

## Abstract

### Dancing in Time: Embodied Engagements with Feminist and Queer Theory

My project springs from the years I have spent at Mount Holyoke College deepening my understanding of the world through simultaneous engagement with my dance practice and with feminist and queer theory. Dance has always been a way in which I create meaning for myself and synthesize knowledges produced through theory. Embodiment as a site of epistemology is a grounding truth in my work.

This thesis work is a collaborative research project, engaging with the work of others across space and time to think through the ways that my modern and postmodern dance practice creates space for queer futurities. Most significantly, my work is in conversation with a duet that Katherine Kain and I made collaboratively called *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* (2021), as well as with Katherine's thesis work *Pillars Remnant* (2020), and Barbie Diewald's *Just the Beams* (2018). Through the framework of these three rehearsal processes, I examine materiality, temporality, futurity, and queerness in three chapters. In the first chapter, I explain physicist Karen Barad's theory of actively drawing boundaries as the basis of any research project, and Donna Haraway's notion of vision as always mediated. I use these theories to engage with rehearsal notes and videos, and think about what each offers to the medium of dance. In the second chapter, I move to talking about the temporal intricacies of *Just the Beams* in particular, the material connections between past and present, and this work's relationships to settler colonialism. This chapter engages deeply with materiality alongside theorists like Haraway,

Samantha Frost, and Diana Taylor. In the final chapter, I write about the role of the audience in relation to the queer futurities enacted and embodied by the performers on stage.

My work follows in the traditions of feminist research because I center my personal experiences as evidence in a collective project of knowledge production about space, time, history, and their embodiments. My work specifically produces knowledge about dancing queer embodiments and futurities during a pandemic.

**Dancing in Time:  
Embodied Engagements with Feminist and Queer Theory**

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## INTRODUCTION:

This thesis is about my own modern and postmodern dance practice, and was written entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Being a dancer has been a major part of my identity and embodiment for almost all of my life, and the abrupt loss of collective in-person dance classes and performances in the spring of 2020 was a jarring shift in my dancing, and therefore my sense of self. Now, one year after the beginning of quarantine and social distancing in the United States, I still have not taken a dance class with another person in the same room as me. Though this loss is difficult, it is important to note that Covid has in many ways forced the dance world to rethink boundaries of accessibility that were previously thought to be unchangeable. Attending a dance class via Zoom at home is easier in many ways than going to a studio, and has made taking class more accessible to a wider range of people, especially in conjunction with the fact that many classes are now being offered at lower prices. Still, the pandemic has also had an equally devastating impact on the community I hold dear. It is always already difficult to write about dancing because the act of translating movement to words is not smooth or unproblematic, and writing about dance after an entire year of dancing in my living room while taking class via Zoom exacerbates that difficulty for me. It is heartbreaking to think about the loss of community that I am experiencing along with my other Mount Holyoke and Five College dancers, and it is hard to think about my embodied dance practice because what that even is has shifted so much since the beginning of the pandemic.

At the same time, however, as Covid forced distance between me and my friends and collaborators, it also served as a catalyst for creating new forms of intimacy. As much as Covid inhibited my processes of writing and dancing, it has also made this thesis possible. I have

framed my work through a duet that I created with my girlfriend Katherine Kain, as I write about a little further on. The creation and content of this duet is entirely connected to how Covid shifted our lives. Not only is it a dance that we created to be viewed on Zoom, already making it different from pre-Covid processes, but the possibility of me even being able to participate in a rehearsal process off-campus with Katherine would be much slimmer in a non-Covid spring semester because I would already be in process with other students on campus. Furthermore, the duet that Katherine and I made displays intimacy in a way that is specific to our relationship, and our intimacy was greatly influenced by the pandemic. Katherine and I spent six months apart during quarantine (she was in Utah, I was in Maine), and as a result we found closeness through texting and talking over the phone rather than interacting in person, where verbal communication is sometimes less central. I feel as though the distance that Covid created between us simultaneously brought us closer because we had to find new ways to communicate and to be together. This new intimacy is present in the work we created together. Covid makes itself known in various ways throughout this thesis, and has been a determining factor of my process of writing and dancing.

My project springs from the years I have spent at Mount Holyoke College (MHC) deepening my understanding of the world through simultaneous engagement with my dance practice and with feminist and queer theory. Dance has always been a way in which I create meaning for myself and synthesize knowledges produced through theory. Throughout my time dancing and learning at MHC, the connection between the dancing aspect and the gender studies aspect of my education became more and more clear to me. Now, how and what I have learned about feminist and queer theory is inextricable from their embodiments in my dance practice, and my dancing is always informed by and entangled with theory. Both disciplines teach me

about space and time, about the materiality of knowledge and history, and about queer embodiments. Both disciplines create the lens through which I move through my own queerness, and how I understand the relationships around me. I experience my own queerness as a multiplicity: ever-shifting and not fully knowable. In fact, in the context of this thesis, the language of “both” disciplines is misleading because I am working with necessarily entangled sites of knowledge production — dance and theory cannot be separated. Embodiment as a site of epistemology is a grounding truth in my work.

The idea of a “queer embodiment” is complex and layered. Embodiment as a center of knowledge and meaning-making is a concept that already queers the binary of body/mind. To call an embodiment queer, then, is redundant to a degree because embodiment is already doing the work of queering ontological binaries, as Karen Barad writes about in *Nature's Queer Performativity*. She writes, “Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime-mattering, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of ‘quantum entanglements’, which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’ ” (2012, p. 32). Matter comes to be through intra-actions with space and time, each both creating and being created by the other. Embodiments are necessarily queer then because bodies are phenomena of spacetime-mattering and therefore come to exist through undefineable, unbounded intra-actions. I use the term embodied queerness throughout my work because it best encapsulates the embodied nature of my queer identities particularly in the context of dance (though, of course, all identities are embodied). This term is purposefully repetitive to make clear the materiality of my queerness and how it influences my dancing. Additionally, I dance queer embodiments because I perform queer dances. Much dance within classical modern and ballet is characterized by a linearity in aesthetic and an emphasis on



finished product, a necessity in those forms that is of less concern or interest in queer dances where unknowing and unfinishing are accepted and wanted. I am dancing queer embodiments because I am a queer person dancing in queer dances, and yet I also understand that the label of queer has meaning beyond this.

This thesis work is a collaborative research project, engaging with the work of others across space and time to think specifically about the ways that my modern and postmodern dance practice creates space for queer futurities. Most significantly, my work is in conversation with a duet that Katherine Kain and I made collaboratively called *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* (2021), as well as with Katherine's thesis work *Pillars Remnant* (2020), and Barbie Diewald's *Just the Beams* (2018). I was a dancer in all of these works which informs my engagement with them as sites of theorization. Through the framework of these three rehearsal processes, I examine materiality, temporality, futurity, and queerness in three chapters.

The creation of *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* was the only rehearsal process that I participated in while writing this thesis that happened in person, in a studio. Without intending or anticipating it, this collaboration between Katherine and I came to frame my whole thesis. Being in rehearsals — where we conducted research about play, intimacy, and physicality as manifestations of our queerness — helped me to synthesize the writing I had been doing for my thesis. The process of making *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* highlights the dialogue of my research with Katherine's, and with longer histories of postmodern dance in the United States. By theorizing with the sometimes divergent transcriptions of our rehearsals, written separately by Katherine and myself, I examine writing as mediation and the complexity of engaging with evidence about bodily processes. Writing about dance, and examining the process of making a dance through writing, is an imperfect means of translation. There are not words for every

movement, nor can dances be transcribed in such a way where the writing is a perfect reiteration of the performed movement.

*swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* is a duet that is both Katherine's work and a collaborative work: it was presented under her name and draws from past works that she has made, and the structure of the work was conceptualized by Katherine, and at the same time it is a work that we made together, both contributing movement and ideas. Katherine is my girlfriend of a year and a half, and my friend and collaborator of three and half years. We danced together in Barbie Diewald's works in 2017 and 2018, and I danced in Katherine's student work in 2018 before dancing in her 2020 thesis piece.<sup>1</sup> Our relationship has a temporal murkiness and multiplicity, due to these layers of love and collaboration, that informs the way we relate to each other in the duet we made, and in our lives outside of this piece. The longevity of our dancing relationship, along with our simultaneous friend/partner dynamic, influences how we dance together and what sort of work we collaborate on. The temporality of my relationship with Katherine reflects much of the research I am engaging with throughout this thesis: creating and performing dance is characterized by complex temporal and historical threads that are entangled and embodied.

In *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, each dance is a discrete work of its own, and the dances range from 30 seconds to five minutes. I am using this same structure to organize my thesis. The body of this work consists of three chapters, as well as a conclusion, and I am thinking about each chapter as dances themselves. These dances are obviously connected in deep and complex ways, but, like the four dances in *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, they can also

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, this is not the first duet that Katherine and I have danced together. The first work we were in together was Barbie Diewald's *Heirloom* (2017), and Katherine and I did a duet where we performed the same phrase in unison at opposite corners of the stage. We had a duet in Diewald's *Just the Beams* (2018), this time next to one another as we performed the same phrase. In Cara Board's work *The Windows Don't Open* (2019) Katherine and I made a duet where we were in extremely close proximity, right next to each other or on top of one another, and almost always touching.

act as stand-alone works. Each of my dances in this thesis is distinct in structure and content, and though there are throughlines of my research, each is not entirely reliant on the context of the others. I am intentionally calling them dances because I do not (and cannot) view dance and writing as completely separate processes in the context of my work. Thinking of these chapters as dances allows me to highlight the way that this project has been mutually constituted through writing and dancing precisely because the writing and dancing are so reliant on one another. From a choreographic perspective, each chapter takes on a slightly different structure, as do each of the dances within mine and Katherine's duet. Each written dance of mine uses a structure specific to it to make my argument clear. The overall structure I am borrowing from *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* is a performative demonstration of the dialogue between dancing and writing, and between Katherine's work and my own. I insist that this disjointedness is not a failure<sup>2</sup> of meeting conventional standards but is rather a rejection of the requirement of linearity and finality in the construction of an argument in academic writing. The work of my thesis has been anything but linear, and the idea of constructing a body of work that is completely cohesive is antithetical to my work and process. An important aspect of this nonlinear disjointedness is the lateness to which *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* was introduced as a part of my work. Though that duet has come to be one of the most important sites of theorization and organization for my thesis, the rehearsal process was not anywhere near the beginning of this thesis. I began my thesis project in the fall of 2020, and Katherine and I began rehearsing in February of 2021. Instead of being a framework from the start, our duet serves as a re-framing and recontextualization that happened toward the end of my thesis project which I allow to inform and shape my thinking about what these written dances are.

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<sup>2</sup> And if it is a failure, what opportunities does failure provide? I think alongside Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* in my third dance.

The first chapter/dance, entitled “Embodied Research and the Mediation of Vision”, fully explores the research we conducted while creating *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops*, and also engages with *Pillars Remnant* and *Just the Beams* through the medium of video recordings. Through these dance pieces I work with Donna Haraway’s notion of vision as always mediated. Both the writings and the videos are a mediated way into the world of the pieces and I examine the specificities of each form of mediation. Katherine and I wrote transcriptions of the latter three rehearsals and the performance, and I wrote an additional detailed transcription of part of a phrase. These transcripts are an essential aspect of my understanding of the dialogue between writing and dance, and they both bring light to and obscure parts of the experience of dancing. I also use Donna Haraway’s conception of a boundary project, which she writes about in *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, to think about the written and recorded meditations of *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops*, *Pillars Remnant*, and *Just the Beams* as my objects of study. About boundaries, Haraway writes,

“...bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their *boundaries* materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not preexist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies. Siting (sighting) boundaries is a risky practice” (1988, p. 595).

The *particular* boundaries of my objects (these three dances) do not precede this project and my engagement with them as locations of knowledge, though, as dances created through research and collaboration, they are always already generative. I understand the creation of boundaries through Barad’s theory of agential cutting, which she writes about in *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter Comes to Matter* which I expand on more fully within the chapter. To create bounded objects to study, cuts must be made to create

distance between subject and object, and yet the positions of subject and object are not inherently ontological but rather are situational and ever-shifting. I use these objects as evidence to gain perspective about the three dance works I named, and to theorize about them from a place of separation while also understanding my own material entanglements with each dance.

In the next written dance, entitled “Ephemerality, Materiality, and the History of Spaces”, I move to talking about the temporal intricacies of dance performance, the material connections between past and present, and my dancing relationship to settler colonialism. This chapter engages deeply with materiality alongside theorists like Haraway, Samantha Frost, and Diana Taylor. I reject the notion that dance performances are singularly ephemeral, and I demonstrate how they instead occupy a complex and fascinating temporal existence that is embedded in the past, present, and future. The temporality of performance is a specific and visceral experience for me, and those experiences ground my thinking within the dance of this chapter. In this dance I also think about the studio theater at Mount Holyoke, where so much of my dancing has been located, and the particularity of the history of this space and its influences on me and those with whom I collaborated. I write about the construction of the studio theater when Kendall Sports & Dance Complex was built by the College in 1950, and I think about the longer and more general history of the geographical area that Mount Holyoke is situated in, and the distinct ways it was shaped by the project of settler colonialism.

In the final chapter, entitled “The Future and the Audience”, I write about the role of the audience in relation to the queer futurities enacted and embodied by the performers on stage. My conception of queer futurities contradicts linear heterosexual time, which relies on the assumption of a predictable future. The future in straight time<sup>3</sup> is organized around creating the conditions for a better world that children will grow up into, a future that never arrives (Edelman, 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> The term used by Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia* (2009).

This future also relies on heterosexual couples to create children who will grow up to replenish the workforce, ensuring the longevity of a capitalist economic and social order. A queer futurity is unpredictable, always in the process of becoming, cannot be fully defined or envisioned. I intentionally use queer “futurity” rather than queer “future” to emphasize this perpetual-becomingness. I borrow the term queer futurity from *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2019) by José Esteban Muñoz, and I explore the presence of the future in queer theory through this book in addition to *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) by Lee Edelman and *Cruel Optimism* (2011) by Lauren Berlant. Muñoz writes in relation to both Edelman and Berlant, engaging with their conception of a heterosexual future that fails queers, but rather than reject the future altogether, Muñoz envisions queerness as a futurity. The very practice of imagining a singular future as a predictable entity is an impossible task because repetitions of a thought are never exactly the same or truly repeatable, as I write about in my second dance. Therefore, the idea that a future can be produced to the same result, over and over, is already a fallacy because repetitions are always different from one another.<sup>4</sup> Futurity, on the other hand, embraces and highlights the impossibility of a reliable future, and instead engages with open possibilities of what could lie beyond the present.

