

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

RENDER EDIT: THE PAPER MY
COMMITTEE ADVISES

Sarah Mertz, Master of Fine Arts in Dance, 2017

Thesis Directed By:

Associate Professor, Sara Pearson, School of
Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

Dear Reader, you are invited to experience the creative process, execution, pedagogy, failures, and visceral response of *Render Edit* – a semester-long project that culminated in an evening-length dance theatre event of three simultaneous performances in one space with subdivided stages and audiences. *Render Edit* asked audiences to engage with a scaffolding that concealed and revealed emotional arcs and structural narrative via movement, sound, and prop. This document is meant to provide you something sustainable, concrete, and explanatory to the dance's ephemeral experience. Both dance and document are a womanifesto of challenge and agency. Both are meant to be duplicitous, triangulated, and experienced from multiple points of view. Both were completed in partial fulfillment and challenge of the Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies.

RENDER EDIT: THE PAPER MY COMMITTEE ADVISES

by

Sarah Mertz

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:
Professor Sara Pearson, Chair
Professor Adriane Fang
Professor Patrik Widrig

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Preface

Render Edit is a work of which I am least proud, most embarrassed, not-mildly ashamed, and pedagogically defensive.

It is a work of tiered care, dedicated performers, fraught designers, a failing choreographer/director.

It is a work that means nothing, or three stages, one hour, and eight evenings worth of things, or something only meaningful in context of how it was made and how it can now be used to apply critique to arts activism.

It was a teaser, an instigator, a hapless romantic, an awkward comedy for insiders, an off-putting discomfit for outsiders, an I-told-you-so, a squashed attempt, a too-big-for-its britches last stand, a place to explore artistic structure which got displaced by administrative structure, and national politics.

It was hard to witness in it the quality of earnest. It was painful to perform it with different notions of a vacuum. It was lonely. It was divided. It was self-fulfilling and trite. Joy was only in the set's divots: mistaken absentia: places to hide.

It was epic in concept and diminutive in execution. It was too late for proper reification. It was too early for most critics' absorption and appropriation of post post

modern and meta meta meaning. It was dark. I mean it was actually too dark. The lights were too dim. Too murky.

It was brazen in making you make up your mind. It was braziers built into costumes under detailed faces and snakes. It was bravado. It was pointed and directed. It was directions to: look here, pay attention, get jealous, miss this, catch a glimpse of that. It was about discovering the efficacy and contemporary press for concealing and revealing information.

It was built on shaky foundations – from swaying walls to feeble choreographic stamina.

It was requirement turned requiem. Consider letting it rest.

Or start from some place; probably not the beginning.

Foreword

It's two months later.

63 days, 12 hours, 4 minutes since I arrived at The Clarice, with one suitcase of homemade props, a second suitcase of materials to make more props and various different under garments as potential options, one and a half notebooks (one was normal size and filled cover to cover, and one was half size with half-pint notes), and a solid, printed out plan made in cahoots with my kickass stage manager to begin tech for *Render Edit*. Sometimes I like specifics. Sometimes the jumble is the most detailed I get. And that's on purpose. A fairytale version of the sentence that finished two lines up ends with: "...and I was ready to conquer my MFA Thesis Week!" In reality, I arrived armed to survive what I could only imagine would be a difficult and joyless string of eight drudging days and sleepless nights. It turned out even worse. And two months distance is hardly enough time to process the myriad majors and misgivings of my thesis undertaking. However, in the last two months, the world order has upended itself¹, the Statue of Liberty's torch has been snuffed out, stayed, threatened, degraded, and the current state of affairs preferences 3rd grade reading level language and picture emotions like: sad, huge, and dumb.

Shortly after conceiving and proposing my thesis project about structure, I was awarded the 2016 Local Dance Commissioning Project from the Kennedy Center. This piece would premiere September 29th and 30th – just two months before

¹ The 2016 US Presidential Election resulted in Donald J. Trump winning the

my thesis concert. It would be my largest undertaking with highest stakes to date, at sixteen Dancers, one composer, three live musicians, one stage, and three site-specific locations. I ended up making an evening-length work, *Skirt the Wall*, which tackled race, immigration quotas, and women's liberation. I found my artistic voice as an artist activist. I changed. And I didn't know how to apply that change to an already in-progress *Render Edit* concept with limited time and, frankly, limited creativity after nine months of work on the other show. When I finally started the thesis choreography in earnest on October 4th, I was disillusioned. I did not want to proceed as planned. Over the next two months, I crumbled as a director and choreographer.

I start this formal writing process with questions of the current definitions of human decency, normalcy, and escapism. My work, conceived over a year ago was purely an imagined physical structure that, meta-meta delight, would explore structure as an emotional arc. But by the time I began rehearsals, one month out from the 2016 Presidential Election, the simplicity of structure, and the complete lack of relevance to the politically charged climate was not enough. Not only was my work lacking in substance, it was almost an explicit denial of the zeitgeist – going against every artistic or pedagogical statement I'd ever written or practiced, and certainly overshadowed by *Skirt the Wall's*, (and my own), recent commitment to social justice.

As political upheaval turned the country upside down, I was confused about concentrating on art for art's sake. However, even though I didn't have much

choreography by October, the thesis process was already well underway in terms of design and marketing. The majority of my scheduled thesis time was spent coaching my designers toward aesthetic and practical realization. The Clarice's Marketing Department had muzzled the artistic scope of the proposal. And the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies' Director and Associate Director were looped into all electronic communications about how difficult I was, unsurprisingly, proving to be. My work, meant to push envelopes, live in marginally uncomfortable territory, and awaken folks to possibilities greater than proscenium-drawn and curtained conclusions, was really only pushing paper. I was asked to stand up and make an example of the good fight. But I did not see the decency in providing escapism from the currency of our country's rifts.

I weighed alternatives. I wondered about finding another way to complete the thesis requirements. Why couldn't I use the work I had just completed at the Kennedy Center? I considered quitting the program. I informed my Dance Director I did not want to do the project. But, I was heard as the Wolf who cried, "Boy, am I done!" And this melodramatic student was firmly reminded of my deep commitments to collaborators and design shops who had already cut and dyed cloth, bought and prepped 2,053 pounds of lumber. I was six months into an arranged marriage and hot on the heels of assignment completion before I found my artistic voice.

By October, I had already identified lessons learned in collaboration, institutional politics, mentorship, diplomacy, and professionalism. I didn't believe

relearning those lessons daily until December would make me stronger or better.

Worse, I knew my piece did not belong on the same concert as my grad school cohort member Chris Law's *Full Circle: Bridging the Gap*.

Three weeks after the 2016 presidential election, my all white cast and scenic design that included large walls on stage, should not have shared an evening with my colleague Chris Law's multi ethnic cast who shed light, commented, and provided creative solutions on and for race relations, women's liberation, police brutality, and intergenerational differences. We needed to consider prefacing Law's serious conversation with my own experimental art. In the end, and in my opinion, my work was both discredited by sharing an evening with something so historic, timely, and important, and discrediting of the time and place in which it was presented.

So, as you press forward on your own relay race of active resistance, and as you read this document of context and academic defense, know that making art and reflecting on creative process in these fraught times is different than in Fall 2015 when this project was conceived and proposed. Interpretation and reception of experimental art for art's sake is different now, than post-November 2016. This thesis document will address that shift.

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Chapter 1: The Scaffolding

Execution Details

I want to share the execution details of *Render Edit*: when, where, and how it happened, who you saw perform it, and in what context it could be interpreted.

Render Edit was officially marketed for and performed December 9th-11th, 2016 in the Dance Theatre of The Clarice on the University of Maryland (UMD), College Park campus. It was conceived as a project that would challenge my creativity as never before – starting from a concept of three shows in one. It was proposed as an ongoing ritual of performance and research that would take place all over the Clarice and at various calculated times throughout the 2016 Fall semester, culminating in a singular version for the official December concert dates. In actuality, it womanifested in the liminal spaces of the Dance Department's hallways, studios, and offices, with the main thrust of stage choreography occurring in a tight window that started three days after my Kennedy Center performance, and ended four hours before my official opening: eight weeks of rehearsals. The cast, members of my dance company Heart Stück Bernie (HSB), were a ragtag bunch of partners in crime who gave me their all for chips, dark chocolate, and criminal performance stipends. We were: two undergraduate Dancers from the University of Maryland (Amber Chabus and Emily Ames), three professional Dancers from the DC dance community (Kate Folsom, Patty Mullaney-Loss, and Juliana Mascelli), and myself. We were also joined by an understudy and completely invaluable rehearsal assistant, Chelsea Boyd Brown, who made performance cameos, in addition to womanaging most of the hand-made props.

Tori Ujczko, also an undergraduate, and an incredibly calm and supportive force, captained our ship as Stage Manager. Though conceived in earnest, the project was ultimately rehearsed and performed only to fulfill the requirements of my degree in a Master of Fine Arts.

What happened was a fifty two minute dance theatre work that was so convoluted, it was difficult to follow. Which brings me to a second, more honest choice to use the word execution in setting the stage and stages for you. This particular disaster of a project was killed by much of my own failing as a choreographer, director, time-womanager, and collaborator. Subsequent chapters are an attempt to explain why it was so bad. But first, my erstwhile intentions: an exploration of structure, a pedagogy that informs my teaching artist and choreographic practice, and a commitment and identification with the avant-garde.

Structure as Meaning

Back in Fall 2016, I was trying to conceive of a project that would synthesize my graduate research: subversive art approaches, a deconstructivist lens, the possibilities and potential of meaning making in an extended dance event², and a

² I proposed the largest dance event I could imagine executing - a durational, immersive, constantly shifting, all-inclusive package that included: long-form reveal of the final product with ongoing dispatches, layered concept, marketing plan, collaboration with designers and audience members, pedagogy-in-practice, and attention to every detail of reveal, reception, set-up, and punch-line. These project components are elements I identified in Professor Miriam Phillips' second year grad seminar Dance in the Global Context where we learned about the dance event framework. "A term coined by dance anthropologist Joann Keali'inohomoku in 1976, the notion of 'the dance event' considers the total environment in which dance occurs

long-term assignment that would challenge my choreographic patterns and abilities (my preferences for duets, extreme distaste of trios, home-state of site-specific aesthetics, my normal starting place of interpersonal relationships, and my near-absent use of narrative). I wanted to take advantage of the Clarice's production value, budget, and my fellow MFAs' expertise from the costume, design, and lighting departments. I wanted to dream big, knowing I might very well return to my small-budget house show model. I wanted to ask for a scenic design and wardrobe I couldn't realize on my own. So, I proposed a process of creating a storytelling structure that unwinds a labyrinthine narrative while also crystallizing moments of clarity that would serve as an underscore, or alternate version, depending on the audience's point of view. I envisioned a scenic design that would divide the audience and the performance space in thirds so that three separate stages would correlate with three distinct audience vantage points for three simultaneous performances. Performance A would occur on Stage Right for House Left, Performance B would womanifest on Stage Left for House Right, and Performance AB would unfold Upstage Center, parts of which could be seen by both sides of the audience. An additional ten to fifteen patrons would be able to sit at the very top of the risers and

and the function it serves to those communities involved. Emphasizing social context, the framework of the dance event recognizes the interconnected activities and participants involved. The dance event framework attempts to diffuse distinctions and weaken hierarchal categorizations/labeling" (M. Phillips 2017). "Keali'inohomoku refers to the arrangement of activities in the total environment that happen before, during, and after the actual dancing. ...the concept of the dance event...acknowledge[s] that dance is dependent upon its relationship to the community of people in which it occurs and cannot be meaningfully studied as an isolated phenomenon" (Vissicaro 2004, 127).

view the entire work as a whole. Each audience member would experience a complete work. (See *Configuration A on Stage and Seating Arrangements Diagram*.) One stage would feature a trio, one stage would feature a duet, and one stage would feature a solo.

STAGE AND SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

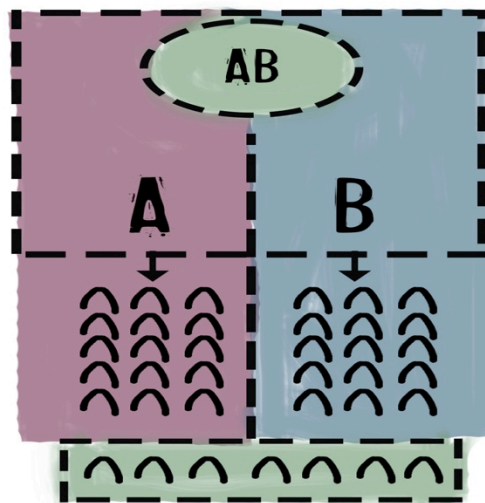


Diagram A: Stage and seating arrangements from thesis proposal.

This proposal checked off my list of desired challenges, but it also provided me with some solid foundations. One of my three stages would be a duet – safe harbor in an otherwise unknown territory. And, instead of veering far afield in choreographic aesthetic, I would lean into my predilection for home-made, site-specific, intimate audience engagement.

I wanted to make something that could be viewed and perceived from three different vantage points to parallel the idea that point of view is partly based on geography (where you are coming from, where you find yourself), partly based on happenstance (where you choose to sit), and partly based on who decides what you

can see, hear, and understand (my directorial choice to render one experience, edit another, just like the media, government, and socio-cultural capital determine framework, accessibility, and rules). I was interested in how a simple structure of divided audiences and divided stages could inform the Dancers' experiences of disparate intention but adjacent actions, and the audience members' experiences of hearing the same soundtrack, while being tasked to piece together a narrative, potentially without all of the information – something we do on a daily basis as we curate our preferred news, entertainment, and social media sources. I couldn't have known how relevant this concept would be to our current state of media assignments, insults, and the bandying about of the phrase “alternative facts.” But, when I conceived of *Render Edit*, I wasn't in a political mindset. I imagined content would be more derived from a sense of wanting to know what's happening on the other side of the wall. I thought this experience might ask the viewer to reflect on herself, on why she wants to see or know more, even when there is “enough” in front of her. I anticipated the likely overstimulation of being able to see all three stages at once, as commentary on more is not always better. I knew audience members sitting in the same section, but with different amounts of access to an adjacent performance space (through gaps in the walls, or proximity to sound) would be confronted with confusing choices. I wanted them to choose; I wanted to give audience members agency in interpretation – from the simple act of having to decide where to look, to the more complicated process of deciphering a particular set of data. I felt this could empower the viewer to make bold choices of interpretation. And this, in turn, could give the viewer more recourse to believe in her own ability to interpret the unknown.

Of course it also saddled the viewer with greater responsibility than a normal theatre seat would conventionally require. In order for my hypothesis of audience interpretation to succeed, the viewer needed to divest from convention, and invest in something decidedly different. I failed to prepare my audience for this in a way that could have proved more worthy or inviting of investment. I left viewers to their own devices – partly out of naivety, partly out of time constraints, partly out of extreme frustration with the process by December 9th, partly out of curiosity and research. The idea, after all, was to set up the walls and see what happens. I didn't want to guide the experience with too heavy a hand.

I also wanted to make a work that could be watched multiple times, mined for meaning, discussed at length “across the aisle.” I was trying to create the preface to conversation in the immediate aftermath of the performance: “What did you see?” “How did your version work with mine?” “What did I miss?” I wanted discussions about experimental art, curious enigmas, frustrating situations, withheld information to spill out into conversation akin to unleashing a theatre full of private investigators into the Intermission Lobby. I didn't want the work to begin on the stage, and end on the stage. I wanted my own research and provocations to spark curiosity, seeking, conversation, and engagement between folks along the way, and beyond the curtain. This layered approach to how we view art, interpret art, and discuss art, is the womanifestation of my scholarly research, the intention for my choreography, the foundation of my pedagogy. The way these categories interact with each other is, in

itself, a three-tiered structure where the boundary walls outline and inform the creative process and product. I believed juxtaposition, adjacent narratives, and a culture of borrowing and sharing across borders would infuse the choreography with meaning. I believed this because I practice it as a teacher daily.

Pedagogy of Interpretation

One of the best aspects of grad school has been the chance to deconstruct and reconstruct my pedagogy. Professor Karen Bradley's first semester Pedagogy course introduced me to the notions of disrupting the classroom as an innovative way to change habits, minds, and complacency (*Disrupting Class How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns* by Clayton M. Christensen, Michael B. Horn, and Curtis W. Johnson) and the idea of a fluid praxis between teachers and students (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire). Growing up in the Jewish tradition of answering questions with more questions, and spending a good portion of grade school seeking out historical examples of radical women as subject matter for annual speech competitions, I had always leaned toward these philosophies. But once I started to examine them more formally, I was able to flesh out my own teaching principles. I am also fortunate to have trained with an incredible roster of dance masters, inspiration, and passion; I am the result of a beautiful lineage of dance educators and performers.

The pedagogy I developed in grad school informed how I theorized *Render Edit*, made it, presented it, intended it for the before, during, and after. It was the

framework for how I experienced the entire project, how I shared it with my collaborators and Dancers, and how I aimed to create opportunities for my students, my audiences, and any overly-aware or unassuming or spectators along the way. I consider it a Pedagogy of Interpretation – hinged on the notion that how we interpret the world around us, and art in particular, is an active practice, and a womanifesto of self and community. As a way of explaining how my teaching and creative process are so thoroughly entwined, the following sections will unwrap this pedagogy with specific principles, examples, and connections between my classroom and my choreography studio.

