2015

Exploring the Relationship Between Text and Dance: Seeking Music in Spoken Word

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Butler University

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Director, Honors Program

For Honors Program use:

Level of Honors conferred: University: Magna cum laude

Departmental: High Honors in Dance

Exploring the Relationship Between Text and Dance: Seeking Music in Spoken Word

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Dance
Jordan College of the Arts

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Anastasia Mary Ellis
April 22, 2015

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INTRODUCTION

I believe that dance, as an art form and body language, far surpasses the reach of spoken language. At times when verbal (spoken or written) language is limited and limiting, the human body can emerge as the ideal vehicle for truth. Experience tells me that our innate capacity for body language offers a level of exposure not found in speech. Since dance exists as an exaggerated and manipulated form of this language, it places the body's honesty in the public setting of the stage. And audiences are content to accept dance as this honest art form, without the demand for verbal language to enter into a dance work's narrative (or lack thereof). So I ask: what is the result of their combination? What is there to discover in the combination of two languages when history suggests that one (dance) was essentially born from the absence of the other (text)?

Certainly, choreographers have created numerous dance works that use text, a selection of which will be examined here, but the details of the combination of text and dance remain hazy. Scholarship that explains the purposes and processes behind choreographers' choices to employ text is minimal, though some of what does exist is summarized in Section I. In part, the text-dance combination is hazy because we ask for its result without narrowing it down into a manageable, examinable field. To address this issue, my study reduces the scope of the combination to focus only on the creation of dance works to spoken word sound scores in which the text and movement are intentionally inseparable. My question therefore becomes: what can be found in the combination of spoken and body language, when they are combined for the precise purpose of exposing an equal (never supplementary) relationship? Can dance "complete" spoken language by breaking its limitations and subsequently find completion in return? Explanations of various factors in the movement-text combination, found in Section II, offer a template of my personal

process discovered during this exploration. Much of my personal process is rooted in treating the text as if it were music—all the better to keep the movement and text equal.

After offering examinations of the movement-music and movement-text relationships (acknowledging the contrast between them) and works of past choreographers, I explain my process. It emerges first from the understanding that the brain can respond both to music and speech stimuli with movement, though music is thought to inspire "dancing" while text may only excite "action." Despite the understanding that the brain's movement-based response to text is not identical to that of music, I attest that choreographers like myself can exploit the action responses that do connect to text and solidify relationships that allow dancers to dance as comfortably to text as they would to music. I found that my choreographic choices—the selection of the text, its presentation, the generation of movement, and the continued engagement of the dancers with the text—were most successful when focused on the idea of making the text personal to the dancers. Making it personal does not necessarily mean that the text is emotional. Rather, my exploration was effective when the text's meaning did not go ignored, in order to make the text matter to the dancers. So, though the biological responses to text and music are different, the understanding of meaning in verbal language can inspire movement and keep the dancers engaged.

Of course, as with any art form, my own process for its creation is outlined with the understanding that art is subjective. My process, derived from the work and research of a singular artist and her dancers, is but one version of a successful exploration of movement and text. Its steps are detailed chronologically in Section II, not meant to instruct but to simply provide an account of my exploration. As always, artistic inspiration is dependent on

the beholder—me, in this case. The choreographic works created specifically in regards to this study are explained in the final section, the Application.

Examination of the Relationship between Music and Movement

Our bodies beg us to move or, more specifically, to dance to music. I will note that any "movement" discussed in this chapter relating to the body's response to music is "dance." Dancing, in this sense, implies a broadening of traditional body language: movements become more exaggerated and attuned to accenting the musical intricacies. Any movement naturally inspired by music is defined as dance in the "pedestrian" sense of the term. No matter a person's dance training (if any), bodies want to move in rhythm with the music—swaying and rocking and tapping out the beat in an untechnical, un-choreographed way. For those of us trained to dance and to produce music, and even taught to judge "good" and "bad" versions of the art forms, there remains *something* within us that will react without (or beyond) training. In this *something*, the movement of the body and the intentions behind it are produced without thought, but gut reaction.

Of course, extensive scholarship has been applied to this *something* in the effort to define the relationship between music and movement. Here, I offer brief summaries of several studies to show the scope of recent research in neurology and social science. According to Lawrence M. Zbikowski's study, "Music and Movement: A View from Cognitive Science," evidence exists of close relationships at a neuronal level between performing actions, observing another performing similar actions, and hearing sounds produced by those motor actions (Zbikowski 2). A 1996 experiment detailed by Zbikowski (in which monkeys were employed as test subjects) discovered the presence of "mirror neurons." Mirror neurons are a special group of motor neurons—nerve cells that carry signals from the spinal cord to the muscles to produce the movement—that become active both when the test subjects performed a given action and when they observed a similar action performed by the experimenter (3). With this discovery, the typical cathartic response

elicited by dance and theatre performances makes sense: humans experience physical and emotional release as they watch dance, as if they were performing it. The concept of mirror neurons, first establishing a relationship between physical movement and visual experiences of movement, supports later discoveries in connections between movement and sound.

More recent fMRI studies in mirror neurons revealed patterns similar to Zbikowski's study when subjects performed a motor action (such as tearing a sheet of paper) versus when they heard a recording of the motor action being performed (Gazzola, Aziz-Zadeh, and Keysers 1824). Auditory stimuli serve as the equivalent of visual stimuli in the case of mirror neurons. With this concept in mind, I would suggest that the intimate connection between music and dance can allow the action of listening to music to become equivalent to watching dance. Just as we hear the tearing of a sheet of paper and note the action, listening to music potentially identifies the attached movement: dance. At least, our brains may tell us as much.

The movement-sound connection has been explored with dancers by scholar Beatriz Calvo-Merino, in her study of "dance neuroaesthetics." Using expert dancers as test subjects, Calvo-Merino showed that the subjects responded with increased brain activity when observing dance actions in their personal motor repertoires as opposed to their observation of actions outside of their repertoires (Hustic). Her work showed that patterns that emerge during the simulation of a series of physical movements directly relate to those that emerge during the simulation of a series of musical sounds (Hustic). With this relation in mind, Calvo-Merino's study makes a strong case for the activity of mirror neurons in human subjects, expanding upon the original experiment chronicled by Zbikowski. Believing that mirror neurons respond equally to sound and visual stimuli, it is arguable that hearing music (the potential equivalent to watching dance) produces the same reaction in the dancer's brain

activity as would the physical action of dance (Zbikowski 3). Calvo-Merino's work therefore arrives at a rather simple conclusion: music makes a body want to dance.

Other scholars have examined the urge to dance to music on an emotional level. According to a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* by Beau Sievers and colleagues, music and dance are emotionally identical. In the study, a third factor was added to the movement-music relationship: the factor of feeling (Sievers, Polansky, Casey, and Wheatley 70). Sievers's study polled a group of U.S. college students, comparing their responses to those of an isolated group of villagers from Cambodia. Both groups were split in half and asked to express five different emotions with a dual-functioning computer program (one half responded with music, and the other half used the motion of an animated ball). As Sievers and his colleagues concluded, both music- and movement-based responses revealed equal depictions of the emotions. The results of the experiment suggest a common structure between music and dance; the expressions of the five selected emotions (happiness, peacefulness, fear, anger, and sadness) "have similar dynamic contours in both music and movement" (70). Consequently, this specific study clarifies one of the parallels between music and movement, explaining that emotion acts as the equalizing factor.

Additional members of the scientific community, such as psychologist and dancer Peter Lovatt, pose the seemingly simple question: "why do you dance?" (Lovatt). *Psychology Today* reports that Lovatt relies primarily on his subjects' verbal responses, and the honest and sensitive responses he received to the question prove that humans are incredibly aware of the connection (however indefinable it may be) between movement and music. The responders in the study were not necessarily trained dancers, but "pedestrians" who understood the excitement (when exposed to music) to move in an unstructured manner that surpasses traditional body language. Many responses spoke to feeling compelled to

move upon listening to music, while others went further to disclose that dancing "connects them to the music in a unique way" (Lovatt). Ultimately, the relationship between movement and music links the two forces as two parts of a single whole: the dancers become the music, as the music becomes the dance (Lovatt).

Yet, returning to that original, indefinable *something* that causes humans to readily move to music, I have found that we do not need to rely on scientific scholarship to define it. The studies listed here suggest the presence of the connection between music and movement, but it is the continued inspiration to study the connection that makes its existence undeniable—scholars may not have found the specifics of it just yet, but they keep studying it because *something* is there. Peter Lovatt's study comes closest to the "unscientific" side of the indefinable urge to dance to music. When asking subjects why they dance, Lovatt assumed that humans are fully aware of the desire to dance and he recognized that he did not need to explore the argument further. Music and dance have a connection that humans have experienced and are willing to acknowledge—this acknowledgement alone validates Lovatt's study. Artistically speaking, there is purpose behind the setting of dance to music. If all life is a series of reactions and the body reacts naturally and immediately to music, I believe that the purest exploitation of this relationship is the creation of dance to music. I focused on this purity in the movement-music connection as inspiration for my process of choreographing to a spoken word score. I worked to maintain senses of purity and necessity in the movement-text relationship, as I will explain in the following chapter and Section II.

Examination of the Relationship between Text and Movement

Text does not excite us to dance, but that is not to say that it does not make us want to move. From a scientific standpoint, a relationship between text and movement exists when the meaning of the text in question indicates an explicit action. Unlike the desire

specifically to dance, provoked by hearing music, verbal language inspires movement that exists well within our personal body language vocabularies. Humans can attribute certain gestures and postures to individual "action words" and are thus inspired to respond with specific body language when those words are heard. My personal experiences tells me that we hear words for their meanings (not for their sounds alone), so *meaning* is the basis of human response to language. Nonverbal language is an innate form of communication on top of which spoken language is later learned—I propose that speech has never existed without it.

