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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

DANCING THROUGH LIGHT: MAKING PERSONAL SPACE A STAGE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Amber Renee Zepf

June 2021

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Copyright Page	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
I. Introduction	1
II. Methodology	3
III. Procedure	13
IV. Analysis	16
V. Evaluation	23
VI. Conclusion	27
APPENDIX A: Images	30
APPENDIX B: Rehearsal Questionnaire	36
APPENDIX C: Final Questionnaire	39
APPENDIX D: Diagrams	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

Abstract

Dancing Through Light: Making Personal Space a Stage

Amber Zepf

As a Lighting Designer, I will be adapting Western lighting design techniques to be impactful, appealing, and cohesive for the entirely online performance of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*. This project includes using at-home and accessible lighting tools available to the dancers, as well as natural outdoor lighting, to create a space that feels like a stage for the dancers and builds connections between people, audiences and company. The inspiration and connections are built from studying site-specific, screen and stage dances; as I work with dancers to create a variety of designs I will also analyze their responses to my questionnaire to find if a shift in lighting can re-center their personal spaces as a performative stage space. Through analysis of the responses, I found that communication and connection begin with acknowledgement of the tools and space to then allow creativity to stretch and grow as a community.

This thesis is dedicated to those who have aided my artistic journey, including by not limited to: Michael “Doc” Chemers, David Cuthbert, Cynthia Ling Lee, D Stone, Patti Strickland, Laura Boutros, and all my friends and family.

INTRODUCTION

The past year of 2020, with Covid-19 restrictions and quarantine procedures in place, has caused a massive shift in how live performances are executed and viewed. With a need for social distancing came a need for new versions of connectivity, especially in the theater space. While many theaters throughout the world have closed their doors, others have turned to online performances as a way of continuing production. The success of these performances varies greatly and has caused artists to examine how theaters have used technology to enrich, or failed to enrich, their live performances. With new technologies, theater production has adapted continuously since the advent of television and mass media; however, the power of theater lies within its ability to implore empathy; which is greater in a live performance setting. Productions like *Lubricious Transfer* connected performers through space and time; this performance in 2005 included projection screens and live video feeds between two locations, Santa Cruz and New York, to create one performance.¹ Online and streamed performances are not new to theater, especially dance productions, but when theater artists are forced to collaborate with technology outside of their own creative choice, it can become a limitation rather than an addition to the performance. How do artists avoid being limited by technology?

¹ Giges, Bob and Edward C. Warburton. "From Router to Front Row: *Lubricious Transfer* and the Aesthetics of Telematic Performance." *Leonardo*, vol. 43 no. 1, 2010, p. 25-32.

Moving to an online platform has caused adjustments in how the theater world views technology, and every show becomes part of the adaptation. How does a Lighting Designer adapt their tools and knowledge to enhance an online experience, for the performer and the audience? The focus is to create a connection to the performance for the audience, which begins with building a strong connection for the performer to the work. The connection with an online performance will be different than a stage performance, but it does not need to inhibit the creativity of the artist. Site-specific and screen choreographers have been adapting performances to blend with technology for decades, and that is the launching point of building a connected performance for a socially distanced company and audience.

In a live stage performance there are many aspects that are involved in the creation: direction, design, rehearsals, space and much more. Performers are usually on the outside of the technical and design processes of a show, but these design elements, especially lighting, have now fallen into the hands of performers because of the restrictions of rehearsing and performing through online communication. From conception to the filming of a show, a performer now has a hand in all aspects of lighting design. This thesis will look into the possibilities of creating a connection between the performers and audience by bringing awareness to their space through design, in specific lighting. As a Lighting Designer for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*, I used my knowledge of design techniques for stage, screen and site-specific performance as a bridge to adapt the design to the available at-home lighting instruments and to recreate a stage like space in the dancer's home. With an

awareness of their lighting, the dancer will have a deeper connection to their performance space, which will create an established connection to the performance and a connection between people, audience and company, that has been lost when forced to produce online.

METHODOLOGY

LIGHTING AS A TOOL

The first part in creating a performance space in a home is to investigate how lighting design is used in a theater setting and the performer's connection to the lighting. As a result of the digitalization of theater during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, a lack of connection between the audience and the performer has created a shift in stage space. In order to create a connection again, the performer must establish a space, the area where the performer will create the piece, that can be re-centered as the stage. The available spaces to the performers are settings such as a home, backyard, or outdoor site; the transformation of such spaces into a re-centered stage, however, allows the performer to view these spaces as a part of the performance. Lighting design is a large part of re-centering the performance in a new space. Prior to the pandemic, common lighting design methods were structured by a system useful for the stage and, therefore, not readily transferable to a person's home. However, by adapting the lighting design in one's home to reframe the dancer's space, the lighting can bring a sense of stage and new connections to the performance.

In visual performance, lighting is always present and the design of lighting becomes a tool for framing a performance by creating dimension in a performer's body. This is done in a Western dance performance, on a traditional stage, by adding side lighting and angles to highlight curves, or to create areas of darkness to minimize the audience's field of view. The absence of lighting design can create a shift in a performance, whether intentional or not; and like a camera, lighting design is meant to direct the audience's attention and shape the stage. My knowledge in stage lighting is the root of how I view performances, and became the bases for how to approach an online performance. Karen White's 2003 article *Dancing in the Light* illustrates the dancer's perspective of lighting: "as [the dancer] made her entrances in each of the eight sections, she felt as if she were stepping into a totally different world- an effect created through the stage lighting alone" and thus showing that lighting design has a tangible, significant effect on a dancer's performance on stage.² It is the Lighting Designer's job to create visual direction within the performance space, which is integrated during the technical rehearsals.

The technical rehearsals, which shifts the rehearsed performance into the stage setting, do more for performers than visually completing the show. Performers spend their time working on a piece and rehearsing, often in a space that is separate from the stage, but during technical rehearsal the dancers begin performing with the lighting design. The power of the lighting design can shift the performer's emotions, in White's words: "especially if the piece is intimate, the lighting can put you in the

² White, Karen. "Dancing in the Light." *Pointe*, vol. 4, no. 2, 04, 2003, p. 50-51 (50).

frame of mind to feel that way.”³ While a space like one’s home can be seen as the most intimate space, the use of it as a performance space can cause distance from the intimacy, which can be reestablished by the lighting design. The time spent in technical rehearsals gives the performers the opportunity to be grounded in the space, creating a connection and mentally preparing the performers for an audience. The connection that is built between the performers and the space is lost when performing in a home, virtually.

To adapt the performance process to a fully online setting, a Designer must begin with their own process. The process of creating a lighting design begins with the space. A Designer, ideally, starts during pre-production with what is available in the theater and the locations for hanging lights, and after discussions with the Scenic Designer and Director, the Lighting Designer begins to build a plot, a blueprint of where lights are wanted in the space (Appendix D). This is done while thinking about how to create the best angles and have a variety of styles available for programming. The Designer thinks about instrument positions in systems of lights, that is to say multiple lights that create a wash across the stage. These systems begin with front light, and build up to top lighting, side lighting, backlighting and end with specials.⁴ The hanging and focusing of these lights into position happens outside of rehearsal space and time, and prepares the stage for technical rehearsals, when the performers and the designers come together to program and run through all aspects of the show.

