

Abstract

Title of Thesis: OVERSCORE

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Thesis Directed By: Associate Professor Dr. Maura Keefe, School of
Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

Overscore is a 30-minute interdisciplinary performance piece that explores the concept of breaking habit. Over her three-year graduate career, choreographer, dancer, and director Christina Robson accumulated a portfolio of choreographic studies focused on interrupting habitual movement patterns and challenging compositional structures. The choreography is composed by generating rule-based approaches to diagrammatic representation from disciplines such as classical staff-based music notation, computer source code, graphic music scores, Morse code, and written philosophies of performance theory. *Overscore* curates a dense collage from this collection of studies, weaving an integrated installation of dance, film, projection, light, sound, costume, and scenic design. Most of the choreographic studies that comprise *Overscore* transpired amidst a global pandemic, thus resourcefulness and adaptation became mechanisms for tenacity; braiding function alongside transparency as cornerstones of process-oriented performance. While revealing human error and referencing the humor, devotion and absurdism embedded in creative process and live performance, *Overscore* demonstrates the physical effort, mental stamina and nimble improvisation of multiple artists committing to high stakes

performance structures. *Overscore* premiered at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center on October 15, 2021, and features choreography and direction by Christina Robson, scenic design by Andrés Poch, projection design by Xavier Taylor, lighting design by Mitchell Cronin, costume design by Stephanie Parks, musical composition by Lily Gelfand and performance by Robson, Nana Edu and Tristan Koepke. This chronological document composed of anecdotal references, choreographic studies, and theoretical analyses explicates the creative research and compositional development of *Overscore*.

OVERSCORE

by

Christina Robson

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Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Dr. Maura Keefe, Chair
Assistant Professor Crystal Davis
Assistant Professor Kendra Portier

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Preface

After a decade of collaborations with esteemed dance companies such as Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, David Dorfman Dance, The Sean Curran Company, and Monica Bill Barnes & Company, I accumulated a distinctive collection of choreographic methodologies, habitual movement patterns and aesthetic preferences. Working as a performer in these choreographers' creative processes made significant and lasting impressions that inform my physicality as well as my perspectives on dance making. Such metamorphosis goes beyond the malleability of the body, the mind too hijacked by the proclivities of the directors' habitual patterns. Not only does the body contort to meet the stylistic demands of the vocabulary, but as a primary problem solver within the choreographic structures, the mind becomes conditioned to seek resolutions that align with each choreographer's values.

I completed my last tour with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company just weeks before I arrived at University of Maryland to begin graduate school. In my first semester, I found myself reckoning with the reality that my body had been emphatically shaped by the stylistic demands of the Jones/Zane repertory. The physical shape of my body was contoured by the consistent, daily technique classes of the company's rehearsal director, Janet Wong. Long, open hamstrings, soft hip creases and pliant feet, sculpted to deliver the weighted sequentially and bone driven quality of the repertory. My mind had been filtered to make choices by the standards of Jones' aesthetic. I sought clean lines, efficient and utilitarian transitions, gestural movement of the arms initiated from the fingertips, and a subtle sequential spine reverberating like an echo from every weight shift. These stylistic attributes became automatic for me.

Educational philosopher John Dewey indicates that specialized training can diminish the scope of coordination. In his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey theorizes that,

Repeated use of certain muscles in a uniform way at last secures automatic skill. Even the faculty of thinking was to be formed into a trained habit by repeated exercises in making and combining simple distinctions. The more specialized the adjustment of response and stimulus to each other, the more rigid and the less transferable to other modes of behavior.¹

Dewey signifies the repetition of skill building as a significant way to build consistency in a specialized form. Yet, the more specific the practice, the less adaptable it becomes outside of the controlled environment. This leads me to believe that dance training within a singular aesthetic although essential for fluency within a stylistic legacy, may limit the overall range of expressivity readily available. However, I believe if the skillset is regularly taxed with wide ranging variables, a protean body can emerge that both accumulates and adapts stylistically informed training into a malleable lexicon of knowledge.

Much of my professional career prior to graduate school took place between 2009 and 2020. The culture of the concert dance world in New York City was almost entirely freelance. Even my tenure with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, the most full-time work I encountered as a dancer, left me with free time in my schedule for so called “pick up projects” or gig work in the dance industry. The nature of this fluidity allowed range in my collaborative endeavors. In fact, I began to feel addicted to the rigor of shifting stylistic priorities. One January in 2015, during the Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP) conference I began my day at New York Live Arts with Jones, took a cab to NYU to rehearse with Curran and then performed in the evening at the Skirball Center with Dorfman. Jones demanding the clarity of a jointed and weighted sequentially in unison ensemble work, Curran a pulled up, turned out, flurry of *petite*

¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, (The Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 69.

allegro propelled by Kyrgyz folk music, and finally, Dorfman, a loose, reckless abandon of risky partnering, motivated by a sensed and improvised group timing. Each cab ride, a transitional period to transform from the aesthetic prior. Each rehearsal arena, a different culture functioning within its own system of unspoken procedures. This rich orbit of stylistic characteristics and processes satiated my desire for curiosity and qualitative range. Yet still, despite variety, this assemblage of influences can be traced in my unconscious choice making like a genealogical map. In my choreographic work, I ask myself, “am I leaning into Barnes’ signature comical timing or bound/flow physicality? Or perhaps I’m employing choreographic derivatives of Curran’s build-a-phrase methods, Jones’ counterpoint exercises or Dorfman’s’ impulsive yes/and scores?” I recognized that I had an appetite for movement invention and variability. I didn’t want to be hemmed in by a repository of knowledge but committed to the ongoing quest for variation. Entering graduate school at University of Maryland was the first time my body was not continuously training to reproduce the aesthetic of the companies I was employed by. I suddenly had the privilege to work contemplatively in the studio without a product-oriented agenda. I became fascinated by the persistence of ingrained movement habits and how I could develop alternatives. My research became anchored in the identification and disruption of prevalent habits in trained physicality and choreographic methods. An example of a small sampling of habits I identified are as follows: cross-lateral spiral, emphasis on large motor movement, prioritization of fluidity through successive action, circularity, working in solo form, choreographing to music, building movement from sensation, and working within a linear compositional trajectory. My goal became challenging these habits, not to abandon my studied expertise, but to expand upon them. I began generating choreographic experiments; each study employing a new system of controls and variables, jolting my body’s automatic response to

stimuli. As I negotiated the choreographic questions of how, what, and where, I was inspired by the concept of schematic representation. Diagrams from various disciplines provided abstract pictorial representations of information for developing systematic choreography. Each choreographic study was tied to a new diagram, allowing me to expand the breadth of my experimentation, while maintaining a related structural motif.

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Chapter One: The Diagram

Introduction

A diagram is a perfect visual schema for posing impossible things, invisible forces, enigmas like the future—all posed as perfectly plausible vectors.²
-Amy Sillman

I grew up in a working-class family employed in trades. My father, an auto mechanic and contractor and my mother, a machinist and retail clerk, raised me in an environment that prioritized hands-on labor. Like any specialist vocation, skilled training is a necessity. In my parents' cases, instruction came from years of hands-on learning passed on during "on-the-job" experience. Learning craftsmanship in their trades was an ongoing process of trial and error, folding in tips and tricks of their industry from more advanced tradesmen along the way. Information regarding functionality and aesthetic inclinations accumulated from the most unsuspecting sources and divergent disciplines. Diverse techniques, diagrams and maps created a unique mélange of methodologies. I watched my parents learn rigorous and time-consuming systems for fabricating metal work, wiring engines and upholstering auto interiors. Each endeavor accomplished through a series of failures, detours, improvised equipment, and a deluge of cusswords...we are from Boston, after all. No matter the inquiry, they set out with a clear goal in mind. To question, to build, to take apart, to redesign, to reimagine, to make something work. Laborers in the trades are artisans of utility.

Nearly 15 years into my career as a dance practitioner, I realize the influence of the trades on my perception of dance making. My fervent appetite for the physical labor of creative process, is tangential to the resourcefulness and imagination of my parents' craftsmanship.

²Amy Sillman, "Notes on the Diagram," *The Paris Review*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/11/12/notes-on-the-diagram/>.

Choreographic process provides a physical invitation to come into a room with what is available, to improvise, to ask questions, to take apart pre-existing structures and put them back together. I am insatiable for a system, a set of tasks applied to movement to cultivate range in physical problem solving. What does a body know? What can a body do? Each choreographic experience, a new opportunity to gather information, and test hypotheses. It is this association between my blue-collar upbringing with my passion for dance making that fueled my interest in building choreographies from diagrams. The diagrams are a visual stimulus, each map, a new calculation, each structure providing a new way to look at an existing system. The transference of a mathematical code into a movement pattern, the transference of line into rhythmic arrangement. American painter Amy Sillman authored a series of essays about her epiphanies with diagrams in relation to an artist's process. Sillman writes, "Diagrams aren't medium-specific: everything is a continuum; everything is relational. In this sense a diagram is utopic, showing how things *should* or *might* go, re-envisioning things expansively, not merely describing them categorically."³

I began to fall in love with diagrams and the visual interconnectivity between wide ranging disciplines. I sourced diagrams from, classical music notation, quantum theory, electrical engineering diagrams, Morse code, graphic music scores, combustion engine models, Bob Dylan lyrics, molecular structures for chemical compounds, wrestling flow charts. Each visual provided a logic, arbitrary as it may be. The appeal of diagrammatic visuality was the proposed function of the system rather than the attributes of its content. Symbols became body parts, syllabic rhythm discerned gestural beats, electron wavelengths indicated spatial pathway and

³ Sillman, "Notes on the diagram."

chemical properties became tools for character development. Physicalizing abstraction from each map's formula facilitated an interruption of deeply rooted, automatic, habitual patterns.

Repurposing diagrams with radical disregard for any pre-existing logic that supports each area of study, offered the potential to expand upon notions of understanding, challenging perceived methods of logic. Though the images of diagrams themselves were static, their design invited action, progression, chimeric variation. The structures of proposed diagrammatic function were an invitation to liberate habit. Sillman writes, "Diagrams are epistemological means and ends. They are visual theorems needed for articulating subsequent conceptual ideas."⁴

Throughout this first chapter, I introduce a sampling of choreographic works I crafted from diagrammatic methodologies, as well as an in depth-movement analysis that investigates movement habits through an application of Laban Movement Analysis. Many of the diagrammatic studies introduced in this chapter constitute or inform my thesis performance, *Overscore*. My first attempt at choreographing from diagrams began in the Fall of 2019. My approach involved applying a rule system to sheet music to yield movement, designing a notation system to document the choreography and translating the movement notation into an original score for cello.

(Enter, NICCOLÒ PAGANINI)

24 Caprices for Violin in B minor → Untitled Translation

Untitled Translation, a formative work for the opening section of *Overscore*, is an eight-minute choreographic work I created from the sheet music of Niccolò Paganini's *24 Caprices for*

⁴ Amy Sillman, "The O-G vol. 1," accessed November 1, 2021, https://www.amysillman.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/OG1_zine.pdf.

Violin in B minor. I do not know how to read classical music; however, I understand the basic logic that the shape, location, and connectivity of the notes on the staff determine their identity and function. While I understood the rudimentary logic, being a novice to the nuances of music notation enabled me to employ the visual structure as a rule-based system to extrapolate choreographically. *24 Caprices for Violin in B minor* was chosen for none other than the visual invitation, the density and range of notes on the page. My inexperience with music allowed me to view the system with fresh eyes, as Sillman puts it, “viewing the diagram as an action, not a thing but a moment, a moment of transformation.”⁵

I focused my intention for this experiment on movement initiation. I aimed to disrupt the predominant body parts that habitually initiate movement and the continuous cursive quality of successive movement patterns that follow. To do so, I generated a variety of rule systems that designated a body part and direction for each note and symbol of the 83 measures. Each measure became a new invitation, using a different scheme of rules for each line of the staff. Where the symbols fell on the staff denoted the sequence of movements. Each measure created an individual movement phrase in compliance with that measures rule system. Consistently throughout all the measures, arches connecting notes signified the use of momentum to connect initiation points, sharps signaled retrogrades, flats dynamic accents, and ledger lines indicated repetition. Below are some examples of how I assigned initiation points to the five lines of the staff.

Measures 45-47 have the following assignments:

Measure 45: head, sternum, pelvis, knees, feet

Measure 46: feet, knees, pelvis, sternum, head

Measure 47: left shoulder, right shoulder, left hip, right hip, left foot, right foot

⁵ Sillman, “Notes on the diagram.”

Referencing the progression of measures 45-47 one can begin to see how the outcome of one choreographic measure instructs the rules for the next. I began to hypothesize how the structure of the rule system could dictate qualitative distinctions between measures. Measure 45 for example had dense note variations in the top margins of the staff. With the top margins being assigned to upper body landmarks, travel through space was limited. Thus, for measure 46, I kept the same body parts for initiation but inverted the order. The musical system still dense in the top margins, the lower body would now drive the phrasing in a way that could offer expansive travel. Recognizing outcomes for measures 45 and 46 had a fractured gestural cadence, I constructed rules for measure 47 to include prominent initiation points for spiral. Although spiral was a habitual tendency I aimed to break, I inferred that new and unusual torques of momentum would occur if the initiations points for spiral were selected by the stipulated rule system. Measure 47 added the connectivity of momentum that measures 45, and 46 lacked, and produced new syntax in cross lateral vocabulary and spiral. In this choreographic system, the lines of the staff were always the manipulated variable. The specificity of the initiation points and directionality were purposefully selected to communicate a variety of choreographic inquiries, each measure informed by the one prior.

The dense, idiosyncratic vocabulary produced by this experiment demands a virtuosity for unexpected and interrupted weight shifts, as well as a clear individuation of the joints for rapid, overlapping initiations of sequential patterning. The choreography feels disruptive and inorganic. *Overscore* collaborator Nana Edu describes the patterning as discombobulated. “It feels like movement I know in all the wrong places. Discombobulated. It feels like a puzzle you are missing pieces to, all crammed together into one, long, run-on sentence.”⁶ This jostled

⁶ Informal conversation with Nana Edu on Zoom during the process of *Crash test* October 2020.

reordering of impulses assisted in shedding my habit for spiral, sequential dominance and head tail initiations. But the challenge was temporary. The more I rehearsed the choreography, the more adept I became completing the tasks. Mastery then cloaked the once jarring syntax with a smooth varnish of familiarity and completeness. At the end of this chapter, I include an in-depth movement analysis regarding the development of the Paganini movement scores.

After each measure was translated into choreography, I notated the movement into a visual code of 22, hand drawn, geometric symbols. It is important to note, that my notation is not a direct translation of the rule system I created, but rather a way to diagram how I remember the movement. For example, rather than displaying a symbol sentence that has a one-to-one relationship with head, head, head, sternum, pelvis, head, it is written how I recall the movement phrase. This may not designate a symbol for each initiation point but reflects the memory of the phrase as it has been embodied. This may include a combination of rhythm, dynamic, initiation point or directionality. There is no key for this symbol language and it was never intended to be an archive for accurate transference or preservation. In fact, I have since returned to the initial score and adapted it creating various permutations of the original study. The notation scores have been altered, reordered and reinterpreted as my body's relationship to the material matured. This malleable relationship serves to maintain the intended labor of its initial jarring syntax.

Performance art philosopher Frédéric Pouillaude denotes that, "Today's choreographer is not someone who writes but rather someone who invents, demonstrates, and composes. Nor is the dancer someone who reads (a score) but rather someone who makes visible, reproduces, and

participates in invention.”⁷ The original notation and initial rule structures serve as a prototype to activate investigation and variation.

Once the initial notation was complete, I gave the choreographic symbol language to New York City-based cellist Lily Gelfand. She analyzed and translated the symbol language into an original composition for cello. This task was delivered without any formal explanation or descriptive direction, it was important to me that Gelfand have complete agency in her methodology of approaching the choreographic symbols. I recall speaking to Gelfand on the phone when I first proposed the project:

LG: “Do you want me to know which movements these symbols correlate to?”

CR: “Nope.”

LG: “Is there anything about the symbols you want me to know?”

CR: “Nope. You are free to design any repeatable logic that connects your composition to the symbol language. Including but not limited to time, rhythm, and melody.”

Both Gelfand and I were composing from systems unknown to us. I made choreographic rules from musical notation, and she, a musical composition from a personal choreographic notation. There was a messiness to the translation process and compelling compositional choices grew in the spaces between what was diagrammable. Yet through a great deal of abstraction, weren’t we both in some way a derivative of Paganini? The process never intended to be a depiction or direct variation of Paganini, nor did it intend to generate a one-to-one relationship between dance notation and musicology. Instead, it poses questions about the transference of hand to eye, and eye to body. How does the mind build associations between visual design and the embodiment of movement or sound? How can a singular source of information breed variation and interpretation? And how can an artist’s habit and ego confront anomalous syntax without

⁷ Frédéric Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 163.

surrendering or deferring to more pleasant or familiar conventions. There is something palpable in the action of committing to this disaccord.

On December 6, 2019, Gelfand traveled to University of Maryland to perform her score alongside my choreography in the premiere of *Untitled Translation*. We coordinated for a brief two-hour rehearsal prior to the performance. Whether a sheer miracle or an energetic symbiosis, our scores harmonized in a most synchronous way. Neither one of us consciously playing to the other but focused instead on completing our individual tasks. The only three negotiations that were additive to our constructions prior to performance were an improvised prelude to warm up and blow off nerves, a physical cue to prompt Lily that I was starting the second major chunk of choreography, and a vamped ending to add crescendo in both the final seated gestural choreography and her final phrasing. Because this choreographic exploration was based in dislodging movement initiation, timing is not indicated by the score, and I am not bound to a meter. Timing is at the discretion of the performer to ensure that the primary goal is accomplishing the physical tasks. For this reason, future performances of the same score could generate new relationships to the musical composition as the timing varies from run to run. Coinciding with the performance of *Untitled Translation* on Dec 6, 2019, is a visual archive of the notation process which I will include in the appendix. This includes not only my initial notes for generating each stanzas choreographic rule system, but a tiered score that shows all three variations of notation systems, Paganini's staff-based notation, the choreographic symbol notation and Gelfand's transposed staff-based notation. This visual notation is both art as artifact and chronological archive of process.

Untitled Translation and its corresponding symbol notation systems serve as the choreographic vocabulary and visual content for the first ten minutes of *Overscore*. In *Chapter*

Five: Shaping Overscore, I speak to the transformation of the notation symbols into projection design as well as the process of adding additional dancer Nana Edu into the choreographic structure.

Solo for Voice No. 61 → Solo for Hansel

Pleased with the choreographic nuance produced from the habit breaking scores of *Untitled Translation*, my choreographic processes continued to be driven by diagrams. I experimented with generating small choreographic sketches from morse code, and quantum theory as well as constructing choreographies derived from the language in Frédéric Pouillaude's *Unworking Choreography*. In the appendix I include a sampling of diagrammatic notations from preliminary studies that did not make it into the final performance of *Overscore*. The next formative diagrammatic study for *Overscore* utilized John Cage's graphic music score, *Solo for Voice No.61* as a choreographic template to generate an absurdist, task-based solo for dancer Tristan Koepke. I wanted to expand upon what I learned sourcing symbol language and explore language-based diagrams. Conscious of the fact that I habitually choreograph solos for myself, I decided to direct another performer in this choreographic pursuit.

Throughout most of my professional performing experience an aesthetic habit of post-modern neutrality and an aversion to overly theatricalized character was prominent. Thus, my goal for the experiment with Cage's text-based score were to lean into theatrical sensibilities. I anticipated that, in contrast to the signs and symbols used in *Untitled Translation*, a text-based diagram might help me discover the narrative possibilities of language.

In contrast to the choreography for *Untitled Translation*, which created choreographic rules in direct correlation with the musical measures as they appeared on the page, I wanted to try manipulating and repurposing Cage's score. This approach allowed me to exhaust the options

for choreographic interpretation from a singular visual source by constantly adapting the score. Working collaboratively over Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Koepke and I created three choreographic iterations from *Solo for Voice No. 61*.

