

LIVE ACTION AND VIRTUAL BODIES:  
RE-DEFINING BOUNDARIES OF THE REAL  
IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

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## FORWARD

I entered into this project with a compelling notion to understand and re-define boundaries among the virtual bodies, presences, and choreographies of projected video, live human figures, and dance action. During a choreography on film course taken at Amherst College, I was introduced to the video dance medium and became aware of the potential for the camera to re-imagine bodies within time and space. The profound similarities and differences between the lens of the camera and the lens of the eye allowed for me to see the potential to multiply perspectives and to create a world of viewing that provides opportunities for an audience member to enter into the work from various perspectives: to see beyond and within both the live movement and the projected movement.

My interest in this project originated with a fascination for bringing multiple realities and worlds into the proscenium theatre. Seven months of creating, experimenting, and collaborating with three other dancers, the camera, and the editing software, Final Cut, culminated in the creation and performance of a twenty-minute live multimedia dance work. The performance of the final project follows myself, Deepti Dhir, Mike Greenberg, and Christina Reppert as we negotiate multiple facets of relationship and ourselves through the passage of time. The video projection consists of images that are residual of this passage, as

the images capture resonant movement, psychological dimensions, and atmospheres of the live figures and the surrounding environment. These projected images distort, amplify, and coax the viewer to re-imagine multiple dimensions of the live action.

Throughout the creative process I experimented with the camera: examining issues of the frame (the lens of the camera versus the eye), working in 2D versus 3D, and the awareness of time and space within a frame versus within the stage space. These studies allowed for investigations into the use of shadow, light, proximity, scale, time, as well as other technical and imagistic possibilities for creating new environments and complexity within the audience's viewing lens. In addition, I rehearsed with Mike, Christina, and Deepti for two hours, twice a week over a period of six months, in a collaborative process to develop movement material and a range of relationships, physical and conceptual.

A pilot for the final project was presented at Amherst College in December 2009. It was entitled, *From Here to There*, and Mike, Christina, and Deepti performed. The final project, *Parting From Present*, was presented on March 26th and 27th, 2010 at Mount Holyoke College, this included Mike, Christina, Deepti, and myself. For clarity within this paper, I have sectioned the final project as follows: opening pre-recorded and live projections, a series of walking in horizontal paths of light, two duets: Mike and Deepti/Christina and myself, Christina and Deepti's duet, a series of running in vertical paths of light, Mike and Christina's duet, Deepti's solo, and my duet with Deepti.

Please note that the purpose of this paper is not so much to explain or justify my artistic choices, but rather, to offer insight into the different dimensions of my choices.

## INTRODUCTION

Within a world driven by technological developments and, especially, within an art world exploring ways to integrate these technological developments, how does a medium rooted in the human body - dance - negotiate the boundaries of new technological opportunities? The creation of the human animated software, Life Forms, the evolution of the camera as a lens for viewing dance, and the use of projection within a proscenium theatre have catalyzed the re-definition of boundaries within dance, for virtual bodies and environments have joined the live human body on stage. The involvement of multimedia in live performance provokes multiple questions and philosophical challenges regarding the integrity of mixed-media live performance as dance and the role of the audience.

In an interview, Kent de Spain asked Merce Cunningham what was important to him about the use of technology within dance performance. Cunningham replied, "I think the possible discoveries. At least that's my personal feeling, that's what I use it for...It's the possible way you can see something in a way you haven't. It's something you've been dealing with all your life and you can see it in another way. And you say, 'Oh, we can go further; we can go on.' You always can, but what's difficult, often, is to find a way, or a clue as to how to do that...I think [technology] is absolutely a marvelous way to open your eyes again" (qt. Cunningham, de Spain 8). Through the interface of live action and



projected video, this project attempts to enhance, multiply, subvert, and transcend “the possible ways of seeing”. The video component intends to illustrate dimensions of experience that dance action is incapable of manifesting in a live performance setting. In doing so, the virtual images expand notions of the real and the live forms.

The act of fusing multiple physical and virtual realities extends beyond the transformation of the stage space and into the viewing place. The shift into the use of mixed-media in dance performance creates a shift within the role that the audience plays as a perceiver, for the multi-sensoral experience pushes the viewer into the realm of the multimedia environment. In turn, the viewer has the capacity to enter into a perspective that questions scale, identity, multiplicity, and the congruence (or incongruence) of live, physical existence with the projected, virtual images of video. As this project converges the live figure with the virtual figure and environment, not only boundaries of the “real” are re-defined and blurred, but also boundaries of the proscenium theatre. The live human body must negotiate the space between and through these multiple facets of “real”, and the viewer must embody a lens that encompasses multiplicity and depth of perspective.

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The intention of this section is to provide a chronological overview of my choices and developments regarding the video, movement, and sound components of the final project. I review specific issues involving the thematic elements, the development of movement material through collaboration, and the interface of the two mediums, video and live action, in later sections.

### *Stage 1: Experimentation and Formalism*

During the beginning stages of the creative process I focused on experimentation, in order to gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the camera and its capabilities. My interest in dislocating the audience and developing various perspectives of the projected and live figures led to experiments with the scale, angle, proximity, and location of the figures within the camera's frame. During each rehearsal, I captured 15-20 minutes of either set material or improvisational structures on the camera. I investigated the fragmentation of the body moving through time and space by zooming in on specific body parts and capturing the same movement in different angles such as frontal, backward, bird's eye view, and side perspectives. These studies provided the opportunity to collect multiple ways of seeing the same movement and, in turn, to envision the interface of these different perspectives with live action.

As time passed, I became interested in a stationary camera and capturing movement that travels in and out of the frame. I was curious about limiting the perspective and repeatedly asked, ‘What can be caught in the frame by chance?’. While experimenting with the scale, angle, proximity, and location of the frame’s composition, I simultaneously made choices to consciously remain still and follow the movement with the lens, to move around the figure(s) while the figure(s) moved and/or remained still, or to use a stationary shot so the movement that was caught within the frame was a result of ‘chance’. These experiments involved different forms of directorial agency, for the degree of how much control I had over how and what movement was captured through the lens of the camera varied with each experiment. This issue of being either slightly or completely not in control was a theme throughout the development of video, sound, and movement layers within this project; as a result, experimentation was inherent within each stage of the creative process, but gradually became more narrowed and defined through time.

Beyond experimenting with the composition of the frame, this stage encompassed my introduction to the editing software, Final Cut. Through trial and error I gradually learned the basics and intricacies of Final Cut; specifically, the vast potential to manipulate the raw footage. I was immediately drawn to the video effects such as blurring, altering the color, manipulating the time, and changing the orientation of the frame. As I experimented with these video effects, I questioned the role of identity, subjectivity, and what could and could not be seen within the manipulated footage. I asked, ‘Who are these manipulated figures

and what is their relevance to the live figures and movement?'. At this point, I was specifically interested in the black and white color palette, the layering of images, manipulation of time, and the echoing of the images. Each of these editing techniques evolved into key aspects of the projections, concepts, and tone of the final project.

In addition to video and camera experiments, I worked with the dancers to develop many movement investigations through formalist tasks and experimentation; I emphasized these investigations on the form and function of the human body. During this stage, I was not focused on developing movement material and physical relationships around a narrative or concepts. Instead, I concentrated on intertwining Mike, Deepti, Christina, and their relationships with each other within the movement; such that each movement and interaction was unique to each individual. I wanted my phrases to be translated through the dancers' bodies and I thought this could be achieved through formalist tasks. I provided base movement phrases and tasks for manipulating each base phrase (dynamically, spatially, splicing, distilling and other forms of manipulation); in turn, this created opportunities for each dancer to have agency in how they chose to work within the tasks and insert themselves into the movement material. After developing individual movement phrases from an original phrase, we would then work collaboratively to transform the "solos" by shaping them into duets and changing levels, scale, and positions in space. Just as I was interested in seeing multiple perspectives of a single movement through the lens of the camera, I

wanted to see how each movement phrase could be recycled and transformed through the live action.

