UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Space Between

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7jp5k5px

Author
Baskel, Alicia Peterson

Publication Date
2011

Supplemental Material
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7jp5k5px#supplemental

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

University of California, San Diego

Space Between

A Thesis in partial satisfaction of the requirements
For the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)

by

Alicia Peterson Baskel

Committee in charge:

Professor Yolande Snaith, Chair
Professor Sarah Shun-lien Bynum
Professor Liam Clancy
Professor Tara Knight

2011

The Thesis of Alicia Peterson Baskel is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

EPIGRAPH

Listening is the key to performance. Responses – whatever the discipline – that originate from deep listening are connected in resonance with being and inform the artist, art, and audience in an effortless harmony"

– Pauline Oliveros, composer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page..... iii

Epigraph……..... iv

Table of Contents..... v

Abstract of the Thesis……..... vi

Introduction..... 1

The Phases of Space Between…..... 3

Phase One – The Idea……. 3

Phase Two – Preparation…….…..... 4

Phase Three – The Design Team……..……..... 7

Phase Four – Building Ensemble……..……..... 9

Phase Five – Choreographing the Dance……..... 10

Phase Six – Getting to my Aesthetic……. 16

Phase Seven – Bringing the Pieces Together……. 23

Phase Eight – The Performance……..... 28

Phase Nine – What Remains……..... 32

Conclusion..... 37

Appendix 1 – Proposal..... 38

Appendix 2 – Writing Dance……. 46

Space Between on file at Mandeville Special Collections Library

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Space Between

by

Alicia Peterson Baskel

Master of Fine Arts in Dance Theatre

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Yolande Snaith, Chair

Space Between is an evening length dance theatre performance that took place at the Theodore and Adele Shank Theatre on February 9-12, 2011. The work examines the habitual patterns of the ‘space between’ audience and performer, and how equally one shapes the other’s experience. Blending movement, spoken text, projection and sound design, Space Between examines our relationship to space and the transitions between personal sanctuaries and public routines, asking the question, "How do my surroundings influence who I am at any moment?"

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2008, Rebecca Salzer and I became the first class of graduate students to be ushered through the MFA program in Dance Theatre at UCSD. We were either the pioneers or the guinea pigs, depending on the person referencing us. Had we not been compatible, this may have been disastrous. But from my first experience with Rebecca's work, I found it interesting and intelligent and I instantly appreciated being placed in this program alongside her. To our surprise, we discovered that our previous methods of making dance were on opposite ends of the spectrum. Due to financial obligations as a company director, Rebecca was accustomed to planning every step of her work in advance. Her process was calculated in order to use her time and money appropriately. Rebecca didn't have the freedom to explore other possibilities, but her vision was clear and her product carefully considered. My work, on the other hand, valued rehearsal and process over final product. I worked with two friends who were willing to meet once each week without pay. I enjoyed entering rehearsal empty handed and experimenting with ideas as they came up, letting each experiment lead me to the next. Unfortunately, without a final vision, problem, or performance I had difficulty moving my process forward. Over the past three years, I've been challenged by Rebecca's ability to orchestrate dances in her imagination, and I believe that she's been influenced by my spontaneous explorations. The processes for both our thesis projects exist at different points in the middle of that spectrum between planned and improvised. I've found a way to move my process forward toward a unifying vision, while leaving room for the improvised experiments that keep me passionate about dance.

In making *Space Between*, the most significant change in my process was to start with a concept that I would then work from/toward. I shaped an outline of the production, and presented this outline to the Area Heads of the Department of Theatre

and Dance precisely one year before the opening of *Space Between*. (For Original Proposal, please see Appendix One.) My aim was to encourage my audience to let go of what had become a habitual mode of viewership, passive observation, and engage with my work more intimately. I would attempt to facilitate an unusual viewing experience, offering audiences new perspectives and the freedom to notice themselves and their relationship to the performance. I proposed a formal structure that might lead me toward this objective. It broke the performance into three distinct performance spaces: Gallery, Theatre, and Home. From this outline, I did not immediately devise solutions that would fulfill my intention but instead asked more questions that led my collaborators and me through a process. Over the course of that process, the details of the original proposition evolved and at times seemed to push us in a completely different direction, but the core emphasis remained. With my collaborators holding onto my target, I explored the choreography without fear of losing perspective. This was a profound experience for me. In sharing my concept and following my intuition, especially when obstacles occurred, I was able to lead this team toward something that was in fact greater than I could have imagined.

This paper is a chronological reflection on that process that made *Space Between*. Though I didn't recognize it at the time, *Space Between* was built in nine distinct phases. These phases overlap significantly and together created this piece. Each step in this development was independently significant and concurrently a component of a larger experiment/question:

Can I choose to trust myself to listen in each moment to what this dance needs, and can I choose to trust that this process will lead me to my product?

THE PHASES OF SPACE BETWEEN

PHASE ONE – THE IDEA

There were a number of factors that influenced the proposal I submitted for *Space Between*. Tere O'Connor, a contemporary dance maker, at a festival in 2004 shared his interest in creating new processes to evolve his own choreographic work. At this festival, I recognized my own pleasure for movement investigation and was inspired by his radical philosophies about dance. Deborah Hay, a choreographer who started making work in the early 1960's with Judson Dance Theatre, taught a two-week choreography workshop that I attended in Fresno, California during the summer of 2009. She introduced me to new possibilities of merging my creative writing practice with my choreographic process. She encouraged me to consider different approaches to and definitions for choreography and improvisation. Crossing Boundaries, a class that was offered in the Fall of 2009, set up a space for its students to research new methods in theatre production. In this class, Tara Knight asked questions that I hadn't considered about liveness in performance and audience involvement. From my design colleagues, I learned what was possible in the world of design, particularly digital media. I shared Shahrokh Yadegari's interest in design and performance improvisation and grew more interested in encouraging my design colleagues to share in our enthusiasm. Finally, the dance faculty at UCSD are continually asking questions of themselves and their students about the nature of dance and choreography. Their current shared curiosity about the spectrum between improvisation and set movement has led me to ask questions and make discoveries about the polarization of these two worlds and how they might merge.

With all of these questions and possibilities occupying my mind, the concept for shifting spaces occurred to me one morning in that space between sleeping and waking.

With the help of several trusted mentors, I was able to fine-tune my concept into a presentation that I was excited to introduce and take on. I harbored fear about diagramming this piece prematurely, so as a precaution, I regarded this proposal as the seed from which the dance and the design could emerge. I put it away for safe keeping in a folder on my desktop. I used it only to inform the designers of what our aim would be.

PHASE TWO - PREPARATION

I had no difficulty expressing to mentors and collaborators precisely what I meant by gallery space and theatre space. However, it was impossible for me to articulate what I meant by 'home' space. I made this my research. What was drawing me toward home/house? Was it the nourishment that my actual home provided me? Was it the comfort of sitting on my couch reading a book with a coffee in my hand? Was it intimacy? Cooking? Family? Familiarity? In the winter and spring quarters of 2010, I mulled over this constantly, making small projects in class that seemed to have a relationship to this theme. I made compositions using sounds from inside a house and images of living rooms as projection design, but nothing was sticking.

Then summer arrived. I spent almost three weeks in my house. I spent time inside of MY walls, surrounded by MY things. I retreated. It was in this retreat that I realized what I meant by 'home'. It didn't have to be a house, but rather the space to create space. I'd been producing so much work at school but never allowing myself the time and space to stop. Only in stopping, could I access the creative space I'd been missing and would need to make this piece. I was able to access my imagination. I began asking questions about the value of the space between 'home' and 'performance'.

The space between personal and public. The space between stillness and action. The space between imagination and reality. The space between nothing and everything.

I have been practicing Transcendental Meditation since 2006 and was drawn to it because of two things: its recognition that this practice exists in today's world and the fact that it is practiced alone. My teacher, Michael DeFrancisco explained to me the purpose of meditation in our contemporary world. In our lives of activity (performance), meditation is a daily ritual that should only be done in short intervals (20 minutes twice daily). Like dying a cloth and placing it in the sun. The repetition of this process in and out of the dye and into the sun slowly sets the color into the cloth. When the cloth hangs in the sun, it simultaneously takes away color and locks in color. Sun is activity. The dye is meditation.