The first iteration employs Cage's diagram in its original form. Working at a fast pace, Koepke and I worked in a collaborative fashion to create physicality that directly correlated with the order, meaning and direction of the words as they appear on the page. The speed with which we worked encouraging our most immediate responses to the graphic instructions. I instructed us to really embrace obvious choices, caricatures of text prompts like "bird" and "sea captain" taking on almost pantomime gesture. This study became more about the unexpected syntax of the phrasing than the originality of the movements themselves. Making movement from the meaning of words created a dramatic, pantomime narrative, that felt antithetical to post-modern physicality I habitually prioritized. Even the more theatrically motivated work I had performed during my career such as Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company's dance/theatre production *Analogy/Dora: Tramontane* was directed to avoid pairing *like with like*. Virtuoso phrases of post-modern vocabulary were constructed apart from the script, creating a juxtaposition between the body and the dialogue or narrative meaning.

The second iteration of *Solo for Hansel* repeated the physicality of the first iteration but is interrupted by handwritten stage directions I interjected into Cage's score. Directions such as: *while hopping dynamically into frame, in a chair close to the camera, introduce brief anecdotal monologue but abruptly stop, leave, get bigger in scale, and complete anecdote while doing the Charleston*. These interjections were made from a desire to add complication, without predetermining how they would confront the first iteration. Koepke's task was to insert these instructions where and when they appeared in the structure of the first iteration. Where the first

iteration frequently resulted in a singular gesture per word, this additional layer of tasks added textural variety to the pacing, as some of the instructions involved more durational tasks.

As I mentioned earlier, this study became focused on disrupting habitual expectations regarding performative syntax, and theatrical pacing. Thrilled with the mercurial nature of the second iteration, I wanted to further fracture the diagram for an even more unpredictable result. American painter Jasper Johns said, “Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it. (repeat).”⁸ John’s suggestion inspired my third iteration which cuts the modified score from the second iteration into 49, one-inch squares and reorganizes them into a checkered collage. This created a frenzied variation of iteration one and two. Jasper John’s method for repurposing content is noted in Amy Sillman’s essays on the diagram. She describes his works as, “literal tools that set off associative chains, prompts that implicate both maker and viewer, integrating, entangling and even confusing subject and object in much the same way that a diagram orchestrates relations between parts.”⁹ The chopped-up iteration I generated for Koepke generated fleeting threads of association between body, speech and memory. Gestures fly by, the word “sea captain” paired with a jaunty saunter, a hyphen instructing a durational flatback posture which we’ve seen before but this time it is interrupted by the darting focus of the word “wren”. The complicated arrangement of interruptive episodes became so difficult to track and remember that we began to use headphones to aid in the memory of events. The transference of media from the third Cage iteration into a system of verbal cueing felt akin to the transference of the Paganini diagram to choreographic notation. It was not a one-to-one translation, but another system that offered a practical way forward. Due of the additional task of listening to directives

⁸ Barbara Rose, “Jasper Johns: “Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.” The long read,” *Royal Academy of the Arts*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/magazine-jasper-johns>.

⁹ Sillman, “The O-G vol. 1.”

and embodying the auditory prompts, an intermittent delay in Koepke's response offered an unexpected quality of performativity. At one moment he is executing tasks automatically, and at others he pauses to contemplate and compute the complex tasks at hand.

The structure of *Solo for Hansel* is cumulative. Each of the three interpretations of Cage's diagram is layered over the original like a series of transparencies generating a looping system of theme and variation. The work became multi-functional in its additive structure for disrupting choreographic habit. Firstly, it used language to engage theatrical possibilities and challenge the performer's versatility in an impulsive series of character studies. Second, it exaggerated sequential action, accumulating an endless flurry of non-sequiturs and challenging my choreographic habits for linear structures that obey traditional energetic arcs. And third, it offered a hybrid approach to the rule-oriented nature of building from diagrams by permitting cultivated choreographic craft. Where *Untitled Translation* aimed to generate unmediated mechanical vocabulary that thrives on the mental and physical stamina for completing dense episodes of rule based choreographic detail, *Solo for Hansel* became mediated over time. The function of Cage's diagram provided a baseline structure, tone and pacing for the final variation of Koepke's solo in *Overscore*. Rather than white knuckling the rule system, or gripping onto its indefatigable structure, we allowed it to be pervasive. The vocabulary and order of events remain intact, but the qualitative textures became adaptable. Even the inserted anecdote, an improvised monologue for Koepke, became subject to change. The task for the monologue included braiding together two realities, an improvised personal anecdote, and the stage directions for the choreographic transition happening around him. Eventually, it came to my attention that once an assemblage of physicality becomes so fractured and unpredictable in its range, there are no visible outliers or identifiable non-sequiturs. However, when placing Koepke's solo within the

larger structural context of *Overscore*, its humor and unpredictable pacing lands like an absurd ostrich egg amidst a landscape of mechanical cogs and wheels. Within the larger structure of *Overscore*, *Solo for Hansel* is the largest compositional non-sequitur.

The Wolfpack wrestling technique flow chart → Men's Grappling Duet

With most of my choreographic processes happening during the Covid-19 pandemic, most experimentation was either a solo for myself, or a remote collaboration via Zoom. In Fall of 2021 I had the opportunity not only to be in the studio with other dancers but to return to Contact Improvisation. Throughout my thesis proposal process this option was not a reality. Once it became a possibility, I could not resist my desire to build partnered material.

Throughout my experiences performing with Dorfman, Jones and Currán, Contact Improvisation and partnering were signatures of their works. Each had their own stylistic sensibility. Curran was more aligned with a traditional ballet formality, Jones an athletic expansion on that formality prioritizing shape-oriented lifts, and Dorfman steeped in Contact Improvisation as the foundation for capturing the unpredictable magic, effort, and failure of spontaneity in weight sharing. Despite their differences, I often felt that all three approaches had a common habit of relying on default vocabulary within the time crunch of producing new work. Performers would find themselves selecting from, *one of these, or one of those*. It wasn't uncommon to toss in a hip lift because it was the most readily available option, or to quickly decide the male and female should switch roles because strength substitution was the most efficient way to problem solve the failure of a faulty fulcrum. I wanted to find a way to use my diagrammatic approach to build partnering material without relying on a base vocabulary.

I brainstormed about the fundamental principles of weight sharing I had learned from Contact Improvisation greats like the late Nancy Stark Smith.¹⁰ Those fundamentals led me toward researching peripheral disciplines. I looked primarily to martial arts, foundational in Steve Paxton's approach to concepts of Contact Improvisation.¹¹ In many mixed martial arts trainings, coaches create grappling flowcharts to guide a wrestler through the ins and outs of mixed martial arts repertoire. These blueprints serve as a training document instructing wrestlers of which movements to employ in various scenarios.

In many ways, the concept of these flowcharts harkened me back to educational philosopher John Dewey's concept of habitual training and automatic skill building. He denotes that the repetition of skill building is a significant way to build consistency in a specialized form. However, the more specific the practice, the less adaptable it becomes outside of the controlled environment.¹² The goal of wrestling flowcharts is to produce a uniform result that prioritizes consistency in execution. For example, when a wrestler is faced with an *arm bar* from the opponent, the chart instructs the wrestler how to default to the three possible physical responses. This training optimizes efficiency within set parameters or predictable movements within the form. My unfamiliarity with the MMA vocabulary and techniques allowed me the creative agency to repurpose the flowcharts as guides for partnered choreography. For an expert in MMA, the flowcharts are diagrams designed for technical analysis and troubleshooting. As a choreographic experiment, they were an invitation to find innovative connections in weight sharing. Prompts from the *Wolfpack Wrestling Flow Chart* offered options like, *work into riding leg, cradle, grab far wrist and run forward shoulder to ear, Michigan (ankle hook), sit*

¹⁰ Nancy Stark Smith was an American dancer and founding participant of Contact Improvisation in the early 1970s.

¹¹ Steve Paxton is an experimental performer and choreographer, founding member of Judson Church, Grand Union and developed Contact Improvisation in 1972.

¹² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 69.

out/separate hips, boot back heel trip and the pumble inside. Overscore cast members, Tristan Koepke, Nana Edu, and I responded to these directives with a playfulness unattached to result. We focused our attention on inventing and combining our varied interpretations of the tasks rather than the appearance, utility, or “success” of the partnered actions. The outcome provided a fresh approach to locating contact points and the possibilities of trajectory in weight share. However, once the body found a familiarity in orientation, habitual paths for departures and follow throughs took over. In the structure of *Overscore*, this shift is evident as the choreography moves from the *Men’s Grappling Duet* into a partnering trio. The men’s duet has a specific partnered action tied to each grappling prompt selected, as the duet shifts into the trio, we begin loosening our grip on the diagram, and letting our momentum and training lead. The trio is a hybrid display of adherence to score and yielding into habit through the context of weight share. The choice to yield into habit here was propelled by a desire to give into the satisfaction of utilizing familiar fulcrums for flight. It felt nourishing after over a year-long pandemic in isolation to give into familiar arcs of momentum that spark joy, a brief relief from the relentless intervention of rule-based scores. My interest in breaking habits was to expand upon what I know as opposed to reject it. Additionally, by generating this section as a hybrid, it became visually evident which parts of the choreographed partnering were built from system and which from intuition, training, or familiarity.

The wrestling chart was a fantastic entry point for confronting default vocabulary in contact. A future project to build upon this diagrammatic experiment could add more nuance and mediation. By fusing the frameworks from *Untitled Translation* and *Solo for Hansel* with the results of this wrestling flow chart, a future experiment could delineate each point of contact for each performer, include interjections of choreographic craft as interruption and offer options for

improvisational intervention alternative to the diagram. I hypothesize this could create a hybrid of *Untitled Translation*'s steely discipline and quirky logic, with the performer's agency from *Solo for Hansel* and the juxtaposition of known and unknown from *Men's Grappling Duet*.

An application of Laban/Bartineff Movement Analysis: *Untitled Translation*

The Laban/Bartineff Movement Analysis system has offered a specific framework through which I can reflect on my movement defaults, analyze the parameters of my diagrammatic scores, the habits they attend to, and trace their outcomes.¹³ As the composer and primary performer of these studies, my proximity to my habits, the scores, and the intended results made an authentic self-analysis impossible. Therefore, I invited two dancers, Nana Edu and Tristan Koepke, to join me in a mutual analysis to expand and instruct my perspective on the results of my choreographic process with habit breaking. Both dancers received a video clip of a phrase from *Untitled Translation* and an observation analysis sheet that paired L/BMA parameters with metaphorical description. Edu learned the movement phrase and completed the survey based on his physical experience. In contrast, Koepke filled out the survey based only on visual analysis. Though L/BMA is traditionally conducted from the outside, the analyst observing the performer of the action, I wanted to note the differences between an outsider analysis (constructed from sight) and an insider analysis (constructed from action). This exchange of analytical roles generated a comparative study between our three interpretations.

¹³ Laban/Bartineff Movement Analysis is a system designed by Rudolph Laban and Irmgard Bartineff for observing, teaching, and analyzing human movement. More on Laban/Bartineff Movement Analysis: Wahl, Colleen. *Laban/Bartineff Movement Studies: Contemporary Applications*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2019. <https://us.humankinetics.com/products/lab-bartineff-movement-studies>.

The results were fantastically varied. While both dancers described the phrase as puzzlelike, Koepke identified the phrase primarily within the system's Body category, while Edu leaned deeper into Shape and Effort categories. As all the categories are interrelated and integrated, I speculate this variance in categorical focus could be related to the difference in their modes of analysis. It could be possible in this instance that visual and embodied analysis use vision differently to identify different priorities, the former for form and the latter for function. Koepke was conducting only a visual analysis, his eye focused on *what* the body was doing. He writes, "Initiation, body organization (and disorganization), and sequencing are all at the forefront."¹⁴ Edu, who was embodying the sequence, centered his attention on *how* the body was moving. He writes, "I don't feel the same flow that I see in the video. The cadence of the rhythm is choppy. I feel Indirect, but it requires clarity of direction."¹⁵ I imagine that Koepke's initial visual analysis does not fully account for the sensation of the functional execution. However, I check my impulse to use this information as a confirmation bias for my predilection to prioritize a felt internal experience over a visual or external presentation.

When identifying this phrase on Effort spectrums, Koepke selected Strong Weight, Quick Time, and Direct Space, where Nana chose Light Weight, Direct Space, and a dynamic relationship of Bound and Free Flow. Koepke visually identified Action Drive, while Edu physically interpreted Spell Drive. As Edu attempted the continuous redirection of momentum, he identified that Light Weight, paired with clarity of direction and a facile relationship to Bound/Free Flow best assisted the demanding series of unexpected and punctuated sequential initiations. The quest to accommodate these tasks nearly eliminates any premeditated sense of Time, as the rhythmic cadence depends on the successful execution of weight shift. Without

¹⁴ Personal email correspondence with Tristan Koepke, May 2021.

¹⁵ Personal email correspondence with Nana Edu, May 2021.

having an embodied understanding of the consequence of the weight changes and sequential patterns, Koepke perceived an overall sense of Quickness and interpreted the punctuation of the gestures to be Strong weight.

The mode of analysis is not the only variable culpable for the dancers' different responses; our distinctive training backgrounds and implicit biases regarding movement sensibilities contribute to our interpretations. This variety between our three perspectives opened the conversation toward perception in performance. Which elements of the physical experience of performing this phrase transfer to the visual experience of the viewer? As multiple dancers embody this choreography, are their unique approaches within the Effort category visually discernable? This study clarified that I would like different bodies to unify in their attempt to accomplish the sequence of initiations without having to employ the same technical approach.

The most profound takeaway from this study was how L/BMA helped reveal the role of unconscious habit. The discombobulated structure of the phrase seemed to target the habits unique to each body attempting it. Though Edu and I have distinct habits in training and preferred phrasing, we both found the more cumbersome the choreography, the more our habitual patterns surfaced. Edu disclosed, "The training instincts in my body take over. It's hard to override my habit to build transitions that connect easily." What Edu describes here indicates how deeply ingrained and unconscious embodied patterns can be. I assumed the more complex and densely I crafted the choreography, the more difficult it would be to source my habits. Somehow, the opposite was true. The more difficult it became to accomplish the phrase technically, the more I relied on my default tendencies to achieve the goal. In the end, the cascade of erratic initiation points intermittently disrupted my habit for successive phrasing and, as a byproduct, generated an unpredictable relationship to Time and rhythm. However, when

negotiating the challenging balances and redirection of momentum, my body unconsciously recruited the coping mechanisms it trusts most, expanding my Kinesphere through distal ends and finding counterbalance through cross-lateral spirals.

This mutual application of L/BMA encouraged a deeper investigation into the roles of habit in learning, organizing, and executing these movement scores and illuminated how conscious and unconscious preferences define visual perception and shape physical experience for each performer.

Chapter Two: The Frame

An Introduction

In the Spring semester of 2020, as Covid-19 swept through the United States, education systems scrambled to find a way to carry instruction forward. With approximately half of my semesters at University of Maryland shifting to online instruction, I adjusted my approach to dance making by constructing choreography for the screen. Film offered a new frame for examining and negotiating choreographic habit. I could create remote collaborations with the click of a button, (ok more than one click), and make the physically impossible visually conceivable. I found the disembodiment of filmic manipulation to be liberating. Storyboarding and crafting recorded material was time consuming but less physically laborious and precious. Editing within the software rather than within the studio offered me the potential to reference footage as a spectator of form. This separation dislodged my ego from my dancing enabling me to identify patterns and visualize intervention more clearly. Within the frame, bodies could take on different contexts, become objects, energies, characters, and compositional entities beyond human representation. A torso could be compositionally isolated and framed to become a rippling sea, my dog's paws extensions of my own arms, a performers shadow duplicated and manipulated to simulate company despite Covid isolation. Andy Abrahams Wilson, acclaimed independent filmmaker and cinematographer known for his work with choreographer Anna Halprin, comments on the relationship between subject and frame, comparing the frame of the camera to the container of the body and the box of the stage. "In breaking the box, we join with something beyond and perhaps greater than what we know, only to find more walls to ponder,

penetrate, or perform dances around.”¹⁶ This pliability or repurposing of reality intersected my work regarding habit and expectation. The cinematic frame could offer new ways of seeing, associating, or communicating ideas.

In this chapter I introduce five different perspectives on the frame, three of them dances for the camera I made, one film review of Boudewijn Koole’s *Off Ground*, and an analysis of the internet platform Instagram. I bring these varied perspectives together as they all directly relate to my research of habit disruption and the choreographic process of building *Overscore*. Each element discussed in this chapter provided essential insight to my aesthetic patterning and inspired interdisciplinarity. Where *Chapter One: The Diagram*, considers habitual patterns with pertinence to vocabulary and syntax, *Chapter Two: The Frame* contemplates compositional arrangement for visual storytelling, in cinematic and live performance structures.

Dine

The combination of Wilson’s nudge to break the box and the reality of being housebound in a global pandemic, inspired me to expand upon traditional casting. I cast my seven-year-old Doberman Pinscher, Parsley. *Dine*, a three-minute, absurdist, black and white film places Parsley at one end of a formal dining room table and myself at the other. Wearing matching black suit jackets, the two of us converse in a dialogue of subtle yet syncopated movement gestures. Centered on the white, lace tablecloth, is a single beef marrow bone on a simple, round plate. Shot from our two different points of view, the dialogue takes on different contexts. A dog seeking amends, an owner, making a peace offering, a farcical meal for two. *Dine* is a film of many firsts.

¹⁶Andy Abrahams Wilson, “Breaking the Box.” in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma (New York: Routledge, 2003), 235.

Dine opened me to experimentation with compositional storyboarding and composing with a shot list. This sequential filmic thinking offered a new tangent in drafting choreographic structure. William Forsythe, an American born choreographer and director of the Frankfurt Ballet, describes his longing to stage film structure, to be able to storyboard or frame the sequential thinking of dance. He clarifies, “It is not films themselves that are the constant source of inspiration, but film thinking.”¹⁷ *Dine* also offered new insights in designing filmic sound scores from script writing. The script, composed in collaboration with artists Amber Daniels and Ricky Watson, was created from the desire to create voiceover that fuses first, second, and third-person narrative styles. This effect offered the dialogue to begin to weave into confusion, a methodology that would later inform Koepke’s monologue in *Overscore*. Is the dog speaking about their own behavior or their owners? Is the owner keeping their dog alive or the other way around? Who has got a bone to pick with whom? The pacing of the jump cut edits, often in conversation with the underscore of a bouncy, wandering bassline helped me steer comedic timing of the gestural delivery. In addition, compositional framing offered an introduction to illusion, and metaphor. I could control what the viewer was seeing when, which allows a director to create anticipations and expectations that a full stage production cannot often isolate. Although our two points of view were shot as separate takes, I could generate an illusion through compositional structure that suggests our sharing of space.

¹⁷ Roslyn Sulcas, “Forsythe and Film.” in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma (New York: Routledge, 2003), 96.

Aqua and Water walk into a bar

As a recipient of the annual Jim Henson Award for Puppetry, I created a short film titled, *Aqua and water walk into a bar*.¹⁸ Blending choreography, comedy, puppetry and chemistry, this film uses found objects to animate comedic storytelling about the journey of a series of scientific chemicals. As a choreographer, I use comedy as a method of relating. Humor can disarm skeptics, find commonality, and redirect and reengage audiences. Comedy humanizes abstraction. Amy Sillman writes,

Process is ordinary, day-to-day work. Art calls for the world-inventing of utopia, the intensity of radical subjectivity, and the anxiety-provoking zig-zag of process: the everyday process of construction, destruction, reconstruction, and every saggy place on the diagram between what you tried and what really happened. Humor is the finest expression of this aspect of the diagram.¹⁹

Aqua and Water walk into a bar used humor to reveal my awareness of satire in self-producing a home-made puppetry film about science as a fledgling in all three said disciplines.