Within this final chapter I then move to interrogating the construction of audiences in the tradition of theater in the West and the ways in which those constructions render audiences passive receivers of a message cultivated by the maker/performers, rather than an active part of the performance. In my conception, audiences are composed of human and nonhuman presences, and they necessarily influence and interact with performance. I write in this dance about *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops* and *Pillars Remnant* to illustrate and explore the concept of futurity: how we embodied queer futures in these pieces and the relationship between performers and

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<sup>4</sup> Butler (1991). *Imitation and gender insubordination*.

audience. My enactment of queer futurity in these two works is one that is created through my interactions with other dancers in the worlds we are collectively cultivating. The presence of the audience has a vital influence on the performances of these pieces, but my role as a dancer in these works was not focused on the experience of the audience. I also examine the effect that digital technologies, especially during Covid, have had on the autonomy of the audience. The ability to watch dance by means of a digital video grants audiences the ability to rewind / rewatch / fast forward, which shifts the temporality of performances. Furthermore, as the pandemic has endured, dance performances have moved to Zoom as the space of the theater which creates new relationships newly mediated by technology between audience and performers.

All of my work follows in the traditions of feminist research because I center my personal experiences as evidence in a collective project of knowledge production about space, time, history, and their embodiments. Feminist methodologies utilize storytelling and embodied knowledge (that which people know because they themselves experience it) to create knowledge about the world around us.<sup>5</sup> I specifically produce knowledge about dancing queer embodiments and futurities during a pandemic. I examine my own embodiment as the central source of knowledge about these topics through three written dances, three performed dances, and many more unnamed dances, small and large.

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<sup>5</sup> Hester, et. al. (2010). *Feminist epistemology and the politics of method: Surveying same sex domestic violence*.

## **DANCE ONE: Embodied Research and the Mediation of Vision**

In February of 2021 I began rehearsing with Katherine Kain because her work was being shown at a Work In Progress showing at School of Contemporary Dance and Thought (SCDT) in Northampton, Massachusetts. This process was just her and I creating a duet relating to both her research from her thesis process and my own thesis research. The process of creating this duet, which we ended up calling *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, was in many ways a short and compressed form of researching all the ideas that I am engaging with in this thesis. Our duet came to be out of years of dancing together — in classes, in works made by other people, and in Katherine's work — and out of our own romantic relationship. The lineages and histories of our dancing practices have become more and more intertwined in the three and a half years of knowing each other and that interconnectivity informs the work that we make. So much of the dancing that we have done together took place in the studio theater at Mount Holyoke. The specific boundaries and qualities of that space are present in the way that we move: the way we orient ourselves in spaces, the way we find contact with one another, our relationship to the floor are all related to and informed by the studios where we danced together. Our duet was created through interactions with the space in which we made it, which was a floor of marley located in the corner of a large warehouse room at the Northampton Center for the Arts, and thus our duet was created alongside the history that created Northampton on land that was historically stewarded by Nonotuck, Nipmuc, and Pocumtuc people. Our dancing is informed by the professors we shared, by classes and teachers that only one of us had, and by the larger context of modern and contemporary dance in the United States. We made our duet about ourselves and our relationship. The process of working together is a collaboration between the two of us and



also a collective project with spaces, people, times, and histories that are not distinctly named or currently present.

The rehearsal process of making a dance, through movement scores and phrases, is the means through which embodiment becomes epistemic. Dancers research through moving, making discoveries about bodies, space, and time. In our rehearsals, Katherine created prompts and scores<sup>6</sup> into which we moved in order to get at the heart of what it was that she wanted to show at SCDT: a queer dance about our relationship. As a means of capturing the rehearsal process, Katherine and I both transcribed our experiences of each rehearsal — what we did and how we felt about it. The process of writing about dance is really difficult because it is hard to capture an embodied experience into another medium, but I wanted both of us to do it so that I could use these transcriptions as research material. These rehearsal transcripts provide a particular framing of the rehearsal process. I asked Katherine to also transcribe each rehearsal as a way of providing multiple access points to the knowledge and material that we produced together during these few rehearsals. In these reports, the different perspectives that Katherine and I bring are made really clear, bringing light to aspects of embodiment that are difficult to sense when in rehearsal together. When I read Katherine's transcripts I can see how she makes dances and how she wanted this dance to go.

Framing our process by using self-written reports creates a particular epistemological framework. This practice of both of us separately writing a transcript of rehearsals provides a sense of how the both of us were feeling, and what we were thinking about while making our duet, and yet it also omits certain aspects of our collaboration and interactions. The dance itself

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<sup>6</sup> One score we used to make our duet is called the "body part game," a score that Katherine has used during other rehearsal processes and one that she learned from their friend and collaborator, Ky Woodward-Sollesnes. We used this score to make *lollipops*. In the body part game, we each write down ten body parts. Then we go down our list, one by one, and find a shape with our bodies that connects our respective body parts.

also, of course, is a capturing of feelings and thoughts, but the dance is only present in writing and thus the insights of the rehearsal notes give space for the dance to interject. It is difficult to convey interconnectivity to the level that it exists in the making of our duet through these separated writings. These writings also, to a degree, omit the physicality of dancing — the dance itself is less present in these reports. This is not to say that the transcriptions are not a physical act, because writing is of course physical, but neither of us transcribed specific movements themselves into our notes, aside from my transcription of *phrase*, I think because the act of translating movement into words is so difficult and tedious. Neither of us really outline the actual movement that we do or the phrases that make up the duet in our reports, and so this framework must be acknowledged as only a partial perspective, unable to capture the “whole” of our collaboration. I understand these insights and shortcomings of the particular medium of personal transcription through Karen Barad’s theory of agential cuts in *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward and Understanding of how Matter Comes to Matter*. She writes, “Agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in the enactment of a causal structure” (2008, p. 144). The material-discursive apparatuses that I am engaging with in this chapter are writing and digital videos. I use both of these forms to examine the role of my dancing embodiments in producing knowledge about queer futures and queer relationships. The written transcriptions of our rehearsals for *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* and the videos of *Pillars Remnant* and *Just the Beams* serve as a means through which I “cut” boundaries for this project. I must create boundaries within my research in order to study these rehearsals, while understanding that those boundaries are relative and mutable, rather than fixed or inherently true. I expand on this idea later in this chapter.

Evelyn about 2/25 rehearsal:

*We changed our plan from making one single sister piece for Katherine's thesis to making a bunch of small dances, still rooted in queerness/being gay/our relationship. We mapped out each dance that she wants to happen. Katherine's research centers on how queerness manifests in dance, and in this rehearsal it felt like it was becoming clearly evident in the movement we were making and the performance that Katherine is envisioning. We ate lollipops and thought about where the audience is for a Zoom performance. We did the big phrase from Katherine's thesis (Pillars) three times in a row and that was really hard. Through this embodiment we were getting at our relationship to one another, being together in a specific way that is not the usual way we relate to each other but is directly connected.*

*I felt extremely overwhelmed when trying to make a companion phrase for the main phrase. I feel like because it has been about a year since I have been in rehearsal with anyone, and a year since I have had to make a phrase for someone/something else, I do not know how to do it anymore. That part of my dancing practice has fallen completely to the side and it feels very scary and difficult to try and get it back.*

I never set choreography for the companion phrase to the main phrase. In the performance, I improvise around Katherine, creating movements in response to her phrase in real time.

Somehow, it was less scary for me to improvise than to create and set movement, even though it meant making something new every time we ran *phrase*. This dance, *phrase*, within the duet is an exploration of physicality and the connection between Katherine and I as we perform difficult and intense movement. It is distinctly flirtatious, as we use eye contact to drive each other through the phrase in an almost-but-not-quite competitive manner, and distinctly responsive, as

we improvise movement that complements the other person during the first half and alter our pacing during the unison in the second half.

Katherine about 2/25:

*I was feeling anxious, lost and confused about going into this rehearsal because I felt stuck in a cycle of the way I create work, which isn't bad but I am feeling like it is the easy way out I guess. I have started every process/piece I've made the past four years with the body part game which I like rediscovered first year. And last rehearsal felt like I was trying too hard to replicate the vibe of Pillars Remnant and I realized that it didn't feel fun or good, or representative of me and Evelyn's relationship to each other and to like the current moment or whatever.*

*I also realized that I couldn't hardly attempt to answer or explore some of the ideas I outlined above in four rehearsals while also creating and setting movement. I thought about trying to create an improvisational score, but that didn't feel interesting either.*

*Right before I left for rehearsal, I saw the tootsie roll pops and thought about using those as a prop because they would be fun and flirty and like about mouths without making out. I didn't know how to center like a whole 10 minute dance around them or like incorporate them into a dance that was that length, so I decided fuck it we are making a series of mini dances that can be anywhere from 30 seconds to 5 minutes.<sup>7</sup>*

This transcription is especially illustrative of Katherine's compositional process — adapting her conception of and ideas for this piece in relation to what is most interesting and exciting, and what is most relevant to us. In rehearsals, we would dance through phrase work we both already

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<sup>7</sup> This structural decision also came later, after we had already had one rehearsal. The restructuring of my thesis in regards to this duet also came at a later stage in my writing.

knew and improvisational scores to try and address our questions about horizons, materiality, lineages, and intimacy. We kept what felt exciting and left behind was what no longer producing knowledge. Katherine's list that follows addresses these questions:

- *Pre-dancing discussion in rehearsal:*
  - *Pillars phrase dance*
  - *Shift settle body part dance - with lollipops?*
  - *Hannah/Tamar & Casey knees<sup>8</sup>*
  - *Dance as active research/embodied research*
  - *Dance lineage - anchors past to present*
  - *Materiality*
  - *toetag/hopscotch<sup>9</sup>*
- *We worked on:*
  - *Blow pop dance incorporated with body part game → improvisational, say 3,2,1 and then our next body part connection out loud and choreograph/sculpt it together in the moment<sup>10</sup>*
  - *Me on top of Evelyn's knees w/blow pop and I Wanna Make Out at the Gay Club*
  - *Phrase → tried it three ways: unison, improvisational, mirroring<sup>11</sup>*
- *For next time:*
  - *Underwater circley duet - horizons*
  - *See where toe tag can fit - could be a glimpse. Maybe between body part tableaux?*
  - *Maybe another sculpture for I Wanna Make Out at the Gay Club?*
  - *Review big phrase*

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<sup>8</sup> This is an image taken from Katherine's thesis. Hannah, Tamar, and Casey are the other three dancers in *Pillars Remnant*.

<sup>9</sup> Katherine researched play in her thesis and incorporated it into *Pillars* in two explicit ways, while also letting playfulness inform the tone of our rehearsals and movement. Katherine made a score for us where we had to create a phrase shifting our weight as if we were playing hopscotch while traveling across the studio. In *Pillars* we also played toe tag: a tag game where everyone is "it" and is trying to tap each others' toes.

<sup>10</sup> We performed an improvisational score within the duet, rather than using it as a jumping-off point to create set choreography, as a way of researching *while* performing to disrupt the idea of performance as always finished or polished.

<sup>11</sup> We both knew that we wanted to incorporate the big phrase from Katherine's thesis into this duet and so she had us try it in three different ways. When we showed it at WIP we did the improvisational version and the unison version.

Evelyn about 3/4 rehearsal:

*Today's rehearsal felt familiar and productive. Familiar in the sense that it felt like a rehearsal I might have gone to pre-Covid, and productive in the sense that we made a whole new phrase to Rosie Tucker's "Gay Bar." I was nervous to make a phrase with Katherine because I am not practiced in creating material and I am not studying dance at school in the same way that she did. I am not going to school to learn how to make dances. Also Katherine is so good at it that it intimidates me.*

*Whenever I dance with Katherine it reminds me of how significant she has been in my dancing practice and how much I have learned from her. She knows how to take up space and that is so cool, and she uses her head and arms in ways that I always want to steal from. I've always noticed that in class with her.*

*We returned to phrase work from "Cubbyhole Snapshot" which, turns out, remains more in my muscle memory than I was aware of — I really remember the solo that I did at the beginning of that piece. This duet is turning into an homage to all the dancing that Katherine and I have done together, and all the dances that she made during college. The history/lineages between the two of us are becoming more and more intertwined.*

Nervousness is a theme throughout my transcriptions. I feel nervous often — before meetings, before presentations, before class, before going on stage — and my nervousness in rehearsals, though usually present, was exacerbated by Covid because I felt out of practice. I do not, however, feel nervous about dancing itself because I am confident in my abilities as a mover. Though I mention nerves in almost all of the transcriptions, my actual dancing is not a location of nervousness for me.

Katherine about 3/4:

- *Gameplan:*
  - *Me pee and you warm up*
  - *Make a swirly duet*
  - *Look over and review old videos*
- *For next time:*
  - *Improvisation for the end of swirly*
- *Dances we have:*
  - *Blowpop improvisation (body part game)*
  - *I Wanna Make Out at the Gay Club sculpture with hats (0:34-1:01 - 27 seconds)*
  - *Phrase (1:48)*
  - *Swirly (3 minutes)*

*Ok so in this rehearsal, we made a swirly duet that was SO fun to make. We started off just each doing like a small string of moves, like one to three moves, and then did it again and edited it and build it like that. And then we added things we knew, like Evelyn's initial big phrase from Cubbyhole Snapshot. And then we reviewed what we already knew!*

Evelyn about 3/11 rehearsal:

*Today we had rehearsal after spending the day outside with Aggie, Izzy,<sup>12</sup> and Barbie to work on Aggie's capstone, which made me tired and made both Katherine and I not really want to dance in our own rehearsal. We started by watching each section and going over notes for how we want them to change and then marking through things, and then adding on to swirly. The more we make, the easier it is for me to be able to feel like I can contribute and like I know how to make contributions. Spending a whole day with dancers was surreal because I never dance with other people anymore, but it also felt really normal and familiar because it is a way of relating to people that I am comfortable*

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<sup>12</sup> Aggie Johnson and Izzy Kalodner are both dance majors in the Mount Holyoke Class of 2021, and are good friends of ours.

*in, and that comfort extended to rehearsing with Katherine. I feel excited to show what we have this weekend.*

*In this rehearsal we talked about how each thing that we had made or that we were using was a dance in itself. We called this dance “swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops” because each of those four titles is the title of an individual small dance. Katherine was saying how she does not want it to seem like four sections of one dance that are messily linked together, but that each section is the dance. Each section begins and ends. The pieces are obviously linked, both because we made them all in the same month and because they all draw on past and current research, but also they each provide something new, and cultivate their own particular worlds.*

Making a duet composed of four short dances created new possibilities for beginning and ending within the work. Rather than trying to choreograph transitions between sections, we just let each dance end either to a sound cue or when we reached the end of movement. Beginnings and endings were casual, brought about by what the movement called for, which created a disrupted temporality. There isn't a linear beginning, middle, and end to our duet because it is four dances in one that each have timelines of their own.

Katherine about 3/11:

*This was the day that was so incredibly beautiful that we spent with Aggie, Izzy Kalodner, and Barbie, and once we got to rehearsal we were like drunk and lazy off of being in the sun. It was glorious. We ate apples outside before rehearsal and it was very sweet. In rehearsal, my gameplan was not executed well for the first 30-45 minutes but then after I stopped being lazy, we reviewed the phrase, quickly reviewed the lollipops section, and*



*most importantly, added onto the swirly section. I LOVE what we added onto swirly.<sup>13</sup> We added a bit more movement before coming down to the floor and I sit on Evelyn and I just really love that part. I like that it looks pretty gay and intimate but also it just is like movement and adjusting to fit together. It can be whatever you want it to be. And then at the very end we had to HURRY and film everything because there were folks who were shooing us out of the space.*

Eating the apples before rehearsal was just as important as dancing in rehearsal. We spoke about what we wanted to get done in rehearsal and what we had done in past rehearsals. Barbie calls this “triscuits” — the talking that happens before/during/after rehearsals that inform the piece. These conversations always make their way into the process of creating work because they shape how the dancers and collaborators relate to one another, which then cultivates relationships within the resultant dance.

