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Following the Threads of Meaning in a Dance-Making Practice

> *Art is the art of affect more than representation, a system of dynamized and impacting forces rather than a system of unique images that function under the regime of signs…Art enables matter to become expressive, to not just satisfy, but also to intensify—to resonate and become more than itself…Art is the regulation and organization of its materials…according to self-imposed constraints, the creation of forms through which these materials come to generate and intensify sensation and thus directly impact living bodies, organs, nervous systems.*—Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*[1]

How is meaning created in and through a choreographic practice? And what does a choreographic practice *do* to the body? As a choreographer and scholar, I am intrigued by these questions. I want to understand what my particular artistic interventions do to both my own body and sociocultural understandings of the body. As the quote above suggests, I believe that the choreographic has potential to "generate and intensify sensation" that can directly impact the living body: a potentiality that has political, social, and philosophical ramifications. In this paper, I hope to articulate the ways in which meaning is created through a dance-making practice and its impacts on the body.

To answer the question of what dance *does,* I will examine the interaction between my body, my body of work, and "the body" in theory and in culture; and how

[1] E. A. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art : Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, The Wellek library lectures in critical theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). 3-4.

this interaction produces a new understanding of the body. Looking specifically at my own dance-making processes and my most recent project, *the following of tracks and other signs* (2011), I will look at three different methodological and conceptual devices I employ to generate new modes of embodiment: repetition, transmission, and documentation.

I approach this research project with a primary assumption: dance-making, or choreography, is a way of thinking.[2] It is a mode of translation that shifts, clarifies, distorts, and multiplies definitions of the body and its capability for meaning. Just as cognitive thought has the capacity to cultivate our understanding of the world and specifically ideas of the body or embodiment, making is also generative. It is a process that constantly redefines the embodied body.

In my analysis, I will draw from a diverse archive of theoretical, artistic, and somatic practices. I will utilize Elizabeth Grosz and her notions of the corporeal, space and time, and the role of art in meaning. Mark Johnson's book *The Meaning of the Body* will provide a second theoretical perspective, particularly his pragmatist argument for

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[2] This particular linguistic articulation of "making as a way of thinking" comes from Susan Rethorst. I participated in her week-long workshop entitled "The Choreographic Mind" in August 2011 in which she introduced this idea as a foundation to approaching dance-making. In an interview with Jean Butler, she explains this conceptualization: "Making is thinking; making is a form of thought in itself. Therefore it doesn't need linguistic preparation, it doesn't need a pre-analysis or preconception...If you say making is thinking...then you are going to do what you do with cognitive thinking which is to stumble, react to yourself, lose a thought and find a thought, and see structures and use structures...all the things that thought does, making does." Susan Rethorst and Jean Butler, *Susan Rethorst in conversation with Jean Butler (Audio Recording)*, *Critical Correspondence* (New York, NY: Movement Research, January 8, 2009),
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the experiential and bodily aspects of meaning. I will also draw upon the somatic practice, Body-Mind Centering® (BMC), created by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and analyzed in the book, *The Wisdom of the Body Moving* by Linda Hartley. This somatic approach to experiential anatomical understanding and kinesthetic awareness approaches the body from a more metaphorical standpoint, providing an interesting and sometimes contradictory definition of the body than the theorists above.

In addition to these channels of thinking about the body, I will engage with the creative works and writings of several different artists. In particular, I will focus on interviews and classes taught by the choreographer Susan Rethorst, and the body of work of Ralph Lemon, who activates the meaning in a single artwork through multiple modes of creation: visual art, dance, travel, writing, and film. Both of these artists have significant textual and audio-visual archives.

I will also make an attempt to honor the non-textual archive of choreographic scholarship that exists in oral and kinesthetic discourse. Some of the richest choreographic knowledge I have encountered has been through dialogue and practice with dance peers and educators. I will conjure this unreliably subjective archive in an attempt to both honor this ephemeral and underprivileged mode of knowledge and acknowledge the failures of both oral and textual discourse to fully encapsulate the non-linguistic choreographic.

