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Movement and Music: Exploring the Relationship Between Movement and Dance

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Movement and Music:

Exploring the Relationship Between Music and Dance

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the goals of dance performance, the craft behind choreographic art, and their respective relationships to music. As it would be impossible to rewrite the discourse and philosophy of dance or reach any concrete conclusions in that regard, I merely aim to present some of the primary theories surrounding this topic and discuss the roles they took on in the dance I created as part of this project, titled *Ash Fighting Balance*. I worked with a composer, Harriet Steinke, over the course of the 2015-2016 school year to choreograph a dance in three parts. I conscientiously pursued a different creative process for each of the three sections; section one, *Ash*, was choreographed to the music, section two, *Fighting*, was choreographed with counts which the composer followed, and the third section, *Balance*, was choreographed in silence, the music overlaid later. I initially assumed that each process would yield entirely different results both in the studio and in the final product. Not only did I find this assumption to be wrong, but ran across a number of questions about the craft and motivations behind dance and choreography that required more thought and research than I ever anticipated. This thesis will therefore thoroughly document and analyze my creative process. The ultimate goal of my thesis is to become more cognizant of the intuitive decisions that occur during dance making. Success in the context of this subjective research will be determined by how much I learn about my process from both strong and poor artistic decisions. I seek to define the characteristics of my choreography that I find both pleasing, as well as uninteresting, and trace them back to their places of origin. By becoming aware of how I create dances and the factors that influence the execution of my vision, I hope to become a more mature choreographer.

Introduction - A Philosophical Foundation

There was a time in Romantic Era Europe when women clad in white tulle, their figures eerily shadowed by gas lighting, held the obsessive attention of the populace. Marie Taglioni, in her lead role in one of the first and most quintessential Romantic Ballets, *La Sylphide,* was regarded as "the ideal bourgeois woman" (Homans, 2010). In her personal life she appealed to the cultural expectations of decency and in her roles on stage she appealed to the melancholic passions inspired by the literary romantics such as Thomas Gautier, Sir Walter Scott, E.T.A Hoffman, and Victor Hugo. In that time and place, dance held artistic efficacy (Homans, 2010). Why did dance, a non-verbal movement based medium, appeal so successfully to the emotional and intellectual atmosphere of the Romantic Era? This is a complex question, a question which demands a greater understanding of dance as a whole. In order to build this philosophical foundation, I will discuss why dance performance provides a unique and valuable experience for audiences, why music plays such an integral role in that experience, and the choreographer's role in joining the two to make an engaging work of art.

To understand why dance offers an artistic perspective which cannot be attained by other forms, I turn to Merlin Donald, a well-known and respected cognitive evolutionary theorist. He argues that human thinking changed upon the development of "external visual storage" including "body decoration, grave decoration, and object arrangement" which are considered the predecessors of analytical thought in primal culture (Adams & Aizawa, 2001). That is, visual representation is considered the start of 'thought' as we know it. In his article, "The Intelligence of Visual Perception", Arnhiem explains the complicated processes of seeing something and processing that sensory intake, giving a clearer context to symbolic representation in primal culture and art clearly indicate higher mental functions:

The perceiving of a work of art is not accomplished suddenly. More typically the observer starts from somewhere, tries to orient himself as to the main skeleton of the work, looks for the accents, experiments with a tentative framework in order to see whether it fits the total content, and so on. When the exploration is successful, the work is seen to repose comfortably in a congenial structure, which illuminates the work's meaning to the observer. (Arnheim, 1969)

Perceiving visual art is one of the most complicated endeavors one can undertake with regard to cognition. However, dance encompasses numerous factors far exceeding the aesthetic elements of spatial arrangement and symbolism.

Because dance uses humans as a medium, the audience member looks for some way to understand what the performers are attempting to communicate and, in the absence of verbal language, inevitably turns to the original language of the body for clues. Many linguistic theories about the origin of language some 100,000 years ago, suggest that language may have begun as a sign language, a more developed extension of the 'body language' we can observe chimps using today, "then (gradually or suddenly) switched to the vocal modality, leaving modern gesture as a residue" (Jackendoff). We must also acknowledge that with the development of verbal language, body language did not disappear. Most of us are extremely familiar with the facial expressions and posturing we rely on to gauge the mood and even thoughts of a friend, acquaintance, or family member. Again, these are visual cues we process and may even consciously address. Ohad Naharin, the choreographer and artistic director of Batsehva Dance Company, utilizes gestural movement in many of his pieces. His 'chair' dances, long sequences in which the

dancers rarely leave the seated position, are particularly fascinating to his audiences both in isreal and around the world. The viewer may be drawn to this type of 'non-technical' movement because it looks like movement we are used to interpreting in daily conversation.

Of course many will argue, and I would be loath to disagree, that spoken language is the highest form of cognition. It allows us to communicate complex situations and abstract ideas in a clear articulate manner, making literature one of the most accessible and valued art forms in most societies. The visual arts garner criticism from new audience members because they 'fail' to articulate a scenario or story in the way that a news broadcast or a novella can. However, there is a clear and well-defended connection between communication, thought and visual, spatial, and movement-based mediums at the most basic level (Adams & Aizawa, 2001). Thus, in both the spatial arrangement of objects to recreate a familiar symbol and in gestural movement which indicates an emotion or intention, it is possible to have an intellectual experience which oversteps the necessity of spoken language to articulate an idea. Art that moves away from spoken language moves away from a set definition of the experience. This is an invaluable attribute of choreography and dance that other, more explicit forms of art such as film, literature, and pop music are incapable of achieving. Once the artist decides to use spoken language, they make a number of decisions for their audience about how to think and feel about the focal topic.