At this point, I was concerned with developing movement phrases for camera experiments. For example, I was interested in shooting a close-up frame of a moving spine, so I created a short phrase with this in mind. This “spine phrase” was the basis for Mike and Deepti’s duet. As I became interested in heightening the human presence and vulnerability of the live figures (in contrast to the projected, abstract figures), I worked with Mike and Deepti on developing this duet further: adding the hug to arrest the movement and the viewer (an image that became a motif in the final project), playing with its dynamics, adding a section of moving away and coming back together (also a running motif in the final product), and playing with the “roles” of the duet, such that Mike was not always manipulating Deepti. It was this duet, that began as movement for camera experimentation, which introduced the viewer to what was to become a key theme of the final project, the ephemerality of relationships.

During this initial stage, I had trouble negotiating the different movement vocabularies among Mike, Christina, and Deepti. Due to my interest in working within a task-based process and developing individual physical and conceptual nuances within the movement, I struggled to establish a cohesive movement thread among the three dancers. Specifically, Mike had recently quit the Amherst College lacrosse team and had never before worked with dance. I was initially drawn to his untrained presence and fearless enthusiasm, and I imagined that the contrasting extremes of his athleticism and vulnerability would add dynamic and

aesthetic interest to Christina and Deepti's trained dancing vocabulary. However, I found it difficult to direct the development of individual movement phrases in such a way that established a balance between individual vocabularies and group wholeness.

Gradually, I realized the capacity of my decision-making as a source for creating this balance. I grew to understand that as a director, I had the facility to guide the dancers through the task-based process so that individual nuances complimented, not contrasted each other. If Mike, Deepti, or Christina's initial adaptation of the task materialized into a movement that was not congruent with the other's movement choices, then I would realize either the need to be more specific in articulating my intention for the task, or the need to provide alternate forms of describing the task. For example, I discovered that one successful way to communicate was through images. The image bank was an effective source for illustrating tone and aesthetics (aspects that I found difficult to articulate) and created a cohesive movement quality among the three dancers. The combination of the images and clear direction not only led to an assimilation of the dancers' individual vocabularies and choices, but also an eventual congruence throughout each of the layers: movement, video, and sound.

### *Stage 2: Performance Project Performance*

For the performance at Amherst College in December, I pulled each of the layers together within the two weeks preceding the show. I felt rushed, but this pushed me to make necessary choices within the movement, video, sound, and the

interface of all three. Preceding these two weeks, I pieced together the multiple movement sections that we had developed. I created a coherent whole in an order that in my mind made sense, knowing the series of interactions and the relationships that had evolved. The work opened with a series of pedestrian, walking crosses that allowed time for both the viewer and the dancers to transition into the alternate, multimedia world on the stage. From these crosses, the work progressed through a series of duets and solos that were interrupted by dashes through space. As the work came to a close, the dancers returned to the pedestrian crosses, left the multimedia world, and the projected video faded to black.

Through these duets and solos, each dancer's individuality was recognized, but as part of a reoccurring whole among the three. Within the individual phrases and physical relationships of the duets, movement motifs such as gestures of intimate contact and a strong focus among the dancers were central connecting threads between the individuals and the duets. In an effort to mediate one of my main concerns - overstimulating the viewer with live action and video projection - the movement exuded a similar quiet, subtle dynamic tone throughout; at times, this caused the physical relationships and roles of the individuals to be simple and not fully developed. As we entered into an intense tech week, changes were made where Deepti, Mike, Christina, and I had always questioned the intention. Details were developed and the degree of insight into the roles of each person and their relationship to the others gradually deepened.

During these final two weeks I spent an intense amount of time working with the video component. The video transformed into its own entity as I edited

and pieced together footage that embodied the essence of the interactions occurring among the live bodies. Here, I use “essence” as a word that describes a literal doubling of the live movement, a residual dimension of the live movement, or as an aspect of the live movement that does not have immediate visual similarity. The video component evolved into a collage of collected footage that I had selected somewhat randomly. However, the video and live action formed a visual connection through moments of subtle interplay between the live bodies and the bodies within the footage.

As I continued to negotiate the issue of overstimulation, I included fades to black within the video. This provided a chance for the viewer to focus on the movement and physical/spatial relationships of the dancers. During the editing process for this performance, I became profoundly aware of the capacity for video manipulation (editing the color palette, timing, and layering of video) to create another world for the viewers to enter - an environment that fused realities and layers of perspective into the identities of the live figures and their relationships with each other. For example, in an attempt to provide an alternate perspective into the kinetic dimension of Deepti and Christina’s duet, I layered video clips of Deepti and Christina moving through their individual phrases within the duet. The black and white color palette transformed the bodies into shapes and forms, the manipulation of slowing down and speeding up the virtual figure’s movement heightened the sense of momentum within the live action, and by layering the footage, the two moving bodies fused into a single image. As a result, these video



effects offered multiple dimensions of viewing the simultaneously occurring live action duet.

The sound component was the final layer that I created during the frantic two weeks before the performances. Throughout rehearsals we had worked with electronic sound as background for the work environment. The sound component was the most challenging aspect of the work, for I had trouble imagining the score as I was creating it; however, I was highly aware of the capacity for the sound layer to influence the tone and environment in which the movement and video would exist.

Similar to the video, I wanted an aspect of the dancers to be represented within the soundscore in order to provide another dimension to their live action. I decided to alter ambient sound of Mike, Deepti, and Christina's feet against a marley floor. In order to amplify the abstract, multimedia environment of the performance work, I manipulated the audio in Garageband by distorting, slowing down, and rearranging the ambient sound. As a result, the sound was similar to a crunching sound of feet walking through snow or ice - a sound that would return the viewers to the opening walking crosses and the running dashes used throughout the work.

I used gaps of silence for transition between segments of abstracted, ambient sound. Again, this resulted from my concern with overstimulating; I thought that the silence would provide a chance for the viewer to focus only on the live action and the video component. However, my failure to time the fades to black with transitions in the live action and video produced a discordant aspect to

the relationship among the three components: live action, projected video, and sound.

Lastly, I wanted to create an opportunity for the viewer to locate the dancers. I thought this would develop an idea of who the dancers are and how they found themselves in the same abstracted, multimedia environment. I chose to place warped, layered voices at the beginning of the score. These voices were reminiscent of a crowded room from which the dancers may have been departing, helping to amplify the sense of entering and leaving a world different from the one beyond the edges of the stage and the frame of the projection.

Presenting the work in this performance provided an opportunity to see areas that worked, some that didn't, and some that had the potential to be taken further. The interface of all three layers within a stage space illuminated key issues. From this experience, I was able to see the potential for building connection and continuity among the three layers by more carefully orchestrating their timing. Additionally, I saw the potential to intertwine nuance and complexity into both the movement and the development of physical relationships among the dancers. After seeing and experiencing the culmination of investigations in a single space and performance work, I left this stage of the process with a need to narrow, specify, and complicate the experiments within all three components of the project.

*Stage 3: Self-Reflection*

After the show in December, I spent the month of January alone. I took this time to synthesize all that had occurred during the first few months. At this point, I felt as though I was hanging in a void, for I was unsure how the fall's performance work should transform into the final project. I was troubled about how to develop complexity within both the video projection and its relationship to the live action. Each layer of the fall performance work was composed of experiments, but as I moved into creating the final project I needed to synthesize an understanding of these experiments. I wanted to push the formalist experiments into a conceptual framework by developing a more comprehensive connection among the three layers. Although I was excited about exploring deeper the individual aspects of each component (the video effects, relationships, and ambient sound), I was unsure of how to bring the individual aspects into a cohesive final performance work.

Because the final project was to be presented in the Studio Theatre at Mount Holyoke and we had just presented the work in the Holden Theatre at Amherst College, I took this time to see and understand the new space. At the Holden Theatre, the back wall was split into three sections and, as a result, there were two wide spaces in the backdrop. The video projected onto this backdrop created an interesting architecture within the projection - it was no longer flat and this enhanced the distortion of the images. I thought that this architecture created an unexpected sense of "life" within the projection, for the 2-dimensional images moved across multi-dimensional surfaces and transformed into 3-dimensional

images. I started to experiment with projecting video onto different surfaces within the Studio Theatre. I became intrigued with incorporating the surrounding space into the projected video, for I thought that this could transform the stage space. Eventually, I discovered the black curtains against the cyclorama. The black curtains not only created a sense of intimacy within the space, but also offered a unique texture to the projected video, morphing both the figures and background of the video into a multi-dimensional entity.