Evelyn about 3/14 performance:

*We performed “swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops” on Sunday in the workroom at Northampton Center for the Arts where we had been rehearsing. We invited other people from our pod to come, and Barbie was also there because Katherine and Sienna were performing a draft of a work they have been doing with Barbie since September 2020. I was surprised that I was not that nervous to perform because I have not since last March, and because Katherine was really nervous. I think the way the audience existed really changed my experience. We were dancing for four people in the space with us, all of*

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<sup>13</sup> *swirly* is the only dance that we made from scratch, except for about three seconds of movement that we borrowed from a phrase that Katherine choreographed on me as a solo in her 2018 student work. *swirly* feels significant because it is so new to us and because it was created specifically within these rehearsals.

*whom I have various close relationships with, and I think that put pressure on me.<sup>14</sup>*

*Sienna was sitting right on the corner of the marley floor so she could reach the music and I didn't look at her once. I can't acknowledge the audience when I'm performing because it throws me off, so the rest of the audience being on Zoom in some ways took a lot of the pressure off.*

*While performing I felt excited, out of breath, joyful, and powerful. This dance is such a reference to Katherine's other works that knowing there were people watching who would get the references made me smile.<sup>15</sup> This was just a work in progress showing so it didn't even matter when we messed up, not that it ever really matters that much in Katherine's work. That tangible, visceral knowledge that there were people watching was present in my performance though which is a feeling that I obviously have not really had since the 2020 senior concert. I've missed it.*

Katherine about 3/14:

*Leading up to the performance was hell. I was so beyond nervous. However, once we got into the space and started warming up and running through everything we had, I was feeling so excited and secure in the work we were showing. Dancing with Evelyn made me feel so at ease and having their energy to feed off of was essential. In our time "onstage" together, all that mattered was that we were dancing together and having a blast doing it. Sharing it with Myla, Alta, Barbie, and Sienna was also so important to me. The space felt so warm, held, and charged with their energies and support. It was*

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<sup>14</sup> Performing works for a decided audience changes the way I dance because I feel that there are suddenly new expectations placed on me and my dancing. This is not a value judgment of those expectations (I love performing) but more of a noticing.

<sup>15</sup> Once again, bringing the work to an audience who will respond with words adds a layer to my own experience and enjoyment of dancing.

*simply so fun to perform. And to get exhausted. And to sweat together. And to feel seen as queer and be seen desiring. Oh my god. Part of why I love parties is like obviously looking hot and dancing and having fun with my friends, but being seen as desirable and being seen while actively desiring is of interest to me. Leo rising I guess. The only part of this dance that was especially sexual (and only really scratching the surface) was the Make Out Duet, and I guess the end of swirly when I have my crotch in Evelyn's face kind of. But just dancing together is incredibly erotic and also extremely intimate and sweet to me. Like doing the phrase is fucking hot. So yeah, desire. And intimacy. And sharing that with others.*

Being seen as desiring/desirable is part of the work of this piece for Katherine (and for me, but I was not thinking about it so clearly). The opportunity to perform for an audience who will give feedback, and to be seen in that way, brings an element of excitement to the themes of the work that is not present when Katherine and I are dancing in a studio without other humans.

Transcription of *phrase*:

*The phrase begins with the right leg turning in toward the left before quickly turning out and moving towards second position, while the right arm snakes upwards through the left, which is held in something like first position. We suspend for a moment before dropping our weight down into the ground on a bent right leg. From there we jump onto the left leg while the right flicks in parallel attitude and we swipe our arms back. We land on the left leg and bring the right through to be in front of the left, standing on relevé with our arms lifted and bent, palms facing the ceiling. The right arm circles as we cross the left leg in front of the right, suspending as we fall into a crouched second position. We*

*chug backwards two times while the arms, which are held out from our sides, do small circles. We hop on the left leg to shift our weight to run in a wide circle, slower at first and then picking up speed and energy as we come around to the right diagonal. The right leg kicks forward with a flexed foot, the left leg is bent, and arms cross one another and move outward, and the head is shaking in a “no” gestural motion. The momentum brings this movement forward and we land on the right foot to immediately shift our weight to the left foot and ronde de jambe the right leg while the right arm sweeps down toward the ground. We shift our weight onto the right leg as it bends and we sweep our left arm across our bodies so that both arms are bent and the left is on top of the right. Then we swing our whole bodies around, led by the momentum of the right leg that we swipe through the air. We chassé to the back left corner and we push the arms behind us. We step onto the left and bring our right leg through into the air in front of us and then shift our torso so the leg is behind in arabesque.<sup>16</sup> The right leg behind us bends to come through and développés through to the front right diagonal as we push the arms out and lean away from the leg, our head tilting back.*

These transcriptions embody the dialogue between the duet Katherine and I made and the process of writing about this research here in this thesis. I use embody purposefully to highlight the corporeal nature of writing. These notes are another extension of our embodied research.

Minds are not separate from bodies — there is no such thing as an unembodied knowledge

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<sup>16</sup> Something I am aware of in this transcription is the seemingly endless number of phrases that could be created from the words that I use here that would be different from the phrase I transcribed. Though I tried my hardest to accurately transcribe the phrase in detail, there is no way to perfectly translate postmodern movement into words. Other kinds of dance, like ballet and old-school hip-hop, have names for every move, but this is not true for post/modern dance. There are forms of notation, but the use of these sorts of transcriptions have largely fallen to the wayside as video documentation has become more available, and material can be recorded and saved through digital videos.

practice. Dancing is epistemic and writing is corporeal.<sup>17</sup> Dancing with Katherine during our four rehearsals brought a new clarity to my writing process because it allowed me to explore things I had been thinking about but had no embodied way-in. Writing about dance is always difficult for me, and it has been especially difficult during Covid because I had not been in rehearsals with other people until this duet. The rehearsal process that is described in this collection of notes and transcriptions is part of the conversation between dancing and writing that builds and describes my experience. This conversation is not just a superficial relationship but a mutual construction of the dance itself, and of this writing. A dialogue is constructed through exchange, one person (or something other than a person) responding to the other, making meaning in relation to one another. Dancing with Katherine allowed me to dance the queer embodiments and futurities that I had been writing about for my thesis. In *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops*, we mapped our relationship as it exists right now (loving, desiring, laughing, dancing) and also as it could exist somewhere else. Eating a lollipop becomes a new sexual act. Performing *phrase* in its intense physicality becomes a mode of flirtation, intimacy, and desire. Creating and performing *swirly*, as the only dance within the duet that was entirely new, set choreography, felt like a dream-like exploration of being in love — love that occurs somewhere in the future, post-Covid and perhaps further than that. Writing about the rehearsals allowed me to begin to engage with writing's response to the epistemic offerings that came from making *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops*. The lack of similarity in our rehearsal notes (and the wonderful moments of crossover) is an example of clarity that writing offered to this rehearsal process because it highlighted our different experiences of making the work together.

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<sup>17</sup> Another illustration of the connection between my writing and dancing is the way that I use movement when I am writing. My roommate and best friend Myla often makes fun of me for constantly moving and gesticulating as I write, but the only way that I know how to make sense of ideas is to *literally* move through them.

My own research has become inextricable from Katherine's and entangled in a multitude of ways, and within multiple temporalities. Her thesis was published in 2020, following a rehearsal process from September 2019 into March 2020. I was engaging with it then as a member of the cast of her piece. When I was in rehearsals with her in the 2019-2020 school year, my own thinking and movement research influenced her work as she created *Pillars* around myself and the other three dancers. Our bodies and our own research came into the process of making Katherine's thesis. Now as I conduct my own research and as I am writing this, it has become clear how being involved in *Pillars Remnant* allowed me to think through queerness, queer temporality and futurity, and materiality in an embodied way. Doing the work of Katherine's thesis was the beginning of doing the work of my own thesis. Now I am theorizing alongside her written thesis, *Vastening*, as well as being in rehearsals with her where she is conducting research adjacent to her thesis and I am using rehearsal transcripts for my own research and thinking. This entanglement of our projects, through time and in multiple spaces, aligns with feminist modes of research and collaboration. Feminist research is conducted collectively through time and space. In this feminist conception, research can occur in academia, in art projects, in relationships, and in community with one another. Knowledge production is not limited to the bounds of hegemonic research — knowledge also includes embodied practices like dance. Rehearsing with Katherine was the mode through which we understood vastness, horizons, disorientation, queer intimacy and play, all of which were the foundations for Katherine's thesis and the beginning ideas for our new duet. As we made this new work, what we found to be true in the world of the piece was established through our research interacting with each other and with the larger context of knowledges that we are privy to (feminist pedagogy, dance studies, queer theory, etc). This collaborative knowledge project aligns with feminist

conceptions of research and knowledge production as collective. Feminist researchers are always in dialogue with others, through time and space. As I have said before, a dance work in the United States is a project that interacts epistemologically and materially with other dancers and choreographers in other times and places. My deep connection to Katherine's thesis work is an extension of feminist research, as this thesis is so clearly in dialogue with hers. The dialogue that we have between our two works spans multiple forms of knowledge making, from writing and reading to rehearsing and performing together, and spans at least two years across places in the United States and most specifically the Pioneer Valley.

In traditional modes of academic research, the person conducting research must be separate from that which is being studied in order to produce objective information. A scientist understands their separation from the petri dish or the salt marsh, a doctor observes and examines their patient, a traditional ethnographer is different from the culture that they are studying. This idea of separation, however, is one that is inherently flawed because the position of complete separation from an object of study is unattainable, as Donna Haraway illustrates in *Situated Knowledges*. Haraway writes, "Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (1988, p. 583). Using videos and transcripts as objects of study is a particular means through which I am gathering information and contextualizing my research. I do not purport to be separate from my objects of study, especially because I am so multiply entangled with the dances that I am referencing. I cannot fully separate myself from my project but I also understand that the scientist also cannot be separated entirely from their own research projects, nor is the ethnographic eye one that is "objective" simply because it is situated outside of the culture being studied.

This collection of writing allows for another way in to the process of creating *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops* which came to be the grounding embodiment for this work. This duet, however, comes largely from *Pillars Remnant*, which was the last work that Katherine made before our duet. *swirly* also comes in part from *Just the Beams*, which is an important work in the history of mine and Katherine's dancing relationship. My entanglement with both pieces but with *Pillars Remnant* in particular occurs on multiple levels. At the time of the creation and performance of the works, my perspective of the work was one from inside, as a performer of the work and a collaborator in its creation. This involvement is really important for me and my conceptions of queer temporality and queer futurity as I see those things as rooted in my experiences of rehearsing and performing. I am viewing performances of myself and thinking about those experiences to make larger connections to theory. Engaging with these two works as research objects was very different than creating the duet with Katherine because they are works that were already made and performed. Therefore, the object of my study is no longer present in rehearsals (or in the specific rehearsals that led up to the 2018 Fall Faculty Concert and the 2020 Senior Capstone Concert). Consequently, part of my research and engagement, with *Just the Beams* and *Pillars Remnant*, is watching the digital video recordings. Using video as a means of examining these two works therefore requires critical engagement with the medium of digital videos.

In *Situated Knowledges* (1988), Donna Haraway writes about the mediation of vision and the fallacy of a "gaze from nowhere." She writes, "I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (p. 581). All vision is embodied therefore all vision is coming from somewhere that has a particular positionality. Engaging with



works that I performed in through watching a video recording of them produces a new perspective for me. Working with the particular form of mediated vision that is created through the use of a camera requires certain questions to be asked: what specific position is the camera producing? What aim does it have in creating an objective lens for viewing? What are the histories and traditions that produce this illusion of objectivity? What does it lose? What does it make? How do these recordings of performance try and reproduce an outside view, or try and pretend it is unmediated? As Haraway shows us, there is no vision or experience that is not mediated in some way. She writes, “The instruments of visualization in multinationalist, postmodernist culture have composed these meanings of disembodiment. The visualizing technologies are without apparent limit” (p. 581). I am writing about the particular mediation viewing of dance performance produced through digital recordings, but viewing dance in a theater, a park, or any other live showing is also mediated through the environment and the person viewing the performance. Haraway (1988) writes that *all* vision and *all* means of seeing are technological, including the organic human eye (p. 583). Watching a performance with the naked eye is also an engagement with the work through visualizing technology.

The video of *Pillars Remnant* is a wide shot of the stage taken from the very back of the audience. The whole stage is shown for most of the work except for when the camera zooms in on smaller movement or duets. At the beginning of the video of *Pillars* there is a long moment of stillness. Hannah is the only dancer moving, swaying slightly in all directions with her feet planted. I remember in rehearsals remarking at how far forward Hannah could tilt into the front of her feet. In the video, however, this movement is very hard to detect as the camera is situated so far away from the dancers on stage. This positioning of the camera is a particular choice made by the cameraperson, along with the choreographer of the piece, to re/enact a certain position of

viewing. Being a member of an audience provides a lot of range of perspectives and choices for each audience member. The experience of sitting front and center is different from being situated on the right side of the house, or in the very back, etc. When a performance is recorded, the camera is placed in one area and stays there the whole time. The question must be asked — what specific perspective is the camera trying to produce? The way that the camera is positioned to encompass the whole stage is a particular choice dictated by the general want for a filmed performance to mimic the experience of viewing a live performance as a member of the audience. This camera positioning reflects what Haraway names as the “view from nowhere” as an attempt to produce a view of the performance of *Pillars* seemingly without the mediation or framing of the camera. Its positioning at the back of the theater, capturing the whole of the stage is not only a means to attempt to best capture the work in its entirety, but it is also reproducing the idea that there is an entirety that can be captured, purely and without mediation. It is important for me to establish that the camera’s viewpoint for the recording of the 2020 Senior Capstone Concert was one that was not given much thought because the concert was put together within 24 hours of Mount Holyoke announcing it was closing for the rest of the spring semester due to Covid. There was no time for choreographers to arrange a different camera set-up for their piece, even if that was something they would have perhaps wanted. It is not coincidental, however, that the default view that was established for the hasty filming of this concert was one that appeared to replicate a position where the whole stage could be seen and the work could be taken in wholly. This attempt to create a video of the whole work returns to Haraway’s point about the view from nowhere that allegedly creates a viewpoint for objective viewing, removed from the subjectivity of personhood. The video of *Pillars Remnant* is, too, playing into this idea of objective, unmediated vision.