The structure of the film script was constructed from a list of chemical names on the back of a skin lotion bottle. The chemical names became personified characters who experience a memorable night on the town. Building upon the aesthetics of *Solo for Hansel*, and *Dine*, I leaned into absurdism, nonsense associations began to accumulate into sensible meaning. The characters in *Aqua and Water walk into a bar* were entirely constructed of household items. This reflected the resourcefulness of artmaking in times of Covid isolation. Thimbles became a gaggle of bachelorette party attendees, and washers, nuts and bolts transformed into graphic

¹⁸ The School of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies hosts an annual competition and recipients are awarded funds to create a puppet project or performance. The Jim Henson Fund for Puppetry was established by Jane Henson '55 to honor the memory of Jim Henson '60, creator of the world-famous Muppets. <https://theclarice.umd.edu/events/2021/henson-awards-showcase>

¹⁹ Sillman, "The O-G vol. 1."

representations of molecular structures and chemical compounds. Using a combination of manual manipulation and stop motion techniques, the homemade puppets came to life.

The script was generated through an improvisational approach to storytelling. I transcribed the chemicals in the order they appeared on the lotion bottle into an itemized list on my computer screen. Adorned with a pair of extravagant gold glasses, I set up Photo Booth and recorded myself telling a series of stories with a deadpan delivery. All the stories were composed instantaneously removing the ability to premeditate a narrative. As I glanced apathetically at the list of chemicals on the screen, I began to weave an impromptu tale that animates Glycerin into a bartender from the Northern part of Glucoside and Benzoic Acid into a rowdy local that always makes a grand entrance. The ad lib aesthetic of the storytelling began to color the delivery of the absurdist narrative. Timing, tone, and the reliance of familiar comedic devices invited the audience to hold onto a sense of familiarity in the arc of the narrative despite the nonsensical syntax of the scientific content.

Familiarity and accessibility became an intentional value for this short work. In these isolated times of the pandemic crisis, now more than ever there is a need for art that can reach audiences with levity. As a first-generation student, I gravitate toward any artwork that can ground itself in the everyday; work that can appeal to audiences beyond the niche of experts in the professional art world or scholars of academia. I found that the tone of *Aqua and water walk into a bar* lent itself to a broad audience. It delivered expert scientific vocabulary in a casual demeanor that disempowered the sophistication of the topic itself. Additionally, by choosing to animate household objects such as coat hangers, thimbles, bottle caps, nuts, and bolts, I could stimulate the imagination, sparking delight in the ordinary and perhaps encouraging housebound viewers to perceive a little more magic in their everyday spaces.

This project continued diagram-based inquiry, deepened comedic sensibilities, enhanced filmic thinking, and heightened my interests in interdisciplinary collaboration. Humor became stitched into the seams of *Overscore*. Comedy became a bit less overt in live performance than it was in film because of mask compliance. Yet, small moments of gestural humor provoked reactions from the audience. Often, these moments were self-referential. The performers interrupted their tasks with hints of realistic, human reactions that signaled fatigue, frustration, impatience. Those very human embodiments stood out from the labor of accurate execution throughout the duration of *Overscore*. These spare comedic moments were a nod to the performers self-awareness, and acknowledgement to the reality of shared space. Amidst a flurry of abstract movement, the performers offered a thread of relatability, “I’m human, this shit is exhausting. I’m tired, you must be too, let’s note that in real-space time, take a breath, and continue.” To go back to Sillman, revealing the saggy places of the diagram between what you tried and what really happened.²⁰

Additionally, the task-based action, and absurdist tone, both researched in *Aqua and Water walk into a bar* influenced the direction and pacing in *Overscore*. Particularly regarding the pace of task-based action, puppetry taught me the nuance of building movement beat, by beat. The beats of an action include, anticipation, pause to suggest sentience, the action itself and the concluding reflection. This way of breaking down action for objects within the frame, influenced the gestural pacing and timing for Koepke’s solo and the table trio in *Overscore*.

²⁰ Sillman, “The O-G vol. 1.”

A film review: *Off Ground*, a collaborative effort to make more with less

As I continued to explore film work, I looked to works of filmmakers I admired for compositional inspiration. Most of my creative work took place during lockdown and was contained to indoor spaces of my home. I sought inspiration from filmmakers, particularly those working in screen dance, for compositional strategies to transcend the monotony of everyday spaces.

Off Ground, a 12-minute film directed by Boudewijn Koole and choreographed by Jakob Ahlbom brings a bare space to life with the combination of gestural choreography, Alex Simu's persistent sound score, and a powerful compositional use of the cinematic frame. A minimalist set design by Joost de Boer, displays a simple table and two chairs in an empty room with mottled blue walls. The two performers, a young boy and an older woman appear to have a familial relationship which develops throughout the film- revealing hints of their bond through the emotional tone of their movements. Perhaps the most striking element to this work is the way choreography, set design and cinematic composition collaborate to warp perceptions of the body and space.

The restriction of Boer's minimalist set directly impacts the design of Ahlbom's choreography as well as Koole's compositional strategies. The table not only becomes a surface for folded arms, but one to stand upon, hide beneath, divide the frame, conceal, support, and at one point launch the female figure into another landscape completely. The two performers gesture their bodies in numerous ways, sometimes in proximity to the table and chairs, forming lines that extend the architecture of these objects into the space, other times, dependent on the objects, giving the objects weight, purpose, and imaginative new meaning.

Koole's use of framing seals the union of choreography with set design. Much of the film is shot with a stationary camera, the stability of the shot accentuates the movement within the frame. Koole participates choreographically, cropping the design of each shot to support action and at times, illusion. Often, Koole plays with concealment. What the viewer sees within the frame becomes as important as what lies just beyond it. In this way, although the camera is stabilized, the zoom and cropping are exhaustive; as dynamic in its action as the choreography. Much of the work is a wide shot, capturing the table centered in the space, dividing the frame across the lower third and allowing for movement to be visible in the landscape above, below and around the table. It is from this neutral or home base that Koole begins to insert framing variations. In a close-up shot the table takes up the entire frame revealing the performers' floating legs dangling side by side in the negative space beneath the tabletop. In other moments, Koole crops the shot, so the top of the table is a liminal line at the very bottom of the frame, allowing for the performers to appear floating on an edge or even levitating.

Breath bolsters images of floating or levitating, a sonic theme that is audible over Simu's frenzied score for piano and strings. Exhales become visible in the stark air of the space, the textures of the performers face and heaving torsos visible through Koole's intimate close-ups. The sound and feeling of breath, has a sensorial universality that adds to the intimacy and relatability of two human beings in an empty room. The closeness of their breathing becomes playful revealing the emotional tone of their filial relationship. In addition, being able to shift sonically between Simu's dynamic score for strings and the quiet of only their breath, allows for another way to play with compositional framing. The quiet drawing the viewer closer, bringing forward the humanity of the film, the next moment, sweeping the viewer up into the

frenzy and drive of the strings in a flurry of the two performers somewhat manic and quirky movement vocabulary.

Wren + Wings (The table trio)

Wren + Wings, otherwise known as, *the table trio*, is a section of *Overscore* that began as a film study and transferred to a variation for stage. *Wren + Wings* expands the Cage diagram and score for *Solo for Hansel* while building upon influences from my previous film works as well as Koole's *Off Ground*. *Wren + Wings* is an 8-minute, black and white film featuring Nana Edu, Tristan Koepke, and me. The film is set at a dining room table. This choice builds upon the influences of my previous work *Dine* and Koole's *Off Ground*. The table serves as a unifying prop for the remote nature of the works construction during Covid-19. Despite the isolation of lockdown, there was unity in building work around a table, a piece of furniture suggestive of communion. Taking influence from Koole, the table became setting, surface, and frame that had infinite options for compositional orientation.

Inspired by Cage's collaging techniques and randomization, the diagram of John Cage's *Solo for Voice 61* came back once more. This time repurposed to create three additional variations derived from the original, a variation for each dancer. Koepke, Edu and I used these as maps to individually interpret, generate, and set gestural choreography at our kitchen tables. I constructed the maps from the same language from *Solo for Voice No. 61* however, the order and orientation are different for each. We interpreted the maps separately without the interference of the other performers, so each response is unique to the individual. Our task was to produce vocabulary in response to the words and their design on the page, while heeding the additional symbols I inserted which dictate shared moments of contact with a specified dancer. My goal

was to generate the choreographic tracks separately and eventually perform them simultaneously seated around the same table.

As Covid lingered on, it seemed impossible to attempt the contact and proximity I had imagined. Thus, complying with social distance guidelines, we filmed at a shared location, however, as opposed to sitting at the table simultaneously, each track was shot individually from several angles. Each performer executed their task-based score as specifically as they were designed, imagining the tone, texture, and duration of the moments of contact and where the ghost of our partners might be.

The union and simultaneity I imagined were then simulated in the editing process. Selecting from four different camera angles for each performers' track, and utilizing overlay techniques, I sliced action into tiny slivers of gestural dialogue and overlapped them to create an illusion of togetherness. This deceptive magic of compositional framing, overlay and choreographic pacing was made possible through the cinematic frame. The work could stand alone and serve as a representational model for what an in-person version of the table choreography could look like.

The arduous labor of editing gestures frame by frame made me reflect on Eadweard Muybridge's *Horse in Motion*.²¹ Muybridge's desire to capture a singular movement in a multiplicity of frames as a method for examining transitional space and time, inspired my selections in editing. I applied his sensibility to all twelve sequences of three-minute gesture phrases by the three different performers. I began using the shadows of the performers as a transitional tool to mystify whose body belonged to which shadow. Jump cut transitions, a

²¹ Eadweard Muybridge was an English photographer in the 19th century known for his pioneering work photographing motion. More on Eadweard's impact on motion capture photography here: Haleema Shah, "How a 19th-Century Photographer Made the First 'Gif' of a Galloping Horse," Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution, December 13, 2018.

signature style of Wes Anderson films, became a successful device for switching between performer point of view. I used this action in *Dine* as well, to a simpler degree. This transition creates an automatic juxtaposition, a suggested counterpoint or relationship between subjects. Anderson is a master of this in his films. His dynamic way of approaching rhythmic sequencing feels like jazz music. Always unexpected, at times making the viewer wait, other times bumping shamelessly from one cut to the next. Anderson modeled how to be brash with some transitions, mundane and straight forward with the next. This textural way of crafting cinematic pacing directly impacted the dynamics for my stage work.

Working with film helped me recognize another habit in my compositional aesthetic: a propensity for density. Not only was the *Wren + Wings* material dense, but also the edits and perspective shifts were fast paced. It moved in a way that could really fly by without leaving a discernable imprint. As a viewer, I found my eyes beginning to gloss over, recognizing I was witnessing intricacies, but no moment lingered long enough to hold onto it. When translating this film exploration to a stage version for *Overscore*, I acknowledged these habits and revised the choreography to offer more visual clarity.

The stage version of *table trio* in *Overscore*, seated simultaneously at the same table, (a major triumph after the isolated Covid variations) loops through the gestural material three times. Each time, the performers shift their seating arrangement and the orientation of the table. This offers the audience, seated on three sides, the opportunity to view the same loop of choreography with altered spatial relationships from a different vantage point. The instructed moments of contact, now a reality in shared space, offer a weighted connectivity between the three performers. This weight allows the dense flurry of action to be more deeply etched into space, adding variance in tone and rhythm. The use of pause, indicated by the Cage instructions,

became elongated and exaggerated to allow the viewer to take in the architectural connections between bodies, set, and projections. The tone of the work maintains a casual, task-based cool. The individual tracks nesting into one another, nonchalantly, like a well-oiled machine. The scenic design and projection, which offer the ultimate frame for the staged version of this work are described in detail in *Chapter Five: Shaping Overscore*.

Dance and Instagram: A cultural analysis of performative embodiment in #culture

I continued to churn out choreographic research in the form of cinematography during Covid; I was creating a digital portfolio of process. This archive was an immediate way to toggle through aesthetic choice making and respond. Immediacy. There is something profound about the speed of media consumption and reaction. This Covid adaptation of generating dance for camera made me reflect on previous research I had done in 2019 investigating Instagram as a digital factory of instant artmaking. Douglas Rosenberg, internationally recognized pioneer in screen dance, describes this digital culture as, “a collaged age of flesh and machine.”²² My research with Instagram examined the implications of everyday media consumption. Artists are not the only individuals generating video art. The primary channel for media consumption, the internet, was dominated by the amateur. Rosenberg, writes, “Video art, once the purview of artists alone, has morphed into a populist methodology for socialization, communication, and entertainment.”²³ Instagram can generate global trends in the aesthetics of performance overnight. Throughout the isolation of Covid screen time was up and digital artmaking was not only the norm but bombarding the performance industry as salvation for live performance in a

²² Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53.

²³ Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*, 16.

pandemic. I reflected on my 2019 research of Instagram, the most pervasive of reality bending video platforms, to gain insights on how the digital frame impacted the choreographic construction of my live interdisciplinary performance work in 2021.

Users of the Instagram platform participate in creating both a living genesis of cultural expression and an archive of cultural trends. The innovation of the hashtag is a generational symbol for socio-cultural trending. Hashtag culture presents blurred lines of performance-based spectatorship, aesthetic expression, and self-representation that invite analysis on the effects of digital media culture on dance culture. *So You Think You Can Dance* Australia winner and Instagram account holder @Michaeldameski creates an aesthetic potency in brief one-minute glimpses by pairing flashy clips of movement material, with saturated Instagram filters, bold lettered text, seductive pop music, and in my opinion, delusive hashtags. He has 506,000 followers. I have conducted an analysis of movement, visual aesthetics, and hashtag use of his post from 10/12/19: ²⁴

10/12/19: DO YOU? -Like my latest choreography? It was a challenge creating this one, but I couldn't resist the epic beat. Thank you @parisgoebel for inspiring me to create to this song. #worldwidedance #michaeldemeski #choreography #contemporary #techniquematters
150,034 views
795 Comments

With a jolting bounce, a black fade up reveals the dancer perfectly centered in the square Instagram frame. As graffiti style font flashes, the music credits "DO YOU?" by TroyBoi, the dancer lies supine, breathing heavily with head turned toward the viewer, delivering a potent gaze. With every beat of the synthesized movement score, @Michaeldameski acutely hits an isolation with a body part that then floats with a smoky reverberation all the while maintaining a

²⁴ Michael Demeski (@michaeldameski), "Do You? Like my latest choreography?" Instagram video, October 12, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B3iEtVJg8Q/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

penetrating stare. There is a taunting confidence to the performer's demeanor. He seamlessly fluctuates between striking gestures of steely accuracy and brief punctuations of release that bloom with a writhing desire. As the dancer toggles between this juxtaposing behavior of direct and supple impulses his head is always keenly spotting the camera. The choreography stays axial in its design rather than locomoting through space. Like a well packaged product, the dancer remains the central object of the Instagram frame. The vocabulary explores the folding and locking of joints in a piston-like manner. An evocative characterization of a calculated droid of the future with the artificial intelligence to compute and embody moments of emotional longing on command. The music chants, "Do you love me?", "Do you need me?", "Do you want me?" Every time I replay this clip to look deeper into the analysis of this :50 second video, @Michaeldameski receives another view. So far, this clip has 150,020 views. 150,021. With one last tart whip of his head toward the camera, he slowly prowls forward toward the camera lens, lowering his chin toward his chest to cast shadows upon his cheeks. @Michaeldamseki captioned this video, "Do you? – like my latest choreography? #Techniquematters". This :50 second clip is available to anybody worldwide as an educational example of #Techniquematters, #Contemporary, and #Choreography. He tags the studio he teaches at, @Brentstreet, using this clip of choreography to promote his classes. Has this consumerist platform devoured artistic expression in exchange for exposure? Has Instagram shaped a lexicon of movement that embodies the art of advertisement and personal brand? In the time it took me to write the last six sentences, @Michaeldameski's video now has 150,036 views, and counting.

With the rise of technology and social media, viewer attention span has shortened, and the performance frame has downsized from the proscenium to a square screen approximately 1080px in width and 1080px in height. Movement characteristics have responsively become

smaller in scale, magnified by ego, and motivated by brand and commercial identity. In a consumerist world, Instagram has made it possible for artists to gain notoriety and worth from the number of Likes and Followers they accrue. The performative square of Instagram is both a tiny, digital, frame and the largest, most accessible, and influential stage. Account holders have found a way to posture aesthetic potency in brief one-minute glimpses using flashy, evocative clips of movement material, Instagram filters and editing tools. Capitalist culture is transcribed throughout the movement vocabulary and performance quality of Instagram's miniature dance vignettes. When observed carefully digital dance cultures on Instagram often reveal provocative marketing or branding standing alongside artistic expression. More clicks equal more visibility, which builds following, brings opportunities, and influence of the dance community. By leaning on the features of film and technology, whether the camera angle or zoom, the image filters or slide transitions, the editing tools of the Instagram frame carry the labor that choreographic craft and performance quality would traditionally be responsible for.

These characteristics crashed into my creative process for *Overscore*. At the time of its premiere in 2021, I knew people were ready for live performance. Eyes were fatigued from the cinematic frame, and dance on screen. At the same time, I believe viewership was unconsciously trained to view work at that framerate. The wow factor, the sex appeal, the tricks, the consumerist flash of entertainment in devourable bite-sized doses. I knew my work with diagrams wasn't designed for that kind of easy appeal. I was purposefully trying to intervene with ego, disrupt the compositional frameworks I knew to be marketable or enticing. I wanted to commit to the rigor of following a structural idea. I wanted to reflect the labor of a long, and complex creative process with dedication to draft and continuum. Video elements in *Overscore* became communicative of that archive. Projections provoked the concept of liveness. But more

than anything, I wanted *Overscore* to be a show that reveals a deep commitment to collaborative interdisciplinary process. Framing process felt counterculture to framing the product or the eye candy of the Instagram marketplace. Rachel Thomas, undergraduate student in communications at University of Maryland responded to themes of ego in her review of *Overscore*. She writes,

Your mathematical process removes the pride from the equation and that is so remarkable. You've shown me that to produce work without ego, the process itself must be braided with humility. That honestly speaks so loudly to me, louder than anything to do with storytelling. I almost feel like that's how meaning is retrieved- dethroning oneself from the medium which they choose to speak through. The piece wasn't trying to be anything other than exactly what it was.²⁵

I wanted *Overscore* to push against habit. Those habits included my personal patterning but also learned cultural norms of traditional expectations regarding performance. This idea of a choice being counterculture made me think about how outliers can transform into mainstream trends. The phenomenon of counterculture as a method of changing societal function is no secret to the founders of social media platforms. In fact, I think platforms like Instagram only further categorize, define and organize patterns of subculture by visual representations of values.

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, reaches 500 million users daily.²⁶ Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook describes the goals of their social networking services to, "give people voice, and bring people together."²⁷ The democratic nature of Instagram and the freedom of expression the platform encourages generate powerful, crowd-sourced momentum behind movements like #BlackLivesMatter, and #MeToo. The application can create viral phenomena to spread global awareness of social and political movements. Viral phenomena also give birth to social media

²⁵ Excerpt from *Overscore* review written by UMD undergraduate Rachel Thomas, October 18, 2021.

²⁶ Tobias Matthews, "Instagram Stories reaches 500 million users per day as Facebook ad revenue rises," *Fourthsource*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.fourthsource.com/news/instagram-stories-reaches-500-million-users-per-day-as-facebook-ad-revenue-rises-23608>.

²⁷ Tony Romm, "Zuckerberg: Standing for Voice and Free Expression," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/17/zuckerberg-standing-voice-free-expression/>.

celebrities who benefit from the platform's exposure. The term "Influencer" is a marketing term coined by Instagram to describe an Instagram user with an established following who persuades others with their content, lifestyle, and interests. In the marketing world, Instagram Influencers play a strategic role in promoting brands with advertisements and endorsements for certain businesses. The marketing strategy boasts that, "Influencer marketing is on pace to become an \$8 billion-dollar industry by 2020."²⁸ In addition to financial benefits, the aesthetic values embedded in the posts of popular dance influencers spread through their stylistic movement trends like a virus through the dance community. Like a game of choreographic telephone, #Instatrends create waves of mimicry that surge through the dance community from education systems to the stage. Insta-artists and their nuanced brands have become a defining portrait of an era.