Working alone, I did various camera and movement experiments. Unknowingly at this time, I incorporated each of these experiments into the video projection in the final project. As I reviewed the camera experiments, I saw myself transform through multiple fragmented perspectives. The long distance shot, the hand-held camera shot, and the shot of my feet offered insight into myself moving through various stages, over time. I viewed these fragments of myself as figurative vignettes that abstractly illustrated myself at different periods in my life. These reflections were the beginning developments of the final project's concept. I gradually pieced together conceptual aspects of an individual's passage through time and the experiences of people coming in and out of one's life. I realized that these thematic elements could manifest within the video, sound, and movement components and build connections among the layers through images and atmospheric sounds. Thus, the components would no longer consist of only formalist experiments, for the experiments could be re-shaped and re-thought within a conceptual framework.

*Stage 4: Continued Experimentation, Choices, and Assimilation*

I entered into this stage filled with information: past experiments, new experiments, and beginning conceptual developments. Mike, Christina, and Deepti agreed to work with me to complete the final stages of this project. This allowed us to build off of the movement and video material that we had previously developed. I questioned what to do with the fall performance work: should it be a section of the final project or a pilot for the final project? Should I abandon some of the past movement and video material? I was unclear *how* to assimilate the formalist and chance experiments from the fall into the conceptual framework.

As I continued rehearsals and collecting footage, I began to spend an immense amount of time editing the footage. It was here that I started to find clarity in this unknown state, for I was able to build a more defined understanding of the concept: its role in the video component and how it could create a connection between the video and the live action. As I grew comfortable working in the editing techniques, I discovered new imagistic possibilities within the color palette, time manipulation, and layering of footage. Surprisingly, as I developed technical complexity within the editing, I found a sense of clarity. For example, as I experimented with the black and white palette, I was able to see how the depth and various forms of the palette could show the transformation of an individual through the passage of time. The opening projection of the final project was a camera experiment from January. At the start of the projection, a figure enters into the frame. All that can be seen is the white of the arms, face, and feet against

the black background. As the figure progresses forward, the strict black and white palette gradually morphs into shades of white, gray, and black; allowing the viewer to see the figure shift into multiple forms. By the end of the video clip, the viewer has observed the figure move through various stages with the evolving color palette and altering manipulations of time serving visual markers for the figure's transformation.

As I developed a more comprehensive understanding of the editing techniques, I was able to define the roles of the black and white palette, time manipulation, and image layering within the final project. As a result, my choices regarding the video component grew from experimental and arbitrary to intentional.

Unlike the video component, the live action layer did not yet have a clear sense of direction or purpose within the final project. I was still trying to decide on the specific actions, tones, nuances, and characters within the physical relationships. In order to transition from the fall performance work, I thought that the work needed an extra body, another dimension in order to build intrigue and nuance within the relationships and space. I was nervous about bringing an outside person into the project due to the well-defined group dynamics among the four of us. I decided that if there was going to be an additional person, then it only seemed right that it be me.

I chose to start building a duet with Deepti, which I saw as an opportunity to develop new movement material and to add new facets of intricacy to the already developed physical relationships. I wanted to create complexity within the

movement and character roles in order to add depth to the aspects of relationships seen within the other duets. Deepti and I created a well-developed duet that intertwined new movement material with movement motifs from the fall performance work; however, I had trouble envisioning how this duet would work with the past series of duets and solos among Mike, Deepti, and Christina.

In order to develop a sense of direction for the physical relationships, I knew that I needed to hear thoughts from an outside perspective, so I asked to have a showing for Jim Coleman and Terese Freedman, committee members of this project. They asked, Who are the dancers? What is the spirit, mood, and psychology of the dancers and their different relationships? What is the connection between my duet with Deepti and the other duets? Why was I only in one section of the work? Each of these questions clearly defined my central issue: the development of character and intention not only within each of the physical relationships, but also within the project as a whole.

As a result of this showing, I made significant changes to the sequence of movement material. I came to realize that the intention of this final project had evolved into a reflection of Mike, Deepti, Christina, and me: both our distinct individualities and the friendships among the four of us. I saw the potential to build the concept into the movement material and physical relationships by developing the duets in order to show the imprints, traces, and marks left with others over the passage of time. For example, different forms of an intimate embrace could be seen from one duet to the next and, in turn, signify these imprints, traces, and marks. As I thought about the movement and characters

within each of the developed duets, I sketched a succession of duets that I felt would manifest the progression of an individual through the passage of time and multiple relationships. I sectioned the duets as: Mike/Deepti, Sam/Christina, Christina/Deepti, Christina/Mike, and Sam/Deepti. In between each of these physical relationships, I inserted moments of stillness and pedestrian crosses.

Additionally, I decided to divide the stage space into dimensions of time in order to parallel the conceptual element of an individual's passage through time. I decided that the performance work would open with a live video feed of the four of us in the corridor behind the cyclorama ("past"), the viewer would watch us leave this space and enter onto the stage ("present"), and, finally, we would leave the stage, walking into the audience ("future"). This framework for the progression of physical relationships and the usage of stage space created a coherent purpose for the live action component, because I was able to clarify the dancers' and duets' roles within the final project. As a result, I was able to make deliberate, directed choices involving the purpose of the relationship between the video and live action components.

To assimilate the relevance of the video and live action components, I collected footage that abstractly indicated the passage of an individual through time and the essence of the relationships among the live figures. In order to signify a continual passing of time, I chose different sets of footage of the four of us walking or running through space, either as individuals or in a group. In addition, each of the live action duets had various forms of intimate, physical



contact and I collected footage that captured a focus or physical interaction that reflected these forms of physical contact.

Furthermore, as I continued to think about the psychology and the roles of the dancers, I expanded the video images and collected footage that I imagined would push the viewer to locate the live figures, movement, and images in an environment beyond the stage. I shot various perspectives of running water, shadows of trees on the ground, and close-ups of sand and gravel. In addition, I captured Deepti running, walking, and standing in a field. I thought that by seeing one of the live figures in a different location, the viewer would search for and create a connection between the projected image and the live figure, possibly asking ‘What is the relationship between the image of Deepti in a field and Deepti live on the stage?’. Each of these images had a visual connection with the live action; in turn, providing dimensions of viewing and understanding the roles of the live figures.

Throughout this stage, I accumulated and edited fragments of various ambient and recorded sounds in Garageband. Initially, I was interested in solo instrumentals because I thought that these would parallel the conceptual aspect of an individual traveling through various stages of life. However, the instrumental sounds were too “real” and recognizable within a multimedia environment that blurred notions of the “real”. Both the subtle conceptual connections and the representation of the live figures within the video allowed for the live figures to fuse with the video component. I came to realize that the purpose of the sound component should be to develop the atmosphere in which the video and live

action existed. Within the sound component, I saw the potential to transform the stage space into an environment in which the viewer could enter.

I searched for sounds that were synthesized, electronic, and atmospheric. I thought that these synthetic types of sound would not only create a tone and environment for the visual components, but also blend well with the synthetic nature of the video effects. In addition, I wanted to use ambient sound from footage in the projection to develop a more direct connection between the images and sound. At this point, I knew that the video component would have video clips of waterfalls due to the interesting texture that the edited footage offered. I edited the sound of these waterfalls by slowing down, increasing the frequency, and adding filters to the sound; however, the manipulated ambient sound was still identifiable as rushing water. I chose to work with this sound of moving water because I thought that the contrast of “natural” sound and synthesized sound would parallel the juxtaposition of live figures and virtual figures. I wanted both the sound and visual components to have “real” and technologically manipulated aspects, because I thought that this would build another connection between the sound and visual layers; in turn, this would help to create a complete environment where each layer is synchronized through visual and sound cues, images, and qualities.

