be occupied. She is separate from both the group and the sculpture that housed the world that has transpired. Almost under her breath she brings back pieces of text from the first section. First, Falcon travels seated on the floor, out of breath repeating the word “me.” Later she states, “there, I said it. It’s been me all along, hosting you...” and then she trails off as her body meets the ground. These moments of text bring back a present memory of the world of performing performativity but this time with the thin aesthetic façade stripped away. The audience is left to wonder if this is her world, her imagination that has created this entire happening or if she is simply a product of it. The lights go dark on her while she is still in motion, leaving these questions unanswered.

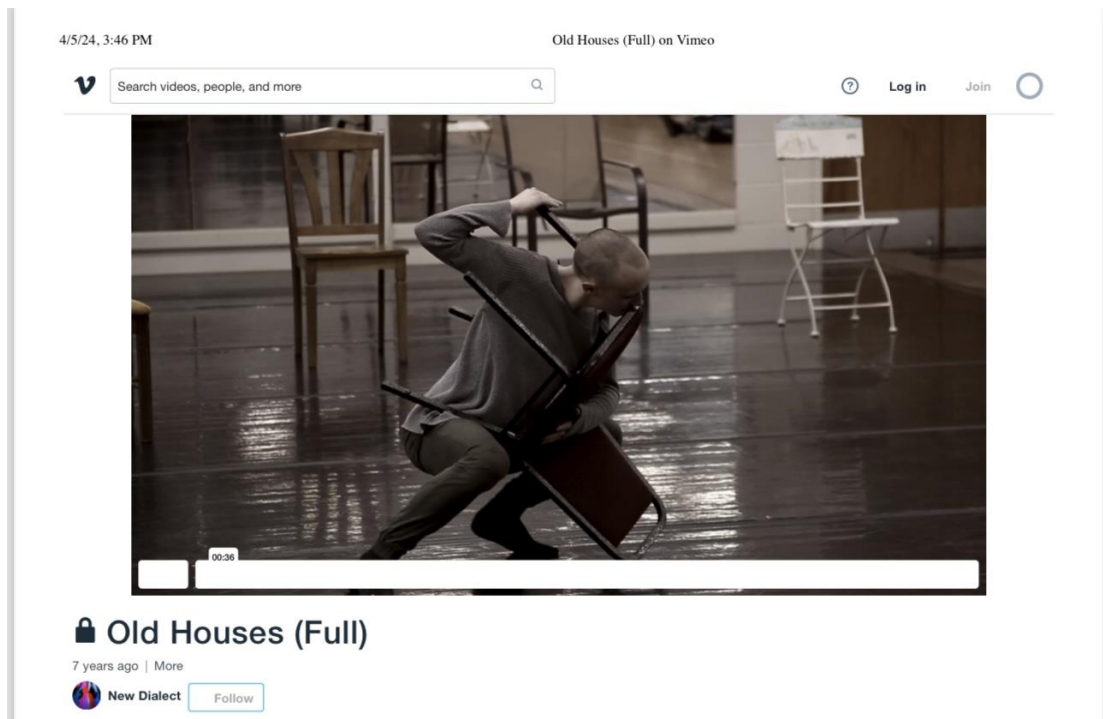
This thesis research and this dance express queer subjecthood embodied, choreography as feminist knowledge production, queerness as a technology, and a world of performing performativity through a case study of both *Cabaret* and my own thesis work, *Tonight, we, may win*. I theorize alongside scholars of queer theory, performance studies, cultural theory, trans studies, gender studies, critical race theory,

and more to encompass the interlocking systems and structures that both work together and in tension to create a queer reality of the world we live in. I dive with deep care into queer performance on stage because I believe in its power and importance in imagining and creating possibilities for more inclusive and equitable futures. Making visible what is commonly unnoticed and unnamed is a practice of queer excavation that I enact through my choreographic work and scholarship. This practice is a responsibility I hold with reverence as an artist and emerging scholar.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Performer James Barrett in a performance of *Old Houses* at Centennial Performing Arts Studios in Nashville, TN, 2016.



