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Framework

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FRAMEWORK

A Dance Honors Thesis

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THIS IS THE DANCE

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(See Emma Judkins' Honors Thesis VIDEO)

THIS IS THE WRITTEN PART

Artists are accustomed to being misunderstood. The moving, dancing, human body in performance is a complex communicator. I have seen dances that speak to subjects ranging from politics, to relationships, to the simple beauty of a body's aesthetics. With a world of inspiration to choose from, the chances for possible confusion in communication of purpose are numerous. By communication, I mean a desired translation, or interpretation of danced movements. This translation can exist in the exchange and replication of movement between bodies, in the relationship between audiences and performers, and in the process of constructing specific intents with movement. However, even through fastidious program notes, sideline descriptive explanations, and carefully constructed monologues, somehow the dancer-choreographer-performer's most fervent intentions can slip through the cracks. Non-artists are accustomed to being misunderstood, too. In an overwhelming, confusing, and contradictory world, the average person wants to be understood. Complications of translation exist in the ideological art-dance world I inhabit, and define the complexity that exists in relationships humans have with one another.

This thesis study is an exercise in clarity. My artistic purpose is to investigate and connect movement and language structures in dance performance, choreographic dance making, and the practice of dance as a part of life. In my effort define this experience, and myself more clearly, I am searching for a way to see how deeply I care if choreography, specifically my own choreography, is received in the manner I wish it to be or expect it to be understood. I feel as though dance has innumerable ways of intersecting with language; I shall categorize this relationship into four parts. There is

language in physical, movement-oriented vocabulary that seeks to communicate via the human form. There is language that is used to talk about dance, its social, cultural, and aesthetic impacts and ramifications. There is language inside the performing dancer, negotiating the choices and intentions of the body. There are words and text within dance, or the use of language whether written, spoken, or drawn in a performance space.

DANCE AS MOVEMENT LANGUAGE

The label 'artist' or even more specifically, 'modern dancer,' does not imply complexity. But I, as a performing artist, do relish obscurity. There is something alluring about abstraction for the sake of density. In choreographer Tere O'Connor's dance piece 'Wrought Iron Fog,' five dancers of alarmingly different statures twitch, hurl, and glide their bodies on stage for 50 minutes to a minimal electronic score with no emotion on their faces.[1] The dancers teeter on the point of physical exhaustion as they repeat floor-shaking jumping and tumbling passes. Each dancer is intently focused on personal trajectory, commanding the space with a confident presence. When I saw the piece live, there were no program notes; the title gave me no clues to a narrative other than thinking that the strands of silver filament that hung all around the space could be said 'fog.' The costumes were simply cut, and all solid colors. I was captivated for all 50 minutes. While O'Connor's dance was abstract, I never questioned the importance of any movement, dancer, or relationship in the work. The choreography allowed me to trust my own interpretation of the performance. In this way, I can find clarity, but I have to know exactly why an abstract or obscure idea is important.

[1] 'Wrought-Iron Fog' premiered at Dance Theater Workshop in November of 2009. I saw a reprise performance at DTW in June of 2010.

At times in my own work, I can feel myself glaze things over when they are not clear, hoping for satisfaction in a wash of movement rather than a precise choice I know I am capable of making. I was in experimental choreographer Jennifer Monson's improvisational dance class a year ago at Saint Mark's Church in New York City. In one exercise I became obsessed with a small pattern of running back and forth, swinging straight arms with fists. My task in the exercise was to improvise a dance with a partner, in a specific corner of the floor, keeping an awareness of that person at all times. After we had stopped dancing, Jennifer asked me if I was getting stuck. I replied, "I don't know, maybe?" She paused and said, "Think about it." I was so focused on making my body do something that would appear significant, or even deviant. I wanted her, as a viewer, to tell me my improvised dance was important. In truth, my head was spinning. What was I running to or from, who were the fists for, and why was I stuck? I became too involved in the image itself, and I lost why I was doing it quite quickly.