It is important to note this failure of language to fully articulate the artistic interventions made through dance-making on the body. In his analysis of John Dewey's pragmatist views, Mark Johnson points out:

> the profound irony that language (in the broadest sense of symbolic communication in general) is both our great vehicle for the growth of meaning, inquiry, and knowledge and simultaneously the source of our all-too-frequent failure to capture the depth and richness of our experience. Language both enriches meaning and at the same time, as a result of its selective character, ensures that we are forever doomed to overlook large and important parts of meaning."[3]

Indeed, language is a particularly difficult vehicle to employ to analyze dance. Dance deals in ephemera, in denotata, in the unsaid, the half-said, the slips of the tongue, the referential semiotics found in bodies.[4] Its slipperiness invites a way of writing and referencing that moves differently than traditional analytics.

As Andre Lepecki writes, "Standing before dance, writing emerges with a double function: it turns the dancer's body into a medium for temporal exchange; it cures dance's somewhat embarrassing predicament of always losing itself as it performs itself."[5] While this relationship between dance and language might be helpful for the dance scholar or critic; as an artist who appreciates and embraces dance's "embarrassing predicament", to write of dance-making feels very much like a failure—it will inevitably fail to capture the form's ephemerality, performativity, or specific materiality. It is my hope, however, to engage with or at least acknowledge this failure

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[3] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body : Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[4] Ralph Lemon and Susan Rethorst discuss the "indescribable" nature of dance in Danspace Project PLATFORM 2011, "Describing the Indescribable (Making the Indescribable)," in *Living Room Conversations* (2011).

[5] André Lepecki, "Inscribing Dance," in *Of the Presence of the Body : Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. André Lepecki (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004). 125-126.

as a space of potential meaning rather than loss of meaning. I acknowledge that I am writing, to paraphrase Deleuze, of the things that I don't know, or know badly.[6]

What Dance-Making *Does*

To attempt to follow the threads of meaning in a dance-making practice, I must first try to define what choreographing *does* to the body.[7] Dance-making acts on the body in particular ways—the process of choreography provides multiple channels of meaning for the body in a constantly shifting landscape. Choreography's interventions on the body are slippery; they exist in a non-representational space of meaning.[8] This space changes perceptions of the body for both the viewer and the maker. As an artist working through the body, my first research archive is my own body—its materiality, the cultural citations it exists within, and my body of creative works. I am interested in how these (most) primary sources interact with theoretical definitions of the body. How does

[6] He continues, "We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the boarder which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other." Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). xxi.

[7] While often enacted through live human bodies, choreography does not necessarily involve the human body at all. Rather, it engages with the design of movement, rendering meaning through the moving body (which could be human, non-human, physical, digital, etc). I will use the term body to mean the human body unless otherwise specified, but the capacity of non-human choreography to engage with the world is a fruitful line of inquiry beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] When discussing this space of symbolic and semiotic meaning in regards to performer Isadora Duncan, Ann Daly utilizes Julia Kristeva's theory of the *chora* in interaction with choreography and performance. See: Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," in *Critical gestures : Writings on Dance and Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). 302-319.

my body (and more generally “the body”) translate through these modes of meaning: philosophical theories, creative processes, lived experiences, kinetic motion?

In its most general sense, choreography is a moving body (or bodies) engaging with space and time. This engagement can refigure the viewer's (and the practitioner's) experiences of space, time, and corporeality. It is this reconfiguration that most excites me within the form—it points to the potential of radicalism in the most basic tenant of dance-making. The moving body exemplifies a mode of corporeality that is visceral, embodied, and present; it asks the viewer to open different modes of perception as it transmits kinesthetic connections and emotional empathy. Its relationships to space and time can create a literal shift in one's perception as well renegotiating how we see and understand these aspects of experience. Simply: I see the world differently when I see dance.[9]