Many users share posts casually without motivation for influential value. However, by participating and attaching hashtags to a post, the user immediately participates in the cultural influence of Instagram by contributing to content accessible and organized by its categorical hashtag. By quickly browsing the platform for content defined by specific dance related hashtags, for example, #Dance, #Dancer, #Contemporary, #Choreography, #Instadance, #Worldwidedance and #Dancetechnique, one can see a range of posts. As a user scrolls through, a wash of various images coalesces into a suggestive essence that gives a new meaning to the term. I thought that the democratic nature of the platform would encourage multiple points of view to expand the dimensionality of how certain terms are considered. Alternatively, it seems that the hashtags become distilled to suggest values of likeminded people perpetuating the

²⁸ Benjamin Chacon, "The Ultimate Guide to Instagram Influencer Marketing," *Later*, April 5, 2019, <https://later.com/blog/instagram-influencer-marketing/>.

imagistic meaning of such terms. Take for example #Dancetechnique, when scrolling through the 25.3 thousand posts, approximately 90% of the posts of the first 100 depicted Eurocentric training with a focus on flexibility, leg height in extension and multiple turns. On the Instagram platform #dancetechnique is an example of how complicated dance terminology continues to perpetuate in this case a Eurocentric ideal that values leg height in extensions and multiple turns without focus on alignment or foundational support and excludes representation of technique in other dance forms altogether. The use of categorical hashtags has the potential to transform interpretations of dance related terminology and challenges traditional understandings of vocabulary, ownership, and representation of genre.

What I have gathered from computational data studies regarding aesthetic analysis on Instagram is that aesthetic analysis alone is not indicative of intent of user content. At the time of their research in 2012, Nadav Hochman, PhD candidate in Art history at the University of Pittsburgh and Raz Schwartz, of the Human Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, collaborated to design a study that traces global trends on Instagram by applying cultural analytics to approximately 550,000 collected photos from NYC and Tokyo. “By analyzing images from New York City and Tokyo, we offer a comparative visualization research that indicates differences in local color usage, cultural production rate, and varied hue intensities.”²⁹ Though the design of this study draws some conclusions about Instagram trends as far as usage and color preference of each city at a particular time, it does not consider any

²⁹ Nadav Hochman and Raz Schwartz, “Visualizing Instagram: Tracing Cultural Visual Rhythms,” *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* vol. 6, no. 4 (2012): 6, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.851.377&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

analysis of image content or their intrinsic qualities. As I translate the goals of this research toward a dance focus, I found myself asking, but where are the *people*?

As I continued in the choreographic process of creating *Overscore*, these themes of digital research and connection swirled within the structure. *Overscore* utilizes both live and digital methods for communication. As I ruminate on the vocabulary and arc of the show in conversation with this research of Instagram and the impact of digital consumption, I can see the imprint within *Overscore*. The pace, density and consistent transformation of the show makes for a visually provoking, action packed 30-minutes. However, my intention in that tempo was not motivated by audience consumption, or watchability, but rather the commitment to the integrated, interdisciplinary puzzle of the structure. The performance is a dedication of labor to score, to teamwork, and commitment to exposing process. Thus, the density of the diagrammatic choreography with the integration of framing digital content within live performance created a visual stimulation consistent with expectations of the current media age. Yet, the impulse behind the choice making, a post-modern approach to process driven performance.

Chapter Three: Interdisciplinary Collaboration

An Introduction

As I mentioned in *Chapter One: The Diagram*, my parents first modeled the notion of interdisciplinary thinking. Neither of my parents received higher education, and I doubt they would ever think to label their methodologies with that term. Additionally, I'm not sure the term of interdisciplinarity is often intended for use outside of academia. But as I see it, their approach to problem solving in the trades is exactly that; drawing information from several fields to create anew.

I have had several experiences performing interdisciplinary works throughout my career. In many of those experiences it was rare for me as a performer to have input in how those collaborations were conducted or directed. Thinking back to the performances that included live musicians, set design, or projection, the juiciest collaborative conversations were between the director and the guest collaborators, not the performers. Often functioning separately from the directors' plans, the dancers were given a physical task to later be paired with another discipline. In that long-awaited moment of collision, the magic of consequence suddenly appears, and the performers make immediate choices to problem solve, adjust, and find relationship. My experience with collaborative works often felt rushed and sutured together or superficially tied through proximity. As a performer, not included in the conversations about the production's direction, I have felt out of the loop, not quite holding enough power in the hierarchy of the process to offer related insight. Additionally, it often felt that the priority for collaboration was choreographic, and the process of building interdisciplinarity was retroactive. Each additional medium served as a buttress to the existing choreography to create future context.

These experiences encouraged me to attempt simultaneity in the interdisciplinary process of *Overscore*. Each medium would have influence toward an integrated investigation of a concept. As a full force, type A personality, the very idea of this made me itch. Knowing the specificity I craved choreographically, I knew this collaborative approach would require a relinquishing of control. Unease was an indicator I was approaching unfamiliar ground. This excited me. Any portal to the unknown was a conduit away from habit. In this Chapter I introduce the members of my collaborative team, projection designer Xavier Taylor and scenic designer Andrés Poch. I explain how our initial conversation about devised performance work led to continued collaboration in constructing *Crash test*, a remote, interdisciplinary performance experiment that became a formative work for *Overscore*.

Brainstorming Interdisciplinarity

In the Spring of 2020, while enrolled in Professor Sara Pearson's DANC708: Choreography and Collaboration, I met UMD graduate designers Xavier Taylor and Andrés Poch. To gauge their interest in the way I was wanting to work, I shared the process and performance of *Untitled Translation* and asked how they would use projection and scenic design to respond to the systems I was using.

As I described in *Chapter One: The Diagram*, the Niccolò Paganini project or *Untitled Translation*, had two corresponding notations systems from the procedure, the choreographic symbol language and Gelfand's staff-based notation. Both notation systems served as visual inspiration for projection designer Taylor, who created a program that allows him to project and manipulate animated visual representations of notation systems in real time. We talked about how projections could reveal the systems or codes. I was still on the fence about whether I

wanted to disclose the systems that constructed the choreography for *Untitled Translation*. On one hand, revealing the system could bridge abstraction for the audience and give them a conceptual thread to follow that could expose the rigor of the choreographic complexity. On the other hand, I found the mystery of not knowing what propelled the performers into systematic action quite compelling. There was something alluring about keeping the secrets of the scores within the players in the collaboration. Stuck on that question, we landed somewhere in between. We decided Taylor's animation of the symbol language would be a portal to a parallel interest in the conceptual process. One idea we explored was that he could use the choreographic symbols as vocabulary and find his own habit breaking system for ordering or manipulating them. Projections could provide a visual context for the choreography without correlating directly with same system or syntax as the movement or music. Taylor identified a visual connection to the jump-cut movement quality, a series of unrelated gestures slammed together, a disjointed syntax that disrupts the blur of successive motion. We found shared conceptual overlap between our disciplines in our desire to reveal a system, remove transitions, and warp time.

Scenic designer Andrés Poch proposed a large cube structure with a mundane, home-like interior, a response of juxtaposition against the movement's mechanical abstraction. Poch described the familiarity of the cube's interior as an opportunity to bridge a gap between the jarring nature of the fractured movement vocabulary with a familiar representation of a home space. He desired the interior space to appear elemental, like a lifeless, IKEA basic. He believed this choice could add an additional artificial twist to the human vs machine juxtaposition. As a performer, my experience was almost entirely concert dance. Performing within a theatrically structured set design was both thrilling and worrisome. How would I translate choreographic

floorwork onto carpet, or into the spaces between a bed frame and a dresser? Again, I thought, fantastic, an unexpected and new challenge guiding me away from habit.

A breakthrough in the scenic collaboration emerged when Poch disclosed his desire for what we called, responsive design. Poch shared, “*I’m jealous of performers. Liveness is wired into their role. So much of my work as a scenic designer is in construction and preparation and once completed, it is still.*”³⁰ It was this admission that prompted us to imagine the cube as an adaptable apparatus. It could function as a frame, an arena, obstruct, provide projection surface, expand, deconstruct. Like Taylor’s goal to create a system to order and manipulate animation, Poch could systematically manipulate his set. We identified a value for interdisciplinary action. Each collaborator regardless of discipline, would be active in manipulating their medium in live performance. Looking back on the durational journey of building *Overscore*, I recognize the weight of this discovery as a foundational principle for our method of collaboration. We desired an equity among collaborators. Although the seed of the work was choreographic, the integration of scenic, sound, and projection was interdependent. The parts of course, could be removed from one another and compelling variations would remain, but our goal was to commit to carefully calibrated scores and negotiate them live as a team.

The connection between Taylor, Poch and me as a collaborative team was magnetic. The more we spoke, the more expansive and interwoven our plans for constructing integrated performance became. However, at this point, our process was all speculated draft work, multidisciplinary conceptual thinking. In Fall 2020, despite being displaced to remote locations by Covid 19, I applied for a TDPS Second Season performance opportunity and our interdisciplinary collaboration propelled into action in the premiere of *Crash test*.

³⁰ In conversation with Andrés Poch over Zoom during early collaborative conversations 2019.

Crash test: An interdisciplinary experiment foundational for Overscore

Crash test was a virtual interdisciplinary performance experiment that blended dance, projection, music and set design. The collaboration premiered Nov 5, 2020, as part of The School of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies Virtual Season at University of Maryland, College Park. The performance included TDPS graduate students Andrés Poch and Xavier Taylor, TDPS alumni Nana Edu, guest performer Lily Gelfand and myself. Devised for a live streamed performance, the five artists in five different geographic locations used a combination of free and found technology to capture and live mix the performers into a singular performance space. Two dancers and a cellist strived to maintain visual and sonic harmony as they engaged in a rigorous score instructed by the musical notation of Paganini's 24 Caprices for violin in B-minor. The set designer, at the helm of nine live video feeds, impulsively selected the perspective the audience had access to. The projection designer, manipulates a looping digital archive, blurring the reality of the live image by blending live capture with the projection of pre-recorded footage. The risk of a real-time virtual collaboration added a level of intensity to the performance as recording devices dropped frames and performers reckoned with decreased visibility and delay. The entire collaboration hinged on the speed and stability of hotspot Wi-Fi connections. The result, a nail-biting gauntlet of virtuosic detail; a fast-paced movement installation of dance in real time communication with music and design.

Working in digital space caused our roles to shift to meet the parameters of virtual process and performance. Poch, the scenic designer, became a curator of live action; controlling what the audience sees. If a set designer's role is to position *how* the work is framed or observed, we thought live mixing would be an appropriate role for the virtual platform. Poch said,

I always struggle with scenic being a static element. In *crash test*, scenic became how we are looking at the piece, and that became active the day of the show. I became an active performer in how the show was being seen. I had to develop awareness, a sense of listening to know when to support projection, when to support live action.³¹

Using Zoom, and OBS Ninja, Poch selected from nine possible camera feeds, and four different performance spaces.³² Poch selected the desired action and live mixed the performance just seconds ahead of what was being streamed. Poch was the only artist functioning without a rule system, working instead from impulse. We wanted to see what it would be like to have one artist be a variable. In addition, we decided that collaborators Gelfand streaming from Arizona, and Edu in Maryland would be digitally rendered into my studio space steaming from Lowell, Massachusetts. We thought this was a strong dramaturgical choice for everyone visually appear in one studio space, despite our varied locations.

If Poch became the curator of the present, projection designer Taylor became the archive. I will describe how Taylor's role as archivist impacted *Overscore* in *Chapter Five: Shaping Overscore*. For *Crash test*, Taylor used Team Viewer and Isadora to control my projector in Massachusetts from Maryland.³³ A visual catalog of process, Taylor employed his symbol animation from *Untitled Translation* research and additionally sampled hours of archival rehearsal footage. He used this combination to generate looping projection bursts that corresponded with a time-based rule system he generated with Isadora. Three textural loops were

³¹ Andrés Poch reflects on his experience. Transcription excerpted from *Crash test* process documentary, 2020. I created this documentary as a supplementary support for our presentation of research which was selected to be presented at the December 2020 GradTerp Exchange. <https://umd.box.com/s/fl9b6dlrm5ybhax78s61yi3uwoqifph>

³² OBS Ninja is free computer software that enables the user to Ninja lets you bring video from your smartphone, computer, or friends directly into an OBS video stream. <https://obs.ninja>

³³ TeamViewer is remote access/remote control computer software. <https://www.teamviewer.com/en-us/products/teamviewer/>. Isadora is a proprietary graphic programming environment for Mac OS X and Microsoft Windows, with emphasis on real-time manipulation of digital video. <https://troikatronix.com/>

patched to overlay one another and juxtapose the action of the live performance. These loops provided the opportunity to blur the perception of time.³⁴ Taylor described his experience of looping archival content as follows,

For Crash test, depending on when I booted up your computer and when the show started would affect how you lined up with the projections. When you precisely, lined up in terms of doing the movement and the projection of that movement happening at the same time, it felt fantastic! Not to mention, when Andrés selected the camera angle that would capture those moments of link up, I thought...the muses are at work!³⁵

From a choreographic standpoint, *Crash test* continued to expand upon my work of disrupting habit by using diagrams as choreographic structures. Throughout the process of *Crash test*, I sourced additional inspiration from computer source code (Ruby), quantum field theory, Morse code, and Frédéric Pouillaude's philosophies of performance theory. Each of these inquires functioned in a similar way to *Untitled Translation* building choreographic codes from a pre-existing symbol language. UMD dancer Edu joined the rehearsal process through Zoom as an additional performer and collaborated on the computer source code (Ruby) translation as well as learning excerpted vocabulary from *Untitled Translation*. I fused the choreographic code scored from Frédéric Pouillaude's philosophies of performance theory with measure 65 of Paganini's *24 Caprices for violin in B minor*. Using a mathematical equation linked to rising and falling intonations within the measure, I gathered a set of numbers that would select specified words from Pouillaude's text. Pouillaude's selected text was tied to a set of seated gestures. The

³⁴ The concept of blurring the perception of time drove a future work Taylor and I collaborated on in Fall 2021 called *digital cache* which explores the concept of liveness. I will introduce *digital cache* in *Chapter Four: Improvisation as Barometer*.

³⁵ Xavier Taylor reflects on his experience. Transcription excerpted from *Crash test* documentary, 2020. I created this documentary as a supplementary support for our presentation of research which was selected to be presented at the December 2020 GradTerp Exchange. <https://umd.box.com/s/fl9b6dlrm5ybhax78s61yi3uwoqjfp>

computer source code choreographies as well as the Pouillaude score were added to the *Untitled Translation* score.

I wanted to create an added challenge for Gelfand and me to propel our habit breaking research from *Untitled Translation*. Gelfand and I agreed to cut our original choreography and composition into thirty sections. The divisions were selected by randomly selected timecodes rather than musical measures and reordered using a randomizer called random.org. The first time Gelfand performed her butchered score, she was shocked. She confessed, “The composition is completely discordant this way. It was fractured before, but this is really rough, almost indiscernible.”³⁶ As the director of the project, I could have pressed for her commitment to the score. A true allegiance to my research regarding habit required systematic obedience to refute ego. However, this interaction marked a break in my systematic approach that offered new variation moving forward. The 30 sections worked as my choreographic challenge, Gelfand wanted to find her own approach. She reworked her original score, reinventing her initial investigation of the symbol language to exaggerate expressions of time and dynamic. This very interaction indicated the negotiation of balancing creative autonomy with compulsory direction.

Shifting to a virtual platform brought incredible insights that directly impacted the making of *Overscore*. Interdisciplinary collaboration on Zoom heightened the necessity for quality time management as well as efficient and articulate communication. Our remote collaboration required an element of trust to emerge between disciplines. In December of 2020, one month after the virtual premiere of *Crash test*, Poch, Taylor and I were invited to share our

³⁶ Zoom conversation with Lily Gelfand during the creative process of *Crash test*, Fall 2020.

creative process as part of University of Maryland's GradTerp Exchange 2020.³⁷ I prepared a brief documentary for the event outlining our process. During the reflection Poch shared,

Something that really came out in this process with technology, is trust. We had to trust Christina to set up technology that she had never set up before. And Christina had to trust us to literally choose how her piece was being seen. This is such a relinquishment of trust in collaboration. In the theater we can be knowledgeable in our medium and isolated. But in this remote circumstance, we were so dependent on each other. I cannot go to Massachusetts and turn the projector on or focus it for you, I need to tell you how to do it. It became a lot more collaborative in that sense because we had to depend on each other, and we made a more unified piece because of it.³⁸

The feats of resourcefulness and successful strategizing while producing a virtual show remotely with eclectic technology was wildly satisfying. Troubleshooting congested public WIFI bandwidth, failures of outdated generations of free and found Mac devices, motion censored fluorescents that intermittently bleached out projections, dropped frames in OBS Ninja, and communication lags between shared sound and video, were all challenges we endured as a team. To provide a frame of reference, during the dress rehearsal, our stream had 30% lag with four dropped camera feeds. For the show, lag was at less than 2% and we didn't lose a single camera. The difference between those two runs was significant, especially because the only variable was congested WIFI usage at that time of day. The triage of technical issues influenced the aesthetic of the work, a homemade sensibility that maintained rigorous virtuosity. *Crash test* was truly the most foundational study for *Overscore* regarding the incorporation of technology in collaborative performance. It began a snowball of self-referential research, a mega work, constructed of archival research, each process indicating or referencing the works prior. *Crash test* expanded

³⁷ The GradTerp Exchange is a monthly event in which UMD graduate students and postdocs share their research to general audiences in an informal, conversational setting.

³⁸ Andrés Poch reflects on his experience. Transcription excerpted from *Crash test* process documentary, 2020. I created this documentary as a supplementary support for our presentation of research which was selected to be presented at the December 2020 GradTerp Exchange. <https://umd.box.com/s/fl9b6dlrm5ybhax78s61yi3uwoqifph>

Untitled Translation from an eight-minute study of movement and music into a 20-minute installation of dance and design. The creative process of *Crash test* provided the opportunity to engage simultaneous agendas and explore how multiple rule systems impede, support, and thwart each other's disciplines.

Chapter Four: Improvisation as barometer

An Introduction

Despite my best efforts for the diagram studies to disrupt habit and encourage movement invention, the very act of rehearsing the studies generated new residual patterns and proclivities in temporary choice making. Disruptive actions were becoming routine. Jarring syntax began to feel casual. When rehearsing variations of the Paganini diagram, my superficial improvisational choices became bound, tight, stationary, gestural, even my quick licks of interruptive pauses became identifiable as relational to that diagram study. This prompted a deep commitment to improvisational practice and authentic movement as another form of intervention. Around November 2020, I began structuring rehearsal time specifically for improvisation. I adopted a daily practice. Improvised solo studies became a contrasting exercise to the highly structured diagram studies. I filmed every session and began generating an archive more than 40 sessions. Each one became a barometer. When given the time to move beyond superficial muscle memory, my body would eventually instruct me toward an inverse quality. Contrasting the fast-paced flurry of frame-by-frame gestures in *Untitled Translation*, came improvisations with lush circularity, sweeping arcs of momentum and ease, the body gliding and folding in a nourishing way. The improvisations filled a qualitative deficiency I didn't realize I'd missed. My feelings on disrupting habit became cyclical. How long does it take for something to become habitual? Perhaps there are gradients of habitual behavior. Some, temporarily trending in the body like a popular internet meme of the month. Others, decade long aesthetics adapted by company training. The improvisational practice became a way to find counteractive balance, a reset rather than a default to, a way to begin again. I found the archive of improvisations to be a flexible and useful gauge for reactivity, residual patterning, and pending fascination.

In this chapter, I introduce three research investigations pertaining to improvisation as a practice. These studies include improvisational sketches on Trisha Brown's *Watermotor*, a pandemic Instagram series I created called *The Daily Diaries*, and a collaboration for dance and digital media titled *digital cache*. These studies directed how improvisation was infused into the systematic choreography and instructed the closing interdisciplinary moments of *Overscore*.