This made sense to me conceptually, but became clear for me through the practice of meditation over time. As I continued to research my own behaviors around this subject, I realized that 'home' was a process we would go through. 'Home' wasn't something we would show, but an experience we would set out to share with our audience. Looking back over the creative process and collaborations that helped build *Space Between*, I can see the enormity of the task we took on. I didn't assume I might know how the audience would feel, but it was worth the experiment.

I realized through this research that the piece needed a name change. *Solo as Unison*, the original title, refers to a concept outside of the practice of dance making. It refers to the possibility that by each of us individually embracing our own unique voice, we can more readily support the whole. However, many people assumed these words referred only to the language of dance. I didn't want to limit my audience's imagination. *Space Between* came from a line that I said in a dance I choreographed and performed in early 2010, *Untitled; Center of the Universe*. "Everyone is sitting around, content

discussing content, sipping the space between my feet." At that time, I felt perplexed by the 'aboutness' that seemed to be expected by theatre audiences and wanted so badly to value the space from which this 'aboutness' comes. Blair Robert Nelson (sound designer for *Space Between*) picked up on this line and had been referring to the space between as a title for a duet we were working on. I asked him if I could steal that title back for my new piece; he said yes.

At this point in the process, I left for Berlin for my dance theatre externship. I had specifically chosen not to participate in a workshop or intern for a company, but to attend a festival where I could see as much cutting edge contemporary dance and performance art as possible. Berlin's dance festival *Tanz im August* brought numerous established and emerging choreographers from all over the world together in one place. Beyond the festival there would be more dance to see from the local community. I was ready to see what was out there so that I could understand where my work could fit into this larger international context.

I had an incredible experience. For ten days, I attended two or three performances, lectures, or exhibitions each day. Six in particular stand out as great influences on my process for *Space Between*. These six performances didn't completely shift the way I was thinking about my work, but gave me the support I needed to pursue my interests knowing that others are researching similar ideas. These works experimented with movement of audiences, audience involvement, exposing technology, writing dance, fully incorporating scenic design, and putting independent works together in space. Seeing this array of choreography was the most important research that I could do as a contemporary choreographer. I was inspired by what I was experiencing, opening up new creative spaces in my brain. One particular morning I awoke and wrote: *On Life and Choreography: It is only our job to do the actions that set up situations for*

creativity/magic to occur.

When I returned to San Diego, I entered into my first rehearsal with a deeper understanding and experience with this 'home' space. I value the space to listen to my own thoughts and make my own choices in dance and in life. Discovering how easily I can listen and trust myself has been a life changing part of graduate school for me. Some of the dancer's, however, weren't convinced that this space of 'home' was their preferred space. They felt intimidated by the responsibility that is implied. It would mean becoming accountable for themselves and their choices. I trusted that this response came from fear or fatigue. I realized this was my greatest task as the choreographer of *Space Between*: encouraging the dancers and designers to embrace this freedom. Encouraging them to not hide in the familiar, but to feel safe in the not knowing.

PHASE THREE – THE DESIGN TEAM

One of the greatest benefits the Dance Theatre program offers its students is not just the chance to learn design skills, but the opportunity to meet and collaborate with talented designers in the fields of scenic design, sound design, costume design, and lighting design. We have been given a first hand opportunity to practice our collaborative skills, devising our own methods of working with others in the creative process. My goal with *Space Between* was to practice a way of collaborating that would empower my colleagues. To lead them towards my intentions, but encourage them to trust their own intuition and utilize their talents to create a performance I could never create on my own.

I gathered designers from the program whom I trust and admire. Sadly, this came about when the department forgot to assign Rebecca and me designers when

they assigned the directors their designers. Initially, I felt hurt and discouraged, but remembering that Rebecca and I are pioneers, we pushed forward on our own. Throughout the two years I'd been in graduate school, I had built strong connections with many of the designers, and was delighted to recruit my own team.

I asked Colin McGurk to be scenic designer and Omar Ramos to be lighting designer for *Space Between*. The three of us have a history that goes back to our first quarter together in Collective Creation with Charlie Oates. After working together in his class, we decided that we should make a larger work together outside of school that we'd call Background Project. That project was squashed by our busy schedules, so I was thrilled to have the two of them on board for *Space Between.* Blair Robert Nelson was my only consideration for sound design as he and I had built a working partnership exploring improvisation. Though Judy Dolan was unable to give me access to a graduate costume designer, I was pleased to find Jaymee Ngernwichit, an undergraduate designer with experience in costume design for professional dance theatre. The only collaborator from the theatre and dance department that I was officially assigned was Leighann Enos as stage manager. I didn't know her going into this process, but Lisa Porter gave it careful consideration, connecting me with a courageous, flexible, and enthusiastic stage manager.

Though all of us were in conversation at various points in the process, Colin and I began our work early by meeting once a week during fall quarter. His design would be due in November, and he knew this process would be unlike his experiences with theatre. It was important for me to work closely with him, as the shifting of the space was an important part of the choreography. In our first meetings we developed our collaborative communication. He learned to dig into what I said, pulling from me what was most important. From this mutual understanding, we would ground each other

when one of us maneuvered off course. He pushed me to make decisions, while making sure I knew where I had wiggle room. Colin cleverly found a way of designing a set that didn't have to be fixed, allowing me to explore my choreography even after the set was built.

I've said on several occasions that I worked with my dream team and its true. I was able to compile my ideal team and this contributed largely to the success of the show. Because of our history, we worked from a place of trust and commitment.

PHASE FOUR – BUILDING ENSEMBLE

By early summer, I began gathering the dancers for *Space Between*. Anya Cloud and Kyle Sorensen were both graduate students in the Dance Theatre MFA program, and Matthew Armstrong was a sixth year undergraduate. Jenn Oliver and Gina Bolles Sorensen were dancers in the San Diego community who I'd had the pleasure of previously working with. They were an eclectic group, coming from diverse dance, performance, improvisation, and life experience, but all were professional, mature, and committed. It would be my job to bring them together as an ensemble. Not necessarily in a traditional sense, I have never been interested in creating a group of dancers who move in exactly the same way. Rather, I was interested in revealing each dancer's individuality, using their strengths to support the group dynamic. I was interested in developing a history that would enable each dancer to take risks knowing that they could trust their fellow collaborators.

We had our first rehearsal on August 4th for a performance six months later. This amount of time was important for us. We needed time to create history. We committed to two-hour rehearsals twice a week for the duration of our rehearsal period.

Our first rehearsals involved conversations around the specific topics I was interested in, starting with up to an hour of discussion about personal discoveries and then stepping into scored improvisations that furthered our research. I knew very little about what the choreography would be except that we'd be creating an hour-long piece. I didn't know whether the dance would call for set movement or improvised movement, but I had an inclination that it would be something in the middle and I trusted that I would know.

Through discussion, we were able to get to know each other quickly. The designers joined us in rehearsal as often as they could to start building relationships with the dancers and the dance as it evolved. I asked the dancers and designers to research their own behavior, giving each of us a sense of how we see ourselves in the world. I am interested in working from the lives of the dancers I have. I am interested in revealing them as people not merely bodies in space, so that the audience can know them more intimately. Through dancing and improvising, we learned more about each other. We continued to build as an ensemble even throughout the last performance. This work supports closeness amongst collaborators and benefits from this closeness. It is something the audience can see and connect with.

PHASE FIVE – CHOREOGRAPHING THE DANCE

I gave myself those six months of rehearsals for three reasons – to build ensemble, to enjoy the rehearsal process, and to avoid feeling the pressure that the ten-week production model brings. I worked four hours each week with the dancers and then spend the rest of my time thinking and writing about the dance. I intended to follow my choreographic intuition that I have been developing over the last fifteen years, trusting that I would know when to keep something and when to let go. There was a lot

of letting go.

We started the choreographic process by following scored improvisations I had invented that involved house/home. In our first rehearsal we explored a score that started with the dancers visualizing a space that felt like home, then imagining bringing that space into the studio. I asked them to exist in the real and the imagined simultaneously and move inside this space. This was a useful starting point, but by the second rehearsal, I started to set movements. Liam Clancy, who so willingly met with me once a week to listen to my process and mentor me in the direction of my interests, helped me to keep my insecurities out of the way. It was way too soon to stop exploring, but I needed that reminder. He helped me to trust myself and to push into the place of not knowing.