Before I summarize a selection of studies that explain the speech-to-body language relationship, I need to outline the basis of language and movement processing in the brain. The brain's comprehension of verbal language is twofold: syntax and semantics are processed individually. Syntactic understanding and language output initiate in networks involving the temporal cortex and the inferior frontal cortex, mostly in the left hemisphere ("Broca's Area, Wernicke's Area, and Other Language-Processing Areas in the Brain"). This leftward-leaning coincides with Pierre Paul Broca's identification of Broca's area in 1861. Broca, after assessing the brains of patients who were unable to express themselves orally or in writing, asserted that "we speak with the left hemisphere" and went on to identify the "language center" of the brain in the back region of the frontal lobe ("Broca's Area"). Temporo-frontal networks dictate semantic understanding and language input ("Broca's Area"). Some ten years after Broca's work, Carl Wernicke discovered an additional area in the posterior portion of the left frontal lobe, bent on language comprehension. Neurologists now agree that a neural loop exists in the left hemisphere along the lateral sulcus, involved in both syntax and semantics. ("Broca's Area").

With these areas of the brain focused on language processing and production, they typically remain unaffected by the activity surrounding movement production. The control of voluntary movements involves almost all areas of the neocortex, but three specific areas are most important: the primary motor cortex, the premotor area, and the supplementary motor area. The primary motor cortex is located in the rear portion of the frontal lobe, on the "border" between the frontal and parietal lobes and across both hemispheres of the brain ("The Motor Cortex"). The process for motor production is quite extensive: it first involves the planning of a given movement, which occurs in the front section of the frontal lobe after receiving signals from additional areas of the brain (such as the parietal lobe and cerebellum) about the body's position in space ("The Motor Cortex"). Frontal lobe assessments are issued to the premotor and supplementary motor areas, which decide what sets of muscles need to engage or contract in order to perform the desired movement ("The Motor Cortex"). The decisions of the premotor and supplementary motor areas are sent to the primary motor cortex, which goes on to activate the intended muscle groups. The relay of information from the primary motor cortex travels into the spinal cord, where the motor neurons in the spinal cord can receive the data ("The Motor Cortex").

Despite the complexity of processes for both speech and movement production, a brain-based link has been suggested by scientists such as Friedemann Pulvermüller who have found specific connections between "action words" and their accompanying gestures. Pulvermüller notes that "in infancy, action words are learned in the context of action performance" (Pulvermüller 576). The motor processes and semantic neural processes in the brain activate nearly simultaneously as a result. This activity develops synaptic connections between neurons in the language and premotor areas—so motor neurons can fire when we hear certain words. Pulvermüller calls this process "practice-related reorganization" (579). It

seems that our brains can create connections for themselves to ensure that text evokes movement. I also argue that "action words" encompass a lot more than we'd initially think. I believe that certain images and concepts can resonate with us in a way that means they evoke a visceral reaction. The "activity" in an image can trigger a physical response, as if the image or concept was being experienced in real time, not just as language. Maybe "action words" are our own creations based on what moves us. With this in mind, I believe that it is no wonder that dancers can become more attuned to textual sound scores with practice; they may not go so far as to reorganize their neurons, but certain words can act as triggers for specific movements. In any case, practice makes perfect.

Zbikowski reminds us that what we call language—meaning spoken language—fails to encompass the full range of what we call thought (Zbikowski 2). I believe that the body is responsible for filling in the gaps of speech, as speech encompasses concrete ideas at which the body can only hint. I have chronicled the work of some choreographers who use text here to demonstrate the possibilities surrounding the movement-text relationship.

Liz Lerman, an American choreographer and founder of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, offers insight into her growing interest in the use of talking and dancing in her 1994 essay "By All Possible Means: A Look at the Relationship Between Words and Movement" (Lerman). Lerman's essay explains her personal reflection on the purpose of the combination of speech and dance. Lerman, much like myself, laments the fact that many dance critics ("purists," she calls them) fail to see the value in the combination. As a choreographer who has worked with text and movement since the early 1970s, Lerman identifies that her more modern-minded audiences "appreciate, need, and respond to the relationship between the language and the dancing"(Lerman). While she does not assert that dance is a fully-fledged language (as I openly argue), Lerman employs the combination of

text and dance for the purpose of keeping her audience comfortable and engaged: she explains that the integration of the two media allows the audience to enjoy the irony, jokes, spontaneity, puns, and metaphors of dance in a challenging and satisfying manner (Lerman).

Therefore, I believe that text can establish a relationship with dance in that it makes dance comfortable. I argue that dance, specifically Western dance (ballet and everything born from it), carries a stigma of elitism. When an audience is presented instead with a "conversational" dance in which a casual tone can replace elitism, Lerman notes that viewers are often relieved. I believe Lerman is correct in assuming "that dance concerts are just too distant a form for most people to feel the kind of connection that those of us making dance seem to expect"(Lerman). To Lerman, it appears that adding speech to dance helps audience members recall that the performers are human; I would like to think that it creates equality in the dancer-audience relationship. And, what's more, it provides choreographers with the facility to reach audiences through speech, an undoubtedly familiar means of communication.

"Word Play," an article published in *Dance Magazine,* offers examples of other choreographers who seek relationships between text and movement. Carrie Hanson, artistic director of The Seldoms in Chicago, explains that she uses text when she believes it is necessary; returning to Zbikowski's assertion that spoken language cannot cover all thought, it appears that the reverse is also true. Where we cannot complete all reaches of thought purely in our verbal language, the extent of human thought likewise falls short if stretched only in nonverbal (body) language. Hanson's concept of necessity emerges when she seeks to make a particular statement in her dance—a statement that begs for literal facts or evidence, which simply cannot be conveyed in its fullest sense of meaning without the introduction of words ("Word Play"). Ralph Lemon, choreographer and artistic director of

Cross Performance in New York City, similarly uses text and dance together to express the fullness of thought: he claims that creating a relationship between the verbal and nonverbal languages allows a dance to follow one long narrative arc. Lemon uses a single textual narrative, divides it into sections, and inserts movement based on the narrative into the spaces made by the divisions ("Word Play"). Both Hanson and Lemon establish a relationship of necessity with which I agree: the text and dance complete one another.

Lemon and other choreographers also seek ways to replace text with movement—in this case, forging a relationship of complete equality, as if the movements of the dance are synonymous with the spoken words. Lemon describes his desire to "push the words to the extreme so that the text becomes a physical language"("Word Play"). Additionally, Annie-B Parson, choreographer and co-director of Big Dance Theatre (NYC), explains that she starts by removing words from her selected text and seeking out passages where she can replace the words with movement ("Word Play"). This relationship formed between text and dance eliminates any barrier between the two media. Text and dance—the verbal and nonverbal together—establish a single language. I would like to call it a "complete" language: one of full thought or full meaning.

Other versions of the movement-text relationship exist where the choreographers tamper with the text and dance by exploiting techniques used on the opposite medium. For instance, Parson considers tampering with word sequence by using the choreographic technique of retrograding movement ("Word Play"). David Neumann, a New York City based choreographer, explores compositional ideas of repetition, cutting, and pasting in both text and dance. Neumann finds that his ability to manipulate the text and relocate ideas allows him to add drama to it, which he can then reflect in movement ("Word Play").

As I examine the works of choreographers who combine text and dance, I find that their discoveries all broaden the movement-text relationship. Liz Lerman explains to her readers that she values the place where "the power of pure movement [is recognized], the delight of language on its own terms [is explored], and limitless possibilities [are discovered] by asserting that the two belong together, too"(Lerman). I value the same place: the place where movement and text relate to one another not only through brain activity and our natural and trained responses to the meaning of words, but simply because we say so. Just as I believe that our action words may very well be our own creations, I argue that the depth of the movement-text relationship is also up to us (the choreographers) to establish.

Choreographic Works and Critical Reception

I'll return to an idea of Lerman's once more: she noted in her essay that many dance "purists" in the world today frown upon the use of text with dance. The purists advocate for dance works that are merely celebrations and demonstrations of movement on its own. Therefore, as the examination of choreographic works with textual scores proceeds here, the exploration of critics' responses will follow in the effort to identify where the purists err—in short, where their minds are closed or where the purpose of coupling verbal and nonverbal language is lost to their interpretations.

Martha Graham's *Letter to the World* (1940) was performed with the accompaniment of excerpts of Emily Dickinson's poetry. The piece itself is about Dickinson—a woman who lived a confined life in her family's Amherst house, but who "nevertheless experienced in those confines every important emotion known to humankind"(Acocella). *Letter to the World* is set to the music of Hunter Johnson with the passages of Dickinson's poetry stemming from her poem "Of Course—I Prayed"(Acocella). Other notable names in modern dance have choreographed to text, including Doris Humphrey and Merce Cunningham. Doris

Humphrey turned to the poetry of Federico García Lorca in *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (1946). The dance work served as a eulogy for a fallen bullfighter set to lines spoken from García Lorca's poem of the same title. Evidently, the work was successful—Marcia B. Siegel, a biographer of Humphrey, notes that *Lament* was the beginning of Humphrey's production of several impressionistic dances that complimented the choreography of José Limón in her dancers' repertoire (Siegel 3).

Cunningham's *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run* (1965) and *Roadrunners* (1979) both incorporated text. *How to Pass* was danced to anecdotes as told by John Cage and *Roadrunners* was set to readings of Chinese legends. Jack Anderson of *The New York Times* in his 1983 article "Dance View: Should Dance Try to Compete with Words?" explains that the most harsh critics of the movement-text relationship claim that dance with text is "literary" dance—dance which is both impure and even challenging to follow (Anderson). Cunningham, to whom Anderson gave the label "abstractionist," employed text in a manner that left it separate from the dance. Thus, Cunningham's dances with spoken word scores are not "literary," given that the dance and words have no relation and their juxtaposition results in incongruities that appear deliberately comical (Anderson). Cunningham (with the help of Cage) frequently explored the use of chance in his choreographic works; with this in mind, the use of unrelated text and dance fits with Cunningham's style. It is as if, instead of the equality-based movement-text relationship that I seek, Cunningham created a movement-text combination of indifference.