Cameras also mediate vision in more discernible ways. Viewing dance through a camera also allows for the possibility of being able to zoom in and out from the performers. This produces a certain idea of closeness to the performers that is an experience not generally attainable in a proscenium performance. This positioning of the camera creates and mediates any viewing of the work and creates a new sort of performance in and of itself. The concept that watching dance by means of a video recording is not the same as watching dance in-person is of course true — it is a different medium and therefore a different experience. That being said, there is a certain sentiment among dancers and dance theorists that watching dance live is the only “true” way to experience dance and that recordings can never do dance justice.<sup>18</sup> This argument is predicated on the idea of a “pure movement”, unmediated and true to what the choreographer had in mind.

The creation of my own object of study requires me to separate myself from this work in some way, even though I am entangled with it in a multiplicity of ways. By using videos of *Pillars Remnant* and *Just the Beams*, I am creating an object of study that is separate from what resides in my body. I have remaining muscle memories of both of these pieces, but material traces are not substantial enough to document processes of creating dance works. I could perform fragments of these works, phrases or gestures, but I could not re-enact these pieces from top to finish without referencing the video. Now, one year away from *Pillars Remnant* and over two years from *Just the Beams*, the videos themselves somewhat replace my muscle memory with

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<sup>18</sup> This notion is now having to face the impossibility of requiring the only “true” dance to happen in person in the face of Covid-19 which has made gathering an audience for a performance mostly implausible. Covid has deeply altered the way that dance is made and dispersed during this time, and conceptions of audience is part of that big shift. I have attended a few Five College Dance performances in the 2020-2021 year, and at each of these performances some dancers interacted with their camera (which is functioning as the “audience”) in new and interesting ways that would not be available in the same way in a traditional performance. Furthermore, the requirement for in person attendance in order to “truly” experience a work is a barrier for those who have disabilities that may prevent them access, always or on occasion, from such spaces, and a barrier to anyone because access is always limited by price, distance, child care, etc.

visual memories of each work. The process of creating distance, through video, from the works I was a part of creating is an attempt at creating feminist objectivity, that which Haraway (1998) writes about. Feminist objectivity does not erase the particular subjectivities of the person who is conducting the research. Instead, those subjectivities — a person's particular *situatedness* within material identities — into the center of the project create a lens of studying that is produced *through* positionality. I acknowledge that my participation and collaboration in these dance works makes my knowledge about the dances and their resonances “subjective” and it is indeed that subjectivity that bolsters my legitimacy as a researcher.

I wrote earlier about the boundary project of mine and Katherine's transcriptions of *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*. My engagement with the videos of *Pillars Remnant* and *Just the Beams* is also a specific boundary project. I use these videos as my object of study to create separation within the world of the dances, a process which involves what Karen Barad calls an “agential cut” in *Posthumanist Performativity*. Though I am separating my object of study from myself in a certain way, I also understand that I am always entangled with the works, and that making a particular “cut” only partially disentangles myself from the material object. Barad writes,

“A specific intra-action (involving a specific material configuration of the ‘apparatus of observation’) enacts an *agential cut* (in contrast to the Cartesian cut — an inherent distinction — between subject and object) effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object.’...Crucially then, intra-actions enact *agential separability* — the local condition of *exteriority-within-phenomena*. The notion of agential separability is of fundamental importance, for in the absence of a classical ontological condition of exteriority between observer and observed, it provides the condition for the possibility of objectivity” (Barad, 133).

Agential separability acknowledges that the object itself also has an impact on the action of cutting — subject, object, and cut are all working with one another actively. The creation of an object of study for my project is slightly different from projects that Barad might conduct as a quantum physicist, but nevertheless her point is still valuable in my own construction of this particular boundary project. I am creating this exteriority-within-phenomena, because although I am entirely embedded in the phenomena (as a dancer in these works), I am finding a way to distance myself by using videos and writing to create the “condition[s] for the possibility of objectivity,” and through this relative objectivity I make discoveries about my practice.

Whenever I watch videos of myself dancing in works, I almost always only watch myself. Part of this watching is an exercise of self-critique where I notice sections of the work where I could have danced bigger, smaller, more intricately, or whatever other judgement I make about my dancing in that moment. In *Pillars Remnant*, I notice that in the phrase (which became *phrase*) towards the end I could have exerted more control over my limbs to make the movement look cleaner and sharper. This critique is perhaps not logical, since my dancing looks “messy”<sup>19</sup> because the movement is so tiring and because of the sudden stress that Covid had placed on our dancing, but it is an important finding of my engagement. I also watch the video of *Pillars Remnant* to reminisce upon the process of making the work, especially right now because Covid has made in-person rehearsals and performances essentially impossible. During a section of the work called “sculpture garden”, I can clearly hear my dear friend Kate Turner laughing at the intentionally gargoyle-like faces that we are making on stage. Not only does hearing her laugh pull at my heartstrings, but it also makes me understand how we as dancers are being received

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<sup>19</sup> Katherine theorizes in her written thesis about how the phrase appears as a failure in *Pillars* because she was not able to fully explain how she wanted me and Hannah to dance — we were not dancing as vastly as she imagined. Rather than have this failure be a negative in her dance, however, Katherine embraces this failure as queer. She writes, “My failure to accurately articulate vastening and my dancers’ failure to meet the depth of my new discovery resulted in a quality of movement that was much more interesting and closely situated to my research” (2020, p. 20).

and what the audience is getting from the work. When watching the video of *Pillars Remnant*, Katherine has remarked that it sounds like there is a laugh track during sculpture garden. Though we are making silly faces, and facial expressions of any kind are generally surprising in a postmodern dance work, we did not expect that the audience would have such a boisterous reaction to these facial expressions. By engaging with the video, I learn about myself as a dancer and about the reactions of the audience, knowledge that I do not have access to in my memory alone.

## **DANCE TWO: Ephemerality, Materiality, and the History of Spaces**

This second chapter is distinctly choreographic<sup>20</sup> in the sense that I use repetition as a compositional choice. In dance pieces, repetition is used often as a choreographic tool: it can ground the viewer in the logic of the work, or perhaps be disorienting, or create a dramatic, building effect. In this chapter, I use repetition to make clear what I am saying and to reinforce my argument. Towards the end, I move away from the repetitive structure of the beginning, and bring new ideas to the center in relation to what I had built in the previous sections. The logic of this dance follows clear threads, but the ending takes on new content to expand the compositional logic.

### **The Myth of Ephemerality:**

In my experiences performing as a dancer, the timeline of a performance has always been somewhat mysterious, and always very visceral. The experience of performing a work feels like a multiplicity of temporalities. For me, time often moves really quickly while performing, and I feel surprised when I reach the end of a work, and yet moments on stage and certain sections within the work often feel very long. Moments within the piece feel disconnected from one another, and my memory of the performance is often not linear. I am reminded of the idea of “being present” — this idea of heightened awareness of one’s actions and surroundings — which feels like both a true and an untrue way of describing the visceral sensations of the temporality of performing. “Being present” implies being *in* the present moment in a very deep way, which is often very true: I feel hyper-aware of my relationships to the other dancers and the ways that we

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<sup>20</sup> Though the others are too, of course. Composition and choreography are intertwined, and are one and the same in my work.

connect within the performance. At the same time, however, the idea of “being present” limits the ways of describing the experience. While performing I am also calling on rehearsals, other performances, and other experiences that happened in the same location as the performance. To put this in tangible perspective, my classes and performances at Mount Holyoke happen in the same space, both occurring in the studio theatre. Therefore, the multitude of ways of relating to other dancers in that space act as influences in the moment of performance. Performing is a moment of being present and being more than present.

The temporality of performance is an integral part of theorizing around performance, of the experience of viewing performance, and of the act of performing itself. In this context, “performance” is referring to a specific, “staged” act (staged being in quotations because of course not all performances occur on a physical stage). The Oxford Dictionary (n.d) defines performance as “an act of staging or presenting a play, concert, or other form of entertainment.” I am making this distinction clear because as Diana Taylor writes in *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2007), the word performance does not have a singular meaning and cannot escape its entanglement from the theoretical concept of performativity. Though this inherent connection is an important one, and performativity informs performance and embodiment in important, material ways, I want to make it clear that, in this section, I am not referring to the theory of performativity that comes from poststructuralism, which refers to the ways in which the process of naming creates realities. Performative acts (whether linguistic or otherwise) make and remake meaning, producing something that comes into being through the performative act. Of course, performance and performativity are not unrelated, either, as acts of performance also produce knowledge that inform and create realities. Taylor writes that the word performance is “a term simultaneously connoting a process, a praxis,



an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world” (2007, p. 15). The fact that all of these ways of meaning-making are attached to the word performance is important because it highlights that the specific act of *performing* is always related to knowledge production, transmitting information, and intervening in the world.

As I said earlier, so-called “live” performances are always temporal acts: they occur at a particular time, in a particular place, and eventually they end. I put “live” in quotation marks because calling something a “live performance” suggests that other forms, such as visually recorded performances, are something other than live or living, which is not true. Recorded performances or virtually attended performances have lives of their own as well. The particular temporality of a “live” performance is remarkable because these sort of performances happen on the performer’s time rather than the audience’s; while the audience for a painting can take as long as they like to absorb it, or the audience for a poem can reread it, the audience for a “live” performance only has what is occurring in front of them. This being said, performances are not solely rooted in the present moment. As Taylor writes, “Debates about the ‘ephemerality’ of performance are profoundly political. Whose memories, traditions and claims to history disappear if performance lacks the staying power to transmit vital knowledge?” (2007, p. 5). Performance, as an embodied practice and one that is rooted in the present, is often discredited for being a location of insubstantial knowledge production because it does not abide by Western logocentric logic. Logocentrism is a Western principle, present in the traditions of science and philosophy but which permeates elsewhere, that holds written language as the ultimate way in which truths about the world can be expressed and preserved. This need for the written word is hyper-present in academia for students, where progress of learning must almost always be demonstrated through a piece of writing, and for professors — the phrase “publish or perish”

comes to mind. Logocentrism and written language has also been a colonial tool used to delegitimize the validity of indigenous cultures whose languages are not written, and to which the idea of logocentrism runs directly counter. The imposition of writing onto these cultures was a means of colonizing language and erasing ways of producing and passing on knowledge that did not involve writing. Dance performance intervenes in the necessitation of language by situating its research, relationships, and product somewhat<sup>21</sup> outside of written language.

Logocentrism has to do, however, with more than just the centrality of written language in the Western world. The power of language has as much to do with the importance of presence in speaking and writing. The prioritization of writing, though central in many aspects to Western culture, must also always contend with the fact that its author is not present. Writing is considered passive or dead exactly because the writer is not present, whereas orality has an active and present speaker. Speaker presence is often privileged as being the sole means of authoritative presence — we see this evidenced in the way that authoritative figures address peoples. For example, I am thinking of the State of the Union Address where The President must be present, physically, to give the address or it would not have the same power and effect. Writing, in order for it to seem authoritative or true, must also purport that it has presence. Logocentrism as a concept, then, denies oral linguistic traditions as legitimate forms of meaning making, while also relying on the text having the “presence” of a speaker to reinforce its authoritative truthfulness.<sup>22</sup> I am interested in this contradiction. I am arguing that performances are both hyper-present and yet not ephemeral — their temporalities exist in the duality of being on the performer’s time, as I said earlier, while also being necessarily tied to times outside of the

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<sup>21</sup> I say somewhat because it is essentially impossible to escape logocentrism entirely in a colonized, Western culture.

<sup>22</sup> I take the concept of logocentrism from Jacques Derrida, who penned the term in his book *Of Grammatology* which was translated into English by Gayatri Spivak (2016, original work published 1967).

present. The meaning-making that occurs in acts of performance is also caught in the contradiction of presence, as presence, or a particular present-ness, is both centrally important and yet not fully descriptive of the temporality of performances.

To say that performance is only ephemeral, and that it therefore does not hold the same value as other forms of meaning-making is not only an assertion that embodiment is not a valuable site of knowledge, but also that performances exist *only* in the present. Logocentric ideology denies the knowledge and history held within the present-ness of performances. Both performance studies and feminist studies counter logocentrism by centering embodied experience as a vital source of knowledge. My own experiences as a dancer are informing this work and my relationship to the theory with which I am engaging. The notion that performances exist in a singular temporal framework, or in a single moment in time, must be complicated in order to understand how performances and embodied practices hold knowledge for myself and the communities with which I think and create.

As I mentioned above, Taylor pushes back on the idea of ephemerality. Ben Spatz follows Taylor's thinking in his book *What A Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research*. He defines the terms technique and practice to give another theory about the temporality of performance. Spatz uses technique to describe behaviors that are learned, repeatable, and not bound to a specific time and place. Technique describes a wide array of behavior (in fact any behavior is a learned technique) from an embodied skill like walking or ballet to other embodiments like gender or sexuality. Practice, on the other hand, is a specific example of a display of a technique that is bound to a particular time in a particular place. These terms are effective in clarifying the temporality of performances. For example, a dance company might perform the same show, with the same works, for many nights in a row. These works

become a technique, repeatable and not singularly bound to a particular time and space. A specific performance, on one night with one audience, is how Spatz defines a practice. Practices are bound to particularity, but are not entirely ephemeral as other scholars might argue. There are ways of capturing and reproducing moments and performances, even though they cannot be exactly the same every time.

I am thinking of the relationship between techniques and practice that Spatz spells out as queer in the way Barad outlines queerness in *Nature's Queer Performativity*. In this essay she uses quantum physics to demonstrate that matter, down to single atoms, is not fixed or predictable, but instead performs a temporality that queers understandings of matter itself. About atoms, she writes,

“In other words, whether or not an entity goes through the apparatus as a wave or a particle – through both slits simultaneously or one slit or the other, respectively – can be determined afterwards – after it has already gone through the apparatus. That is, it is not simply that the past behavior of some given entity has been changed because of something that happens in the future, but that the entity's very identity has been changed” (Barad, 2012, p. 43).

The interrelatedness of past, present, and future *creates* realities, it shifts the composition of matter at the level of atoms. To apply this to Spatz, practices are created by the past and future. Techniques, as Spatz understands them, transgress space and time, traveling between moments and lives. A moment of performance, then, is always calling on a history of other performances and other bodies, and is therefore also deeply embedded in the past as well as in the present. Practices and performances influence the future of a technique, and how it shifts and changes, and technique influences practices. Spatz's definitions are important in understanding how performances are not simply ephemeral, but are always connected to techniques that move across time and space. The relationship between technique and practice is not a binary, with technique

being an archive located only in the past and practice being only in the present, but rather they speak to the shifting, queer temporality of performances. Both Taylor and Spatz complicate the temporal understanding of performance and challenge the relationship between past and present by demonstrating how performances cannot simply be considered ephemeral.