When I watch dance performances where it seems that the choreographer is at a loss for cohesion, I often wonder if they are merely speaking to a specific experience, perhaps one so inside their process of creating that it is difficult for me to enter freely. This past summer in New York City, I sat in the front row of a small studio showing of dance pieces. In one piece, two women in coats ran onstage past each other with speed and weight, arms splayed to one side, screaming at an ear-drum puncturing level. This continued for about two more minutes. I thought I must have missed something. I looked at the program, and it gave me no support for their yells. These dancers were so sure of their screaming, so confident in their volume, but long after the piece ended I was still thinking, "What was I supposed to get from that?" In twenty-one years I have tried to see

as much dance performance as I can, yet my semi-experienced eye, as an example, will still feel unsure in watching some dance choreography. So, these methods of language can appear to have less known translations. Artists can familiarize, they can plunge, and lose themselves in the languages they know. This is inside speak. This insider moving lends itself to a predetermined, and experientially based intention. Maybe screaming at each other is the best means of communication for those two women, but I did not see that in the work. I was left unsatisfied, unguided even in wondering.

In the process of making my thesis work "Framework," (performed April 26, 2011), I named many sections for the process we used to make them, like the "Rewrite" and the "Me Phrase." These sections were choreographed with specific performance directives I gave. I cannot guarantee that everyone in the audience during my performance knew that the "Rewrite" section was a dance-emulation of the process of erasing and rewriting. However, I as a dancer, performer, and choreographer, use this experience-based movement language despite its potential obscurity, because it is how I say what I want to the world. In fact, this could be said of any means of communication, art or non-art, and for the purpose of this work, art and dance are communicative devices. Rendering something 'modern dance' does not mean it is 'less understandable' than any other language. Basking in that fist-swinging haze of density, perhaps 'dance,' or moreover simply what I am calling my dance, can work a bit harder to translate itself.

DANCE AS MY LANGUAGE

Dance has a unique and abstract manner of communicating. I do care about the reaction of each audience member to the things I dance, I make, I share. The experiences

of humans, both artistic and quotidian, will inevitably read differently. While there are common sensibilities, shared backgrounds, similar trains of thought among audiences, participants, and bystanders, there is no guarantee that everyone will leave a dance performance with the same interpretation. For the purpose of this thesis, if I am trying to be clear (and I really am), I am wondering what you will take from this if I tell you in advance what you inherently experience is all that is necessary. More simply, I hope that when I am finished speaking, dancing, or writing, there is no need for a translator, or a process of figuring out between you and me. Whatever you receive, understand, or interpret from this investigation is important. The whole process is important to me.

For me, dance is an odd language to choose. While there are many modalities with which to express one's self, I think dance inhabits a peculiar and elusive space. Side by side, dance and language are remarkably similar**.** Movements can act like words. I string movements together in a pattern or sequence like sentences. I am a person who moves, a living entity that brings to phrases' execution an experiential sensitivity. In 'Framework,' I perform a duet with a dancer named Rachel. We stand close together, facing one another, gesturing with our arms and moving our torsos. I stretch my arms and shrug my shoulders; Rachel mimes catching something small, and cups her hand. I twist my hand around my mouth like I am telling a secret; Rachel pulls her elbow sharply to her side and clasps her hands. My series of gestures becomes a conversation of coming and going; my hands swing and point, moving my shoulders. Rachel continues to drop, catch, and rebound. There is development of the movement through the body, and we finally reach stillness, looking at one another.

All people grow up with language; I grew up with modern dance. Feeling as though I have to explain the essential nature of something that for me, has been omnipresent, often proves challenging. Day-care consisted of watching my mother take dance class. Many of my weekends were spent in theaters, choreographing dramatic recreations of what was onstage with my brother. Dance has always been a part of my conversation. I do not remember the cerebral excitement of my first words but I do recall a wide-eyed sense of accomplishment in communicating. There was a profound resonance that hummed internally when I was finally able to express what I meant, make my actions understandable in words, particularly to myself. More vividly, I remember recognizing a kind of corporal reverberation while dancing as a young person. There was that hum, again, the sneaking premonition that I was onto something, chasing as it remained just out of my reach. In the beginning, in any language, there are these early struggles of comprehension. As I fumbled through training my muscles to know positions, shapes and intentions for the first time, I was attempting to speak in a broken language, a novice not yet privy to the finesse of experience and conversation.