I had a final showing three weeks prior to the performances of the final project. This was the first time that Jim Coleman and Terese Freedman had seen the new developments and the first time that Wendy Woodson, my third committee member and director of Performance Project, had seen the work since

the fall. Although the project felt like a different entity from the earlier work, all agreed that each component needed more clarity in order to better develop the connections among all three. The video component and live action appeared as two different vocabularies and, as a result, forced each of the viewers to choose which component to watch. In addition, they felt that the sound component was too ominous and heavy for the movement vocabulary and relationships. In order to create a congruent thread between the video and live action, I decided to rearrange the video images so that there were moments for the viewer to undo the mystery of the video and find direct visual connections to the live action. For the sound, I needed to find new pieces that were subtle and helped to shape the quiet, mysterious tone of the movement and video components. I chose to establish clarity among the three components by orchestrating the timing of the video and sound to the timing of the live action.

#### *Stage 5: Finding Clarity, A Final Project*

A week after this showing and two weeks prior to the performances, my external hard drive, containing all of my edited footage, malfunctioned and had to be sent to a specialist in California. I thought that I had lost seven months worth of editing and the video that I was to use in the final performances. Fortunately, I had all of the raw footage on tape and I was able to upload the footage and re-edit the material. Although an intensely emotional period, this malfunction turned out to be my key to clarity. Suddenly, I did not have all of the edited material at hand to choose from and I simply did not have the time to edit all of the raw footage. I

had to make choices about what images I wanted and how I wanted to rearrange these images relative to the live action. I spent the beginning part of spring break re-editing the chosen footage. As I was about to finish editing, I received an e-mail telling me that all of my data on the hard drive was recovered - Ironic? Possibly.

During this period of distress, I knew that I couldn't take control in finding new pieces of sound. I approached Peter Jones, Mount Holyoke's dance musician, and explained that I wanted to create an environment in which the live action and video could co-exist. The opening section in the corridor was mysterious and I wanted this to evoke a dream-like soundscape. Similarly, I wanted to find sounds that captured the soft, intimate tone of the duets and the hurried intensity of the running section. He introduced me to a CD of atmospheric songs and I was suddenly able to envision the sound with sections of the movement and video. I selected songs from this CD as well as others that I had discovered from various sources that I felt captured the tone of each movement section. I worked in Garageband mapping out a score that consisted of these songs with the manipulated waterfall sounds as transitions and initiations into a new section of sound and movement.

Using a tape of the final showing, I recorded the duration of each live action section. I worked closely to synchronize the timing of the sound with the timing of the movement, and I became aware of the need for pauses and stillness within the video, sound, and movement. I realized that these would help provide

transitions and opportunities for the viewer to process the unfolding events on stage.

Just as I timed the sound to the movement, I timed the video to the movement and the sound. I rearranged the video so that each segment of video was not only perfectly timed to a section of movement, but also visually reminiscent of the live action. The waterfall footage and sound occurred simultaneously and were used as transitions from one section of projection, live action, and sound, to another. I chose to use this footage of water in order to provide a balance among the live figures, the virtual bodies, and the virtual environment. The zoomed-in, time altered, color manipulated water translated as moving texture. Although used for transitions, the manipulation of this footage developed a continuous momentum within the entire stage space; even when the live figures were still, the large scale of rushing water created new dimensions of kinetic energy.

Each movement section was suddenly its own entity and the viewer was able to see a clear progression from one physical relationship to the next. Each layer was cued up to the second and I felt that suddenly there was clarity within the project. All of the puzzle pieces fell into place by orchestrating the timing and developing a connection among the virtual and live action images, as well as the soundscape. During this final stage, the unknown started to dissolve as I made decisions. As a result, I was able to clearly see and allow for the intricacies of each component to manifest and co-exist within the final project.

*Stage 6: The Performances*

The week leading up to the performances involved an intense period of fine-tuning the technical aspects of the work (teaching the crew how to time and use the live video and pre-recorded projectors) and finalizing artistic choices such as costumes and lighting. Initially, I struggled to articulate my concerns about the lighting with the lighting designer, Brenda Cortina. I wanted to create a world where the video projection shaped the stage space and the live figures moved through the video projection. Due to the differences in stage lighting and the light of the projection, I was worried that the stage lights would cut through the projected light, creating a separation between the projected video and the live figures. After many trials and discussions, Brenda and I finally came to an understanding: the stage lights would be minimal and set in a light gray/blue tone in an attempt to match the gray/white projection light. The result was a world that the live figures moved through, into, and out of; the dancers were fully lit only when they were in the path of the projected video. This choice added complexity to the notion of “real” because the live figures could only be seen through the projected virtual images.

The costumes for the final performances were borrowed from the Amherst College Costume Department. For the fall performances, I had the fortunate opportunity to collaborate with an Amherst College design student on the look, palette, and overall tone of the costumes. I wanted the costumes to fuse with the color palette of the video in order to establish a coherent relationship between the live and virtual figures. As a result, all of the costumes were in shades of white

and gray. When I decided to join the cast for the final performances, I needed to find a costume. Thankfully, I am fortunate to have a mother who has worked with stage costumes for years and who looked for any chance to help with this project. By the time of the performances, Mike, Deepti, Christina, and I had costumes that were complimentary, yet distinct - resonant of our roles within the project.

As the last technical glitches were solved and costumes were finalized, the performances arrived. Each show felt profoundly personal for Mike, Deepti, Christina, and me - it was a fleeting event, but one with strong and lasting imprints on each of us.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEMATIC ELEMENTS

As the project progressed through multiple stages, I saw the potential to develop both complexity and clarity within the video and live action interface by making a shift in focus from formalist experiments to the thematic elements of relationship, time, and memory. As Mike, Deepti, Christina, and I navigated the multiple paths of this project together, aspects of our friendship and individual characters seeped into artistic developments regarding the physical relationships and images in the video. I believe that the poignant and nostalgic tensions and themes that the final project embodied resonated from myself and my personal experiences. During crucial and intense periods of the creative process, there were many catalysts within my life outside of this project that, whether consciously or not, influenced my artistic choices.

During the month of January, a close friend shared a poem with me. For him, the poem illustrated his sense of displacement over the past years as experiences and time transformed facets of his identity that he had once recognized as “himself”. Please note that my intention to add this poem is not to offer a form of explanation; rather, the poem offers insight and inquiry into the development of the thematic elements within the final project.



You ever forward,  
 ever backward I

Alone am I in night's dark void, caught fast  
 twixt shore and dune, sand and sky, earth and air.  
 Our being draws close where all else begins.  
 My emptiness is filled with your presence.

In silence, I pursue a phantom you:  
 Your past, in sunken footsteps, leaves a path  
 of what was, of what promises to be.  
 Eternity trapped in a single step.

Alone was I among my pieces, many  
 lost in a time long since passed. "I,"  
 or rather what "I" once was,  
     is no more.  
 "Myself" is sacrificed, a memory.

Delivered from my broken being, new  
 I chase your vanishing trail,  
     and reform  
 anew in your ephemeral image.  
 For a brief moment, we preserve our union.

Alone, soon, you will be in place unknown.  
 The future (and the "you" that waits) preserves,  
 the essence of the "I" that briefly was,  
 the "we" that never truly came to be...

And ever forward moves your restless mind.  
 The future parts from present,  
     as once our  
 own present did the past: without a care.  
 We move now to our final solitude

You ever forward,  
 ever backward I.

-Jaime Batista

These words define an over-arching insight into and understanding of specific artistic choices within the project. Although they are literally found in both the title of the work, *Parting From Present*, and within the soundscore ( I layered each of our voices saying, “You ever forward, ever backward I”), they transcend the physical interactions, and shape our relationships in the work. I was struck by the poem’s articulation of time; specifically, an individual’s inability to preserve aspects of him/herself as time passes and relationships fade.

Additionally, I was taken not only by the poem’s imagery of memory as traces and imprints of a “past” self, but also the illustrations of impermanence, “the vanishing trail”, “the essence of the ‘I’ that briefly was”, “anew in your ephemeral image”. I saw the potential to visualize these elements of time, memory, and ephemerality by editing the video: the color palette, the layering of images, and the manipulation of time. Although I decided not to create a specific movement narrative for this poem, I did compose connections of thematic imagery among the poem, the movement, and the images within the video.