Here, I am also thinking of queerness and queer time in relation to the way that José Esteban Muñoz outlines queerness in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. He writes about queer time as separate from the timelines and constrictions of a heterosexual world. I see dance performances as a way of moving (literally) into this notion of queer time as nonlinear and open to the world. This openness Muñoz is talking about is centered around futurity and utopia. He writes, “Queerness’s form is utopia. Ultimately, we must insist on a queer futurity because the present is so poisonous and insolvent. A resource that cannot be discounted to know the future is indeed the no-longer-conscious, that thing or place that may be extinguished but no longer discharged in its utopian potentiality” (2019, p. 30). Performances are both an immediacy, a present moment, unable to be reproduced in their entirety, *and* a practice that is embedded in histories and processes that occur outside of the performance itself. Any movement is always drawing upon other movements that occurred, and that will occur, in other places and other times. Muñoz makes it clear that it is in this inherent connection between the present and the nonpresent that queerness and futurity lies, in what he calls the “no-longer-conscious”, a term he borrows from philosopher Ernst Bloch. The no-longer-conscious are performances, existences, lives, and knowledges that are in the past and therefore out of mind. Muñoz writes, “This temporal calculus performed and utilized the past and future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes

cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity” (2019, p. 12). Linearity is abandoned to create space for existence outside of the oppressive present. While performing a work, the sensation of the passage of time lives in multiplicities: it is happening in the present while having visceral ties to other moments and experiences. My sensory experience reflects what Muñoz writes about the no-longer-conscious, where past and future bleed into the present

### **Space/Time in *Just the Beams*:**

Performances are moments where time is queered as past and present mesh within bodies. Though performances take place in the present, to say they are singularly ephemeral discredits their resonances and knowledges. This expression of nonlinear time has been present in my own personal experiences performing dance pieces and has allowed me to engage with Taylor, Spatz, Muñoz and others in an embodied way. A work in which I performed that I feel particularly exemplifies this embodied engagement with theory is *Just the Beams* by Barbie Diewald. This work was made in the fall of 2018 for the Fall Faculty Concert at Mount Holyoke College. Diewald set this work in collaboration with her dancers (myself and five other dancers) which is an important aspect of the creation of the piece. Much of the movement in the piece was created by the dancers and then used by Diewald to build the work<sup>23</sup> — her choreographic process is inherently collaborative.

*Just the Beams* was, in part, a reflection on Martha Graham’s work *Appalachian Spring* (1944). One of the dancers in *Just the Beams*, Izzy Thompson, had a long monologue that she spoke in parts throughout the work. This monologue consisted of Diewald’s notes from watching a performance of Graham’s work, but the connection between the two works was likely not

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<sup>23</sup> Diewald would give us directions/a prompt/a score from which we would create a phrase. One phrase I remember creating was a gesture phrase with Izzy Thompson where we both made a single gesture to each word on a list that Barbie gave us, and then we performed our gestures side by side in rapid succession.

legible to the audience (unless an audience member had a particularly vast knowledge of modern dance or the early years of the Martha Graham Dance Company) because the monologue was not a careful description of *Appalachian Spring* but a personal reflection on it. For example, Izzy says, “Two people walk in with their hand folded in front. One of them, I think, is Merce Cunningham. They turn a corner” (Diewald, 2018) With the mention of Cunningham, a famous modern dancer and choreographer who was in the Martha Graham Dance Company, perhaps some audience members could pick up on this clue, but the lack of detailed description of the movement and space has a disorienting effect when the spoken text is introduced in the work. This relationship between *Appalachian Spring* and *Just the Beams* was most obviously through words. It would have been relatively easy to allude to Graham’s presence in Diewald’s movement, because Graham technique is so codified, specific, and recognizable, and yet the movement itself did not explicitly draw upon the movement in *Appalachian Spring*.<sup>24</sup> The content of *Appalachian Spring* was transferred and translated into *Just the Beams* first through Graham and her dancers, then Diewald, then Izzy, and then through Katherine Kain, who spoke her remembrances of Thompson’s monologue during a section of Diewald’s work. Though we did not dance *movements* from *Appalachian Spring*, Graham appears in *Just the Beams* not only through the spoken monologue—all of our dancing references Graham because her technique has so greatly influenced modern and postmodern dance teachings in the United States. These many iterations of *Appalachian Spring*, filtered down through dancers and through time queers the temporality of Graham’s work. The particular performance of *Appalachian Spring* that Diewald watched and drew from no longer exists only in the past, and its label of an archival

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that Diewald’s movement is untouched by Graham. Working within modern and postmodern dance in the United States implicitly brings in Graham in an embodied sense as her work and technique was central in the development of modern dance. Furthermore, all those who participated in the creation of *Just the Beams* grew up training in modern dance (to varying degrees) in the US, and therefore were necessarily impacted by Graham.

work was disrupted as it was drawn into the present through Diwald, and re/created into something else through the words of Izzy and Katherine. *Just the Beams* is inextricably entangled with Graham's work, and therefore the moments of performance of Diwald's work are entwined both with moments of performance of *Appalachian Spring*, and with the larger histories of modern dance in the United States to which Graham is centrally significant. This connection situates *Just the Beams* into a necessarily temporal relationship to performance, where the moment of performing Diwald's work is haunted<sup>25</sup> by Graham's. To use Spatz's terms, the particular performances of *Just the Beams* are individual practices, and yet they necessarily stem from the larger technique and archive of US modern dance. Performing Diwald's work was a queering of the relationship between technique and practice, and between past and present. The memory of Graham, through the words spoken by Izzy and Katherine, brought the archive of modern dance in the US into conversation with Diwald and her dancers.

Another perspective on the ties between past, present, and future appears in Samantha Frosts's book *Biocultural Creatures: Toward a New Theory of the Human* (2016). In her book, Frost extends posthumanist theories into the field of Biology,<sup>26</sup> coinciding with work that many feminist scholars of science studies have been conducting. Frost proposes that humans (and organisms besides humans) are "biocultural creatures," meaning that human lives are created

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<sup>25</sup> I do not want to use the word "haunting" lightly. I am thinking about ghosts as figures that exist in both the past and present (and the future), as beings whose "lives" are over but are still affecting the world and the present day. Graham could be thought of as a ghost in many ways, since her technique is still taught in classes, and her company continues to stage her works and make new works within her technique, decades after her passing. Furthermore, her work haunts *Just the Beams* as she is present and yet unnamed, easy to go unnoticed by an audience member. It is the memory of *Appalachian Spring* that is in *Beams*, more so than anything else.

<sup>26</sup> This capital B Biology is in reference to the Western field of academia and medicine that follows Cartesian logic. The field of feminist science studies uses capital S Science and capital B Biology to refer to these fields in which white heteropatriarchal epistemology is central. Banu Subramaniam and Angela Willey write about these terms in the introduction of the "Science out of Feminist Theory" edition of *Catalyst*. They write "...when we use the words 'Science' or phrases like 'the biosciences,' we mean knowledge that is produced through the legitimizing apparatus of various institutions, approved by reviewers and published (or legitimated by patents), i.e., this is 'official' knowledge. Someone can produce scientific knowledge in their garage or kitchen, but not 'Scientific' knowledge. For the latter, we use 'sciences'—small s, and plural—to mean knowledges that are scientific by all measures except that they are not authenticated by the official apparatus of science" (2017, p. 10).



through the intra-actions, to use Barad's word, of matter, chemistry, social norms, symbols, and environments. She contends that Biology and culture are in fact not separate entities but rather coconstitutive or inextricable. This is of course also reminiscent of Haraway's language of naturecultures, where she too argues that the binary of nature/culture that is so ingrained in Western ideologies is a false binary, and that all bodies are naturecultural products. Frost's book engages deeply with the field of Biology, and through this engagement she looks at materiality on a small scale. She looks at the behavior of cells to think about how material bodies are affected by environments, and how all matter is cultural.<sup>27</sup> Frost writes, "If we consider this transgenerational shaping from the perspective of that "next and next," we can see that an organism is the living trace—an accretion, a many-layered palimpsest— of many histories of creaturely engagements with habitats" (p. 123). This "transgenerational shaping" is the way in which organisms shift in behavior and adapt over the course of generations. Therefore, the very *material* of organisms today is material that is shaped by inter/intra-acting with the environment, and is historical because it draws upon a lineage of the material of organisms that are no longer living. This historical materiality is also relevant to dance. A dance is a "living trace" of "many histories" and of "creaturely engagements with habitats." In Barbie Diewald's *Just the Beams*, the history of Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* is present, though it might not be obvious or legible<sup>28</sup> to an observer. In part of Izzy's monologue, she describes the space in which the particular performance of *Appalachian Spring* that Diewald watched occurred. In this monologue, she references "...suggestions of walls, but just the beams. They're transparent

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<sup>27</sup> Here the wordplay of "culture" comes in: "culture" as a way of life and communal practices, and "culture" as it is used in Biology to talk about bacterial growth. When I say that all matter is cultural (and what Frost, Barad, and many others have written about) I mean that all matter and organisms have practices, behaviors, and ways of communicating that are specific to them. These specificities that are present on all levels of being are all cultures also — "culture" is not a phenomenon reserved only for the human experience of interactions.

<sup>28</sup> Here I note that I am using "legible" to describe something that is understandable, reinforcing the idea that in order for something to be truly understood it must be able to be described in words and writing.

structures” (Diewald, 2018). She calls the old space into the new space, drawing a direct historical line between the space in which *Appalachian Spring* was danced and that space in which Izzy is dancing *Just the Beams*. The “creaturely engagement” with that particular stage upon which Graham’s dancers moved is called into being through the materiality of the dancers in *Just the Beams*.<sup>29</sup> Frost intentionally calls humans “creatures” to contradict the hierarchy that Western philosophy and Cartesian dualism perpetuates and so I am using her language to execute the same contradiction.

### **Material Histories in my Dance Practice:**

Though I write about movement that I have performed and even movement that I “made,” this movement is never “mine,” and I mean that in several senses. I am writing particularly about my experiences in two pieces that were choreographed by other people, and though the processes were collaborative, those works do not have my name ascribed to them — they are not mine under laws of intellectual property. Diewald, in making *Just the Beams*, was conducting research of her own which was necessarily shaped by who she cast in this work as her dancers. Our bodies, influences, and opinions created and shaped the work itself, but these sorts of contributions are not considered in the logic of intellectual property. Even though Diewald herself credited us in the program of the show, the work is hers in hegemonic ideas of authorship. The idea of intellectual property came to be in the West in the 17th century specifically in the context of literature. Intellectual property states that ideas are owned, are the

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<sup>29</sup> I want to call attention to another double meaning. Here I am talking about dancers’ materiality, the *matter* of our bodies. Dance is a material form in that it involves bodies of all sorts, human and nonhuman, present and absent, and moves with and through them in an embodied way. However, material also takes on a different meaning in the context of dance because it is also used to refer to phrases and choreography. We create material for a work that then composes the body of the work (I use “body” here intentionally as well). This language is important because it clearly illuminates the way that materiality interacts and interjects into the making of dance. Bodies and materiality are always present and are epistemic actors in the process of creating work.

property of, those who created the work. It is a law that very much dictates our practices of research and knowledge production today. One of the very first traditions that we participate in as first year students at Mount Holyoke is to sign the honor code, promising that the work we produce is our own work. Though I am not denying that these laws and practices are important, ownership, however, becomes more complicated when a work is made collaboratively between choreographer and dancers. The work cannot exist without the dancers and their contributions, and yet it is the intellectual property of the choreographer. Furthermore, citing ideas and movements as part of a dance practice is a way to acknowledge the ways in which movement is collectively cultivated, connected through time and space, rather than singularly created and owned by one person.<sup>30</sup> It is important to acknowledge the complications of intellectual property because I am engaging so deeply with *Pillars Remnant* and *Just the Beams*, both of which I was a collaborator in but not the creator. Though I was engaging in the research and creative process in both of these pieces, they are not my intellectual property and thus I do not want to mistakenly pose them as “my own” research or work. To take this further, however, this movement is not “mine” because it is no one’s. Movement always has a history, a spatial and temporal existence, that goes beyond one person, and goes beyond people entirely. Every movement, whether it be a single gesture or an entire codified dance technique, has a history and relationship with many other creatures.

I understand that movement is not my own through Donna Haraway’s conception of the material-semiotic: the idea that all matter, all material, participates in making meaning of the world. In her essay *Situated Knowledges* she writes, “Situated knowledges require that the object

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<sup>30</sup> This practice of “citing my sources” as a part of making and learning modern dance is one that I learned and practiced in classes and rehearsals with Barbie Diewald. She always names her influences and the origins of phrases and exercises as a means to show us, her students, that her movement comes from a lineage. I want to cite my sources for the practice of citing my sources.

of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (1988, p. 592). In dance making and dance studies, bodies are the objects of research and the central means through which research is conducted. The material of the object of study is an actor in whatever relationship there is between object and subject, and that material is enlivened and agential. This contradicts the Cartesian duality of mind and body, where the mind is in control of the immutable body. Haraway uses the term material-semiotic actors to think about the ways that all matter contributes to the making of meaning. This conceptualization of materiality is also relevant to Frost’s theory of humans as biocultural creatures. In talking about the interconnectedness of creatures with their environments, Frost writes,

“The histories of habitat-induced responses through which an organism composes and decomposes itself mean that an organism is not wholly contemporaneous with its environment. Indeed, it is through conceiving of organisms as noncontemporaneous with their habitats that we can grasp conceptually both their porosity and their distinctness. It is through organisms’ noncontemporaneity with their habitats that we can conceptualize what it means to say that they are biocultural creatures” (2016, p. 123).

Frost is saying that organisms are always necessarily temporally multiple. Through the lens of Biology, Frost shows us how distinct, singular organisms are entangled with their surroundings and with other organisms through generations of “habitat-induced responses.” While organisms are also bound to the present and have their own specific responses not necessarily tied to evolution or past generations, organisms are also *materially* bound to the history of their habitats, and species. Humans’ material bodies are created through and with environments, which have pasts and futures that then shape bodies. Spatz and Taylor outline this historical

interconnectedness in theoretical terms, while Frost is engaging with noncontemporaneity through materiality.<sup>31</sup> In the same way, movement is both particular, bound to time and space, and also historical.

Thinking with *Just the Beams* is also an easy example of how movement practices are noncontemporaneous because it so clearly engages with Martha Graham's work, who has a distinct and traceable legacy. The ways in which her movement manifests in Diwald's work not only was an explicit aspect of making the work, but also is a reference that is clearly connected to a distinct and defined history of modern dance. *Any* movement is also noncontemporaneous, related inextricably to its material environment, the people enacting it, and the space in which it is enacted. *Any* movement has ties to the past, to the histories of spaces and people, even if it may be less obvious or trackable.

*Just the Beams*, in addition to an engagement with the materiality of the dancers, is also a material engagement with the space in which it is performed in 2018.<sup>32</sup> This work was choreographed and performed all in the same space: the studio theater at Mount Holyoke College. The actors in this setting are important to acknowledge because they meaningfully and significantly influence the making of the work. The studio theater is a large room with a gray marley floor, a white cyclorama in the back that faces an audience of seats, one wall with mirrors, and one partial wall with a ballet barre that slopes up into concrete bleachers. In

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<sup>31</sup> In 2019 I was cast in *One*, a piece by Uri Sands that was restaged at Mount Holyoke for the Fall Faculty Concert as a collaboration between the dance department and the sciences. *One* is a piece that was made to honor the life of Henrietta Lacks. It begins with one dancer, then two, then four, then eight dancers as a representation of Lacks' multiplying cells. This piece is an interesting exploration of materiality. The very material of Lacks' cells, HeLa cells, have been exploited, used, and continue to shape how we know what we know about cell behavior and carcinogens. In *One*, we were interacting with the knowledge of our bodies, that which we know more about because of Henrietta Lacks, by moving with her. I am not engaging further with *One* in the body of this thesis because I do not have access to a video of this work. Sands is highly protective of his work, and does not want it to be in the possession of dancers who were only restaging his work. Furthermore, Sands is no longer the director of his dance company after accusations of assault by a former employee.