I try to teach my students (in pre-professional studios, after school arts programs, grade school, and higher education) how to interpret art, and how to intuit and womanifest³ meaning. I encourage them to develop a particular point of view,

³ As a practice, I place “wo” in front of “man” in a number of words: womanifest, womanifesto, womanage, womanager. This is my own take on critical feminist theory, on growing up during the 1991 Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas sexual harassment hearings that changed the pronunciation of harassment to stress the first syllable, instead of the previously preferred second syllable, on my understanding that language and languaging help us codify and understand culture, context, and knowledge, and on my personal teaching artist/choreographer womanifesto to empower women and challenge scholarship. Womanifest/womanifesto is a node to radical manifestation from a feminine POV: using intuition, wiles, multi-tasking, and prowess to overcome a history of subjugation, disregard, or invisibility. Womanifesto and womanifest are the manifest plus versions of realization: they include the act of bringing theories and concepts into being while championing the individual (here feminine) voice, and contextualizing the assertion of ideas historically, academically, and artistically. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a manifesto is “a written statement declaring publically the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer.” Where manifesto declares the views, etc. of the issuer, womanifesto declares *and* the views, the issuer, *and* the creative process.

I tend to use the wo-fronted words as my go-to gender neutral, the way “man” is generally used to represent all people. I use the wo-forms to help folks stop and

keenly responsive to environment, acutely aware of where they come from, and tuned into how their experiences inform, inspire, and ask them to think. The components of my Pedagogy of Interpretation are Womanifesto, View in Context, Ask & Answer, Theorize & Defend, and Community Practice. Definitions, and their direct connection to *Render Edit's* creative process and presentation follow.

Womanifesto

The womanifesto is a personal framework for understanding the world and engaging with it. This stems from the development of a highly stylized point of view from personal investigations and community dialogue. The womanifesto is both the result, and then the continuing practice and revision of critical thinking, opinion, and personal conviction.

I encourage my students to be radical, bold, articulate, and earnest in their convictions, preferences, and aesthetic choices. I expose students to as broad a range of possibility as possible – helping them identify and find themselves on a map that acknowledges margins, but knows it doesn't yet include all the topography of a creative landscape and its resident prospectors.

The Womanifesto introduces students to radical tactics, subversive elements, and extreme examples. I don't require my students to identify with an ends-of-the-

think about the origin, contemporary usage, and future possibility of the word and its meaning. Toward this end, and increasingly during my time at UMD, I even question using wo, as opposed to a more LGBTQQI-friendly prefix or word.

earth/all-or-nothing ideology. I do, however, encourage them to acknowledge and engage “the other,” as a way to widen the definitions of art and artistry. I believe the Womanifesto makes a case for why and how to examine and practice outside of conventional societal expectations that contribute to systemic problems with race, gender, culture, and socio-political factors.

Identifying their unique point of view invites each student to share her own personal background, institutional education, and a presently shared cultural context, for instance in a shared classroom, to interact with other equitable experiences – both predicated and justifying individual viewpoints.

“Make it more what it is.” These are words from my undergraduate choreography mentor Neil Greenberg, and these words are my mantra as a teacher and dance-maker today. I ask my students to saturate their womanifestoes. To understand shades deeper, to invest with intensity, to engage with moving resolve.

In my own creative process, the womanifesto is a set of premises to which I adhere choreographically and performatively: inquisitive and challenging work, consistency, consideration of every detail, immersive theatre, an eye toward the overall arc, subversive and avant-garde art and practices, and making it more what it is. It serves as a way to measure the importance of a particular choreographic or philosophic element of my process – in determining what to pursue, amplify, minimize, or change entirely. I invite equally strong voices into the mix; but if a cast

member or collaborator isn't sharing her own dynamite womanifesto, then I provide the framework, and I have high expectations for the tone I set.

View in Context

We interpret based on what we know. And if we only know a particular set of views, we're working with a redacted map. Therefore, one of the most important elements to my pedagogy is helping students examine and interpret a work of art in context. I instruct them to suss out the background of a work, tune into the political climate and socio-cultural factors of when it was made, and when it was/is presented, the lens, motivation, and polemics of the presenting venue, the artistic directorship, and the viewing audience. After a period of unbiased cataloguing of contextual data, the student can look at the intersection of her womanifesto with the art work's own set of truths. I encourage students to understand and experience a work of art or state of being that can hold multiple truths and be seen through multiple lenses.

As a choreographer, I am consistently tuning into the zeitgeist, and always gathering reconnaissance about the environment in which I'm working, presenting, and provoking. While one part of my womanifesto is to practice subversive art and tactics, I am always playing with a precarious balance of the *meaning* of subverting norms. Understanding my work in context provides me a measuring stick and thermometer to make considered choices, and to encourage my Dancers to make their own considered choices at any given intersection with the work. In my own practice, this is about understanding as reflection from a prism, and not a demagogue's mirror.

Ask & Answer

I want my students to invoke agency, to feel empowered to express their thoughts and opinions as an integral part of the classroom culture. I encourage students to ask questions of each other and to feel confident that their own answers are contributing factors to group knowledge. In a learning community, we can source funds of knowledge from the group, which means draw from each individual's unique cultural and educational experiences to answer from multiple points of view. Questions can be an honest format to frame a conversation – creating boundaries of unknown and known. By following the direction of conversation based on individual questions, I can better understand whether I need to explain things more clearly, provide different kinds of examples, immerse the students in a different approach for better engagement, etc. But, more importantly, the agency to ask questions – is the agency to be in a place of mystery, or obscurity, or enigma, or complete lack of understanding. This is an important place to experience, witness, and grapple with. I believe art is as much about an “answer,” as it is about the creative process. Honoring questions supports the artistic process. It asks the student to practice her womanifesto to understand, interact, and create answers. Ask & Answer is also about a student advocating for herself by seeking clarification and feeling empowered to answer from her own experience. As an artistic community, as citizens, we need to create answers together.

I am always asking questions. I am asking my Dancers to field and pose questions, and I am inviting my audience to engage with questions and imagine their own answers. I believe this honors a back-and-forth, or a dialogue between the Dancers and the audience members. I believe it turns an audience member's head to a forty-five degree tilt upwards – eyes rolling, or eyes rolled back to the brain – with a, “huh...” I think it keeps my work fluid, curious, and reliant on what each of us can bring to the dance floor.

Theorize & Defend

Where Ask & Answer are more of an informal conversation, Theorize & Defend are more of a formal process. After piecing together opinions, context, questions, and their own intersectionality with these broad categories, I ask students to identify an overarching lens and defend their conclusions with reasons and context clues. I ask them to use specific examples to articulate why they experience pleasure or pain from a work of art, or where they gain or lose interest during a work. Again, this agency to opine, to imagine, to search for meaning based on their own womanifesto and the context of the work, is the formula for developing and articulating a point of view. Puzzling pieces together and espousing a larger framework requires students to see a larger map, and to understand their own point of view in relation to other valid topographical markers.

As far as this connecting to my own process: welcome to my Thesis Document!

Community Practice

The work does not stop in the classroom, or on the stage. It goes on.

Community dialogue about artistic examination and discussion is a lifetime practice. It is citizenship. It is community organization. It is pursuing a lifestyle of convictions with questions and creative problem solving, that relies on community members for reflection, confirmation, and persuasion. The first thing I ask my students after we view a dance is “What did you see?” This is the *start* of a conversation – not the end game. And when we realize that we all see something different, and that we can all see something different, our exposure opens up infinite possibilities. I aim for my classroom curriculum and my choreographic work to stir up mixed feelings of comprehension, importance, taste, tone, and scope. I hope my pedagogical and directorial choices direct folks right out of their desks or performance cushion seats to talk about it afterwards. Because I believe in an open-ended, I-search-and-you-search-too, it’s necessary to debrief, understand that other narratives (emotional, content-driven, structural) exist. I am more interested in students and viewers deconstructing the work in living presence and its aftermath, than just taking it as is.

The whole premise of my thesis was to conceal and reveal only so much so that audience members would be left with no choice but to leave the Theatre and ask somebody else, “What did you see?”

The Avant-Garde

The last nail in the structure of my thesis is its connection to the avant-garde. My first collegiate choreographic attempts sixteen years ago at SUNY Purchase were

brash, but inexperienced, all fired-up, but with little to say, and always erring in self-indulgence. After viewing that for two full semesters, my composition teacher Kazuko Hirabayashi directed me to spend my summer studying Dada art. This coincided with several other important inspiration moments for me that year: a deepening affection for the work of John Jasperse as seen from the BAM Harvey theatre's aged and intimate character, crumbling walls, a house show in Bushwick, Brooklyn put on by Miguel Gutierrez with mattresses, a velvet couch, and my favorite dancer Parker Lutz, and my first live experiences with Batsheva Dance Company and Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal. I had no idea what Dada was when Hirabayashi knowingly forced my hand, but as soon as I opened *The Dada Painters and Poets*, an anthology edited by Robert Motherwell, I was sold. It was brash, it was boundary-breaking and genre-mixing, it was pretentious, *and* it was self-aware. It became my bible for the rest of undergraduate choreography classes. As a young artist, most of the writing and *objets d'art* blew my mind and opened up an entire universe of possibility⁴.

⁴ Wikipedia defines the Dada Movement as a reaction to World War I consisting of “artists who rejected the logic, reason, and aestheticism of modern capitalist society, instead expressing nonsense, irrationality, and anti-bourgeois protest in their works” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dada> 15 Apr. 2017). Before my second year college choreography class with Hirabayashi, *The Communist Manifesto* was the extent of my knowledge about a manifesto's brash declarations and calls to action. Tristan Tzara's *Seven Dada Manifestos* from the Motherwell anthology were my first encounter with *artistic* manifestos – and the idea that artists could change the rules by rewriting them, and shift the tides of an artistic movement by embodying their very own made-up ideas. This was a benchmark in my understanding of how to manifest action from concept. My college understanding of Dada was ANTI: anti-establishment, anti-structure, anti-history, anti-sense. This appealed to me as I was beginning to feel boxed in by the formalities of my art form, and my own physical and artistic limitations as a Dancer with limited, conventional career prospects. The mix of abstract portraiture, wordplay, gender-bending, media, collage and art made from

I got woke, as my students would tell me today, to the idea of happenings, events, pop-up performances, manifestos, and, most of all, subversive art and practices. Quickly, and surely, my work and process found its voice in the fringe, in alternate surrealism, in the theatrical world of turning meaning and narrative into meta-meaning and non-linear structure. Important here is that I was not reinventing the wheel, but I was experiencing my own choreographic coming of age as I encountered and gained inspiration from historical examples.

The post-modern choreographers of the 1960's and 70's, (of which Merce Cunningham, Robert Dunn, and Trisha Brown have significantly influenced my

sounds, found objects, bric-a-brac and trash from the streets comprised my first academic, artistic, and conceptual encounters with highbrow and lowbrow art: meaningful intention duplicitously (or not) labeled brazen anti-presentation. In a movement that was anti-history, I was fascinated by the clash between Dada's mission to conjure and review its own art while its very manifestos negated anything that actualized. This illustrated for me the idea of process-based art: it was an antidote to the ephemerality of dance, and it expanded my understanding of artistic connections across genres. I was drawn to the absurdity, artistic experimentation, and cheeky brashness in appropriating societal norms (conduct, practices, words, objects) for purposes of resistance, political commentary, and expressionism. The movement confronted individual creative practices and questions, as well as the gravitas of the western world's angst in the aftermath of war; it was a discrete demonstration of art grappling with reality, and pushing both to their conceivable limits. I was enamored, and seduced by what seemed to be an invitation and instruction manual for a DIY aesthetic.

Some of the infamous *objets d'art* include Marcel Duchamp's 1917 porcelain urinal, signed R. Mutt and titled *Fountain* which sparked debate among artists about the very definition of art, Duchamp's 1919 addition of a penciled mustache and goatee to a print of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, intentionally provoking dialogue about respect and authority, Man Ray's 1921 *Gift* - an iron featuring 14 thumbtacks glued to its soleplate, mischievously misaligning utility and commentary, and Ray's 1924 *Ingre's Violin* whose f-holes painted onto the back of a famous actress juxtaposed the real body with man-made objects, and whose image has since become recognizable in popular culture.

dance education) inspired themselves by Dada, Surrealism, and the concepts and philosophies of performance art, began to create composition curriculum and present work that eschewed formal artistic pedagogy and critique in favor of experimentalism, genre-crossing, and provocative operations and analytic discussion. These choreographers broke away from conventional, proscenium formats and narratives. They established a foundation of art for art's sake. They widened the possibilities of performers, audience members, and performative content by redirecting the eye and the experience toward process, interpretation, chance, and choice.

Allan Kaprow, an artist, lecturer, and early forerunner of performance art, coined the term “happenings” in 1958 as clashes between art and real life meant to expand the definitions of artistic, performative, and blurred performer/audience participation. I encountered these happenings in my explorations of Dada art, my forays into art-house cinema (most notably Michelangelo Antonioni's scene of a happening into his 1966 film *Blow Up*), and Twyla Tharp's famous pedestrian performance *The One Hundreds*, first premiered in 1970, and learned and performed by the writer at American Dance Festival in 1999. In each case, I was drawn to the quality of “other” the auteur expressed; I was intrigued by the imaginative ways to break with convention.

Sally Banes explains the sources of post-modern dance as related to the origins of happenings in the Introduction to her book *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. She writes,

The new theater, like the new visual art, was in a process of dematerialization. When a live sculpture or painting dissipated the traditional permanence of an art object, it dissolved the commodity aspect of the work as well. A sense of immediacy and concreteness combined with spontaneity and an interest in the work process, rather than the finished product, to repudiate the romantic notion of the artwork as a fixed instance of the artist's expression (Banes 10).

Process, experimentation, audience participation, shared meaning-making between performer and viewer, and pushing choreographic boundaries with absurdity, chance, provocation, and banal and quotidian content: these are the elements I learned from my predecessors, and which guide much of my pedagogy and choreography today.

Following Purchase, I moved to East Berlin, Germany in 2005, where I started making my own house shows, in addition to presenting work in artist squats, and liminal spaces still affected by, and rebelling against, the German Democratic Republic's repression of art and free speech. Moving back to New York, I kept with me a spirit of the margin, a preference for the fringe, an inclination for turning institutional negations into creative independence.

Chapter 2: The Dance Event

Verb: Render; Product: Edit

Three Concerts in One Go

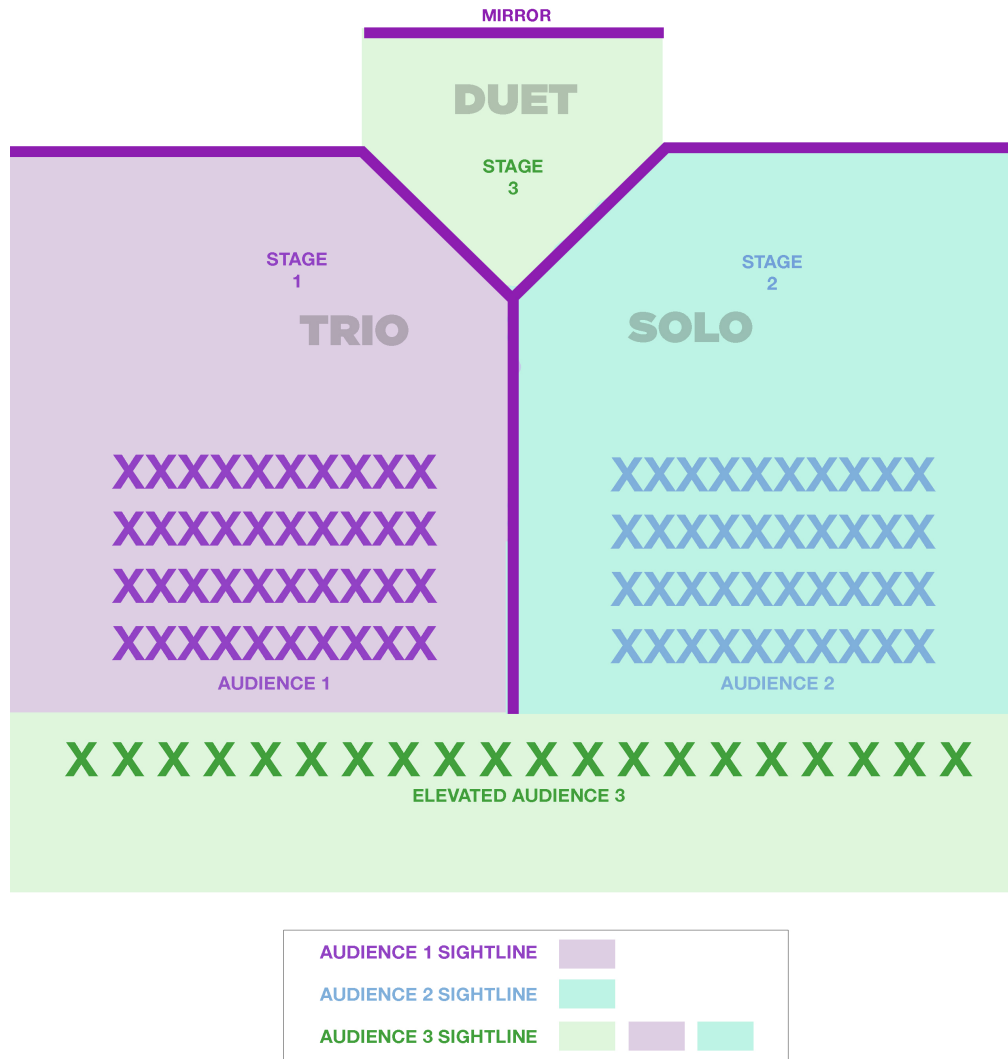


Diagram B: Stage and seating arrangements for thesis concert.