Appreciating a work of choreography is not a passive activity in which information is delivered in the familiar avenues. Instead, choreography forces you to analyze and reference the visual and audial modes of perception that we process every day without exercising any conscious thought. And if you stop to consider it, this is the majority of the information we process. Consider your day today. Consider the ratio between the linguistic experiences consisting of news articles, conversations, radio, advertisements, lectures and so on in

comparison to the non-linguistic experiences consisting of your commute to work or school, the time you stopped to squint at a strange cloud formation, the sound of a door closing, the spatial relationship between your desk and the nearest window, the way your spouse or partner held themselves at the breakfast table, the sound of birds and cars, the color of your shirt. All of those non-linguistic aspects greatly outnumber the linguistic ones, and though you may not have thought about them, or spoken about them, you processed that information and either stored it or forgot it entirely. Thus, choreography and dance challenge the traditional view of 'thinking' in the sense of Rodin's sculpture, hunched over on a block with his chin on his fist. You are perceiving and thinking about the world constantly in a way that seeks to categorize and understand it. A dance performance has the capacity to tap into and engage that part of your mind in a way that no other art form can. The choreographer should make use of every element available to them, including music, dancers' talent, costuming, lighting, and the spatial and dynamic aspects of craft. The choreographer's role is most similar to the surrealist artist, in that he or she invokes seemingly familiar symbols, gestures, and dress, to create an alien world into which the audience member can freely interpret and draw meaning.

I would like to take time here to distinguish and draw comparisons of this concept and understanding of dance with the Primitive, Laban, and Modernist theories in order to clarify the practical goals of my research.

The cornerstone of Primitive theory is that dance arose from primitive culture and its ritual functions, and is most effective when it seeks to recreate that honest, believed intent while acknowledging its "illusory status". Primitivists argue that "dance's non-verbal language of gesture, can express meanings and ideas with greater force, precision and economy than is possible for abstract "verbal" languages," because gesture is often more spontaneous, and

therefore more honest, than speech (Cohen, 1981; Langer, 1983). The obvious issue with this argument is that gesture in dance is always premeditated and rehearsed, and the moment gesture becomes 'imagined' for performance it loses the 'force' and 'precision' of the expression and body language we rely on in daily life. I also hold issue with much of the writing, particularly that of Sussanne Langer and Havelock Ellis, as it is tainted with ignorance and racial bias which reveals inconsistancies in their argument for dance as a high ritual art. As acknowledged by Kealiinohomoku, many dance writers fail to acknowledge that their ideas of 'primitive dance' come from modern day encounters with non-western forms of dance, ignoring the functional role of ballet, modern and other forms as entertainment and intellectual stimulation (Kealinohomoku, 1982). Ellis, is so blinded by the racism of his era as to write off the 'insect' and 'bird' like functional courtship dances as only appearing "among human savages in various parts of the world, notably in Africa," and proceeds to make the argument that 'civilized' humans use dance only for ritual (Ellis, 1983). A non-biased observer would note the functional role of waltzing, other court dances, and today's non-technical hip-hop club dancing in courtship. Therefore, though I agree that dance has 'primitive origins' in the sense that it is a part of human life in a variety of ways, I do not believe that imitative gesture or movement that shows the 'soul' is the foundation of dance. Primitivism fails to offer all of the potential components a choreographer could draw on to make an experiential work of art. Gesture and intentioned movement can certainly contribute to the emotional tone of a piece, given the accuracy and commitment of the performer, but it certainly cannot fully satisfy the other elements of dance that make it unique and valuable. Though the performer's experience is certainly something a choreographer needs to consider (a subject I will discuss in more depth in the section *Elements of Choreography)*, a

choreographer is responsible for all elements of a piece and should not presume to be able to communicate explicitly to an audience through a dancer.

I certainly agree with many of the principles of Art Nouveau that developed during Rudolf Laban's lifetime. Robert Vischer, a German aesthetician, presented the idea that "we are able to project our feelings into the objects we perceive," and Heinrich Wolfflin, a Swiss art critic, furthered that idea by adding that this empathy develops with regard to architectural art because we have bodies which understand the forces of gravity and what it feels like to inhabit those areas of space. By Wolfflin's logic, we find the Washington Monument to be beautiful because we understand the effort required to occupy a vertical position. We know that holding ourselves upright takes more energy and may make us feel more confident or authoritative. Thus we project emotional associations on to the Washington Monument based on memories we have associated with our own body. Laban, one of the most renowned dance theorists of the twentieth century, extended this thinking in order to classify all of the space around the human body, assigning it emotional 'connotations' which he referred to as the kinesphere. In his classification of human movement, Laban created a more analytical connection between movement and music than ever before, using basic principles of musical composition to establish his theories. Just as in music, he created scales, defined harmonic movements and dynamics, analyzed the role of time and space, and even created choreographic groupings similar to those used by composers considering compatible notes and keys. In addition, Laban's definition of certain movement qualities established more possibilities for movement than the 'stable' technique and lines of ballet. The theories of Art Nuevo that Laban incorporated into his work reappeared in Modernist theories by offering a foundation by which abstraction became valuable and imitation less

necessary. However, movement and music are so closely related under his movement theory he stands apart from the theoretical discussion between the Primitivists and Modernists.

Modernists believe dance should exist 'within' the bounds of its form, consisting of the physicality of the human body and "should confine itself to examining and revealing the qualities of human movement in greater isolation for its own sake," (Cohen, 1981). Merce Cunningham is most commonly held up as the modernist ideal because he so firmly believed in dance as an independent form. Though Cunningham did present dance and music together, he insisted on "freeing choreography from a dependence on music," and encouraged his dancers to perform as they had in rehearsals, with no regard for the music (Copeland, 1983). It is understandable for a choreographer to hail dance as a truly independent art. However, it seems then counterintuitive to play music at all for the simple reason that it will be perceived by the audience along with the dance, regardless of their 'independence'. I found the lack of control over the music, particularly in my last section, unsettling as an artist because it felt as though I was failing to attend to the full range of decisions I could make, leaving so much to chance. If there is music, it should be acknowledged in order to achieve its full effect. My reasoning for this is based on both personal preference and partial agreement with the Primitivist stance and respect for Laban's harmonic Movement Theory. As much as I hesitate to be fully convinced by the absolute necessity to create with clear intent in every movement, it is a fact that dance has 'primal' origins. Those origins acknowledged and celebrated the rhythm of music.