Appendix 2

Photo 1: *Tableau Vivant* research 8/29/23



Photo 2: *Tableau Vivant* research 9/12/23



Photo 3: *Tableau Vivant* Research 10/5



Photo 4: *Tableau Vivant* research 10/10



Appendix 3

On Friday 8/25 after I warmed the dancers up, I gave them a very simple score to work with. As they embodied this simple score I was mostly observing and sparsely interjecting with my voice to add another layer to the score and to invite in energetic diversity that I wasn't seeing in the space but was craving as a director. From the outside this process creates a snowball effect. Observation leads me to an improvisatory decision that cycles back to observation until I read that the dancers are ready or need another decision or layer in the space. This cycle continues until I decide to intentionally pause for breaks or to switch ideas. It is through this process that I come in with a plan and ideas and for the most part end up enacting something entirely different. Through this process in the first three days of rehearsal, I have created and the dancers have enacted approximately seven newly birthed scores. I am tracking each of these scores in my notes and we'll see if they develop further or mold into something entirely new through time.

A few examples of scores I've titled in these first three rehearsals:

1. "Getting to Know"
2. Concentric circles/secret roles
3. Fire and Ice
4. Falling in, Falling out
5. Weighted Puzzles
6. What Happens Next?

Scores 1 and 5 were the only ones from this list that I planned before hand to try. The rest are ones that I created in the moment in response to what I read from the room.

Appendix 4

The original text. Not all of this text is spoken in the final performance:

I'm your host X12

Me
Me
Me
Me
Me
Me
Me

There I said it.
It's been me all along.
Hosting YOU. HERE.
(Long pause)
Welcome (weird smile)

Hello stranger
Happy to see you
I care very much whether you go or stay
If you kiss me
If we tooooooouchhhh
Warnings fair
I care very much

(Repeat choreography)
There I said it.
It's been me all along.
Hosting YOU. HERE.
(Long pause)
Welcome (weird smile)

Hello darlings!
Beautiful?
Diss-appointing?
Butt all our troubles are HERE.

Go ahead—try.
I'll wait.

Who knows? Tonight, (pause) we (pause) may win.

Appendix 5

Rebecca thesis rehearsals, Fall 2023

Kris's horizontal/dramaturgical notes, meanderings, conjurings, unravelings, recollections...

Thursday 11/2, Studio 2 then 1

rehearsal time space

How to let the work go and come

The wigs aren't here
But the hair is real anyway

G ray stray
Nothing stays

A way
A weigh
[google auto capitalization OFF]
at bay okay
weight what

it's good we just looked
for the kind of space we
were looking for

all in and all out
isn't that the dream and wish a wash let er rip
here just trying a grip a gripe

everything comes & goes

how to be s wipe
swipe
swipe
how to be with something decomposing Z Z Z Z Z

I fear I
I fear I
I fear I might

and they very well may
show us how to meet an other
finding forms that organize
organics, but with whispers
they will keep you afloat and abreast
have you heard of this way faring way

it's not so far ashore, astray

ashen
writing from inside the cauldron
from the soles of feet
that yawn through ground to imbibe

it's a world apart
it's a world where the front of your
rib cage remembers it has a back, and sides

a rib cage - - discrete & composite

insides made of insides
queer
—a chamber dance

growing a queer biome/ body

synthetic biome
organic artifice

brittle network
brackish choreography

building barges

space inside

to be inside yourself
is to know the world,
a limited world, which is why it matters how you compose it,
not just who's near
but how you hold them
near

At the risk of feeling/being/staying
distant from some of your

conceptual kernels, I write
from you my body and all of its specificities, limitations, and
possibilities as someone in the space.

It's all tender and mutable,
finding forms that
are perches, transient trails
to meet and trust, to voice
and quiver

To see & see
// Rebecca coaching:
→ "whatever feels better"
→ "I want to bestow the agency upon you to add a layer of yourself to this frame
you've been given"
→ "the group can decide from your somatic sensing from the inside"

&HORIZONTAL DRAMATURGY -
FINDING SUPPORTS WHERE THEY ARE
-dramaturgy from the ground, for choreography from the in between

Thursday 11/30, Studio 1

crowns crimps

Open the space, flip the arm, this goes up

Mathematical and sharp, dut dut dut
To gather and slice, swipe

I'm trying to get back something about the relationship between the two

I find myself turning my head as I write - as though I want to view horizontally
This space is configured horizontally, which is already an interruption of the
inheritances/conventions of this space;
To watch sideways
To know another way