> *Why bother conducting and experiment at all if you know what results it will yield? Maybe every essay automatically is in some way experimental ---not an outline traveling toward a foregone conclusion but an Unmapped Quest that has sprung from the word Question.*
>
> *David Shields, author of Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*

In another rehearsal, I set out to explore the space between 'performance' and 'home'. I created an improvisation designating two adjacent spaces as 'home' and 'performance'. The dancers researched these two worlds through movement and their bodies, moving between the two, making discoveries about each and about the transitions. When we finished this experiment, Jenn Oliver suggested that we add a third element in the middle of these two spaces and call it 'other'. This was a turning point. In the 'performance' space I saw the dancers deliver expectation, in the 'home' space I saw the dancers work internally, but in the 'other' space I saw something else. I saw the dancers as available and vulnerable. When we discussed what had changed, Gina concluded that the performance space was 'for others', the Home space was 'for

myself', but the other space was 'with others'. There it was…the space between. Though this score never made it into performance, the term 'with others' became a reminder of a way of being with each other and the audience.

From this last score came a new one about defining spaces. In step one of the score, the dancers would vocally define spaces: "This is the lonely space." "This is the hallway lined with family photos space." "This is the _____ space." The second part of the score was to dance in the space that had been defined. As the audience, I could associate the movement with the defined space, allowing the dancer or the audience to start weaving a non-linear narrative. At this moment, I imagined this would be the choreography for *Space Between*:

1. Build a home – (define the spaces)
2. Live in the home – (dance in the space)
3. Tear it down and see what remains – (absence of dancers, only memories)

While, this was an interesting score that I'd like to explore again, at that point in our process it limited the dancers. Their movement became task oriented and often literal to the spaces they'd defined. Again, we had to let it go.

I was and still am interested in finding new ways to set movement in an organic and evolutionary way, so I borrowed a score that Janet Hayatshahi had introduced in a choreography class the previous spring that we called *Reset*. The score: 1. Dancers make a dance (improvise) 2. I stop them and ask them to reset from the beginning. 3. They start again from the beginning, repeating this dance and continuing on until I say reset again. We would repeat this process four times, each time letting the dance grow longer and longer, before the end. When the dancers first worked on this score, they kept it safe, making sure that they could remember the movements that they had done the time before. To free them, I gave permission to reinterpret each version. We later

called this Creative Memory. They could keep the things that easily resurfaced and let go of the things that didn't. This opened up the score and allowed the dance to grow in unexpected ways. Sometimes movement remained the same, but as the dancers researched, their movement choices evolved into something that appeared to be completely new.

Every evening I wrote out the dances that they performed. One evening produced a particularly interesting dance. I wrote it out, an effort to preserve what we had done and an effort to "set" the dance in some way. In our next rehearsal, we read my response and relived the whole experience in our minds, laughing and applauding the smart connections and inspiring moments. Then we set out to recapture that dance. That rehearsal was a disaster. In "trying" to relive the dance we killed the excitement we had generated in the original making of it. In its recreation, the magic was lost. I felt that loss, as did all the dancers. In this failure, however, I learned many important lessons.

1. Trying to relive an experience doesn't work for this dance or my aesthetic. It's like returning to high school. We can laugh about the good old days, but actually trying to "go back" and capture that same experience is impossible.
2. I recognized how important Deborah Hay's mantra of "Here and gone" is to my rehearsal process. Teaching me to trust that things will come back if we allow them to but not if they are forced.
3. I recognized how interested I truly am in seeing the feedback loop as it happens in the dancer's minds and bodies. The feedback loop is see/respond/feel all at the same time. When the dancers are in this loop, I see them working with the present moment and I am interested.

4. Finally, I learned that these difficult rehearsals contribute a great deal to my process. In the past, I may have completely dismissed this experiment without finding the questions that are inside of it. At this point in my career, I can look at the obstacles and lean into them, recognizing what I don't want so that I can become clear about what I do want. It is a simple concept in theory, but in practice it is crucial.

One score that did stick was developed early in the rehearsal process. We called it *Priority*. We were in the ensemble-building phase of the process and I wanted to encourage the dancers to listen and respond to one another. Before they knew each other, they could become preoccupied with themselves in improvisation, prioritizing their own separate explorations. To remedy this, I gave them this score, "your number one priority is always the trio." This made a difference in how they interacted with one another. This score became the baseline for the final choreography. This does two things at once: gives the dancers a clear task of keeping track of one another and gives me as choreographer the performance quality that I am looking for.

On October 27th, we finally had a rehearsal that validated all of our previous trials and failures. We'd officially let go of the reset dance and were much more interested in *Priority*. We started calling this score *Priority 6*. Six references the five dancers plus the dance (which includes everything in the space and the space itself). In only one and a half months, the group had already built some useful history together. Anya mentioned a score she'd done where the dancers choose the three best moments from a dance to recreate. I was interested in using this score in a different way. The dancers would perform a 20-30 minute *Priority 6* and then I would immediately choose moments that either didn't evolve the way I'd hoped or that were already quite interesting. I named these moments extractions. The dancers would then take these extractions and using

their Creative Memory make a new dance from the originating moment. In an early rehearsal with this new concept, I had extracted a trio with Jenn, Kyle, and Anya. They'd missed an opportunity so I gave them their starting point and they created a five-minute dance that had focus. I started to get excited. Then I extracted a duet with Kyle and Matthew, giving them a started point and the guidance to see each other and the space. Again, I was interested in what I saw. In these extractions they were able to get to the work instantly. I could have my choreographic hand in the mix while still allowing the dancers freedom. This is what I'd been looking for. This is the space between choreography and improvisation!

In early November, another new and exciting part of the puzzle emerged from a piece of choreography that I had written. At the start of this rehearsal process, I began working with creative writing with dance in two different ways. The first was to record dances that I saw in my rehearsals in an attempt to archive my choreographic experience. Though we found that these writings weren't necessarily functional in the rehearsal process, I was inspired by the associations the dances created in my imagination. I allowed the dance to produce stories that could exist separately from the dancers and the movement. I wanted to encourage this possibility in my audience, so we included these stories in the performance. We mounted them on the gallery walls in a familiar format, as though they were explaining the art (which of course they were, by way of the dance). I remain interested in finding other arenas where these short stories might live in the future. (For the writings that hung from the gallery walls, please see Appendix two.) The second way of working with creative writing was as written choreography. Deborah Hay introduced me to this practice. She doesn't call it a score because it is more specific, but it doesn't necessarily dictate the specific movement. It dictates the work that the dancer is doing to create the movement. I rediscovered a

short piece of choreography that I created over the summer while spending so much time in my home. I often dance in the small spaces of my house in front of bathroom mirrors, closet mirrors, or even reflections in glass doors. I brought this writing into rehearsal and read it to the dancers as they explored the possibilities.

1. She tells a story and through that story we see her in what she leaves out
2. She puts on a costume
3. She stands in front of a small mirror, not this large audience

It was a repeatable score that offered specific work and choreography while leaving plenty of room for the dancer to bring his/her own images, associations, and movements into the space. When I first brought it to the dancers, I didn't know how it would fit with anything, but I couldn't resist this experiment that had long been an interest of mine. When I saw the dancers take on these solos, I knew it belonged in the gallery part of the dance. I could watch any of the solos for hours, the dancers were hard at work following their score, brain distracted, allowing the body to invent the movement.

When I met with my designers again on November 12th, at exactly the halfway point in the six-month process, I had a clear concept of what I imagined the dance would look like.

1. Pre-show without audience - 20-30 minute *Priority 6*
   (give the dancers a chance to warm up their listening skills and me a chance to see what I can extract)
2. Gallery (20min) – solos
3. Extraction (7min)
   Extraction (7min)
   Extraction (7min)
4. Dance (10-15min)
5. Absence (5min)

PHASE SIX – GETTING TO MY AESTHETIC

Though I am not asking my ensemble to find a unified way of moving, I am deeply invested in my ensemble developing a unified performance quality as well as a

specific awareness to their choice making. With varied performance and improvisational training, the dancers each come with their own expectations about performance and improvisation. An important job I would have as choreographer would be to help the dancers release some old habits to find new ways of being and working onstage. I was asking for extreme exposure from the dancers, but what does this really mean? I recognized quickly that my role as choreographer would be to see this dance into being, to learn to see/respond/feel as the choreographer. It was my job to practice what I was asking them to practice.