But viewing dance is very different than choreographing dance, and I am primarily concerned here with the perspective of the maker. As I have stated, I consider dance-making a way of thinking. It is my primary way of framing and understanding the phenomena of the world. I approach making dances from highly personal places of questioning—through making I ask questions of my self and the world that can only be answered through the act of making dances. I do not make dances about phenomena that I understand or can conceptualize—dance-making is an intuitive and non-linguistic reach into an abyss of non-knowing. Making is my experimental methodology, and in

[9] I must qualify this, however, as taste and aesthetic are so intertwined in one's ability to view and engage with art. Both “good” dances and “bad” dances have the potential to shift perception, but perhaps the worst criticism that could be deployed on a performance would be “forgettable”, i.e. lacking perceptive impact.

this way, it is a very personal investigation into my own limitations, history, and understanding. It comes from my body and my relationship with other bodies and environmental forces.

My aesthetic as a creator addresses my historical relationship with the forms of ballet and post-Judson post-modernism. [10] I value detailed gesture and minimalism pared next to explosive, athletic movement. I appreciate juxtaposition as a way of revealing meaning, and often my work develops sectionally as dance-making thoughts that reveal their meanings through their spatial and temporal relationships. I look for and try to articulate the invisible forces between bodies and space, between bodies and space, and between bodies and sociological and psychological structures. I am drawn to the sparse, the silent, the poetic, and the implied.

The interactive, experimental nature of my making body is echoed in writings of both Elizabeth Grosz and Mark Johnson. Grosz considers the idea of the body as both "thing" and "non-thing" that is constituted through its interactions with the environment. She writes:

> Thus it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects…Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable.[11]

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[10] Melanie Bales names the trained body that has been embraced in the period following the Judson Dance Theater's influences on art, "post-Judson" in her essay "A Dancing Dialectic". Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[11] E. A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994). Xi.

The aspects of the body she mentions are constantly explored and revisited in the choreographic practice. To make a movement is to both objectivize the body as a moving image and to rest in the body's "interiority"—its holistic capacity to move. The making, moving body is not reducible to other objects; you can imagine your foot or hand or liver moving, but it is always in an effort to mobilize the whole self. To Grosz, the body is generative and productive; it can create something new from its interactive relationship with its environment and history. "Newness" or originality that derives from the body is often primary goal or value in the post-modern, post-Judson choreography.

Mark Johnson also sees the body as a complex, interactive concept; he articulates this concept even further than Grosz by identifying five levels upon which the body operates. First, the body is a biological organism: the body-mind that "can perceive, move, respond to, and transform its environment."[12] The body is also ecological, in that it exists in an interactive, non-bounded ecological system with its environment. Johnson cautions us here that it is problematic to think of the body *and* environment, because the actual boundaries "we choose to mark between them are merely artifacts of our interests and forms of inquiry."[13] Thirdly, the body is a phenomenological body that we perceive: "the living, moving, feeling, pulsing body of our being-in-the-world."[14] The body is also a social body that engages in an environment that is not just physical and biological, but allows for communication of shared meaning-making. And finally, the body is a cultural body that is "constituted also by cultural artifacts, practices,

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[12] Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body : Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. 275.
[13] Ibid. 276.
[14] Ibid. 276.

institutions, rituals, and modes of interaction that transcend and shape any particular body and any particular bodily action."[15]

So then, both Grosz and Johnson define the body as a multi-dimensional interactive organism that engages with the world to create what Johnson terms *meaning*. He considers meaning to begin in the corporeal experiences of the body—we come to "understand" or "know" concepts cognitively first through our physical or bodily experiences. For Johnson, "*meaning is prepared and developed in our nonconscious bodily perceptions and movements*"[16] He speaks of the intensification of ideas to a conscious or cognitive level. For example, we understand *tension* primarily first as a physiological process of muscular exertion that then becomes applicable to more metaphorical or structural situations.[17] This intensification of meaning through movement speaks directly to the act of choreography.