Improvisational Studies on *Watermotor*

Trisha Brown's *Watermotor* is my favorite choreographic work of all time. I know, I know, it's a crowd favorite.³⁹ Nonetheless, the solo exemplifies everything I love about what the body can do. It reminds me in the face of naysayers who believe "everything has been done" the fact can't possibly be true. It is simply impossible that the joints of the human body have been articulated in every conceivable sequence, dynamic, speed and spatial orientation. *Watermotor* offers that kind of infinite possibility. French cinematographer Babette Mangolte recalls an encapsulating photo of an early run of Brown's solo in 1978, "you feel that Trisha is moving in two contradictory directions at the same time as if half of her body is going left when the other half is going right."⁴⁰ Similarly, art historian Douglas Crimp writes, "Because she seems to dart in two directions at once, spring into the air with no preparation, and keep every part of her body in continuous motion, you can believe Brown would be capable of miracles."⁴¹ I always marveled at the mercurial movement quality of *Watermotor*. Her tone seemingly relaxed, loose, and supple, allowing for one movement to collide against the next without sabotaging the flow. Watching *Watermotor* was like watching waves, currents collide and continue, the continual motion never

³⁹ Trisha Brown was an American postmodern dancer and choreographer. *Watermotor* is a solo created by Brown which premiered at The Public Theatre, NY 1978.

⁴⁰ Babette Mangolte, "The Making of *Water Motor*," 2017, <https://babettemangolte.org/maps2.html>.

⁴¹ Douglas Crimp, "You Can Still See Her: The art of Trisha Brown," *Art Forum*. January 2011.

threatened by the interruption of conflicting swells. If that is how her movement appeared, I had to know what it felt like. In late September 2020, I used Mangolte's film, *Water Motor*, which displays Brown performing the solo in slow motion, to begin learning Brown's choreography.⁴² I will never understand how she can seem so spontaneous and free while designing shape and direction so clearly. Designing while falling. A perfect calibration of finessed abandon. Her line quality is light and thin, bone driven. While she is deeply rooted to the ground, her spine constantly reverberates from her foot falls. My attempts at capturing Brown's choreography off the video also told me something about my habits. In the first few attempts, I realized my primary focus was on initiations. This focus also appeared primary in many of the diagram scores I had generated. Which body parts are doing what, where? It wasn't until I understood the firing order of events, I began to look at weight. This gap is where I noticed the biggest disconnect between Brown and me qualitatively. It became obvious that initiation, direction, and weight were interconnected in constructing *Watermotor*. One of those entities could not be disconnected from the other. Perhaps the connection of those three items, creates the feeling of consequence in her body. The hybrid of tasks creating the visible pull and ride of gravity. Regarding my research, I recognized it was less essential I learn the exact choreography of *Watermotor*, and perhaps of more critical to attain a strategy for developing a similar oppositional quality. When I watch Brown dance in *Watermotor*, it appears she is calm and supple while dancing at the edge of what is barely within her reach. She remains in control but swerves in and out of oppositional demands. A characteristic that reads to me as Brown executing the labor of disruption through the habit of studying improvisational disruption. I

⁴² *Water Motor* is a filmed record of Trisha Brown's *Watermotor*, 1978. The film is silent and black and white created by Babbette Mangolte. For more information on *Water Motor*: Babbette Mangolte, "The Making of Water Motor," 2017, <https://babettemangolte.org/maps2.html>.

generated seven improvisational structures to help me attempt Trisha Brown's movement quality in *Watermotor*.

1. Using circularity and momentum, focus on the intersections between movement gestures. Which transitional intersections request redirection rather than continuum? Does that transition happen by desire for design or sensation or by consequence of gravity?
2. Circularity, continuum, redirection, rotation. Initiating circularity from the spiraling of the bones and their trajectory through space. Internal and external rotation of limbs and digits, sometimes with opposing agendas.
3. An awareness of the 3 dimensionality of the spinal column. Bring attention to the weight of the column's endpoints, pelvis, and head.
4. Drive limbs from the column of the spine. Torso directs the limbs. Try this with high and low tone in the limbs.
5. Torque and force without a game plan. Can the bones and joints stay soft and weighted while exploring torque? How does that converse with redirection?
6. Cyclical sweeping surfaces. Exploring circularity and continuum as it relates to the surface of the floor. Continuous brush strokes. Potentially a visual way to track habits of redirection.
7. Attempt the second score on the floor. Pay attention to which body parts initiate redirection on the floor. After a few tries, begin intermittently peeling those pathways into the standing plane through redirection.

Brown became a lighthouse for me throughout my creative process with habit. Not only was *Watermotor* a guiding light, but Brown's ever-changing approach to choreographic construction in general. Dance historian Ramsay Burt articulates, "Brown's fascination with movement invention and her rigorously conceptual approach to structure have, in my opinion, remained productive tension in her dances throughout her career."⁴³ Brown was insatiable for the hunt for possibilities. Tracking her works, and processes over the course of her extensive career, she darts

⁴³ Ramsay Burt, "Against Expectations: Trisha Brown and the Avant-Garde," *Dance Research Journal* 37, no. 1 (2005): 13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20444617>.

in extreme directions, one process and result driving a seemingly reactionary impulse in a polarized direction.

In *Watermotor* (1987) she abruptly revised her creative process to arrive at what she considered “dancing” (as opposed to “dance movement.”) Revisiting the use of autobiography and physical memory as a basis for movement score- but now working with a solid basis in an abstract vocabulary of her invention- the outcome was far from pedestrian: instead *Watermotor* announced the highly personal idiosyncratic, physical intelligence that became Brown’s signature movement style throughout the 1980s. Paradoxically, Brown claimed her new dance was borne solely from experimentation with movement: created through improvisation, edited and finalized as choreography. Yet her insistence that this dance (*Watermotor*) had no score- and thereby marked a major shift in light of her extensive use of scores based on architecture, geometry, mathematics and alpha-numeric permutational sequences throughout the 1970s- is belied by public statements. As well as writing in the notebook that she kept during the period of the dance’s making.⁴⁴

Whether *Watermotor* was created with an improvisational score of physical memories, or had no score at all, *Watermotor* employed a compositional structure that differed from her habit of working with calculated scores. This desire to break routine and exhaust methodologies inspired me. Archived improvisational practice became a way for me to isolate my habits in movement invention from my habits in compositional structure and to formulate analysis of the relationship between the two. It is the very thought of infiniteness that keeps me hooked to dancing. Each day is a new one to discover what waits in the body. New codes, new syntax, a living puzzle with limitless arrangements. Brown is an icon for me regarding drafting and overlaying systems for both movement phrasing and compositional structure. For me, those two processes are related but not the same. Ideally, with time, I can become facile enough to blend

⁴⁴ Susan Rosenberg, “Trisha Brown: Between Abstraction and Representation (1966–1998),” *Arts* 9, no. 2 (2020): 43, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020043>.

and move between them. The physical intelligence of wildness and order, exemplified in Brown's execution of *Watermotor*, is a metaphor for what I aspire to be able to implement compositionally.

My fascination with Brown's choreographic methodologies and the execution of *Watermotor* became inspiration for the last section of *Overscore*. It is an improvised response to the preceding sections of rigorously set works. This improvisational response stretches across three mediums, Lily Gelfand on cello, Xavier Taylor with projection, and me with movement. With the majority of the 30-minute work exploring rigorous, highly structured habit breaking, the closing section holds space for an improvisational response that suggests ongoingness. Embracing Dance historian Sally Banes remarks on *Watermotor* as a work that, "pries open Brown's logical systems to make room for exquisite disorder," the final section of *Overscore* functions as a conduit for continued processing and spontaneous response.⁴⁵

The Daily Diaries

Separate from the archive of improvisation studies in the studio, I created an Instagram series called the *Daily Diaries*. This was a creation that allowed me to blend my research interests of improvisation, Instagram analysis and spoken text or voice over. This project transpired during the most reclusive stages of the Covid lockdown. Unable to travel to the studio, these miniature film entries took place in corners of my home and outdoor spaces. Each one, a time capsule of the isolation during the pandemic. I would begin with an improvisation, each one a physical response to my surroundings. Using the site to inspire movement, I created bite sized

⁴⁵ Burt, "Against Expectations: Trisha Brown and the Avante-Garde," 13.

dances that felt nested to place. Part of this inquiry for refining space arose from the realization that most of my habit breaking studies took place in empty studios. With much of my focus on movement initiation, syntax, and quality, I rarely generated rule systems that instructed spatiality. This realization illuminated my privilege for what the body is doing over where it's going. This relates to what I discovered regarding Trisha Brown's approach to choreography. Movement phrasing and compositional structure are separate processes in my mind. To contaminate a movement phrase with spatial demands is to disrupt the nature of the phrase. This is totally an option, but one I would intentionally choose for affect. I consider the variance in these options: constructing a phrase that is deliberately created to travel in a particular pathway, constructing a phrase based on movement invention and then layering a spatial task upon it, constructing a phrase based on movement invention letting its essential spatiality be a byproduct of its execution. I much prefer to build movement phrasing and consider compositional structures that could later house that material. I am always prepared for the material to change, but I enjoy allowing the phrasing to instruct the structure. That said, I'm not consistent and I value intervention and rule breaking, I am studying breaking habit after all. But it would be fair to say I rarely privilege *where* over *what*. These *Daily Diaries* were a way for me to let space instruct movement.

Additionally, after I recorded the movement, I generated a contrasting monologue. These monologues were usually mundane accounts of my day-to-day activity in lockdown. Using editing tools such as iMovie, Premiere Pro, and Garageband, I created compositional choices that highlighted comedic timing of voiceover work. How could I create a relationship between the dynamics of the movement and the dryness of the text delivery to incorporate humor in these mundane diary entries? Using tips from behavioral scientist Jennifer Aaker, I focused on tactics

of truth or relatability, misdirection, and contrast. In an interview about comedy with *Hidden Brain*'s Shankar Vedantam, Aaker instructs, "Basically what you're doing with the misdirect is you're just taking the small little thing that you notice that's kind of interesting, not even funny, and then you're exaggerating or contrasting it."⁴⁶ Using these tactics, I found methodologies for text to highlight or contrast my physical relationship to space, and associate pauses in motion with the pace of internal thought.

The Instagram miniatures were a hit. Don't get the wrong idea. My posts didn't make me a social media "Influencer" overnight. In fact, I intentionally did not hashtag my posts, which limited the visibility of my content to mostly family and friends. Yet still, some of the miniature video posts racked up over 600 views, a lot for my amateur social media status. I paired my site-specific clips with comedic voiceovers and light underscoring of the English *Swingle Singers*. Instagram viewers were attentive to the voiceovers, often taking time to comment with their favorite quote from that diary's monologue. This made me recognize not only the importance of speech, but how language may take priority in viewership. This is no surprise to puppeteers and animators. Yael Inbar, guest professor of puppetry and animation at The University of Maryland, uses the Simpsons as an example.⁴⁷ "It is the voices of these characters that make them distinctive in our minds."⁴⁸ When pairing dialogue with movement, the combination of body language and sound makes contextual impact, but I think our connection to language, cadence and rhythm drives home the delivery. These discoveries guided my sense of pacing in the *table*

⁴⁶ Shankar Vedantam, *Humor Us*, Hidden Brain, podcast audio, April 19, 2020, <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/humor-us/>.

⁴⁷ Yael Inbar is a theater director, puppeteer, and a script writer for animation films. She is a senior lecturer and head of the animation department of Sapir College in Ashkelon, Israel and she founded the animation department of the Sapir Academic School of Sound and Screen Based Arts. <https://tdps.umd.edu/news/tdps-welcomes-new-faculty-0?fbclid=IwAR0UbSywunUclCdSv3wuX7xYHkEPlgHyEr0sgulhYca0UWZjABmLbBEO7JQ>

⁴⁸ Quoted Inbar during her undergraduate puppetry lecture in October 2021. I am Inbar's TA for TDPS458D-Puppets-constructing, manipulating, directing.

trio section of *Overscore* as well as my approach to coaching Tristan Koepke's monologue construction and delivery.

Digital Cache

As the recipient of the 2021 TDPS Board of Visitors award, I created an installation combining dance and digital media design.⁴⁹ This project continued my interdisciplinary virtual performance experiment, *Crash test* which premiered as part of the TDPS Virtual Season 2020. The temporary installation, housed in the Choreography Studio at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center during the weekend of August 6-8, 2021, explored the concept of liveness. Can digital ephemera preserve and redefine the body's end? Building upon our research with live capture technology and real time manipulation of digital video, Xavier Taylor and I investigated how the algorithms within projection design can compose expressions of choreography alongside live performance. The algorithms continued to create digital variations of the performance upon the live performer's exit.

The Choreography Studio was divided in half into two play areas. In one half, the live performer is captured by four surrounding camera feeds. The other half is a landscape of four overlapping projection screens (6x8 feet, 4x6, 4x4, and 3x4). The screens provided a dimensional canvas for the projection designer who manipulated the action of the performer live. This side-by-side framing offered the viewer a live experience alongside digital collage. The screens, which I designed and constructed, are freestanding with sliders and can be moved to

⁴⁹ The Board of Visitors Award was established by the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies Board of Visitors in 2018. Students with good academic standing are eligible to apply for the merit-based award to fund projects supporting career training and choices in the performing arts or entertainment industries. These projects may include performance, design, choreography, or research; study abroad programs; and unpaid internships. <https://tdps.umd.edu/news/first-tdps-board-visitors-student-awards-announced>

create a variety of orientations. The audience was encouraged to move in and around the lab space, each position in space, a unique visual experience.

This installation lab was not only an opportunity to continue research interdisciplinary collaboration in support of my thesis research, but a moment to celebrate live performance and experimentation on campus. The installation engaged the three dimensionality of dance that has been sorely missing throughout the pandemic and framed the fleeting forces of the body with the infinite and immediate possibilities of digital design.

Taylor and I had three primary takeaways from this project that infused projection design in *Overscore*. The first was audio reactivity. Using the parameters within Isadora, Lily's live composition for cello from *Untitled Translation* became a force to drive the function of geometric visuals. Pitch could determine projected symbol rotation or location, and amplitude could determine the scale of projection. This breakthrough was a key in finding connectivity between movement, sound, and symbol projection in the first section of *Overscore*. The second take away was exploring tiling of live capture media. Taylor was able to capture live action with a collection of four cameras and stretch and tile the video feeds into a collage of checkered action. This effect created a wash of exquisite corpse-like media. This allowed the viewer the opportunity to revisit live action in new orientations, assembling digital collage from pre-existing loops of live capture. This technique was used in the last section of *Overscore* when action spills out of the set design, up the wall and onto the floor, exploding visuals of fractured action into the play space. The final takeaway from *digital cache* was a potential public installation project. Combining my scholarly analysis of amateur video and social media with my research of dance and digital design, I formulated a pitch for a public installation in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center lobby. Serving the public and the UMD community as an interactive arts exhibit, a

Covid-safe, and hands-free design, encourages live participation without physical contact. Functioning similarly to familiar video sharing applications, the installation encourages the passerby to create movement content that immediately gets sourced, manipulated, and randomized onto four large, layered projection screens. Not only does the installation encourage instant art making as an action-based design tool, but with the ability to log up to 12 hours' worth of footage, the installation becomes a randomized archive of the day's events. The lobby transforms into a participatory time capsule. The mosaic of projections juxtaposing live ephemera from a digital cache. I aim to formally pitch this installation as part of University of Maryland's NextNOW Festival 2022.

Chapter Five: Shaping *Overscore*

Introduction to construction: a collage of perception

Rope dance (Seiltänzer) is a short minimalist animation by a German director named Raimund Krumme that animates one thinly drawn square, a rope and two simply drawn male characters.⁵⁰ Over the course of the nine-minute film, Krumme exhausts the possibilities of these four players and their conceivable relationships and reveals endless representations of dimensionality and perception. Without ever changing the objects themselves, but repositioning their spatial relationship, Krumme offers infinite compositional scenarios. Krumme sets himself up with a limited palette and asks what the parts are capable of. The square becomes surface, space, container, frame, doorway, portal, pond, boundary, viewfinder, swing, and wall, at one moment weight bearing, the next an empty void. Krumme examines all possibilities of line as metaphor. The rope becomes a lifeline, a divider, a lasso, a river, a guide, an arrow, a jump rope, a circle, marionette strings. David Joselit, a professor of film at Harvard University, describes diagrams as, “a kind of container, a come-one-come-all structure for representing polymorphous perversity.”⁵¹ Krumme’s experimentation with line and composition offered this flexible action of contrariness; a consistent restructuring of parts to generate new implications. For me, this short animation paralleled my choreographic quest to sculpt a cohesive 30-minute work from my collection of studies with diagram, frame, and improvisation. The process of shaping *Overscore* became a meta-application of my research. My commitment to habit breaking over the course of my three-year graduate journey primed my thesis performance structure to be a process of compositional curation and collage. Like Krumme, I examined my players, the palette of studies

⁵⁰ Raimund Krumme, “Seiltänzer,” YouTube video, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXl46Ena9Ks>.

⁵¹ Sillman, “Notes on the diagram.”

I created, and began the process of composing with them. With minimal alteration to the entities themselves, I began integrating pre-existing studies alongside new ones, incorporating design elements, and observing the vast flexibility compositional framing offers controlled variables. I repositioned disparate parts of my diagrammatic thinking to generate an interconnected whole. This chapter revisits themes of the diagram and the frame as I provide details about the structural construction of *Overscore* with a focus on choreographic curation and manipulation and the integration of scenic and projection design.

Revisiting the diagram

In July 2021, I began distilling and organizing choreographic research from *Untitled Translation*, *Crash test*, and *Solo for Hansel* into a compositional structure for the Fall 2021 performance. I decided to order diagrammatic studies chronologically in the order they were constructed. This decision was a logical way for me to map progression of the studies over time. I like to think of this as a macro approach to the development of the Paganini measures. Each study informed by the one prior. I started at the beginning. I reverted to the first draft of the Paganini diagram by sourcing video documentation from the Fall 2019 performance of *Untitled Translation*. The first choreographic goal I identified was to incorporate performer Nana Edu into more of the material. Although Edu was introduced to excerpts of *Untitled Translation* phrasing as a performer in *Crash test*, our Zoom rehearsals limited the amount of detailed gestural material I could successfully translate through the screen. Since commitment to the nuances of the dense and fractured gestural material in the Paganini exploration was paramount, a selection of 13 of the 30 total sections seemed surmountable.

I opted to take on less material to avoid the appeal of defaulting to more familiar executions. If a single gestural description from the original Paganini score described an action as, “Push off the right big toe so the right leg hinges at the knee, exaggerate the knee as a priority of the gesture. The impulse for the knee to move is the right big toe not the hip flexor.” The default would be, “Yeah, some kind of *passé-ish*- thing.” At times the relentless focus on the specificity of initiation points felt precious in a way that spiraled me deeper into questioning, “but why?” Does it matter that the score indicated initiations for the foot to move the knee? Who would know? French performance philosopher, Frédéric Pouillaude’s remarks regarding “instrumental rationality” began to swirl in my mind.

Dance appears fundamentally contingent since its movement is divorced from any identifiable teleological structure. There is no particular reason to dance. It rarely functions to precisely determine the nature of the gestures made: at some basic level, there is no reason to perform one set of movements rather than another.⁵²

How could I justify the commitment to the score I had generated? If the choreographic system was never revealed and could never be traced, why would it matter if the movement defaulted into a less scrupulous series of gestures when I translated them to Edu? I returned to my favorite artisan of utility. I remember a conversation with my father about a wiring job he was doing on a hotrod: Lying just beneath the cars sleek interior snaked hundreds of bundles of color-coded wires, plastic terminals, and fuses, meticulously organized, numbered, and anchored in place. I marveled at it. A clear system. But why tidy it with such obsessional clarity if no one will ever see it? His response was two-fold. First, functionality. Automobiles are reliant on the electrical system to function, so the form of how they are cut, bundled, and threaded is directly related to their function. In addition, troubleshooting is alleviated when mechanics can track and trace wiring visually. Ah, utility. His second response, which he said through a smug grin, was that

⁵² Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography*, 256.

even if no one ever saw it, he would know it was tidy, meticulously crafted, aesthetically pleasing, and dependable.

Did the function of my dance depend on the clarity of those nuanced initiations? I thought so. Especially for the Paganini study, initiation points were the name of the game. It was important not to round out the disconnected impulses to become something more familiar. Once that metamorphosis takes place, the habit breaking obedience dissolves. It wasn't that I wanted Edu and me to look the same performing the choreography, but I did want to share the task of embodying disruptive movement sentences with another body. Beyond my ego's desire to maintain the score's integrity, our shared experience of the habit breaking syntax would create a discourse about our individual processing. Our dialogue prompted fruitful conversations regarding the clarity of pedagogy, body and training variance which eventually led toward conducting the Laban Movement Analysis study in *Chapter One: The Diagram*. Our goal was not to perform perfect unison, but to understand the rigor of the specified system and commit our effort to physically conquer the material with our own approach. The commitment to nuances of the vocabulary was important, not the shape of the execution. The efforts of that accountability were not only visible in performance but also instructed my philosophies as a pedagogue.