> *I have become very interested in seeing what [dance] can become through a process of witnessing as opposed to employing choreographic technique.*
>
> *Tere O'Connor, choreographer*

I borrowed performance teachings from others with more experience than I. We practiced Deborah Hay's questions in three different rehearsals and each dancer discovered something different. I also borrowed ideas from Liam Clancy, Yolande Snaith, and invented my own. I'd discovered the value of *Priority 6* in requiring the dancers to see, listen, and respond to each other specifically. With *Priority 6*, I started seeing magical moments. Our biggest question now was how to reach these magical moments more quickly, easily, and repeatedly. We all felt when the whole group was listening and responding to the same pull. We practiced finding this pull, which seemed to be difficult and often fleeting. Was there a way to find that place and stay there?

This is when I checked in with my own experiences and was able to relay something important I'd discovered for myself over the last year. In my journal I'd written: *What if what is on the surface IS the thing?*

Before this discovery, I'd thought that the answers I was looking for were buried deep inside of me, and I'd need to dig to find them. This sounded exhausting. However,

through Deborah Hay's question, "What if where I am is what I need?," I recognized that the information I need is much closer to the surface than I'd imagined and much easier to listen to than I could have known.

This new awareness brought out ways of listening in the dancers that weren't so burdened and insecure. It offered the possibility to perceive this practice as simple and intuitive. The dancers practiced listening for what was on the surface with their whole bodies at once, their eyes, their ears, and their imagination. Maybe we don't have to dig for ideas, maybe we start at the surface and then we follow that seed down or around or under or over or along or nowhere. What if our work is really listening for what is on the surface in each moment rather than following the solutions that have been trained into us? It can take time and practice to recognize the difference, but imagine the possible implications of this practice in our contemporary world.

Another ingredient that started coming up early in our process was speaking while dancing. For the last five years, I've been intrigued with dancers speaking on stage and how this somehow changes their state of being with the audience. This was an ingredient that most of us had little experience with on a choreographic and performative level, so we practiced specific exercises to increase our awareness of language. First we worked on speaking aloud in a stream of conscious 'feedback loop'. The dancers found this refreshing. No time to think, no time to judge, connections were made without trying. They recognized and interacted with each other in different ways. They felt a bit scattered, but this allowed me as the audience to make connections on my own. Then we did an exercise on speaking internally. The results of this experiment were not what I'd expected. I assumed this would work in the same way that the vocal exercise did, but it did not. Without the physical release of the words, thoughts festered in their minds. This tapped into an over-analytical and judgmental voice. The dancers

became calculated and calculating. This was interesting research but not something I was interested in repeating onstage.

Through watching the practice of speaking in *Priority 6*, I became aware of what my interests were in relationship to speaking in performance. I found that literal associations that summarized what I was seeing offered me little room to insert my own interpretations. However, allowing text to enter the dance and then providing space for it, sparked my imagination and encouraged me to participate. Sarah Shun-lien Bynum said in the graduate fiction writing workshop this fall that a good author meets her reader somewhere in the middle, giving the reader just enough, while asking the reader to contribute. When done well, they meet in the sweet spot. I feel as though language in dance can offer this, and I'm interested in continuing to practice finding where that sweet spot is.

The addition of the extraction choreography helped me to ask more of the dancers in practice rather than in theory. Through this practice, something critically shifted in the dancers' ability to feel the pull of the dance. The extractions jumped into the middle of a moment, getting immediately to the core of the work. These extractions gave me an ideal place to insert my corrections and direction into the dance.

I will not forget the night I recognized how important these extractions were to *Space Between*. I extracted a duet with Jenn and Gina and gave it the word: tenderness. After a couple minutes of careful performing, Gina's head hit the ground abruptly. The shock brought tears to her eyes. Jenn began brushing Gina's back to comfort her, and Kyle crawled from where he was sitting in our outer circle to rub Gina's feet. As the choreographer and facilitator, I didn't want to assume anything. I asked, "Is the dance over, Gina?" She responded through her tears, "No, I don't think so." I was struck by her courage. Matthew, Anya, and I sat watching while Kyle and Jenn took care

of Gina. “I’m fine now, but I can’t stop crying.” Kyle returned to the circle while Gina and Jenn went on with their patient and tender dance. Gina’s metaphoric mask had been thrown off. She was no longer in her habitual performance mode. She could no longer hide and she didn’t want to. All of the subtle shifts I’d been asking for were thrust upon her at once. When the dance finished, we all felt grateful for what we’d witnessed. What courage. This night was a huge leap for us performatively but also as an ensemble. We’d all witnessed together how beautiful total exposure could be.

There were many more extractions that sent the dancers in new directions:

Jenn, Anya, Kyle – Kyle do less than the women Up until now, he felt as though he had to constantly move – but with this extraction he was asked to practice ‘not doing’ as a specific task. In this extraction, I also saw Kyle recognize that he could “take things on” rather than “take things in”. We’d become a close group and after much prodding, Kyle finally felt safe.

Gina – seeing as first priority (w/others) My story “the cocoon” is based on this moment. (For *The Cocoon* and other stories, please see Appendix two.) I saw the surprise in her eyes when she saw me and Jenn and Anya surrounding her. I felt that I could see her more clearly as I saw her seeing what surrounded her.

All 5 – Matthew, find where you belong in the dance Matthew often found himself in what I considered arbitrary solos, disconnected from everything else that was going on. I don’t expect the dancers to literally see everything but to imagine that they can place attention on everything (a great tool that I learned from Yolande Snaith)

Kyle, Jenn, Anya, Gina – Kyle, control the dance This was a difficult extraction. The women in *Space Between* are strong performers, and Kyle felt comfortable allowing them to lead. I wanted to encourage him to assert himself and insert himself into the whole. This was a brick wall moment for Kyle. A moment of recognizing that he didn’t

want to take responsibility for the dance. A wall he was willing to start breaking down but knew at that moment, he was slamming hard against it.

At this mid-way point in the process, it became important to get an audience into the studio. I did this for two reasons: to get feedback from people I trust and to give the dancers the opportunity to practice with an audience. We lined up six open rehearsals for November and December. Up to this point, they had only rehearsed *Space Between* in front of designers and me. We'd established our 'home', but it was time to see how the dancers transitioned between 'home' and 'performance' with an audience.

Our first guests were extremely generous. They gave us their attention and their presence, so that I was able watch how the dancers responded to being seen. Even with all of the practice, the dancers reverted back to old habits of performance. They forgot to listen for what was on the surface and instead created a dance that was disconnected. I expected having an audience would shift us, so this was a critical part of our process. Some of my feedback from that night:

I saw Kyle using solo arbitrarily
I saw Kyle rebel against the moment
I saw Gina trying to close the gap between group and Kyle, smooth over
I saw Gina reference the dance
I saw Jenn see in her periphery, but not right in front of her
I saw Jenn using habitual movement (gathering/sitting)
I saw Anya get frustrated, ditch the dancers, and side with the audience
I saw Anya reference the dance

At our second open rehearsal, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. The dancers became so involved with each other that they started leaving the audience out. A comment that I got was that the dancers seemed to be imploding. This was true. In the first scenario the dancers hid behind old habits. In the second scenario the dancers hid inside the group. They needed to experience this to be sure they could trust each

other and to recognize that the only way this dance could work would be to allow themselves to be seen working at a process of listening.

The adrenaline calmed down for future showings and we could deal with the dance rather than our feelings about the dance. At this point in the process, I was telling the dancers their extractions during the performance. At the moment I wanted to see Gina and Anya enter their duet I'd say, "Gina and Anya – a duet in sameness". From this direction the two dancers would find their way into "sameness". I did this in front of several colleagues and mentors and discovered that by openly directing these shifts in performance, I was giving my audience a lens through which to see what I was seeing. Omar Ramos, my lighting designer became quite interested and related this to a piece from the 1960s by Yvonne Rainer in which walkie-talkies were used to deliver the choreography. This felt exciting to me, as though I could have my hands in the dance, choreographing in front of the audience.

In January, we moved from our rehearsal studio into the theatre. Things were happening rapidly, but I noticed two aspects of the piece that weren't quite where I wanted them to be: speaking and seeing. The dancers had made drastic shifts performatively, but there were still details to work on. I decided to ask people with more experience than I to lead us in some specific workshops. Liam Clancy led a workshop on speaking with dance in which he encouraged us to practice using text non-functionally. Eric Geiger led a workshop about seeing in which we practiced noticing different ways of seeing in performance and determining what worked for my aesthetic. These workshops led to breakthroughs for the dancers and for me. It was worth taking time from "the dance" to work on techniques that ultimately led to huge shifts in the performance.