To continue to look at intensification of embodied meaning as a function of dance-making, I would like to turn momentarily away from theoretical sources and to other modes of knowledge of the body. Body-Mind Centering® (BMC) is a somatic movement practice created by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen in the 1970s.[18] BMC's philosophy "is founded on the understanding that mind and body are integrally connected and

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[15] Ibid. 277.

[16] Ibid. 25.

[17] Ibid. 25.

[18] The School for Body Mind Centering, www.bodymindcentering.com. Last accessed: December 12, 2011.

mutually interactive expressions of being."[19] In BMC, the body's developmental movement patterns are traced to a cellular beginning. In a course recently taught by Roseanne Spradlin, I was asked to imagine my cellular body dividing in utero: two-four-eight-sixteen-thirty two cells. This exponential sequence of cell division lead to imagining the blastocyst; cell specialization; spine and limb specialization; neonatal movement patterns and eventually a walking, active body.[20] This is a highly-metaphoric movement practice to hone proprioceptive sensitivity to the internal processes of the body.

In BMC, the body has a meaningful resonance from the cellular level to the gross motor expression. Linda Hartley contents:

> Any disturbance in cellular functioning is at the root of disorder and sickness in the body. This model can be applied to relationship between the individual and society, the nations of the world, and the planent as a whole, and so on, in ever expanding spheres of inclusiveness. The psychophysical health of each cell is essential to the health and well-being of the whole.[21]

This assertion is problematic in many ways, particularly its emphasis on a cure mentality for psychophysical "disorders", a position that seems to negate bodies that contain difference such as disability.[22] I am interested, however, in the BMC conceptualization of the resonance between the cellular level and the sociopolitical level of analysis.

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[19] Linda Hartley and Society for the Study of Native Arts and Sciences., *Wisdom of the Body Moving : an Introduction to Body-Mind Centering* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 1995). xxx.

[20] RoseAnne Spradlin, "Chaos and Order--Exploring Movement Skill and Movement Invention" (courseat the MELT Summer Intensive, New York, NY, 2011).

[21] Hartley and Society for the Study of Native Arts and Sciences., *Wisdom of the Body Moving : an Introduction to Body-Mind Centering*. 8.

[22] For more information on somatics and the disabled body, see: Carrie Sandahl, "The Tyranny of Neutral," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Although it is primarily an imaginative movement practice, it privileges a connectivity across scale, in much the same way we see the body operating in Johnson's five levels of meaning.

In Ralph Lemon's work, we can also see the resonance between the micro-level and the macro-level as a meaning-making device. In his ten-year trilogy, *Geography*, he traveled across the world, collecting dancers, dance forms, cultural experiences, and ideas to create a multi-modal performative project. In its entirety, *Geography* consists of three evening-length performances, two books published by Wesleyan University Press, a dance-film, and a visual art installation. Lemon's production company described the project as: "a ten-year project that was a profound self-examination and a sustained inquiry into the social gravities of art, race and identity at the turn of the 21st century. The Trilogy developed a global performance and visual language that was simultaneously modern and traditional, East and West, light and dark, formal and free form."[23] In the work itself, one sees a highly personal, highly physical interaction between bodies and movement, but through the entire documentary process, one becomes aware of the vibratory resonances between the bodies moving and a larger sociopolitical context. The active bodies literally embody the themes of the work through their very presence.