After I proceeded teaching Edu the material, I began to design our spatial relationship and add moments of pause and counterpoint to the original 2019 material. As I explained in *Chapter One: The Diagram* the initial Paganini diagram study only set parameters for movement initiation points. Timing, and space were not part of the equation, but a byproduct of the movement generated. In devising a variation for *Overscore*, I worked from beginning to end making choices based on rehearsal efficiency and aesthetic desire. I adhered to the syntax of movement initiations, but I allowed myself to lean into moments of pleasurable compositional

choices regarding time, space and dynamic. Each tiny break in obedience to the score felt like an oasis of agency. The allowance of impulses of desire was a return to the constructive feedback from Gelfand in *Crash test* about finding a balance of creative autonomy and compulsory direction. As I learned from her reluctance to break her score into 30 discordant sections, there could be a balance of structure in freedom. Our commitment to habit breaking didn't have to be totalitarian to be authentic. This return to agency was a reminder of why I set out to break habits in the first place. Enforcing structure enabled a resurgence of fresh potential in choice making that drove beyond automatic habit.

I made two choreographic additions to the original *Untitled Translation* score. The first, a duet insert that did not rely on a code system to build. I craved a disruption to the Paganini system and after months of working alone throughout the pandemic, I wanted to prioritize physical contact. The partnered duet insert was built through an investigation of action and reaction. This was constructed primarily using a “first thought, best thought” approach and later adjusted through analysis-based adjustments regarding rhythm. I wanted to maintain the quick gestural beats of *Untitled Translation* but allow the sensation of weight in partnering to interject contrast to the otherwise steely, mechanical unison.

The second addition was an improvisational score performed by Edu as a second interruption to the Paganini score. This score is also repeated later by Koepke and Edu in duet form. I devised the improvisational score alongside the making of *Untitled Translation* in 2019 to help me find variety in my choice making. The score was sparked by the words of Pouillaude, “*Improvisation must aim at establishing a new code, or risk finding itself trapped within a preexisting idiom.*”⁵³ I was drawn to Pouillaude's idea of improvisation as a systematic code and

⁵³ Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography*, 257.

drafted a score designed to counter habit. The task of the score is to allow a movement impulse to arrive without pre-meditated visualization. Once the impulse is triggered the next goal is to interrupt it with a gesture in complete opposition to the initial action. This oppositional action then serves as the next impulse to oppose. This creates a looping series of obstruction. The crux of the score is holding two minds. One mind is the constant unconscious flow of intuition, the second, instantaneous intervention of non-compliance. When the performer is unable to stay present in the intentional doing and undoing of this score, they must stop, clear the palette, and begin again. The same is true if the performer believes their impulse or intervention to be inauthentic. This creates immediate psychological confusion pertaining to personal discernment, ego, and authenticity to the score.

This improvisational score is in direct conversation with educational reformer, John Dewey's philosophies on habitual training mentioned in *Chapter One: The Diagram*. The general idea Dewey suggests is that the more specific the training, the less transferrable the behavior.⁵⁴ A philosophy I interpret to suggest that the scope of bodily coordination can be limited by muscular training in a uniform way. The repetition with which my dance training practiced the organization of limbs, the centering of weight, the integration of *plié*, the priority for both shape and fluidity makes those practiced proclivities at the forefront of my improvisations. The goal, what philosopher John Locke would describe as automatic skill.⁵⁵ When employing a score that asks for unconscious movement impulses, the output will generally be comprised of habitual patterns by the nature of their superficial readiness. But when I consider the connection between the mind and body, I contemplate how automatic skill relates to a habit of automatic thought. The improvisational score I devised commands an immediate secondary

⁵⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 69.

⁵⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 69.

action oppositional or inverse to the habit, creating a binary that strives to place the known and unknown in direct relation. Thus, the mind and body simultaneously engage in a practice of recognizing specialized training and stimulating responses that are not an antithesis to but an abundance beyond automatic or mechanical habit.⁵⁶

Solo for Hansel maintained its initial diagrammatic integrity without much additional intervention. The solo indeed landed in the structure of *Overscore* as a non sequitur. Taking place approximately one third of the way through the show, Koepke's nonchalant entrance into the space feels like a refreshing and bewildering surprise. One of the greatest choreographic challenges in translating Koepke's solo to the stage was finding a way for the subtleties of the gestures to translate while wearing a mask. The theatrical sensibilities derived from the text-based Cage diagram, *Solo for Voice No. 61*, included states of being, facial expressions, subtle adjustments of focus that became hard to read on stage. I realized that scale became a communicative variable. Although subtlety read on film, for stage Koepke was tasked with an inflated sense of broadcasting his directionality and posture. Focus became driven by the whole head. Dynamics had to really push range, the polarization allowing for tonal shift to be legible.

The table trio became one of my favorite diagrammatic metamorphoses within *Overscore*. As I briefly mentioned in *Chapter One: The Diagram*, *the table trio* was constructed as an offshoot of the initial Cage diagram, *Solo for Voice No. 61*. Each dancer received a list of color coded, language and symbols I repurposed from Cage's score, to derive a unique thread of gestural material. The creative process stretched from remote Zoom rehearsals to a socially distanced film shoot, and finally an in-person variation with physical contact. Our adherence to our rule systems sustained the journey. It is this adherence that allowed for glorious and

⁵⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 69.

unexpected discoveries that interjected the obedient tasks. For example, one of the color-coded tasks instructed in remote process was to connect to another performer at specific moments of their phrase. Not knowing the action or timing of the other performers tracks, these contact points were imagined, hypothesized but executed with simulated conviction. This clarity and conviction created a dynamic clarity and instructive tracing of space for the in-person variation. Wildly, some moments of contact were possible, others accurately described limbs where they were not, and simulated the weight of a grasp from empty space. The more we committed to the integrity of our tracks, the more opportunities arose for potential detours. Unable to let the promise of a fantastically positioned lift or exaggerated space hold pass by, I selected these golden inserts along the way as we ironed out three loops of *the table trio* material. The inserts served as slight variations within the repetition. The inserts signaled to the performers which loop they were in and added a filter of complexity within the visual structure of the repeats. Like to *Solo for Hansel*, subtle focus shifts and tonal differentiation in the head, neck and torso were less legible with the mask. For this reason, we brought a clipped, attentiveness to the demeanor of the gestures. I realized that the casual, task-based approach to the gestures could read as lack-luster, unclear, or marked. By bringing a hair more bound energy and brightness to the choreography, the connection points, and rhythm of the beats became clearer. The brightness and crispness of the head movements created well-defined indications between performers that linked the mechanics of the three performers tracks with one another and the set.

The final choreographic moments of *Overscore* included the *Men's grappling duet* and an improvised solo for myself. The *Men's grappling duet* was constructed from the *Wolfpack wrestling technique flow chart*. Each weight sharing action was in compliance with a directive from the chart. The duet was bookended by a partnering trio. The trio repeats twice, the first

time, a simpler variation, the second adding inserts of complexity. As mentioned in *Chapter One: The Diagram*, the trio was constructed as a blend of rule adherence and intuition. In both creative process and order of the show, the partnering trio came after *the table trio*. The saturation of bound rule-based gestures in *the table trio*, made the cast crave swaths of momentum and flight. For this reason, we used the partnering trio to cleanse the space and break up or redirect pent up energy. I began with the *Wolfpack wrestling technique flowchart* for an impetus for connection, and from there, allowed intuition to fall out into sweeping trails of reactionary movement. Unfamiliar ledges to propelled familiar arcs of action and moments of familiar follow through were interposed to arrive at unusual connection points. The partnering trio became the most expansive locomotion in *Overscore*, a tumbling breeze of recognizable and uncharted navigation. It is no surprise to me that this section is most expansive, as it was one of few sections constructed without the spatial restrictions of Covid lockdown.

I intended to pull from my research with improvisation for the closing solo of *Overscore*, specifically my studies related to Trisha Brown's *Watermotor*. I imagined this would be a moment for me to respond to the overwhelming structure of the scored work prior. I imagined holding space for a reflective, spatially expansive, lush, and impulsive physical response. The solo intended to be an authentic response, not a planned outcome or predetermined finish. I wanted to undermine the weight of an ending with the spontaneous authenticity of arriving in the moment. Placing this task on the heels of such rigorously scored physicality removed any transitional space for preparation. Some performances of *Overscore*, I found myself forcing a moment of recalibration although the structure of the work didn't construct one. I stood and waited for an impulse to come. I let options pass through me without moving, feeling impulses rise and empty out before grabbing an action that felt grounded as a contrary response. Other

performances, I began moving straight away, letting information flood out of my body without considering intent, trusting that anything that propelled from my body at that point in the show was as valid as an improvisational response. Those performances didn't land for me. I didn't want to premeditate an ending, but I wanted more parameters for my final score. The last dress rehearsal, I decided to restrict the solo with light. This limitation created a visual anchor that instructed the solo was an epilogue, a response that was related, but removed, an emulsion. The process of framing this solo was only one example of how the interdisciplinary approach to this work instructed compositional choices choreographically.

Revisiting the frame

Draw a different frame around the same set of circumstances and new pathways come into view.⁵⁷

-Rosamund and Benjamin Zander

All my work with compositional framing throughout the pandemic from applied Instagram analysis to editing dance for camera served the construction of *Overscore* for in-person live performance. The combination of cinematic composition and interdisciplinary experimentation set me up to navigate scenic, lighting and projection design as structural components within the production of choreographic process and performance. Andrés Poch's steel, mobile cube, Mitchell Cronin's stark edged lights, and Xavier Taylor's geometric symbol animation and live capture projection wove alongside physicality as dynamic choreographic players. The implementation of design disciplines became an essential component in sculpting a cohesive whole. Each discipline offering a compositional frame that coordinated time, space, and energy.

⁵⁷ Rosamund Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The art of possibility* (New York: Penguin Press, 2002), 1.

Scenic design: frame and function

On August 17, 2021, upon my arrival to the Kogod Theatre, the shop team greeted me by the shop door with large grins. Pleased with their construction, they led me through a brief introduction to Poch's scenic design structure. The massive steel cube frame is constructed entirely of steel, weighing about 200lbs. The cube sits upon eight castors which allow it to roll multi-directionally, pivot, and rotate. The welded frame comprised of four rectangular panels are joined with removable corner braces that allow for the cube to maintain 90-degree angles while being manipulated. When the braces are removed and pressure is applied to one of the vertical posts, the cube can be compressed into a narrow rhombus creating a nearly flat, two-dimensional landscape. In addition, two of the four rectangular panels are stretched with scrim. Each scrim panel is attached to the frame with hinges which allow for the panels to swing open in both directions and be removed completely from the cube frame. This allows for two mobile scrim pieces to be isolated from the cube structure itself. Conceptually, this design paralleled my diagrammatic studies. The cube could be assembled, disassembled, and restructured. The cube is another player in the performance, like many other entities throughout this work, it continues to adapt, reinvent itself and reorganize.

Witnessing the cube move from scaled design drawings to a three-dimensional, functional structure was thrilling for Poch and me. Much of our collaboration in early stages of design was spent hypothesizing how we could build a stable, yet responsive design that could offer multiple framing options for choreography, as well as a dimensional and functional projection surface. The shop's choice to build the frame from heavy steel allowed for stability and weight bearing potential and the choice to use castors and barrel hinges provided the malleability for transformation.

Because the set was designed to be responsive, creative research time discovering its functionality was essential. The initial rehearsal intensive led to practical and artistic developments that drove the integration of the cube forward. I was committed to the cast being the only personnel to move the cube. This choice made the action of the performance self-contained. Without crew support, the manipulation of the cube became another puzzle piece coordinated by the performers' palpable effort and labor. Due to our small cast size, there were several moments where we were attempting to move the cube with one or two individuals. Rotating the cube and driving it while maintaining its orientation caused the joints to buckle when driving with less personnel. This is because an imbalance of pressure on one of the vertical posts caused the 90-degree corners to bow. The shops added two additional corner braces which allowed the cube to maintain its geometric integrity which allowed a singular individual to more easily locomote the cube.

The second structural change was adding magnets to the swinging doors. The doors mobility allows for many configurations throughout the show. However, for the first section of the work, the cube maintains its form. By adding magnets to the swinging doors, we gained a more secure and streamlined look while moving it as a contained structure. The shops applied these magnets on both sides of the doors which allowed for more choreographic options in terms of directionality and sequence for the cube's continuous transformation throughout the show.

Scenic design: frame and context

Like Krumme's simply drawn square in *Rope Dance (Seiltänzer)*, the cube acts as container, frame, projection surface, partner, and landscape. It serves as both a frame for action and a canvas for projection. To me, the cube represents the containment of organizational thinking and categorical boundaries. It also represents what it means to continuously refine a

system of many variables. Within the first day of rehearsing with the cube, it became clear that its presence applied an enormous context to the choreography. Challenges ranged from contextual implications like the cube indicating pandemic isolation, to more logistical considerations like the how the cube would dictate choreographic composition. It is undeniable that the impression of the pandemic will generate context for performance. Over the last two years, the effects of isolation, the desire for physical contact, and the constant negotiation of space intersect choice making in performance. In many ways, it would be naïve to assume that *Overscore* could exist outside the scope of such a cultural impact. The cube's initial design in 2020 was created before the Covid crisis, Poch's earliest design, a familiar, yet stark, 8x8 bedroom set. We never imagined the following 16 months we would all be more familiar with our bedrooms than ever before. There are certainly coincidental design themes that continue to materialize retrospectively in the wake of Covid-19. However, I neither wanted to press the cube be representational of isolation, nor deny that this process has been undoubtedly shaped by the circumstances of the pandemic. From the earliest design sketches through the square, white walled studio I rented for the *Crash test* virtual premiere, the design for the cube morphed and changed to reflect the resources and realities of each step of the process. The cube's final design, a spare, yet functional apparatus, became less representational of a dwelling space, and instead more of a partner for framing action-perhaps a nod to the way Zoom framed our lives for multiple semesters.

From a more logistical perspective, since the cube's inception, I was conscious of how reduced square footage would impact the choreography. In July 2021, before Poch's cube was constructed, I used painters' tape to mark the dimensions. This process enabled me to visualize how to approach the choreographic tasks within the spatial restriction of the speculated set

dimensions. I made decisions about when to be inside the cube and when to break beyond it. I didn't want the cube to become representational of restriction beyond the performers' control. I wanted it to be clear that although the cube acts upon the dancers spatially, it was also an obstacle within our control. I was enticed by the challenge to scale the demands of the first sections virtuosity to a 64 sq feet footprint. Indeed, the challenge was real. I aimed to translate the movement to the cube's interior without removing material or changing the sequence order. My tools for compacting the phrasing were to adjusting facings, scale size and dynamics. Making use of the cube's diagonals became helpful in most binds as it offered the longest spatial trajectory for movement. The dimension of the diagonal of a square is found using the following calculation: $d = a\sqrt{2}$. Therefore, if the sides of the cube are 8ft, the diagonal is 11 feet and 3/8 inches. Since the opening solo of *Overscore* requires several sweeping leg movements and traveling floor work, the cubes orientation is placed with a corner facing downstage. This choice allowed for the diagonal to be parallel to the downstage line, providing easy access to the diagonal on flat horizontal and vertical trajectories. With the two swinging scrim doors closed to be adjacent to one another, this also allowed for two projection surfaces to be upstage frames for the physicality.

Additionally, the cubes 10ft height produced a considerable amount of head space above performer height which compositionally draws the eye upward. This upward spatial pull combined with the facial conceal of Covid-19 mask compliancy, urged for a pronounced upward and outward focus. This prompted a careful balance of maintaining clarity in the cascade of truncated movement isolations while tracking and toggling how and when to extend focus and distal reach to the cube's periphery and beyond. However, tailoring the material to the cube was the least prominent problem solving with set design.

The most notable compositional provocation of the set design was its power. Stationary and static, without a performer in sight, the cube dominates the space, its sleek yet massive frame a visual anchor that defines gravity in the space. It became clear to me, marveling at its imposing presence, that I would have to be incredibly mindful of how I craft my relationship to it, beginning of course, with my introduction to it. To avoid the potential trap of tropes regarding the helpless female archetype, or any impression of the cube acting upon me, it was clear I should not begin the show within its boundaries. Instead, I made the choice to be visible entering the cube at the top of the show. I approached the structure irreverently, communicating my agency as a performer and diffusing the preciousness of its confines. With this choice I affirmed, “If I choose to enter, I can choose to exit.” I communicate that I am about to engage in a partnership with this set that explores mastery and negotiation, structure, and freedom. Rebecca Steinberg, UMD first year MFA candidate in dance, remarked,

The combination of your irreverence followed by the mastery and clarity of your opening phrasing sets up this idea of mastery of some system. We trust you know what is happening, where the edges are, how you are choosing. We quickly trust you are the mastermind of the logic.⁵⁸

My first choice to exit the cube was about four minutes into the opening solo. This felt like enough time to get swept up in the rapid paced movement initiations of the phrasing. The opening solo became about tracking the body, its relationship to the cube’s geometry, and identifying the labor enforced by its limits. Fueled rather than defeated by its confines, I exit the cube as irreverently and matter-of-factly as I entered. This provided a visual breath of relief before I return, this time bringing performer Nana Edu along with me. I knew if I could build

⁵⁸ Feedback conversation with UMD graduate student Rebecca Steinberg during informal showing on August 20th, 2021.

trust in the opening moments of the work that conveyed control over the cube, I could generate expectations and break them later. Set designer Poch noted,

Your choices to enter or depart the confines of the structure signal rule systems and power dynamics early on. Your tenacity to stay within the cube in the first section builds tension- an expectation that this show will exist as a solo in a stationary box. Is that all there is? Then, the moment you break the cube, you signal there is more. A new performer, and now the cube moves. Each next action, an exciting accumulation or turn of events.⁵⁹

Once Poch and I determined which actions we wanted the cube to complete, I was tasked with the pace of compositional framing. To achieve the arc that Poch mentioned and to conceal the cube's transformative potential, I needed to craft the timing of its adaptability. The cube began as a container for action, framing movement within its confines. Dancers then moved through it as an architectural portal, outlining entrances and exits. Approximately six minutes we began moving the cube through the space. This revealed its mobility and offered a roving frame, capturing action and concealing it with the rotation of its enclosed scrim. About one third of the way through Koepke's performance in *Solo for Hansel*, the John Cage diagram requested he exit the performance space and reenter. It is this moment we decided to reveal the scrim doors could hinge open. He exits the cube via the door hinge and reenters the cube, door still ajar. During Koepke's anecdotal monologue, the cube is rotated again, this time spinning open both scrim doors to flank another variation of an architectural frame. This time the cube and its opened doors stretch across the entire diagonal of the thrust play space. The center of the cube, now exposed on all four sides, became a 3-dimensional arena for the omnidirectional *table trio*. The dining room table, anchored in the center of the hollow cube, created its own architectural composition in conversation with the cube's steel frame. The three performers, three chairs and

⁵⁹ Feedback conversation with UMD graduate student and scenic designer Andrés Poch during informal showing on August 20th, 2021.

dining table within the 64sq ft frame, make use of every inch of space. Even the space beneath the dining room table, became a mini proscenium for the shuffling of feet. *The table trio* finished by constructing a throne-like sculpture. I sat atop the mountain of furniture, while Edu and Koepke closed the scrim doors unison. In a single beat, the throne is contained and framed within a dark shift of Mitchell Cronin's lighting design. The cube then became a weightbearing structure as I clutched the top bar of the cube and Edu and Koepke struck the furniture I scaled to get there. From this point in the show forward, the dancers began the process of deconstructing the cube. The corner braces were removed, and the structure was compressed into its landscape position, creating a foreground for the now expansive stage space. This shift of spatial perspective offered a major shift for projection design which I'll speak to later. The final choreography of the cube included the removal of a single scrim panel. A mobile frame, operated by a rotating coupling of performers, trailed the action of a single dancer. The dancer's final improvisation framed by the panel in fleeting companionship with Cronin's slices of light, sometimes capturing silhouette other times, Taylor's projection and in brief magical moments, all the above. In each transformation the cube and the choreography were in direct conversation. During our collaborative research with *Crash test*, Poch was aptly named "the curator of the present", Poch maintained this role in *Overscore*. The cube framed action within and beyond its confines, redefining perceptions of space and activating the relationship between viewership, choreography, and interactive set design.