A choreographer must find a way to integrate dance and music in a way that honors their artistic vision. In the same way that a classical dancer improves by applying corrections offered by their instructor even when the dancer may not understand why or how the instructor's methods will help them improve, A choreographer must find a way to respect the musical

element of dance in some way. A classical dancer will pursue difficult and uncomfortable feats with an unwavering faith in the trial and error of his predecessors. A choreographer should hold the same respect for the score of cultural dances which arose with functional purpose and adhere to complex musical rhythms with rigor and excellence. To throw away thousands of years of a heritage and growth alongside music without any artistic justification would be completely foolish. Slavic Character dance, developed in regions across what is now Russia and Eastern Europe, serves a function in community events and celebration. The mazurka is so closely tied to the rhythm of the music; we use the same word for both. African dances in every region serve a number of functions and their distinct connection with the percussion instruments of the area is remarkable. When an African dancer moves, it is possible to discern individual body parts representing each drum playing for them, the arms might represent the *dun dun ba,* the hips moving to the *dejembe*. The tango finds its place between the old world court dances and the African rhythms brought along with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and became a totally new dance style, now an integral part of Argentine culture. And Geaorge Balanchine, the great choreographer who brought ballet to America, created works that beautifully enacted each note in the tradition of his imperial Russian inheritance. The connection between dance and musical rhythms are not only ancient but also widespread, suggesting a certain 'humanness' to the act of physically representing music. I do not intend to take a naturalist approach here, as human nature is far too complex to ever determine the true meaning of 'natural', but to acknowledge the sheer satisfaction and visceral enjoyment most of us have experienced at one time or another when either performing or watching a performance which is truly in sync with the music.

This leads me to the second philosophical question I wish to establish and the central question of my research; "What is the role of music in dance and why"? Music presents the

audience with another emotional aspect to weave into the framework of their understanding, in addition to providing a structure for the movement that, if honored, creates an opportunity for pleasure. To quote Doris Humphery, "Dance is not an independent art, but needs a sympathetic mate, not a master, in music," (Humphery, 1987). Even Balanchine, who is often considered to have put dance to music, surely adhered to this principle more than he may have liked to admit. None of his dances lack story or intent but he was certainly a master of achieving a synthesis of the two forms. Blom and Chaplin outline the five ways which the choreographer can pursue the process of weaving dance and music together:

> 1. Dance and music composed simultaneously with the choreographer and composer working together; 2. Dance created first with music composed specifically for it; 3. Composed music with dance choreographed to it; 4. Dance and music created independently and performed simultaneously in a framework of coincidental coexistence, such as the works of Cage and Cunningham; 5. A working sketch of the dance is created independently and then suitable composed music is found. (Blom & Chaplin, 1982)

My thesis amalgamated options 1, 3, and 4 in order to evaluate their outcome and value during my process. The mixing of processes made total synthesis very difficult to achieve. However, by purposely complicating this process, it became even more apparent that integration of dance and music during the creation period is essential for the end result.

Music gives the audience emotional if not narrative context and adds another equally complicated layer to their experience. When dance and music are cohesive and entwined, the piece is more accessible because the audience has a number of related elements they can

reference when trying to determine meaning. It is more likely they will find an accent or centerpiece in the work that they can hold on to, serving as another non-verbal element to process. We have to ask ourselves why we can accept music as an individual art, but not dance. I believe this has to do with the cultural expectations that the viewer brings with them into the theater. In the minds of most, dance has always been connected to music and it would be almost cruel to the viewer to separate the two without any explanation. I realize this is a populist and practical argument to present in a theoretical discussion, but it harkens back to my original proposition that dance performance can make the audience cognizant of the unconscious factors they take for granted. This is in many ways consistent with the Modernist perspective, but with the addendum that music should be presented with and related to music. I discovered the full value of music in a dance performance during my research, which I discuss in more depth in the *Analysis* section. My final conclusion in this regard is that though there are advantages to choreographing in the absence of music, it has the capacity to bring 'primal' and artistic value to a piece. By pursuing a well-balanced relationship between the dance and music a choreographer can create a work of art with many aspects and dimensions. The ideas I am currently communicating could never be expressed in dance, music, or a combination there of. Just because dance is not explicit, (even the pedantic pantomime sections in many classical ballets leave room for interpretation and misinterpretation), does not devalue it as an art form but allows it to attend to a state of mind we might not be able to reach otherwise. I am interested in finding the creative process that leads me most easily toward that goal.

Historical and Contemporary Context

In his essay, "The Idea of Dance: From Aristotle to Mallarme", Andre Levinson acknowledges that "ever since the students of the Renaissance created the ballet, inspired by the *Orchesis* of the Greeks, there have been two elements vying for supremacy in the dance; movement and story, abstract form and pure expression, execution and pantomime." (Levinson, 1983). As much as I attempted to create a foundation by which to negotiate this dichotomy in the previous section, it would be wise to examine the progression of choreography as an art form through the decades, how music was regarded in each era and consider some techniques contemporary choreographers use to negotiate the space between movement and music. Because my background is primarily in classical ballet and classical modern techniques, I will refer to the histories in these styles only.

Choreography is a relatively new craft. Many other art forms have considered the viewer for longer, demanding a greater attention to craft and reception. For much of dance history, choreography was not thought to have principles in the same way that drama or architecture did. This is for the most part a symptom of the initial functional role of dance. Though the performance of dance became codified and artistic, choreography as an art form fell behind the individual's performance for some time. The performer had a much clearer path than the choreographer as dance progressed to the stage; Where the dancer had to train in a predetermined technique and recreate learned steps, the choreographer was left to cater to the dancers needs and the audiences interests. In order to achieve the kind of intellectual experience I outlined in the last section, choreographers needed define their own craft and aspire to make dances with intent.

Dance was not assessed as an art form until it drew crowds during the reign of Louis the XIV. Then, choreographers were merely referred to as 'arrangers' and little thought was given to

the craft behind their work. However, because dance during this time still held a clearly functional role as a means of maintaining political power as well as religious purpose, the 'arrangers' had little artistic merit (Homans, 2010). Regardless of who they were, their goals for a *Ballet comique de la Reine* performance were the same. They were about grandeur, geometry, and spectacle, leaving little room for deviation or experimentation. With the foundation of what would eventually become the Paris Opera Ballet in 1669 under directorship of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Pierre Beauchamp's as ballet master, ballet exchanged hands, slowly becoming the professional's responsibility instead of the noble's. During this transition, Lully began to develop the French Opera, *tragédie en musique*, in which ballet became a light and pretty break to the seriousness of the song and music. Again, the choreographer's role was pre-determined, to make a pretty and unintellectual variation.