Attracted towards

1 2 3, bup bup

Get on the phone, start stirring, the thing drops, you pick it back up

&
Good

To have any capital letters in this feels already wrong

Head nod,
Shoulder stir stir stir

Rise up and swirl

Pitch forward, spine slightly front of hips, dut dut dut
[google docs auto capitalization OFF]
the head is a reaction to the arms coming down; drunk again, nonspecific
word lag time

can we come into a tighter formation
would that be scary for everyone (scary's not the right word)

i see hair transmuting into addams family lamp shades; but to be michael jackson
might just be enuf
PIZZA - i said pizza

arm joints disconnect
3 inches from their insertion

anyone say if the closeness is not positive; touching okay for me but say if there's any
touching that's not okay for you

head tick no no no no
can you hold something up between your shoulder and your head
which shoulder is it

it might just keep slipping away though

i'm gonna propose something as an experiment
let me know if it will throws folks off
this motion can be inserted anywhere you want in the whole shebang shebang

turn your fucking head as deborah hay would say
let's add 2 without the foot, and then one more

cave and crack, slide forward but into attention

brush my hair my hair it's magical did you know i'm an angler fish
itching tea pot top
it's unraveling so catch it all quick; but you might just make me tick tick ticket
swirl and collect

thank you all so much

this group is synapses - sounding
it's all so full of sound

// break

(minus Peter and Bree; those left are Emilia, Zoe, Daniel, Brit)

a preface
various tableaux that foreshadow i'm your host
it's not going to be what it'll end up being without 2 of our people here
7 ideas for those tableaux
a moment from your solo

1tableau / 2construction
primed for 2 after those gestures

to build a tableau is to wait and see
to make shapes with ghosts

building stills building photo-graphs
sudden snapshots

"i'm your host" - all
"the frozen place"
the distance feels far

i hear traces of Rebecca in myself - frequent gratitude
threads through space

how an image ricochets, ripples through
group accountability is really helpful for me

still images 1-10

the directing position -

emilia handstands, and everyone is Involved

people arrive at images in different times, slightly or slyly; but inevitably the
group image dissolves and i lose it; it's so slippery to swatch, it's so slippery human
perception, Limited

moment of connection, or leave early
moment of congeal before we dissipate

*By end of intensive, have a sketch of the whole thing, folks will be invited in and
out.

"i'm kvelling. you know kvelling?"
"no"
"it means: overwhelmed with emotion."

Thursday, Dec 14, 12pm, Studio 2

breathing trio - heaving having

keeper of exactness

walking casually
foxhole foxhole ascend like a g0d

heated touch we are planets we orbit whether we know each other or not

is it a basketball game, because it's not a tennis match
it's also not a golf course or a pinball machine

but it might be a

we're all in a suspended place

do alligators just hover or do they lick their lips and dream of other worlds

is brit a mirror ball
because bree is a disco

daniel might be tree of life

it's all delicious, tasty - bowls of chowder and lemon wedges

to make it a jungle gym is a side-eye system,

steam rolling ahead - - - - there's a forward press that's palpable
to hold a shape is to hold the world

roisserie
it's different by the light of day

slowness relieves, i can see more - like a strong cup of tea
(why don't you try out different things and report back to me what feels sustainable)
energetic information

dancers are love
we are all just a bunch of pelvises

my gaze dissolves but does it penetrate movie screen call my be your name
i forgot your name

stand and stare - emilia butt star

is choreography about partitions or is it about touch

electron ghosts, brimming here's my undersides for u
it's a live notation ee mm an u ensis

fresh cut flowers
be full

a quiet checking in, the dance happens in the sidechats
she sees more than she says
they are an emoji

now we are islands
to make a soup you cannot rely on the computer chewy soup

if petri dishes were gallon size
feet are just their very own dance

how to become a vessel but not a candelabra

everyone has cheeks; everyone has cheeks
gay glitch

foldinggg table but loose legs
ta da

time is thick pangs
to be transcribed is to be registered but 57

wrist watch

mark-thru:

curtains open

we're inside the catch and release score

i want us to try for this first round a warming up into the score

and what i mean by that is, when the curtain opens we're not _____

but when the curtain opens we're in the part of the warm up score we've been
working on when we're fully sensing each other

we escalate into the peak - the peak is here - catch and release

tableaus 1-6

from 6, i'm ur host 1 and 2

i'm ur host 1, conversational

i'm ur host 2, with the same vocal pauses from yesterday - no knees/me's?