Lemon's choreography is concerned with the relationship between the conceptual and the physical. His live performances are highly repetitive, exhausting physical experiences that are meant to find a raw visceral connection between concept and

[23] Mapp International Productions, "Ralph Lemon," http://mappinternational.org/artists/view/2. Last Accessed December 11, 2011.

body. For example, in his most recent piece, *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere* (2010) he explains through a lecture and film his process for creating the movement—he provided the dancers with alcohol and marijuana and had them dance for hours while filming. Then, he had the sober dancers relearn their abandoned, exhausted movement to recreate for the stage. After explaining this process, the film screen goes up, Lemon leaves the stage, and the dancers perform this dance for the audience for over 30 minutes. The movement is chaotic, wild, exhausted, and uncomfortably extreme; its physicality is far too raw for the highly theatrical framing the auditorium provides and several audience members left the performance I viewed. The dancers grasp for each other, for meaning, for endurance. Lemon explained that one dancer gets through this section by thinking, "Fuck Ralph, fuck Ralph, fuck Ralph…."[24]

What does this particular experience of the body in a choreographic medium do? As a viewer and presumably as a dancer, it both exhausts and elates. The reframing of time and space becomes both an arduous journey to be endured; and afterwards a spacious sense of relief, connection, and expansion to be cherished. As a choreographer, Lemon can be observed self-consciously searching for the physical essentiality of complex ideas. His press states, "The project takes on questions of transcendence and grace as experienced in human partnerships, in the idea of escape, in the performance of dance, in the end of human life, and in the attempt to translate personal experiences into works of art."[25] He is attempting to address these ideas

[24] Ralph Lemon et al., "How Can You Stay In The House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?," (Krannert Center2010).

[25] Productions, "Ralph Lemon".

through an embodied presence as opposed to a representation placed on the body. In this work, the bodies are not symbols of "escape" but instead they quite literally *escape* a normative sense of time and space through their physical momentum. It becomes a mode of translating the body that is kinetic and direct; running in parallel to a more linguistic understanding of the embodied body.

Coming back to Elizabeth Grosz, we can see the role of dance-making as a parallel to the philosophical/linguistic echoed in her ideas of art as a mode of organizing or intensifying the chaos of lived experience. She writes:

> Philosophy, like art and like science, draws on and over chaos. The chaotic indeterminacy of the real, its impulses to ceaseless variation, gives rise to the creation of networks, planes, zones of cohesion, which do not map this chaos so much has draw strength, force, material from it for a provisional and open-ended cohesion, temporary modes of ordering, slowing, filtering. If philosophy, through the plane of immanence or consistency, gives life to concepts that live independent of the philosopher who created them, yet participate in, cut across, and attest to the chaos from which they are drawn, so too art, through the plane of composition it throws over chaos, gives life to sensation that, disconnected from its origins or any destination or reception, maintains its connections with the infinite it expresses and from which it is drawn.[26]

Art then, through the compositional impulse of making, is thus a way of understanding—an intensifying practice that gives a sense of both the concrete and the vast.

I would argue that this non-representational space of compositional meaning has social and political ramifications. To reorganize space and time through an embodied body, even in the momentary fragments of a performance can propose a new way of inhabiting the world. As Jose Muñoz argues, "performance is the kernel of a potentiality

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[26] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art : Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. 8.

that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses…the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging…Performance, seen as utopian performativity, is imbued with a sense of potentiality."[27] Extrapolating from his argument, I believe the potentiality of dance performance exists within its manipulation and proposal of a *new* temporal and spatial ordering.[28]

Personally, I am interested in this political potentiality through the reimagining of space and time rather than the political impact of dance-making that take on explicit political themes. While political themes can clearly impact audiences, I question dance's utility as a medium of political propaganda. Its lack of clearly understood symbolism and the delicious inefficiency of dance movement can lead to an excess of allegory and representation in works that attempt to directly incite political responses.[29] But what dance can offer quite easily is a reimagining of the embodied body that exists in

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[27] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : the Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Sexual cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Kindle Edition: location 1969-1973.

[28] To this argument, I must refer to Henri Lefebvre and his conceptualization of revolution through space. He writes: "A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space." Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991). 54.

[29] I am expressing perhaps a post-modern bias towards abstraction and non-representation. Historically dance has been used quite voraciously as a political agent. For more information on ballet and revolution, see: Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's angels : A History of Ballet*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2010). For more information on modern dance and communism, see: Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel HIll: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

different experiences of space and time. As Grosz writes, "in order to reconceive bodies, and to understand the kinds of active interrelations possible between (lived) representations of the body and (theoretical) representations of space and time, the bodies of each sex need to be accorded the possibility of a different space-time framework."[30] It is my hope that dance allows the viewer, maker, and participant to "reconceive bodies", if only within the moment of performance.