Render Edit was three shows in one. There were three stages separated by walls, and three audiences with uniquely different sightlines. Two audience groups

were separated by walls on the ground level, and the third audience group was seated in a Balcony area for a bird's eye view of all three Stages and Audiences below.

There was one soundtrack for each of the halves, divided by a Talking Intermission in which the entire space filled with multiple spoken texts, visual stimuli, and audience engagement activities. Please see Diagram B to understand how the stages, audiences, and sightlines were delineated.

The Stages

Each Stage featured a different premise that guided the choreography, design, and direction of the entire work.

Stage 1 Utility and Manipulation: The walls and Dancers were meant to be flexible, shifting in design and intent, useful in myriad, evolving, surprising ways. Here serving to direct action, now working to subvert instruction, there shifting gears into nefarious intention. Stage 1 was home base to a trio of Dancers: Kate, Amber, and Juliana. Sometimes they manipulated the set and props, working together to build meaning and cozy structure. Other times they manipulated each other to lay brash territorial claim in a labyrinthine journey. They were antagonistic to each other, they were deeply comfortable with each other, and they either dropped you right into their star-crossed, taped-up middle, or mitigated a rift right through your own. They were triangulated juxtaposition. And their mystery had to be solved in order for the concert to end.



Stage 1: Utility. Dancers using the set and each other to manipulate and complement narrative. Photos by Stan Barouh.

Stage 2 Doors and Windows: Stage 2 was my solo home base. The metaphor of dancing with a set full of doors and windows is an obvious one: personal confrontation with egress and emersion at the end of my graduate career. Whether conceived as multiple ways in, or limited ways out, it could be perceived as question, imperative, or choice. I wanted to present literal and figurative frames for personal interpretation. I wanted to invite ideas and interaction, but control closure. I declared definitive boundaries. I was firm, and so were the solid, wooden walls and brass

handles. This stage stood on its own, but it did not contain any one Dancer's entire narrative arc. It was more of a crossing walk, a throughway, a fork in the road. Almost every Dancer passed through, and, still, its ending position, and mine, was questionable.



Stage 2: Doors and Windows. Examples of light, gaze, body, and egress in the doors, windows, frames, and gutters. Photos by Stan Barouh

Stage 3 The Vacuum: Upstage, triangular, minimal. A stripped duet for Emily and Patty, best viewed through their reflections against blank brushed metal walls in a swath of mirror. A tour de force pas de deux full of vigorous negations, starved intimations, and hard-wired to slow burn. Devoid of objects, but amplified by echoing space. The Vacuum was just as liable to blow away any white noise or detritus, as it was to suck the life out of its inhabitants, or limited eighteen balcony viewers. It occupied center stage, and it was the heart of the work. The key was small, exclusive, and fastidiously hidden. It was a chamber, a closet, a vein cave: the work's vena cava powered by a choreographic on and off switch, seen only from inconvenient angles.



Stage 3: Vacuum. The Dancers draw the focus, effectively obliterating surrounding scenic, light, dance, or audience elements. Photos by Stan Barouh.

The Dance

Dance Sections

Render Edit was comprised of ten sections. You'll read about them, throughout this document, when the time is right. For the purposes of identification and the most pressing element of each section, I will start by supplying you with ten titles and the central mission of each section.

As Dancers do, we developed a shared language in the studio – part shorthand, part pet name as a way to identify each section in the most memory-jogging way. The titles generally reference a key movement, or the main essence of the section. It's telling that most of my sections used the music track as the titular name – my creativity was waning throughout the process, and I was relying too heavily on the music's driving beat, genre, or structure for movement invention I could compound into a full-length work, as opposed to finding music that supported the arc of the concept.

Peaches

Music: *Peaches* by the Stranglers

A blaze open

Dynamite outline of the Dance Space

Womanly, mischievous, physical dancey-dance

Just enough repetition for audiences to glimpse synchronicity and connections between all three Stages

Duck Duck Vulture

Music: an edited version of *You Go on Ahead* by Sunset Rubdown

Introduce game-like dynamic between all the participants: Dancers, Audience, Crew

Introduce scenic disarray as an element: interaction with the set, messiness of the Stage

Notion of Change: Dancers, ideas, and spaces will move throughout the performance

Work Work

Music: *Work Work* by Clipping

Highlights Dancers and scenic elements of Stage 1

Sets up the rules for watching the work:

Audience 1 momentarily enjoys a full house – with most of the Dancers using Stage 1, and all audience members straining to see Stage 1. The choreography places physical, rhythmic movement adjacent to task-oriented gesture.

Audience 2 must look through all of the open spaces to watch movement on the other side. They will have to work to see, or find some other redeeming quality to enjoy about the performance: the look and meaning of empty space, the music and light show they can see...

Audience 3 understands movement will be portioned out differently through

the evening

Tinker Tailor

Music: *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief* by Radiohead

The Dancers return to their home base, and present the embodiment of their emotional arc and stage aesthetic. This section introduces three completely different threads of the work with several intermittent reactions and nonreactions to the same soundtrack of recorded music and live Dancer vocalization.

Stage 1: utilitarian manipulation of each other

Stage 2: one framed moment, suspended in time, searching for egress.

The literal interpretation of “up against a wall,” the overall feeling of the thesis process.

Stage 3: This duet is the lynchpin of the entire work: the endless reorientation of Two Women toward each other, performed in and for a Vacuum.

True Believer

Music: *True Believer* by Clipping

Highlights Dancers in Stage 2, where most of them accumulate

Fulcrum point where the work turns dark, heavy, and tense with strong armed, invasive partnering and abandonment.

Talking Intermission

Music: *Golden Brown* by the Stranglers and Text by the Dancers

Mission: disperse. Create as many moving pieces and performative elements as possible – trying to engage different batches of audience members, and coax them to choose their own path.

Mission: comic relief, letting the air out.

1. Sarah Solo in Stage 1
 - a. A home alone intruder dance in not-my-space
2. Audience Participation in Stage 2
 - a. Viewers asked to take a group photo, in addition to selfies on the stage, with the set
3. Field Trips (described later)
 - a. Emily’s Fine Dining Experience in the Vestibule
 - b. Amber’s Measuring Room Solo in the Egress Room
 - c. Mount Everest in the Balcony
4. Methel Monologue, Audience 1
 - a. Sarah’s pornographic monologue about Methel, a very, very dirty matron and Jewish Bubby
5. Rabbit Ears, Stage 2
 - a. Tin foil feet attached to a Dancer who is then dragged around for good reception – catching snippets of a Telemundo soap opera, Oprah, and an infomercial for dealing with difficult people
6. How-To-Manual, Stage 2

- a. The womanifestation of the last channel, instructing the audience how to deal with a Don't Budge, Wet Noodle, and Stare Down
- 7. Here Kitty, Kitty, Balcony Audience 3
 - a. Emily and Patty goading each other

Pina Pina/EmPat/Balcony

Music: *Sorry for the Delay* by Grizzly Bear and *Get Out, Get Out, Get Out* by Jason Molina

Exploration of derivate formulas from several of *Render Edit's* inspirations: Dancemaker Pina Bausch's canon, filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos films *Dogtooth*, *Alps*, and *The Lobster*, and the graphic novel *Here* by Richard McGuire.

The important element here was to bring everything back down to a simmer after the overstimulation of the Talking Intermission. The movement maintained a brute thick, but the music was lullingly melancholic.

The Two Women of Stage 3 were here featured in Stage 2 – to give the audience a break from my solo halves of the evening, and to share with a larger audience how their connection informed the work.

Dream Baby Dream

Music: *Dream Baby Dream* by Suicide

Render Edit's Ultimate Structure – a dance parsed out in as many different ways as sightlines allowed.

Solos, duets, trios, quartets, and one miniscule five seconds of a full cast sextet that morphed through walls, regroupings, and tightly choreographed, but shifting, unisons.

Pecking Ending

Music: an edited version of *Winged/Wicked Things* by Sunset Rubdown

Anticlimactic denouement, just how I like it.

The finishing touch on each Stage's emotional arc, by this time articulated and quite disparate from anything the other side of the wall.

Animal Collective Epilogue

Music: *Spilling Guts* by Animal Collective

Ebullient Light Show Finale, as a bookend to a dancey beginning, and as a way for all the Dancers to bow for all the audiences before the applause potentially ran out.

The Choreographic Aesthetic

My performance art is built from home-spun arts & crafts that expose seams of meaning and making – always as a dialogue between performer and audience. I

have honed a quirky-luscious movement vocabulary that zigs and zags classical training with contemporary sensibilities. Tender to tense, the work flies through space with abandon, until it grounds itself. It explores conversational and emotive duet work, and it plays at unraveling causation in tight-knit group work. When the curtain rises, opens, or gets thrown aside with gamine intention, my work looks like a been-around-the-block broad – full of accumulated propositions and proposals. She’s been dressed up and stripped down, and she knows how to ask the hard questions.

The movement is best described as quirky-luscious meets highbrow/lowbrow, while long-term dabbling with tender-stark.

Immersive Theatre

Pushing into the audience’s comfort level with physical proximity pushes our own performance choices, until we are all immersed in the experience together. With: each other, as part of the scenic, light, and sound designs, intertwined with the work’s emotional and narrative arc, and affected by each other’s steps and potential missteps.

My professional choreographic career before arriving at grad school was concentrated on site-specific immersive theatre. As a culmination of my graduate work, I wanted to explore whether I could transform a proscenium space so much that it could still feel site-specific and immersive. So I embarked on a mission to make my theatrical components more “with.” And I made up a word to describe it.

withing
[with-ing]

noun

1. the act of creating a space of with
2. the section of an immersive theatre work when the performance and the audience boundaries blur

verb

1. turning the natural state of existing separately into an active togetherness
2. breaking the fourth wall, or knocking down the boundary between performer and audience

Heart Stück Bernie creates immersive audience experiences through withing, by making up new words, using them on an audience, and then talking to the audience about it.

Withing is how I establish the suspension of proscenium performance convention. It's about working together to get through the work, and not just about us selfishly knocking the wall down for our own manifest destiny. But my performance art is also exactly about that: breaking barriers for a shared experience between Dancers and audience.

The first minute of *Render Edit* choreography, in a section called *Peaches*, featured three bold and bordered entrances meant to immerse the audiences in particular ways: questions, space, and clandestine operations. Each stage debuted with a bump in the lights on a separate musical cue to reveal Dancers looking directly into their intended audiences. The introductory stance, stature, and focus were only about being present with audience. All six Dancers then gathered in a single file line across the three stages before walking forward – each of us different distances – to set up the rules of the evening.

Stage 1 Dancers walked up to the line between stage and audience to delineate the boundary and question its (and your) plausibility, deniability, cross-ability. In Stage 2, I bulldozed right through the proscenium into the audience proper, effectively breaking the fourth wall and establishing larger definitions to performative, personal, and content-driven figurative space. The Two Women in Stage 3 could only take two steps before hitting their Stage's apex, so they turned upstage and began a dance only Audience 3 could see.

Called to action, set-up for surprise, and privy to select sightlines, the audience could now choose to search for, wait for, or be guiled by an evening of punch lines. We don't ever force folks, but we do dip your toes in the deep end for you. At that point, it's just easier to dive in, rather than sit with soggy toes for the duration of the evening. It's a benign push. Or it might mean everything. Come with us. Get with it.

The Field Trip

Part of the immersive theatre experience that I include in most of my evening-length works is the Field Trip. The Field Trip is a solo performance for an audience of one that takes place in a separate area during the performance. An audience member is identified, invited to leave with the performer, and then ushered to an alternate world for a few minutes before being escorted back to her regular seat.

The Field Trips are another way to amplify individual experiences and attend to each audience member as a unique voice and unique perspective. I also think this

encourages further discussion and exploration of the work after the fact, outside the theatre. Site-specific Field Trips allow me to explore the performance venue's anterooms, foyers, back corners, and behind-the-scenes – informing the work more holistically. Opening these spaces up to an audience member also opens up different definitions of dance, performance, and theatre. Since I encourage students and audience members to interpret from and with multiple points of view, it's helpful to model an expanded vocabulary and realm of possibility. And since I encourage community dialogue, it's also helpful when these Field Trip participants can spread the word on their own. They become agents of change and interpretation beyond what I could offer by myself. They also add to the necessity to ask, and expanded possibilities of answers to, the question: What did you see?

In *Render Edit*, three Field Trips took place per performance. They each served very different functions, noted below.

Emily's Fine Dining Experience: Emily and her participant enter the vestibule of the Dance Theatre which was complete pristine when audience members entered thirty minutes prior, but which is now completely decorated as a small, intimate restaurant: tea lights on a table, two chairs, a starry night sky out the fake paper window, and a maître d' at Emily's beck and call. Emily, in an effort to finesse the perfect first date, takes the audience member to the Tropics, the French Riviera, and the Swiss Alps where the participant ends up skiing and almost crashing into a giant bear, before being led back to the dinner table to sign her name onto a paper, which Emily reveals to be the evening's bill, at which point she thanks the viewer,

and sends her on her way, beverage in hand. The whirlwind, world-wide escapade is a feat of props (*paper, cardboard, representational, edible*), co-conspiracy (*between the maître d' and Emily, between Emily and her date*), and finely tuned theatrical performance. It's also all in the balance of reality and suspension of disbelief. The Tropics were a paper palm tree and shark fin in a cardboard wave, but they came with an actual beer. The French Riviera was serenaded by a paper accordion that played audible music, and the Swiss Alps' hot chocolate was a mug filled with brown, crumpled paper topped with a real marshmallow. The bear on the skiing adventure was foisted on the participant as an actual surprise (previously hidden in the dark room). Real reactions to fake props is a game of make believe. And, just to toy with the audience member further, there would be no trace of this date left in the Vestibule by the time the audience filed out at show's end.

The Dining Experience functioned as sheer delight, snack and beverage sating, and a behind the scenes opportunity to connect with a behind the scenes Dancer. Emily of Stage 3 invited a guest from Audience 2. That connection is also about revealing Emily to be only one half of the performance equation; by inducting the audience member into the relevance of the work with consequences to her own actions, the audience member becomes the other part of the equation.

Consequence? One perk of being removed from the main performance for a private show is the option to be ushered back to a seat in either of the other two audience sections. Caveat: to gain this desired access, the participant would have to

displace an audience member, and send the unsuspecting patron down to take her own vacated seat.

Amber's Measuring Room Solo: Amber, left alone in Stage 1 half way through the show, seeks the help of an audience member to escape her space. She invites someone to the backstage egress room (its door is visible from Audience 1), and asks the Field Tripper to help her make jet pack flames that will, eventually, propel her out of Stage 1, conceivably toward freedom. The participant is supplied with scissors, a pen, and red gel to help Amber in her task, even while being hosted, plied, and strongly urged to get warmer (blankets and pillows offered), lie down next to Amber and enjoy the starry sky (enter a mobile milky way), and indulge in chocolate sustenance (a tray of dark chocolate sea salt caramels provided) as a thank you for her time.

Throughout, it's revealed that Amber chose this audience member for the perfect size of her hands as they related to creating the right-size jet pack flames that would later ended up attached to the backpack used to propel her out of Stage 1 in the final moments of the work. This becomes the only person in the entire three audiences made privy to 1) Amber's desperation to escape 2) Amber's jet-pack plan of escape and therefore 3) the exact magnitude of disappointment when she crashes and burns at the end.

Render Edit's ending is the jet-pack escape of Amber who gets wound up by her Stage 1 compatriots, flies across the space, only to hit the wall, and fall down

through a doggie door, ending half way into Stage 2, falling on top of a paper accordion (experienced only in Emily's Fine Dining Experience), and causing a smoky paper fire to knock me out – the third and final knockout, providing a literal punch line set up an hour earlier for Audience 2. Do you follow? Maybe not entirely, but anyone can enjoy a good pratfall, while at least two audience members with intimate insight from each of the above Field Trips do follow, and they realize their actions actually affected the outcome of the dance. It's a shocking moment of audience agency, within a humorous moment of physical theatre, wrapped up in a flaming paper bow.