³ Ibid, 51.

⁴ Specials are any lights that are singled out from a system of lights, and are usually used for a specific part of the show- unlike systems that are general lighting for the whole show.

The purpose of lighting design, then, is to create multiple qualities of light on stage. Lighting design, in combination with other design elements, creates a variety of shapes, colors, tones and brightness that will influence the performance of a piece and indicate to the audience the intention of the performance, while also making the performance appealing visually. In a theater setting, there are a variety of instruments that can be used: gobos, gels, dimmers and LEDs are common, but those tools are not readily available in a home.⁵ For a stage play or musical performance, the performer's face is lit because it is central to conveying the text to the audience. With a Western dance performance, where my training lies, the focus is the body and shapes of movement created, so side lighting and sharp angles are used to help highlight those shapes. Image 1 (Appendix A) shows how color, in systems of side lighting, is combined to create contrast on the bodies. The contrast can also come from just the angle of lighting alone, without any color. Image 2 (Appendix A) shows how top lighting in combination with darkness on stage can shape how the performers are viewed. These concepts are translated to a lighting plot which can be moved, with adjustments from theater to theater, and made to fit an area.⁶ I used the same concepts, translated to a home, by creating a plot as a blueprint for the ideal lighting positions (Appendix D).

There are advantages of filming and producing virtually; many of the lighting elements, like the use of gels to color the lights and gobos to add texture, could be

⁵ *Lighting Design*. Film.; The American Theatre Wing, 7 Dec. 2016.

⁶ *Theatrical Lighting*. Film. Andrew Preston, prod.; Appleseed Media Group, 1995.

done virtually in post-production through editing. However, while many programs can edit the colors and tones of a video, they still require the lighting to be established in the footage before editing. Because my skill set is focused on in-person design, I chose to focus on creating as many effects through lighting instruments rather than in editing. Having the dancer perform for the camera and have no part outside of learning the choreography causes distance from the show, because they will not see or have part in the building of the show like they would in a theater space. The dancer in a stage production is not involved in the designing of the lighting, but they are still present for the process and have that time to create a connection between the choreography and the lighting design, making the lighting design another element of the choreography. Involving the dancer in the lighting design allows for balance with the technology; in a virtual setting that means the technical processes must be compounded with the rehearsal process to create a connection, rather than causing more alienation.

SITE-SPECIFIC AND SCREEN PERFORMANCES

The process of creating a design can rely heavily on reference photography, to visualize the tone of lighting that is desired, but the online performance limits the recreation of the tones. To begin creating a design for an online performance I looked at site-specific, or performances that are centered around a space outside of a theater, to examine the design process and how balance is created without the conveniences of stage lighting.

My use of site-specific dance in this paper is an adaptation of the art form in combination with screen performance. All of the performances created for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* were made with specific locations in mind, and I feel would not be transferable to another performance space. These pieces have also been choreographed for a screen performance, which is another element of dance that is outside the realm of stage performances. To give context of my working definitions, I looked at *Site Dance*, edited by Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik:

In closing, the goal of this book – one akin to the goal of the site artists themselves – is this: To amplify the connection between places, people, and performance. To explore the possibilities that art can bring to the dialogue between humans and their environments. To celebrate the beauty of place, the community spirit, and the deep-seated knowledge of our surroundings that site-specific dance evokes.⁷

The use of site-specific in this paper follows similarly to these goals, as *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* was created the intention was to build connection over the various locations and include a new view of the personal space for the performers and audience, one that includes performance and creativity within the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. While working with this definition of site-specific performance, there was a need to examine the uses of screens in performance. Many artists from the 20th Century have been experimenting and developing a practice of dance for camera, in *Dance on Screen* by Sherril Dodds the goals of dance for camera are explained:

⁷ Kloetzel, Melanie, and Carolyn Pavlik, editors. *Site Dance Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*. University Press of Florida, 2009, p. 1-24 (22).

It therefore seems that part of the agenda of dance designed for the camera is to avoid the transposition of a stage context to screen. One way in which this can be achieved is to locate the performance in a site that would not bring to mind, or normally be associated with, a stage setting.⁸

While my goals for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* is to create a sense of stage for the performers and the audience, the filming and setting itself needs to break away from the intentions of creating a work for a stage that happens to be filmed. To build a performance that is aware of the space in a site-specific manner and is connected to the screen with the techniques of dance for camera in mind, my designs looked at the techniques of stage lighting design, but focused on a “do-it-yourself” creation of tools and adaptation of the designs to fit the non-traditional stage spaces.

Looking at site-specific dance, there is an emphasis on location and space, which is often an outdoor space and was influential in how I approached the outdoor sections of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*. The use of the sun was described to the dancers in the same format as the blueprints of lighting positions (Appendix D) and they were instructed to establish a clear forty-five-degree angle between themselves and the sun. Choreographers for the stage get to discuss the setting that is built, but in site-specific performances (like those created by Martha

⁸ Dodds, Sherril. *Dance on Screen Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art*. Palgrave, 2001, p. 1-35 (23).

Bowers) the setting is pre-established and has a history.⁹ These connections, built by a personal history to the location, are present in personal spaces, such as homes. A person is accustomed to having their home stay stagnant visually for long periods of time, but in online performance, the home is becoming the stage. In my approach to having unison between locations, the inspiration came from site-specific performances, but the dancer's homes, in some instances, had to shift and became more of a transformative space with the movement of lighting and furniture, which emulated the building of a set for a stage. Viewing a home with a new connection emotionally can shift how the performer moves with the space and one of the simplest ways to shift how a space is perceived is to change the tones of the lighting, which creates an adaptation of site-specific location dance in combination with dance for camera.

THE BALANCE

In site-specific outdoor performances there is also a use of large flood lighting to illuminate the bodies and large areas. Image 3 (Appendix A) shows how theater lighting instruments are not needed to create a theatrical setting for a performance that has intentional lighting design. The choreography is often utilizing the space's natural lighting for the dance, which builds conversation between the movement and the space. The premade performance space becomes a part of the design and the

⁹ *Site Specific Dance - Martha Bowers #1*. Film. Charles Dennis, dir. prod.; Charles Dennis Productions, 2007.

history influences the performer's interpretation of the choreography. Designing the lighting with an awareness of the space will bring a new tone of acceptance and enjoyment that is intertwined with the performance.

To achieve connectivity, the performance must create a balance between the choreography, design and space. The Japanese concept of *sokyokuchi*: "mutuality in balance", shows the balance between performance elements, but Chemers and Sell's article also highlights how the balance bleeds over to technology in live performance.¹⁰ The article speaks specifically on the relationship of balance between dramaturgy, design, technology, and actors, but it is impactful to all performances, especially dance. Technology being used in performance does require balance, but the focus of the technology is supporting the performer and their goals, as any design medium does. "What supports these illusions and gives them life is the intensity of mind of the [performer]" and the addition of technology must support "these two contradictory states (intensity and becoming) in constant, productive tension with one another" to build an impactful, emotionally connected performance for the audience.¹¹ Without the balance of *sokyokuchi* in an online medium, the use of technology overpowers the creative intentions of the performance. To build a balance in online performance, one must look at the impact of technology and mediatization within a live performance.