<sup>32</sup> The same is true about *Pillars Remnant* and *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* which were both also made and performed in one space.

particular, the cyclorama is a relevant actor. The cyc calls to us as dancers, we return to it throughout *Just the Beams* — it holds some knowledge or gravity that is important to Diewald and to us dancers. The studio theater also has a skylight on the ceiling that is covered during performances but is left open the rest of the time, and in the morning the sun casts a particular light into the studio. I think about this light often when I dance, even though I no longer dance in this studio, because of the way the light made my dancing feel grand and special.

Before it was a dance studio, the studio theater was a swimming pool. Currently, there are a few bits and pieces from the pool that remain in the studio, like bleachers and a section of tiled wall,<sup>33</sup> that remind us of what movement patterns and histories took place within. The majority of my dance practice at Mount Holyoke occurred within this reconstructed pool,<sup>34</sup> and yet the history of the labor and construction of this space is unknown to me, so I turned to the Mount Holyoke Archives. In a record of the inspection of the building by the Department of Physical Education, I learned that the construction of Kendall, the building in which the studio theatre is located, was a \$790,000 project taken on by the College in 1949 before the building opened in 1950. There were 7,500 square feet of tile used in the pool (Howard, 1950). Kendall was renovated and expanded in 1984, which was when the pool was converted into the studio theater (Web Content, Mount Holyoke Athletics, n.d.). The resources from the Mount Holyoke archive provide detailed information about the building of the pool in 1949, but far less information

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<sup>33</sup> I also realize now that the space that is now the studio theater has always been intended to host an audience, originally for swimmers and now for dancers. The concrete bleachers that were built for swimming spectators are still intact in the studio theater, a reminder of the ghosts of past audiences for a different variety of physical performance.

<sup>34</sup> Halberstam writes extensively in the third chapter of *The Queer Art of Failure* about a photography project conducted by a collaborative duo of Spanish artists, Cabello/Carceller, where they use the visual of an empty pool to think about “longing and melancholy” (Halberstam, 111) and the negative air of queerness. Halberstam writes, “In a series of photographs following a research trip to California in 1996–97 Cabello/Carceller document the empty promises of utopia. The images of vacant swimming pools in these works signify the gulf between fantasy and reality, the subjects and the spaces onto which they project their dreams and desires” (p. 111). Pools have connotations of wealth, joy, and carefreeness — utopian ideals that often fall short for queer people.

about the renovation. This construction process, from its budget to the labor of building to its presence in the archives, has a political history that marks the space. In a supplement to the Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly, former MHC President Roswell G. Ham noted that the Board of Trustees approved \$750,000 to build the physical education center<sup>35</sup> on July 18, 1949, a budget that was approved before the amount was secured (Ham, 1949). The Board of Trustees is in charge of financial decisions in the name of the College and is a conservative presence at Mount Holyoke: they are largely responsible for MHC continued investment in fossil fuels. Their presence in the construction of Kendall is important to note because it is important to think about where the money for the project came from, an aspect of the project that goes unmentioned within the archival documents. The contractor is George B. H. Macomber & Company (Howard, 1950), but the workers themselves who performed the labor of construction go unnamed. These absences are relevant because they shape the political atmosphere of the construction project, and therefore influence the space itself. I owe my dancing in the studio theater to the unnamed laborers who originally built the pool and those who renovated it into a studio in the 1980s, and to the workers who produced the funds for the trustees to be able to approve the construction of Kendall in the first place.

Most importantly, Mount Holyoke College is located on the ancestral lands of the Nipmuc and Pocumtuc people. The archival resources about the construction of Kendall did not include any information about what the land was used for before the building was there, or any resources on how the land was acquired by the college. When looking on the MHC website, there is no land acknowledgement, nor any acknowledgement of any sort that this land was taken from these Indigenous groups through practices of coercion and violence, and yet this

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<sup>35</sup> The dance department is located not in an academic building on campus, but is put with the athletics. The physical distance between the location of the dance department from other academic departments seems to reinforce the perceived separation between embodiment and knowledge production.

relationship defines every practice done on the land occupied by the College. This absence in information is reflective of the larger lack of knowledge about Indigenous land ownership after centuries of genocide, forced assimilation, erasure, and colonization. The practices of documenting in the Mount Holyoke archives is also important to consider in relationship to what knowledge is preserved. Though the College may now be moving toward documenting histories of student and local populations that were formerly excluded from the archives, the archival practices from the 20th century do not reflect this push for inclusion. Now, the College's decision to begin interacting with and including the voices of people within marginalized groups is a particular and calculated move to create an image of MHC that is marketable and one that will attract students. The push to include Indigenous voices and stories in the history of the College is also more recent at Mount Holyoke and within the Five Colleges, and the field of native studies generally is relatively new, and therefore it is difficult to engage in a study of absent information about the College campus and Kendall in a field that is essentially, though not entirely, absent from my own studies and realm of understanding. The idea of absence is one that marks Native/settler relations in the United States: the Americas were viewed as open land ready to be overtaken, and the project of settler colonialism relies on the erasure of indigenous people, communities, and knowledges. Native Americans did not gain legal citizenship until 1924, furthering the rhetoric of absence from US society and history. Native people continue to be systematically denied access to resources and political power as a mechanism of the continuing colonization of the land.

The combination of the lack of available resources about Native American land and sovereignty, my unfamiliarity with the field of indigenous studies, and the scope of this project results in failed research. I use failure intentionally here, calling in Jack Halberstam's theory of



failing in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). To “successfully” outline and acknowledge the history of settler colonialism at Mount Holyoke is an impossible task, and even if my research were more in depth, it would be dishonest to call it completely successful because there is so much erasure of knowledge and sources about early colonization. To fail, then, leaves room for an understanding that this research is doing something else not accomplished through success. Halbertsam writes, “Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (p. 2). I did not “master” the history of MHC, I do not fully “know” what violences, interactions, and transactions occurred (or continue to occur or will occur) to establish the College — this, in academia, is a failure. Through this failure though, I understand that I now have the task of a more comprehensive engagement with Native histories in my dance practice.

The history of the land at Mount Holyoke and the histories of the area now called the Pioneer Valley are difficult to engage with because New England was settled hundreds of years ago. Absence plays a role in what information is available, and also in my own research in relation to the scope of this thesis. It is beyond my capacity for this project to fully encapsulate and engage with the history of the land where my dancing took place because there is so much history, and so much covering-up of that history. The legacy of colonialism has shaped all relations to land and possession. My dance practice engages with the floor, and therefore by extension the ground below it, which is inextricable from the construction of Kendall at Mount Holyoke College, which was built on violently colonized land. All of these histories and connections change the land materially, and shape my experiences in a material way, as Eli Clare writes in his book *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017). He writes about the

slaughter of bison populations as a tool for the displacement and genocide of the Native stewards of the Great Plains, which led to the establishment of modern monocultural farming practices.

These practices altered the very make up of the land. Clare writes,

“...white farmers literally tore up the prairie with their plows. They planted monocultures of wheat, corn, and soybean. One hundred seventy million acres of tallgrass prairie used to exist in North America; seven million are left now. Today when we eat corn or steak produced on agribusiness farms in the Great Plains, we are connected all the way back to that mountain of skulls. Monocultures start with violence, removal, and eradication” (p. 134).

Land everywhere in the US has histories like the one described by Clare in this chapter. In Western Massachusetts where MHC is located, King Philip’s War is an important and violent part of the colonization of what is called New England. The village of Peskeompskut, located just north of Mount Holyoke, is now called Turners Falls, named after Captain William Turner who led an attack on the Native people who lived in the area. Turners Falls was founded in 1868 with the intention of becoming an industry town, powered by the nearby falls. The town was funded by the mills and became, for a period, somewhat of an industrial hub for New England. The establishment of this industrial town, one which defined the relations and industry of the area, relied on the destruction of the Native community who stewarded the land before violent interruption. The Town of Montague website documents the history of the town and the King Phillip War:

“The King Phillip War resulted in the virtual extinction of Native American culture in this region, and in the Turners Falls area. Perhaps as important, it established the pattern of all subsequent relations between Native Americans and our country. The patterns established during the aftermath of the war ultimately became institutionalized in our national policies, our treaties and

our agreements, and in our attitudes and perceptions and prejudices towards Native populations, as the country aggressively pursued its ‘manifest destiny’ ” (Town of Montague, n.d.).

This war defined Native and settler relations in New England and consequently the track of violent colonization that created the United States. As a student at Mount Holyoke College, and a person who grew up in New England, my education is embedded in this history. Moving with the floor, wall, seats, dancers, audience, curtains, dust, etc. while performing in the studio theater at Mount Holyoke is inextricable from the history of violent colonization that allowed the College to be established and that provided the space for Kendall to be built. It is impossible to be dancing anywhere in the United States without moving in relationship to the history of settler colonialism.

My experience in *Just the Beams* is connected to the builders who constructed the pool in 1949, the builders who renovated Kendall in 1984, Martha Graham’s company of dancers, the dance lineages of Diwald, Katherine, Izzy, and the other dancers, and the long histories of colonization and erasure. Naming “the” “owner” of these dances is complicated because when thinking about ownership it becomes clear that the entangled histories of land (as a product of colonization), modern dance (as a form cultivated in relation to racial power in the US and elsewhere), and the conjunction of land and dance in the Pioneer Valley in relation to me and my fellow dancers, all contribute to the creation of this work. Citing the choreographer as the single owner of the work does not allow for an understanding of the mutually constitutive reality of dance. Movements and choreographic works exist inextricably in relationship to other consciousnesses, and yet, there remains the requirement of an author within the logic of intellectual property that I wrote about earlier. In order for choreographers to have access to money and wages, their work must be their own. Though there are of course many dances choreographed by multiple people (the Nicholas Brothers are credited for their work together)

and dance companies with multiple founders (the Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane company), but my sense of collaboration goes further, to an extent that is not legible within practices of naming and owning. My dance practice is in collaboration with the other dancers and makers, as well as with nonhuman organisms, the material of the floors and walls, and the histories of space, land, and labor in the United States that are so often marked by absence.

## DANCE THREE: The Future and The Audience

This final chapter dances through multiple pathways and trains of thought. It is difficult to begin anywhere because each section of this chapter relies on the presence of the others in order to fully be understood. My rejection of linearity within the content of my work is reflected in the impossibility of linearity in my writing process: a beginning is always situated *somewhere*,<sup>36</sup> in relation to what has come before it, and the context in which it exists. All scholars write within this circularity but few acknowledge the impossibility of beginning at the beginning of an idea. I am thinking alongside Eva Bendix Petersen (2016) who uses a method called “cacophonic story-telling” in her essay *Turned On, Turned Off: On Timely and Untimely Feminist Knowledge Production*. She shifts between stories of different tones and voices, not linearly connected but intentionally placed together. This essay was the first that I had ever read that purposefully used a different temporal structure that denied linearity and I am thinking about it in relation to the structure of this chapter. Still, I must begin somewhere. I write about the ways that modern dance is a place where queer time is always already manifesting, the presence of the future in queer theory, and how futurity is present in my dance practice. In this written dance I ask: if the performance of dance is one that imagines/enacts a queer future, what does that future look like for the audience who is witnessing this performance, and who constitutes an audience in the first place?

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the beginning of dance performance is not the beginning of that dance: the dance “began” in rehearsals, and even still is a continuation of longer histories of dance that relates to people, spaces, and times all over the world. When I begin this chapter, I am creating a beginning in the midst.

### **Futurity in Modern Dance:**

Dances have the potential to hold and create futures. Dancing and performing blur the binary of past and present, producing a queer temporality where dancers embody both past and present to create and imagine futures. When I say queer, here, I am thinking alongside Karen Barad's definition of queer in her work *Nature's Queer Performativity*. She writes "...queer is a radical questioning of identity and binaries, including the nature/culture binary" (2012, p. 29). Queer temporality collapses the perceived disconnect between past and present, abandons linear constructions of time where there is a distinct beginning, middle, and end, to instead favor an entanglement of multiple temporal states. I understand that past/present/future as fixed sites of time is a false construction, and dance within queer time where past, present, and futures are all being called upon.

Modern dance (and, consequently, postmodern and contemporary forms) has always already been a site where time and temporality are not always singular or linear. In *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1996), Brenda Dixon Gottschild shows how the creation and progression of modern dance in the United States is inextricable from the presence and influences of Africanist aesthetics, those which are both named and unnamed. She writes, "The impact of the Africanist presence has come up from under in the current or postmodern era, but it is really nothing new. These influences have existed in European American life and culture since Africans and Europeans together set foot on American shores" (p. 3).<sup>37</sup> Two of these aesthetics named by Gottschild are polycentrism and polyrhythms. Polycentrism is the quality of having multiple centers from which movement is generated,

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<sup>37</sup>As I argued in the previous chapter, dance is always formed by the context in which it exists. In the United States, where the enslavement of African people defined the establishment of the nation, the connection between Africanist and Europeanist aesthetics is then always entangled with the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of chattel slavery in the United States.

contradicting the erect spine that is central to ballet (the hallmark of European dance).

Polyrhythm is a means of dancing in which people embody and employ more than one rhythm, a quality that also is not present (or welcome) in ballet (1996, p. 14). About these two aesthetics Gottschild writes,

“From an Africanist perspective, a pulled-up, aligned stance and static carriage indicate sterility and inflexibility, and the performer is encouraged to ‘dance with bended knees, lest you be taken for a corpse’. In the classical Europeanist view, the movement exists to produce the (finished) work; in the Africanist view, the work exists to produce the movement. As assessed by Africanist aesthetic criteria, the Europeanist dancing body is rigid, aloof, cold, and one-dimensional. By Europeanist standards, the Africanist dancing body is vulgar, comic, uncontrolled, undisciplined, and, most of all, promiscuous” (p. 9).

Gotschild shows us how African aesthetics are always present in modern and postmodern dance, and yet these influences often go unnamed or unconsidered because of racist, imperialist ideologies. Africanist dancing aesthetics are present in all kinds of dance in the United States and elsewhere, and yet the people who occupy positions of power in the dance world are largely white.

### **A Digression:**

The imperialist lens with which Europeanist forms view Africanist forms that Gottschild describes influences dance at every level in the US. I have taken dance lessons since the age of three and taken predominantly Western forms like ballet, modern, and contemporary. Even when taking classes in styles from the African diaspora, they were almost always taught by white people. The whiteness of my dance education led me to believe and uphold certain ideologies, the most prominent being that “ballet is the basis of all dance.” This thought is one that pushes

young dancers to study ballet in addition to other forms they may be learning to “strengthen” their dancing, reinforcing the idea that learning ballet is the only way to be a “good” dancer.