Sarah's Mt. Everest Climb: At the extreme periphery of the Balcony Audience's view, there was an open space where I built a giant pile of miscellaneous items (chairs, pillows, jackets, blankets), covered the pile in a white sheet, and then started to ascend the mountain. An audience member was brought over and asked to tear up white paper into tiny little bits as she watched me layer up: two jackets, several scarves, a hat, and gloves. As I started to climb the mountain, the Field Tripper was directed to blow the paper snow into my face. I reacted with bitter cold gesticulations and breathless perseverance, until I reached the top, planted a tiny flag, and celebrated with the snow blower before ushering her back to a seat.

This third and last Field Trip was actually visible to any Balcony Audience member who turned their head to the left, and it served a very different function than the other two Field Trips. Mt. Everest was a veritable how-to: a visible building and dressing of the set, scene, and costume, a workshop in how I create paper props, and a

demonstration of how committed physicality and acknowledgement of blurred boundaries between imagined and manifested can create real experiences. It was an invitation to embody the creative process.

Though each Field Trip served a separate function in the body of the work, all three ended with the option to change seats. I wanted to confront the Field Tripper with the idea of sacrifice and consequence in personal choice. I wanted the audience member to consider and weigh her actions, just as I strive to do choreographically. Also, who doesn't like a good field trip? Watching my work can be challenging, but I also plant perks, rewards, and delightful surprises throughout.

The Design

Props

Render Edit used 197 props, plus various assorted piles of things. Some of these props were scenic elements that set the tone of the stage, or served particular movement phrases. Other props were contextual clues to the work – poetry, commentary, pithy asides that served as companion pieces to *Render Edit*. Yet other items were souvenirs for the audience to take home. I accidentally ended up with one pillow from UMD prop storage. But they accidentally ended up with my bat in a purple net. I also kept the glue sticks and chalk. I'll use them again, and call it even.

40 pillows for audience members
3 packs of pegboard hooks
6 rolls of duck tape
24 picture frames
2 cardboard taxidermy boxing bears

50 envelopes for an exploded aesthetic

Various miscellany to fill the envelopes from previous HSB pop up performances and concerts, as well as important 3rd year graduate cohort events, including but not limited to:

- 1 cosmonaut with American flag from *Skirt the Wall*, 2016, Kennedy Center
- 6 headless black swans from *Satch*, Shared Grad 2016, UMD
- 1 anatomy of a vulture, attached to Professor Fang's door for the bulk of the semester
- 1 Invitation to Chris Law's Block Party, from his 2015 Thesis Proposal Presentation
- 1 Reclining Man Mobile: placed on Professor Alvin Mayes' door as part of my 2015 Thesis Proposal Presentation
- 1 anatomy of a cat, attached to Professor Morgan's door for the bulk of the semester
- 2 boxing bears, attached to Production Manager Cary Gillett's door for the bulk of the semester
- 1 painting of a cardboard box made by Emily, in reference to her cardboard boxes from *Sentiments of a Doormat*, which I mentored
- 17 additional envelopes filled with rainbow colored yarn
- 2 exit signs, 1 mounted on the entrance door to Stage 2
- 6 sparking windup toys, *to scare the living daylights out of Juliana*
- 1 house chandelier made of approximately 75 detachable houses
 - 2 houses per night inscribed with poetry about the work
- 1 cassette chandelier made of approximately 100 cassette tapes, with the ability to unravel
- 1 puppet theatre curtain, rigged with a miniature pulley system
- 6 puppets on popsicle sticks (one of each Dancer in costume)
- 1 red carpet on a paper towel roll, *able to be rolled out, cut up showing its usage and jagged diminishment, before being rolled back up each night*
- Elmer's Glue, glue sticks, scissors, markers, colored pencils for use in prop making and set decoration
- 3 clip lights
- 50 cardboard frame practicals
 - never used because of poor communication between the scenic designer, lighting designer, production manager/budget officer, and myself
- 2 packs of washable markers, *so Patty could keep score on the mirror of how many times she knocked me out over the course of Tech and Performances*
- 2 construction paper joints, *struck during Tech Week, due to one kind of cultural appropriation and a politically incorrect joke*
- 1 tissue paper fire, *to replace the joints, ill-fated, and poorly constructed; stores were low on red tissue paper that week*
- 1 backpack, *which would turn into a jet pack*
- 2 red gels per night, *turned into jetpack flames during performance*
- 10 folded notes in detachable gift houses, *instructions directed to audience members*
- 1 mailbox with a boxing glove *that could be opened from Stage 3 to deliver a punch and a product to Stage 2*

1 boxing glove attached to a mailbox
 3 paper polaroids per night, inscribed with poetry about the work
 2 paper accordions per show
 1 thin sheet of metal, *used to make the sound of thunder*
 Large pile of blue construction paper rain drops
 1 cardboard lightning bolt
 1 purple umbrella
 1 box of chalk for chalk signs, *never used*
 1 stuffed bat on a stick
 1 stuffed bat in a purple net
 1 fluttering heart wind-up toy
 Pile of pillows and chairs with white sheet to make a mountain
 1 white paper flag
 1 roll of packing tape
 1 paper palm tree
 1 paper wave with shark fin
 1 small, round dining table
 2 small dining chairs
 Candles
 2 boxes of chocolate
 1 beer per night
 1 mug of fake hot chocolate with one real marshmallow per night
 1 restaurant bill in a tray with a blue pen, new bill every night
 1 red mustache on a stick
 1 giant stuffed construction paper bear with boxing gloves
 1 Milky Way mobile
 1 blanket and 1 pillow for lying back and viewing the milky way mobile
 2 hard hats
 1 cassette tape case with a playlist of the concert, *to later be filled by a combo of unspooled cassette tape and duck tape, and presented to an audience member as a mix tape*
 2 White board walls, *so that I could write and erase messages during the performance. Ultimately, the sealant was troublesome, and the markers weren't dark enough, and it took so much time to erase that we had to forgo any changes to the wall during the show, and just reset each night.*
 6 rotating boxes on a pole that could serve as shelving units for miscellaneous props, but also surfaces for letters so that the boxes could rotate to spell different messages or words, including the following:
 Render
 Edit
 Err
 End
 Any of the Dancers' names
 1 giant heart
 2 flashlights
 1 cardboard TV cart, *made to resemble a 1995 jr. high classroom*

4 paper television channels

1. Please excuse the interruption to your regular broadcast.
2. This would have been a great time for projections, but by the time Sarah figured that out, it was too late to ask.
3. Actually, Sarah just didn't finish choreographing.
4. OOPS.

1 roll of tin foil, *used for television rabbit ears attached to human feet*

1 doggie door for low level movement

1 Charlie Brown *The Dr. is In* door for waist level movement

1 Rapunzel high tower door for peekaboo moments

Numerous sliding doors

Numerous doors that opened into one stage, and away from another

Curtains that could be thrown back

2 shutters to manipulate the amount of light and visibility, *scrapped in the last week due to the fact they could not actually be opened or closed, and they caused major sightline problems*

1 regular door for pedestrian walkway, *serving the audience's entry into Stage 2, but also providing a norm*

My use of hand-made, construction paper thingamajigs, attached to thrift store repurposed products, and glued together with paste, sweat, and spit is all about the highbrow lowbrow aesthetic of my choreography. Lofty imagery designed by amateur inventor yours truly. An eleven-tiered humble pie. An intense amount of earnest dedication attached to a paper accordion that can only be used once. Running from a stuffed bat on a stick wielded by a stage hand because words and theories are just as biting, just as porous, just as daring as actions. Part of this creative process is about connecting the Dancers to the Dance. By investing deeply in a do it yourself (DIY) aesthetic, and committing to the ephemera of earnest movement as much as to the importance of constructed reality, we can create a lived-in, habitable, world of magical realism; here, anything is possible. And we show our hand: the curtains pulled back to reveal lights, talking to the Stage Manager during the performance, asking for visible technical help to make the invisible magic happen, revealing the

duck tape, scotch tape, and mixed tape seams of old fashioned work ethic and new fangled production value – all to your most desired soundtrack. Here: you can, too. You just have to look for the entry point.

Production and The Design Team

Spectacle, poor theatre, quirky, convention, collaboration, production value, possibility: these are words, along with approaches and definitions of art, that the various key players interpreted and misinterpreted quite differently along the way. We didn't get there as a team. "We" being Production Manager Cary Gillett, my design collaborators from the Scenic, Costume, and Lighting MFA Design Programs, our mentors, the various professional shops, and the administration. This is partly because we all hail from different camps in the university system. The Dance Department at UMD is part of a larger School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (TDPS), which resides in The Clarice, which is a national performing arts presentation venue. The Dance Department is the smallest branch of TDPS, which is otherwise dominated by theatre with a theatre director, more theatre faculty voting power, and modeled after theatre principles in production management and scheduling. The Clarice is home to a learning community of students, but its professional agenda serves guest artists. The professional design shops (scenic and technical) and the Clarice administration (including marketing) serve all main season shows, which include guest artists, pre-professional student productions, and MFA thesis concerts. The Dance Department, TDPS, and The Clarice all speak and follow

different codes and beliefs; each constituent adheres to a different set of values. On paper, we champion diversity. But in person, we have a difficult time bridging.

Gillett and I encountered some of those fundamentally different principles and values about production. Namely, she is incredible at running an organized ship, overseeing the larger moving pieces, and getting to the finish line on time, and I am more focused on the pragmatic details and responsibilities of that organization, as well as the artistry of crossing the finish line. We did not work well together. I wanted to address problems as they arose; we ended up hurriedly troubleshooting at the very last minute. From my point of view, it was Gillett's lack of galvanizing management of the whole team that led us down that pathway. I also experienced what I felt to be a patronizing management of me. I felt Gillett dealing with me, as opposed to working with me. She was always calm, pleasant, and willing to meet, but she was dismissive of my concerns, and she treated me like a student who didn't need to know all the details or inner workings of my own project. She was reassuring, as opposed to proactive. I never felt that she understood *Render Edit*, so much as she wanted it to go off smoothly. And when we got to Tech Week, it was evident that the rules and timeliness of production took precedence over the dance and design. There was no interdisciplinary approach; it was a theatre technical model for a dance theatre work – we could only get half way there.

I asked, every single night of Tech Week, for frames to be attached to the wall so they wouldn't fly off during the performance. They were never attached.

What was attached, to me, was the stigma of a nightmare director so fickle, so inarticulate, so unprepared, that she didn't know what she wanted until it was too late. To wit I would like to attach the addendum: I saw this coming in May. I raised a red flag in September. And, when things went awry in November, I felt like the production and shop team dramatically raised their naked forearms to their wrinkle-free foreheads and gallantly, collectively, lamented: 'I do declare,' with all the surprise and feigned interest of a Wild Wild West whore house matron. But then again, *East of Eden* is my favorite book, and I love to hail from California's golden hills and wild ways.

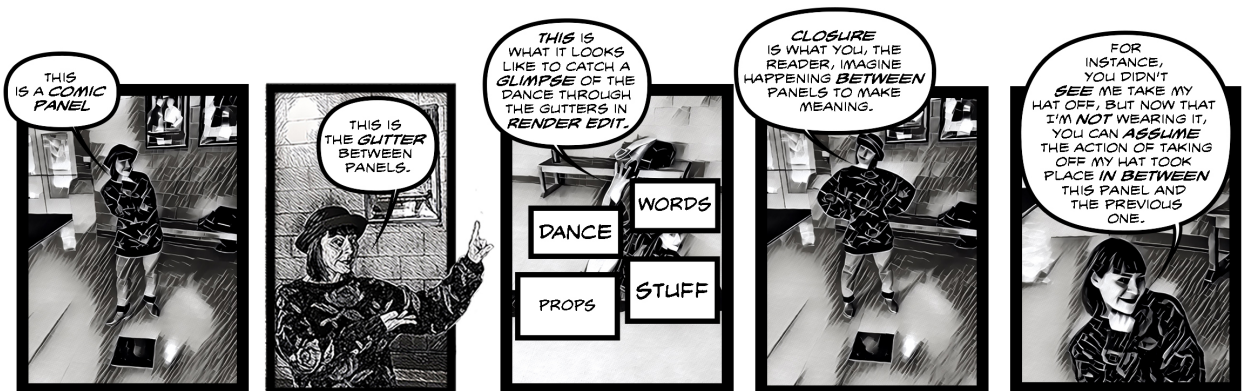
Scenic Design: Unhinged

The best thing my scenic designer Tyler Herald did for *Render Edit* was shift my initial floor plan into a Y-shaped structure that maximized dance space, made efficient use of two-sided walls, and imbued each stage with a unique look and definitive shape. The walls were embedded, boasting, hiding props. They were textured, punctuated, craftily built to withstand weight-baring movement.

Tyler's design played on a comic book sensibility in which the walls were divided into rectangular panels of various heights and widths. He designed a forced perspective skyline in which the tops of the walls appeared jagged, or stepped. This gave the set an incredibly dynamic feel, and played into the subversion of order and regularity. Perhaps you could see over one part of the wall, but its adjacent panel skewed your sightline. And *its* adjacent panel might dip so dramatically that you had

an excellent view into another stage, only if a Dancer happened to be dancing in one particular square foot of space. There were many literal and figurative moving pieces and bodies that had to align for perfect visibility: where you chose to look when, and who happened to be framed in a panel, visible in a gutter, or reflected in a mirror.

In comic books, panels are separated by gutters - the space between and around the individual panels. Tyler added gutters to the design of Stages 1 and 2 by designing narrow margins of visibility around the panels. Comic panels generally present pieces of a narrative, words and illustrations that capture timely moments. The comic book reader has to fill in the gaps, which is to say use her own imagination to connect one panel with the next. This active engagement between each panel and the reader's own conclusions of how the panels connect, is called closure. I was interested in playing around with the concept of closure in the work; namely, asking viewers to piece together meaning from variously concealed and revealed moments. Tyler's gutters allowed members of Audiences 1 and 2 to peek into adjacent stages.



*Illustration A: Explanation and demonstration of panels and gutters.
Comic by Sarah and Oliver Mertz.*

The walls were made of peg board, wood, and brushed metal, Stages 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Textured, punctuated, crafted, the walls spoke to the aesthetic of each section – imbuing Stage 1 with utilitarian means, Stage 2 with entrance and exit, and Stage 3 with absence. Miniature theatres within the theatre space and zig zags of barrier tinged duck tape summed up the reveal and conceal moments of *Render Edit*.

But I ended up with large swaths of unused border wall – at exactly a time our country was being threatened with a border wall. It could not have been worse timing to present this project, and I was embarrassed and humiliated that Tyler had to grapple with this design, and the shops had to build walls at a moment in history when the tune was changing to chants of active resistance. And to be writing about the walls now, when “No Ban, No Wall” is the most strident note registering across our campus, through our classrooms, in our blood...am I desecrating more honorable thesis-topic territory with an attempt to defend superfluous wooden slats? It’s a question I have to ask out loud, on paper, to you, for us.

A challenge I encountered with my set designer was trying to mentor him toward a design whose sightlines allowed the audience to...see. There is no doubt he created beautiful imagery, spent significant time matching the concept of each Stage to appropriate aesthetic in building materials and décor ideas. He was particular, if not on the same page as I, with color, shape, size, placement of props, and fulfilling his duties toward completion. And, every step of the way, he was committed to creating a design that would give me a great amount of wiggle room and leeway in the very last stages to add props, change resting places, and, generally, be

manipulated as much as premature production and late stage choreography desired. I was lucky and thankful to have a designer who catered to my working process.

However, at almost every stage of our collaboration, it was apparent that Tyler picked up only a portion of what I was trying to convey, coax out of him, inspire him toward, or clearly articulate as necessary. When I asked him to watch a clip of Michel Gondry's *The Science of Sleep* to reference a set design created entirely from toilet paper rolls, he came into the next day's design meeting with a portrait of Michel Gondry. (I was supposed to have seen a rendering of walls that day.) After talking about the animalistic qualities of my choreography in surprise, in attack, in double entendre, he brought in pictures of a band costumed in horse heads. Horses – being one of the only animals I hadn't named to him in a prior conversation. And even though I vetoed them at first conversation, he continued to turn in renderings with rubber duckies, which I felt infantilized the set, and kept the look firmly on the side of cute and saccharine – expressions I generally try to subvert.

But our biggest problem was scale. I walk a fine line with my choreography between imaginative and imaginary. I enjoy blurring experiences between surreal, hyperreal, and vaguely unreal. But I stop just before hyperbole and make believe. Part of this aesthetic is contained by the choreography, but a great part of it is also reliant on how the ingredients fit together – the alchemy of movement to music to costume to set. Tyler's forced perspective set dwarfed the Dancers and exaggerated reality every two to four feet. Prop décor was either too large to be taken seriously, or too

small to be seen, too large for Dancers to move around the space, or too small to be commentary on size. We had a Goldilocks problem; we couldn't seem to calibrate the size of our ideas toward a shared vision. The scale of Tyler's designs increased or decreased based on the look of the set in space; it had nothing to do with the interaction of the Dancers and the set, or the correlation between Dance and Design, or, indeed, the intent of the choreography to connect with the audience.

And that leads me to the production's most challenging debacle: one week before opening night, the walls were too high. The entire premise of the concert, to create three shows in one, but to have one audience that could view all three stages, was somehow lost on him. Only once we saw the walls inside the Dance Theatre for the first time, with a view so limited, select audience members would have only heard a soundtrack and seen a puppet show, did he begin to understand what I had been after all along. And still, he seemed comfortable with the endgame of upper body halves, visible in roughly half the usable space. He fought tooth and nail to keep the integrity of the wall height for design purposes; he could not understand how the design needed to showcase the dancing.