The Following of Tracks

In this section of the paper, I would like to turn from the question of what dance-making *does* to an examination of my own particular artistic processes in my most recent project, *the following of tracks and other signs* (2011). In this year-long, four-part project, I approached my body and "the body" as a source of meaning that I could find through experimental searching. The name of the project comes from the 1911 Boy Scouts Handbook, in which boys were encouraged to pursue woodcrafting (or animal tracking) skills. To excel in woodcrafting meant, "not only the following of tracks and other signs, but it means to be able to read them."[31] As the name suggests, I began this project as an investigation—trying to track the shifts in meaning and embodiment in my body and my dance-making practice that occurred over the course of a year. I found that through this process as I was searching and tracking, I utilized three conceptual and methodological ideas: repetition, transmission, and documentation. These provided a

[30] E. A. Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion : Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995). 100.

[31] Boy Scouts Of America, *BOY SCOUTS HANDBOOK The First Edition, 1911*, Kindle Edition ed. (2009). Not Paginated. Chapter 1, Paragraph 12.

framework for which to understand my dance-making practice and its interventions in space, time and the moving body. While the political and sociocultural ramifications of my dance-making practice were modest at best, I will examine the potentiality of what could be; what the structures I create could suggest at a different scale.

Part I: Dailiness was a 4-month daily improvisational practice lasting from January-May, 2011. Each morning before any engagements, I danced in a studio for 20 minutes without pause.[32] I had no score or directive—I simply moved. I videotaped this project each day to create an archive of my body; I spied on my physical experiences to understand on a more conscious level the body/self I inhabited daily. I began this project as a way of acknowledging my body's role as my primary site of synthesis, an intelligent archive of my history, philosophy, experience, and relationships. I wanted to privilege the kinesthetic as a mode of response, and simultaneously examine my responses through surveillance.

I had many questions at the start of this experience: Would the daily practice translate into a more conscious understanding of myself and my creative practice? Would the repetition uncover something like essentiality? Could the practice work on the visceral or intuitive level to engage with the theoretical concepts I was reading? What would this practice *do* to my body?

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[32] I was introduced to this practice by choreographer Jeanine Durning in a 6-week choreographic workshop in 2010. Deborah Hay also proposes this daily practice in her book, *Deborah Hay, My Body, the Buddhist (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England : Wesleyan University Press, 2000).*

On the surface, what this practice *did* was create hours of boring and nearly unwatchable footage.[33] Through the repetition in the experiment, I discovered my body's role as an outlet for layers of sedimented culture and affect. Years of acculturating my body (through my dance training, through my sociocultural kinesthetic experiences) seemed to regurgitate in my daily movement choices. It was a difficult, tedious project with results that seemed problematic. Was I actually reinforcing these movement patterns and calcifying the oppressive kinesthetic effects of history/culture? And why did I desire so emphatically a ritualistic work practice?

Theoretically, I became interested in repetition as a methodology of creation. I found differing conceptualizations of repetition. Judith Butler, for example, seemed to see repetition as a process that layers or sediments the effects of cultural constructions through performativity. She states, "performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.[34] This process of sedimentation provides a materiality to the body that reiterates the laws and culture in which it is surrounded. Translated to the kinesthetic,

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[33] Choreographer Tere O'Connor (who was my advisor for *Part I)* has written about the role of boredom in his own process, cautioning that boredom often becomes erased instead of investigated: "Simply by observing, not trying to craft anything into excellence, I recalibrated the hierarchy of qualities often valued in the critical evaluation of dance. By embracing the ineffable as an editorial tool, an element like boredom becomes a quality rather than a problem. It doesn't necessarily need to be thrown out. It just needs to find its context. Once again, I had to work slowly through process to reaffirm my commitment to the hidden lessons embedded in ambiguous structures."Tere O'Connor to Tere O'Connor Dance: Blog, June 18, 2010, http://www.tereoconnordance.org/blog/.