During the Enlightenment Era, and the rise of the Romantic ballerina, choreographers such as John Weaver and John Rich began to lean heavily on pantomime and gesture to convey complicated literary story lines, pregnant with moral teaching (in Weaver's case) or low comic relief (in Rich's Case). Their respective productions, *The Love of Mars and Venus* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* stood as testament to the inadequacy of gesture to convey a meaningful story, though Weaver's serious moral goals elevated his work above Rich's. Finally, Jean-Georges Noverre, the most revered choreographer of the era entered the scene, and suggested that "ballets should not be like plays at all: they should be like paintings," (Homans, 2010). His works, known as *ballet d' action*, mixed music, gesture, tableaux, and dance and excluded theater, opera and other verbal arts in order to bring the audience "into a psychologically dramatic and penetrating world," (Homans, 2010).

Ballet's French origins at the Paris Opera, maintained its relationship to the court but was made the lesser companion to music and song. Through the influence of the seventeen hundred modernists, realized in Noverre's *ballet d' action,* a foundation was laid, upon which ballet progressed through the decades. All of that history can be said to have culminated in Marius Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* which relied on the acrobatic virtuosity developed by the Italians, the drama and aesthetic beauty of the French, and even Bourneville's puritanical discipline. Furthermore, "Tchaikovsky was the first composer of real stature to see ballet as a substantial art and his music lifted dance into a new plane" by demanding far more expressive dancers than any score had before. This successful collaboration emphasized the invaluable aspect music can bring to dance, even in a style which often relies on literary like story lines (Homans, 2010). *The Sleeping Beauty* was also an illustration of Petipa's formulaic choreographic style; in variations steps are repeated three times (right then left, and then right again), lines are essential, and there is an even number of dancers in the *corps de ballet*. For dance and technique, the 1890 premier may have been a highlight, but for choreography and its potential for intellectual engagement something was seriously lacking.

Perhaps the greatest gift classical ballet presents to the current choreographer is a tradition against which to rebel, and a technique with which to execute that rebellion with expressive and virtuosic success. This was realized during Diaghilev's time, quintessentially during the Paris premier of Nijinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* or *Rite of Spring*, when audiences walked out, shocked that dance could portray human depravity. In the midst of the World Wars, "millions of people died, and the conflict touched lives in battle and at home across the globe... Empires fell, families mourned, boundaries moved or evaporated, and the landscapes of the eastern and western fronts changed beyond recognition. New technology in the form of the

machine-gun and the tank wreaked destruction,"(Brandon, 2016). Society changed. Art, including dance making, changed in order to address the issues that now occupied the minds of modern audiences. Choreographers were suddenly making pieces about politics, death, and psychology. Simultaneously, the modern dance movement took root in the U.S. and spread throughout the European dance world, offering a new, more grounded basis of movement further embracing the intent based content. It was perhaps due to the upheaval caused by the World Wars that choreographic theory finally developed into a serious subject matter in the 1900s as "Isadora Duncan removed story from dance altogether and insisted that dance could be an emanation of the soul and the emotions. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn proclaimed… ritual as valid subject matter, and psychological discoveries introduced profoundly new ways of dealing with character and drama," (Humphery, 1987). This new level of artistic depth grew and stretched over the next hundred years in ways it never had before.

 Today, dance is clearly acknowledged as an art form in its own right. The most prominent ballet companies seek out choreographers with a specific vision, voice and understanding of movement and its emotional potential when organized meaningfully. These choreographers do not approach the relationship between dance and music as some sort of battle for prominence. Instead music and dance should be considered equally to create this alternate experience for the viewer. Choreographers of a high caliber, those who see dance as more than just meaningless movement, wish to bring an artistic vision to life that hinges primarily on the dance, but can become more successful by incorporating music, lighting and costumes.

 Jiri Kylian occasionally works with a composer in the studio, so that as he creates movement phrases the composer can adjust accents and rhythms to match the dancers (Telford, 2015). This is a reversal of my original perception of the choreographer, listening to the same

piece again and again until they can see the movement that would match it. Though dance does take precedence here, it maintains the essential relationship between movement and music. This process acknowledges the satisfaction and pleasure the viewer and dancer get from movement and music that are intertwined. Kylian's *Petite Mort* however, is to two of Mozart's slower movements. Kylian writes about his artistic decisions with regard to music:

> In my work, I have based my choreography on two slow movements from the two most famous piano concertos by Mozart. I have cut them away from the fast movements, leaving them as mutilated torsos, lying helplessly in front of the listener and beholder. They lie there, just like some ancient torsos, without arms and legs, unable to walk or embrace. (Creations, 2007)

So even in choosing music to 'dance to', Kylian made a significant decision which represents the heart of his work. Furthermore, he created the piece because those sections of music spoke to the world he wanted to create, knowingly disregarding Mozart's artistic goals. And yet, without the beauty, mood and the movement the music brings to *Petite Mort*, it would hardly have the same poignancy. Ultimately, concerning oneself with the 'proper' relationship between music and dance is superfluous and far removed from the ultimate goal. Choreography has finally matured from its purely functional role in the French courts, to pursue the artistic vision present in other high art forms and make use of set principles of the craft.

Elements of Choreography

Part of the difficulty of writing about choreography is that there are no hard and fast rules. We can list the elements that compose a piece: steps, dynamics, timing, intention, spatial relationships, movement, story, dancer's performances; and we can list the factors that often

accompany a piece: music, costumes, lighting, program notes. If asked to arrange these by order of importance, it is unlikely that any two choreographers in the world would come up with the same list. However, I am sure that each of them would be very committed to the order they chose.

Most of my research has been conducted by watching live performance and surfing YouTube, asking myself what I feel when watching a piece and why. Partially because these observations were specific to me, they were varied and difficult to articulate. I found a wide gap between the ability to draw from material I had watched and to draw from material I had actually performed. Thus, I am certain that the first step of becoming a choreographer is a creative, valid rendition of plagiarism. I turned to this because so many of the books on choreography, such as Blom and Chaplin's *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, and Doris Humphrey's *The Art of Making Dances*, merely outlines all the things you *could* do in analytical detail. But, as an amateur walking into an empty studio, I want to know what works. I want to know what is interesting. You simply cannot learn choreography from a book in the same way you cannot learn to dance or play piano by reading about it. You have to experience the emotion that is evoked by the execution of the craft; you have to practice. You have to try to steal bits and pieces you have seen and regurgitate them in a new order. You have to step back and see how your version compares. This is a disorganized, often subconscious process but in the following section I focused on the ballet *Le Sacre Du Printemps* in order to narrow the field of possible dances I could reference when discussing elements and drawing comparisons. I chose *Sacre*, because I was inspired by it during my creative process and because so many notable choreographers have their own version. I do not pretend to have achieved or diligently pursued all of the elements I

define as effective in *Ash Fighting Balance.* However, I will refer to this section in my final analysis of my work.