I chose to materialize an individual’s passage through time in multiple forms. The progression of the performance work follows the path of the dancers through both space and time: “past” (corridor behind cyc), “present” (stage space), and “future” (audience). This delineation of time has multiple, fluid interpretations, for each spatial materialization of time has complex layers. As a result, the connection between time and spatial dimensions may not have been apparent to the viewer. I was interested in delineating the space such that different

aspects the dancers' characters and relationships could be associated with different locations in the space.

The viewer saw the “past” through a live video feed; thus, the dancers were present, but the image resonated a mysterious dream, dream-like state, and/or memory. Although the “present” did encompass the live figures, the stage space was joined by pre-recorded projection with images that were evocative of memory and/or states of being that were not directly connected to the live action. Finally, the “future” was still the present, but unlike the previous spaces, I chose not to define the space with video projection; thus, the live figures moved forward and away from the video component.

I chose to depict an individual's passage through time furthermore by creating paths of light at two points during the work; first, when each of us left the corridor space and entered onto the stage, one by one, moving in pedestrian form in our individual, horizontal light paths; second, when Deepti initiates a frantic running sequence back and forth within vertical paths of light. During this section, I wanted our paths from upstage to downstage to reach the edges of the light in order to allude to the “past” that was within the corridor and the “future” in the final departure from the stage space.

Immediately following this section, our voices echo, “You ever forward, ever backward I” in the soundscore and initiate our transition into a period of stillness. As this occurs, a photograph that another close friend had taken and given to me is projected. The photograph captures footprints in the sand - an image that refers directly to this poem and thematic elements of time, self, and

memory. Over this image, I layered footage of Christina, Mike, Deepti, and myself walking, individually, with our backs facing the camera - as though we are moving away from the viewer, into the back corridor, and, literally, away from our present selves on the stage.

This image of a figure walking in the opposite direction of the live figure is also the final, closing image of the performance work. Within the video projection, Deepti is in a field. She turns and looks at both the live figures and the viewer, and then turns her back and walks away into the field. Simultaneously, Deepti, live, looks at the three of us and her projected self, and turns her back to leave the stage space, the three of us, and her projected image. As these virtual images fade away from the live figures, I intended to acknowledge both the aspect of memory and the ephemerality of memory, of a self from the past.

Although these images and physical materializations have roots within the words of this poem, I did not intend to define a specific narrative or character roles within either the movement or the video component. Instead, I had intended to develop broad conceptual elements, such as notions of time, relationship, and memory, through imagery because I thought that this would provide the viewer with an imaginative space for interpretation. However, I now recognize that even though Mike, Deepti, Christina, and I did not signify alternate characters, the specificity of our individual selves and the relationships among the four of us followed a narrative - the narrative of ourselves through both our individual paths and the development of our relationships. I saw the thematic elements of this poem as an illustration of not only myself, but also my relationships with Mike,

Christina, and Deepti. In turn, the development of the conceptual aspects - time, memory, and relationship - within the movement and video components was an organic progression that provided clarity into our physical relationships, relationships with the virtual images, and individual roles.

## COLLABORATION

As a choreographer, I was interested in working collaboratively in order to develop individual choices and vocabularies within the movement phrases; thus, I did not want to provide all of the movement material for each of the dancers. My use of formalist tasks as a source for creating movement phrases derived not only from a concern to integrate our individual selves into the movement, but also from a lack of interest in developing movement from an intended concept, narrative, or meaning. Over time, this formalism materialized into an intricate blend of the raw, personal self and a profound awareness of the larger dynamics within the group and environment.

Many times I came into the rehearsal with a movement phrase and asked Mike, Deepti, and Christina to take the “essence” of my movement in order to create their own phrases. To generate certain dynamics, I would ask each of them to find, for example, three places of stillness and two moments of sharpness within the phrase. Although we did not use every developed phrase within the final performance, a product of this process is seen in the performance work immediately after the running section, when Mike, Deepti, and Christina are on the ground. Each of their phrases are uniquely their own, but founded in the same

original phrase; thus, there are multiple visual threads that connect the individual movement material.

From these phrases, I would then piece together duets. The same phrases that Christina and Deepti did at the end of the running section, can be seen in their duet. Although Christina, Deepti, and I worked together to fuse the individual phrases into a coherent movement section, I made choices regarding the intention of the duet. For example, at one point, Deepti transitions to a push-up position in her phrase and Christina transitions to a fetal position in her phrase. At this point, I wanted to develop a contrast of departing from one another and returning to each other in an intimate form. With these two movements, I chose to place Deepti on top of Christina and I asked them to pause so that Deepti hovers over Christina, looking face to face. This still image can be seen at the end of both Christina and Deepti's duet and my duet with Deepti.

When I wanted to expand their duet, I came into the rehearsal with a movement phrase that I did in my duet with Deepti. In order to develop individual phrases, I went through each movement of the original phrase and I asked them to take the "opposite" - however they interpreted the word "opposite" - of that movement. We then worked together to put these phrases into duet form, developing nuance in dynamics, focus, and touch. This was my abstract way to form a thread between Deepti and Christina's duet and my duet with Deepti. I wanted to develop some manifestation of a connection among all of the duets to allude to the conceptual aspect of time's passage: leaving imprints of ourselves behind as we move forward, as relationships form and dissolve.

To further develop this connection among the duets, I wanted movement and gesture motifs to evolve throughout the progression of the performance work. Specifically, all of the duets embody, in some form, an intimate touch and/or focus that is abruptly departed from and, at times, returned to. In order to develop the thematic elements of traces, marks, and imprints, I chose to sequence the duets so the viewer could recognize an accumulation of movement and gestural motifs; thus, the opening two duets establish motifs, these motifs are further developed in each of the duets, and the final duet encompasses all of the motifs. The traces, marks, and imprints were represented through these gesture and movement motifs. For example, in Mike and Deepti's duet, Mike's hand pushes Deepti's face away. This initiates a series of movements that ends in a hugging position. In Mike and Christina's duet, the dancers face each other, place their hands on the other's face and, simultaneously, push each other's faces away. After a series of movement that takes them away from each other, they return and touch the arm of the other person. Finally, Deepti and I touch each other's faces in the same way as Christina and Mike, but we return to each other in a hug. Each of these moments acknowledge motifs from previous physical interactions.

Furthermore, when Mike, Deepti, and I worked to expand their duet from the initial movement series of the spine, I asked Deepti to go through the motions of the duet, but by herself - as though she was tracing Mike's body. Christina, Deepti, and I performed this movement in the opening duets. We all look in towards each other, while Mike is still, his back facing Deepti. Deepti and I perform the movement once again in our final duet, with our backs facing each



other. This repetition of movement, but in different spatial locations and at different moments in time, references the imprints that we leave with others and/or carry with ourselves over time. The cyclical nature of the repetition is a comment on the passage of time and the placement of our individual selves within a path from one point to another- the movement is seen both in the beginning and the end, but in different physical relationships and contexts.

As an experiment for Deepti's solo, I came into rehearsal with a list of randomly selected and grouped action verbs, and I asked her to place a movement to each action verb. I was curious if this process would generate new and different movement qualities and dynamics.

Point, Extend, Thrust, Sink/  
 Swing, Change Direction, Break/  
 Throw, Shift, Fold, Dash, Swing/  
 Look, Point, Circle, Jump/  
 Hit, Extend, Drop

The movement series that she created became a framework for some of the movement and gestural motifs. As the sections of action verbs developed into a coherent solo, I was struck by the dynamics, level changes, and imagery of the movement. Throughout the solo, Deepti's choices in focus and specific gestures created a sense that another person was with her, in the same space; particularly, when she extends her arm and looks in the opposite direction as well as when she focuses on her hand, drops it, looks away from the hand, and runs.