Despite having broached this concern in May, throughout the summer, in September, and vociferously in November, I was constantly told by Tyler and Production Manager Cary Gillett that it would be fine. They were wrong. They did not understand how the scenic design was supposed to support the dance, itself. They did not understand that I was making something that should be seen, visible, top of

head to bottom of foot, from many different angles since the body moves through space: front and back, up and down. Cary did not provide the support to help Tyler figure this out logistically in the space. Tyler's mentor did not provide the support to help him understand the concept. Tyler did not do the appropriate research; he had never even been in the balcony section of the Dance Theatre until we brought the walls in to do the sightline test. And I failed, too. I was not vocal enough, firm enough, directorial enough. I was told to wait and see. I was reassured by my scenic designer, in a design meeting of twenty some folks, that the math couldn't be wrong. Well, the math might not have been wrong. But Tyler's math stopped dead short at design, and fatally negated the idea of movement within design. I should have spoken up and organized everybody to do a sightlines test months earlier. I was derelict in my own responsibility. And I had clearly failed to articulate my concept. I couldn't be the only one right in an entire team of designers, production employees, and shop employees. And, as it was happening mere days before opening night, I was so demoralized and disgusted, that I did not lead, I did not inspire, and I did not problem solve effectively. I looked with dumbfounded eyes and gray heart. Meanwhile, everybody else rolled their eyes, tightened their lips, catalogued the extra hours they would have to take around a holiday weekend and into tech week. And, of note, no one seemed all that concerned anyway. Of course, they weren't about to premiere a concert that looked like it was supposed to be a puppet theatre. This could just be chalked up to another student mistake from which they could teach a future lesson.

According to Tyler's design mentor, Dan Conway, we (downstairs, in the Dance Department) need to be able to speak their (upstairs, in the Design Department) language. Why not teach each other and share language? Conway visited two of our graduate seminars in the first half of our MFA course load: Collaborative Choreography in the first year, and Workshop in the Direction of Dance Production in our second year. In each class visit, he explained that we should never ask a designer for what we want; rather, we should share our aesthetic and overall vision, and allow the designer to bring his own creativity and voice to the table. I spent ten months understanding Tyler, practicing his language, and fruitlessly redefining my concept, scope, and aesthetic to first invite him into the process (dialogue, shared images, suggested films and books that have served my aesthetic), then to initiate him into the process (a veritable show and tell of previous props, sets, dance works with a demo of how these things would be used in my process and my show). But, he never familiarized himself with suggested books, films, or even my own previous work. He always left his workload for my project until the end of his week – otherwise filled with GA obligations, classes, homework, and always just before a Friday deadline. He seemed only able to capture a few words here and there. He did show a modicum of research and creativity with those words, and his research plates were always visually stunning.



*Bird's eye view of entire performance from Balcony Audience's sightline.
Photo by Stan Barouh.*



*Bird's eye view of entire performance from Balcony Audience's sightline.
Photo by Stan Barouh.*

The Lights: I can't see. No, literally, I can't see.

Lighting Designer Brandi Martin and I had enjoyed an excellent working relationship from the time we collaborated on a smaller project for the Second Season Shared Grad Concert in early 2016, right up through our last design meeting toward the end of the thesis project. Brandi and I were always on the same page – excited to approach lighting as an integral storytelling element in the way my Dancers could manipulate practicals, in the exposed nature of light sources, in the play between dramatic effects and softer narrative looks that foregrounded the dancing from the walls. We imagined lighting cues would speak in color, shape, shadow, contrast, and intensity to each of the three stage's needs, and to the overall avant-garde aesthetic. For instance, lights in the utilitarian Stage 1 were meant to be turned on and off by the Dancers, light sources were meant to be visible to the audience members, and items on the wall, such as the bear portraits were meant to be lit, like one might light paintings on a wall. The lights were meant to play off the numerous props: creating a shimmery surreal effect through the tape chandelier, or a rainbow effect during the rainbow yarn moment in Duck Duck Vulture. In Stage 2's Doors and Windows aesthetic, lights were meant to spill through curtains, blinds, and shutters: providing insinuated pathways or parenthetical existence from the other side, or lighting up portions of my own stage to suggest pieces of the narrative, or concealed sections of the work. We talked at length about a sense of film noir shadow in tandem with a chandelier made of tiny houses. The idea was to double entendre or meta-meta cast the shadows of many, small houses (yours, yours, or yours, Committee) on me, framed by my own house wall – to connect us through outlines, dark sides, and

questionable redundancy. To be on the nose, you have to hammer the nail on the head of the house. You have to make it more what it is. We wanted to create the feeling of the Vacuum in Stage 3 by hiding the light sources, ensuring lights didn't bounce off the mirror into audience view, and, at times, sucking out the extraneous energy and narrowing in on the two Dancers.

Brandi was confronted with numerous challenges from the get-go: figuring out a lighting plot that worked for my proscenium-melts-into-the-audience half of the evening, and Law's in the round set-up for Act II. Limited tech time in the theatre was almost Production Manager Gillett's mantra. Every single meeting was a warning about having to choose: not what we could and could not conceive and womanifest, but what we would and would not have time for. The warning was so dogmatic, uninspired, and defeatist, it seemed to be running for president, too. Brandi had also been conceiving of lights focused over walls of a certain height. When the wall heights were lowered considerably (how many feet?), it entirely undercut all of Brandi's work to date. Furthermore, Brandi was trying to manage poor health, a heavy workload, my colleague's concert, and major design deadlines for an upcoming spring concert. By October, I started to worry that she was becoming distant with me, and unfamiliar with the direction of the choreography. I invited her into rehearsals, scheduled meetings, gently reminded her, then directly asked, then pressed, and finally moved forward without a collaborator by my side. Brandi found herself unable to attend enough rehearsals and meetings to be adequately prepared for tech week.

I would never see the finished lights with an outside eye. The lighting designer sent me a text message at 4.38pm on opening eve: “Hey! I just wanted you to know I got all my cues done.” I don’t know what they looked like. I can only gauge success from whether or not I could see, from how color saturated I felt, from how timely they grew, faded, turned on, bumped out, and what shadows they did or did not cast. The lighting was supposed to have been an extension of the visibility I wanted to muzzle, wield, invite, obstruct, toy with. It ended up being a repertory light show; each section sporting a different look that referenced the theory of the work, outdated conversations, and instinct fatally paralyzed by tech week’s stress load and the lighting department’s paltry support. Ultimately, the lighting did not necessarily take into account the moving bodies and the overall flow of the work. It did not supply the coverage and visibility the choreography warranted. It did not delineate the main themes of each stage as distinctly as possible.

An unexpected, and welcome, surprise that was the result of Brandi’s research and inventive design was all of the light spillage into the beautifully rendered, but sometimes unused space in Stage 3. Brandi crafted lighting in the Vacuum that set a tone of absence, sometimes mournful, sometimes breathtaking, sometimes actively missing its inhabitants – a parallel to how audience members would potentially feel privy to the comings and goings of the Dancers. These moments imbued the work with mystery and an underpinning of grounded emotion.

One highlight of my tech week with Brandi was sharing a private moment with her on the Thursday before our opening. We sat in the balcony, drinking warm comfort, and found a moment of solace and camaraderie through an honest discussion of our own feelings toward the near-finished product (unresolved, frustrated, intense disappointment that we couldn't fulfill our initial dreams). Brandi shared with me her clear understanding of the work from the inside out. She had spent the week living and breathing *Render Edit*, and she had finally found at its essence. It would simply be a race against the clock to record cues and adjust levels appropriately. But she did arrive. The mentor and teacher in me believe it's pleasant to think of the December concerts as a beginning.

But I'd rather smother its continued life with a protest sign.

The Costumes: From Choking to Yoking

Alexa Duimstra, my costume designer, earned the Most Improved Player Award. We were collaborators beset with opposites: Alexa: tall, lanky, living in black and white, and me: short, squat, and speaking and donning all the colors. Where I saw sexual maturity in 6 powerful women – revealing or outlining legs and breasts with contrasted strength in fabric pattern and shirt collars, she saw flirtatious and cute in silhouettes and mismatching. Where I saw layers and applique details as sophisticated and nuanced, she saw layers and patchwork as “Frankenstein” and “more is more.” Where I am abstract and able to hold and choreograph multiple truths, she is intensely literal, and singularly focused.

For the first three quarters of our collaboration, she could not access the language to understand or execute designs that would be flattering to my Dancers' bodies, with fabric that would move well with my choreography while holding her designed stitches, or with an appropriate sense of balance between individual Dancer and connected Stage, or between highly stylized and sensually mature looks and hemlines. Early research designs were culled from Pinterest pages – lacking in personal design and any rigor aesthetically attached to my concept. Each conversation we had, about color, about pattern, about the best silhouette for each body resulted in a layered effect where she added changes, but wasn't able to let go of some foundational flaws.

The turning point came in early Fall when she started designing from scratch, as opposed to shopping. I witnessed a transformation in her creative process; she became fearless, dedicated to following the voice of each costume, as opposed to defining its character before hand. She developed instinct; she came to understand both the work's essence and my preferences so well that she became bolder and more daring. I sat with her for hours, week after week, as she, unemotionally, scrapped what didn't work, and plunged into the business of feeling it out, getting it right. I don't want to misunderstand collaboration as a process where the Designer only works toward the Director's concept on a one-way street. But I do want to credit an iron work ethic in which she followed the work's trajectory, and kept up with the choreographic pace. It wasn't so much that she let go of her own opinions; she expanded her palette. She developed new skills in serving the work. We arrived at

costumes that neither of us could have conceived alone. I was thankful that the Costume Shop, with a little more time on their hands than usual for a double thesis bill, was willing to edit designs at very late stages. The Costume Shop was fastidious and fabulous. I am indebted to a team of committed and patient workers who took both Alexa and myself seriously.

We were able to try costume mockups in the studio for rehearsal. When they didn't look right or feel good, neither Alexa nor any of the Costume Shop employees hesitated to redesign, re-stitch, redo. For a few weeks, they were a veritable recycling factory – in taking costume parts that didn't work and outputting more flattering and better-colored pieces that fit the overall aesthetic.

The collaboration was not without its undue stresses. Alexa, on probation for her design work since the moment she entered the program, felt that she was constantly on the chopping block. She was often at loggerheads with her design mentor, and she lost previously promised projects, funding, and support throughout our time together. Every time I asked for a change, I was worried that I would put her education in harm's way. At several key moments, I felt burdened in weighing *Render Edit's* needs with the potential of Alexa's future at UMD. I had difficulty understanding why I was teaching her about the movement of fabric on a Dancer's body, about the importance for a flattering silhouette on a moving body, about the political incorrectness of a black face on a white body (one of her designs). She spoke about some of my curvier Dancers as fat, and she was sometimes reticent about

designs she was theoretically committed to, even if they didn't flatter my Dancers or serve the overall work properly. As late as mid-November my costume made me look like a little girl; the colors clashed with my skin tone and personality, the applique looked cartoonish, I had no top. But she went back to the drawing board. She rendered again. She edited. Alexa and her design arc are, I believe, the womanifestation of the thesis.

What we ended up with were appropriate proportions. Alexa and I were able to leave off our opposites, and meet in the middle. The skirts and shorts flared, but not with exaggeration. The shirts were fitted in all the right places, and loose enough for Dancers to move with gusto. Every Dancer flaunted enough skin to present as Woman, without crossing over into unintended sexuality. Alexa found a cohesive element in her creative process: collars. Weird, unique, perfectly quirky, with a dash of cheeky on the nose (but just the right amount), she designed collars that displayed winking eyes, slithering snakes, articulated fingers. Our costumes varied, but we all had a collar. In this way, she connected the cast.

Alexa added details to the costumes that, effectively, populated each space with commentary. For instance, in Stage 1, Kate's purple skirt had cutouts revealing leg and light in horizontal batches – just like the legs and lights intermittently seen through Stage 1's gutters. Juliana's turquoise skirt featured appliqued pants. The one type of apparel sewn into the other, stitched together the idea of multiple narratives to be considered throughout the concert. Amber's sheer top connected to Kate's

peekaboo skirt. Juliana's turquoise matched Amber's bra. Each Dancer was connected to another with a prominent color that triangulated them in space no matter where they danced. The Dancers appeared to belong together in aesthetic without losing individual personalities.

My own costume in Stage 2 featured several articulated hands – two on my collar, buttoning me up, and one on my skirt, pulling up a fake hem. Mostly alone for the length of the work, my costume gave me an extra hand. It referenced the others in their own spaces, but presented me as resourceful. The hands and fake hemline played on the concepts and questions of the work: who was doing what, where, and when? Which hemline, or which storyline is the real one? The earthy greens connected me to the wooden walls. The pop of yellow was sunshine in an otherwise blue-hued state that matched my hand in the melancholy choreography.

Stage 3's costumes were the absolute hardest to design with the greatest reward. Alexa built profile faces into the seams of Emily's dress and Patty's shirt. I thought the faces were an ingenious addition for the two Dancers who would be the most alone in the smallest space. The extra faces amplified their experience. In addition, the costumes mirrored the Dancers in the same way the actual mirror reflected the Dancers. Here, Alexa's designs perfectly catalyzed my concept of sly reflections and double takes, while leaning into my choreographic mantra: make it more what it is. The Stage 3 Dancers turned so inward to perform so outward. There was an element of turning oneself inside out for the other: Dancer to Dancer, concept

to presentation. Alexa's designs of the faces looking at each other, and not away, in addition to the details of closed or winking eyes on Emily's collar and Patty's waist was the epitome of the work's sly adjustment of sight. The blinking eye also harks back to the concept of closure in comic books. We make up what we don't see to fill in the blanks.

I am most pleased to share that every Dancer felt fantastic in her costume. And that, is entirely due to Ms. Duimstra.



Articulated hands, profiled faces, embellished collars, zig-zag motifs, mixed and matched patterns and colors cross referencing stages, couplings, and content. Photo by Stan Barouh.

Chapter 3: The Research

The Brigade

Disruption

On Monday, October 24th from 5.30-6.43pm Amber Chabus just lay there.

She was sprawled in the middle of the hallway, per my instructions, and she wasn't to

move until Professor Adriane Fang passed over her and continued toward Studio 1.

Professor Fang had rehearsal at 5.30. There were several more actions that were

supposed to happen, in domino effect, down the hallway and into the studio as Fang

proceeded to her rehearsal, culminating in a performance that would have two

Dancers emerge from the studio's recycling bin, sing instructions in unison to Fang

and her Dancers about watching and dance, and ultimately producing hot pink

construction paper which they would use as rolling papers to smoke the word Clarice

– Clarice being made from aquamarine construction paper. We had planned to take

over, perhaps, the first 2-4 minutes of her rehearsal time. But thirteen minutes later,

Fang was still standing in the corridor waiting for Amber to do something. And

Amber, now famously committed to the happening, would not budge. I was about

twenty feet away witnessing the commitment of all of my Dancers sticking to the

original plan, the respect of Fang to what she'd come to expect as her weekly Monday

pop up performances, and the frustration and not-mild annoyance of all of Fang's

Dancers watching their precious time ticking away. We were in a frieze -- a game of

chicken vulture. And that was entirely *not* the point. Fang was watching a non-

performance; the performance would only be triggered by her taking one step. But we

had rules. We were not allowed to tell viewers what to do. Around 6.40, Fang

squatted down to regard Amber more tenderly, more curiously. She was tucking in. I began to panic.

This thirteen-minute period of waiting kicked my thesis research into a tailspin. It made me think about knowingly and unknowingly disrupting. It made me think about my allegiances and hierarchy of respect. It made me think about everything being easier when you're convicted to a particular goal, and your questions or curiosity don't *actually* intersect with your thesis statement. I wouldn't have cared about a stranger's schedule, *haven't* cared as much when doing other pop up performances. Neither have I passed judgment on folks hurrying by and forgoing a performance experience. It's a luxury to have time for art. But Fang was now thirteen minutes late to rehearsal. How long was I going to knowingly disrupt? Would saying something ruin the happening? Taint the research? Be giving up too easily? What about apologizing to Fang after the fact – letting her know I didn't mean to shred her schedule to bits.

Aside from feeling like a disrespectful student, I was fascinated. Everybody was genuinely following the arc of the performance – for it had surely become a performance at this point. Nine weeks after starting the Thesis Brigade, my Dancers were armed, prepared, committed. This was entirely out of my hands and beyond my directorial scope; they had fully embodied the essence of *Render Edit*.

Adriane, as this is the first you are reading about this, I want you to know a few things. I am conflicted about apologizing for the disruption to your rehearsal time on October 24th. I can't say I am sorry to you and still uphold the premise of the project. I think this is ok; I think you believe in this sort of idea. I think you know me well enough to know that I wasn't trying to ruin something for the sake of nothing. I think you know I was exploring, investigating, researching, and accruing data for guerilla performance art. So, while I can't say I am sorry, I can say this: Thank you for letting it happen. Thank you for supporting the research by measuring lost time with gained experience. But, please know, as your dedicated student, I was sweating my balls off for thirteen minutes. And it's a hefty weight off my conscience to write about it.