Theme

Many choreographers and dance writers concur, that dance as an art form is caught between two opposing and essential elements; that of intellectual, literary like motivation for the dance and that of the physical, primal joy of movement. All successful choreographers must negotiate this dichotomy based on their own experience and preference. When asked what a piece of choreography is about, choreographers may talk about a kind of relationship, an existential feeling, or describe a specific circumstance. Because I argue that dance does not lend itself to a complicated story, meaning can tell a story but not at full potential, I am not regularly interested in "story" ballets. Dance is much better at addressing those unspoken states of being by making their inner world concrete. When I talk about an inner world, I refer to the artistic vison behind a piece, how the choreographer wants the audience to feel while watching, the color scheme, the mood, the subject matter; basically all of the input and references that stand behind the surface level of movement, music, and other visual elements. I find the most successful pieces have the clearest vision behind them, whatever that vision may be. This clear vision is essential in a non-verbal form. Even though the viewer is imbued with a greater responsibility to derive meaning, there is a fine line between challenging your audience and losing them in convoluted and arbitrary decisions.

Ohad Naharin for example almost pointedly avoids 'meaning' in his work and in an interview proclaimed a disregard for program notes. In that same interview he states:

My work—for me, I like to create for myself, for my dancers, for my viewers. I'm trying to create something that is another world, maybe. Many times when you see artwork, you have your point of reference. We see something and it reminds us of something else. I'm very interested in the ability to not to let this point of reference disturb us from having a fresh moment—even if I can recognize the existence of this reference, even if I use it on purpose. (Naharin, 2012)

Even though this statement may seem to avoid a concrete definition of 'what my work is about', Naharin's worlds are very evidently his own. They work, in part, because they exist as an expression of this other world, something he obviously regards as a tangible pool from which to draw. He even acknowledges the 'craft' behind making choices that an audience member can reference, turning that cultural content into something new entirely. Essentially, there is a difference between action-based conceptions of a work and thematic, psychological, and emotional themes. Though the latter are more difficult to describe, work that clearly and effectively attend to that theme, work best.

Le Sacre du Printemps , for example contains clear themes of sex, death, collective action, and religion. This ballet, originally choreographed by Nijinsky as a story about the primal sacrifice of a virgin, has been remade by many well-known choreographers in the last decade. Choreographers tend to follow this general story line, but inevitably stray from it as they craft a new version to the same score. Each has their own merit and focuses on a different psychological, emotional, or action based motivation. It is such an appealing ballet to remake because the 'story' is extremely simple, the group chooses a member to kill, thereby providing a vision for dancers and choreographers to portray with conviction without losing the audience in pantomime or complicated plot points.

Music

  The nature of the relationship between music and dance can manifest in many ways including "music is the background and dance is the main focus[or]…dance is the background and dance is the main focus[or]…sometimes the music and sometimes the dance [is] dominant[or]…it is a conscientiously designed, unexpected relationship between the two usually resulting in satire, tension, or absurdity," (Blom & Chaplin, 1982). When watching a dance performance, the last two relationships accomplish the most because they intertwine the art forms. This is more difficult to accomplish successfully. If achieved, it is possible to see that "movement is the source of dance, and music is a related art that is used to help achieve choreographic intent. When the finished piece reaches performance there should be a synthesis of the two forms and music becomes…'the floor that the dancer dances upon,'"((Blom & Chaplin, 1982).

  Nijinsky's original rendition of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, as performed by the Joffery Ballet in 1987, is most appealing to me in its intense representation of Stravinsky's score. In the opening scene, the dancers are divided into four groups. Each group performs their various stomping and gestural movements in perfect unison to different parts of the score, either the melody, harmony or base rhythm. This is positively mesmerizing and viscerally satisfying. Furthermore, I do not believe this attention to music undermines the movement's capacity to convey emotion or meaning in and of itself. Even with a ballet like *Le Sacre Du Printemps* with similar thematic content and just one score, choreographers have used the myriads of other artistic choices at their disposal to create different experiences for their audience. I believe the best of them utilize the complicated rhythms available to them.

Style/Steps

Stylistic choices should clearly be consistent with the thematic goals of the work. In Martha Clarke's *Garden of Earthly Delight's*, the dancers thrash and gyrate. In *Giselle,* they float. This seems like an obvious decision, but the execution of this concept presents infinitely more challenges and possibilities than one might expect and can seriously influence the overall reading of a piece.

Edward Clung's version of *Le sacre du Printemps* makes use of rigidity, classical lines, movement ideas that directly reference Nijinsky's original choreography, and creature like movement. Clung makes use of water on stage, which allows the dancers to slide long distances while holding a stagnant position. All of this contributes to the terror and vulgarity of the subject matter because it is done with such intent and control. Pina Bausch's version makes use of a looser, almost lolling style. The dancers wear smeared frocks and by the end of the lead dancers "death dance" both nipples have escaped from her costume from all of the flailing. The overall result is one of pure insanity. The dancers appear human, but seem to have lost full mental facility. Both of these renditions follow the traditional story line, but choices with regard to the type of movement make all the difference. Those choices are only effective when they contribute to the choreographer's vision and inner world; Clung saw a death ritual, Bausch saw a tragedy amongst the demented.