I chose to incorporate forms of these two moments throughout the duets. For example, the latter image can be seen towards the end of Mike and Christina's

duet and in my duet with Deepti. In each duet, the two dancers have different spatial orientations when they focus on their hands, drop the hands, and look away. However, in both duets, the run brings the two dancers together. Mike and Christina's duet occurs before Deepti's solo and my duet with Deepti immediately follows her solo. I intended for this movement motif to not only develop the sense that there is another person with Deepti in her solo, but also to define the role of the individual within each relationship.

During the month of January, I used the series of verbs I gave Deepti to create my own phrase. My duet with Deepti begins with the start of her phrase and my phrase put together. I intended for my phrase to fill the space in Deepti's solo that I had imagined was another person. The remainder of the duet is composed of spliced movement motifs from her duets with Christina and Mike. By culminating the movement and gesture motifs in the final duet, I intended to visually mark the connection of all four of us, and the imprints that we left on each other through our duets.

Accompanying these motifs is movement material that Deepti and I created together. Throughout the development of this duet, Deepti and I, whether consciously or not, intertwined ourselves and the history of our friendship within the movement and spatial relationships. The development of our individual phrases, either through improvisation or from the series of action verbs, were reflections of personal movement vocabularies and interpretations. Deepti's specificity within her nuanced movement vocabulary complimented my fluid, linear movement vocabulary. Although we had to make specific choices regarding

how to put the individual phrases into duet form, the dynamics and focus were never verbally decided. I believe that our past experiences and friendship provided a comfortable setting for these personal nuances to develop within the movement material.

I think that each one of us could see ourselves within the conceptual facet of the work, for each of us illustrated aspects of the thematic elements; the development of our relationships with each other paralleled the development of the project and the concept. The use of collaboration allowed for the movements, the gestures, and the physical interactions to be uniquely our own, yet shared among the four of us. The intimate embraces seen throughout each duet, but in different forms, were unique to each pairing of dancers as the duets developed into reflections of the relationships among the four of us. Through the collaborative process, we each had the opportunity to develop personal intentions and choices within the movement phrases and physical interactions. Christina's quiet, gentle approach to the movement, Deepti's strong focus and presence, Mike's enthusiasm and commitment to the movement and the other dancers, and my precision in articulating the movement - all were intertwined within each aspect of the final project. I believe that this can be seen from the opening improvisation section in the corridor, to each moment of focus and moment of physical contact throughout all of the duets. As much as I made specific choices regarding the dynamics and the sequence of movement phrases, each dancer was given agency to develop personal nuances of touch and focus - aspects that I believe defined the roles and characteristics of each movement and duet.

SUBJECTIVITY:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLACK AND WHITE PALETTE

Throughout this process I've discovered many complexities within the interface of the two mediums, dance and projected video. Numerous dilemmas, intrigues, and questions arose from the relationship between these two mediums and, specifically, between the virtual figures and the live figures on stage: 'Who are the virtual figures?', 'What is the relationship between the virtual and live figures?' and broadly, 'What is the purpose of the video component?'. As I questioned the identity of the virtual figures, my interest developed into a narrowed juxtaposition of projected, abstracted bodies and live, human bodies. I became intrigued with the role of abstracted bodies and their capacity to heighten both the human presence and vulnerability of live figures.

In his essay, *Dance and Technology: A Pas de Deux for Post-Humans*, Kent de Spain states, "Throughout our history, dance has been (arguably, I'm sure) the most 'human' of the arts, by simple logic that its medium of expression is the human body itself...No matter how much one works to choreograph non-referential movement, it is ineluctably contexted and referenced through the somatic presence of the performer" (de Spain 11). I questioned how both the viewer and myself, as the creator, would come to understand the role of an abstracted, virtual figure that would not fully embody the somatic presence of

live, moving bodies. By choosing to record and project a moving body and, furthermore, choosing to abstract/manipulate these images through editing techniques, I believe that there is a transformation of the human form. Suddenly, the human body is seen as a 2-dimensional figure and lacks a living presence inherent within live bodies. I believe that my choice to eradicate the subjectivity of a virtual body while, simultaneously, presenting a live body provoked multiple questions and challenges for the viewer: How does a viewer go through the process of identifying the virtual bodies if they are unable to define what is being seen and/or how to negotiate their own somatic experience of the projected bodies? How do virtual bodies and environments force us to re-imagine live bodies?

I chose to transform the subjectivity of the virtual figures by altering the color palette of the video component. In my initial stages of experimentation, I investigated the editing techniques to abstract an image - to re-shape facets of identity. I discovered that by putting the images into black and white, they would transform into moving shapes and forms in which one was no longer able to see the physical details that lead to personal identification. Although these physical details were no longer visible, the black and white palette produced multiple perspectives of a single form by highlighting and transforming that which is rarely seen: shadows, the space around the figure, and the shape of the figure.

As a result, the projected images became reflections of the live figures and not simply doubled images of the “real”. The viewer could build a connection between the live and virtual figures because each component consisted of the

same bodies; however, due to the editing of the color palette and timing within the video, the virtual bodies were seen in different forms and, in turn, became metaphorical re-imaginings of the live bodies. For example, the video projected during the running section is footage of myself. Within the projection, the viewer is able to see close-up images of my feet, hands, and shadows. These images are reminiscent of the live figures running and sliding onto their hands; they also parallel the passages of the individuals in their paths of light. Here, the black and white figure shapes dimensions of the live figures, dimensions that amplify the present and the real, and offer multiple perspectives into the live action.

This black and white palette illustrates the virtue of ambiguity. A sense of mystery develops into who the projected figures are relative to the live, present figures. Within the mystery and the residual facets lies an opportunity for the viewer to develop an understanding of the virtual figures and their relationship to the live figures. During Deepti's solo, I chose to project footage of Mike, Deepti, Christina, and myself walking, running, and interacting through touch and focus. The virtual figures could be identified as the live figures, but the black and white palette illustrated the figures as black shadows. In the live action component, Deepti was the only moving live figure. The stillness of the other live figures directly contrasted the moving shadows within the video, yet the video images were reminiscent of live action seen in previous sections. As a result, the viewer had the opportunity to develop a connection among the still live figures, Deepti's live movement, and the projected, moving shadows.

Within this ambiguity, there is a simultaneous sense of knowing, for these black and white forms allow a viewer to enter into an imaginative state; providing not only the space for personal interpretation and connection with the images, but also the opportunity to access psychological dimensions that touch upon memory and states of being. By locating the bodies of the live figures within the video, the viewer has the opportunity to see the black and white virtual figures as extensions of the live figures.

These dimensions into the psyche are created not only by the black and white palette, but also by my image choices. During Christina and Mike's duet, I chose to project footage of an improvisational movement structure of Christina, Mike, and Deepti. I had asked the three of them to move within a confined space and acknowledge each other through touch and focus. Specifically, I was interested in seeing a hand holding a face, arm, or hand of another person. I cut the footage, zoomed in on the image, and slowed the movement down to 20% of the real time. I altered the color palette so that the virtual bodies were white forms moving within a black space. Within the video, I thought that the juxtaposition of the anonymity of the figures and the intimate, hyper-slow touching of the hands illustrated multiple ways to perceive the virtual figure's actions.

When the video was projected with Mike and Christina's movement, another dimension of imagery was created. Their movement was simple, yet profoundly intimate through touches of the hand to the face and moments of focus. The video also captured intimate physical contact, but in different ways: holding another figure's arm, reaching for a figure's hand, pushing a figure's face

away. As a result, the interface of the white, virtual figures and the live action illustrated multiple forms of viewing and understanding the relationship between Christina and Mike. By seeing the bodies of the live figures within the black and white palette, the viewer had the opportunity to draw connections between the intimacy of the virtual figures and the intimacy of the live figures.

*The Ambiguity of Black and White: Physical and Psychological Dislocation*

Throughout the performance work, there were only two projected images that illustrated a recognizable location. The first occurred after the running section and was the photograph of the beach with footprints in the sand, and the second was the final image in the performance, of Deepti in a field. For me, the first image was a visual metaphor of the text and the physical action. While the image was projected, all four of us were still and focused on one another. Thus, the viewer was only looking at the live figures within the frame of this image. At this point in the performance, this image marked a shift within the work. This was the first still image and the first image that placed the live action within a different location - physical or psychological. Although the photograph was originally in black and white, I edited it in order to define and/or blur certain edges. Over this photograph, I chose to layer images of the four of us walking, as if the footprints were our own, symbolic of a past memory. The viewer could recognize that the virtual and live figures are the same and, in turn, could locate the live figures within the photograph. Although the location is specifically delineated and illustrated, the black and white palette produces an inherent ambiguity within the



identity of the photograph and its relationship to the live figures, providing space for imaginative interpretation.