PHASE SEVEN - BRINGING THE PIECES TOGETHER

As the performance drew closer, it became necessary to re-imagine all of the pieces coming together. I'd been working with the dance itself for quite a while, but the designers were also at varying stages of their processes. As we brought them together, I appreciated the extent to which everyone involved supported the improvisational nature of this piece. My enthusiasm for real time performance seemed to be spreading.

In his first draft, Colin designed the space as a gallery with two back walls that open and become projection surfaces. After careful consideration for the movement of the audience, he added a wall to the center of the space to keep the audience from settling in one place. They would be required to move if they wanted to see all the dancing. This wall created the three dimensionality of the gallery space, inviting the audience to explore. Then Colin came to me with his idea for creating charcoal drawings for these walls. I was thrilled to have something distinctly Colin in the space.

Colin and I agreed to include Anna Chiaretta Lavatelli as the video artist for both the video art in the gallery as well as the projection design. I met Anna in the graduate fiction writing workshop and was drawn to her way of perceiving. Anna had been looking for the chance to work with dance and was excited to work on *Space Between*. I intended to use the projections to create a changing environment for the dance. She convinced me that we could use the dancers' bodies to accomplish these goals. When she first mentioned using the dancers, I squirmed at the thought of adding more dance to the space, but Anna was interested in disembodying the human form by using body parts to create landscapes. When I saw what she was able to do at the shoot, I was floored. The first time I saw the projections with the dance, they changed the way I saw the dance. The video landscapes put the dance into a new context that allowed me to see the space as more than a theatre.

Though Blair was unable to join rehearsals until late in fall quarter, he jumped in exactly where we were. He had been trying to "think" his way into *Space Between* and I continually discouraged this. I knew he would need to come to rehearsal and experience it. Once he joined the process physically, he tried things out and determined exactly what would be best for the piece. He found his process – a merging of sound with music that he derived each night from his response to *Priority 6*. He would watch *Priority 6* then gather samples based on his inspiration. He would then compose the sound live by mixing live sounds with the prerecorded sounds he'd gathered. His background as a composer and improviser supported him in this performance.

By January, the costumes were also starting to come together. I was a challenge for Jaymee at first. I couldn't articulate to her exactly what I wanted and I didn't have a script for her to refer to. So the two of us went shopping. Together, we found a look that was everyday but still connected the dancers to one another. It was dressy enough for the gallery but also artsy and quirky. Her concept was to compile a 'closet' of clothes for the dancers. After each *Priority 6* they would choose what they'd wear that night or at least for that performance, but only with her coaching and approval.

Leighann Enos was a critical figure in bringing everything together. Though she was unable to make many rehearsals before staging and tech, she made herself available to support the logistics of this show. Leighann was ready and willing to help invent a new way of running technical rehearsals. She was flexible and knew her priority was making sure that all of the creative elements had sufficient time but used this time wisely. She was willing to be in the moment each night, setting the lighting and projection cues only moments before opening the house. She was also willing to expose her responsibilities in this piece instead of hiding in the lighting booth. The dance needed this.

Of all the designers, Omar Ramos had the most unique design problem. He wanted to be on *Space Between*, but he was already assigned to show that would require his presence the day before our opening. As it became clear that *Space Between* would be working with improvisation, Omar devised a plan for improvisational lighting scores that he could teach to Leighann. He created a chart that responded to the extractions I chose each night. The lighting was cued based on the dancers onstage. He also recognized that in rehearsal, I was saying "blackout" as a way to end the dance. Omar created a hand signal that, used in performance, would allow me to choose my ending. These were very supportive solutions. They supported and validated my improvisational structure without requiring his presence. I could continue to play an active role as choreographer in *Space Between*. It would be my job to watch the dance and shape the dance in the moment. I would also have the all-powerful responsibility of ending the show.

I found some clarity with the choreography in the weeks before our tech rehearsals. I was now working with:

1. Gallery – 10 minutes no dancers, 10 minutes with solos
2. Performance – shifting spaces within 4-6 extractions (20min)
3. Home – Priority 6 (20min)

The only thing we still needed to work out with the choreography was the shifting of the space. How would we transition the space from a gallery to a theatre to 'home'? I was a bit overwhelmed by the largeness of this task. We would have fifty chairs to move in and around and two walls to take off. The idea had perplexed me for months, but I knew that I wouldn't be able to solve it until we were in the space with the walls and the chairs. I enlisted my dancers and Liam Clancy to help, becoming vulnerable myself in this rehearsal. I was aware that this decision might make or break the piece. What I wanted was for the space to continually shift throughout the middle section of the dance.

What we found was that if we eliminated chairs completely and let the audience view from the risers, the moving of the walls would easily direct the audience's attention and change their perception. I had everything that I needed; it was just a matter of discovering how it could work.

Which now brings me to the first staging rehearsal on January 31st, the first time all of the elements came together. The dancers' new tasks included tending to the moving walls and the movement of the audience, while experiencing the new energy that the lighting, costuming, projections, set, and sound brought to the dance. The dancers were overwhelmed. Anya commented that it felt like a completely different dance. At our next rehearsal I offered questions we'd been asking all along:

*How can we stay 'home' in the space of performance?
*How do I change depending on the space I am in?
*Can I live as myself inside of performance?
*Can I be in rehearsal while surrounded by performance?
*Can I see the space I'm in for what it is and not be ruled by it?
*Can I be with the people and the space…imagining that all of it is practicing what I'm practicing?

That night they performed a provocative dance. Now with the elements coming together, I realized that I needed to take my own vocal directing out of the dance. It was a difficult decision, as I appreciated its function for an audience, but at this point I was feeling awkward interrupting the dance with my voice, as though I was trying to assert my own authority over the piece. I trusted my own ability to listen to what the dance needed. In this new performance space, the dance had different needs than it had in rehearsal. And the dancers were ready to take on a different kind of Creative Memory.

Throughout tech rehearsal, I continued to feel intrigued by the creativity and commitment from the designers and crew to serve the intention of the dance in ways that I could not have imagined. Our main concern in these last days of rehearsal was to facilitate an experience for the audience that could take them out of their habits of

spectatorship and bring them into a new awareness of their relationship to the performance. In Sarah's class, we talked about how to encourage our reading audience to follow us and participate. Her suggestion was to teach your audience through consistency and repetition, bringing them in before revealing your quirks. This was our aim for the audiences of *Space Between.*

Without knowing what each audience might do, we took precautions. Blair created a sound installation outside the theatre that solved two major problems. First, it satisfied the safety needs for the theatre before the doors opened so that we wouldn't have to interrupt the experience of gallery. Secondly, it invited our guests to wander about the exhibit, priming them for this unusual experience. Colin held true to his gallery design, by lining the walls and the space with his artwork, Anna's video art, and my stories. The audience would have permission to see and read, in the middle of a performance space, experiencing this theatre in a new way. I situated the solos so that the audience would be forced to move in order to see each one, while Omar created a lighting design that subtly encouraged the audience to feel welcome on the 'stage'. I incorporated a pause at the time in the dance when the audience would think they'd figured out the system. In that my favorite moment, the audience would have a chance to recognize that they are a part of this experience with us all. When the walls start to move we'd have already established with the audience that they may also move if they need or want to. People would no longer hesitant, they'd realize exploration is welcome. The theatre would then transform revealing an open exposed space. Allowing the audience to settle into a new viewership with this dance. Allowing the audience to feel 'home'.