Laban movement theory stands to date as the most rigorous examination of movement and dynamic. His theory does not condescend to dictate how certain dynamics should make the audience member feel, but provides the full range of possibilities. As Crystal Pite noted in an interview, conflict and difference in dynamics makes dance the most interesting:

The conflict that comes up when you have contrasting ideas set against each other inside the subject of a work. So for example…um..certainty and doubt, or conflicting physical tasks within the body that create states of torque or exertion. I find it really compelling to see a performer just dancing right at the very edge of their ability. It is really compelling to see that and I think that there is conflict inherent in the effort of trying to achieve something that is really difficult…It's not about balance. Balance feels still. (Pite, 2013)

To put it in Laban's terms, Pite recognizes the beauty of dance that punches and then floats or a body attempting to move toward the upper left diagonal and the lower right diagonal at the same time. This gets back to my original argument about how dance taps into all of the spatial, gestural, non-verbal cues we process. In that subconscious process we look for change; a quick movement in our peripheral vision, a car coming, a loud noise that makes us turn our head. It is therefore in change, in variation, and in conflict that a choreographer seeks to catch and hold the audience members' attention.

Performer

The dancers play an enormous role in bringing a work to life. Furthermore, this is an element that, to a large degree, is out of the choreographer's control. However, a choreographer can help the dancer to give a committed and honest performance by helping them understand what they are supposed to portray. Choreographers should explain whether the work is passionate, joyful, serious or tense and help them find dynamics and musicality and focal points that can help them get there. Dancers who are aware of the inner world the choreographer is trying to bring to life are better able to make decisions that contribute to it. Good dancers can convince the audience of the experience the choreographer aims to give them. Dancers are the

medium with which choreographers work and there are many benefits to this. When dancers enter the studio, they bring with them all of their past experience and training. The uniqueness of each dancer in both personality and movement aesthetic can serve as an inspiration to many choreographers. Great choreographers have the privilege to work with the best dancers and are loath to set their work on anyone below a certain standard. This is because good dancers can give the simplest movements power. However, they are not a crutch. In the same way it would be possible to paint something boring with Michelangelo's handmade paints, a choreographer could create a disaster with the members of Netherlands Dance Theater.

Duets/Group relationships

The most unavoidable connotation created in duets is that of sexuality between dancers. Marice Bejart's *Sacre du Printemps* capitalizes on this principle. His version is split into an all-male section, which produces a 'sacrifice' and an all-female section that also produces a 'sacrifice'. The dance concludes with the men on one side and women on the other observing the 'sacrificial duet', inevitably making the version about sex rather than death. This undertone is something that choreographers must consider. Bejart's version also is very cognizant of the group and each section makes use of symmetry and unison as it is traditionally seen in classical ballets. This artistic decision created the "balance and stillness" that Crystal Pite talked about avoiding in her interview (Pite, 2013). It lacked the conflict, or change, that can keep the audience constantly engaged based on that evolutionary instinct to look for something different . I am interested by group work that acts as an extension of one body to create organic images that would be impossible for a single dancer.

For example, in both Crystal Pite's *The Second Person* and Akram Khan's *Dust*, the corps members grab hold of the soloist's arms and undulate to look like wings. In Nacho Duato's *Gnawa,* the group coordinates in the opening scene so that the movement of a single dancer effects the rest in the same way moving my arm in a circle causes the rest of my body to react. When Lesley Telford worked with Butler Ballet, she created group sections in which the dancers would coordinate with the soloist's movement to achieve a similar effect. Group work does not always have to manifest this way, but I believe it works best when there is a coordinated awareness between dancers on one side of the stage to the other. I am interested in the transfer of movement. That transfer can elicit very interesting results any time you work with more than one dancer, and it presents a solution to disorganized movement. This is something that Doris Humphrey warns against. She states, "Simplicity in linear design is a must. Suppose we start modestly with three or four in a group… with all eight arms, eight legs, forty fingers and forty toes are going to make our group look like a centipede on the hunt if everybody moves energetically at once," (Humphery, 1987). Movement that does not achieve a clear relationship with the rest of the movement onstage via consistency in timing, dynamics, or variations on a theme is difficult to absorb. If that chaos is unintentional, the choreographer runs the risk of creating something that fails to leave an impression. The best choreographers constantly challenge the way dancers relate in space to each other and how they make use of the space on the proscenium stage in a coherent way.

Lighting &Costuming

Costumes and lighting contribute the final components to a dance performance and give it additional dimensions. Though secondary, these aspects are integral to a dance performance and give the movement even more context. My thesis received a grant for collaboration that

allowed me to engage costume designer Laura Scobell from the theater department to conceive

of and make costumes. *Ash Fighting Balance* would not have had the effect it did without the

costumes and make up that I had access to. I felt that the full body and face paint seriously

contributed to my vision and made character differences more pronounced. As seen in figure 1,

"The Ladies of Darkness", two taller dancers representing evil, had their hands painted red and

their faces painted white to make them appear otherworldly. As seen in figure 2, the corps

members had red face paint so that it appeared as if 'The Ladies of Darkness' had painted them.

This was wholly the costume designer's idea, but it brought an element to the piece that

otherwise would have been completely lacking.

Figure 1 – Lady of Darkness

Figure 2- full cast in makeup

Analysis of Personal Process

Without realizing it, I began this project with a distinct literary like intent. From the

beginning, I wanted to tell the archetypal story of change. The story became about a society

polluted by evil. My lead dancer breaks away from the collective and tries to change the world, eventually taming the evil. The two dancers in horns and body paint, or 'Ladies of Darkness', represented the evil. This was the seed of the entire project and I believe it undermined the artistic merit of the work as a whole. At times, I was distracted from many of the goals I outlined in the previous sections of my thesis, *Philosophical Foundation* and *Elements of Choreography*. Because the piece hung on a story line, the thematic content was too broad, encompassing natural processes, mob-mentality, spirituality, change, balance and revival. This made it difficult to coach the dancer's performances on anything other than character motivations. Furthermore, because I focused so much on action, or plot like events, I often neglected the 'simplicity in linear design' Doris Humphrey suggests, and group relationships were undefined and confusing both spatially and choreographically. I also did not spend enough time thinking and deciding what type of movement and dynamics would tap into the non-verbal thinking I discussed. The movement was either wholly gestural or movement for the sake of moving. The gestural movement was effective in in the sense that it authentically contributed to the inner world, but the more athletic sections did not. I chose a lot of powerful, precise movement in a piece that was full of mysticism and spirits. That decision didn't make sense for the feeling I wanted and only served to move the plot line forward. In the future I will aim to make the choreography wholly consistent with the vision behind the piece. After researching and thinking about choreography intensively, I am certain that narrative in dance often distracts the choreographer from the potential for movement to tell a 'story' of its own, one that does not lean heavily on program notes and still gives the viewer something to hold on to.