The conceptual translation I am invigorated by is the experience of watching whatever I decide to share, for whatever reason, in whichever space, in the context of modern dance. In the words of choreographer Miguel Gutierrez, “I feel that dance is often accused of being opaque…I often feel people don’t consider the fact that they can look at dance and, without necessarily understanding the vocabulary, realize that any dance proposes a corporeality of value (37).” I choose dance as a vocabulary, a language, and a means of communication because it creates a sensorial reverberation kinesthetically, intellectually, and existentially. The experience is important because a human body is

dancing and because I want you to understand me when I dance.

Being labeled as an 'artist' or particularly 'modern dancer' is daunting to me. The title holds a lot of responsibility. The very word 'modern' exemplifies a rupture from what came before; a newness that stands alone in its contrast to what precedes it. As dance forms continue to morph and mutate, new layers of complexity enlarge the greater modern dance conversation. The need to be considered as a viable speaker, whether the language is spoken or moved, remains universally crucial to me. Choreographer Liz Lerman said "Most of us in the dance/performance world think our audiences still connect with us in some visceral, tribal way. But I actually think this is no longer the case, except for audience members who have taken the same technique class in the morning, or who have watched dance for years and years" (4). I agree with Lerman that we can no longer assume anything about the background of the people who comprise dance audiences. Shared experiences can direct our eyes to similar reactions but they cannot guarantee them. Similarly, the importance of the reaction of the audience can vary among choreographers. Whether dance is used as a means to political activism, to multi-media expression, to social commentary, or to the very corporal and spiritual connections that bind human relationships, I think the relationship with the audience has to be considered with great attention.

While modern dance has always existed as a communicative art form, I think the importance of the 'who' in who is speaking/dancing has become more significant. In my own experience, modern dancers' identities are an equally if not essentially important component to dance choreography, practice, and performance. The construction of 'dancer,' has accrued a definition that now includes an intellectual; the modern dancer is

a dance-thinker. Back at Saint Mark's Church a year ago, I was studying dance composition with Neil Greenberg. At the end of our first class, he gave each of us a sixteen-page packet of reading. The first few pages were a 1999 interview from the *New York Times* with Howard Gardner about multiple intelligences and their influence in the arts. Philosophical critiques followed, including two articles deconstructing Nietzsche's notions of 'dissonance,' and Maxine Greene's 'dialectic of freedom.' Having taken a philosophy course one year prior, I read the extensive texts, and came back the next day ready to flex my intellectual muscles for Neil.

The discussion was slow to start, with a few dancers who read quotes they found provocative. I mustered the courage to share, and compared Nietzsche's analysis of finding pleasure in the transition of musical dissonance to consonance to a contact improvisation duet. There are moments where I feel like my body is only bouncing off of my partner, and I long for the pressurized weight sharing that can create a seamless moving connection between bodies. Neil asked me if I could show him what I meant. I stood up with a girl named Kate, and we improvised a dissonant duet and then a consonant duet. Our dissonance was defined in movement by sharp, awkward transitions of weight, and misplaced force. Our consonance felt more like warmth; we used the weight of each other's bodies as potential energy, swishing our forms around the space while maintaining bodily contact with one another. After, many dancers shared their experiences of watching the duet, but also of similar corporal sensations. We continued to delve deeper into Nietzsche's dissonance. Neil not only valued everyone's intellect but also held us all accountable for our ideas in the conversation. I left the workshop that day thinking that dancers are some of the smartest people I know.