PHASE EIGHT – THE PERFORMANCE

On Wednesday, February 9th, 2011 *Space Between* celebrated its opening night. This long awaited date was upon us. Our timeline for the evening:

6:06pm – Dancers run *Priority 6*
Alicia and Blair watch

6:30pm - Dancers choose costumes
Blair selects sounds
Alicia creates choreography, chooses video and projections

After working through this process for the last three and a half months, I found a system for extracting that made it efficient. During *Priority 6,* I wrote down every possible combination that I saw placing a star by the moments I particularly enjoyed. I then hid myself at a desk in a small office and choreographed. I imagined several combinations before choosing six extractions that worked well together. I then chose a 7th for all five dancers to help lead the dance into the open space of 'home'. I wrote these extractions out using each dancer's first initial and the title I'd given the extraction. This was the choreography for the middle part of the dance. An example from Thursday night's performance:

1. JA – Reaching through
2. KM – Scoot
3. JG – Unison arm twist (first wall exits)
4. MA – Tidal wave carries me (second wall exits)
5. KGA – Lay face down in a line and see where that takes you (curtains)
6. JM – Patient tracing
7. All 5 – Easy does it & Follow the group energy

From twelve possibilities, I chose the video content that would best suit the extractions I'd chosen. The video environments would be projected on the upstage gallery walls once they opened during extraction two or three. Sometimes I chose video to juxtapose the dynamic of an extraction and other times I preferred to simply create an

environment for the dance. All of this choreography was decided within this fifteen-minute window:

6:45pm - Alicia hands choreography to Leighann
Leighann enters the data for the light and projection cues
Alicia shares the choreography with the dancers

6:50pm - House opens for *Space Between* (gallery)

6:55pm - Dancers enter one at a time to mingle

7:03pm - Jenn starts her solo followed one at a time by Kyle, Matthew, pause, Anya, Gina

7:20pm - Walls move – Extractions begin (performance)

7:35pm - Priority 6 (home)

7:50pm - Black out

After an hour break, we repeated this structure again by opening the doors at 8:50pm for a second performance. We used the same extractions for the second performance, but approached them in a new way. By the second performance, these extractions were consistently richer than the first. They'd been explored once, so a journey into them a second time opened up more possibilities. The need for two shows each night arose from the actual theatre space and our need to limit the audience number, but I became intrigued with what it meant for the performance itself. I was interested in what it meant to be in that state of listening for four hours each night and then four days in a row. Though the dancers grew tired, their performances became increasingly settled and aware.

One of the most interesting things about this dance is the room for failure. On any given night, we could completely break down. We've done all this prep work, but with so much open space, there is plenty of room to fail. I reminded myself several times during the process that graduate school is the time to experiment and push my

limits. I remembered this going into the performances. I saw each performance as another experiment. A chance to see what happens when the dancers are under pressure. A chance to witness how the audience responds to them. A chance to take the same kind of risks that I was asking of everyone else.

With this chance for failure, comes my focused responsibility as the choreographer to support the dance wherever it needs me even during performance. My influence on this piece is recognizable and immediate, possibly more so than if I'd choreographed every detailed movement. How I felt, what I said, what I looked at, what I was attracted to, it all affected the dance. Unlike my more traditionally choreographic work, where I might abandon the work as it took the stage, I couldn't step out of this process. It was my responsibility to watch, shape, and then end the dance in every performance. Through choosing the extracted moments that struck me, I directly insert myself and my preferences into the dance. In the nights of performance, it was my job to articulate to the dancers the nuances of the piece that needed to shift. To see what was really happening on stage and say the thing that could bring the dancers into the work of the dance.

This is what I have to offer as a choreographer. I once found my strength in the tools of spatial movement patterns and timing, but I now recognize that 'seeing' has always been my greatest strength. Out of curiosity, people have asked me how I can call myself the choreographer of a dance that has no set movements. The kind of choreography I'm interested in making requires a kind of trust and attention that a more traditional definition of choreographer may not imply. Along with many fellow artists, I am asking an old question in a new way. What is choreography and what else could it become?

Knowing my effect on the work, I wrote this for my collaborators:

I trust this process we've shared and continue to share
I trust this dance that wants to be found
I trust your finely tuned listening
I trust what's on the surface
I trust your dive into what's on the surface
I love the dive
I love not knowing
I love watching you not know
I love watching you trust the not knowing
I love watching you
I love you
I trust you

I was pleasantly pleased with the size of that first audience and their willingness to move about the space. This audience took our invitation. We felt successful. The second audience was much more conservative, scattering to find their seats as the first walls started to move. Audience behavior continued to vary throughout the eight shows and it became delightful for me to watch the audience to see how each was so different.

Neither performance on that first night was our best, however. The dancer's seemed overwhelmed by the crowds and responded by entertaining their audience. I saw the dancers leave the work we'd been practicing to try pleasing an expectation they felt from the audience. Everything they were trying to do was keeping them from their ability to really listen and create. For the next twenty-four hours, I pondered over what to say to shift the dancer's perspectives. In the end, I was brutally honest with the dancers. I told them that I saw them dancing "for others" instead of "with others", that they'd resorted to habitual ways of performing. I asked them to consider this question: *Can I be 'with other's and trust that the work I'm doing is enough?*

Thursday's performances were filled with the work I am interested in and the space I long for. The dancers shifted. They trusted the work we'd been doing and invited being seen doing this work. It was more than enough. We all left the theatre satisfied.

Friday brought its own new challenge, fatigue. The *Priority 6* that evening was dragging, and the first performance was a struggle. The dance and the sound became dark that night, and the dancers resisted it. In trying to add lightness to the piece, they forgot to allow the dance to show itself and instead wrestled to get through it. I saw the dancers struggling. They felt defeated, but it wasn't as bad as they'd feared. *Space Between* at its worst is an interesting journey through unrelated moments. At its best, this piece is a wild ride landing me in a place where I can't quite remember where I've been but I know I'm home. We changed some extractions around and shook that dance off with a reminder from Blair to "let the dance be what it wants to be." The second dance that night was one of their best. The dancer's had gotten their energy back and the audience applauded their extreme generosity that night.

Saturday's runs were both successful. The dancers were now able to adjust to their audience without losing their own footing. The audiences were willing to participate, some people even staying onstage for the entire piece. These last couple of performances welcomed humor and unexpected surprises, a strong way to close our run.

PHASE NINE – WHAT REMAINS

On the last two nights of *Space Between*, I gave talkbacks. I explained the dance, the process we'd been through, and the journey we'd hoped to achieve. I am interested in how this information may have changed the way people reflected on the performance. I am not a purist who believes that the work needs only to stand-alone. I am much more interested in the conversation that it can create afterward and the shifts in perception that may continue to occur. I'm interested in the greater understanding that comes from seeing a work multiple times. Building a familiarity in the same way we

do with music. We had several audience members attend repeat performances, becoming addicted to this ride or wanting to absorb it more fully.

> *As I let go of the subconscious desire to name things and to categorize – a process often mistaken for choreography – I slowly allow the specificity of the temporal ride I've been on to come to the fore and be enough.*
> *- Tere O'Connor, choreographer*

This is the quote that I included in my program. I feel that it gets at the heart of what I my interests are with making and presenting dance in our contemporary world. How do I ask my audience to let go of naming, something they've learned to expect when coming to the theatre? Something they may even take pride in as they solve the mystery of the performance? Telling them to let go seems counter intuitive to what I'm really asking for, but creating an experience where they have the opportunity to let go and enjoy the ride became the challenge and driving force for *Space Between*.

From a variety of responses from a variety of audience members, I've determined that we were successful at creating this journey. Encouraging our audience to let go of deeply ingrained habits was not an easy task. I know there are several members of the audience who "didn't get it." However, there were many who were either ready for a new experience or were simply carried away by the thrill of this freedom.

Elizabeth Swallow, a dancer in the community and close friend of mine, felt herself take the ride that we offered. Unable to anticipate what might happen next, she found herself thrilled during the shifting walls and then satisfied and settled when the space opened up. She saw the dancers supporting one another without deleting their own options. She was inspired by what this could mean on a humanitarian level.

Garrick Oliver, an architect and husband to Jenn Oliver, wrote in an email: What I meant to express [in reflection of *Space Between*] was that I could see that there wasn't

necessarily one theme or concept to the piece that everyone would take away. I understood that every person would take away something different AND that every performance would end up offering different feelings. That, combined with the length of the performance, left me feeling like I wanted to see more and think about it more because I didn't get enough from the first go. It wasn't that I didn't get enough in the sense that there wasn't enough being offered...I didn't get enough in the sense that I just wanted to experience more of it, period.

Courtney Kilian, a second year MFA fiction writer, wrote an artistic response to *Space Between*. She attended the first performance on Friday that many of the dancers felt badly about. I read it to the dancers before the performance on Saturday and said, "In case you were wondering, the audience IS practicing what we're practicing."