In an effort to tell the same kind of story a play or novel tells, choreographers force the audience to compare their non-verbal work the clarity of those in verbal forms. Of course, any

rational audience member wouldn't be satisfied. Choreographers may try to overstep this by reverting to the gesture or pantomime Weaver and Rich mistakenly pursued during the Enlightenment Era or fight scenes that are almost always devoid of dialoge. In doing so, it is easy to create stagnant scenes that ignore all of the principles of choreography and still lack the clarity the same scene would have in book. The choreographer may also create scenes with lots of running and grabbing which may have the advantage of plot conflict, but forget the kind of conflict Crystal Pite discussed in her interview. Conflict in dance must manifest in the physical not the literary sense. Twyla Tharp discusses how the 'seed' of a piece must be pure and foundationally strong in conception so that you are less likely to be misled during construction (Tharp, 2005). In the future, I hope to have a much better understanding of how to choose ideas that lend themselves best to development and find the line between a literary story and a physical story told with dynamic movement. I am now convinced successful choreography has a little bit of the former and much more of the latter.

Though I was not impressed with the final product, my thesis was a success with regard to how much I learned about collaboration, my process, and craft. Furthermore, the literary intent that created artistic inconsistencies, came with the benefit of clear discussions with the composer about the music and with the costume designer about costumes. It made it easier to create that experiential world that dance performance is capable of because I had so much to draw from. I knew from the beginning that I wanted the piece to have dark, spiritual, and primal themes. I looked at cave paintings, aboriginal art, depictions of Japanese spirits, Latino surrealist paintings, tribal face paint and headdresses, and Wiccan ritual art. I knew I wanted my dance to take place in another world, one I could see clearly, and that made collaboration with the other artists I worked with much easier. I based much of my gestural movements on of that research, which I

believed yielded some very interesting and original content. However, because so much of that material was inspired by two-dimensional artwork, I often neglected to consider the movement dynamic and intention. My dancers brought additional meaning to the performances. The presence of an audience pushed them toward that imaginative mask but, as noted before, the removed sprawling nature of the subject matter made it difficult for me to create image that they could relate and commit to.

Balance/ Choreographing in Silence

I choreographed *Balance*, the last section, first. In the absence of any kind of musical direction, I was initially completely lost. This is when I first turned to visual art with practical purpose. I created movement by stringing together a series of poses from the artwork that inspired me in the first place. I also checked out a book called *Spiral Dance*, which documented a wide range of Wiccan rituals and detailed some of that mythology. I often grouped dancers in twos or threes and asked them to avoid symmetrical lines. I was aware that I wanted the whole work to look organic. I spent most of my time in the studio experimenting with the transfer of energy from 'The Ladies of Darkness' to the rest of the group. It is fascinating to see the movement of one body trigger or initiate that of another.

I workshopped *Balance* twice. The first time I showed it, I showed it in silence and at that point still had not heard the music. Even in silence the movement was interesting and had a momentum of its own. However, the rhythm of the piece was somewhat monotonous because the dancers slowed down in order to feel each other better. Music often gives the dancers a greater understanding of the piece and encourages speed and change in dynamic. If I ever chose to present my work with music as a background, I will choreograph to music in the studio. I realize

now that it is an invaluable tool to encourage both intent and timing that would otherwise be very difficult to achieve.

For the second showing of *Balance,* we performed with a computer realization of the composer's work. Afterward, my colleagues and noted that they interpreted the piece almost entirely differently from the first time. They said the first time felt darker and more ominous. This can be explained by the simple fact that Harriet and I had discussed the last section as a hopeful resolution, or discovery of balance in the world, a discussion she portrayed beautifully in her music. This indicates that the music will almost always hold precedence in a piece when the audience decides how to feel about the movement they see. The choreographer would do well to seek consistency among the dancers intent, movement and the mood of the music. I believe the discrepancy between how my colleges perceived *Balance* in each showing developed because I spent most of my time in rehearsal giving the dancers images surrounding witches and mind control and the even rhythm they found to stay together may have seemed dirge-like. The music was able to overstep all of those choreographic decisions and create the mood I had originally decided upon, but forgot during the creative process in the studio. This does not mean music limits the communicative intent of dance. In fact, as a choreographer, it is somewhat freeing. It means to get an emotional tone across I am not limited to just one dynamic, level, or intent because the music can do that for me if I need it to. Clarity in a piece can come from either dynamic consistency or contrast with the music, depending on the ultimate goal.

Ash/Choreographing to Music

I was not able to fully achieve my research goals in this section because I worked primarily with a computer realization during the process and later realized that it sounded quite dissimilar to the live music used in the final performance. Furthermore, I found myself most

stunted in this section by my narrative intent. Instead of turning to movement fully in order to create images consistent with my vision of dark spiritually and nature, I reverted to a number of movement decisions that 'moved the plot forward'. Those decisions were uninteresting and did nothing for the world creation I wanted to pursue. However, because *Balance* forced me to find means of creating movement that stepped away from solely relying on musical cues, I was able to produce some movement which attended to my themes.

I learned the most from the missed opportunities in this section. Because my choreography tried to create plot points rather than interpret the music, I realized the importance of strong thematic content which encourages musical and dynamic consistency. If working with a composer in the future, I will be sure to request live recordings of the music before I hold any rehearsals with the dancers in order to achieve true synchronization. I think because most images, conflicting movement concepts, intent, emotional goals and concepts for spatial relationships come before I ever enter the studio, it would be unreasonable to wait to use music immediately during movement creation. If anything, because I waited so long to try and integrate the movement to the music, I handicapped myself. When things like structure, melodies, and even tempo were so up in the air, it was difficult to really focus on movement and image because I was so concerned with when things should happen and if it would work well with the music. If I had the music all along, this never would have concerned me.