INSIDER DANCE LANGUAGE

Art forms, in truth all specialized studies, produce insider language. Dance has insider language. This language is both verbal and non-verbal. Insider dance language appears at many different entry points, from the exercises that are performed to prepare muscles for moving, to the customs and etiquette of taking a dance class, to the expression of ideas, emotions, and concepts through movement. Upon being interviewed about my experience as a dancer recently, I found myself privy to the use of a vocabulary that seemed to me perfectly sensible and direct. However, the apparent mystification of my interviewer made me wonder if perhaps I was in fact speaking a foreign language. I was talking about the complex thought-process that occurs within a moving body, and the ways in which dancers feel ourselves being 'in' and 'out' of our bodies. I stumbled over explanations, made fruitless metaphors, and ended up saying, 'well, when you know you're dancing really well, you're 'in' your body, embodying the movement, see…' My interviewer did not know. I am sure my interviewer still does not understand what I meant. [2]

The more accustomed we are to our specific, self-sufficient communities, the more developed the language becomes, and the farther away we move from a universal constant that is unilaterally understandable. This process is inevitable. This jargon, this 'in my body,' speak makes more sense the more time I inhabit it. As creatures of belonging, we feed on the new slang. We want to be in the know, from knowing how to do an 'everybody's putting it in their choreography' ceiling-scraping jump to saying 'ooh, c'est top,' ('ooh, that's cool') to a new gaggle of foreign friends minutes after

[2] I was interviewed by Jenny Weinstein in September of 2010 about my experience as a dancer. Specifically, she was interested in what I am thinking while dancing.

learning the expression from your grammar teacher. Flawed as insider language's clumsy explanatory relationship with dance may be, it is essential and the two mediums are inextricably linked.

I inhabit this language where I am comfortable. This descriptive and privileged vocabulary seems to be available to me because I feel I have generated it by moving "in my body." No, I am not the only one who uses the phrase 'in her body' but I feel as though I am entitled to it because I have the embodied experience as a context. How can I explain such a sensation to someone who has yet to experience the shift? There are aspects of being a trained dancer, just like the sensation of being in an airplane taking off, or tackling a teammate that would be difficult to relay even if simplified into utopian, uniquely understandable language. There are things you just 'know,' corporally, that become available in relatable, communal experiences. In ballet class, before the *grand allegro* section of large jumps across the floor, I join all the other dancers to line up in the corner to maximize the space of commonly rectangular studios. When I am warming up my muscles for dancing, I spend more time in stretches where I feel tightness. My practice of dance predisposes me to a certain type of movement experience. Technical dance training, the learning of specific dance types and forms, directs the body to operate with a specific kinesthetic awareness. Becoming a dancer requires corporal attention.

BODY-TO-BODY TRANSLATION

Language and the acts of translation that inevitably follow language are at the very core of dance practice. In the process of translating movement from one body to another, dancers often speak. For example, words are used to clarify the body's specific

shapes, shifts of initiation, and locomotive patterns when describing a movement. While working on 'Framework,' I created a section that featured a series of quick jumps that traveled diagonally across the floor. As I taught it to my dancers, they initially lost some of the speed in their unfamiliarity with the changes of weight. In particular, there is a roll that briskly goes to the floor before a standing jump. I had to verbally emphasize the importance of a deep lunge to the right to set up for the roll's quickness so that the movement pattern could continue to rollick on. After listening to my comment, the trajectory of the phrase changed, and my dancers harnessed the momentum of the pattern. Everyday language and dance are interconnected. In my own process, there are many moments where speech is used to emphasize something a dancer might not see at first, second or third glance. This language is often ordinary. Dance is real life.

Dance classes are full of these explanatory translations. Contemporarily, dance classes are largely verbal; dancers ask clarifying questions, listen to teachers' explanations of certain exercises and movement patterns, and make comments to one another often. When a teacher speaks, they want to make themselves, via their movement, clearer. When I took Vicky Schick's technique class at Saint Mark's Church for the first time, I was physically confused by her movement quality. A long-time company member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company, Vicky moves with a fluidity that perhaps comes with experience but she also never seems to over exert herself in the execution of her movement. While she put her glasses to switch her CD from Balkan Beat Box to Missy Elliott, I listened carefully to her explanations and thought about how to navigate through the class material. I tried to actively apply her comments, but as I took a few more of her classes, it proved true that there was no better teacher than her

body in negotiating the trajectory of her choreography. I noticed that she did not thrust her leg to the side when she kicked it but rather allowed it to float, and then swing through the joint, leading to new spatial facing. Her arms did not slash through the air with destructive power, but rather glided, supported. I was reminded that while words are important, the body as a teacher is invaluable.