If you ask me about this face to face, of course, I will have to tell you, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

The Thesis Brigade met every Monday night throughout fall semester. Six Dancers gathered each week for three hours to learn a new dance and perform it. Our one rule about Thesis Brigade (Fight Club style): No talking about the Thesis Brigade. When pressed to answer questions, admit participation, or acknowledge a happening, the Dancers were to respond with, "I have no idea what you're talking about." By the end of the semester, this would come back to haunt me.

The Monday nights served as a lab between the regular Sunday and Tuesday rehearsals of my formal thesis cast. I generated about half of the material for my thesis concert with the Brigade Dancers. They tried things out first. It was invaluable to test out the choreography on a viewing audience before deciding which threads to follow, and what material to keep. It was a low-stress environment – more pedagogical and research-based than the regular thesis rehearsals. We were really investigating the subversive arts premise of my thesis proposal, and it was my goal to transfer the conceiving and the actioning of these avant-garde choices, guerilla tactics, and clandestine infractions to the Dancers. From your reading above, you can see that by late October, they were rather proficient!

Something else very freeing, and helpful, about the Brigade was the immediacy with which material had to be made (we performed each Monday), but also the ability to make something more important to the mission, than to the entire body of work. The immediacy kicked us into a highly focused work environment. But the lack of “long-term commitment” to the movement material continually opened up possibilities of making and performing.

Our Monday meets became very important for the Dancers. They were escapes from a busy week. They provided instant gratification. They provided the correct proportion of work, to element of intrigue, to performance opportunity, and to a niche feeling of belonging in the bigger picture. We were bonding. Even as *Render Edit's* tentacles reached further out into the building, we were becoming a more

closely-knit family. And what happened over the semester-long engagement, is that the more comfortable we became with each other, the more bold all of the Dancers' conceptual, performative, and reflective choices became. Applying this growing connection to *new* material every week meant we pushed further boundaries, as opposed to refining the initial concept. We found new ways to disrupt the norms, subvert expectations, and question habitual practices. We ended up grappling with the ethics and potential of disruption. We debated the lines between good and bad disruption. We made ourselves uncomfortable to measure artistic value in the institution.

Network of Inside Jokes

These pop-up performances, also known as happenings, were about disruption, guerilla marketing, movement and performance research, boundary-pushing, and extension of the dance event. In order to tailor these experiments toward personal connections and meaning, we sometimes targeted specific viewers. For instance, starting with the very first Thesis Brigade rehearsal, something was performed for Professor Fang every Monday night, whether she was on campus or not. Slowly, we started to add on weekly recipients: Artist-in-Residence Christopher K. Morgan became a weekly recipient. Professors Pearson and Widrig were frequent recipients. Eventually, the graduate students became target audience members. The performances started to infiltrate other parts of the Clarice, and time slots other than our scheduled Monday nights.

Slowly, these happenings pushed their way into thirty seconds of your technique class, an interruption in your rehearsal, an obstacle on your way to the car. The beginning of Alvin Mayes' choreography class became routinely tagged. The beginning of the Advanced Jazz class received numerous performances. The Grand Pavilion of the Clarice and the halls in the Design Wings and Administrative Offices started to see a silent duet ghosting around the building, amplifying in sighting frequency and intensity in the weeks leading up to the Thesis. TDPS callboards held visual clues, and bathroom mirrors gazed back with easily ignored, papered pieces of the show. Tape was affixed to floors; notes left for unsuspecting happenstance audience members to find. Office doors were papered with messages, declarations, and illustrations that alluded to *Render Edit's* choreographic content. Of course you wouldn't know that until and unless you saw the show in December. My idea of good comedic timing includes the callback. And my adoration for many artists and artistic works involves a slow burn.

Early in the semester, the Brigade played Duck Duck Vulture outside Fang's office. For the rest of the semester, every single time they walked by her office door, they called out the dark chant: "Duck, Duck, Duck, Vulture." They walked in time with the words, circled around on Vulture, started well before and ended well after her door and range of hearing.

One performance included the application of tin foil rabbit ears to a Dancer's feet, and the search for audible television channels throughout the building.

You might have seen Brigade Dancers emerge from lockers, garbage bins, restroom stalls, photo booths, storage closets, and window frames. You might have seen them perform in hallways, staircases, in your offices, under your desks, within your periphery.

Other performances extended the length of the Dance Wing, or circled around the entire wing so that viewers experienced the performance in waves of anticipation, coming, going, ebbing, flowing, impending, receding. The dancing featured in the most highly trafficked areas broke out into melodramatic face fanning, or a game of “Catch this limb I am launching at you!” The Dancers had to be aware and ready at all times. They had to negotiate their timing and tactics, like an audience member had to negotiate getting around them.

One brigade Dancer booked appointments for informational interviews with a number of graduate students and faculty members. She would start each meeting in earnest, addressing very specific research topics catered to each target’s interests: asking the resident expert contact improvisation (CI) grad student to help her on a project about the founding and evolution of CI in relation to the second wave of feminism, asking the resident inversions guru grad student for his tips on teaching inversions, related to her Teaching Dance seminar, meeting with her technique teacher to discuss her semester progress, or meeting with a former *Doug Varone & Dancers* company member (and current faculty) to get information of the Varone summer intensive. After establishing sincerity, she would suddenly fall down dead

with a message attached to her, “ Revive Me.” Each participant tried different tactics; each of these tactics ended up performed in the December concert: aggressive body rolling, the offer of M&Ms, the threat of cutting hair, desperate, impassioned pleas to, “Live!”

The bear gloves of the original title, which also featured Production Manager Cary Gillett’s name (*Bear Glove for Cary*) graced her office door until they appeared on the actual set in the Dance Theatre at the beginning of Tech Week.

Artist-In-Residence Morgan was asked to hold onto a book about opera for eight months. He gave it back to me recently. On the day this was delivered to you, *it* was delivered back to him. Keep your eyes open for a musical note.

The idea was to create a network of inside jokes and personal connections with *future* viewers – patrons who would see the concert in December. I was offering a strategy and opportunity of artistic investment. I was going for long-term, very personal relationships with as many potential viewers as possible. I wanted to see how pervasively I could infiltrate the entire building, and the entire milieu around performance interpretation. These happenings were about activating the Pedagogy of Interpretation as ongoing research.

Step 1: Our womanifesto was a particular performance aesthetic of disruption and repurposing time, meaning, and making.

Step 2: I was asking each viewer to experience the performance in context. The viewer may not have identified this, but the nature of these performances happening over the long haul, as a lead-in to the Thesis, and with time to

reflect, respond, and even anticipate the next event, meant they had a longer period of time to process, and multiple opportunities to contextualize the experiment which leads me to

Steps 3-4: Multiple opportunities to Ask & Answer, Theorize & Defend.

Step 5: I thought these performances would produce more questions than finite answers; I wanted these questions to shift a community's practice. I wanted viewers to ask their office neighbors or friends standing in line or students sitting around waiting for class: "What did you see?"

I also wanted these happenings to stand on their own as one-off performances. You didn't have to see the end product in order to garner any enjoyment, annoyance, or meaning in the immediacy of each performance. In that case, I was simply conducting research into what happens to the dance, Dancer, and viewer when sightlines are altered, dance you didn't order is served, audiences are divided, and exclusivity is cache.

In the spirit of artistic process, attached to my pedagogy of interpretation, and desirous of a challenging thesis project, I wanted to mine the creative process for performance material, and I wanted the process' performances to inform the dancer-viewer relationship. I wanted the opportunity for some audience members to fall in love. To know the material and the Dancers so well that all the situational scenarios of a long-term relationship would come into play on the December stage: larger reserves of patience, forgiveness, abundant joy, intimacy, agency, the private smile of insider knowledge, the feeling of personal achievement in having helped create the work.

I wanted each step of the project to inform the next. So that, collectively, every single *Render Edit* Dancer, every happenstance viewer along the way, each of the pop-up performances, each of the design meetings, every single person with a hand in the project, would actually have a footprint on the final stage. I wanted to provide an opportunity for us to make something together. Part of my pedagogy is about agency. If you make it, you have more agency to dissect it, deconstruct it, reconstruct it, interpret it, talk about it, add it into your context and point of view. I wanted to amplify individual performance experiences. Had you been sitting at your desk six weeks ago, seen two women walk by, one fall to the ground dead, before getting up and moving on? Had you ignored it? Ruminated on it? Are you seeing it on stage right now? Are you making the connection that this dance began for you, in your space, and is playing out more strikingly for you right now – differently than how your current seatmate is viewing it?

I was interested in creating a show that not only meant something depending on where you sat, but also meant something depending on what you had experienced before entering the space. I wanted to create the feeling that I made this dance for you. If you walked in without any preface, you'd still have experienced some good dancing, fun times, a visually stimulating set, and an excellent soundtrack. But, if you had experienced any number of events in the run up to the performance, then perhaps that was I, reaching out to you, in an amplified way. The live performance was meant exactly then, exactly for you. I wanted you to know: we are connected. The dance was only one suggestion. Let's continue the relationship.

As a reminder, writing about the Thesis Brigade, is a betrayal of the Thesis Brigade. I would ask that you honor the premise of inside jokes, and keep this between us. The Dancers could not, and still cannot, talk about Thesis Brigade.

Marketing and the Poster

In conceiving of a Thesis Concert that would start in early September and infiltrate and expand in concept, on stages, and throughout the semester, I was also considering marketing as a key performative element. The Clarice brochures, online blurbs, and publicity posters would be another medium for performance art, another opportunity for audience engagement, another invitation into a different world. I thought the pairing with Chris Law's hip hop evening would be an opportune moment to introduce both audiences to an aesthetic than they might otherwise not seek out. Audiences would surely find their preconceived notions debunked, with regard to the complete experimentalism of my half of the evening and the perceived accessibility of hip hop's second half of the evening. Both of our works crossed genres, blurred boundaries, and leaned into and away from our habitual and newly researched tropes. I really believed this would make our evening stronger as a whole. Toward that end, I identified ways and means to push the boundaries of marketing, and I included these in my official Thesis Proposal in December 2015. But when it came down to it, the Clarice Marketing Department wasn't game.

It had been my plan, all along; to write about *Render Edit* in a particular way for publicity, leave traces and contextual clues to the work in advertising campaigns in the lead up to the performance, and to "tag" the publicity posters with detachable

pieces that invited audience engagement. Law and I had discussed the poster tagging at length. It was both an illusion to graffiti – one of the pillars of hip hop, and also a creative solution to address a poster that prominently featured Law and his work, but kept *Render Edit* to the margins.



Publicity Posters for Render Edit. Originally designed by the Clarice Marketing Department as presented on the left. Embellished by the Thesis Brigade on the right with interactive items and décor motifs from the choreographic and design process.
Photo by Sarah Mertz.

The Clarice presented alternative facts⁵: my blurb was deemed too inaccessible, and it was completely rewritten and published in all Clarice print and

⁵ On Saturday, January 21st, 2017, one day after Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as 45th President of The United States, Press Secretary Sean Spicer, in his first address for the Trump administration, said, “This was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration period.” He barked his acerbic response with blatant contempt for what his boss calls “the fake press,” and willful disregard for photographic evidence showing crowd sizes much smaller than previous inaugurations. On Sunday, January 22nd, Political Spin Queen and Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway

online media by a woman who had never met me, or spoken with me about my work. The published blurb revealed key elements of secrecy about *Render Edit* that changed the entire scope of the project. The Brigade would no longer be able to conduct embodied research/perform the pop up performances as conceived. And anybody who happened upon these performances would be able to find an answer about them in the published material. After the fact, I was invited to a Marketing Meeting to talk about my project. I was confronted, at least three times in the meeting with the question, “How are people supposed to understand your work?” I thought to myself: by giving me the opportunity to explain it. Not by hijacking it and slapping on some contemporary dance buzz words.

After redacting some lines of text from a handful of brochures (both to rectify the Clarice’s publicity, and as part of the proposed campaign to alter marketing materials as a way to leave bread crumbs or thumbprints with which a patron could engage), I was threatened with “severe punishment.” Academic probation was batted around the table in front of me. I was made to promise, in repeat-after-me-manner in front of ten marketing professionals, with a finger wagging at my nose, “I will not touch a single brochure.”

I would later get an email from the Marketing Coordinator Kate Spanos, explaining the only way I could alter posters was with post-its. Oh, and I had to clear it with her first. Oh, and I could only touch the posters in the Dance Wing. She might

appeared on NBC’s *Meet the Press with Chuck Todd* where she used the phrase “alternative facts” to defend Spicer’s comments.

as well have added something to the effect that my proposal about subversive art pop up performances was just fine, as long as it wasn't subversive, was cleared, through Administration, and advertised according to protocol that would preserve the integrity and longevity of archival material. I wasn't asking for permission. I [REDACTED] [REDACTED] her email. I [REDACTED] posters with post-its – or things that I posted to it. And I [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at least twenty-six brochures. Thesis Brigade [REDACTED] more.

For three weeks after that Marketing Meeting, I was so demoralized, I didn't want to teach, dance, or choreograph. I considered quitting the MFA program. I considered quitting dance. Everything about that meeting went against every single grain of my pedagogy and of my belief that students should be supported to find ways and meaning in counter culture, and patrons can and should be introduced to art that challenges and questions. That was the first time I told Director Karen Bradley I did not want to do the Thesis Concert. She didn't even respond to me. My support system of faculty members, some of you are reading this, encouraged me to forge ahead, to be an example. I didn't agree. I don't agree. We were in a bubble.

The Creative Process

I consider my rehearsal studio an experimental lab in which I mix inspirations from music, cinema, and literature into movement and words. All of these layers are part of an ongoing dialogue between the work's thrust and the alchemy of zeitgeist

and performance art. These components work like an ebb and flow of an artistic ocean. You can find the waves below.

Rehearsal Studio

When I was confronted with a year of my two biggest projects to date, and knowing I would need to jump back and forth at several key moments, I decided it would be better for me to conceive of my Dancers and separate projects as my company working in ongoing company rehearsals. It's a small shift in thinking, perhaps semantics. But, it allowed me to divvy up the time accordingly, and to create freely, without apology for saving or transferring movement material from one project to the other. Mercifully, at the point I lost touch with my creativity and choreographic finesse in mid-October, my Dancers had already become a family – able and willing to continue working and relish performing. They were industrious, conscientious, and helpful on one stage, while I turned attention to another. They carried me. I owe them, and my understudy and rehearsal assistant, Chelsea Boyd Brown, everything.

The most important element to my creative process is a comfortable working environment that honors good food, a solid warm-up, and the sort of social components that bond a group: storytelling, jokes, relationship updates, and work-life recaps. Investing in each Dancer's comfort is what imbues the choreographic work time with efficiency, commitment to clandestine operations, and risk-taking. Many contemporary creative processes draw on each Dancer's improvisational and choreographic voice to craft a work collaboratively. I'm a bit old fashioned in that I

choreograph every move, with a very particular movement aesthetic, and personal motivation to direct the work into a cohesive look. In a generation where the individual voice and contribution are celebrated, if not just taken for granted, in social media, the classroom, and the studio, I am cautious about my process feeling too oppressive. So, I work to invite the individual into the process through a different door – camaraderie that influences the choreographic trajectory and expands the group mission. And I work to give each Dancer a different track – a throughline in the work that could only be made for her – in the transitions, the details, and overall emotional arc.

I also believe in womanaging expectations. Entering a Heart Stück Bernie process means a short orientation that covers everything from food to language to work ethic. Humor welcome, but also taken seriously.

Do not eat fruit in the studio, if you can help it.

No oranges allowed. If you packed an orange, keep it packed. Do not, under any circumstances, peel it. Same for any similar fruit: tangerine, clementine, etc.

Possible answers to fruit inquiries, depending on mood:

The smell of citrus makes me nauseous.

I'm allergic.

Line item description of the whys:

Texture, odor, taste...

Followed by a line item description of possible, even if hypocritical or very unhealthy exceptions: pink and red starbursts, strawberry margaritas if the strawberries are pureed, (*I can tell you a story about a bad OK Cupid date at a fancy cocktail bar with real strawberry chunks in the drink*), and maraschino cherries. I'm from wine country in California, so don't even ask.

Followed by, "No, I don't have scurvy.

I do not like words that unnecessarily end in y. So, you can take your girly, twinsy, cutey pie, mommy, daddy, and tummy to the trashcan. I will always feed you, but if you suggest it's yummy, I'll leave the room. (*You can still keep eating.*)

Expect to learn a lot of choreography, quickly. Know that it will change. Know that it will likely change at least six times before a final stage. A final stage could include an actual stage, or a few square feet in the proscenium of an office door, or a currently undiscovered location. Know that some of these changes will be as minute as one degree of separation, and some will drown with other lucky darlings.

And I hate cats. But, if you're my friend, and you ask me to cat sit, I will dutifully oblige. The Torah commands that we feed our pets before we feed ourselves. I will even do that for your cat.