I also took a large risk by working with a composer who I knew little about artistically. In initial rehearsals I had no idea how the music would sound or what it would bring to the piece. In preliminary conversations she asked me if there was a composer who she might listen to and mimic. I suggested Stravinsky and his *Rite of Spring*, since so many of the themes matched those in my piece. The story line even has some similarities. Harriet was able to create a work with

remarkable similarities to his work, and I believe this comparison seriously unified our efforts. However, there were still elements of her work I couldn't anticipate, given time restraints, and this made it difficult to engaging the score fully. For example, the realization in one section included a fast piano section to which I choreographed a quick section for the corps. When played live, that section was primarily dominated by a melody for the violin. A number of those issues could have been solved if the dancers, Harriet, and I had no other obligations, but that kind of luxury is rare and difficult to attain. As I continue to work, I would like more control over the music. It is too integral to the overall piece and to the success of the dancers to be left to chance.

Fighting/Choreographing with Counts

This section underwent the most editing over the course of the project. Here again, I reverted to movement that moved the plot forward. The lead dancer ran away from 'The Ladies of Darkness' quite a bit and there was a lot of grabbing and escaping. To make matters worse, after the first showing I realized I had completely stolen and recreated group relationships from a piece by Lesley Telford I was in rehearsal for at the time. Interestingly enough, I did this without realizing it and only became cognizant of it in an informal performance setting after giving my work some distance. This goes to show how much our artistic experience and history contributes to the creative process. For this reason it is important to pursue a performance career as a choreographer.

Using counts to choreograph involves many of the same issues that choreographing in silence presents; There is little emotive or intent based inspiration for the dancers to draw from and dynamic may become monotonous and tied to the steady beat. However, by telling the dancers they needed to accomplish steps in a certain time frame I was better able to approach the kind of conflict Pite referred to when she spoke about dancers moving at the edge of their ability.

Throughout the process I had the dancers count out loud together. Despite the fact that Harriet and I were working on the same set of counts it was still difficult for the dancers to stay in time when the rhythm gave way to melody during performance. Harriet expressed to me some frustration that she couldn't capture some of the accents in the dance with her music. Again, many of these problems might have been overcome more easily without the time restraints.

Before beginning this section, I anticipated that I would find it the easiest as I usually rely heavily on counts in rehearsals. It turned out to be quite the opposite as I discovered how arbitrary counts become in the absence of music. Even when ones goal is to get dancers to move in unison, a task that lends itself to careful counting, the best way to achieve this is by letting the dancers learn a piece of music by moving to it. Without emotion, phrasing, or musical accents that the dancers can learn to anticipate, counts quickly become confusing and garbled. Here again, I would have been much better off choreographing to a piece of music with the appropriate rhythm and tempo.

Editing and Production

I used the second semester to try to correct some of the mistakes I made initially. In *Ash*, Harriet and I worked together to tighten the score. I had her rearrange some of the sections so that the trumpet section opened and didn't disrupt the momentum of the piece. I also changed the beginning and added more movement for the corps and 'The Ladies of Darkness' in an attempt to get closer to a performance that communicated through movement rather than pedantic methods. I also changed the transitions to be more consistently dynamic. In *Fighting*, I tried to get away from the Telford movement ideas I found myself reproducing. I made the section less about the lead dancer trying to get away from the Ladies of Darkness and more about the mind

controlled group trying to consume her. By clarifying my own intent for the section, I found I was much more apt to create original content and images. I left *Balance* alone as I found it the most structurally sound and the least influenced by the story line.

The biggest challenge during production was the switch from the computer realization of the music to live musicians. In dress rehearsal and performance it became distinctly evident that the music and movement had not been crafted together. This was in part due to the difficulty of coordinating rehearsal time but I think a greater part of that had to do with my creative process throughout. *Balance* was the clearest in some ways because it was possible to tell that no attempt had been made to represent the purely melodic music. However, as stated previously *Balance* was the most monotonous and slow of the three. I think the change in pace would have been more pleasing in the middle of the dance so that tempos went from fast to slow back to fast because change is one of the most important aspects of a successful work. It is inevitable that if you leave the audience in any one state for too long they will cease to be interested.

After the changes I made, the introduction of live music, and use of costumes and face paint, *Ash Fighting Balance* did achieve several elements I hope to continue to pursue. Some of the moving tableaux I created effectively produced poignant images that contributed to making my inner world a reality. I also discovered the capacity to create relationships and develop character through similar movement phrases. In future works, I would like to play more with this idea of conversation through repeated steps and variation on those steps. Finally, I am much more familiar with the collaborative process now. In the future, I would like to develop a closer working relationship with the composer so that I spent less time in the dark and more time tailoring the dance to the music and the music to the dance. However, after the dress and first

performance, the dancers did find their way in the live music. This was an interesting and engaging process to witness.

Conclusions

For all intents and purposes, my research and collaborative efforts were a success because I achieved the ultimate goal of my thesis. I became more cognizant of the decisions I make while choreographing, learned about my process from both strong and poor artistic decisions, defined the characteristics of my choreography I find pleasing as well as those I find uninteresting, and traced them back to their places of origin. I also became more aware of how I create dances and the factors that influence bringing my inner world to the stage. Though I felt the product of my research was lacking artistically, the work and analysis surrounding it yielded a great deal information I can use in the future. My research also gave me the chance to realize a number of theoretical foundations and practical implications of my creative process.

Furthermore, I arrived at a conclusion that seems obvious; dancers should move to music. This does not mean that music supersedes the communicative and emotional intent behind dance, only that it can add a powerful dimension to the experience you wish to create. By forcing myself to work with music differently in each of the three sections, I sacrificed a great deal of clarity and cohesion in the final product. I was also forced to fully realize the value of music both in the studio and in performance. Most importantly, I realized the true origins of my creative decisions and let go of the misconception that they were wholly reliant on the music or sound that I chose. The steps and intent and dynamic behind came first. However, music can be used to draw more interesting performances and movement possibilities out of the dancers. Furthermore,

music is one of the easiest ways to create a tone or emotional space you want your choreographic work to inhabit. Therefore, not only does music move the dancers, but also gives the audience context clues.

Due to the complicated unique nature of the choreographic process, I am not willing to suggest that any type of music is more appropriate for dance than others. Isadora Duncan danced to symphonies, Ohad Naharin and many others have whole sections in silence. However, the choreographer doesn't need to be afraid of mating their movement with music for fear of it drowning their artistic intent. Given commitment to the artistic vision and skill in executing it, the choreography will hold its place as the center of a dance performance. The choreographer should decide what experience they wish to create for the audience through a combination of craft, music, costumes, and lighting.

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