> Nikolai said I could do that twice a week. And, after I saw it I knew what he meant: have an experience that moved through every part of me. Something that touched my mind, my synapses as they struck each other, made me aware of my fingertips against Daniel's worn jeans, and the gold etched charm from Spain resting at my throat, and the striped scarf with its different textures tugging at my neck, and the coolness of the space we were in, and the surroundings moving around me and. And all those things that we are feeling simultaneously but are not supposed to process all at once because it would be too much information. It would be chaos. But this is what I feel now. And it is not chaos. It is something in between hovering, in between levitating, in between feeling so human that I know this is right.
>
> Find this in another's face, in another's movements: the etchings of lines, and sunspots, and dark, deep eyebrows that brush against a glass frame, or eyelashes that curl against sunglasses, or eyelashes that are different on both sides of the same face—bright blonde and then dark brown, or chapped lips, or someone that needs water, or space, or air, or. What do we give to others? How do we move through space? What is touch and how does moving a finger down the tip of another's nose or down the indent in the back imagining the spine in all of its elasticity, in all of its curves, in all of its bumps, rumples, links, bring you closer to something than you've ever been before but you still cannot touch it, still cannot explain it. That it cannot be contained on this page, or in these or words, and is not enough for this one moment. It is a thousand voices or five. It is those that I've let in and those that I chose not to listen to

even when they tell me, I can do this. I can.

> In every second we are creating a moment. What more can an artist do for their audience than create moments? Than create an experience that resonates through every part of you. That makes you feel completely alive. And then some. That awakens something in you. Even if you are not sure what has been awakened. Or how. Or what perfectly paired moments in the sequence happened to occur as they just did. Like that. To make you feel like this. Like someone new. Like someone who could walk out of this story. And into another story. That is more real. And is more yours than the one before it.

I will acknowledge that these examples are all artists or friends, but they are some of my most trusted and critical colleagues. I didn't take a survey of my audience's response because that might imply that they should have an immediate response to the work. However I did receive responses from many audience members who weren't on the same page with us. Judy Dolan's husband said that he wasn't so sure about this kind of dance. My friend Mary Vlassis said, "I didn't get it," but with a smile on her face. I could see the audience at every moment in the performance. On one side of the risers I could see a man so intent on watching the dancers, while a woman sat in the front row with a scowl on her face. I could hear a woman laughing as she was forced to move in the space while a man put his head in his hand to avoid eye contact. This is the nature of this kind of work, and I feel it is my job to push dance and its audiences forward toward what is possible.

Lastly, my father Garvin Peterson is a man whose only attachment to the arts is through his two daughters, so his response intrigued me and inspired me most of all. My father is a former engineer who works in the world of industry creating processes to efficiently produce goods. He saw *Space Between* (whispering into my ear during Matthew's solo, "I don't get it") and then stayed for the talkback. After this experience, he made an incredible realization. He was doing in industry what I was doing in dance. Most people in his position create systems that are expected to work forever leaving out

a fundamental part of the equation – change. My father works from a model of production that values improvisation, stepping back from the systems to reevaluate the needs of the environment at any given moment. This philosophy is radical, and often dismissed because it requires critical thinking and evaluation, something that can never be systematic. He found the work we were making supportive to his own process.

Instead of choreographing the steps and asking my dancers to repeat them systematically, I developed a process that creates the dance differently each night. I found a way to give the dance direction but keep it open to all of the elements that couldn't be predicted. This incredible connection that my father made goes much deeper than whether the dance was good or bad, whether the dance was successful or unsuccessful. It hits at the core of how I want to live my life and how I hope the world can change.

CONCLUSION

When looking at the performance of *Space Between* with some distance, I notice that there are three main elements responding to each other inside of the space at any given time: the audience, the performers, and the choreographer. The audience's mobility asks for a certain level of participation and self-awareness, turning their focus toward their own existence in this room at this moment with everyone involved. The choreography asks the dancers for a heightened awareness of their own work in the moment whether it is working with the written choreography in the solos or working on keeping awareness of the group in *Priority 6*. Finally, my own attention to the dance as I practice seeing what the dance needs in every moment is palpable. I am with the dancers in their work as I work to find the ending. There is something about the quality of this attention from everyone in the room that runs central to *Space Between*. Together we experience a hyper-awareness of the present moment.

What are the implications of this? What can we do with this attention? Where did it come from? Did improvisation create it or can that attention exist inside of other more known modes of dance? Where else in life does it exist? These are all questions I am left with after this experience. I intend to continue to explore these questions both in written analysis and in movement. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to create this work. I intend to continue making work that explores the questions that I am interested in now…and now…and now…and…

Appendix 1 – Proposal

MFA Dance Theatre Thesis Proposal

February 22, 2010

As a result of our consumerist society, audience participation in concert dance in the U.S. (whether directly or indirectly) has become improbable. Our American theatre and dance audiences have learned to sit down, be quiet, watch passively and understand. Unless an audience member has a relationship with contemporary dance, they often do not recognize that dance may read differently than traditional theatre, cinema, or classical ballet. Many audience members are looking for a story, a statement, or beauty that is unambiguously communicated to them. If this fails to happen these audience members feel left out and disappointed. Of course all art is subjective, but as human beings we have inherited the capacity to understand our experiences intuitively, truth without logic. In an attempt to invite others to share my excitement for the obscurity that exists in dance theatre, I want to encourage audiences to let go of what has become habit when they enter the theatre. The thrill of mystery is far more exhilarating than the confines of a clear reality. My thesis performance, *Solo as Unison*, will attempt to facilitate a more experiential viewing of performance, giving audiences the freedom to notice their own kinesthetic response.

How can I encourage an audience to recognize their role as witnesses who not only receive but also give simply with their presence? How can I blur the separation between audience and performance/performer? How can I empower an audience to become aware of what they are experiencing in their bodies in response to the performance? What is the difference for a performer between rehearsal without

audience and performance with audience and how can the two merge? How much does the imagination play in both the audience's and the performer's experience of the performance?

An Evening Performance in Three Parts

In order to begin examining these questions, I have created an organizing structure for this evening length work. I am interested in creating three very distinct viewing spaces: gallery/theatre/home (rehearsal/performance/imagination). The three spaces will last for approximately 20 minutes each. I had originally conceived these three worlds existing separately in three different locations, but have been challenged and inspired by the possibility of shifting the same space underneath the audience's feet. Shifting only one space has more potential to allow the audience fewer disruptions. I would like to use the Theodore and Adele Shank Theatre for my performance. I am also considering using space around the theatre and towards the dance building. I am not only interested in shifting the space, but more importantly shifting our perception of how we, the audience and performers, are seeing in the space.

Gallery

The space that the audience will enter first is the gallery. This is an open space where the audience can meander through many often-changing installations. Throughout the space I will choreograph live human installations, photographic dance pieces, telematic dancers on computer laptops, and live/delayed projection designs that can bring together these separate installations into one cohesive picture. Each installation is a portrait. How can these portraits live in individual worlds but also work together effectively? By starting my piece in a gallery setting, I intend to create a world where my audience has more choices than they have trapped in a seated theatre space. I intend to give the audience more responsibility in their involvement as witness in these

earlier stages of the performance, so that as the space transforms into a theatre these choices and these questions will stay with them.

Theatre

The transition into theatre is possibly the most crucial. I anticipate that an audience's habit could be to slip into a more passive state, so my challenge will be to keep challenging their awareness. Even this space will be in a constant state of flux and transition, utilizing some of the content that we established during the gallery setting. Choreographically, I will be looking closely at performance technique with my dancers. Finding ways of merging the person with the performance. This has long interested me and I will continue studying present-state performance onstage as this too allows for the audience to have a more direct experience with the performance.

Home

The last space is home. A space that represents what is personal and intimate. I connect home to the space inside all of our individual minds, our imagination. I see dance in my mind everywhere I go. In this portion of the piece I will read aloud the script of a vivid dance that I have written, allowing for each audience member to visualize the dance in his or her own mind. I have recently begun to write my choreography in the form of prose. In this writing, I reveal score, process, and unlock the influence of imagination. It may be read in the dark or while observing a specific image.

Collaborations

*Scenic Design Collaboration

My collaboration with a scenic designer is going to be crucial to the evolution of this piece. There are three scenic elements that will be constantly shifting, influencing the movement and the way the audience sees the performance. The first is the audience seating/standing arrangement. I expect that this will shift at least three times. The second is a floor that will make dancing in that space safer for the dancers. This floor, however, is also a part of the reorganization to the space. I see this as a floor in many pieces that could be put together in several different ways, redesigning the space as the performance progresses. Performers would be able to reorder these pieces of floor either horizontally or vertically, exploring spatial configurations. The third element is a series of projections of footage that is taking place live and also being processed live. The technical needs for this piece will be demanding, as I would like to use live video feed all around the gallery space to manipulate live and several projections that may include an outdoor wall.