There is so much in the non-verbal space between bodies. And while detail and specificity can be drawn out of that space with a kinesthetic hyper-sense, a serious sonic attention to detail, and a fine-tuned bodily articulation, there is still so much information that can be lost. This kind of translation, a body-to-body reaction, holds an enormous amount of complexity. Many times not everyone learning a set piece of movement material has the same skills, strength, or flexibility. Sometimes, the lines of the movement will be different. Also, a (some)body can simply decide to do movement differently, where the movement either resembles or does not look at all like what the originating body intended. For the first two years of college, I was focused on getting the dancers I choreographed on to look just like I did, or how I wanted. I became enveloped in dictating every moment of what I made, from the look in the dancers' eyes to the way they moved their toes. I made a lot of dance phrases that did not have much movement in them. For my final project in dance composition class, I had one dancer progressively look out over the space, as if she was surveying a mountain range. Then I had her fall down. Then she said 'Hm.' That was it. At that time, I felt like it was the only thing our bodies could do exactly the same.

Body to body translation can be difficult for me. I think that in modern dance today, mimicry and individuality create a very puzzling and illusive dichotomy.

Deviations in movement style can come from a myriad of impetuses. In casting dancers for 'Framework,' I considered a list of diversely talented dancers. In the end I decided to choose two people I wanted to work with before I left college. I tried to take out the comparative critic in me that led to such a minimalist conundrum two years prior in composition class. When we started to work together, I shifted my focus in choreographing for the three of us as individuals. Rather than rehearsing material so it all looked the same in spite of our bodies, I wanted the intention and movement quality to be specific and self-sufficient within each dancer, myself included. This way, I could simultaneously accept that the three of us are anatomically different, and truly hone the performance of the movement I made. The body can serve as a carrier of a collective focus. I wanted our bodies to be committed to the choreographed movements as they were taught, but not let our identities and subjectivities become subservient to the execution of a swing, jump or fall. The aesthetics of movement are very important to me, but I also want my audiences to be concerned with who the dancers are, as well as whom I am, and why we are important to the message the work seeks to translate**.**

INTERNAL DIALOGUE

Dance covets the unique. When dancing in other choreographers' works, I often feel I have to be myself and someone else at the same time. I am myself, but sometimes my body, flailing in a way unnatural to my usual movement patterns or standing still, twitching with an odd penchant to move larger, lives a different story. This space is new to me, new in the scope of the past seven or eight years. When I was in eighth grade, I was in a piece where I really felt like a dancer. At the time I was taking class with an

inconsistent group of older teenagers, and two women in their thirties. This class became a cast for the teacher's spring show. I was the youngest person in the cast. I remember being truly proud of my performance, and having the sensation of knowing the material intimately. When the lights went up onstage, I remember wanting to fill up the space all by myself, and to be held accountable for my performance. I did not want to just do it on stage; I wanted to do it well. I wanted the 'performance' to make the dance I knew already more important. I like to think that I performed that piece the very best I ever had. Sometimes personal experiences create deviances in movement execution, differences which contribute to a performance quality that speaks a language all its own. In dance, I often hear people say how much someone 'brought' to the work. Perhaps the things I 'brought' were my youngness and my desire to be important. At times, an unexpected movement aesthetic can support dance in a way that flexibility or practiced facility cannot. My unconscious naiveté and desire to be bigger than myself transcended my lack of experience as a performer. In allowing the vulnerable canvas of my body to speak, it was inevitable that these feelings would rise to the surface. As Susan Sontag said**,** "Transparence means experiencing the luminousness of the thing itself, of the thing being what they are" (13). I am drawn to performers who are transparent about their performance presence because they appear to be processing in a way that is not only unique but also personal. I strive to find that presence anew each time I perform.