Projection design: revealing the diagram/framing the present

Collaborations with Xavier Taylor in *Untitled Translation*, *Crash test*, *Wren + Wings* and *digital cache* generated the content and creative direction for the three major projection palettes

for *Overscore*. The first section of *Overscore* sampled the choreographic symbol notation from *Untitled Translation* and employed the audio reactivity we discovered during the process of *digital cache*. The symbol notation is isolated to one panel with the opening solo. Symbol order, location, duration, and scale are variables for the Isadora patch. Once we were in the tech process, I recognized the visual overload of the symbol language with the dense movement vocabulary. For that reason, we adjusted the duration parameter of the symbol notation to have a longer time range. Attempting to develop the compositional arc of the symbol language, the projections occupied both scrim panels upon Edu's entrance to the cube. This created a quartet of associated syntax between two bodies and two panels of projected design. With a desire to make a clearer connection between the symbols, the choreography and Gelfand's live musical composition, Taylor added inserts of symbol sentences. The sentences accumulated one symbol at a time in a linear arrangement, hinting to a code logic. Additionally, the audio reactivity was inserted toward the end of the first section of *Overscore* offering one last visual nod the integration of sound, movement, and notation.

Projections had a respite for the majority of Koepke's *Solo for Hansel* material. Since *Solo for Hansel* functioned as a non-sequitur it was the only moment in the show void of projection. It became about the conversation between Koepke's movement and Mitchell Cronin's moody use of light, and shadow. As an attempt to thread a hint of the prior systems at play in the section prior, a single line of projected symbol language spilled onto the floor as a graphic recall when Koepke opens the scrim door panel. For me, this moment hinted to the complex overlap of compiling and overlaying multiple systematic processes.

The table trio sampled three elements of media design. These included the short film Taylor and I created in 2020 entitled *Wren + Wings*, graphic text from John Cage's *Solo for*

Voice No. 61, and live video feed from a camera mounted to the interior of the cube. The two scrim panels framed the live performance adding a visual flurry of the three projection vocabularies. The live feed was edited into grayscale which blends alongside *Wren + Wings* content creating a disorientation of time and space. The panels offer a large thumbnail of detail, whether archival *Wren + Wings* or the live capture, the viewer gets a more detailed and intimate view of various body parts and textural images of the dining table.

Following along with the development and integration of the cube, the projections too went through a metamorphosis. Upon the cube's compression into landscape, the projections slid from the cube's containment up the wall. Utilizing the creative research from *crash test* and *digital cache*, four perimeter cameras captured live content and projected a mosaic of larger-than-life action. Going a step further, Taylor decided to pour the content from the upstage scrim onto the floor. A mixed digital collage of distorted filters, heightened contour edits and over pixilation covered the space. The choreography, set and projection design worked together to transform a space of scored order and obedience into a dysmorphic array of images that warp time and embellish liveness. The final image of *Overscore* is a looping clip of live action captured from the closing improvised solo. Each performance, Taylor selected a clip from the closing solo in real-time and manipulated the image into a scarcely recognizable pulse of lines and data housed in the center of the last remaining cube panel.

During *Crash test*, I referred to Taylor as "the archive" a catalog of video footage, and symbol notation trailing the ongoing process. Taylor's conscientiousness in archiving gave the work a self-referential quality that nodded to the years of draft work compiling into *Overscore*. It wasn't until we discovered the beauty of live capture in the process of *digital cache* that we realized the breadth of Taylor's role as archivist. In *Overscore*, Taylor exposed the duration of

our creative process in various frame rates. He gave the audience the opportunity to look back years with the symbol language from 2019 or blink back seconds as he captured and projected fleeting improvisation moments after its physical expiry.

Overscore: closing remarks

Did I succeed in breaking habit? Yes. I imagine these habit-breaking efforts as an expanse to my artistic range. I've mentioned throughout this thesis that my goal was never to break habit and discard embodied knowledge, but rather to add to it. This research has opened doors to future ways of working, thinking, repurposing, and associating ideas. In terms of devising an interdisciplinary collaboration, did our team succeed? Yes. My collaborative team defied odds as we continued three years of conceptual research throughout a pandemic. From virtual shows and remote processes to persevering challenges of accessing rehearsal time with the responsive set design, to technology crashes in light board and projection software, the team stayed agile, resourceful, and optimistic. We showed great dexterity in the way we brainstormed moving forward in less-than-ideal circumstance.

Limitations only pushed for more innovation and heightened the team's communication. Our trust as a team allowed for our roles to be fluid. Poch, though having completed his scenic design in August 2021, was present at every rehearsal and gave detailed notes regarding everything from dramaturgy to movement dynamics and spatial design. Taylor, came to know the choreographic beats intimately, building cues for projection of off nuances of movement initiations and offering options for cinematic framing. During technical rehearsal, costume designer Stephanie Parks considered the conceptual thread of action and reaction, construction and deconstruction and gave helpful insights on the motivation of lighting, sound and scenic

cues. Lighting designer Mitchell Cronin helped me create contrast, and rhythmic variation throughout the work. We consistently negotiated the choreographic motivations and rhythmic beats in triggering cues. This fluid exchange in an interdisciplinary approach to art making is perhaps what I am most satisfied with. The mutual trust, and equity we constructed over a long-term process allowed for ego to soften in the creative practice. Each of us sought less control over our individual mediums and shared more of a goal on making clear conceptual and design choices to serve the goals of the work. Our teamwork not only served the direction of the work but was palpable in the performance.

It would be a wild exaggeration on my part to say that ego was completely absent from the work. I can speak to a handful of ways my own ego was tested in the creative process. The first, brings me all the way back to the making of *Untitled Translation* in 2019. After the first showing of the phrase material, and I got feedback that it was too dense, that it wore people out. This flared up my ego straight away. I found myself thinking, “why is it my responsibility to make things palatable for you?” I realized that my feelings were hurt. I worked hard on an idea that I liked and my reaction to the feedback was defensive. I translated the feedback into, “I am unwatchable. My ideas are not interesting.” Once I removed my ego from the critical feedback, I shifted the question to be about finding a threshold for durational endurance in viewership. If the choreographic fabric stays dense for an extended period without change, nuance begins to all feel the same. There was something to learn in that. I made considered choices about how to construct rule systems for diagrams that would generate range in varied choreographic results. I was able to braid breath into the arc of *Overscore* by being thoughtful about how I curated diagram studies into its weaving structure. I think ego exists in both reactions to that initial feedback. There is ego in the choice of saying, “No, I will not change. I don’t care if the work is

challenging.” There is also ego in the choice of saying, “I will change, because what these audiences experience matters to me.” The combination of both feels authentic to how I wanted to respond.

Another moment I remember hearing ego knocking was when I was devising the closing section of *Overscore*. I was confronted with the weight of endings and felt the urge to default to familiar, traditional energetic arcs in performance. I felt the need to tie up loose ends in an a/b/a structure or finish with a provoking question. Therefore, the decision to end the show with an improvisation for Gelfand, Taylor and I felt almost irresponsible. I wondered if an open-ended ending could make all the systematic efforts before it vulnerable to its failure. In this moment, I realized my overarching tendency to think in either/or binaries. It could be improvisational, or it could be set. It could be driven by ego, or devoid of ego. Perhaps my work translating movement from symbol binaries was creating a habitual proclivity for this kind of clear-cut, yes or no, in or out thinking. In this moment, I was reminded to remember shading, the spaces between, the agreements that dwell somewhere in the seams of structure and freedom. Working in this intermediary place brought me back to Sillman. She writes,

Diagrams are failures, paintings are failures, and life is a failure. The diagram can only do so much. The rest is as Donald Barthelme asks, “What happens next?” And then the answer is, “I don’t know.” That’s what a good diagram indicates: that there are things beyond control.⁶⁰

The idea of diagrams being porous or rife with possibility was what drew me toward utilizing them in the first place. However, I realize that once I found my systematic approach, I tended to grip onto it. The limitation and ambitious diligence to the rules served the physical output I’m sure, but in moments, I had to remember to hold space for my humanity. I had to

⁶⁰ Donald Barthelme is an American short story writer known for his post-modernist style of short fiction. Amy Sillman refers to Donald in her web zine. Amy Sillman, “The O-G vol. 1” accessed November 1, 2021, https://www.amysillman.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/OG1_zine.pdf

remember that I am in fact human, not machine. My mother likes to make a joke when I'm being a perfectionist where she pretends to bend down and pick something up off the floor and mimes placing it on my chest. Then she says, "Oops, your H must have fallen off. This is supposed to say human." Many of the noteworthy moments were the breaks in the system. Breaks were driven by any number of things desire, ego, fatigue, memory. The act of engaging humanity didn't need to be contorted into display. The limitations of the scores, their impossible design and dedicated effort allowed humanity to come through. I had to remember to make space for that.

When trying to land on an ending for *Overscore*, I made space for humanity in messiness, not knowing, releasing systematic control. The context of the unknown reverberated through every aspect of the creative process, and we pushed through at each hurdle. It made sense for us conceptually to close the piece with an element of indeterminacy. Our only terms for the score were to decumulate players, starting with dance, then sound, and finishing with projection design. This was the loose contour of the score. The final two-minute ending became a triangular conversation between Gelfand, Taylor and me, where we could lean into the moment and rest assured that we have done the work throughout our research to contextualize the ending. We had built our relationship. We had generated the content. The closing moment then became less about what we were doing, and more about how we were framing it. The dramaturgical choice for the digital capture of the final solo to continue its metamorphosis as the physical bodies of the artists exit was a hint at ongoingness. I circle back to my statement in *Chapter One: The Diagram*, "Laborers in the trades are artisans of utility." What is the utility of an ephemeral art? What is the lasting impression of *Overscore*? To me, the integrated union of dance, sound and design in that final moment of the show felt like an emblem of *Overscore's* value. For me, lasting value

goes beyond performance. There is value in the dedication of committing to ambitious tasks, in experiencing the development of long-term collaborative relationships, in constructing connectivity from incongruent parts, and expanding critical thinking beyond enthusiastically imaginative hypotheses.

Appendix: Diagrams and Figures

Figure 1

24 Caprices for Violin in B minor, Niccolò Paganini

Solo Violin Caprice in B Minor
Op. 1, No. 2
Niccolò Paganini

61

⁶¹ Niccolò Paganini's 24 Caprices for Violin in B minor instructed the choreography for *Untitled Translation*. This sheet music is from: https://musescore.com/user/13502736/scores/5343214?share=copy_link.

Figure 2A, 2B

Excerpts from constructing choreographic rules systems for Niccolò Paganini's 24 *Caprices* for Violin in B minor diagram study

Music → Movement Translation Rules

Head
Shoulders
Pelvis
Knees
Feet

= directional change
~ = means connected momentum
~~# = level change~~
= reset • fingers • hum

ribs/heart | head | knees | head | thighs |
head

R direction | knees | head | pelvis | head
or
Chest
head

pelvis | direction energy | head 3x connected | head 2x

Shoulders | head | chest | head | pelvis |
head

(36)

4a thigh | direction change | head | direction | ~~knee~~ knee
head | thigh | head

→ R thigh turns / quick headstand rotate
R knee down | head to knee | decay
circle L thigh | head decays to back
like "arm sleep"

assign different parameters to

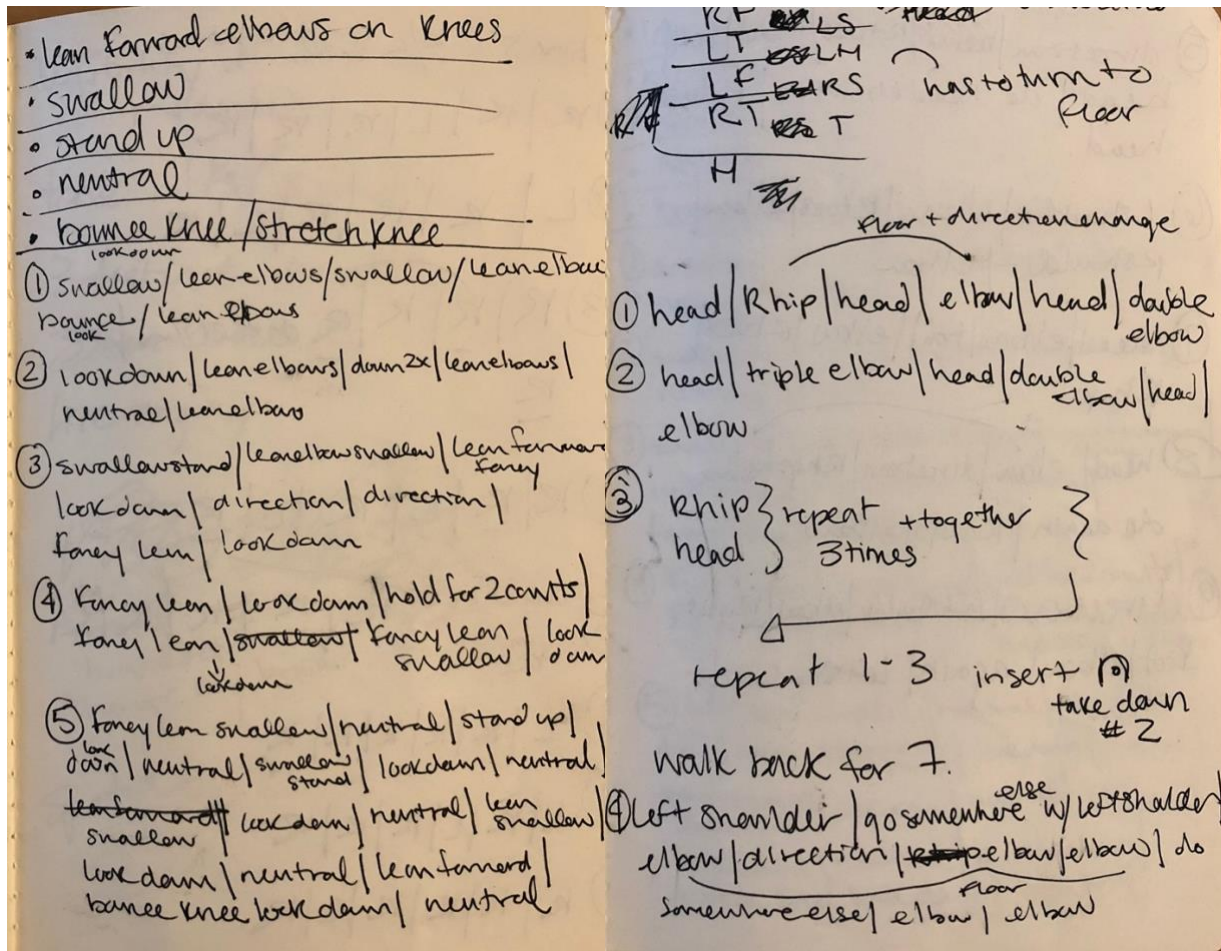
pelvis | head | heart | head | shoulders
head

62

⁶² Notes from choreography sketch book in early process of constructing choreographic rules from Niccolò Paganini's 24 *Caprices* for Violin in B minor diagram study.

Figure 2C, 2D

Excerpts from constructing choreographic rules systems for Niccolò Paganini's 24 Caprices for Violin in B minor diagram study

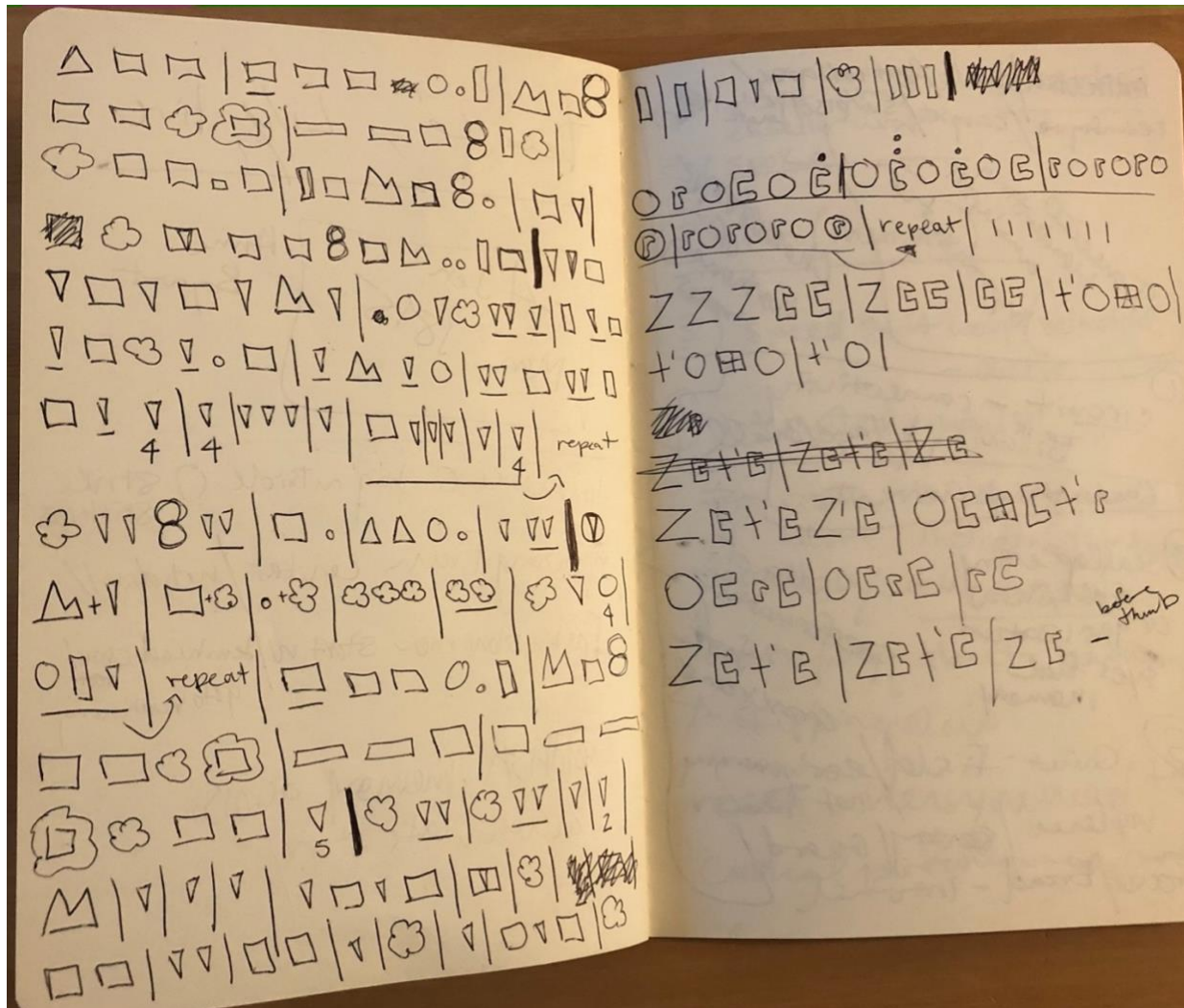


63

⁶³ Notes from choreography sketch book in early process of constructing choreographic rules from Niccolò Paganini's 24 Caprices for Violin in B minor diagram study.

Figure 3

An excerpt from my initial choreographic symbol notation of Niccolò Paganini's *24 Caprices for Violin in B minor* diagram study



64

⁶⁴ This excerpt of my choreographic notation is pulled from my choreography sketch book in 2019. The notation symbols represent the choreography devised from Niccolò Paganini's *24 Caprices for Violin in B minor* diagram study.