During one of the showings, Jim asked me to discover and develop the psychological state of the live figures. I thought that this could be produced by seeing a video projection of a live figure in a different location, for it would push the viewer to develop a visual connection between the live figure and a seemingly unrelated image. This led me to a field near Hampshire College with Deepti and the camera. At the time, I was unsure of what I was looking for or even if the footage would turn into something to use in the final project, but I wanted to capture footage in a field because the location could be recognized, but not specifically identified. In addition, for myself, a single figure within a vast field connoted a sense of freedom and departure.

I chose to film Deepti because I felt that she was the thread throughout the work - within the final project, she was the only one that had an intimate, physical connection with all of us. As I edited this footage, the black and white palette took on a very different look and feel from the rest of the video material. The color palette transformed the landscape of the field, but the landscape also seemed to transform the color palette by opening up new ways of seeing. Suddenly, I was no longer working with bodies and body parts, I was working with a landscape that had depth and life, for its form was elemental and “natural” - one could see the wind moving the trees, the grass, and Deepti’s hair. This “natural” landscape within an “unnatural” palette evoked a mysterious displacement as multiple realities fused.

Although I had originally used the footage of Deepti in a field to produce a sense of physical dislocation, I believe the relationship of the live action with this image, instead, created a more psychological dimension to the live action. The poignant and nostalgic states that the live action emulated were heightened by this projection, for I believe that the image, in relation to the live action, was a manifestation of such states. In many ways, I feel that the black and white palette transformed the landscape into a different reality - a reality that exists beyond the present, the real. The numerous states of being that were evoked at this point in the performance as Deepti walks away from herself in the field and the three of us, and as we choose to follow her exit, evolve from these multiple realities existing within the same space. Within this example, the black and white form negates the “realness” of the image, but allows the viewer to see the natural landscape and its relationship to the live figures in a new way, as a new reality, and, as a result, gives an unfamiliar sense of life (psychological, time, location) to both the virtual images and the live figures.

## THE MANIPULATION OF REAL TIME

In her essay, *Time as Medium: Five Artists' Video Installations*, Barbara London explores the manipulation of time in the work of five video installation artists: Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Dan Graham, Bill Viola, and Gary Hill. Each of the installations investigates the complicated framework of time and the potential to destabilize the viewer's perceptions and experiences of real time. Through this article, I became aware of the capacity to build multiple spaces and senses of time within a single locale and, as a result, to transform the viewing experience of both the projected video and the live action.

### *Destabilizing the Viewer*

I manipulated the viewer's experience of time by not only editing the virtual bodies into hyper-slow and hyper-fast timing, but also projecting a live video. The delineation of the Studio Theatre space into regions of time ("past", "present", "future") led to my decision to project a live video feed of the four of us in the back corridor. Although I was aware that the viewers would not immediately understand or see this relationship between space and time, I was interested in destabilizing the viewer's experience of the projected video, the live figures, and what was real.

In relation to the stage of the Studio Theatre, the space in the back corridor is unrecognizable and one would think that the two spaces are not connected. In order for the projected image to be seen against the black curtain, I chose to place a stage light in the corridor. This light was blinding in person, but created an interesting color palette in the projection, for it washed out some of the coloring in the space and the dancers. As a result, the projected image was mysterious and dream-like in its unidentifiable form. The viewers watched the four of us negotiate this unrecognizable space, leave the mysterious image, and enter onto the stage in real time. This live projection added complexity to the viewing experience, for it pushed the viewer to question, ‘What is real?’, ‘Where are the live figures?’, ‘Is this a pre-recorded video?’.

### *Enhancing the “Real”*

I believe that the editing of real time in the projected video did not necessarily disrupt a viewer’s perception of the ‘real’; rather, the manipulation enhanced the viewer’s perception of the ‘real’. I altered nearly all of the timing within the projected video. My hope was that the contrast between a 2-dimensional movement in hyper slow/fast/echo time and a three-dimensional movement in real time would develop an added feeling of kinetic energy within the stage environment.

The effect of slowing down a movement allows the viewer to see the clear, precise shifts of weight. This intimate understanding of the movement’s kinesthetic details provides the potential for a viewer to not only have a visual

experience, but also a somatic experience. In many ways, one expects a distance to be created by editing footage, for the “real” has been altered: the body in motion has been recorded and manipulated by editing the real time, space, and form of the human body. As a result, the vulnerability of the live, moving body - its quivering muscles in a strenuous movement, the sound of the breath, or the struggle through exhausting motion - has been removed, leaving the viewer to observe a 2-dimensional moving shape. However, I believe that the manipulation of the “real” potentially allows for a deeper understanding of the footage. By editing the time and color of the footage, the viewer is pushed to visualize the action of the virtual bodies through a lens that captures a different dimension of the “real”. Instead of negating the “real”, this manipulation of time, arguably, enhances the “real”.

The physical understanding that slow motion provides can be seen in the projected video that occurs during the running section. This projection consists of myself moving through a series of movements; however, the camera is angled towards the floor and, in turn, only close-up parts of my body can be seen within the frame. The timing of this video clip varies throughout the clip’s duration. I was interested in the contrast between hyper slow and hyper fast motion, especially when the scale of the body was so large.

Within this clip, generally, extremely slow timing occurs when a hand or foot makes contact with the surface. For instance, the opening movement of the clip is myself jumping into the frame and landing on the floor. However, due to the camera angle, the viewer can only see the action from the knee down;

therefore, the viewer sees the exchange of weight as the toes, balls of the feet, arches, and heels hit the ground. In addition, the black and white palette creates a doubled image of these movement details by illustrating the movements' shadows. The final movement within this clip consists of myself moving backwards on all fours and only my hands and profile can be seen. The hyper slow movement enables the viewer to see and physically sense the precision of the hand as it gradually picks up and places down onto the surface. The shadows of the hand move in slow motion as well and, in turn, leave imprints of the hand behind as the body moves out of the frame. This final image dissolves into the photograph where imprints of feet in sand are left behind.

In contrast to this intimate, somatic understanding of the images that slow motion provides, hyper-fast timing transforms the bodies into shapes and forms, producing a different manifestation of kinetic energy. Within this same video projection, I chose to speed up parts of the movement to 300% of real time. The combination of this speed and the black and white palette illustrates moving shapes, rather than a moving body - the viewer is only able to capture mere instances of that which is real.

This video clip opens with slow motion and, therefore, the viewer is able to determine that the footage consists of moving feet and legs. When the timing is increased and the feet and legs turn into quickly moving shapes, the manipulation of time offers the viewer a different way of seeing the "real" forms. Although this creates distance between the viewer and these obscure, quickly moving shapes, it is the contrast of this obscurity and intimacy of slow motion that produces a

multi-dimensional viewing experience. The somatic understanding of the kinesthetic details transforms the viewing experience, for it offers new ways of seeing and understanding not only the projected video, but also the relationship between the movement in the projected video and the live action.

## THE MULTIPLICITY OF IMAGES

The final element of video manipulation was an echoing and layering of images. The black and white palette produced ambiguity, the manipulation of time created new kinetic dimensions, and the echoing and layering of images developed multiplicity within a single image. By using the echo video effect, the body's image is literally tripled and there is a delay within each echoed body image; as a result, the number of bodies and body parts within the frame is multiplied. By layering an image, I decreased the opacity of the footage and placed different sets of footage on top of one another; this allowed for multiple, different images to be seen at once.