¹⁰ Chemers, Michael and Michael Sell. "Sokyokuchi: Toward a Theory, History, and Practice of Systemic Dramaturgy." *Theatre History Studies*, vol. 39, 2020, p. 24-52 (37).

¹¹ *Ibid*, 32;37.

MODERN MEDIATIZATION

There has been a shift to mediatization of live performance spaces even before the Covid-19 pandemic. In a site-specific setting, a performance becomes part of the space, and highlights the *sokyokuchi* balance of the choreography, space, and design, but it also adds a new element of audience mediatization. Some choreographers, including Maria Hassabi, Xavier Le Roy, and Anne Imhof, have been setting their performances so there is an ideal social media image; by allowing the audience to interact closely, slow choreography and allow posing in position for a dramatic snapshot of the show they are making the performance “Instagram-able” for the audience.¹² The layer of audience interaction and the “Instagram-able” accessibility to the performance for some feels tainted and steps too far away from live performance, but Claire Bishop argues that “the gadgets have simply changed: opera glasses have been replaced by cellphones” and shows that performance is viewed through a lens and always has been.¹³ Whether the lens is the audience and their preconceived notions, or a camera lens, there has been mediatized consumption of the performance, which does not change in online performance.

The way in which the audience views a theatrical piece can, of course, shift the tone of the performance, but the connection for the performer to the piece is a quintessential aspect of what draws the audience in, and this aspect should not change if viewed through a screen. The need for balance and immersion in an online

¹² Bishop, Claire. "Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention." *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 62 no. 2, 2018, p. 22-42.

¹³ *Ibid*, 36.

performance is paramount; to make the performance separate and stand out. Making a performance “Instagram-able” can be avoided, but in today’s world of technology it becomes another accepted part of creating a performance. Our predecessors have done the heavy lifting for us, and have shown that stage techniques can be translated over digital platforms. The balance of technology, as shown in *sokyokuchi*, has been shifting in performance, but with intentional design and a connection built with the performers, an online performance can be impactful and bring a new kind of immersion.

PROCEDURE

The process of creating a lighting design and implementing it in a dancer’s home requires some adaptation. Throughout the rehearsals and designing of the *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*, I asked the dancers questions and followed a single piece through the rehearsal process. At the end of the production, all of the dancers were given the opportunity to respond to a final questionnaire that was intended to gauge their response to watching the production and how they felt about the collaboration process. I relied heavily on using the tools available to the dancers and created a layout that would be similar to a lighting plot to aid the dancers in lighting direction and camera angles. Each dancer had to set up their own space for filming and work with the choreographer to have a cohesive look to the piece, while also allowing space for movement.

A large focus of the design for *Open* was creating moods through color shifts, which meant unifying the dancer's spaces. To do so, LED string lights were integral, as they were accessible and many dancers had them available already. The LED lights, although not accurate with color output generally, allowed the dancer to create washes of color in their space, as seen in Image 4 (Appendix A). The lights were placed on a wall or in an area behind the camera to light the room, more than the dancer (Appendix D). In a theater space, I would also add side lighting to brighten and highlight the dancers, which helps break up the large wash of color filling the area. We did the same for the dancers at home and used desk lighting to create shape and dimension on the dancer, but the desk lighting was dim enough and at a distance which allowed the colors to have more impact on the space.

Keep Moving called for colors in lighting, but because of the number of dancers, LED lighting was not the best option. I chose to send the dancers lighting gels, with instructions on how to use them, placing the gel over a mobile lamp and directing it at the body from a forty-five-degree angle while having a white light on the other side, for the best impact (Appendix D). This created a different look in the shadows than the LED washes, as seen in Image 5 (Appendix A). The gels were also great as an in-person lighting tool that allowed more dimension and tones.

The largest part of creating the design for the show was working with natural lighting. Many of the pieces utilized outdoor space in their dance, but my focus was aligning the dancer and the camera to create effects that I would use in a stage production. Some portions of the show used the sun and sky as backlighting and

created a shadow effect, while others focused on angling their bodies and cameras so the sun was at a forty-five-degree angle to their body. The angling of the dancer was very important to create dimension in the dance and allow for the sun to be used as a tool, rather than flattening the piece. The time of day was also important in the outdoor sections, because the sun shifts to an amber, golden tone later in the day and closer to sunset. For some pieces a very bright and light look was desired, which means filming needed to be done in the early or mid-afternoon. For those pieces that wanted a warm tone they needed to utilize the “golden-hour” of the sun, which means filming in the hour to thirty minutes before the sun fully sets.

5 Minutes required more creativity in designing lighting texture. Because gobos were not available to the dancers, nor did they have the instruments to use them properly, I had to think of a more accessible way to create breaks in the lighting and add texture to the piece. My solution was to use tin foil around a flashlight, seen in Image 6 (Appendix A), that had strategically cut shapes which created layers of texture in the lighting, as seen in Image 7 (Appendix A). In the same piece, outdoor lighting at night was required. From looking at the site-specific work, a flood of light would be best to create dimension and make the dancer visible to the camera. The most accessible way to create this flood of light was to use headlights of a car, which allowed for a mobile flood light in an area because it did not need a separate power source. A car headlight has a lens with facets that refracts light at a wider angle than the lamp alone is able to, which is the same lens structure found in a PAR Can stage light.

The dancers and choreographers were a part of the process from the beginning and became a part of the design team by building an understanding of the tools to create the lighting designs discussed. I began the project with the assumption that the dancer's knowledge of theatrical lighting was limited and that as they discovered and learned in rehearsals, how they viewed lighting and their space would shift and adapt for the performance. To follow the dancer's process, I asked questions throughout and focused on how they viewed the space and lighting for the performance. At the end, my questionnaire broadened to encompass the dancer's possible connection to the audience, even though the performance was not done live. I hypothesized that after viewing the full performance, which included transitions to make a cohesive look between all the pieces, the dancers would see their space in a new light.

ANALYSIS

The responses to the questions by the dancers were varied and the analysis of the overall production and impact can be broken down into three sections: how I, as the Designer, viewed the outcome of the lighting design, how the dancers viewed the lighting and space throughout the rehearsal process, and how the dancers viewed the piece at the end of the show.

Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum was a learning experience, but overall, the visuals of each piece and the lighting design was successful. There was a clear connection between each piece, but they all had their own individuality in the final product. The outcome of the gobo adaptation had a clear, textured effect in

combination with editing. This achieved a stage like design by adapting the techniques used by designers. There were differences in the effect of gel and LED washes of colors, but not a large difference between the overall impact, which means adding color to home is very accessible. I think the lighting went well with each of the choreographers' editing styles and it was an outcome that was well received by the audience, based on the comments during and after the viewings.