Additional modern dance choreographers, such as Valerie Bettis and Margaret Beals, also deepened the relationship between text and dance for themselves. Bettis, known for her emphasis on character studies, used spoken word frequently. One of her most well-known and evidently successful choreographic works, a 1943 solo titled *The Desperate Heart*, was set

to a poem of the same title by John Malcolm Brinnin ("Bettis, Valerie Elizabeth"). Margaret Beals, a pioneer in dance improvisation who is frequently noted for her successful combination of movement with voice, poetry, and text, has created works to poetry from Sylvia Plath and Edna St. Vincent Millay ("Margaret Beals"). Anderson also takes note of Meredith Monk's multimedia spectacles and Kenneth King's creation of dances to abstruse scientific, or even pseudo-scientific, texts; both choreographers in this case create what Anderson calls "verbal collages," and they mark the increased insistence of choreographers to incorporate thematic material into their dances (Anderson).

Seeing that Anderson's article was published over thirty years ago, numerous text-based dance works have been created since its publication. The preceding list of works served to focus on some of the "modern greats" that have graced the dance world—so, when looking into recent works, I explored within the category of today's most notable choreographers. Jiří Kylián is a world-renowned choreographer noted for his creations while working with the Nederlands Dans Theater. His *27'52"* (2002) uses Dirk Haubrich's original score, which borrows two Gustav Mahler themes along with text from Baudelaire and Bruce Lee, among others. The words are recorded in multiple languages by the piece's original cast (Zacher). The most current reviews of the 2002 work, precisely a 2014 review of its performance by Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, describe the piece as intricate and fascinating, though alarmingly busy at times. Even today, spoken word scores can evidently overwhelm audiences (Zacher).

Critiques of Kylián's work are tame in respect to many past instances of critical reception for text-based dance works. It's understandable—audiences today have evolved as modern and contemporary dance has, and the "weird" or "impure" is much more commonplace. In terms of the most heavily criticized works, I return to Anderson's article.

He cites Yvonne Rainer's *Inner Appearances*, a 1973 solo in which Rainer simply pushed a vacuum around stage while the text displaying her complicated thoughts projected on a screen. Rainer, a leading figure in the Judson Dance Theatre movement, has been classified as a postmodernist and minimalist by many critics ("Yvonne Rainer: Dances and Films"). The concept of *Inner Appearances* appeared to focus on the combination of pedestrian movements with the complexities of the text—yet, the text overwhelmed the work (Anderson). Additionally, Johanna Boyce, another experimental choreographer and director of Johanna Boyce and Performance Group, fell victim to overwhelming text in her piece entitled *Incidents (In Coming of Age)* (1982). According to Anderson, when the text is more interesting or engaging than the dance with which it is presented, the "choreography becomes almost subservient to words and pictures" (Anderson). I must note that these instances in which dance was overshadowed did not use text as the sound score, but as another installment of visual art atop the dance. However, both Rainer's and Boyce's works sought to establish a relationship between text and dance, and the dancers were still "dancing to words" in a sense.

My research shows that the most success in choreographic works set to textual scores occurs when text and movement act as partners. When text, as a learned language with definite, undoubtable meanings applied to words, demands to be followed closely and attentively, the potential exists for it to distract from the movement. If a text is too complex, too amusing, or too exciting in relation to the presented movement, the action onstage can very well be lost (Anderson). Anderson's final words on the matter define a balance of text and movement that I will work to find in my own choreography: the two languages can combine "if choreographers are exactly sure just what they want to accomplish through verbal and nonverbal means. And actions in such dances must always speak as loudly and

eloquently as words"(Anderson). So, where many choreographers have failed to define their own "why" and "how" in terms of the solidification of the connection between text and dance, one critic put it in basic terms with which I agree.

Relating this Research to My Process

Music is thought to exist as a medium as honest as dance—choreographers employ it naturally and out of habit, presumably maintaining the honesty of the language (dance) that they speak. Therefore, the movement-text relationship can emulate the movement-music one when it proves to be as intentionally honest. I believe that honesty, in this case, is rooted in the discovery of the need to employ text and the recognition that the movement and text are equal partners.

To discover this honesty, I return to Carrie Hanson's statement that a choreographer should only employ text when she finds that it is absolutely necessary—when the statement of the choreographic work will be lost without the implementation of words. Or, inversely, text should be employed in choreography when the text's statement is so important that it requires coupling with the exposing quality of body language. Section II's Text Selection chapter reflects how I apply these concepts of necessity by determining the statement I want to make with my choreography—what comes first, the intended statement or the text selection? Additionally, the honesty of the movement-music relationship inspires another idea found in Section II: the text-based sound score for choreography created to spoken word can eventually be addressed as music. Although I initially acknowledge the sound score for its difference (essentially, for its lack of music), my dancers and I ultimately respond to it habitually, like music. We seek out sound cues, moments of quiet or stillness, and moments of emphasis or climax, just as "traditional" music begs of its dancers. The Text Presentation

sub-chapter in Section II explains how I determine the best method to speak the text for the purpose of maintaining its "music" status.

Thus, much of the preceding research simply enables me to operate to my fullest potential in regard to choreographing works to spoken word. The recognition that the movement-text relationship is one that choreographers can expand for themselves serves as the foundation of my process in Section II. Beyond this, in terms of the generation of the movement for the dance piece, I apply Jack Anderson's seemingly simple statement of the need for equality between movement and text. The Movement Generation chapter in Section II deals explicitly how I kept the movement equally as important, engaging, and action-filled as the text with which it pairs. I try to keep the movement driving, informing, and clarifying the important aspects of the text (rather than miming it), as reflected in my ideas presented in Movement Generation.

I must note that this search for honesty—by way of necessity and equality—is again dependent on me as the individual artist. The statements that drive my choreography are based on personal inspiration and preference. Any indulgence in personal emotions and "venting" is never my intention, despite these personal preferences. I knew from the start of the application of my process that my intended statement is dependent on my own urges and my own understanding of what ought to be "said" with this art form.

Exploration Exercises—Process Creation

Explorations in text selection (versus creation) and dancers' engagement were conducted in my effort to create my choreographic process for spoken word sound scores. Many of my explorations required simply that a willing group of dancers join me in a series of exercises and provide feedback to me to figure out the most successful means of

employing the text, creating the movement, and maintaining the dancers' engagement with the subject matter and "music." My trials were conducted in the spring and summer of 2014.

I divided the text selection exploration into two exercises: one in which a found text was given to the dancers at the first rehearsal and one in which the dancers and I attempted to generate our own narration through movement exercises. In the found-text rehearsals, I investigated two options. The options covered the idea of awareness versus memorization. First, I distributed hard copies of a poem to my dancers, read it aloud, and gave them time to analyze the poem as written (my actual process for poem selection is detailed in Section II). I asked the dancers to personally explore a specific segment of the poem (one with especially strong image or statement) in an improvisation exercise, while I joined them. We all developed movement phrases from the improvisation and applied them to the poem to begin generating choreography to the text. I watched and recorded the movement phrases of the dancers together in order to closer identify the relationships that exist between the dancers themselves, as well as between the dancers and the text. In our second found-text trial, the poem was distributed prior to the rehearsal and the dancers memorized the poem before our meeting, during which we again explored movement through improvisation. The memorization was meant to help me analyze how to keep the dancers engaged in the text at all times. The results of my memorization exploration are included in the Maintaining Dancers' Engagement chapter in Section II.

The exploration of self-generating the text dealt with the introduction of an idea: I gave my dancers a certain concept (for instance, "discovering" a certain body part and finding freedom in it or examining an un-treasured memory) for them to evaluate with movement. The ideas were tailored toward evoking interesting images, inventive movement, and original emotions—reactions which would hopefully allow the dancers ample

information to respond verbally and create the sound score. The improvisation exercise was given time for personal exploration, after which the dancers and I discussed our responses and discoveries and recorded a full "synopsis" of our experience. We worked to combine the written recordings into a narrative that we could then use as the sound score for choreography. Just as the memorization results are disclosed in a later chapter, the results of the various text selection exercises are found in the Text Selection chapter in Section II.

Text selection and the maintenance of the dancers' engagement with the text showcase only two segments my four-part process. Text presentation and movement generation (the two remaining parts of my process) were developed based on the exploration exercises outlined here as well. The proper presentation of text was discovered from observing how the dancers interact with the text when it is first read aloud: as I will discuss further in Section II, I found that the most visceral reaction to a selection of poetry occurred during the first listen to the poem, so my presentation of the first reading was of the utmost importance to the dancers' abilities to treat text as music. As for my own generation of movement, the improvisation exercises in the trials for text selection proved invaluable. Working to couple my personal choreographic preferences with the work of my dancers helped me uncover ways of making interesting and collaborative choreography. I worked to continually challenge the dancers in movement and textual understanding, assure that the movement and text are permanently equal, and insist that the movement remain informed by the text at all times—even if that information signifies that the movement ought to directly contrast the text. I will clarify my choreography tactics in the Movement Generation chapter in Section II, born frequently from advice gained in choreography classes at Butler University and research conducted on contemporary choreography.