i'm ur host 2 ends w "i'll wait" - we wait

transition for ryan's sound - pull bree and emilia into their duet from here

the duet happens - just go to crouched releve - part 1

part 2, full shift, we're all on the ground; end w leaving brit for solo

chairs, stool, piano bench

could we please move the shit in a sculpture over here
score minute 7

slow into connecting, someone breaks it and everything swirls and swishes, slowing
down into next energetic perch

letting a tableau emerge
finding a set tableau

line arrives, launching into one last pose

"i'm your host"

chairs - me me me me me me me

THERE

talk show host

hosting you
here
family portrait - smile hard cheese havarti

clowns i don't know where we land; it's a
"there, i said it - it's been me all along - hosting you - HERE"
smiles are scary, i cringe inside, i can't look away
who are these people they are so many versions
uninvited chorus, no core
hyper-performance
bree and emilia emerge; they see each other; they figure something out, there's a
language, a listening, a leaving, a pawing kneading
SNIFF

how to decide what matters and what doesn't matter but everything happens and is
worth noticing

coalesce and break up magnetic, you feel the repelling and coming together
we've been here before

marking is interesting because i don't know where the person starts and ends, where
the choreographer starts and ends, where the contract starts and ends, it's like
watching someone close their eyes and then knowing that they don't know whether or
not you're still looking at them
we are framed by apples
is a solo a sculpture/is a sculpture a solo

the solo is one of measuring, how many feet til i can't keep going
so much information
bodies errant and holding close i will brew you something for this is how i noknow to
curl up and i know there's nothing left for you let me wait for the light to come back
oh let me wait there's nothing to say about stillness like in closed captioning there is
nothing to say about silence unless the image suggests that we should hear
ass first
an electric current tell me how to pose for you i'll fold myself like a mobile i'll be the
mobile and i'll crunch you a place to land are you going to see me or what i'll pull my
insides out and i'll make my face ready to see you swim will you unhinge my bowl,
will you make the soles of my feet a recipe for keeping on; i just found you here like
that, i keep slipping into myself with no way to get out; i see you're stuck here too

the chairs

"i'm your host" - tonal shifts

swing swung swing

full out

to see listening is to see a clear network of attention
watching negotiation
finding space to fit, to slip, to encounter and meet in a way that doesn't require only
the eyes
the crack releases a store of potential energy

to wait and breathe, we might lose count
every tableau is a relation crafted uncrafted for the flights of my familiar
arrangements
communal flurry gives way to egg yolk drip, ooze
the spine and neck is so expressive
it's the jaw, the way the jaw is held/unheld

harder MMM - air behind the lips - more staccato on each word

it's been me all along, hosting you, here

disssssssssssssappointing
go head, try, i'll wait

to commit to working thru a duet form; underscoring loneliness when a duet is un-
coupled

we fabric; we are fabricated; we will buzz unconditionally
if we warp we will rid ourselves of eyes there's a pouch you probably haven't seen
yet
to become undone
to pontificate to be supplicant
is it weave a world are you going to copy me watch me wilt
quiet metronome gather me up some of this is like a video game
why did he clap;

to begin from here:
i see a group of
we keep arriving in a place we just start to make sense of and we grow to meet its size
its shape its specific contours
we contour ourselves to listen but to meet w

unside down i find my side; waiting wondering willing; arising to grow and hop with
precision; i'm dogged and i'm excavating from the inside or the outside; left shoulder
holds it all i must rest; i must find ground; legs wiggle to locomote this is a shedding,

i find the space above me to rest again; the ground is only as hard as you make it out to be; i'm readying to arrive full of wonder, testing nthe ground, steadying but only to catch myself. lower lower everything will empty find the curvature i will burst, repeatedly, chest don't find me a chest without this one at the center; exhaling i'm figuring something out, i will hold it all, i will catch stars in my mouth, i will charge and crush, i will wait for you to see it all
what's done is done

[patrik in attendance]
quality of attention /listening
hot core

leave for some time and come back
we stew

Appendix 6

Rebecca thesis rehearsals, Fall 2023

Kris's horizontal/dramaturgical notes, meanderings, conjurings, unravelings, re-collections...