Throughout the rehearsal process a small selection of dancers answered questions relating to the space and lighting (Appendix B). The dancers generally described their spaces as small and confined. Dancer A found that “during quarantine, I have spent a lot of time just in my room so I kind of associate it with feeling closed in, in a way that is safe but also restrictive.” The feeling of being restricted resonated with the dancers in different ways, Dancer C noted “I dance in my living room in my leisure when I am feeling inspired, but it is really hard to create for film when I am not feeling inspired.” Some of the dancers also took into consideration that they were responding to questions for the Lighting Designer, so there was more of an emphasis on the quality of lighting that is present in the space. The descriptions varied between “light and the sun coming through almost all day” from Dancer B to Dancer D’s description of their “dark living area ... it’s good for a dark setting and possibly silhouetted, but doesn’t get much natural light for more than a couple hours.” This piece included a large part of outdoor filming and lighting, but also included parts where a dark room is needed to allow side lighting and the colors to be emphasized by the camera.

Early in the process the dancers had not yet been introduced to any of the lighting design concepts that would be used for their piece. Dancer D responded to the second question, how do you feel performing in your space, and articulated the impact of shifting to online performance:

Initially, I felt deep loss and a sad feeling when adjusting to the dance space that I currently have access to. I miss studios and open floors where I didn't have to have my headphones in constantly and worry about how the lighting of the small room looked on my computer screen. I have been learning to appreciate the uniqueness of the living room furniture around me and see the space as having certain qualities that present advantages that the normal studio or stage doesn't have.

The dancers found creativity by finding new ways of moving within the restrictions of their space. What the dancers noticed about their lighting was generally the brightness or dimness initially, but even part of the way through the rehearsal time their awareness of the lighting was in tune with the performance. This shows how the dancers begin to utilize their space as a site-specific area with the intentions of dance for camera rather, creating a conversation with the space and camera as another part of the choreography, which Dodds stated is agenda of online performance.¹⁴ Dancer E's summary of what they noticed about the lighting is similar to working in a site-specific medium:

I have pretty good natural lighting in my room, so I do notice it when I am dancing during the day and it's a very different 'vibe' to when I have my string lights on and I am dancing at night. They both bring out different feelings or emotions which affects the movement. It's nice to be able to play with lighting when I can and I think filming dances has

¹⁴ Dodds, 23.

made me aware of lighting and I think about where to move relative to that light.

The final question was to think about how the lighting had changed how they feel about their performance space. Their responses indicated that their connection to the lighting had increased over the process of rehearsing for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*. Dancer D stated that they are “finding new ways to alter the lighting so that it fits [their] needs” and they have been “using more lamps to find alternative lighting styles.” Similar to the performance pieces described by Claire Bishop, the performers adapted their style and choreography to be appropriate for the setting.¹⁵ Although, from their response, Dancer D did not see a shift in how they connect with the space, they did find a connection between how they dance for the camera and the lighting- making it more “Instagram-able” for the online performance.¹⁶ Dancer E’s response was the goal of my thesis, to use the lighting to create a personal connection:

The colorful lighting made me feel more in touch with the space aspect in my performance, since the colors specifically tied into the emotions of the performance. The lighting and the dancing felt like they fed into each other and I like that it was thought out more than what we are used to; that each dancer could pick their own lighting and work on that aspect of the performance, which is usually done for us.

The process of creating a design was a connected process that included the performers and choreographers throughout, inspired by the structures established by

¹⁵ Bishop, 22-42.

¹⁶ Ibid, 22-42.

Claire Bishop and Martha Bower. I was left wondering how the dancers felt about their connection to the audience, after viewing the performance for themselves. The final set of questions were sent to all of the dancers during the technical rehearsals.¹⁷

The dancers responded to questions about their perceptions of lighting and performing on a stage in comparison to this year's performance online (Appendix C). All of the dancers that responded had previously danced on a traditional stage and they described the sense of dancing on stage as "exhilarating", "dynamic", and "energetic" which they attributed to the audience and the adrenaline rush of performing.¹⁸ Their perception of the lighting when performing in a theater space also noted that the audience cannot be seen because the lights can have a blinding effect on the performer, which also makes it challenging to see the audience. The lighting that causes a blinding effect is front lighting that is used to highlight the body while washed in color or texture. Dancer K described how the lack of light on the audience "makes it so I can only feel that I am dancing for someone and not necessarily seeing who I am performing for." The energy of the audience is what is feeding the adrenaline and the passion that comes with performing on stage. Without the audience's energy present when performing, the energy has to come completely from the dancer. To enhance the energy, I wanted the dancers to be aware of the lighting; as Karen White's article describes an immersive environment created by lighting, by

¹⁷ For this production, technical rehearsals included viewing the performance for the dancers and focused on timing and the mechanics of Zoom Webinar and OBS. It did not include designing the lighting like a stage performance would.

¹⁸ A traditional stage in the questionnaires was defined as a stage in a theater space.

having the dancers aware of the lighting they created a stage area while in their home.¹⁹

The dancers had a variety of responses about their perception of the lighting when filming, Dancer K's statement highlights the goal of the lighting, "the lighting is really all about me, what lighting suits my image and body, and how the lighting can compose the scene." This statement was captivating to read as a Designer, because that is my goal when designing for any dance performance, including on stage. Through having to execute the film shot on their own, the dancers came to feel a more personalized sense of lighting. Other dancers explained their frustrations with the lighting, feeling that it "was not good enough" or that "it was very difficult to get the lighting to look the way I wanted it to," while others felt that the lighting could be adjusted or added after filming in editing, so it was not a worry, as it would be on stage.

The dancer's relationship to their performance space, for a majority of the responses, was more accepted as a performance space. Dancer L noted that their living room is now seen as a space that is also a stage, giving areas a dual purpose, like how Martha Bowers viewed train stations and other non-theatrical locations.²⁰ Some of the responses explained their difficulty to think of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* as a performance, because of the online and filming aspects of the show. For those who did feel a sense of performance during the show, Dancer L

¹⁹ White, 50-51.

²⁰ *Site Specific Dance - Martha Bowers #1*. Film. Charles Dennis, dir. prod.; Charles Dennis Productions, 2007.

mentioned that there is “more potential in my performance space” and Dancer N saw that their space “look really cool on film.” The connection to the space was built by performing in it and is an example of the *sokyokuchi* balance that can be created when technology is an equal part in the performance.²¹

The performer’s connection to the audience was not to the same level as a stage performance, as I had hoped. Their responses were overwhelmingly “not directly” and that the “it feels like that audience isn’t even there.” Dancer O, who did not notice any connections between the lighting and space did explain “I am feeling connected [to the audience] because I can imagine [the audience] watching me.” There was a note by Dancer P that the lack of connection to the audience “was actually relieving because I did not have to think about who was going to be in the audience.” Bower’s observations of the connection to space was achieved, but did not build the audience connection. This is in part due to the questionnaire being shared during the technical rehearsal, if it had been sent after the performances with an audience the dancers may have felt differently and if done again, is a shift I would have made in the initial research.

The lack of connection to the audience and the line of questioning that I followed throughout the process of the show shifted the intent of research slightly. My initial intention was to help create a connection between the audience and performers through the space, similar to site-specific works. Their responses showed a more realized connection with the performance space, but not a significant

²¹ Chemers and Sell, 24-52.

connection to the audience. With the initial research and the intention of creating individual site-specific spaces for each dancer, the connection to the space for the dance for camera performance becomes the most important connection for the performance. The lighting that was used and the evaluation of the space that is needed to create the lighting design helped emphasize a new connection with the location of filming and to reshape how the dance and the space interact with each other.