I remember taking a class with Michelle Boulé my very first week working at Movement Research, a non-profit dance organization in New York City. It was summer-in-the-city hot, and between my walk through the crowded SoHo streets and the four flights of stairs to the top-floor studio, my skin was already percolating with a topcoat of

uncertainty. We spent the first ten minutes of class activating our brain's cortices, by tapping our hands on parts of our skulls. The next hour was spent improvising, responding to Michelle's movement commands and qualitative suggestions. We gravitated towards partners, and continued sweating on one another in weight-sharing, leading-following dance interplay. After a half an hour of steady moving in the heat, the state of the room seemed trance-like. Each binary was focused on their shared orbit, sensitized to the moving patterns and impulses of the partnership.

Michelle introduced sound, an open invitation to spout stream-of-consciousness words, sounds, utterances. I was swiftly removed from my humid trance. I remember thinking, talk? Out loud? Why? I felt as though I had been speaking all along, my mind had been negotiating each movement choice I had made in relation to my partner. It did not matter if I had been thinking in sentences or images, the internal nature of my experience and my presence in the class made me realize how influential my headspace was. In terms of 'headspace,' I am referring to the thinking, intellectually charged, spatially aware brain cells that I have come to use quite often. The presence of my internal dialogue had become so seamlessly fused with my movement experience that the thought of introducing a third layer to my system seemed semantically impossible. So, I murmured things, punctuated my breathing, and made my moving contact with the floor resonate with heavy changes of weight or intentional noise making. I did not really want to talk. This was both clear and surprising to me, as I have spoken while dancing before, and choreographed speaking with dancing. The goal of the exercise was to function simultaneously on different, yet interconnected levels within a dance class structure. Thinking back, the exercise was important to me, as both a simple comfort-zone breaking

brainteaser, and a way to bring less expressed thoughts and sounds to the surface. It raised for me the possibility of an interesting relationship between internal dialogue and just how much I think should be said out loud.

WORDS AND TEXT IN DANCE

"In thinking through the ramifications of a prickly question—Where does the meaning of language (in dance) reside? (Robertson, 97)."[3]

Spoken language and dance performance have a tumultuous relationship. Many artists have introduced words, speech, and text as a means to contextualize or render more comprehensible a desired intention. This language can aim to elucidate, can represent the aforementioned 'in-speak' that develops as a part of the process of making a dance piece, and can serve as a frame for the dance it inhabits. Sometimes words in dance are not so harmonious. David Dorfman asks, "When does language become a crutch for expressing ideas that could ideally be danced? Does language undermine the innate abstract qualities of the body in motion? How does one know when an eloquent balance is struck between movement and words? (Dorfman, 16)." In Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin's 'MAX,' the soundtrack features a deep voice that counts one through ten in Hebrew.[4] The dancers respond by accumulating movements into a sequence; each number is assigned a motion. The dancers react to the voice's pace, modulating their progressions with the changes in counting. The counting continues for a very long time.

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[3] In this quote, I am considering "language" to be the use of spoken or written text in dance performance.

[4] I saw 'MAX' performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in March of 2009.

After three or four minutes, the sound score started to annoy me, but it persisted. After a few more minutes, I realized that I was becoming dependant on the numbers; I felt their necessity in the craft of the piece. Eventually, the task was abstracted further. The movements become assigned to harsh electronic drum sounds, layering over one another, making a syncopated movement collage. I saw the counted number sequences in the dance long after they had stopped being said. I felt like I had been given a small sliver of the craft to take with me, to fulfill my understanding of the piece. The words were inextricable from the dance.