Another aspect of this thinking is present in the ways that Portland Youth Dance (PYD), the pre-professional company with which I grew up, organizes its classes. PYD is split into a company and a crew, where the company performs primarily modern, contemporary, and jazz pieces and the crew performs hip-hop. The requirements for the PYD company, listed on the PYD website, are one ballet class a week and “two additional technique classes such as modern, jazz, contemporary, hip hop, or tap per week” (PYD, n.d.). The use of the word “technique” here has a lot of connotations. It implies that the only forms that are based in technique are Western forms that are derivative of ballet, and the requirement of a ballet class presumes that it is necessary to know ballet technique to know any technique. This separation of technique from hip-hop forms is rooted in and perpetuates the ideology that whiteness is the only serious trait in movement and performance.

### **Requiring an End:**

Time passes differently for me when I am dancing, moving both slowly and quickly, and I can viscerally feel my relationship to tempo and time. Tempo lives materially in my body: it pulls me into responsive movement as I watch other people dance and drives me through time as I dance. The temporality of a performance<sup>38</sup> feels like an odd duality in my body, where I am both more conscious of the passage of time and yet always surprised when we come to the end of the dance. My visceral timeline of performance is never linear or perfectly logical. Additionally, a nonlinear temporality is a choreographic and rhythmic tool: there are always points of ending

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<sup>38</sup> It is also difficult for me to write about this because it has been so long since I have performed on a proscenium stage, which is where most of my experiences of performing have happened.



and re-beginning in the middle of dancing — dances do not follow a temporally linear pathway. In *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, we begin and end four dances within the piece, subverting the straight convention of beginning, middle, end.

In my own dance practice, I can feel and see Africanist presences. My trainings and teachers ask me to find multiple centers and to allow movement to emanate from a variety of body parts, and the requirement of an ending is not a characteristic that is valued in my practice, nor in the practices of those with whom I collaborate. As Gottschild writes, requiring an ending or finishing is central to European linear constructions of time and it therefore informs cultural products of the West as well. European dance requires a finishing, an ending, because of its conception of time as linear. Modern dance in the United States grew, in part, out of a desire to reject the structures and rigidity of ballet. The combination of the partial disavowal of ballet along with the presence of Africanist aesthetics results in a reconceptualized construction of time in my current dance practice. Leaving linear temporality behind feels further queer to me because linear time is entangled with heteronormativity. Heterosexual society creates a linear timeline for everyone's life: everyone eventually gets married to their heterosexual counterpart and produces children and eventually dies. Heterosexual sex, even, is a linear act that ends when the man "finishes". This language is reflective of the dominant, cishet social order that dictates the timelines of people's lives.<sup>39</sup> Dancing is a way for me to feel my way out of heteronormative linear time and into a queer temporality where futures are collectively created by the dancers and choreographers.

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<sup>39</sup> I came to my understanding of linear time in relation to heterosexuality through Jane Gallop's 2018 book *Sexuality, Disability, and Aging: Queer Temporalities of the Phallus*. I do not engage with Gallop's theory directly within this project because she uses Freudian and Lacanian thinking to make her argument, and that is theoretical field outside of the scope of this project and outside of my own

### **The Future in Queer Theory:**

The idea of queer futurity has been written about by a number of scholars and is an important topic in queer theory, and is a central, guiding idea for this thesis. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) by Lee Edelman is the polemic call for queer people to reject the idea of futurity altogether. Edelman conceptualizes the Child as a figure that is always innocent and always in the future, and which all politics are organized around protecting. The Child (different from actual children), Edelman argues, is not accessible to queers (or only becomes accessible through homonormativity which is a disavowal of queerness anyway to Edelman), and therefore the concept of futurity itself is also not within reach. He writes “...we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future” (p. 31). He is arguing that staking our collective hopes on some notion of a future is futile, because the future will always come to mimic, in some way, the past and thus the oppressive structures under which we live currently. Edelman is not interested in the imagining of a better world through politics because he argues that politics is inherently antithetical to queerness. Queerness, for Edelman, is not an identitarian label, and in fact must necessarily avoid descriptors or identifications, or else it loses exactly that which makes it a valuable perspective. In a similar vein and in response to Edelman, Lauren Berlant theorizes about the future in *Cruel Optimism* (2011). She writes, “Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object” (p. 24). A brighter future, as an optimistic attachment, is always cruel because it promises conditions that will never be realized by people in the present. A bright future can only exist as a futurity and is therefore cruel because it only gives false optimism for those in the present. In particular, a future that maintains heteronormative ideals and social structures will always be cruel to queers

whose futures cannot be fulfilling within those heterosexual norms. Both of these perspectives are important in creating a definition of queerness that rejects being boiled down to an identitarian label.

In contrast to these two books, José Esteban Muñoz adopts a queer of color critique in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2019). He argues that “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (p. 1). This description of queerness is different from what Edelman outlines. Muñoz situates queerness *only* in the future, seeing it as a world that is always on the horizon, which deviates from Edelman’s description of queerness as a standpoint that disrupts and disassembles normative social order. Muñoz does not, however, disavow Edelman entirely, either. He too sees queerness as opposing normative society. Similarly to Edelman he writes, “Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality...” (p. 22). In *No Future* Edelman is also arguing that the driving organizer of the politics of futurity is the Child which is not for queers, which is important to Muñoz and his conception of straight time. Muñoz goes on to say, “Queerness’s time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time’s ‘presentness’ needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of a queer utopian hermeneutics. Queerness’s ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world” (p. 24). This quote is important for my own thinking about queer time and its relation to futurity — queerness as existing outside of heteronormative constructions of linear time, thus opening the potential for new ways of creating relationships to other people and processes. Muñoz writes about ecstatic time as the opposite to straight time. The word ecstasy stems from the Greek

ekstasis meaning to stand outside yourself.<sup>40</sup> Ecstatic time is a state of existence outside of the constrictions of straight time, stemming from its etymological origins. Enacting queer futurities through dancing allows me step outside of the set future of straight time.

Though utopia is necessarily unattainable, forever on the horizon as Muñoz shows us, this does not mean that futurity is entirely worthless. These texts that reject futurity as futile are important to the field of queer studies and notions of queer time, but I do not align myself fully with their arguments. I think that there is value in acknowledging that the future is cruel, that it so often only reproduces the past, while still believing in the potential for a future that is better than the present moment. Additionally, this perspective that Edelman and Berlant are taking is extremely white. The theoretical genealogy of the Black radical imagination centers on liberation through imagining worlds without white supremacy, intersecting forms of oppression, and state sanctioned violence. In her book *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* (2018), Charlene Carruthers writes about the Black imagination as an alternative to white capitalist heteropatriarchy. In her theorizing, the Black radical imagination is the means through which futurity is created and engaged with. She writes that Black justice movements in the US have always had a need for imagining a future as an organizing tactic because the present is only violent toward Black people in the US. Imagining a future where violence does not control people's lives is not a futile endeavor, but is rather vital to finding ecstasy as Muñoz writes. Carruthers' theory of the Black radical imagination has more intentionally political implications, but both imagine a world outside of the one mediated by white heteropatriarchy.

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<sup>40</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.).

### **Audience and Future:**

After giving context about the presence of queer time and the future in modern dance and queer theory, I now move to talking about the audience in my work and in relation to queer futurity. The role of the audience in Western theatre is greatly influenced by Aristotle's dramaturgy. The Aristotelian catharsis of emotions is Aristotle's conception of the relationship between performers and audience. Theatre for Aristotle was a means through which the audience could be transformed, made better, by viewing performances that stages tragedy. Audiences would view these horrors and be cleansed of bad emotions — a cathartic reaction to theater. The idea that performance can have an impact on the audience was also an important aspect of the work and theorization of German playwright, actor, stage director, and critic Bertolt Brecht. His practice, called epic theater, was a kind of theater production that had particular political goals and centered the reactions of the audience. Brecht was a Marxist thinker and wanted his productions to influence the thinking of the members of the audience. Actors in his performances would break the fourth wall and talk directly to the audience, explaining what was going on in a scene. This breaking of the fourth wall is a breaking down of modes of performance in the Aristotelian tradition for the sake of getting a message across. At the same time, however, Brecht's epic theatre does not critique the idea that audiences are passive receivers to the message being enacted by performers/curators. Brechtian theater "aims at abolishing 'the Aristotelian catharsis of emotions' " (Rokem, 2002, p. 11, quoting Benjamin, 1939), and yet the audience for Brecht remains passive, receiving the message of the performance rather than being in meaningful, influential relation to performers.

In her book *Performance* (2012), Diana Taylor talks about the role of spectators and the fourth wall. She writes, "In commercial theatre and official performances, spectators are taught

to refrain from intervening or resisting the hegemonic vision of persuasive drama, conflict, and happy endings; passive watching is usually part of the behavioral code for audience members during performances. They—the actors, the heroes—act. We just watch” (2012, p. 77). Both Brecht’s and Aristotle’s conception of the role of theater is one that has a specific and targeted effect on the intended, human, seated audience. In cathartic and epic theatre, audiences “just watch.” Audiences, however, are not so simply definable — receptive to whatever the performers/creators want to convey and consisting only of human minds. I say minds here intentionally because the convention of Western proscenium theater conceptualizes an audience that is white, heterosexual, and middle or upper class. This population of people is considered rational, above bodies or nature, and therefore only their minds are relevant to the production of an audience. People of color, queer people, women, and other marginalized communities are seen as being closer to nature: primitive or inherently sexual, irrational, and therefore their bodies intervene in the construction of a passively receptive audience.

The position of the audience as seated opposite from the stage is a very specific form of theatre that dominates white forms of dance and performance, but there are many kinds of dance whose audience is not traditionally located in the seats of a theater. For example, hip-hop dancing began essentially on the streets and in community centers in the Bronx. The first people to dance in the style that came to be called hip-hop were dancing in circles, taking turns going in and out of the circle. The fabricated binary opposition of performer/audience is blurred, where people are both observers and participants.<sup>41</sup> As the form grew, hip-hop also began to be performed in proscenium stages (somewhat inevitably), but it is still simultaneously located

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<sup>41</sup> Onye Ozuzu speaks about this in an interview conducted by Aretha Aoki for dance publication *Contact Quarterly*. In this interview, Ozuzu is talking about her artistic practice “Technology of the Circle” which “explores the circle as a structure for improvised group interaction” (Ozuzu, 2016). She talks about the uses of the circle as a technology of performance, as well as the multitude of ways that circles are used in Africanist practices.

outside of the theater, and its origins are not in traditional theater spaces. Forms like ballet and classical modern dance are both traditionally and historically forms that are performed on proscenium stages where the audience is always inherently separate from the performers. In dreaming of futurity, of a world in which the colonized order of white supremacist imperialism is dismantled, I do not think that there is no longer space for proscenium performances. Hip-hop and other diasporic forms are performed on proscenium stages now too — it is not a necessarily “bad” thing to separate audience and performers, nor is it a space only occupied by white people. However, the hierarchy that is placed on dance forms, where ballet is posited as the most elevated or sophisticated kind of dance and street dance is considered low art as a result of colonial ideologies, is what must be disrupted and broken down. At the same time, I also want to caution against demonizing the space of the proscenium stage as a means of favoring a form of dance that has a “truer” connection between audience and performer. I think that looking to African diasporic forms as a way to conceive of audience that is not beholden to a singular position can romanticize Africanist dances as a “purer” form of dance, which is a primitivist conception of those dances, even though it is also important to understand how African diasporic forms bring new knowledge and offerings to the performer/audience relation in the context of the West.

The role of the audience has changed with the development of digital recording, and has also been shifted greatly as Covid has forced dance to occupy online spaces in new ways. When watching works that are pre-recorded, the audience gains new control of their viewing experience. Suddenly, the option to rewatch, rewind, and repeat moments of the dance is in the power of the audience member rather than through the choices of the performers and choreographers. This phenomenon creates a new temporality where linearity can be disrupted not

only as a choreographic choice but also as a choice on the part of the audience. The structure of the dance can now be altered and played with as the audience pleases. The Covid pandemic has also revealed itself as another means of digital mediation of the relationship between audience and performer. Many performances right now are happening on Zoom, and the audience is not fully visible or tangible to performers. Though this is often true about the space of the theater as well, where lighting makes the audience difficult to see from a performer's perspective, once the lighting shifts or the performer moves past the lighted proscenium, the audience is visible.

Audiences on Zoom can only be revealed if they choose to turn their camera on. The performance of *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* was on Zoom, and we received feedback through the chat function which I did not read until a few weeks after the showing. My interaction with the audience was very limited, and when I attend Zoom performances as an audience member, I find that I participate in a limited capacity. I think this has much to do with the sheer amount of time I spend on Zoom during a given week, which makes engaging more draining, and also much to do with feeling the loss of in-person community at dance performances.

When dancing in *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, I am envisioning collective futurity, where performers and audience both are interacting with new worlds that locate queer futures (though the audience and performers may engage in this in different ways, depending on the relationship between audience and performers). These futures include human and nonhuman witnesses and contributors. In the fall of 2018 I took a site specific improvisation class with Professor Terre Vandale. During this class we performed and constructed improvisational scores in various places across campus and primarily outdoors. This is a very clear example of dancing in spaces where nonhuman audiences alter the experience of dancing because we were in the



woods so much. I do not, however, want to purport that only by dancing outdoors are nonhuman organisms members of an audience. Performances everywhere have nonhuman presences who attend to the dancing. While dancing in my living room in Belchertown, birds would come and go outside my window. Our cat-neighbor named Joe once stopped at the door and stared right at me while I was dancing for a long moment before he moved on. My roommate Myla's house plants live in our living room, and there are, of course, organisms too small to be seen also present in "my" dancing space. These audiences were less notable in my dance practice pre-Covid because I was dancing in studios that are comparatively less crowded. The sudden obvious presence of nonhuman witnesses to my dancing has made me understand more fully the way that audiences always include those nonhuman witnesses within the space.

The question of the audience is often secondary in the work with which I am involved. Katherine and I did not make *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* for a particular, intended audience, apart from the knowledge that our audience would be on Zoom. The question that must be asked, then, is why do we perform? If we are not making work *for* the audience but for ourselves instead, what does performing in front of an audience lend? Katherine and I both write in our transcriptions about our perception of audience and the significance we feel of our dancing being seen. In mine, I write,

"I think the way the audience existed really changed my experience. We were dancing for four people in the space with us, all of whom I have various close relationships with, and I think that put pressure on me. Sienna was sitting right on the corner of the marley floor so she could reach the music and I didn't look at her once. I can't acknowledge the audience when I'm performing because it throws me off, so the rest of the audience being on Zoom in some ways took a lot of the pressure off" (Kirby, 2021, p. 25).