EVALUATION

Creating an online dance performance is an intimidating task, especially for people who are trying to work and learn during a global pandemic. This performance in specific was completely conceived, rehearsed, and performed online with no in-person meetings. The goal of any performance is to create a connected and visually interesting show for the audience. The challenges of building that connection are magnified with social distancing and the emotional turmoil that the world is feeling, especially when there is no in person communication. Can moving lights around and making fun colors really create an impact on a performer? By looking at the history that theater has created and the innovations of performance, lighting can and has created that impact. Through the joy of creating with challenges of a completely online performance, the company of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* created a unique and stunning artistic presentation.

The tools of performance and their ever-shifting advances have caused performance to be always adjusting. There are now more lighting tools available at an

affordable price than ever before and anyone can create their own stage or studio in their home; what can be missing is the knowledge of technique. The collaboration between the dancer, choreographer and the designer can build a flowing connection within the performance with balance, one that should reflect the communication between the choreography and space in the performance. The dancers shared their hesitations and reservations about being creative comfortably in a space that is not built for performance, but bringing examples of site-specific and dance for camera performance and building a connection to the space allows for the freedom of creation within the restrictions and are the roots of moving forward to a theater space that can be distanced, but connected.

The dancers did not find as large of a shift in space as I was intending, but it was present with the subtleties of each piece. The main shift was allowing creativity, and feeling connected to all aspects of the performance, which minimized the feeling of being trapped in a space. The dancers had technology available, but creatively felt restricted to be performing for a camera, initially, rather than the excitement to perform for a stage. These restrictions and hesitations stem from a lack of balance and connection to the space, which could influence the performance. The lighting of a room will highlight the lack of balance; there are no parts that are hidden and no focus on the energy and movement. The joy of creating a lighting design online is the adaptability of light; it can shift and flow naturally, but it can also be directed and molded with intention.

There is not a singular solution to building connections between: dancers and lighting, dancers and their space, dancers and other dancer's spaces, dancers and the choreography, especially in performance, but the intention behind communication is the starting point. The many layers of design and crafting are all centered around making the intentions of a performance clear and to build unison between multiple spaces for the dancers. To connect the dancers to a space and to each other's spaces, in an attempt to connect the audience to the performance, all production members need to begin with intention. The intention built by my designs allowed for communication to begin about accessibility to tools, the worries and doubts about space, and the feelings that the performers were left with during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In building a piece for online consumption, there is a line between creating and filming, and creation for filming. Claire Bishop's look into museum performances highlights that the performances made for filming have been happening before the need for it.²² During this time, with enforced restrictions, the shift to creation with the camera in mind became forced upon stage performers and those feelings bleed into the space that creation happens. Using lighting design is one of many ways to break those connections, and build new shapes and visions inside a known space. Lighting design's purpose in a theater is to direct the audience's eyes, highlight the body, and build worlds in an empty space; the only difference in an online performance is that the communication is distanced by space. The dancers felt

²² Bishop, 22-42.

the difference in connection when they were aware of the lighting design and how the lighting is shaped for their performance with their body. The intention of creating a design that is accessible for the performers was of utmost importance, but in communicating the design and techniques the dancers discovered lighting as one part of a whole; not as an addition to the choreography, but a part of the movement.

For many performers, their personal spaces have their own stories that are ingrained in the space, and the lighting; although it was not explicitly influential in discussion, the responses of the dancers showed me that they were thinking about their connection to the space. While attempting to break the forced negative connotations of isolation, the performance and design creates new positive connections between the performer and their space. The dancer's feelings of being trapped in a comfortable space can be balanced with the performance and the lighting by keeping the *sokyokuchi* concept of the performance in mind.²³ The education and understanding of lighting design allowed the performers to have their own balance with the many aspects of the performance. The lighting thereby becomes another connection to the movement and integrates the movement in the space. The distance of online performance is necessary during the Covid-19 Pandemic, but within those confines the creativity can begin to flow and shift with the new possibilities of bringing a stage concept into a home.

²³ Chemers and Sell, 24-52.

CONCLUSION

Dance and performance are ever changing, especially with new connections with technology. The connections built and sustained in theater are irreplaceable and audience impact keeps people present, even with technology's involvement. The need to create audience connection is ongoing, as theater is settling into a new stage of online and virtual performances. People around the world miss being in the same room together, and that part of theater, I hope, will be reinvigorated in the future, but it will include changes and shifts in how we approach large gatherings in a post-pandemic world. With this time of online performance, there is a discovery of a new way of working in live performance that is filled with communication; while it is not the same as a stage performance, there is a version of theater that is widely used and is accessible, safe, and allows for artistic visions to be shared remotely.

A connection between artists and audiences is the main focus for theater, but online performance has caused theater makers to reevaluate how to bring their visions to fruition. Originally, my goal was to use lighting design to build a connection between the audience and performers, allowing the same impact as being in a theater space. Through connections to site-specific work and discussions with the dancers, the connection for the performer to the audience is not the same online. What is present, is the connection to the artwork and the space, which I found is just as impactful as the connection to the audience. Although resources may be limited in a virtual space, there are still ways to create dynamic lighting, costuming and settings that stretch creative thinking and shift the performer's perspective of their space and

connect the piece to the history of the performance area. The rush of adrenaline of performing on stage is not always present when filming, but a sense of intimacy that is almost unachievable on stage becomes illuminated in the moments of building a performance.

This thesis is focused on the production and creation of the performance in connection with the dancers, but it does not evaluate the impact that the audience received viewing the performance. The audience's interpretation of performance has been established by the traditions of theater for centuries. As a continuation of questioning we, as theater makers, look forward to the future of theater. What are we expecting from audiences? Audiences, like performers, have been experiencing their lives through online communication, and they may have a new level of expectation when it comes to viewing online performances. Their perception and connection are of the most importance to a piece, and how they approach a performance will change how they are impacted. Beyond the evaluation of the audience's perspective, there is more to be built upon when approaching online and in person performance. Although in person theater performances are happening again, online performances have allowed theater to be viewed in a new way. The presence of online performance allows for creativity to be shared across miles and it allows Designers to think resourcefully and creatively with the application of available tools.

Those who are adapting their skills to the online platform are able to see Design and performance in a different way, which can translate to the building of more integrated in person performance. I found a new level of communication with

the dancers, along with the choreographers, and for this performance established a flow of design ideas between all members of the company. This communication is often lacking in stage performances and without it, there is a disconnect between design and performance. I have built on skills that were established by many years of theater knowledge, but discussion with the dancer's and their thoughts in a group setting allowed for a better design. Of course, there are restrictions in the level of communication for a stage performance, due to time, money and unions, but in the instances where Designers can be integrated into the process of rehearsals, it should be taken. During this process I developed a better understanding of the intention of the pieces, which allowed for the lighting design to better reflect it, and I believe the dancers gained a better understanding of how the lighting design is made to work with their bodies and movements, allowing it to become a part of the choreography. These connections were built with the intention of centering the space, which is the first step to creating a connected, yet distanced, performance for many to enjoy. The design of lighting and communication with performers is one piece of the puzzle used to shift and illuminate a performance space in a connected way.