Arts & Crafts Aesthetic – Making the Movement Layer Cake

My layered choreography comes from my layered process and processing. I am an artist who takes inspiration from multiple places (film, literature, music) and reacts. I don't create from scratch so much as take known ingredients and mix them into something newfangled. I might make props you've never imagined a need for, but you certainly know about construction paper, scissors, and paste. I might put movement together in an unfamiliar mix of brute physicality with repetitive, dialoguing gesture. I might sculpt an uncomfortable family portrait or a sincere and sincerely dying truth. But you know the ingredients: dance, family, Martha Graham's daily small deaths. And I might pull from obscure literature or film, but you know about words and pictures. And so, this is how I choreograph: I look at the Dancers and things in the studio, and I mix them with the most resonant inspirations from current viewing, reading, or listening. I add in my own brand of grounded, pointed movement. And, like a very serious amateur in a lab coat with Fischer-Price science

goggles, I mix things together and watch elements catalyze, solutions form, and free radicals combust.

One way to conduct that sort of science experiment would be to enter the studio, look at the bodies in space, and give them movement material. I would manipulate movement with regard to spacing, timing, and cannon. I would find the Oppenheim aesthetic, if not already built into the thrust of movement: inserting proper pace of arrest to speed to thick texture tempo. I would edit moves into a legible state that stayed true to the mission of that particular section: destruction of set, utility, egress, vacuum, dissemination of information, immersing the audience, instructing the audience, providing the same questionable choices for the audience as the Dancers, campaigning for movement, campaigning to stay the same, referencing/defending/justifying the need for separate stages and divisive walls, etc. This is how I practiced the mantra: make it more what it is. Make the material, then sculpt it to the mission. Add more material, sculpt more. Render, then edit.

I continually measured, checked-in, compared, and contrasted sections to what came before, and what would come after. I mapped the movement and the meaning in relation to the particular section, and the work as a whole, or, in this case, the work as a hole. I kept track of an evolving ingredient list. I made lists, wrote sections on small papers, arranged, rearranged, re-rearranged.

I inserted spatial tension to confront, regard, and never negate the space: always with an eye toward the proximity between Dancers, relation to walls, and understanding of where the other Dancers in the other stages were currently dancing.

Sometimes I wanted to create symmetry on each stage, for instance in the opening section Peaches, we were often dancing in the same directions – all moving on the same downstage diagonal, or straight to stage left, or around in the same circled trajectory. I played with culmination points where we all met in the center, and I played with the ability to evenly populate the entire space.

Sometimes, I tried to be as disparate as possible – so Stage 1's movement would be more about things: doing them, touching them, using them. Things being props, body parts, moves. And Stage 2 would be more about where my body was in relation to an opening – how the light, move, or egress itself could express the myriad interpretations of doors and windows. Stage 3 choreography would be so zeroed in on the precise interaction between the Two Women in a vacuum – wholly unrelatable to anybody outside the viscous tension.

This spacing tactic was most obvious in Tinker Tailor where the Stage 1 Dancers moved all about the space, almost continuously. In Stage 2, though I wandered away from the walls with a few short bursts of activity or sustained suspension, I was mostly committed to dancing in place – framed by one particular wall and high window. And the Two Women in the Vacuum either delineated the

space with perfect, but separatist symmetry, or they danced within two inches of each other to create – a magnetic force field, constantly beckoning their own black hole of movement.

Choreographically, I don't usually start looking for the answer. I start by looking for the question. So, to use a game show metaphor and apply it to experimental concert art (lowbrow/highbrow aesthetic – you can decide which category belongs to which description!), I literally put the Dancers and the work in jeopardy. I put the audience in jeopardy. I compound everyone's questions with double jeopardy – raising the stakes as we raise our awareness and investment. Today's audiences are litigious, they have to see it to believe it, and they will believe in, sue, and pursue alternative facts. So, I give them alternate realities. So, I make the same calculated cold-blooded moves as Campaign Manager and Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway? My many gods and goddesses of dance. I was doomed.

Music

I hear music in its sonar pulse and timbre; I can rarely decipher lyrics or scales. I react to the dig, the bellow, the mew. Sometimes the music comes first, sometimes the movement finds the music; the order is dictated by gut reaction and falling in love.

Certain bands are staples of Heart Stück Bernie playlists, if not in performance, than at least in the rehearsal process: Grizzly Bear for its melancholy,

but unsentimental tone (used during Pina Pina), Animal Collective for its buoyant, sonically rich, and exuberant must-dance imperatives (used for the Epilogue), Radiohead for its contemporary dance sensibility: asymmetrical phrasing, voice and instrumentation melding into tonal lunges and breathtaking recoveries (Tinker Tailor), Sunset Rubdown for its refusal of expectation, but perfect samples for repeating one heart string (Duck Duck Vulture and Pecking Ending). I'm a musical junkie, and, teaching teenagers, I'm always searching for new music; trading recommendations with friends, listening to new music podcasts, keeping my ears pricked for a new earwig or compositional structure. I can't narrow my musical process down to one approach, but I can point to each of *Render Edit's* tracks for express purpose ranging from ebullience to destruction, to rhythm-driving, to fractal parsing.

One aspect of musical choice for me is about connecting with viewers. Since the natural state of my work is challenging, I often rely on music to draw you in – to even out the playing field, as it were. For *Render Edit*, I leaned into musical double takes. I used two tracks each from The Stranglers, Sunset Rubdown, and Clipping. I used the Radiohead track two times in a row. I bookended the work with dance tracks. And I paired two similar sounding tracks in the middle. This was a way to encourage a visual double take, alongside auditory rubbernecking. I don't want my audience to work hard for everything at once; the philosophy of repeated or similar musical tracks helps alleviate some of the challenging choreography. It lets the listener lean in a bit more comfortably.

I came by the hip hop outfit Clipping by accident. My sound designer, Jeff Dorfman, introduced the artist to my colleague Chris Law, with whom I shared my Thesis evening. He played a section of Clipping's *Work Work* during a design meeting, and I fell in love instantly. Chris and I had talked about how we could insert little pieces of each other's work into our own halves of the concert. I liked the idea of us both using Clipping. An insider process-oriented connection informs the making of the piece as much as the explicit performance of it informs the viewer's two-act concert experience. Chris was also going to use Clipping, albeit a different track. I was unsure of the fairness, or the good-Samaritan/I'm white nature of being the first artist of the evening to use the music. This topical issue was part of a larger conversation about hip hop that Chris and I have been having over the years. Together, we decided I should use the music; we were both inspired by the artists, and we wanted to share our different interpretations.

Work Work's musical tone and aim were confidence – bawler, my colleague might say. It was bold, allocated a modicum of cool to my work, and it was also a surprising pairing with my other tracks. It was a great way for me to dig into all the layers of the women on stage, sexuality being one of those necessary acknowledgements. The choreography that came out of this track was a simple reaction to the seductive beats and saturation of Boss that seeped from its rhymes, up-tempo, and adult undertow. Plus, it mentioned Trump with irreverence. The closest I could get to political commentary at the time was contrasting the derisive Trump lyric

with strong, powerful women, completely in control of their minds, bodies, and the gaze of the audience. Swagger. Swag. Assuage.

Like *Work Work*, every other track was a vehicle for the particular section's central mission. The track and I communed, the dance and the melody melded, and the overall mixed tape of *Render Edit* solidified into a beast all its own. Sometimes we rode it like a bull, other times it carried us like a dream. I wonder what Marketing would have done if I suggested that as a tagline for the work!

Cinema

Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos' films changed my thesis course during Summer 2016. I saw his most recent film *The Lobster* in the movie theater, and immediately sought out his CV. His work is described as absurdist dystopia and dark comedy. Check. His narratives are stark and daring. Check. He has an ability to drop the viewer into the middle of a drastic otherness that erases preface and banks on committed performance quality. Check. And, like my adored Pina Bausch, he will go so far, so long into a deep plunge, that your wits end, briefly; they just die of breathlessness, before a rush of unruly emotion and understanding flood you inconsolably. I wanted to make a dance like that.

At various junctions throughout the process, and across the Stages, I deferred to a list I had made of his filmic qualities. I tried different methods of restraint,

different lengths of painstakingly little, different shards of violent slay. I pressed and dug into the work – beyond the borders of comfort.

I approached Stage 1 as my Lanthimos terrain in *Tinker Tailor*. I took stark as my blood oath. I wanted the movement as viscous as the vein's poultice, but slowed down to the kind of heart rate where you hear your own beleaguered breath from your echoing inside. Furtive, but pounding; endless and possibly ending in one contraction. It was slow and painful, even as it threatened to hemorrhage.

Aside from Lanthimos' influences, my work pays homage to French and Chinese New Wave Cinema. The filmic jump cuts inform my approach to movement transitions, and my overall ideas about editing, non-sequitur, juxtaposed, perfectly timed. New Wave's complex layers of candid character dialogue, accompanied by more poetic voiceover or written narration, parallel my own narrative, emotional, conceptual, and poetic layers in a work. I strive for similar balances of serious and comedic found in the works of Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Wong Kar-wai. I also work toward New Wave's kismet connection of visually rich imagery attached to the important storytelling components of sound score and lighting. Lastly, New Wave directors and their characters tend to mix bold and experimental actions with fastidious *mise-en-scène* work, and I try to do the same. New Wave descendants Wes Anderson and Michel Gondry use scenic design as though they are stage managing my very dreams; their use of quotidian materials with such earnest invention and committed belief elevates their work, and my inspiration.

Lanthimos' larger and stranger than life cosmos is still my current inspiration. *Render Edit* just scratched the surface. But I think this filmmaker will inform a lengthy next phase of my choreographic career.

Writing

All of my work stems from a seamless and undefined back and forth between written words and movement invention. Word play and movement intrigue, inspired by, sparring with, and challenging each other to make it more what it is. Rehearsal preparation includes creative writing, list making, and syntactical goals. Rehearsal debriefing generates distilled poetry, clarified lists, new paragraphs.

Just as much as cinema, literature has played a significant role in my creative life, particularly the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Haruki Murakami, the tell-it-as-it-is simplicity of John Steinbeck, and the Social Realism (or post post-modernism) of Jonathan Franzen, among others. I structure my works with the various lessons I have learned from their syntax, diction, sophisticated plots, and challenging vocabulary. And part of how I make choreography takes a page from their literary lines: I write about a work until it becomes movement.

Interested in pursuing writing more seriously, I took an independent study in Spring 2016 with resident scholar Professor Miriam Phillips. She had encouraged my writing, creative and functional, since our first class together at the beginning of our graduate course load. One of my writing assignments with Miriam last spring was to

take a ninety-second excerpt of my work, and write about it from multiple points of view. I chose the first ninety seconds of Emily and Patty's Tinker Tailor duet. It was brand new at the time, one of the only sections I had made in preparation for an official Thesis Showing, and my time spent with it in the studio and at a writing table turned it into the lynchpin and literary standard for the entire work.

I wrote about those Two Women in those ninety seconds in nine different ways: the choreographer's point of view (POV), the Dancers' POV, the accompaniment's POV, a particular point in space's POV, the audience's POV, from the choreographer to the audience, a macro description of the duet, a micro-thick description of the duet, and one version written entirely out of cliché first lines. The writing helped me define the duet, and the duet helped refine the writing. The writing and the dancing partnered each other in a new kind of duet.

Buoyed by a deeper connection to my writing, I enrolled in a Poetry Workshop in Fall 2016 with Professor Michael Collier. My plan was to continue writing about *Render Edit* throughout the semester, in the attempt to create a companion piece of literature – a collection of writing that could be read on its own, or as further insight into the thesis project. Over the months leading up to and just past the 2016 Election, my poetry got increasingly political, even when my choreography did not. It's interesting to see the trajectory over the course of the semester. But even when the poetic content veered away from *Render Edit*, the structures of these new poems still informed the choreography. For instance, an end

of semester imitation assignment from Solmaz Sharif's book *Look*, was about war and political language, but it was presented as a triptych – three ways of writing about the same thing – three stages for language to perform differently, and different tasks. What I ended up making is a small collection of poetry that originated from Emily and Patty's duet, and moved toward political upheaval – reflecting the possibility of the work, over its execution.

Chapter 4: Render Edit. End it. End.

The End is the Beginning is the End or: My name is _____, and I have a(n) _____ problem.

I had to title the Thesis Concert when I turned the proposal in – twelve months before the premiere. I hadn't even set foot in the studio to do choreographic research. I had no idea what the piece would look like, feel like, taste like to perform; I had no idea how to title it. My husband, sitting next to me as I was working, recounted the story of filmmaker Kevin Smith when he was tasked with prematurely titling his film *Dogma*. Smith looked around and saw a box of bear claw donuts on the table. He titled the script *Bear Claw*, pending its more researched and appropriate title. As he was storytelling, I glanced sideways, toward the end table that separates our individual couch/workspaces, and I saw a miniature bottle of Bearglove – an Old Spice body spray. I'll omit the oddball reason for its presence, but suffice it to say the cherry red bottle decorated with roaring grizzlies was in the right place at the right time. I picked it up, depressed the nozzle, watched the scented particles dissipate, and bestowed the bear-clad name on my Thesis Proposal, as a placeholder. Or did I steal the name, pick up the bottle, and depress the project? Or was it, steal the integrity, bottle the depressed pieces, and watch the dissipation? In any case, *Bearglove* was the first iteration.

After faculty members looked over the proposal for a first time, word got back to me that Production Manager Cary Gillett loved the name. I had never intended to keep any part of the title, but I enjoyed a through-the-grapevine reaction from Cary,

and I quickly realized this had to be part of the project. My audience engagement, already proposed to play out as an extended prologue to the December Concert, could also include engaging with a changing title. I decided the title would get longer over the course of the research and rehearsal process; morphing every time a faculty member or the Marketing Department directly confronted it. I envisioned a “final” title that would look like a redacted sentence – hinting at the notion of seen and unseen in print and person. I got as far as the following iterations:

Bearglove for Cary (final proposal draft)

Bearglove for Cary. Ask Her. (initial title sent to Marketing)

Bearglove for [REDACTED] & The Marketing Team. [REDACTED] Them. (after I was first asked to send a blurb to Marketing)

Bearglove for [REDACTED] Ask [REDACTED]. (final version sent to Marketing during the summer)

At first, Coordinator of Marketing and Communications Kate Spanos made a hearty and conscientious effort to support this cumbersome task. I was thrilled and excited to work with Marketing on a different kind of titular publicity. But then I was informed the redacting would be impossible, and the Clarice needed a name that wouldn’t change. I understood the nature of needing a deadline title to print, but I didn’t understand the reticence with the redacting, or the unwillingness to perhaps update the website once a month until my Thesis Concert. The Clarice website utilizes all kinds of images and icons, beyond Helvetica Neue-Regular (yes, I checked). The Clarice updates bios, performance details, and any necessary changes to performance material. The Clarice wants whatever is next, now, and innovative. According to University President Wallace Loh’s endorsement published in all its materials, The Clarice supports fearless ideas.

If pressed to say why I feel a morphing title is a fearless idea, I would say it creates a reason to ask questions. I am deeply saddened every time a student's reaction to something she doesn't understand ends in condescending laughter, as opposed to launching her into questions. My creative process and pedagogy envision and model a world where there are more opportunities to ask questions, and more standards by which we could apply knowledge and learning. If we asked questions as opposed to indulging nervous or shallow laughter, we might not conflate curiosity and discomfort with shame and demeaning negation.

As administrative decisions started to interfere with the project, I tried to maintain control of the work by retitling it on my own terms. Instead of continuing the titling process, I labeled it. At each juncture, I was re-rendering a title, and then editing it according to specific interactions. *Render Edit*. If the work would be about structure, I thought the title could be about process.

I appreciated that the title could be a noun if taken whole, or an imperative, a call to action. It referenced the edits I felt the Clarice impinged on the project, and it referred to the many stages of renderings from my designers. It represented the work-in-process, the final product, an invitation to make your own visual or physical edit, or an instruction for how to view the work. It also referred to what I knew would be a thesis writing process that would need significant edits. I enjoyed the syllabic symmetry of both words, even as *Render* softened the palate in preparation for the

abrupt d and t in edit. I was drawn to the nuanced alliteration, and I took solace in the e-n-d sandwich of Render. At some point, it would be over.

The title also references the sometimes length and nail-biting process of a computer rendering a file. When the computer is rendering, nothing else can move forward; you just have to wait for the computer to do its part, before the file is available to be edited, watched, shared. That's sort of how this thesis process felt to me – so many moving parts. So little control. A vision so large it wrapped us up like a Christo, and ideas and inner workings got suffocated inside.

Tuning Fork

An important element of my teaching and rehearsal directing is starting by tuning into the group's tone and needs. I enjoy the challenge of facilitating an environment in which everyone feels engaged, supported, and empowered to stay on task together. Naturally, this idea of tuning made it into a Thesis Brigade happening one Monday. The Dancers situated their hands in the shape of a band shell dome (sculpted acoustics), and, after identifying the correct location on a neighboring Dancer (like searching for a stud in a wall), they struck the body part and enjoyed the hum of the instrument (you choose the metaphor). A large group of Dancers doing this sounds a bit like several pianos simultaneously being tuned into harmony. We called this action The Tuning Fork.