Thursday 11/2, Studio 2 then 1

Thursday 11/30, Studio 1

Thursday, Dec 14, 12pm, Studio 2

We Stew

leave for some time and come back

unside down i find my side; waiting wondering willing; arising to grow and hop with precision; i'm dogged and i'm excavating from the inside or the outside; left shoulder holds it all i must rest; i must find ground; legs wiggle to locomote this is a shedding, i find the space above me to rest again; the ground is only as hard as you make it out to be; i'm readying to arrive full of wonder, testing the ground, steadying but only to catch myself. lower lower everything will empty find the curvature i will burst, repeatedly, chest don't find me a chest without this one at the center; exhaling i'm figuring something out, i will hold it all, i will catch stars in my mouth, i will charge and crush, i will wait for you to see it all
what's done is done

we contour ourselves to listen but to meet w

its specific contours

we keep arriving in a place we just start to make sense of and we grow to meet its size
its shape

i see a group of

to begin from here:

why did he clap;

quiet metronome gather me up some of this is like a video game

is it weave a world are you going to copy me watch me wilt

to pontificate to be suppliant

to become undone

if we warp we will rid ourselves of eyes there's a pouch you probably haven't seen
yet

we fabric; we are fabricated; we will buzz unconditionally

disssssssssssssappointing

it's the jaw, the way the jaw is held/unheld

the spine and neck is so expressive
communal flurry gives way to egg yolk drip, ooze
every tableau is a relation crafted uncrafted for the flights of my familiar
arrangements
to wait and breathe, we might lose count

the crack releases a store of potential energy

the crack releases a store of potential energy
finding space to fit, to slip, to encounter and meet in a way that doesn't require only
the eyes
watching negotiation
to see listening is to see a clear network of attention

full out

swing swung swing

the chairs

way to get out; i see you're stuck here too
feet a recipe for keeping on; i just found you here like that, i keep slipping into myself
with no
make my face ready to see you swim will you unhinge my bowl, will you make the
soles of my
i'll crunch you a place to land are you going to see me or what i'll pull my insides out
and i'll
an electric current tell me how to pose for you i'll fold myself like a mobile i'll be the
mobile and
ass first
unless the image suggests that we should hear
nothing to say about stillness like in closed captioning there is nothing to say about
silence
i know there's nothing left for you let me wait for the light to come back oh let me
wait there's
bodies errant and holding close i will brew you something for this is how i noknow to
curl up and

SNIFF

uninvited chorus, no core
who are these people they are so many versions
smiles are scary, i cringe inside, i can't look away
"there, i said it - it's been me all along - hosting you - HERE"
clowns i don't know where we land; it's a

finding a set tableau
letting a tableau emerge

next energetic perch
thing swirls and swishes, slowing down into
slow into connecting, someone breaks it and every

could we please move the shit in a sculpture over here

chairs, stool, piano bench

part 2, full shift, we're all on the ground;
the duet happens - just go to crouched releve - part 1
a warming up into the score
i want us to try for this first round a
i'm ur host 2 ends w "i'll wait" - we wait
pauses from yesterday - no knees/me's?
i'm ur host 2, with the same vocal
i'm ur host 1, conversational
from 6, i'm ur host 1 and 2
tableaus 1-6
the peak is here - catch and release
we escalate into the peak -
we're fully sensing each other
warm up score we've been working on when
but when the curtain opens we're in the part of the
opens we're not _____
and what i mean by that is, when the curtain
we're inside the catch and release score
curtains open
mark-thru:

wrist watch

to be transcribed is to be registered but 57
time is thick pangs

ta da
foldinggg table but loose legs

gay glitch
everyone has cheeks; everyone has cheeks

how to become a vessel but not a candelabra

feet are just their very own dance
if petri dishes were gallon size

chewy soup
to make a soup you cannot rely on the computer
now we are islands

be full
fresh cut flowers

it's a live notation ee mm an u ensis
my undersides for u
electron ghosts, brimming here's