Figure 4

An excerpt of Lily Gelfand's symbol logic for transposing choreographic notation into a musical score for cello. A key system for transferring symbol to note

Handwritten musical score for cello by Lily Gelfand. The score is written on a single page and includes a key system for transferring symbols to notes. The notation is a mix of musical symbols and letters, with some symbols circled or boxed. The score is divided into several systems, each with a key system for transferring symbols to notes. The key system includes symbols like 13, 22, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100. The score includes various musical notations, symbols, and annotations. The key system includes symbols like 13, 22, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100. The score includes various musical notations, symbols, and annotations. The key system includes symbols like 13, 22, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.

13 = silence
 O = A
 P = D
 E = F
 E = F#
 E = E/E#
 P = A/D
 Z = B
 t' = C/C#
 G = G/G#
 Z' = Bb
 Z B t' E Z' E | O E G E t' P | O E P E |
 B F# C# F B F | A F G# F C D | A F D F |
 O E P E | P E | Z B t' E | Z E t' E | Z E.
 A F D E D F B F C# F B F C F B F

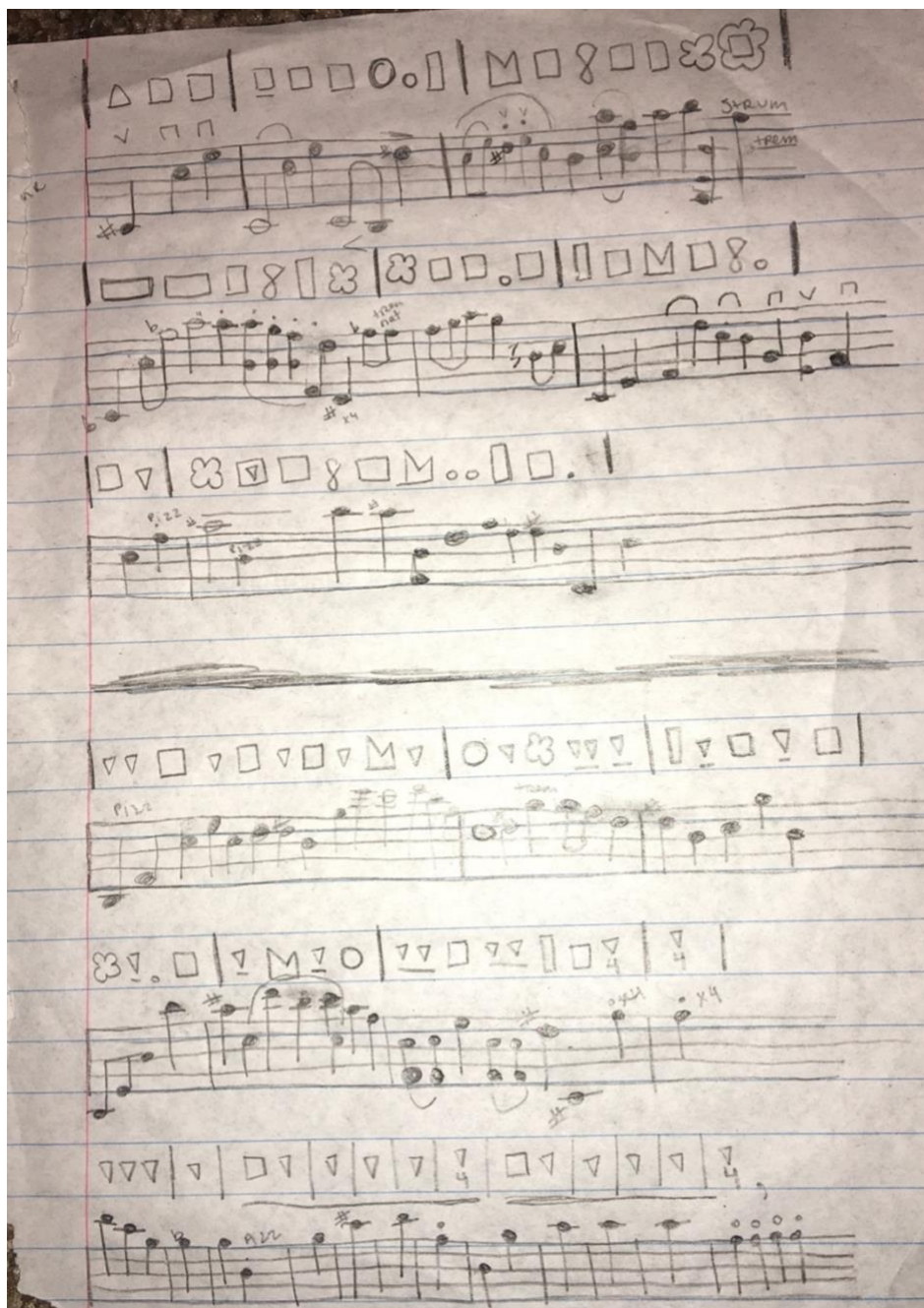
14 = hand phrase
 15 = new? w/ zariz
 18 = accumulation insert
 24 = wall (new)
 30 = new

65

⁶⁵ Excerpt of Lily Gelfand's symbol system emailed from Lily Gelfand in 2019.

Figure 5

An excerpt of Lily Gelfand's notes depicting the transference of symbol logic into classical staff-based music notation for cello



66

⁶⁶ Excerpt of Lily Gelfand's symbol system emailed from Lily Gelfand in 2019.


An excerpt of Lily Gelfand's notes depicting a segment of her original composition for cello



90

Figure 7

A hybrid diagram study I created which combines measures 65-68 from Niccolò Paganini's 24 *Caprices for Violin in B minor* with excerpts of text sampled from Frédéric Pouillaude's *Unworking Choreography*



First Measure

19 3 18 2 17 1

1[Ideality|and] 2[the|the] 3[signification|of] 4[the|the] 5[or neutrality|aesthetic] 6[part (eyes closed) part]

18 2 19 3 20 4

7[signification|of] 8[the|1] 9[ideality|and] 10[the (head down) and] 11[works|the] 12[the (eyes closed) it]

Second Measure

11

[We might, then, reformulate this first condition as follows:]

[gestures: 19, 3, 18, 2, 17, 1, 18, 2, 19, 3, 20, 4, 11]

Third Measure

9 12 9 12 9 12 9 12 9 12 9

13[The-the-discussion-structure-in-of-part-address-I-and-suggested-its-one-possible-condition-
content-on which dance can escape the absence of the work|possible] 14[dance (head down) to]

6 5 6 5

15[moderns|the] 16[dance(stand clap) to] 17[moderns|the] 18[dance(eyes closed) me]

7 5 8 5 9

19[is|she] 20[dance|to] 21[ballets|stephane] 22[dance|necessitate] 23[Voyeurism|the]

5

24[dance (eyesclosed) a]

Fourth Measure

10 5 11

25[SCENE|is] 26[dance|real?] 27[We,might, then reformulate this first condition as follows|reformulate]

5 12

28[dance|space] 29[The structure of address and its possible content|structure]

5

30[dance (eyes closed+head down) or]

13 5 12

31[part III|discussion] 32[dance|space] 33[The structure of address and its possible content|structure]

5 10 5

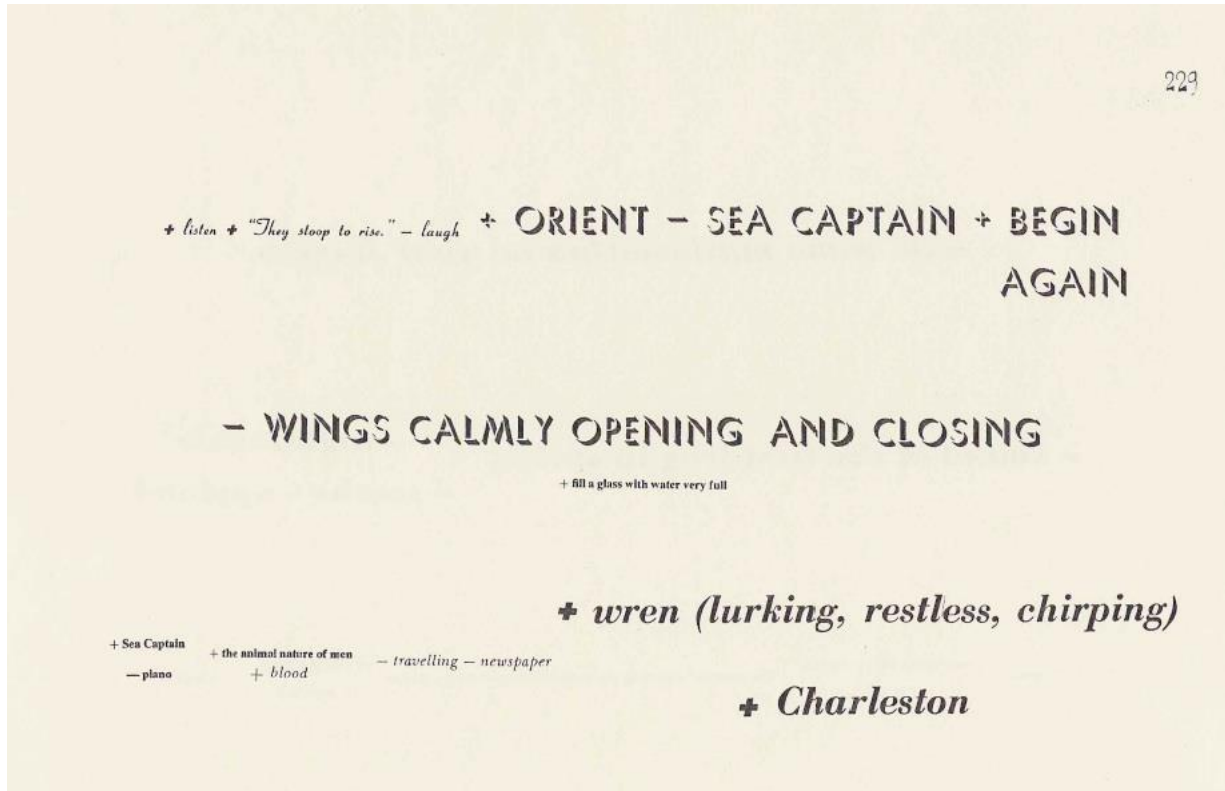
34[dance|A] 35[SCENE|known] 36[dance (eyes closed) twirls]

68

⁶⁸ This hybrid diagram study generated gestural material performed to a live dictation of text by the automated voice of Siri. The choreography did not make it into the final production of *Overscore*.

Figure 8A

Solo for Voice No. 61, graphic music score by John Cage



69

⁶⁹ *Solo for Voice No. 61* is a graphic music score by John Cage. I utilized this score to create the first loop (template one) of choreographic material for *Solo for Hansel*, performed by Tristan Koepke. Cage's score sourced from: <http://www.robertworby.com/2012/11/11/john-cage-song-books-cd/>.

Figure 8B

Solo for Voice No. 61 with stage directions and additional choreographic prompts

229

tiny
while hopping dynamically into frame
half seen
+ listen + "They stoop to rise." - laugh
leave
repeat with different interpretation 7 times
AGAIN
repeat is only altered material

This hyphen needs is a physical line through space

- WINGS CALMLY OPENING AND CLOSING
+ fill a glass with water very full
in a chair close to the camera
insert brief anecdote, introduce it but abruptly stop

+ wren (lurking, restless, chirping)

+ Sea Captain + the animal nature of men - travelling - newspaper
- piano + blood

+ Charleston - face upstage, get bigger in scale
finish anecdote while doing charleston

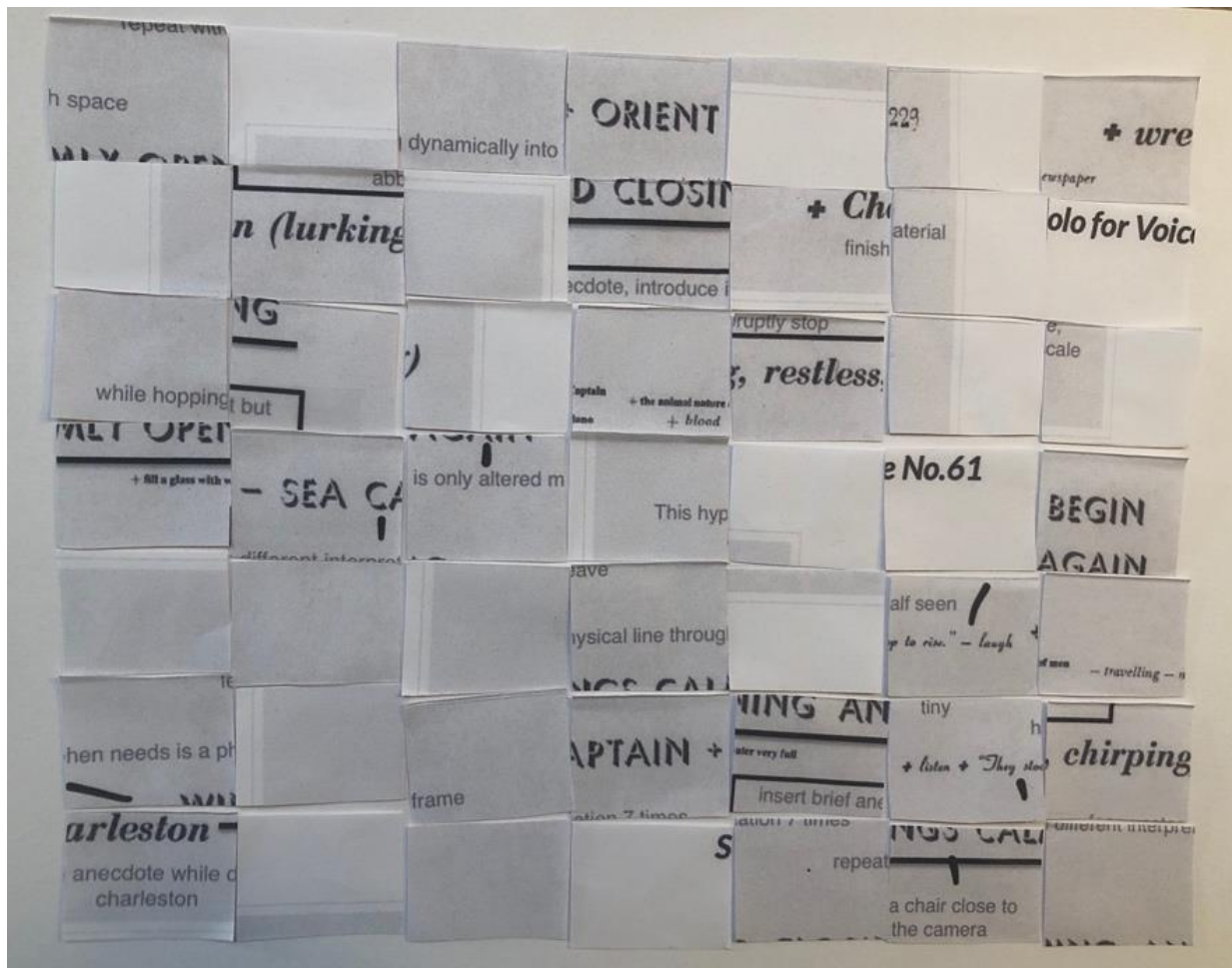
Solo for Voice No.61

70

⁷⁰ Using John Cage's *Solo for Voice No. 61* as a base choreographic template I added additional stage directions and movement prompts to the score to create the second loop (template two) for *Solo for Hansel*, performed by Tristan Koepke.

Figure 8C

Solo for Voice No. 61 cut into 49, 1-inch squares and reordered



71

⁷¹ Using Figure 8B as a base, I cut the score into 49, 1-inch squares and reordered them into a new composition. This diagram was used to create the third loop (template three) for *Solo for Hansel*, performed by Tristan Koepke.

Deconstruction of John Cage's *Solo for Voice No. 61* choreographic structure for *the table trio*

Nana:

- CALMyly. [link C]

Calmyly open?

- Plus-Wren, Calmllly
- Open and CLOse.

Pause. [link C,T]

Closing, Closing, Closing, Closing, [whole insert in round 2]
(Minus sign) (plus sign) Minus sign, +
WREN

- Lurking

WREN, WREN [link T]

Sea CapTain, + Sea CapTain, +
CALMyly, pause, opening. [link T]
AND
(fill a glass with water very full)
LURKING LURKING LURKING LURKING

- Wren + Wren +

PA-REN-THE-SIS
(Lurking) PARENTHESIS
Open and Calmmmmmmly?

- Calmlyyyyyy? [last 1/3 of insert in round 3]

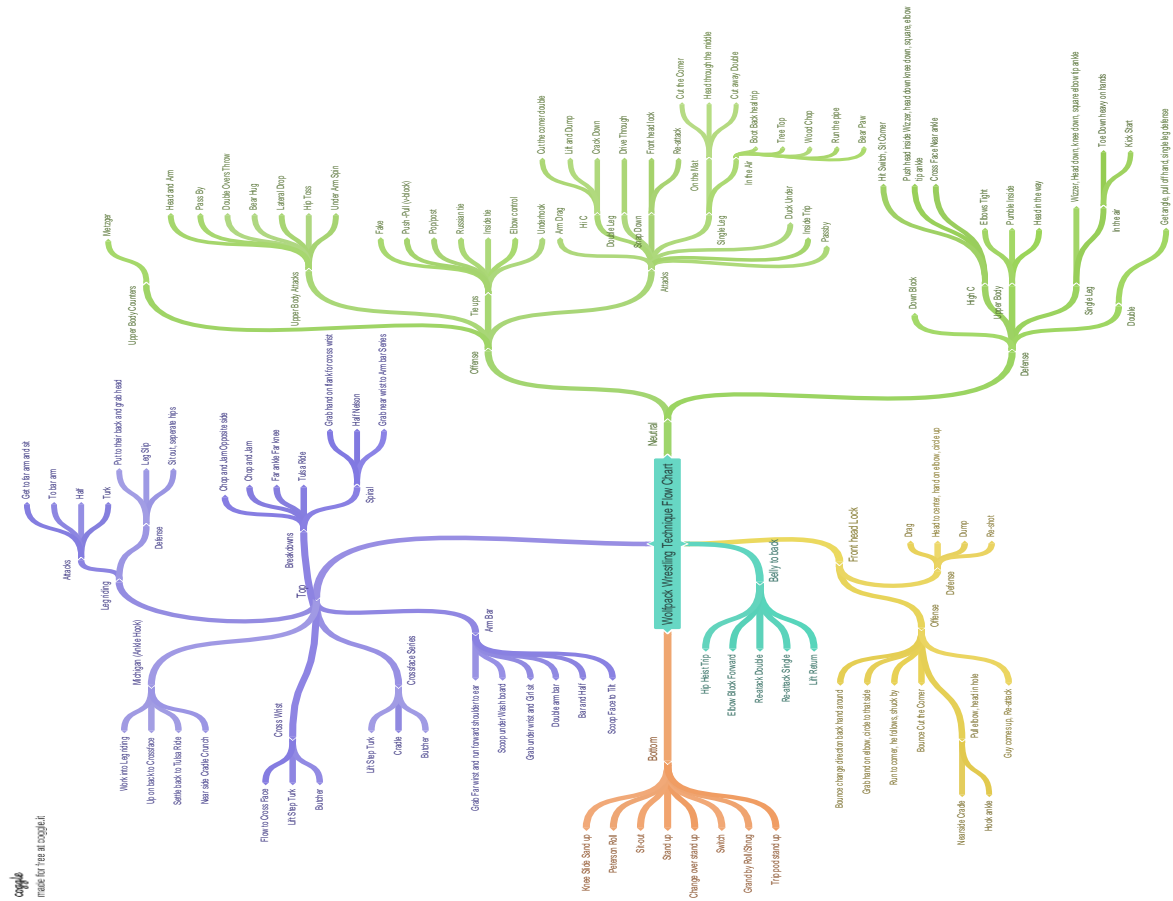
Wings. [link C, unlink C]

72

95

Figure 10

Wolfpack wrestling technique flow chart



73

⁷³ The *Wolfpack wrestling technique flow chart* was the diagram used to construct the *men's grappling duet* as well as additional ensemble partnering work. The wrestling technique flow chart was sourced from: <https://coggle.it/diagram/XZatBbstyK68EenL/t/wolfpack-wrestling-technique-flow-chart>.

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