Text Selection and Analysis

The task of finding words to dance to appears rather daunting, so it is my duty to first narrow it down. For this reason, my exploration seeks only to employ found text—meaning text from outside writers—rather than have me write the text myself or with the aid of my dancers. I personally fear that a self-generated text verges on the too-personal or self-indulgent. One of my early exploration tactics entailed that I ask my dancers to approach an idea, analyze it through improvisation, and write about the experience (detailed in the previous section). I combined the writings from the dancers in the effort to create a narrative that would serve as the sound score for a choreographic work. Issues arose that determined the pitfalls of a work choreographed to a self (choreographer and dancer)-generated text: the text lacked substance in terms of image, rhythm, and concrete concepts. Because of its basis in personal response and experience, the work of text made by my dancers and I was fueled too purely by emotion. I worried that it would become exhausting and redundant for an audience.

I believe that a work rooted entirely in emotion presents itself too forcefully: it is as if the audience is told what to feel too "loudly," without room for interpretation or distance from the emotion. What's more, I've found that it disengages the dancers from the text. I cannot force the issue of engagement upon my dancers since the goal is to treat the text as music, nor can I assume that the dancers' willingness to participate in the creation of a narrative would produce an acceptable work of text at all. So, rather than potentially damage or disengage the dancers' relationships with verbal language by demanding brilliance in text production, I find it much safer and ultimately more successful to select a work of found text and present it to my dancers before setting choreography. In this manner, I believe my dancers all develop personal responses to the chosen text. Furthermore, I often find that an

overly emotional work is uncomfortable because of its forced quality—so, my text selection process covers only the use of comfortable, found text.

In seeking the best text to use, I argue that poetry offers the most viable option. In my opinion, poetry is the most evocative display of verbal language. Poetry, no matter if it is written in systemized stanzas or in the form of prose, appears to enable a sense of rhythm that benefits dancers seeking to treat text as music. The internal rhyme schemes that many poets are careful to implement, along with the rhythmic manner in which poems are read aloud, make my search for the "musical" aspects of the text simpler. I believe poetry is driven by image, rhythm, and emotion—sometimes the three forces are all equal, sometimes we get a bit more variety. The important thing that I have found is that these driving forces keep the poem *active.* And the "activity" of poetry can excite the body to move.

Approaching the entire inventory of poetry that exists in the world today is essentially impossible—it would take a lifetime or two. Yet, seeing that all art is personal to an extent, all art preferences are personal as well. So I find what I like. I spend time reading poetry and I have discovered what I want poetry to accomplish. I have quickly realized that I respond to poetry that I think is *necessary* and begs to be said with the honesty of the body. To me, that poetry comes from writers set in a world that I know, but who can express certain lessons about that world a little more eloquently than I. So I examine strictly twentieth and twenty-first century American poetry, knowing that such writers write of a familiar world. Recall that I initially questioned what would come first, my intended statement or my choice of text. This search through poetry means that for me, the overall purpose of using poetry is decided first, but the actual statement of the text is only determined when I find a work of text that I believe to be particularly meaningful, instructive, and active.

SECTION II: MY PROCESS

Dancing to words, in my opinion, should include text that requires greater honesty—the body's honesty. So I return to Hanson's statement of necessity: the words that I select for a sound score are words that I am sure must be said. But I have more to consider than the necessary quality of the text. When I come across a poem that I am particularly impressed or moved by, I need to then decide if the poem can even be choreographed. And I argue that this factor is determined by the balance of driving forces in the poem. By "balance," I mean that I have found that the most workable poetry has one driving force that I willingly place above the others in importance and its attachment to my intended statement. That driving force comes to act as my primary inspiration while the other two forces are still present in a supportive capacity. I find that this distribution of forces most successfully leads to a dynamic work, since the movement inspiration is varied and the primary force highlights my work's purpose. I believe that only one force at a time should be used to inspire choreography for clarity purposes—it seems that the attempt to employ multiple forces at once can overwhelm both the choreographer and the audience.

As I consider the idea of only one inspiration source at a time, I realize that my primary driving force should only be relied on for as long as it takes to fulfill it. I mean for all three driving forces to be obvious and not be made redundant by repetition or overuse. Of course, the duration of employment for each force is up to me to decide. I return to the written text and highlight the passages in which I most readily identify the primary driving force, ensuring that no more than two thirds of the poem is selected (really, between half and two thirds)—and it is only in these passages that I use the primary force as movement inspiration. By insisting that I balance the forces with this management of the text, I make certain that my movement will have dynamic variations and that the text will always directly inform the movement. For instance, if my chosen primary force is emotion, I look for the

presence of images and interesting sounds in the remaining text—images and rhythms that I could rely on once emotion is exhausted.

I need to also consider the length of the poem, certainly. A shorter poem, namely one that does not extend past two minutes in length when spoken aloud and would not be considered practical even for a very short choreographic work, seems usable to me only if the poem can be repeated or if silent periods can be implemented as well. Furthermore, I only consider the use of repetition or silence if the meaning or purpose of my statement will be heightened by their use. Specifically, will the repetition of specific images, concepts, or segments of the poems allow the audience to better see my intended statement? Or, will repetition allow for the choreography to illustrate my statement in different perspectives? And, will the use of patches of silence give the audience the proper allotment of time to process an image, emotion, or concept?

Finally, with my belief that poetry is the medium that best ensures success in choreographing to spoken word, I find that the text can also be evaluated for its physical structure: stanza breaks (or lack thereof), punctuation, rhyme (or lack thereof), and the actual shape of the poem on the page. Again, the structure and its varieties allows for my making of informed choreographic choices. Any break or structure change can indicate a place for me to alter the movement phrase, choose the ideal force to drive the movement, or place the dancers effectively on the floor. My further exploration of structural adaptations to the movement follows in the Movement Generation chapter in this section. My purpose here is to assert that the poem I select for choreography is one that I believe is structurally interesting and intellectually stimulating, varied in concept, image, rhythm, and emotion. The poem has to be one that I believe has the potential to matter to my dancers and their

audience—a poem that can be made personal for the fact of its ability to stimulate and engage both performer and audience.

I have found that this ability to engage depends also on how the text is presented in the performance of the work—for the audience's response to the work and the rehearsal of the dancers. For my purposes, the text will be spoken (despite evaluations of choreographic failures when the text was projected on a screen during the dance performances, this particular exploration has always intended to use the text solely as music). The following sub-chapter explores further how I chose to present the text; specifically, it focuses on how my text is introduced, how my speaker is chosen, and how my work is rehearsed and performed.

Text Presentation

The first manner or text presentation that I have to consider is its presentation to my dancers. As I mentioned at the end of the Exploration Exercises chapter in Section I, my initial presentation dictates how easily my dancers can respond to the text as music: I believe we connect to our first listen of the poem, just as the original version of a piece of music remains the "comfortable" version (whereas any remixes or covers of the music sound slightly strange). I have to spend time with the text to determine the spoken version that I will provide for my dancers as the "original version." In some cases, I find that my own manner of speaking the poem serves as the best original. This choice assures that my dancers heard the variation of driving forces that I identified in the poem, for I intentionally read the poem with inflections that unveil the driving forces. Other times, I have discovered that readings from outside sources (from other performers or the actual poet) should be the original version given to my dancers. My choice of outside recordings and speakers indicates that I experienced significant reactions to them—in my personal analysis of the chosen texts,

those particular recordings best demonstrate what I want the poem to convey, with the clearest demonstration of my chosen driving forces.

My text presentation in rehearsal and performance relies heavily on these first listens from my dancers. Since the purpose of my exploration focuses explicitly on the relationship that my dancers develop with the text to help it function as music, it is their responses that matter. Most often, my choice of speaker for the performance reflects my dancers' reactions to the original versions—however, I have to take other factors into account as well. For instance, depending on my intended statement, the gender of the speaker can change how the poem is heard. Perhaps the poem names individuals, lovers, enemies, etc. that allow me to illustrate specific relationships between my dancers onstage, depending on the speaker of the poem. Specifically, I have found (and I will detail further in the Application section) that my choice of the speaker's gender can dictate the various sexualities that the dance piece explores. I need to consider how a male poet's words would sound as spoken by a woman, or vice versa. Every consideration of speaker gender was built on the desire to uncover the depth of my intended statement. Though I do find it beneficial to keep with the texts as introduced when making my speaker selection for performance, I cannot forgo any discoveries of a more appropriate speaker. If I have to make a change from the original version to feel that I have accomplished my purpose, I find that the best method of handling my dancers' now interrupted relationship with the text is through discussion.

I work to remember that dancers are thinkers as well as movers—I do not need to shy away from opening a discussion. In short, I have to explain myself and my individual reasoning to my dancers if and when I made a change to the speaker of the poem. Think of it as if I have handed my dancers a Stravinsky score—counts, rhythm, and timing are incredibly varied, unclear, and require that I dictate exactly what I hear and what I expect my

dancers to learn to hear. The same practice is applied here for the changes in speakers, though instead of counts, rhythm, and timing, I need to discuss inflection, connotation, pauses, and rhythm with my dancers.

Having addressed the question of speaker selection, I also must clarify the method of rehearsal with the text. To me, the key component in rehearsal is consistency. My need for consistency determines that I ought to use a recording during the rehearsal process as soon as possible—specifically when I intend to speak the poem myself or when I have chosen outside speakers from whom recordings of the poems do not immediately exist. When I choose to use a found recording as my dancers' original version, that same recording is used in rehearsals. I have found that the sooner I acquire a recording of the text, the sooner my dancers can begin to develop a lasting connection with the text. If I or my speaker simply recite the text during every rehearsal session (for an extended period of time), I fear that my dancers will continuously fail to discover the nuances (the cues, the rhythm, the various inflections) of the words, because they will not exist with any degree of permanence. I recognize that live readings will always differ to some degree; any changes in the length of a pause between ideas or sentences, or even in the volume of the speakers mean that my dancers will have slightly different experiences and reactions to the text every time it is read. The use of recordings during rehearsal sessions allows me to insist upon the maintenance of the dancers' engagement. More on this idea will be revealed in the Maintaining Dancers' Engagement chapter.