APPENDIX A: IMAGES



Image 1: *Random with a Purpose XXVIII: Prism* performed in UC Santa Cruz's Mainstage (2020)



Image 2: *Random with a Purpose XXVIII: Prism* performed in UC Santa Cruz's Mainstage (2020)



Image 3: Martha Bower's production of *On the Waterfront* (1993)



Image 4: Online performance of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* that was pre-filmed and presented on UC Santa Cruz's Theater Department Zoom Webinar platform.



Image 5: Online performance of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* that was pre-filmed and presented on UC Santa Cruz's Theater Department Zoom Webinar platform.



Image 6: Image sent to the dancers as an example of how to create a gobo out of tin foil for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*



Image 7: Image of the online performance of *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* that was pre-filmed and presented on UC Santa Cruz's Theater Department Zoom Webinar platform.

APPENDIX B: REHEARSAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The Rehearsal Questionnaire was administered through Google Forms and the dancers were asked to respond anonymously to one question for each week of the rehearsal process.

Dancer A:

Describe the space you are dancing in.

The space I filmed in was my bedroom and it has a lot of white and is brightly lit. If I dimmed the lights, there would definitely be a very different feeling. During quarantine, I've spent a lot of time just in my room and so I kind of associate it with feeling closed in, in a way that is safe but also restrictive.

Dancer B:

Describe the space you are dancing in.

It is small and confined with a hard floor. It is usually hot and not well insulated but has a lot of light and the sun comes through almost all day. It is private, my own space but it is not isolated.

Dancer C:

Describe the space you are dancing in.

I'm dancing in my living room. I've added a number of props to make it feel more like a performance space for the camera but behind me is a couch and a window, my hamsters cage is on top of the TV stand and behind the camera is my kitchen. I dance in my living room in my leisure when I feel inspired but it's really hard to create for film when I'm not feeling inspired

Dancer D:

Describe the space you are dancing in.

The main space that I dance in is a really small and pretty dark living area. I usually set my computer up on the kitchen counter and dance in front of our small dining table. It's good for a dark setting and possibly silhouetted, but doesn't get much natural light for more than a couple hours in the morning. I do have access to a large park with open grassy areas near my house and have been filming a lot of stuff for classes there, so that's been useful for natural sunlight. I have some string lights and the classic led strips that I could hang up to get a specific color, and I could also bring in a couple lamps if I wanted the small space to be

brighter for filming. Other than that, my space is overall very poorly lit and filled with a lot of furniture, but I've been enjoying finding new ways to navigate around those obstacles while dancing at home.

What do you feel when performing in this space?

Initially, I felt deep loss and a sad feeling when adjusting to the dance space that I currently have access to. I miss studios and open floors where I didn't have to have my headphones in constantly and worry about how the lighting of the small room looked on my computer screen. I've been learning to appreciate the uniqueness of the living room furniture around me and see the space as having certain qualities that present advantages that the normal studio or stage doesn't have.

What do you notice about the lighting in the space you are performing?

I don't get very much natural light in my indoor dance space right now and the bulbs that I do use to brighten my space are very dull.

How has the lighting changed, if at all, since you began performing in this space?

As I'm getting more used to filming for the camera indoors, I'm finding new ways to alter the lighting so that it fits my needs. I've been using more lamps to find alternative lighting styles since my space doesn't get very much natural light from the windows.

Dancer E:

What do you feel when performing in this space?

It's a bit confined compared to dancing in a studio space with other dancers, so it takes a bit longer to open up and feel comfortable with my movement. The limited space also makes your movement feel more confined, but that limitation also leads to new kinds of movement and more detailed focus on what you move and when and how etc...

What do you notice about the lighting in the space you are performing?

I have pretty good natural lighting in my room so I do notice it when I'm dancing during the day and it's a very different "vibe" to when I have my string lights on and I'm dancing at night. They both bring out different feelings or emotions which affects the movement. It's nice to be able to play with lighting when I can and I think filming dances has made me aware of that lighting and I think about where to move relative to that light.

How has the lighting changed, if at all, how you feel about your performance space?

The colorful lighting made me feel more in touch with the space aspect in my performance since the colors specifically tied into the emotions of the performance. The lighting and the dancing felt like they fed into each other and I like that it was thought out more than what we are used to and that each dancer could pick their own lighting and work on that aspect of the performance which is usually done for us.

APPENDIX C: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The Final Questionnaire was administered through Google Forms and the dancers were asked to respond anonymously to the questions during the technical rehearsals.

Have you performed on a traditional stage? *Traditional meaning in a theater space

ALL:

Yes

If yes, describe the feeling of performing for an in-person audience.

Dancer K:

It feels alive and dynamic. Performers and audience members feed off of each other in a live space.

Dancer L:

It feels like a rush of energy powered by nerves and excitement along with the crave to impress the audience.

Dancer M:

Incredibly exhilarating, feeling rewarded by the end of the show. Everyone's energy mixes in the theatre. It's nice to know people are willingly watching me, and better yet when they applaud.

Dancer N:

It's exhilarating. the feeling of the lights in your eyes and the audience there smiling and cheering you on in support and feeling the other performers around you and feeding off of their energy. It's just an all around amazing feeling.

Dancer O:

The feeling is amazing, the amount of adrenaline is awesome and is unlike any other feeling.

Dancer P:

Out of body, I usually remember performing as such a blur esp when I first started to perform. Recently for longer performances (10+ min), I have a pretty aware feeling of being on stage and sometimes have internal thoughts.

Dancer Q:

When in front of an in-person audience, I'm able to feed off of everyone's energy easier as it feels more interactive.

Dancer R:

Performing for an in-person audience is the reason I do what I do. I love dancing for myself and expressing myself, but performing for an audience, be it alone or with my friends is something I cannot describe. The energy, the focus, and the passion are what makes everything worth it.

What, if anything, have you noticed about traditional stage lighting when you are performing?

Dancer K:

It's bright, slightly disorienting. It makes it so I can only feel that I'm dancing for someone and not necessarily see who I'm performing for.

Dancer L:

Most of the time when I perform, the lights are very bright and hot. It can also blind you from the audience.

Dancer M:

The audience is dimly lit usually, and lights add to dynamics and/or immersive-ness in the story.

Dancer N:

You can change the lighting color and direction on the stage to make the lighting look however you want and it's super adaptable

Dancer O:

It makes it so one cannot see the audience very well, which helps with anxiety.

Dancer P:

Not really, was never in the tech aspect of things, but I remember not being to see the audience because they were in complete darkness.

Dancer Q:

The lighting we normally get on stage creates a sort of black out effect for the audience's faces and plays into the ability to feel less nervous.

Dancer R:

I notice the stage lighting while I am performing but less than when I watch from an audience perspective. Usually I just notice where the lights are and how I cannot see the audience haha.

What were you able to notice about the lighting while performing for the camera?