Being seen clearly alters the way I dance, especially being seen by people who I am close to. Their knowledge of me is held in comparison to what I am dancing, and the possibility of them seeing something personal in my dancing that I normally do not share verbally. The presence of an audience makes me feel differently about my movement, and consequently shifts the dance itself. In her transcription, Katherine writes, “Sharing it with Myla, Alta, Barbie, and Sienna was also so important to me. The space felt so warm, held, and charged with their energies and support. It was simply so fun to perform. And to get exhausted. And to sweat together. And to feel seen as queer and be seen desiring” (2021, p. 26). For Katherine, part of the queerness of the work was it being viewed and perceived as queer. Having witnesses to our dance that displays desire and intimacy brings excitement, energy, nervousness, and warmth to our movement. The audience is not a passive collection of spectators but influences and alters the dance itself. Katherine and I, in our duet, are researching and dancing in time with one another as well as with the histories of our movement and of the space in which we are dancing, and in relationship with the audience.

### **Futurity and Me:**

Dancing in *Pillars Remnant*, and *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* were both works through which queer time and futurity manifested in their creation and performance. The world of each of these pieces created new spatiotemporal relationships between us as dancers that allowed singular moments of connection to be centrally significant for the development of the work and of our relationships. For example, in *Pillars Remnant*, we began by playing a variation of the game of tag where everyone was simultaneously trying to tag one another, and also avoid being tagged. Each time someone was “tagged” there was shouting and laughter: moments of

contact felt electrically charged. This moment of intense physicality where all four of us on stage were on edge, hyper-aware of those around us, laid the foundation for the flirtatious, vast dancing that followed in the rest of the dance. In the introduction to *Queer Dance: Meanings & Makings* (2017), a compilation of essays by many authors and edited by Clare Croft, Croft writes:

“Dance has potential to have a particular power within queer work because dance emphasizes how public, physical action can be a force of social change. Dance, as it is taken up by artists, teachers, administrators, and scholars, produces a field for discussing and imaging how bodies in motion offer alternative meanings and ways of being. Some dance makers, audiences, and thinkers have long embraced queer possibilities of coalition, anti-normative critique, and social disruption” (p. 2).

Dances are a means for the performers to engage in “alternative meanings and ways of being” but that does not guarantee that a utopia will be fulfilled, or that the audience will necessarily engage in the same envisioning of a futurity. Indeed every performance contains a multitude of meanings because each witness will interpret and influence the work in their own way. Dance does, however, make the space for newness, for something else beyond our current heteronormative capitalist reality. Envisioning, embodying, and enacting queer futurity in dance works through the dancers themselves who are collectively creating newness that does not need, or perhaps cannot be, articulated in words to an audience. Of course some dance performances have the intention of political change, but it does not need to have that explicit purpose in order to engage with futurity. Taylor writes, “Each performance anticipates its ideal response. The fourth wall asks the spectator not to intervene, to keep her distance, to remain seated to observe the artistic work. A demonstration asks that people come together in solidarity with a cause” (2012, p. 86). For most modern and postmodern dance performances, the audience is expected to inhabit the traditional subject position of non-intervening spectator, but there are also definitely

more avant garde performances that invite alternative configurations of audience. Furthermore, the construction of a separated audience is a distinctly Western one so there are forms of dance in which the construction of a seated audience is nonsensical. In my own performance experiences, the audience has almost always been seated across from the stage. My focus in performing is always the other dancers and our experiences collectively creating a world rather than its effect on the audience, but at the same time, I do not think that audiences are passive spectators.

How, then, does this enactment of futurity take root in the dances I am writing about? In Katherine Kain's *Pillars Remnant*, she was researching play as a form of queer intimacy, and so play also came in as we created *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* because this duet takes its origins from *Pillars Remnant*, and because "goofing around"<sup>42</sup> is an integral part of mine and Katherine's relationship. In *Vastening: A Queer Choreographic Perspective*, Katherine's written thesis companion to her staged work, she writes, "Play gave me a way in and allowed me to see how the individuals I gathered interacted. Collaboration is an essential part of my process, and beginning with play lets me glimpse how they are researching within the context of my rehearsals" (Kain, 2020, 41). This form of being with one another was specific to the rehearsal process for *Pillars Remnant*, and one that allowed the four of us dancers to find a togetherness that was then used in Katherine's process of choreographing her work. In his conclusion, Muñoz writes, "Queerness's time is the time of ecstasy. Ecstasy is queerness's way" (2019, p. 187). In *Pillars Remnant*, our queerness manifested in joy and play. We were ecstatically investigating our relationships with one another by moving together, being still together, and communicating in new ways that made sense within the world of the piece. For example, myself and another dancer, Hannah Berry, have a close relationship throughout *Pillars Remnant* that manifested in

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<sup>42</sup> I put this in quotes because it is a colloquial phrase. I used "goofing around" intentionally because it is the best descriptor for how Katherine and I relate to one another, and because of its simultaneous sexual connotation.

touch, play, flirtation, and vast movement. Towards the end of the work, she and I are performing fast, athletic, expansive movement (what we came to simply call “the phrase”), and Katherine instructed us to flirt with each other while dancing, and to use each other’s energy and presence to move through the tiring phrase.

In *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, we once again used the phrase (hence its presence in the title of the work). This intense physicality was an important aspect of the queerness of both pieces: finding intimacy, flirtation, and collective exhaustion by moving together. As Katherine touches on in her transcription of our performance of *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, we were dancing with our desire for one another, and desiring each other because we are dancing. In *Queer Dance*, Croft gives a definition of queer dance, saying it is,

“The pleasures *and* difficulties of moving between multiple, layered identities. Frustration and diminishment physically reframed as strength....A slyness, a sexiness, or a joke arriving fast, sideways, and deep all at once. No single entity marks something as a queer dance but rather it is how those textures press on the world and against one another that opens the possibility for dance to be queer” (p. 1).

The worlds cultivated in Katherine’s two works that I name here align with what Croft writes in the introduction of *Queer Dance*, and illustrate my own experiences of enacting queer futurity through performing dance. *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops* is a work where Katherine and I dance queerly: the embodiment of our queerness/our queer relationship is enacted through the movement and through the process of making the work. In rehearsals, we not only welcomed but intentionally worked with messing up, giving up, starting over,<sup>43</sup> laughter, and casual physical intimacy. These aspects of making the dance come directly from how Katherine and I interact as

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<sup>43</sup> Jack Halberstam writes about failure as a welcomed trait in *The Queer Art of Failure*. He writes, “Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers” (2011, p. 3). Failure disrupts binaries and is a joyful disavowal of the requirements of heteropatriarchy.

girlfriends, and yet dancing in this work is also a facet of our relationship that exists outside of normal day-to-day interactions — we do not dance together in such a choreographed way on a regular basis. The collective exhaustion I mentioned above was a central aspect to Katherine’s thesis research and directly relates to the way that Croft writes that emotional states are “physically reframed as strength” in queer dance. Exhaustion is ecstatic in these works: it takes us outside ourselves and is joyful, sensual,<sup>44</sup> and exciting.

Dancing in *swirly*, *phrase*, *make out*, *lollipops* brought a time in our relationship that has not yet come into the present: post-pandemic, where we can make out at the gay club<sup>45</sup> or go to a gay bar.<sup>46</sup> The “frustration and diminishment” that Croft names have defined much of my experience during the Covid pandemic, and this duet was a means through which we could dance outside and away from those feelings. Together, Katherine and I dance a queer temporality through simultaneous inhabitation of our past collaborations, the present-ness of our romantic relationship, and the dancing of a futurity that takes us beyond the current moment.

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<sup>44</sup> I say sensual because the exhaustive dancing isn’t *sexual* per se, but it is flirtatious, physical, and intimate.

<sup>45</sup> The *make out* dance in our duet is 30 seconds of stillness where I am lying on my back with my legs bent into my chest and Katherine is kneeling on my shins. This tableau is borrowed from Katherine’s thesis piece where Tamar Cohen and Hannah Berry both knelt on Casey Roepke’s shins. In *make out*, we are eating lollipops while Katherine kneels on me. This dance of stillness is set to “I Want to Make Out at the Gay Club” by NVDES. It is a reference to Katherine’s 2018 student work entitled *Cubbyhole Snapshot* in which I began the dance with an energetic solo performed to the same song.

<sup>46</sup> *swirly* is the only dance in our duet that is (basically) entirely new choreography. We made this dance together, taking turns adding movements and suggesting ideas, and it is set to “Gay Bar” by Rosie Tucker.

## CONCLUSION: Dance Four

How do I begin an end? How do I conclude this project that will inevitably continue after I submit it?<sup>47</sup> Both dancing and writing require that eventually, in some capacity — an end must be found. The conclusive cut I make in order to create this last dance is agential, like all of the other cuts I make while doing this work: it exists only in the context of this specific thesis and is informed by each dance within the work. Finding an end is not an inevitable outcome but a choice I am making, as dictated by the requirements of the Academy and the temporal nature of dancing and writing. Ending a dance is a choreographic process that involves making a series of decisive cuts to create an end. Even when an ending seemingly comes “naturally” within the choreography, the choice must be made for the dance to end. The same is true for writing — endings are created through compositional decisions and conventions of finality. Outside of the particularities of this thesis, the concluding cut does not exist because I will continue to dance, and therefore continue to engage with temporality, futurity, materiality, and queerness in my dancing practice. This thesis is both a culmination, of a year’s worth of research as well as my undergraduate education, and a beginning — it will serve as a catalyst for many future dances and projects.

In the norms of the Academy, a conclusion summarizes what has already been said and clearly states the main arguments or findings. It creates a finality that closes off the knowledge produced within the project, claiming that it is over and completely thought through.

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<sup>47</sup> Throughout my writing process I have been in significant conversation with Myla, who was writing a thesis of their own. When I read the draft of their conclusion, I remarked at the striking similarities between how Myla began their conclusion and how I began mine. How and what I know is always deeply shaped by my conversations with them.

In *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006), Robert McRuer writes about the ways that composition, as it is taught within a corporate world, has requirements that are necessarily unfillable because they are predicated on the fetishization of an end. McRuer compares the myth of a perfectly composed essay to the illusions of perfect heterosexuality and able-bodiedness that are always already threatened by the presence of queerness and disability. He writes, “Desiring queerness/disability means not assuming in advance that the finished state is the one worth striving for, especially the finished state demanded by the corporate university and the broader oppressive cultural and economic circumstances in which we are currently located” (p. 159). Queer writing, as well as queer dance, reveals the impossibility of a perfectly linear connection between beginning, middle, and end. Tossing out the “finished state” as the only appropriate mode of creation creates space for new compositional possibilities. Intentionally unfinishing, not concluding but leaving projects open for continued epistemological production, opens futures for this work. Indeed, even within this specific quote there is room for futurity. We are “currently located” in “oppressive cultural and economic circumstances”, but, through dance, I find ways to engage with the past and with futures that lead me somewhere beyond the oppressive present. Queer composition makes room for queer futurity.

To desire disability and queerness, as McRuer calls for in composition, is very different from the desires within much of the dance world. Dancers are thought to be, and in many spaces “supposed” to be, not only able bodied but distinctly athletic, flexible, young, supple, nimble, and resilient. In commercial dance spaces in particular, dancers’ bodies are produced through years of training to be spectacles to be consumed by audiences who can marvel at the abilities of these dancers. This capitalist, spectator-driven progress narrative aims to continually produce bodies that are stronger, faster, younger, more capable, and more flexible to the point where, in



this fantasy, bodies are eventually no longer limited by age and ability. Dancing a queer futurity, then, also dances disabled futures because it advocates for limits. A queer future in dance accepts bodies as they are, with varying ages, levels of ability, and capacities for movement. Queer futurity means making dances that intentionally and effectively include bodies that are not produced to be consumed within spectator-driven capitalist logic. Including disability in this frame limits the capacity of dance as a form, and those limits “fail” the capitalist construction of a future. As Halberstam (2011) shows us, however, this failure is queer — it makes room for understanding what limits can offer us, which is, in this case, a dance world that does not put so much pressure on dancers’ bodies to look and act a certain way. Halberstam writes, “[failure] also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (p. 3). I conceptualize a futurity that includes, preserves, and defends the limits of bodies, and which intentionally fails the capitalist, neoliberal conception of utopia. Dancers’ bodies are always at the center of focus of the creation and consumption of dance, and to desire queer and disabled bodies is to desire failure in its dominant fields.

The conclusion of this work is a limit of its own — a limit to my thesis and limited in its capacity to “sum up” the work I have done. Limits serve a dual meaning in the context of this conclusion. On one hand, I reject the fetishization of limits within corporate composition that McRuer outlines. He writes, “...composition in the corporate university remains a practice that is focused on a fetishized final product, whether it is the final paper, the final grade, or the student body with measurable skills” (2006, p. 151). Composition of this manner is limited by its need for a clean finish and a distinct end, while my work is ongoing and rooted in multiple temporalities which makes me unable to conclude in the ways demanded by the Academy. On the other hand, I am also embracing limits in my conception of queer futurity to combat the

progress narrative in dance that continually desires *more* from the bodies of dancers. I do not want to align myself as neither “for” nor “against” limits, but rather I simply highlight this contradiction in my work as a point of contention for future theorization in future projects.

As a means of refusal of the requirements of the Academy, and to write a queer and disabled conclusion, Katherine and I made a short dance on which I end. The transcription that follows is of a dance that does not quite exist yet. It stems from *swirly, phrase, make out, lollipops*, which comes from *Pillars Remnant*, which is the culminating project of the particularities of Katherine’s Mount Holyoke education. These connections through time and space give a historicity to this conclusive dance, situating it in the past, present, and future. I end on this small dance as a final gesture to my conversational relationship between dance and writing, and as a move into future dances.

*The phrase begins with the right leg turning in toward the left before quickly turning out and moving towards second position, while the right arm snakes upwards through the left, which is held in something like first position. Katherine is directly behind me, her front pressed against my back. We suspend for a moment before dropping our weight down into the ground on a bent right leg. Katherine bends her right leg into mine which makes my weight shift toward the left. My right flicks in parallel attitude and we swipe our arms back. I land on my left leg, take a step on the right, and then bring the left through to be in front of the right, standing on relevé with our arms lifted and bent, palms facing the sky. Katherine chugs on her left foot, bending her right leg while her bent arms circle back to join me in relevé on my left. I sweep my right arm and let my right leg swing towards the back. I land back to back with Katherine. She puts one arm on my*

*shoulders behind my neck and one around my waist. She swings her legs across my stomach and I catch her hip, holding her perpendicular to my body, and we both move her feet toward the ground on my left side. We pass each other in opposite directions as our right legs kick forward with a flexed foot, the left leg is bent, and our arms cross one another and move outward, our heads shaking in a “no” gestural motion. The momentum brings this movement forward and we land on the right foot. I immediately shift my weight to the left foot and ronde de jambe the right leg over Katherine’s body, my arm sweeping down, while she brings her right arm down and around, bringing her torso with the arm. I bring my right leg onto her back, giving her all my weight, and then she pushes her hip up, sending my right leg into a big arc through the air. Katherine is holding onto my waist to continue the momentum. We both chassé forward and push our arms behind us, our heads pulling toward the ground. Katherine steps onto her left leg and brings her right leg through into the air in front of her, and then shifts her torso so the leg is behind in arabesque, then steps forward onto that left leg. I step on the left and bring my left shoulder and elbow up, then pivot my legs and bring my body toward the ground, my left arm pointing downwards as Katherine moves next to me.*

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