For the performances of the works of choreography, I have determined that the use of recordings again offers the possibility for greatest success. While I recognize that dancers are frequently accustomed to performing with live music and they should be adept in anticipating and responding to it (after rehearsing and familiarizing themselves with

recordings), I worry that live poetry readings will overwhelm the dancing or cause the well-oiled connection between dancers and text to be lost. I think that having a speaker onstage or even off to the side, out of view, can distract audience members and diminish the equality between movement and text by giving the audience too much action to look at or look for. Since the presentation of the choreography intends to highlight the discovery and application of this equal connection, I have decided to keep the performance of my work as close to the rehearsal process (where the connection is forged) as possible.

I must note that I do not recommend the option of my dancers speaking the text as they dance in this exploration. Early on in my initial trials in the spring of 2014, I considered this option, but its pitfalls immediately made themselves obvious. When dancers occupy their time with proper enunciation, volume, and memorization of the text (for the purpose of speaking), I realize that they lose the connection to the text as music—to put it simply, the text does not function as my dancers' music when they speak it. My exploration seeks to mirror the movement-music relationship in as many outlets as possible, and it is not often (or ever) that dancers are asked to play their own music. So, I do not ask them to speak it, either.

Movement Generation

I determined that the foundation of movement generation with a spoken word sound score lies first in my adamant convictions that the text functions on levels higher and more complex than its literal meanings. Yes, words signify specific, undeniable (and unavoidable) meanings. The text that serves as music, however, cannot be employed only through its meanings; the text also exists as sound (sound without meaning, but with rhythm, pauses, "spaces" and accents of its own). Therefore, the generation of movement spawns from the exploration of the intricacies of both the sounds and word meanings

(which I find easiest to discover through the balance of the three driving forces) and from the application of traditional contemporary choreographic principles. See, most of the information I need to use to generate movement is information I have already been given in choreography courses at Butler University or that I have found in research—my process simply requires that I uncover how to apply traditional choreographic principles to a spoken word score.

First, we are frequently taught that the choreography must not always follow the "commands" of the music: interesting and successful choreographic works are thought to spend time contrasting the music as well as following it. I have to ask myself if my movement set to text both adheres to and resists the formalities (rhythm and meaning) of the words. I have found that I ought to return to the written text to identify the passages that serve to best demonstrate my chosen primary driving force—given that I believe image and emotion to be the two most common primary forces, these passages will likely be those that are the most literal, in which I hear the words for their meanings (as opposed to their sound). In the case of sound-based driving forces, I seek to identify passages with interesting rhythmic patterns, syllables, and alliteration. Basically, the selection of the primary force passages allows me to time the movement to present itself in a way that I believe will ensure my audience hear the passages—the passages that the movement will directly follow.

I discovered a way to personally calculate timing, depending on each driving force: If I mean to highlight a specific image- or emotion-driven passage by coupling it with demonstrative movement, I find that I should time the movement to present itself immediately after the words it represents. With this pattern in place, the audience first hears the idea (the emotion or image—the driving force) and then sees a direct repeat of the idea in movement moments later. Furthermore, I believe that this pattern ensures that the

movement and text remain equal. If the movement is placed before the words or even in time with them, I worry that the equality will be lost (since these two driving forces rely on the meaning of the words).

When spoken language carries definite meaning and body language takes time to interpret, I find that the verbal needs to come first so that the movement then serves as a translation of the words and an exposure of their purpose. Were the movement to precede the specific words, I argue that the audience would be left too focused on interpreting the movement to hear the words it signifies. Likewise, I found that the equal timing of movement and text can become too much for a dancer or audience member to process: to keep the text functioning as music, I believe that both the dancers and audience need time to briefly evaluate it on its own, prior to the introduction of movement. That way, specific words can function as accents and sound cues and the attached movement can directly follow. Additionally, I recognize that the sequence in which the movement follows the text helps ensure that the movement carries the responsibility of conveying the two driving forces in consideration. With the movement acting as translator, it is obviously responsible for relaying the precise purpose of the text and can therefore be thought equal to the text.

Of course, the pattern of the movement following the text is not always applicable. A sound driving force, I have found, requires a different sense of timing. When I seek to ignore the words' meanings (with a sound driving force), I find it best for the movement and text to occur simultaneously—that way, I can be clear that the dancing accents distinct syllables and the dynamics of the words, not the meaning of them. I believe that the sounds should be accented as they occur, so that the dancers and audience both don't have the time to process them for their meanings, but only mimic and evaluate their rhythms. In the case of sound driving forces, I realize that this equal timing also promotes the equality between

movement and text, just as the text-then-movement timing for the other two forces does. When I work with text for its presence as sound (music, not meaning), I want the dancers to truly dance to the "music" in the words: and when we dance to music, we want to move in time with the musical accents.

Moments in which I want the text's meaning to be contrasted or ignored—perhaps where I wish the audience to see the "unseen" or unspoken idea in a certain statement—are ones that I believe ought to be handled with different sequences of events. I find that the movement should happen first so that it acts as the original thought. Here, the audience can see a motion to which they react, due to its familiarity (since the driving force in this case would be either emotion or image, and I find traditional body language to be the best inspiration for such instances), only to hear an opposing thought moments later. That way, I intend for audience members to apply the confusion of contrasting emotions to the actual feeling of the dance. Additional options for contrasting both the text and movement will be discussed later in the chapter, with an examination of dynamic variations.

How I determine which specific movements properly indicate my balance of driving forces depends on personal artistic preferences. Having all three forces in play gives more movement options: recall my argument that music inspires dancing and text inspires action. When I approach text with a sound-based driving force, I assess the text as music. I listen to the text for its rhythms and sounds, not its meaning. I found that in those cases, I am more likely to give my dancers movement inspired by my trained dance vocabulary. I choose movement that doesn't connect to the meaning of the words, but which can accurately adhere to the rhythms of them. When approaching text with image or emotion-based driving forces, I rely on meaning. It is when I focus on movement from this standpoint that traditional body language vocabulary becomes my inspiration for movement. I ask myself:

how would a body respond to this image or emotion naturally? This return to typical movements in the human body language vocabulary gives me a movement starting ground—movement that can be exaggerated, modified, or reimagined in variations. In creating these variations, I explore my available body parts, as I've been taught in traditional choreography classes: where can a particular movement find initiation, other than its natural place?

Beyond that, the creation of shapes between bodies or the creation of shapes on the floor in formations offers me as the choreographer the opportunity to tailor images through my generated movement. I create images specifically when working with the two meaning-based driving forces (image and emotion), acknowledging that when the inspiration of typical body language is not enough to convey my purpose, I often need to create images with the shaping of multiple bodies onstage. Sometimes these images are direct translations of images in the poem, while other times I seek to illustrate scenarios and settings to which I think my audience will produce a specific reaction. Therefore, I believe that "illustration" through choreography can produce both sight- and emotion-rooted reactions. Drawing images with a group of bodies requires I apply my knowledge of the body and its potential to make shapes, again based on principles I have learned that are true of all choreography—how can a grouping of bodies demonstrate something delicate? Something powerful, spacious, or intimidating? I have to recognize that I will not be able to directly remove an image from a section of the text and place it onstage, since spoken language is so much more specific than body language. I have to find the purpose or the "core" of the image and work to illustrate specifically that. By the "cores" of the images, I mean their roots in delicacy or power, in beauty or horror. Where I cannot build the precise dimensions of an image, I instead illustrate the essence of that image.

Of course, to produce the images I act as any choreographer will: I observe my dancers in rehearsal, noting the chemistry (or lack thereof) between them. My dancers that readily play off one other can create cohesion in an image, such as those founded in delicacy or beauty, while those that lack chemistry can demonstrate an uncomfortable image. So, I need only to return to the text to remind myself of the image's essence—after that, I simply shape the image with the bodies I have to work with. This shaping requires my consideration of the closeness between bodies, the implementation of angular versus smooth edges, the number of dancers needed to form the shapes, and the intended audience focal-point(s). While these criteria are mostly relative to me and my purpose, I have discovered that an uncomfortable image typically shapes itself angularly, while comfortable or delicate ones may be smoother.

The most important aspect of creating images with text that I encounter is that the dancers engage themselves in ensuring that the images produce a visceral reaction—that the images feel active to them (as discussed early in Section I). If dancing to words in which they find no activity, I find that my dancers perform a static dance. So it is not only me who has to return to the text itself, but my dancers, in order to identify how to experience each image as more than verbal language. Often, we observe the surrounding language of the image, for transition purposes and to seek contrast with the image itself. As I generate the movement for the chosen images, I am intentionally precise about the transitions into and out of the shapes. I recognize that helping my dancers know how to arrive at and finish an image gives them a reason to keep it moving and eliminates the creation of static movement. This idea of "static" dancing is not to be confused with a dance that implements stillness: here, a "static" work is one that does not achieve anything with its lack of activity. Where stillness breathes

and facilitates thought, static movement lacks the smoothness and "alive" quality that would enable it to do so.

The use of stillness in a dance work (especially one inspired primarily by image), raises the question of how I balance the overall movement of a piece in terms of dynamics and difficulty. Above all, I believe that dance must always push boundaries: frequently, this belief takes me to the idea of surpassing physical limits. But not always. When pressing the bounds of the physical is not appropriate for a particular section of a dance work, I argue that the work should instead push against emotional boundaries—namely, the limits placed on human intimacy. When using text, specifically poetry that is evocative and frequently demonstrative of human connections, I find the exploration of emotional limits very effective. These beliefs apply well to the balance of driving forces when generating movement: the sound-based forces that inspire movement from my dance vocabulary most easily help me to explore physical boundaries, while the image- and emotion-based forces inspired by human body language leave me open to both options. I can keep movement as simple and "human" as possible, exploring emotion, or mold the variation of a human movement into a physically challenging display.