Dancer K:

The lighting is really all about me. what lighting suits my image/body and how the lighting can compose the scene

Dancer L:

I didn't notice much about the lighting for the outdoor shots. But for my indoor shots with special lighting, I felt kind of blinded, as if I were onstage almost.

Dancer M:

Never felt good enough

Dancer N:

You had to make sure you did it as specific times of days so that the lighting looked correct because you could not change it the same way and it was very difficult to get the lighting to look the way you wanted it to

Dancer O:

Sometimes it would get in one's eyes

Dancer P:

Since I had to film in non-stage areas/outside/inside my house, I had to learn more about how light works and be more aware of how lighting placement looked.

Dancer R:

It is a lot different than on a stage. I feel like a good amount of the lighting can be added on after the videos have been taken, whereas lighting during a show is live so it has to be perfect.

During your performance this year, did your perception of the performance space shift?

Dancer K:

Absolutely. It's hard to describe the differences between performance for camera vs performance for stage.

Dancer L:

Yes, it's made me realize that dance can be performed anywhere and everywhere, not just on a stage with a live audience.

Dancer N:

Yes because anything could be a performance space and it was interesting to go around out of my comfort zone and dance many different places like outside in public and not necessarily on a traditional stage

Dancer O:

Not really

Dancer P:

Yes, definitely, I am more aware now of how much stage and professional lighting can change a performance.

Dancer Q:

I felt frustrated while filming in my space about how it was difficult to properly frame and get my whole body in the video, but after seeing the edited performance, I'm very happy with how it turned out.

Dancer R:

Absolutely, it was a very unique experience and there were a lot more options, yet at the same time, a lot of limitations as well.

What was your relationship to your space before and after performing in it? Was the relationship impacted by the lighting?

Dancer L:

I see my space as a stage as well as the living room that it was before.

Dancer N:

I was also uncomfortable to perform in a space that wasn't a traditional stage and I would get shy and embarrassed and now I have been able to step a little more out of my comfort zone.

Dancer O:

Never really thought about space or the relationship with lighting.

Dancer P:

I had to constantly move around things in my room and performance space and house so it generally got more cluttering and crazy during filming week. But I also found that there is more room to be creative when there is videographic freedom. In terms of lighting, I had to plan more because I had to take into account weather from day to day, and in door lighting.

Dancer Q:

In certain circumstances yes. For instance, for some shots I was sitting at a table with the camera right near my face and a desk lamp lighting up the shot. The performance was a lot more intimate and a very different experience than on a stage when I am so far away from the audience.

How does your personal performance space feel after viewing the performance in it?

Dancer L:

I feel like I can see a lot more potential in my performance space when it comes to camera angles or cool ways I could move around it.

Dancer M:

Difficult to view it as a performance

Dancer N:

I have a new look at it because I would have never thought of performing dance in the spaces that I have but they look really cool on film now that I have done it

Dancer P:

Not different because I changed it back to how it looked before.

Dancer Q:

I have a more positive outlook on the spaces that I'm able to dance in while in my home since seeing it during the video performance.

Dancer R:

It feels a lot more intimate and personal.

Did you feel connected to an audience during this year's performance?

Dancer K:

No

Dancer L:

Not really since they aren't physically present. but I feel closer to my fellow dancers since we all have this shared experience of filming our dance.

Dancer M:

Not directly, but the connection to the other people who made this happen reminded me of the audiences from last year. Even though it's less personal I know they are there.

Dancer N:

no I have had this problem with doing zoom theater is that it feels like the audience isn't even there which is really sad.

Dancer O:

I am feeling connected because I can imagine them watching us and I try to show more energy.

Dancer P:

Less so this year def, I feel like this year's RWAP was more just for me and my passion to dance and not for a show. In some ways it was actually relieving because I did not have to think about who was going to be in the audience, if I messed up on stage or heightened the amount of self-consciousness sometimes felt when performing for a live in-person audience.

Dancer Q:

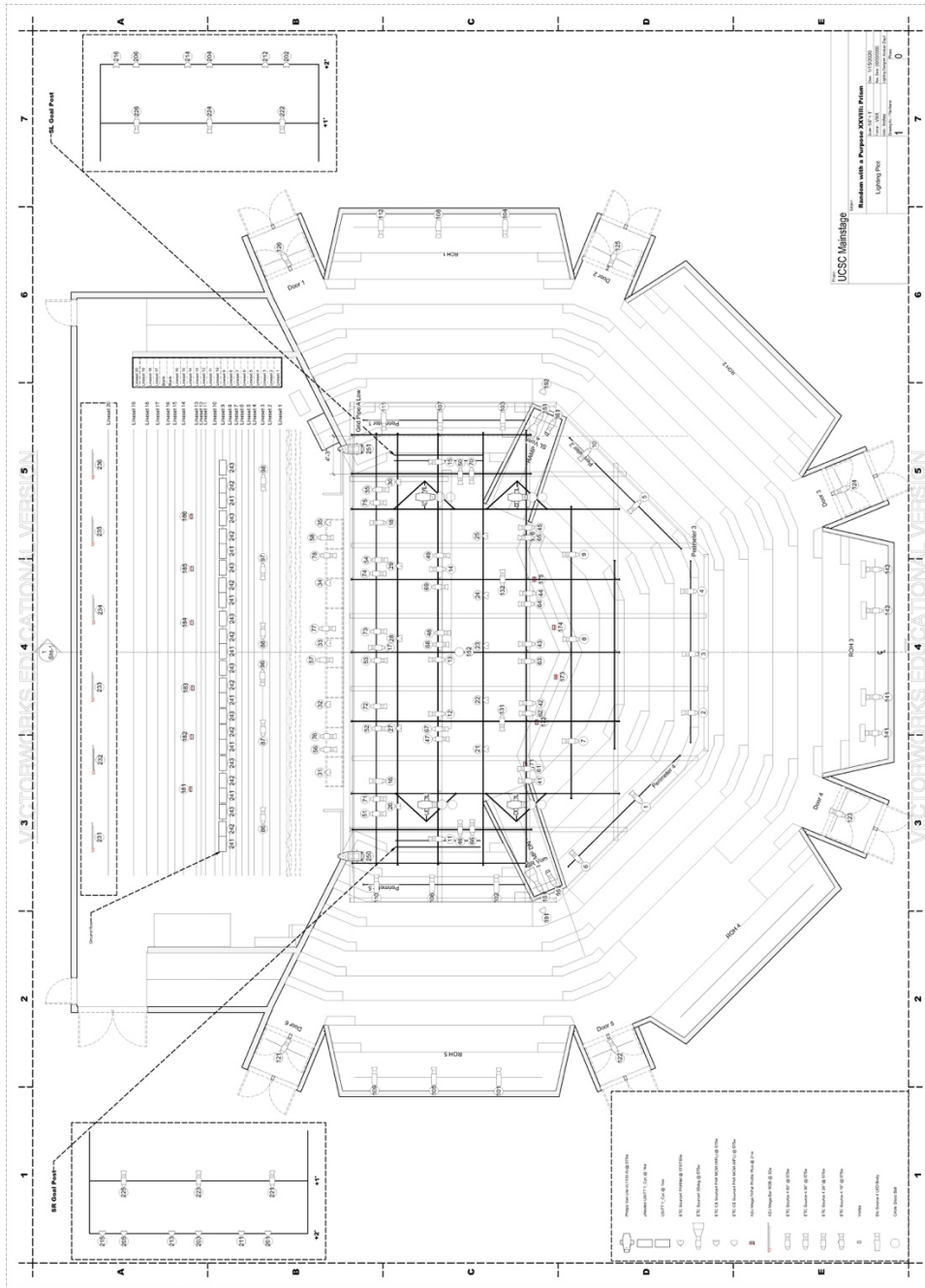
I think I felt a stronger sense of community with the other dancers and choreographers as a result of having to persevere during times where it's very difficult to continue dancing. I felt more disconnected from the audience since we can't see their reactions during the performance.