it's different by the light of day
roisserie
to hold a shape is to hold the world
there's a forward press that's palpable
steam rolling ahead - - - -

to make it a jungle gym is a side-eye system,

and lemon wedges
it's all delicious, tasty - bowls of chowder

their lips and dream of other worlds
do alligators just hover or do they lick

we're all in a suspended place

but it might be a

it's also not a golf course or a pinball machine
is it a basketball game, because it's not a tennis match

orbit whether we know each other or not
heated touch we are planets we orbit

foxhole foxhole ascend like a god
walking casually

keeper of exactness

"it means: overwhelmed with emotion."

"no"

"i'm kvelling. you know kvelling?"

moment of congeal before we dissipate
moment of connection, or leave early

sudden snapshots
building stills building photo-graphs

to make shapes with ghosts
to build a tableau is to wait and see

thank you all so much

swirl and collect
but you might just make me tick tick ticket
it's unraveling so catch it all quick;
itching tea pot top
brush my hair my hair it's magical did you know i'm an angler fish
cave and crack, slide forward but into attention

let's add 2 without the foot, and then one more
turn your fucking head as deborah hay would say

you want in the whole shebang shebang
this motion can be inserted anywhere

it might just keep slipping away though

which shoulder is it
shoulder and your head
can you hold something up between your
head tick no no no no

3 inches from their insertion
arm joints disconnect

PIZZA - i said pizza

would that be scary for everyone (scary's not the right word)
can we come into a tighter formation

drunk again, nonspecific word lag time
the head is a reaction to the arms coming down; drunk again,
[google docs auto capitalization OFF]
Pitch forward, spine slightly front of hips, dut dut dut

Rise up and swirl

Shoulder stir stir stir
Head nod,

To have any capital letters in this feels already wrong

Good
&

you pick it back up
Get on the phone, start stirring, the thing drops,

1 2 3, bup bup

Attracted towards

To know another way
To watch sideways

the relationship between the two
I'm trying to get back something about

To gather and slice, swipe
Mathematical and sharp, dut dut dut

Open the space, flip the arm, this goes up

crowns crimps

and quiver
to meet and trust, to voice
are perches, transient trails
finding forms that
It's all tender and mutable,

possibilities as someone in the space.
limitations, and
from you my body and all of its specificities
conceptual kernels, I write
distant from some of your
At the risk of feeling/being/staying

Near
but how you hold them
not just who's near
how you compose it,

a limited world, which is why it matters
is to know the world,
to be inside yourself

space inside

building barges

brackish choreography
brittle network

organic artifice
synthetic biome

growing a queer biome/ body

—a chamber dance
queer
insides made of insides

a rib cage - - discrete & composite

rib cage remembers it has a back, and sides
it's a world where the front of your
it's a world apart

that yawn through ground to imbibe
from the soles of feet
writing from inside the cauldron
ashen

it's not so far ashore, astray

have you heard of this way faring way
they will keep you afloat and abreast
organics, but with whispers
finding forms that organize
show us how to meet an other
and they very well may
they will hum
they will hold
we will find thread

together
We will find fibers to be

**To sing of other ways
A choreography of tender grooves
To come back into full form
To check in is to soften
To share space is to share weight
other
Strategies for finding each
Networks for listening
between people
A choreography of the space**

warm red light
all is full of love

that springs out of everyone]
[to know a queer way of tending
[to find a queer way of being
that swells into everyone
the floor is never not there
trove troubadour
Imminent warmth
imagine
Immanent warmth

to mow the lawn
but not town

is it not just always a clown
is it not just always a crown

ho hum
but locust knows
maybe plague

in everyone is everyone — no?
there is only one person

I sigh not
I might now
I fear I might
I fear I
I fear I

Z Z Z Z Z Z
how to be with something decomposing
swipe

swipe
how to be s wipe

everything comes & goes

here just trying a grip a gripe
isn't that the dream and wish a wash let er rip
all in and all out

were looking for
for the kind of space we
it's good we just looked

weight what
at bay okay
[google auto capitalization OFF]
A weigh
A way

Nothing stays
G ray stray

But the hair is real anyway
The wigs aren't here

How to let the work go and come

rehearsal time space

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