How do I apply my understanding of physically and emotionally challenging movements (and their inspirations) to make a dynamically-varied work of choreography? I adhere to the balance of the driving forces once more and I listen to the chosen recording of the poem. I decided that my primary driving force (taking up between half and two thirds of the choreographic inspiration) should almost exclusively inspire movement that follows the text directly with the force-specific timing already discussed. I want my audience to hear and process the passages fulfilled by my primary driving force. For the supportive forces, I need to explore the options for contrasting the text, so I listen specifically to the recording.

Perhaps the recording's speaker stresses certain statements that don't stand out when I reexamine the written text. In the effort to contrast the music, I recommend that passages emphasized in the recording will be better served by smaller movement or stillness; as my lessons in traditional choreography have taught me, a dance work that creates a crescendo with both the music and movement simultaneously is predictable and unoriginal. Likewise, I found that the sections that stand out in the written form of the text that the speaker perhaps has not said with notable gusto or volume—the quiet statements—can be paired with larger, physically challenging steps.

Shifts in dynamics do not only happen in relation to contrasts between movement and text, but between my dancers onstage: the way I group my dancers, and how the different movements that the groups perform either compliment or contrast one another. At times, I employ full unison movement. I find that the desire for unison movement is fueled by the need to have my audience listen intently to a particular statement, without the distraction of a mess of movement onstage. I give my viewers one particular action to look at in order for listening to take precedence. But, in other instances, I determine that a statement is more complicated and requires that it is uncovered for its various levels of meaning through different groupings of movement. I believe it is my job as the choreographer to keep a single driving force inspiring the groupings, while the power and "size" of the steps contrast each other.

The methods of contrast depend on what I know I need to accomplish—meaning what movement I intend to highlight (if any) and how a driving force is applied as inspiration. If one movement is meant to be highlighted, logic dictates that that particular movement is the one that is the abnormality onstage: perhaps the other groups of dancers all perform with the same dynamic, and the one group meant to be showcased performs with

the opposing dynamic. I employ this tactic with the belief that the eyes of audience members will be drawn to the movement that is different—the movement that should, in theory, standout. Of course, this tactic is essentially true of all choreography. It is when I apply the driving forces as inspiration that I can work to create contrasting movement in a single section of a dance set to a spoken word score.

In the case of a sound driving force, I find that the most likely scenario includes one group dancing to a steady pulse in the text while other groups' movements showcase the special sound cues that act as musical accents in the text. Essentially, a sound driving force displayed in contrasting movements depends only on identifying the musical intricacies of the words. When using an image or emotion driving force, I have discovered that creating contrasting movement is all about uncovering the layers of an image or emotion: how do they literally manifest? In my work, I find it effective to have one group display the literal manifestation of the image or emotion, while others illustrate my interpretations of it. These interpretations include what I want the audience to learn from the concept and any context that I believe my audience needs to see in order to process the concept literally.

I can state with certainty that a dynamically-varied choreographic work keeps an audience stimulated. To me, a bored audience member defeats the purpose of the art form. Yes, dance is a language and it serves to transcend barriers that spoken language builds. Yet, dance is also a performing art that means to entertain, excite, and interest its audience in order to relay its message. My personal criteria for movement generation that I develop here is therefore bent on both creating a choreographic work that establishes an equal movement-text relationship and remains visually interesting to my audience. In early trials in the spring of 2014 and through the fall of the same year, my generation of choreography grew in part because I constantly had outsiders watch my work. Consistent feedback from dancers and

outside viewers, acting as my audience, gives me insight into the visually stimulating quality of my choreography. I pay particular attention to feedback that focuses on questions that I wish to ask my audience: for instance, what do viewers notice in terms of the direct relation between movement and text? My goal is always to assure that the emphasis of chosen passages is not lost in an overload of movement, nor is it lost in the absence or over-simplicity of the dance.

Above all, receiving feedback in this manner also helps me to answer the question that I'd think is on any choreographer's mind: does the movement help the dancers and audience members hear the music differently? Or, in the case of my exploration, does my choreography ensure that the communication of the text's ideas is successful and equally as important as the movement? Given that the success of choreography is entirely subjective (success, like art and inspiration, is dependent on the beholder), I can't guarantee definite answers to these questions. But posing such questions, I believe, is a necessary part of my process.

Maintaining Dancers' Engagement

An incredibly important factor in my process is the continued engagement of the dancers with the music—in this case, the text. I find that the other factors, the selection and performance of the text and the generation of choreography, are useless if my dancers do not possess the ability or means to respond to my chosen text. Much of the process for maintaining dancer engagement is similar (even equivalent) to the way that I personally interpret and relate to the text during the other steps of my process. My dancers, too, must spend time with the text. In the Text Presentation sub-chapter, I applied the analogy of a challenging musical score (i.e. a Stravinsky score), and I find it relevant here as well: when asked to dance to a sound score that is unusual or uneven, I believe that my dancers need to

repeatedly listen to the score in order to create habits for responding to it. It was my duty to provide my dancers with accessible recordings of the texts for this purpose. As my dancers spend time with the text, I argue that memorization is actually unnecessary. My explorations in memorization, explained in Section I, proved unsuccessful. Since I would not ask my dancers to memorize their music, but only remain familiar and responsive to it, I intend to ask the same of my dancers when working with text. If my dancers continuously listen to the recordings, pick out accents, and note specific timing, I believe they can respond to the text like music. Sure, my dancers may accidentally memorize some passages just from increased familiarity, but I will never require that they do so.

Seeing as I cannot fully monitor the work of my dancers outside the studio—"work" meaning the continuous listening and assessing of the sound score—I bring the work into rehearsals. First, when the rehearsal process is in its early stages and my dancers are just being introduced to the text, I make sure to discuss the various obstacles that working with text will bring to the situation. In essence, I explain that dancing to text will indeed feel different than dancing to music (I can't ignore the differences), but that our work will be focused on eliminating the strangeness. More than that, I find that I need to explain why I choose to use text as my music. I have selected the text and presented it to my dancers thoughtfully for a reason; in my case, because I find necessary lessons in poetry that I wish to profess with dancing. I give my dancers much of the information explained so far in my process: I name the driving forces (noting the primary one) and explain the specific passages that I wish to highlight so that my dancers have information enough to reflect my intentions in their movements. I recognize that it is important to start with this information, prior to setting movement, so that my dancers have a thoughtful starting point and know that my process will require their mental engagement with my purpose.

SECTION II: MY PROCESS

Once I begin setting movement sequences on my dancers, I no longer need to constantly reaffirm that yes, the text is a different medium than a normal musical score. I found that if I clearly lay out my intentions and my process beforehand, my dancers have the information to consistently make informed decisions about the movement they are given with each driving force in mind. However, when treating the text as music without question, I am sure to provide sound cues just as I would in the case of a traditional musical score. Of course, certain movements will happen on specific words instead of musical counts—but the principle of listening and responding to certain moments in the music remains the same. My dancers already possess the habit of listening and finding musical accents, so I merely exploit that habit for the sake of keeping my dancers engaged with the text.

However, my role as choreographer also necessitates that I leave room for my dancers' explorations. Again, I'm working to employ my dancers' normal habits: just as a typical piece of music has direct cues and spaces for experimentation, my chosen text has room for my dancers to personally make it comfortable and in which they will discover their own accents. Additionally, I discovered that the inclusion of sections of silence offers my dancers the opportunity for further exploration. I want my dancers to have equal opportunity to react to the text based on the information I give them and based on their own freedom—I find that this balance it the best means to keep them engaged with the text and believing that it is important. In some cases, I give a section of movement set to a specific passage, but I ask my dancers to explore it without my designation of sound cues. I play the recording and ask that my dancers take the time in the studio to find how different movements can accent different words. After their individual explorations, I reconvene my dancers and ask them to demonstrate their findings; I apply the various discoveries of accents to the entire group in the manner that I believe best serves my work's statement.

This process for dancer engagement allows me to momentarily become the audience. In this position, I am left to discern what individualized emphases from the dancers enable the unique listening experience I intend to produce with the combination of text and dance.

Equally important in keeping the dancers engaged, beyond movement exploration, is my insistence that the text matters in some way. I try to put my dancers in a place where the meaning of the text becomes as important to them as it is to me, since the text obviously carries something within it that I think begs to be said. When I feel I need to reengage my dancers with the meaning and the purpose of the work, I provide them with a personal example of why I care so much about it. I tell my dancers why the work is personal, special, or important to me, particularly if my dancers are struggling to embody the purpose of the movement by only dancing "superficially," meaning that they dance without thought but continue to go through the motions. I am careful not to drench these examples with emotion, because I am not looking for my dancers to try to empathize with the way the text matters to me, but just to respect it. The words that they're dancing to can be thought special or important—this reminder gives the dancers the incentive to reevaluate the words and reengage with them.

Two Works

After creating my choreographic process based on research and practices conducted in the spring and summer of 2014, the work was applied to the creation of two short dance works. The works fulfilled the requirements of DA 453 (Choreography 3), a course studied in the fall semester of 2014 at Butler University and they were presented as part of the DA 454 (Senior Production Project) course in the spring semester of 2015, along with my oral presentation of my thesis work. While my process was mostly developed prior to the beginning of its application for the two works, shifts in it were made as needed in response to previously unforeseen obstacles encountered in the creation of the works. Chronicled here are explanations of the two works and the processes of their creation. First, I must explain the premise for the Choreography 3 class and how the two works were brought to fruition.