Dancer R:

Right now, I do not. I am filling this out before the live shows though, but currently during tech and rehearsals I do not feel very connected.

APPENDIX D: DIAGRAMS

Below is an example of a Lighting Design plot that would be used in a theater space. This plot was designed by Amber Zepf for *Random with a Purpose XXVIII: Prism*.



Below is a scan of the instructions mailed, along with sheets of gel, to the *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum* dancers. This information was also given verbally to the dancers, drawings are not to scale.

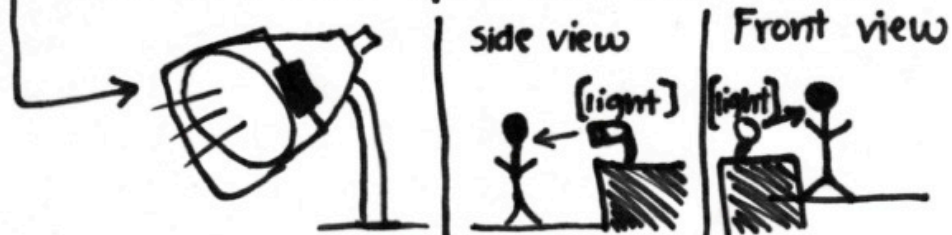
Hello Dancer, [FROM: Amber Z. (lighting designer) ♡]

Here's some gel that will add some color to the part your choreographers want.

WARNING: Gel is plastic, it can melt or catch fire! Please only have the gel w/ the light on for the period you are filming/dancing and then turn it OFF!

[duct]*works best
You can use tape (or a rubber band maybe) to put it on the front of a desk lamp.

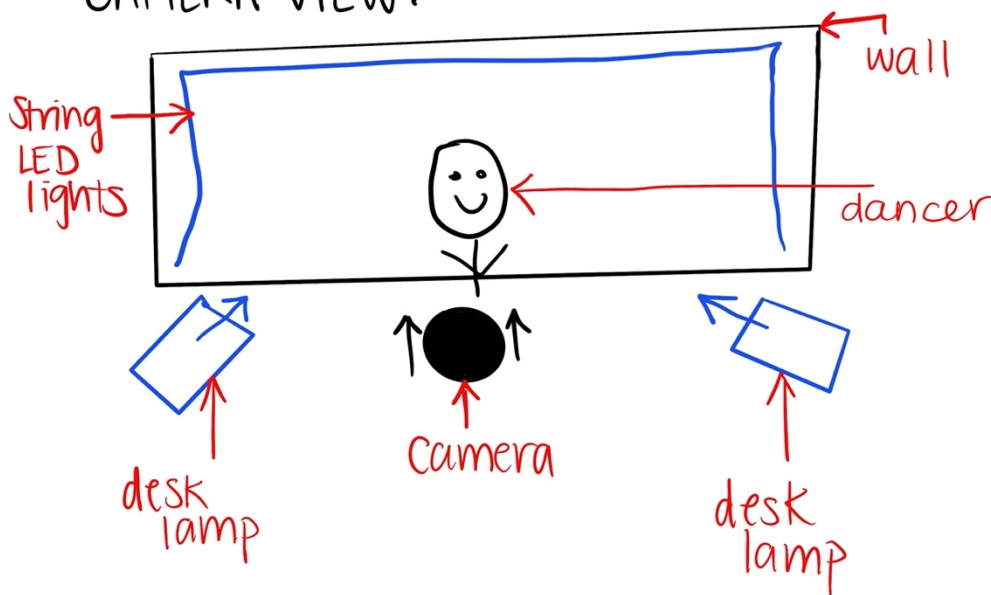
!DO NOT PUT GEL ON THE BULB!



Below are instructions on where to place lighting in relation to the camera and dancer, used for *Random with a Purpose XXIX: Continuum*. These instructions were sent to the dancers to visualize the verbal instructions given, drawings are not to scale.

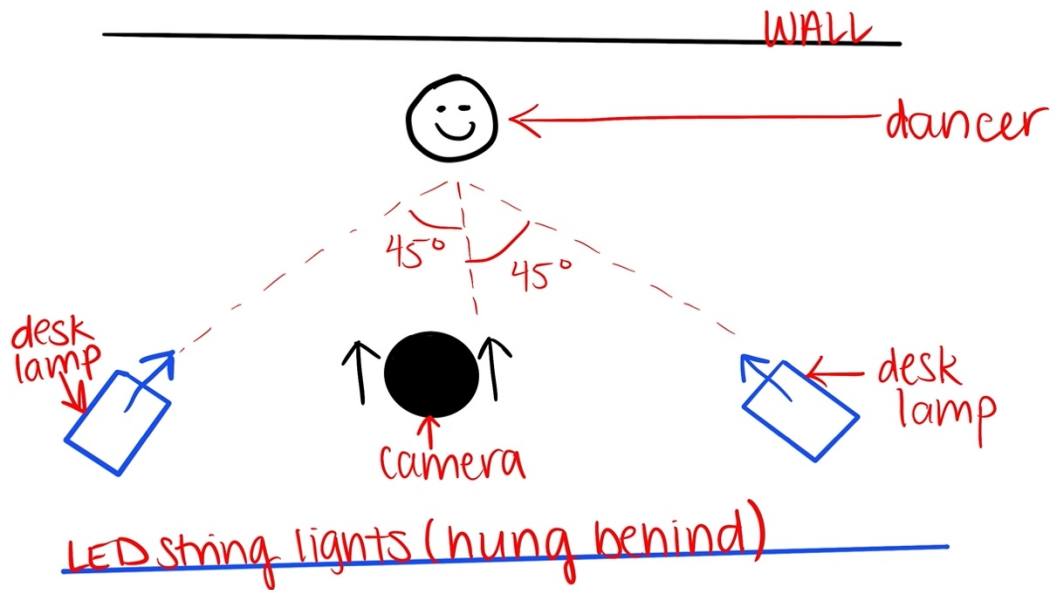
How to set up lights (LEDs)

CAMERA VIEW:



-
- string lights should be placed outside the camera frame
 - they can also be placed behind the camera (see overhead drawing)
 - desk lamps should be further away than camera at a 45° angle

Top Down View:



- String lights can also be behind the camera (this is the best spot)
- you only need one desk lamp, but it can be on either the left or right of the camera

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