### *The Echoing of Images*

The interface of an echoed virtual image and live action produces multiple ways of seeing and experiencing the relationship between the virtual and live images. Within the performance work, an example can be seen when the live video feed closes and the pre-recorded projection comes up. The first segment of video is a close-up shot of feet walking. Although an interesting perspective of the feet, I did not necessarily want the viewer to fully recognize the feet. By adding the echo effect, I was able to multiply the number of feet and develop a dynamic sense of their moving through space. In addition, the black and white palette



transformed the feet into moving shapes, allowing the viewer to capture only glimpses of a foot form. While this video projects, the dancers are walking and running across four horizontal paths of light. This echoed segment of video amplifies the motions of walking and running; literally, our feet took us from one end of the path to the other, but the projection visually reverberated the kinetics of walking and, especially, running.

Beyond the materialization of kinetic energy, I used the echo effect to illustrate states of being or memories. Because the viewer is able to locate the live figures in the manipulated, virtual bodies, the video projection can be viewed as an extension of the live figures; offering dimensions of insight into the role of the live figure. For example, during Deepti's solo and the beginning of my duet with Deepti, I projected a video of the four of us making passes across the frame, similar to the opening crosses in the paths of light. The black and white color palette allows for the bodies to be much more discernible than when the feet were multiplied. The contrast of the multiplied bodies and the single live figure creates multiple dimensions of seeing and identifying the live figure. Do these multiplied figures remind the viewer of an anonymous crowd in a past memory (either a distant past or as recent as the crosses with the multiplied feet projected at the start of the performance)? Or do the multiplied bodies acknowledge that we, as humans, harbor many different persona?

*The Layering of Images*

By layering footage, I was able to bring depth to the 2-dimensional figures and multiply the ways of seeing the projected images and their relationship to the live figures. For example, after the running section, when the photograph appears, I layered individual clips of us walking forward. Gradually, the photograph disappears and all that remains is the image of a single back walking away from the viewer. My intention was to allude to the conceptual aspects of memory and time. As we walk, one by one, following the footprints in the sand - are the footprints our own? The layering effect illustrates each of us coming in and out of each other - are we a part of a single whole that is moving forward? Are we separate individuals moving along a similar path, leaving traces of ourselves with each other? Additionally, these layered images are the only moving figures, for the live figures are standing still. Thus, the virtual figures, in a black and white palette that clearly identifies the figures, walk away from the live figures, calling upon either a memory or a "past" self.

The latter example described my choice to layer similar images. However, in the projected video of the running sequence, I chose to layer two clips of footage that consisted of different images and produced a more abstract way of seeing each layer. Originally, this projection consisted only of myself moving on the floor. As I began to finalize the projection, I wanted to create a visual connection between the abstracted images of water (that acted as transitions) and the images of virtual bodies. This led me to layer the clip of myself over a video of water; thus, as I jump into the frame, I land in the multi-dimensional, textured

image and as I move, I move through this textured image. By layering these two images that are seemingly unrelated, multiple facets of physical dimension were created as the 2-dimensional form began to translate into a 3-dimensional form. This acknowledges the capacity of layering as a tool for multiplying the various dimensions (physical or conceptual) within a single image, virtual figure, or movement.

## THE INTERFACE: A SYNCHRONOUS ENVIRONMENT

Throughout the beginning developments of the video component, I was focused on negating the virtual body's identity by manipulating facets of its normal reality - color, time, scale, focus, etc. However, over time, I realized that this 'negation' was truly a morphing of the virtual bodies' identity and a heightening of the live figures' identity. The video effects, such as the black and white palette and the manipulation of time, transformed the virtual bodies into characters that shared the stage space with the live figures.

During the 1950s, Alwin Nikolais developed a theory of "decentralization", "With personality and ego made transparent, the dancer is able to merge into an environment of which he is a part. He finds himself a functioning kinsman rather than a dominating dweller. Space becomes not just a hole in which to kick into or spin about; it becomes an architecturally fluid companion" (qt. Nikolais, Feinman 44). Nikolais sought to depersonalize the live figures in order to shift the viewer's focus from the live figure and towards the entire stage environment. Although Nikolais's theory of "decentralization" is not central to my project or my process, I believe that the interface of this project's live action and video projection allowed for the two mediums to co-exist and merge within a single space. Like Nikolais's theory suggests, this interface resulted in a viewing experience of an environment, not two separate mediums, for it was the

relationship between the live figures and the virtual bodies that shaped the environment and, in turn, was central to the viewing experience.

Through his philosophy of “decentralization”, Nikolais discovered that removing a dancer’s subjectivity “does not dehumanize him [the dancer]; it will rather enhumanize” (qt. Nikolais, Feinman 186). I believe that this process of “enhumanizing” translates into a newfound understanding of the live figure’s identity and presence. The black and white palette, time manipulations, and choice of images defined the virtual figures as extensions of the live figures. During the horizontal paths of light the video projection of multiplied, zoomed-in feet captured the kinetic energy of walking and running live action; the physical contact of the projected white figures reflected the intimate live action in Mike and Christina’s duet; and the image of Deepti walking away into a field amplified the sense of departure within the final exit of the stage. Each of these examples acknowledges the mutual relationship between the two mediums, and the creation of a single environment. Furthermore, the live figures literally moved through the projected light as the images were projected onto the live figures’ bodies; thus, not only were the images reminiscent of the live action, but the live figures could only be fully seen through these projected images. Ultimately, the coupling of the live figures with the virtual figures allowed for both mediums to become decentralized and enhumanized, for the two mediums fused, amplified one another by expanding the ways of seeing each medium, and created a single, synchronous environment.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

During an interview with David Sylvester, the figurative painter Francis Bacon reflects, “I know that, in my case, I know what I want to do but don’t know how to bring it about. And that’s what I’m hoping accidents or chance or whatever you like to call it will bring about for me. So that it’s a continuous thing between what may be called luck or hazard, intuition and the critical sense. Because it’s only kept hold of by the critical sense, the criticism of your own instincts about how far this given form or accidental form crystallizes into what you want” (qt. Bacon, Sylvester 102).

Throughout this process, I have developed a profound awareness of the unknown - learning to settle into and delve within the unknown, relinquishing control, and allowing for intuition to guide me through the creative process. Francis Bacon beautifully and simply articulates the act of being within this unknown, for my negotiations among “critical sense”, “accident”, and “chance” are ones that brought me to this point in time now, as I reflect on the entirety of this project. There is a compelling notion that we must all know, always - we must plan, define, and frame our choices, belongings, and selves. However, as I learned to be within the unknown and allow for perceptive instinct to define the path of this project, I gradually defined and clarified my artistic choices.

Each one of us, Mike, Deepti, Christina, and I came into this project without knowing what lay before us. As a former varsity athlete, Mike had never been a part of a dance work before. Christina and I met at a dance festival the preceding summer and was in her first year, as a transfer student, at UMASS. Deepti and I had a past together since our sophomore year, but she just returned from a year abroad in France, and we hadn't seen each other for a year and a half. Through the collaborative nature of the project, we each developed our individual spirits within every aspect of this project. The final performance was, for us, both the culmination of our paths together as well as the departure of our paths together. Even though we will each have a recording of the performances, this dvd will never truly speak to the living essence of ourselves and our relationships with each other that manifested at that moment in time.

I believe that this is a testament to the inherent ephemerality of both our presences and of the live, human body. Over the course of this project, I have developed a heightened awareness of a body's vulnerability in live dance performance: the physicality of taking up, moving through, and breathing within space. As the video and sound component developed, I grew to realize that the transient state of our present, *real* selves was the true foundation and connecting thread among all of the technological components. Although I have confidence that the use of technology allowed for multiple, interesting ways of seeing the "real", I believe it was the impermanent facet of our live presences that captured the viewer. The touch of Mike's hand to Christina's face, the breath of pause when I hug Deepti, Deepti's focus when she turns to leave the stage - these live

moments cannot be re-created or captured through video. The video projection can start over and be viewed once more by simply pressing the 'play' button, but the live action could only be seen at that particular moment, on that particular weekend at the end of March. Deep within the unknown state, my intuition led me to what I did know, what was tangible - Mike, Deepti, Christina, and myself. Ultimately, as I reflect on all aspects and layers of this project, I have come to realize that beyond the technical manipulations, it is our distinct, present selves that carry the mysterious, fleeting impact of live performance work.



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