Butler University's DA 453 class requires that students produce two works of choreography. One work must be a "large group" with upwards of five dancers, and the other a "small group" with four or fewer dancers. The choreographers are each allotted a time span of twelve minutes, to use as they wish; both dances do not have to last the same amount of time, nor does the entire twelve minutes have to be filled if the choreographers feel that their pieces are complete in a shorter time span. The dancers used for the choreograph studies are mostly freshmen in the Butler University Dance Department. An audition was held at the beginning of the fall 2014 semester and the dancers were divided up among the five choreographers participating in DA 453. The creative processes of each choreographer and their individual progress are assessed in routine "showings" throughout the semester. The five student choreographers, instructor Susan McGuire, and the dancers meet to show the new work they have accomplished in the time between showings. The

choreographers and Professor McGuire workshop the pieces by critiquing the presented works, offering suggestions for improvement, and commending particularly impressive work.

Knowing that the group of dancers from which I would select my groups would consist of freshmen dancers (who, though terrifically talented, would potentially be more inhibited in contemporary movement), I brought two upperclassmen into my application process, one for each work; both dancers are ones that I admired and viewed as innovative and impressive thinkers. I needed to ensure that examples would be set—examples of dancers readily exploring the text as music, seeking cues in the text (even at times when I, the choreographer, did not dictate any), and responding to my promptings to explore variations of certain movements. The two works were performed on March 5 and 6, 2015 during Senior Production (DA 454) under the titles *What My Mother Taught Me* and *Our Sexuality is not the Most Interesting Thing about Us*. A DVD copy of the two pieces is included with this document.

What My Mother Taught Me

My large group work, entitled *What My Mother Taught Me*, is built upon Albert Goldbarth's poem "Away." I first explored this textual work in my DA 492 (Intro to Acting) course at Butler University in the spring of 2014. I personally selected Goldbarth's poem for the fulfillment of the monologue recitation exercise dictated by the course requirements. And I will note that I made the selection because the poem is indeed personal—I believe it to be particularly meaningful because the text evokes emotions that I find both familiar and valuable. Goldbarth walks his readers through the impact of a single blink, from its indications of power on the evolutionary tract to the implications of losing that seemingly minimal amount of time (including the loss of entire cities or peoples), only to reign in the

scope of his statement and discuss the ease and speed with which an intimate relationship can fall apart. The poet asserts that the ever-enticing world of "Away" promises beauty and happiness when the present world is crumbling, and people will leave for Away because it is easier than fighting for something outside of themselves—something less safe or less beautiful. But Goldbarth finds the solution in a childhood understanding: at the end of the day, as children do, humans will lay themselves down to sleep and find their own Away in dreams, if only to find comfort until they claim their "return ticket" and awaken to the present world once more.

It was the exploration of the universality of a relationship's disintegration that first drew me to the poem. As I have shared Goldbarth's position as witness to a failing partnership, I find that the information he provides readers with is that which everyone ought to learn. So while I immediately defined the poem's primary driving force as emotion, I had to approach the poem from an educational emotion-based standpoint to shape the choreography. Even though I respond to the truth in Goldbarth's work primarily with anger and resentment, using emotion as the driving force does not insist that I force my own anger upon my viewers. Instead, I believe that my duty as a choreographer who seeks to inform my dancers and audience on an emotion-driven subject lies in presenting them with an illustrated scenario that can evoke the same emotions as the poem. For this reason, I chose to isolate a single dancer (a soloist) in the work: my solo dancer spends time exploring the world and relationships around her, immersing herself in the group when possible, but remaining ultimately separate and observant.

Prior to setting choreography, as per my process, I presented my dancers with the text. Since I had spent my spring semester of 2014 working with speaking the text as a monologue, I was confident in employing myself as speaker. Not only do I have the poem

memorized, but I have experience performing it and I have explored the exact passages that I wish to highlight vocally. The first day of rehearsals, I handed out printed copies of the poem to all my dancers and encouraged them to follow along as I spoke it aloud. I knew that much of my personal response to Goldbarth's words came from my own manner of speaking it and my significant amount of time spent with the text. Seeing as I generated movement with my own emphasis and inflection choices in mind, I wanted my speaking of the poem to act as the original version for my dancers. I recognized immediately in that first rehearsal that this was the correct choice: after listening to me speak the poem, my dancers were notably excited and enthusiastic to explore the poem further. I encouraged them to continuously revisit the text during the week between rehearsals. I soon recorded the poem.

To begin crafting the movement, I first looked at natural human body expressions of loneliness, isolation, and discomfort. Namely, how does one's posture express such feelings? Or, how do the hands wring or twitch in uncomfortable situations? I worked to find other outposts in the body to express these typical body language mechanisms. I went on to pair them with opposing movements—those indicative of comfort and satisfaction (in terms of human contact). My soloist is placed in a group of five couples, all expressing love and tenderness for one another. For the most part, my soloist's movement when she is separate from the group relies on the ideas derived from the embodiments of loneliness, while the movements of the couples rest in the variations made of the opposite. For example, the soloist begins the piece as the only dancer moving onstage, sitting with her knees up, her torso hunched over, and all extremities pointed inward: she is closed-off from her surroundings. When my soloist becomes (momentarily) part of the group, her movements are meant to reflect her newfound sense of belonging. She matches the movements of the couples.

Later in the piece, when the relationships fail, I created movement based on examinations of motions of unfamiliarity. Rather than show that the couples break apart in anger or sadness, they separate as strangers. Goldbarth writes "thousands of wives and husbands put on parkas and go inside of themselves—they say for a pack of cigarettes—and go up in smoke"(Goldbarth 453). This idea of "going inside" oneself speaks to the concept of detachment or lack of familiarity between people. The movement reflects the idea by asking that the dancers consistently bypass one another (bypass their original partners) without recognition. At times, partners place hands over their counterparts' faces or hold each other back-to-back, so that they miss the opportunity for emotional recognition of one another. Meanwhile, the soloist now serves as witness to a world she no longer trusts as worthy of joining. Her movements are born from interpretations of expressions of disbelief and curiosity, while past phrases (from her isolation phrases) are brought back in varied forms.

The now-missing connections between couples culminates in a full unison section where the dancers all replicate the starting posture of the soloist: everyone is uncomfortable, detached, and lonely. This section occurs near the end of the work, after which all but the soloist exit the stage (as individuals, not couples), leaving her to ponder what she has observed, again isolated—yet, she is isolated this time for the sake of the knowledge she possesses and an unwillingness now to join a world where things can so easily fall apart.

Of course, not every single moment of movement was generated by the examination and re-imagination of normal human body language habits (my process for movement generation, with the need to keep the movement dynamic and apply contrast, was used in full). Often times, a variation on human body language would find my dancers in a place where they needed a transition between that and the next section of body language

movement. In these cases, I examined the supportive driving forces (image and rhythm) while I investigated patterns to make on the floor in the way that I placed the dancers onstage. The desire to convey a connection between couples insisted that I give them moments of stillness—moments where they hold a tender stance or even just hold one another's gaze, for the sake of gentleness and love to show through. Other times, the soloist needed to be still. To generate the movement of the couples in the midst of the soloist's stillness, I worked with improvisation exercises (involving both me and my dancers).

Knowing that my dancers and I came to understand how a dancer's body responds to selected emotions and most of the primary force movement was made from variations of human body language, we sought different movement dynamics in our improvisations. Instead of returning to pedestrian body language, we looked at "dancer" body language with image and sound inspirations. Additionally, particularly in the cases where I rely on the sound of the words, I looked at the repetition of particularly angular movements, such as the shift or jutting out of an elbow, in the effort to accent the flavor of the words' sharp consonants.

In terms of the pattern investigation of my dancers on the floor, the pathways of the dancers onstage frequently serve to amplify the confusion and isolation of the soloist. I often separated the couples into two groupings (still attached to their partners) and placed them onstage in a way that a path through them was not easy to navigate. My soloist therefore struggled to break through them or into them (and when she joins the couples in unison, it occurs when the entire group has come together). In one instance, the soloist rolls across the floor on a shallow diagonal in the effort to explore the couples and relationships around her—she stays on the floor both to demonstrate her "lost" quality (in that she is difficult to

find at times in the space, as low as she is) and to simulate the tumultuous process occurring in her mind as she observes and comes to terms with the world around her.

It was with this group that I encountered the issue of "superficial" dancing that required that I return to a discussion of the text with my dancers (particularly my couples). I first furthered my explanation of my personal connection to the poem to the group, as I wanted the dancers to know that the text has the ability to matter—if they were struggling to attach themselves to the text, I wanted them to see an example of attachment. I went on to discuss the driving force of the poem (the emotion, namely anger, through the movement's "educational" direction) and asked that the dancers focus on its resonation in their bodies. I didn't ask them to be emotional, but analytical. Basically, in the face of anger, the dancers cannot be gentle with their own bodies. This requirement of power means that the dancers must not confuse the expressions of gentleness and tenderness toward their partners with an overall gentleness of movement. The choreography shouldn't feel soft, but strong—even violent. With this new focus on internalizing power and anger, the dancers began to process the movement in a different light, eventually leading to a successful end product. I simply had to reengage them to achieve the intended "feeling" of the dance work.

Our Sexuality is not the Most Interesting Thing about Us

Terrance Hayes's poem "At Pegasus" serves as the sound score for my small group work, *Our Sexuality is not the Most Interesting Thing about Us*. The poem captured my attention after I found it in *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry*. It tells two stories simultaneously: one of a male narrator at a gay bar, watching men dancing with and "grinding" on each other, and the other of his memories of his childhood, playing with a male friend in the creek. Hayes equates the two relationships through the common behavior—"[he has] held a boy on [his] back before"(Hayes 568). The poem follows the two

stories, with the male narrator observing the sexual behavior of the men around him and reminiscing about carrying his young friend Curtis on his back after Curtis gashed his foot open on a bottle shard in the creek. The poem concludes with the narrator's acknowledgement that the weight of his young friend on his back is a fond memory; the men at the bar "know something [he] used to know"(568). It is with this fondness that the narrator deems the men at the bar beautiful. Their love is holy.