I favor functionalism when it comes to using text (spoken or written) in dance performance, something I think Naharin does quite well in 'MAX.' 'Functionalism,' is the absolute necessity of each word's presence as an integral element of the construction of a piece of choreography. When I think about speaking in my own dances, I often return to the question, can the dance speak for itself? I made a solo for 'Framework' that began with lot of text. I started by saying 'Hi.' I continued with sentences like "This is a solo. Solo means you do it by yourself," and "I think solos are selfish sometimes." I wanted to be explicitly clear, but I was too effortful in my approach. I realized that telling the audience what to think while watching me would not produce the response I actually wanted. These kinds of negotiations are both conscious and subconscious, and "the observer is always in difference with his/her own presence. That is to say, it is not only the object (the dance) that is in motion; the writer, the viewer, the spectator, is never, ever fixed as well" (Lepecki, 135). After showing the solo a few times to different audiences, I whittled the text down to the bare essentials of what was purely functional. In the end, all I really needed was the 'Hi.'

Improvisational dance pioneer Simone Forti wrote, “I often feel that movement is like paint and words like pencil, or vice versa, together on a canvas. They can contrast or follow each other, with a time lag or contrast of perspective, a detail against a broad indication. The references turn back around each other building a while, spontaneously (2).” Forti postures that dancing with words is much like visual art with words, creating a circular structure of points of reference that remain interrelated. I find the most crucial element of her writing is in supporting the communicative power that movement holds, and that the simplicity of bodies moving together or alone in space can create an all-telling framework. In my thesis dance piece, the three of us stood upstage right in the corner of the space, facing one another, two to one. Our shoulders were linked, our torsos against each other’s, our heads side by side, yet just looking past one another. We teetered on tiptoes with our arms held at the elbows behind our backs. We all switched between nodding, shaking our heads no, shrugging, laughing, and giving uncertain looks. We were not looking at each other. Slowly, we became aware of each other’s presence. As we recognized one another, our facial gestures turned to nods. The complexity of human interaction is present without words. I try to think before I speak.

Moved, spoken, and written languages confound the process of translating from one medium to another. Whom does it serve for me to dissect how I feel in each moment of a movement phrase, in clumsy, extrapolated English sentences? Each development of language translation seems to be based upon an experience, but in an effort to evoke understanding through language do we try to make our experiences simpler? Accepting dance as an “elusive presence… as the fleeting trace of an always irretrievable, never fully translatable motion: neither into notation nor into writing” feels impossible when we

have the developed means of descriptive language that serve well to recreate or reexamine (Lepecki, 127). The fear of losing essentiality is universal. However, I cannot ignore the fact that this elusiveness is part of what makes dance performance so enrapturing. I argue that we are too often using one language as a means to arrive at another, without truly understanding each medium singularly. Perhaps writing about dance is not an exercise in explaining what dance itself says quite well, but more an effort to support one's experience of watching or being in a dance.

Different languages exist to contextualize and communicate specific and exclusive experiences, and while they have many intersections, each individual structure holds an unexplainable, untranslatable *je ne sais quoi.* There is a phrase in French that I have always loved, *un univers de référence*. Directly translated in English, the phrase means 'frame of reference.' In French, the meaning functions on a much larger scale. To speak about someone's 'univers' you are invoking all the points to which they align themselves, not simply the circumstances of one situation or another. "Derrida [sic] argued that the meanings of texts are unstable because different readers (or viewers in the case of visual texts [dance]) bring their own worldviews to their reading and looking, which skew interpretation. No text has any single, correct interpretation; meanings change with the reader, the time, and the context" (Robertson, 28).

RESPONDING, MOVING AND OTHERWISE

I am writing a paper about dance, right now. This is one of my responses to my yearlong investigation of translation and dance. I want to make the power and clarity that dance holds as a communicative language undeniably apparent. In dance, "the body's

gestures *begin* to signify that which cannot be spoken" (Foster/Lepecki, 127). Dance offers a medium of telling unlike the written word. Dance's pages are the body, each with a unique, rich context. "This is a live, kinetic activity, which leaves visual residue, an accumulation of the experience… a remnant with human implications (Kelly, 8). Simply, the human body speaks volumes, and humans recognize the power in dance's voice.