*Sound Design/Composer Collaboration

I would like to work with a sound designer who is interested in composing an hour length piece that involves the concept “Solo as Unison” as a process within which to work. I am interested in using pedestrian sounds, instrumental sounds, and text to create audio for the entire piece. I am interested in the mixing of both live and prerecorded elements. I would like my sound designer to feel confident as a composer.

***Costume Design Collaboration**

I am interested in costumes that can create a character/performance persona. I am also interested in post-modernism's desire to stay "real" in street clothes on stage. In rejection to costume, this street clothes solution has become a style of its own, recognizable to those of us who see dance regularly. I am interested in playing on both of these extremes, in the same way that I am interested in performance persona versus authenticity in performance. I see character arising out of the gallery space, almost as portraits on the wall. Each dancer would then have another costume that would be more pedestrian, but in some way connect to their character costume. Something else to consider would be the space and the elements used in the space. Concrete, glass, stone, trees…how would a costume designer work with or against the space?

***Lighting Design Collaboration**

My designer could have many challenges that are not typical to theatre. I am looking to light spaces outdoors, rooms without grids, and projection. I am interested in non-theatrical lighting and even darkness as possibilities as well.

My Choreographic Process

I would like to give myself time with the unfolding of the process, starting work in the spring quarter and continuing into the summer and fall. My choreographic processes are always clearly that, a process. One in which I am continually creating and recreating, constantly evolving without getting attached to what I've made. I keep my work open as long as possible allowing for form and content to emerge from structure. My work has been greatly influenced in the last five years by the work of Tere O'Connor and in the last year by the processes of Deborah Hay. I have developed a way of gathering movement that involves writing both associatively and creatively. I intend to use this writing to create scores that can be interpreted into movement individually by each dancer. I will ask the dancers to participate in the creation of movement as well as setting my own movement on their bodies. I intend to work with character and self, improvisation and choreography, unison and solo.

The concept of *Solo As Unison* runs throughout every aspect of this piece. From my desire for the audience to take responsibility for his/her own experience to the floor which can be used individually or put together as a whole, from the individual experiences of the dancers that come together to create the choreography to the sound that brings together individual elements, "solo as unison" exists physically in the whole of the performance. I will continue to investigate "solo as unison" as a concept within my own creative process as the through line for this dance piece.

Solo As Unison:

*4-8 dancer/performers (non-students, though possibly grads from other disciplines)

*2 videographers (from the visual arts department)

*Possibly live musicians

**If the audience design requires fewer audience members, this piece could be performed twice each evening. 7pm/9pm.

An Example of my writing for *Untitled: Center of the Universe*

---She slipped into her black satin gloves that stop just before the elbow and stepped into her full white petticoat in all of its fullness and bounce. She was late for her afternoon tea at 3pm. They exchanged tangential conversation specifically about the many ways to get to town. She sighed a grand sigh as she sipped the sweetness of the kool-aid.

She was no longer a little girl, but her Red Balloon was always available to relieve her of that great ego that held onto trying and expectation, two nasty bugs that lived subtly inside her ribcage and teeth. The only thing she needed to do when she found herself heavy with burden was pull that latex balloon over the culprit, tie a knot, and send it flying into the air. She used to tie the white string that hung from her red balloon to her fence, not ready to let go of these familiar friends but hoping to at least give herself some distance. Now, these balloons fly high over California until they disappear into a dot or is that the light from the sun causing an illusion.

Appendix 2 – Writing Dance

Cocoon

She lives in a cocoon. It wraps around her and goes with her everywhere she travels. And she travels far. To the southern states of the U.S., Georgia specifically, with its peaches and heat. But maybe she's just passing through. I don't think she stops to take a look. Just driving through the southern states in her cocoon without me. She tells me about her travels but refuses to bring me along. No room for me in that cocoon. And I'm not sure she realizes that it is wrapped around her. So tightly that I've decided to leave. But then her head pops out the top. She looks like a turtle and I am charmed. She sees me standing on the corner on a sidewalk that doesn't belong to me. She asks me if I'd like to hop in. I do. Only it's not a cocoon. It's a beat-up Volkswagen bug. It's a convertible. I tell her I'll go anywhere with her. And I do.

That's the Stupid One

"That's the stupid one," she says with her face in the floor.

"That's the stupid one," she repeats, her body lying in a position that looks as though she's been dropped from a tall building. A splayed position that reminds me of a football player lying on the turf after a career-ending hit. The moment when the crowd wonders if he could be paralyzed. But at least he is talking. She is talking, "That's the stupid one." Then her arm that has been twisted beneath her unbends and I release the breath I didn't realize I was holding.

"Don't say it," comes a second voice. The voice of the woman sitting next to her but not looking at her "If you say it, you'll make it true…"

"That's the stupid one."

My heart drops. Just moments ago this was a joke. Just moments ago I was walking on the comfortable cushion of what must have been a cloud or cotton balls, but these voices dropped me. I didn't even notice the fall. They say the mind protects. That it will conveniently forget trauma. Self-preservation. Except that the place I have landed has the most powerful gravitational pull. I don't know how I got here, but I am here.

"If you say it out loud, you'll make it true. You'll make it real, and I'm not ready for it to be real so don't say it out loud."

But she already did.

And she will do it again.

And I am grateful.

A Lullaby

They are two women walking along a clear path. They see something up the way I cannot see, but I trust it must exist as their enduring eyes stay with it. These women are comfortable in their patience.

A man stands behind them looking the other way. Gazing down the path from which they've come. Uncertain of what he sees. His uncertainty bubbles up to the surface and rather than push it back down, he allows himself to be that boy he sees on the path behind him, to feel his fear. He has become a fragile crystal champagne flute allowing these bubbles to swirl ferociously until he is drunk and spills over onto the women. He is surprised. They are not.

He stands where they have just been, looking up the path toward the thing I cannot see. They back away from him, witnesses to his floating. They stroke his hair and rest their motherly hands on the small of his back, from afar. They hold his hands and kiss his forehead from the other side of time. She sings a lullaby while the other rocks him to sleep.

Space

And there it was

space

Open space

You left it there not an accident

Like a bowl of milk left on the back stoop for strays

I want you to know that this space was not wasted on me. I took it. I used it as a portal into another world. A world that is mythical as it exists in close proximity to my outermost layer of skin.

You invite me to take this portal to the boardwalk of an east coast beach. With circus acts and carnival games and bouncy red balls. Or to a cartoon suburb where pre-chewed gum sap is sold by children for a hefty price and snails the size of cars leave slimy trails along the black paved roads. Or to a barn where mama pigs fly next to pink polka-dotted bugs but sail back home on sailboats.

Or are you simply a dancer moving alone in an empty room with gray marley floors and high ceilings? Silly thought. That could only happen in dreams.

Solos - This is the choreography

1. She tells a story and through that story we see her through what she leaves out
2. She puts on a costume
3. She stands in front of a small mirror, not this large audience
4. She tells a story and through that story we see her through what she leaves out
5.
6.
7.

Untitled

The long-legged woman is avoiding your gaze

The long-legged man cannot catch your gaze

But the man in the middle is available

He is holding it all together

He is holding it all together and supporting the others

He is holding it all together and supporting the others and reaching out to you

He is holding it all together and supporting the others and reaching out to you and taking care of himself

He is a juggler of sorts

Emerging Forms

Her image blurs from heat and distance as if desert pavement separates us. She approaches. I make out only colors, then shapes, then a petticoat and a large-brimmed lace hat. With a debutante's accent she says, "My, my. It is warm in here. I am darn near perspiring."

A surge of laughter fills the room and she is gone.

But her medium remains.

An Unlikely Combination

There they go…the pack

The collection of animals unlikely to assimilate anywhere except maybe as a screen-print on a young child's cotton T-shirt.

The Lama's graceful neck and her whimsical stories
The furry Koala's warm embrace
The teenage Elk's jointy awkwardness
The Panther's sensual preparedness and deadly pounce
The Polar Bear's playful roar – always on cue
And the Fox with his smooth intuition

Together, roaming forests and oceans and open hills beneath the Hawk's watchful eye

Together, they are loyal to this moment
loyal to the pack