I was particularly drawn to the idea of the equality in the two very different, but loving relationships. Again, I found something valuable in the poem that I felt the world would benefit from learning. Especially in the present day, when many people still fight against the rights of homosexual individuals and refuse to accept their sexuality as anything more than a "choice," I wanted the world to see how lovely their relationships are—how honest, how natural, how valid. More than that, I chose to create a dance that I believe reflects the beauty in all love by demonstrating love without definition. While the poem acts as the music, the images acted as the primary driving force in the generation of choreography. The small group is a trio of three women who are intentionally costumed in a way that their outward-appearing gender is not the first thing that the audience notices; they are meant to appear androgynous. That way, the loving relationships that the dancers emulate in their movement are completely interchangeable and essentially undefined. The audience is not meant to admire their love for the hetero or homosexual nature of it, but simply for its existence. While the dancers seem to share the same sexuality, the label of it remains unnecessary. Their sexuality is not supposed to be the most interesting (or noticeable) thing about them—their love is.

When I first spent time examining the poem, I found a recording of Hayes reciting it. Hayes speaks with an incredibly easy, casual quality that is often lost in poetry, when so

many speakers try to force meaning into the poem by adding unnecessary drama to their voices. I quickly determined that Hayes's recording of the poem ought to serve as the original version for my dancers. The poem itself is rather short, as it only spans about one and a half minutes when spoken. To handle the issue of length, I returned to the physical text on the page and examined areas in which I wanted the audience to linger on a line of text with an especially strong image. In these places, I broke the poem apart by adding in stretches of silence to my highlight-intended passages.

Even though I connected with the emotion fueling the poem, the images (the driving force) created by Hayes left me in the status of "student"—the poem is Hayes's lesson to the world, and it is merely my duty as choreographer to illustrate it. My dancers and I paid special attention to the easy quality of Hayes's voice as we examined the sound score. Even though Hayes speaks words that could be construed with a sense of violence or harshness (words like "grinding," "piss," "slap," "fire," "raw," and "gashed"), Hayes does not interrupt his gentle tone of voice to allow for that interpretation. We discussed the potential for changes in dynamic in the choreography, with the need to maintain a softness to the dancing and the relationship(s) at all times.

This recognition of gentleness served as the starting point for movement generation. Knowing that the poem's images act as its primary driving force, I worked to evaluate displays of tenderness, support, and attraction. The images were created first in "normal" human movements, and then exaggerated and expanded to match and challenge the dancers' physical abilities. Many of the images are simply ones of connection: how can three bodies represent equal love and support for one another? How can three bodies create a picture of complete attachment to one another? These images are therefore not born from a concrete object named in the poem, but from ideas of what love can look like. For example, the

dance begins (even before the text plays) with an interweaving motion meant to create equality among the three dancers. They interlace arms, switching around the center individual while testing their limits in speed and weight distribution. The movement that directly follows this image relies on the statement that the narrator "has held a boy on his back before"(568). The dancers break from their unison movement, but not without remaining related to one another: two dancers form a partnership, in which one woman jumps onto and flips around the back of the other. The third woman takes a variation of the movement to the floor, sliding to the ground as the "jumper" lands on the other's back, arching her body as the couple creates an arc-like shape, and ultimately mirroring the end position of the jumper.

It is in this manner, where the three dancers constantly relate to one another in movement and shape even when only two (or none) are physically connected, that the piece is built. The choreographic work is a study in continuous connection. One of the primary illustrations of love is in the dancers' ever-present support of each other—that, combined with their genderless physical presentation, is meant to signify absolute equality and care for one another. Another notable moment in the choreography is one that occurs in a section of silence. The poem is paused on an image in which "a young man sticks his thumb into the mouth of an old one, and I [narrator] am not that far away" (568). During the actual recitation of this image, the dancers are huddled together with the center woman held by one dancer and the third dancer gently turning the center dancer's face as the two lock eyes. In silence, the bodies unfold from their close-knit grouping. Two women break off, one catches the other as she falls in a showing of support, the third woman leans into them, one woman catches her, and the other supports the back of the catcher.

Other images created in the movement are meant to show equality through interchangeability in the relationships. As Hayes recites "but I remember his weight better than I remember my first kiss," the women take a stance in which they are linked by arms, shoulders, or heads. From this stance, the dancers simply replace one another in position, returning to a variation of the original stance. The act of replacement happens once more, to allow all three women the chance to inhabit all three positions of the image. Lastly, the piece ends with the three dancers facing directly forward without touching—yet, they spread their arms open to the sides with a sense of fullness. The dancers are both fully redeemed in their love for one another and welcoming to the audience.

Much of what had to be considered in the generation of choreography dealt explicitly with the maintenance of the image of complete equality, love, and connection. However, in the effort to relate to the poem in more ways that this one continuous image, I also had to consider the two overlapping narratives and the implications of each in respect to the supportive driving forces. Despite the fact that the stories have the same narrator and they are told in the effort to equate the two seemingly different occurrences, the age of the narrator still must be taken into account. It is assumed, given the action of playing in a creek, that the narrator and his friend Curtis are children in the account of their friendship. Furthermore, the narrator speaks in present tense during his explanation of the goings-on at the gay bar, so he is understood to be an adult in the present-day narration. To handle this age difference, I examined the body language variations between children and adults—namely the playfulness that children exhibit and the maturity and tenderness that adults express. In this case, the supportive emotion-based driving force came into play: I asked my dancers to physicalize the movement of a child and an adult, placing themselves into different characters and imagining the emotions running through each.

SECTION III: APPLICATION

To approach the differences between childhood and adulthood in the actual movement, I focused mainly on how the dancers travel across the floor. In the childhood sequences, the dancers run in a casual manner, as one would run in everyday life instead of onstage. In the stories of the narrator's adult life, the travel is slower and is built into the movement (such as the initial interweaving movement or in a grounded run where the dancers are deep into their legs and able to flow directly into the next movement). The traveling sequences also serve as the moments of the most dynamic changes and the dancers often rely on the sound, specifically the steady rhythm of Hayes's voice, to keep the traveling pace smooth. The need to establish differences in quickness and fluidity was particularly prevalent in the creation of this piece, as the gentleness of the relationships had to remain consistent throughout (meaning that angular or violent movement was not considered). With the implementation of the quick traveling movement, the images of connection were highlighted for the stillness in them. This stillness created challenges when it occurred in the silent passages. In fact, the biggest challenge in creating the piece was rooted in the periods of silence—particularly in judging their length and maintaining correct timing. To solve the issue, I rehearsed the dancers first by simply pausing the music (the text) and allowing them time to complete the given choreography in silence before restarting the music where the choreography picked it back up. This practice enabled me as the choreographer to get a sense of how long the pauses needed to be, so the addition of silent periods into the sound score was easier to manage.

I initially approached the idea of adding a sound (not text or music, but a "natural" sound, like a heartbeat or sounds of breathing) into the silence, to give the dancers a rhythm to work with. I discussed the option with my professor and fellow choreographers in DA 453, who advised me to reconsider. Recall that my process encourages feedback from

outside viewers—here is an ideal example of the benefits of receiving feedback from educated dance professionals and students. My professor and classmates explained that the addition of sounds to the silence could limit the quality of the relationships discovered in the silence: the lack of sound allows the viewer to linger on an image without introducing a new stimulus to capture their attention. In the end, the silence proved the best option for the work; not only did it keep the audience engaged with the text even after the passages were spoken, but it keeps the dancers connected to the text in that they constantly must work to express its images clearly, both with and without the text playing.

CONCLUSION

I assert that dance exists as more than a worthwhile, inventive, and ever-advancing art form; it also thrives as a language. The language of dance cannot say everything on its own, for body language is limited to the interpretive. Yet, speech carries limitations as well. Spoken language houses the potential for dishonesty and fails to encompass all that we notably call thought, seeing as the human mind can think in pictures and invent concepts that present themselves without labels. The two languages therefore have the opportunity to complete each other—an opportunity that I, as a dancer and choreographer, fully believe should be acted upon. Our bodies keep us honest and fill in the indescribable, while our speech defines the concreteness of an idea and keeps the work advanced. Dance breaks the barriers of spoken language and its value rises from this action.

It is my hope that my exploration, detailed here, serves to offer an example of dance's worthiness as a language. Everything in my exploration is built upon finding action in language—yet, as beings who learn speech atop our natural capacity for body language, the visceral connection to text for choreography's sake seems to me to be merely an extension of our typical human abilities. Dancers are meant to be adaptable beings, and the exploitation of the movement-text relationship just requires that they use their powers of adaptation on a new kind of "music." So, this creation of my personal process isn't just set on finding that it can be done (in that I can create works of choreography to spoken word scores for a specific purpose). Rather, it's set on showing that there is more substance to the movement-text combination than what we currently know or have explored, myself included.

So often today, dancers are asked why they dance. The frequent answer has been repeated to the point that it simply generates more questions about the art form: "I dance to speak." If we dance to communicate, express, and ultimately speak our minds, what are we

saying? And why must we, as dancers and choreographers, "say it" in this art form and not another? I believe that the insistence on and use of the relationship between text and dance provides unique answers for these questions. I choose dance as my communicative art form for the sake of its honesty. Paired with text, I find that it spans all reaches of the human mind (thought) while maintaining its truthfulness. Imagine where the combination could eventually go, if we take the time to look. What could we say and how much could we say if we continuously work toward "completing" spoken language with dance, and vice versa? I hope that someday, we'll be able to say whatever we want with this combination—no language barriers, no obstacles. Thus, I admire and use dance with text for the incredible potential it houses: the potential to communicate, translate, and create. A potential that I do not intend to ever stop exploring, for there is too much more to find.

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