You'll notice the description above mixes metaphors: tuning a musical instrument and searching for a place to hammer something into the wall. Back a ways in the Field Trip section, I described how Emily directed the patron to get into a skiing position, which she did by asking the patron to assume the position of a figurehead on the Titanic – mixing movie, nautical, and skiing references. My choreographic language is full of these juxtapositions and paradoxes. I might ask my Dancers to move like Big Foot ice skating, while riding a pony, and driving a Mack Truck. That means I want gliding lunges, with an open, grounded pelvis, Wild West panache, and gargantuan traveling. I might direct the Dancers to undulate their spines, or ask for costumes that reveal an inch of extra plunge - both with all of the sensational steam of a Hollywood seductress - even as they articulate a firm handshake manner or costume silhouette that means serious business. I might search for, draw out, refine a textural movement quality or scenic aesthetic in which balls and walls are meant to be approached with wiles, guile, and hardware glue – the kind that makes it all stick. This is how I mix high brow and low brow choreographic and design elements. And this is why there are so many layers (and possible interpretations) to my work. I am sourcing from pop culture, nostalgia, current events, historical connotations, and wry commentary or adoring adaptation of jokes, incidents, and personal connections in the immediate studio environment.

I might ask for the Dancers to perform open-heart surgery – cracking open their breast bones with self-conducted incisions that release all the rays of a dark care bear, but with all the maturity of an address to the United Nations. My Dancers move

with deep reserves of gravitas and comic relief, pelvises that are powerful and feminine; moves that are animalistic in roar and pounce, with distinctly human heart-strung or deadpan choice. They can make you cry for all the right and all the wrong reasons: truth, destruction, beauty, raunchy jokes, misconception, confusion, conflation, willful stubbornness, touching you, making you, laughing with you until you pee, holding you while you recover, sending you off to make heads, tails, and decidedly blinking lashes – to draw your own metaphors and make your own closure.

In *Render Edit*, the Tuning Fork happened at the point in time when the Dancers were as far from each other as possible in physical space and narrative arc. I was up on top of the Balcony. The Stage 1 Dancers, having just constructed a giant web of unstrung cassette tape, got down on the floor, and were stuck in a movement pattern – like a broken record. And Emily and Patty, having temporarily taken over my Space in Stage 2, were about to cycle back around to the beginning of their duet life-cycle. They found themselves forty-five minutes into the work and having gone nowhere. They realized, they might be able to change their location, but they were locked into a self-sustaining orbit. So, me at my highest, Stage 1 at its lowest, the Two Women at their infinity-nature realization...and then the Tuning Fork started – one Dancer at a time, until we were all harmonizing. It was the catalyst to return to our home bases and start the end of the show. No matter how high-strung, far-flung, or seeming disparate, we were still a cast of Dancers working together.

The cast members tuned so well that they started to devise their own intrigue outside of my purview. In the last four weeks of rehearsals, little pins started to show

up everywhere. All of these pins were connected thematically to either the movement material or inside jokes formed during the rehearsal process. Eyelashes, just like the ones on the costumes were attached to my backpack. Clasped hands were delivered to me by a student who had nothing to do with *Render Edit* shortly after we made a section with clasped hands. A pelvis showed up in my actual home after our Sunday porn rehearsal. Once, I was sent on a scavenger hunt through the Dance Wing - through spaces that required faculty or grad student keys; it seemed like the co-conspirators were growing to folks outside my cast. As I got closer to the premiere, I grew more paranoid. I was doing double takes wherever I went. I had effectively become an audience member to my own show! And everybody just said to me, "I have no idea what you're talking about." Touché.

Choreographic Failings

The choreography became more attached to the music and each section's mission than the natural cadence or flow of the entire evening. In that sense, I created a repertory show: a series of same-sized dances with same-size effect – either overly repetitive or canceling out contrast; the choreography became self-indulgent.

Especially with the time I gave it to unfold, it lizard-lounged in its slowness, in its self-importance to say the same thing over and over, in as many different ways as *I* thought necessary. I have to ask myself if I gave the audience a way in for their own interpretation, or just cloaked them in my aesthetic. As a performance without any explanation, as it was experienced in Fall 2016, I suffocated or overwhelmed my

viewers. I think written explanation like you are reading could have mitigated some of the distaste and confusion expressed by audience members and myself.

Explanation could have been effective in preparing an audience for what they were about to see. Whereas I saw a structure that begged questions and engagement on its own, a program note or pre-show speech of words and kind actions could have truly invited folks to engage. In fact my Thesis Chair encouraged me, multiple times and with increasing frustration at my reticence, to pursue the more inviting pathway. My stubbornness in letting the work speak for itself made the viewer expendable in my largesse attempt to buck institutions. Disadvantaging the viewer in such a way is anathema to my pedagogy. In hindsight, I disgust myself.

Worse: the hindsight was foreshadowed. One of the reasons I assess the choreography as so poorly rendered is my lack of time and attention to its editing. The research really mandated that each section be made, picked apart, and re-crafted in relation to the audience, and to each of the other two stages. I was so pressed for time, in my small window between *Skirt the Wall* and *Render Edit*, and I was so preoccupied with defending my proposal against stalwart Production-ese and Clarice-isms, in addition to working through difficult design collaborations, that I didn't get the opportunity to pore over each section with a fine-bristled vacuum hose attachment in the way I usually work on a project. And, instead of paring down the scope of the project to match the allotted rehearsal time, I maintained the majority of my original structure and just powered through by filling each section in, without distilling it down to its necessary elements, and without properly vetting every movement. I did not make the work more what it is. I just made the work. And this realization didn't

come from reflection; I knew it all along. I felt duplicitous in my own process.

A lack of time meant I didn't properly finish the work. But, more importantly, and more consequentially, it meant that I didn't get to try anything in the studio before making decisions. My process generally involves at least three versions of a move, a dance phrase, or an entire section before a puzzle piece falls into place. The luxury of trial and error allows me to find the correct dance answer for the Dancers in the room, and for the work as a whole. For *Render Edit*, I ran out of time, and I was only able to make the choreography, and then circumvent the most obstructive roadblocks. I got as far as building the triptych structure, but I didn't fill in the linings, details, or *raison d'être*. In turn, the work was not able to dialogue with, or guide an audience member successfully through my creative process, execution, or pedagogy of *Render Edit*.

Most problematically for me, the work did not address the current political climate. It was not a representation of the artist activism, which I felt was necessary in the weeks following the 2016 Presidential Election. It was untimely, and it was superfluous to December 2016's culture. And even if the argument could be made that it still mattered, I didn't connect to it or believe in it. I found it crass to ask an audience to do something that I didn't support.

I do think bits and pieces of the choreography fulfilled their potential, and I think some of the work is worth salvaging...maybe even performing again in a more considered context. However, this document purported to delve into failure. At least I can deliver that from start to finish.

Lessons Learned

I learned:

Tone is everything.

Exasperation ruins everything.

I learned about disdain for poor theatre.

I learned about disdain for getting paper cuts from your own aesthetic

I learned about repercussions for espousing a pedagogy of fiercely different.

If I were a vacuum, I might say I learned nothing.

The end could have been the beginning. Nothing was so touched or transformed as to have any legible impact.

If I were a doorframe, or window frame, or empty frame hanging onto my wall by a corner, even though I asked to be attached on Monday, secured on Tuesday, removed on Wednesday, and accorded some [REDACTED] modicum of attention to detail on Thursday, I might have said I learned asking to be screwed to the wall is just asking to be screwed.

And if I were meant to interpret anything from a utilitarian DIY stance, I would say I learned it would have been better to do it myself.

Of course, I also learned that this was one project too many in my time here – that my choreographic creativity had a limit, and that limit was met approximately sixty-eight days before my Thesis Concert, and crossed for the eight weeks of thesis push. I

learned that my choreography gets more manic, convoluted, and attached to incessant rhythmic counts, the farther I entangle myself in my own triptych web.

I learned the production arm of TDPS cares more about how things are supposed to happen, over how things are happening, could happen, or can be solved.

I learned my Thesis Chair and I would rather talk about what's not working and not happening – both able to mine drama and hardship for humor, feisty response, sighs and eyes over chocolate. (*This support was necessary to complete the concert.*) I learned about my ability to blame something or someone else.

I learned about the meaninglessness of proposals, even as I felt confident this was meaningful, or, perhaps, in spite of its perceived meaninglessness.

In light of my current internship with Dancers Without Borders, and my particular training with the Stage Department's Hilary Brandt in project management, I learned this project, choreographic and written, failed from lack of consequence over deadlines, more articulate depiction, and shared language. In part this is due to the changed political climate and landscape in which I believe everything should change, and in part due to my turn as an artist activist in my previous work.

Three Endings to the Thesis Document

The overarching spirit of *Render Edit* was multiplicity in making, explaining, and experiencing. I set out to create a triptych performance, with triangulated throughlines, and three different lenses. So, I thought it only appropriate to conclude this thesis document with three different endings.

Ending 1 Animal Collective Epilogue Light Show Truncated Version

The Russian novelist Anton Chekov theorized that if a loaded gun is introduced in a narrative, it must go off. The metaphor and principle is about utilizing narrative details to their fullest and promised extent. In my case, this transfers to prop usage and scenic design necessity.

To me, putting compartments on stage demands for them to be adequately filled or intentionally untethered. And in regarding all of the artistic elements comprising the project, light is one of the active ingredients – it needed to fill the space, just like the scenic design, the Dancers, and the dance. I felt that the scenic design's relatively low sightlines which blocked the view of Audiences 1 and 2 from seeing over the wall, but didn't hide from them the other space's existence, needed to be acknowledged. Audiences 1 and 2 could still see light sources affecting the other stages. Before the work's conclusion, I felt compelled to acknowledge this active ingredient of light in a more buxom way. A light show would both highlight what each audience was supposed to see, and what each audience was missing – filling a twin role of necessity for complete consideration. Together, Brandi and I designed a

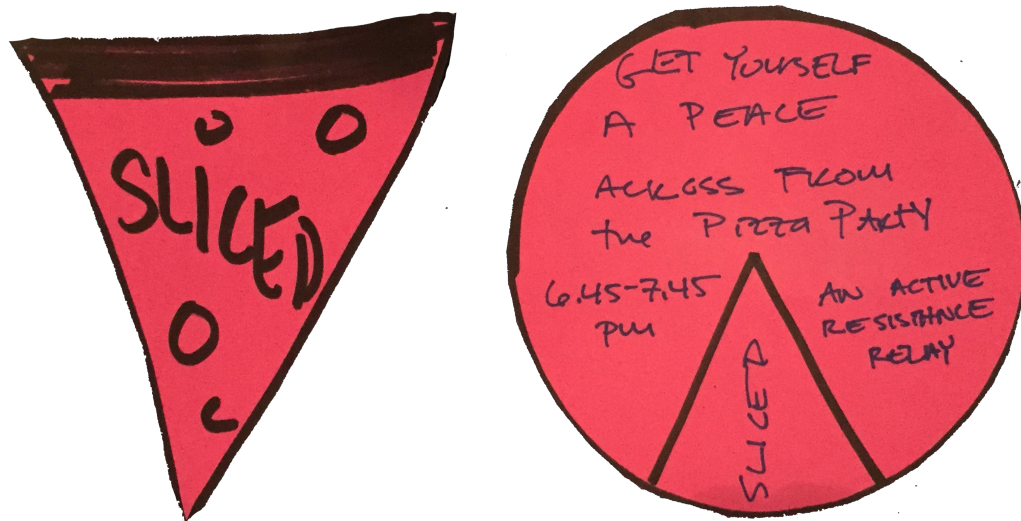
beat by beat diagram of lights that would ping pong through the stages in different patterns in time with choreography.

This was a great theory, shared by my lighting designer in conversation, but never fully realized. As a nod to the work she had done in conceiving of the design, and the fact that I could use a creative finale to ensure everyone bowed for every audience, I just cut the section in half, settled for strobe lights, and relied on the ebullient Animal Collective track to top off the repertory smorgasbord my work had become with a fun ending. Perhaps the flashing lights and finale of joyful dancing could serve as slight of hand. At the very least, the work's beginning and ending, as different from the middle as they could possibly be, suggested multiple possibilities for interpretation. They set the work up for complex, layered viewing tracks. Or they were disingenuous. Both are honest truth and critical commentary of the project.

Ending 2 SLICED, Grab Yourself a Peace

The weekend this document was due, I organized a subversive artist dance event for the 450 students attending the Mid-Atlantic North Region of American College Dance Association. The theme of the Conference was crossing borders, and, in the wake of the election, the Trump Administration's most recent roll outs of the Travel Ban, revised healthcare system, the start of construction on a Border Wall, war on the media, barring of press pools on foreign diplomacy trips, unprecedented budget slashing, etc., I wanted to provide some events that would disrupt, help students process, and provide an opportunity for active resistance. I set up across from the Friday night Pizza Party, and I ran an event called SLICED, An Active

Resistant Relay. Students could sign up for five minute slots, declare what they were dancing for, and pass the torch from one group to the next in an unbroken chain of moves forward. This event was connected to the political climate. A way to get your piece of pizza, and then grab yourself some peace.



Hand made publicity paraphernalia for SLICED. These were hand delivered and roguely placed around The Clarice in the lead-up to the event. Photo by Sarah Mertz.

A key element of Law's and my concerts was the transition from one work to the next. My walls were in the shape of a giant Y, which needed to be pushed away and hidden, to make room for Law's benches, trash cans, telephone wire, basket ball hoop, and benches – formed into a hip hop cypher. Law's performance taking place in the round, meant the circle of his work, overlaid on the ephemeral footprints of *Render Edit's* Y, created a peace sign. Sometimes we need delineations. Sometimes we need walls off of which to bounce ideas. Sometimes we just need to tear them down and make a circle out of the ashes. No matter how you slice it...

Ending 3 Mentorship

Since I approach choreography partly as a pedagogue, I am vigilant about the experience of my Dancers within a Heart Stück Bernie process. In particular, I want to model professional and memorable work and choices for my Dancers. Just as I hope my audiences will continue conversations after the curtain, I hope my Dancers will continue the work beyond a single project's life expectancy. I encourage them to join the avant-garde movement, to practice fearless moxie from their own niche and point of view, to develop a critical eye and articulate creative process. Some of my Dancers are professional colleagues, but some are undergraduate Dancers or very recent graduates for whom I try to offer mentorship. *Render Edit* was a failed choreographic endeavor, but I believe the most important part of the entire project was the work I did with my younger Dancers.

From February – December 2016, I worked with these Dancers on *Satch*, *Skirt the Wall*, and *Render Edit* (Brigade and concert components). I was privileged to witness these burgeoning artists transform inside and outside the studio. I believe the hyper-focused work ethic, the Heart Stück Bernie shtick and womanifesto of pedagogy and performance, and the familial and comfortable rehearsal environment provided the sort of space to insert steps of pedagogy, which is why they grew.

They had to grapple with a sophisticated performance quality – working toward the HSB aesthetic, but maintaining their own voice and artistry

They had to navigate institutional politics, make on-the-spot decisions in the immersive theatrical experiences at the Kennedy Center, in the Brigade – contextualizing the mission of the work with their own longevity in the institution, with their own artistic preferences and understandings.

They asked and answered a lot of questions throughout the process out of necessity. Both of the evening-length works had so many different locations, that they had to work on their own for periods of time during some rehearsals – developing strategies to move forward, catalogue questions, and figure out how to contribute to the work ethic without holding up the process. Deciding which questions needed my opinion/attention, and which questions they could address with the autonomy of their own choices. They were able to do this by learning and practicing the HSB language and aesthetic. And, as I brought greener, additional Dancers into the KC project to amplify the cast from eight to sixteen, or as I reassigned choreography one stage had learned to another stage and Dancer grouping, they also had to teach sections – flexing their own rehearsal directing skills, becoming more adept and articulate with all the layers of movement explanation from meaning, to technique, to performance quality.

While I use wildly colorful metaphors to describe movement, and I often share the impetus of a section or reason behind a choreographic exploration, I do not spend very much time offering up my personal interpretation of what the

choreography means. The Dancers, along with my audience, have to theorize and defend their own interpretations.

We do a lot of reflection, check-ins, and debriefs of the process. I feel confident that any one of my Dancers can speak on my behalf and share our company values with the community. Loyal to the cause, they can also continue the mission beyond my rehearsal directives. But I am most interested in how they have gone on to establish their artistic voices as they make layered, considered choices in their own deepening investigations. My measure of success in *Render Edit*, is that they achieved heightened levels of performance in maturity, womanhood, and nuance, and they have since gone on to make daring choreographic choices with a noticeably expanded palette, including immersive theatre and choreographic content that subverts expectations and norms. And that is why, at the end of this document, and approaching the end of this requirement, beyond choreographic failings, collaborative mishaps, administrative interference, and production mismanagement, I am still devoted to an artistic process that questions, pushes, and redefines; their invigorated successes and explorations are my inspiration. All along, it was about shifting things to sculpt just the right cut of hide and seek. Whether you found that in this document, or you're still searching, that's the point. And to beleaguer it, since I love repetition, the slow burn, and...making it more what it is...if you found your own renderings edited by any of these words, then we've done it together.

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