When bodies move in space, there is an inherent biological reaction. In recent research, "neurophysiologists are… claiming an intrinsic connectivity between dancer and viewer based on the discovery of mirror neurons-synaptic connections in the cortex that fire both when one sees action and when one does action" (Foster, 1). This connection is corporal and automatic. A reaction occurs between watcher and watched, but the intangible space of translation that exists in between the minds of the dancer and viewer is what leaves much to be determined. This non-verbal space exists in simpler modalities, too. For example, if I walk into a dance class, I am immediately aware of glances, stares, smiles and closed eyes. The ritual of a dance class speaks loudly to the nonverbal language of dance and dancers; we all have our habits. There are assortments of balls for rolling muscles, tools for cutting tape to mend broken skin, and certain stretches done either to prepare, pass the time, or relax. Dancers who frequent certain teachers' classes claim a spot, and often have tendencies in regard to where they stand, sit or lie for the class. There are those who move at fullest when guarded behind two lines of bodies, and others whose bodies illuminate if given the spotlight of a front spot, or spotlight. There are dancers who engage socially in class; others prefer to focus solely on their own practice.

In the process of creating my own work, work that attempts a multidimensional consciousness of the many definitions of 'translation;' clarity, however well intentioned, proves to be a challenge. Simplicity in movement and purpose are not always synonymous. Equal focus must be given to each. When I began moving at the beginning of this thought process, I felt myself improvising in broken and abbreviated thoughts. My limbs would stop before their full extension, my neck twisted awkwardly in a half-cautious look over my shoulder. I moved in huffs, snatching small swatches of the studio space in tight foot patterns and trips. As I reviewed the video of my danced improvisation, it seemed like in an effort to say everything, to get it all out into space somewhere; I could not finish any thoughts fast enough. It was strange to watch myself in that state of constant negotiation. There was just too much to say. My body's next response was to move slower. I spent more time thinking about rewriting my own movements as I inscribed them in the room for the first time. What kind of trace was I leaving, and could I make it deeper?

As these experiences began to compound, I kept returning to the ideas of rewriting, reforming, and reinforcing. Each time I strung a few movements together, I thought about how I could move each in a different way. What if I was speaking with someone, and I just could not make them understand what I meant? I told myself to try again, and when I started working with two other dancers, my challenge tripled. At first I thought, 'I am now responsible for their intentions, in this work.' To an extent, I still believe that. However, I cannot ignore the fact that I chose them to be a part my investigative process because I was intrigued by who they were as both people and dancers, not solely because I thought they moved like me, or were even like me at all. But

how do you rewrite a sheet of pencil scrawl with a calligraphy pen? It may look different, but it can say, or at the very least intend the same thing. I realized I do not want all pencils.

Back again to that hot New York City summer, to a different excruciatingly humid loft studio space. I was watching a dance performance in a studio-theater, featuring a conglomerate of choreographers from the area. I recognized some fellow class-takers, faces I had seen on stage before. My legs were curled up underneath me, the clasps on my sandals digging into my ankles, my knees slipping on the wood floor. I remember thinking that I felt like I had been sweating all summer. Sitting in that audience, I felt so nervous. As I was watching the strange array of self-titled 'experimental' works, I wondered why any of these people wanted me to see their dancing, and in turn, why I wanted to make any dance. Why do I want to dance anything, and why do I want other people see it, and even further, understand it? Most of all, *what* do I want to dance? I once had an English teacher who would ask 'What about it?' to every proposed conclusion I made in class. As much as I abhorred her questioning, there was a certain amount of that kind of self-interrogation that resonated in my thoughts, and for whatever reason culminated in a shattering deconstruction of my artistic goals. I went home after the show was over and tried to write something really smart about myself, an artistic statement for the ages, one never produced by a professional-dance hopeful with only twenty-one years experience in her bank. Now, after this process I have many of the same questions. They will be important for the rest of my life. In an untidy, smudged scrawl, here's what I ended up with:

AUDIENCE
(WHO ARE ‘THEY?’)
DO I CARE?
DOES IT MATTER IF ‘THEY’ “GET IT?”
SHOULD ‘THEY’ “GET IT?”

SAY IT SO THEY GET IT.
(I CARE.)

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