[34] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter : On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, vol. (Kindle Edition), Routledge classics (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011). 12.

this conceptualization of repetition as reiteration and sedimentation seems to bring about stasis as the body becomes stuck in its one method of citationality. This certainly referenced my experience in the daily movement practice. I felt literally weighed down by the dailiness and its effects of reiteration.

While this explains the experience of the practice, it does not fully articulate my desire for the ritualistic repetition. For that, I turned again to Grosz and her discussion of vibration as that which constructs harmony in the universe.[35] Essentially, that was my goal—a harmony or "rightness" through a daily ritualistic rhythm or vibration. She writes, "Vibrations are oscillations, differences, movements of back and forth, contraction and dilation: the promise of a future modeled in some ways on the rhythm and regularity of the present. Vibrations are vectors of movement, radiating outward, vibrating through and around all objects."[36] I was searching for a vibration that was a daily rhythm—an organizing principle under which my kinesthetic experience could gain a temporal and spatial ordering.

How did this desire fit into my sociocultural and historical experiences? I have always been an a-habitual person who was obsessed with regularity, ritual and habits. Going through this process, I began to wonder if this obsession was the result itself of cultural sedimentation—the reiterated notion that habits, hard work, and regularity would make me a "right" person or a good artist. This notion felt particularly American and a part of my unexamined cultural baggage; thus began my investigations into the second part of this project.

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[35] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art : Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. 54-55.
[36] Ibid. 55.

Part II: Liveness developed in response to some of these questions. This manifested in a live 7-minute solo that premiered this August at the Center for Performance Research in Brooklyn featuring music by composer Ken Beck. Looking at the repetitive drive present in *Part I, I* this solo referenced masculinity, americana, work ethic, and old-fashioned moral imperative of good deeds and good behavior. I was interested in my own obsessions and failures with habit and work, and looking creatively and critically at *Part I*. Why was I so obsessed with a daily practice? Were its roots located within the American habitus of hard work as the way to success?

Within the solo, I began to choreograph around my semiotic conceptualizations of hard work, honor and the honorable. [37] I studied the 1911 Boy Scouts Handbook as a primary source for many small boys understanding of honor and merit. I was intrigued with its philosophical stance: "There have been heroes, there have been scouts, and to be a scout means to be prepared to do the right thing at the right moment, no matter what the consequences may be. The way for achievement in big things is the preparing of one's self for doing the big things--by going into training and doing the little things well."[38] Was this idea of doing the small things well no matter what the consequences my essential drive in *Part I*? What are the political consequences of this moral

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[37] During the creation of this solo, the television program, *Battlestar Galactica: The Complete 2004 Series*, (Universal Studios, 2010)., heavily influenced me. In the program, the human race is decimated, with the few survivors living in space while being chased by Cylons—cyborg robots. Throughout the series, the conceptualization of "honor" becomes extremely important to the human characters as they realize their previous moral codes are unmatched in the new post-apocalyptic reality. Each character negotiates the differences between the "right", the "honorable", and the "good", and the show often highlighted the failures of each option.

[38] America, *BOY SCOUTS HANDBOOK The First Edition, 1911*. Not paginated. Chapter 1, Paragraph 9-10.

imperative? I began the solo by taping my body with bright red duct tape in three different locations: ankle, knee, shoulder, and covering my mouth. Each movement was crafted and careful—deliberately contained. My head repetitively nodded yes, a sedimented gesture that eventually develops into an off-balance lilt. To say yes is to give up control, my body seemed to say, even as it performed the deliberately controlled movements.

Interestingly, through my bodily experience creating the solo, I discovered the episodic nature of what I made—each piece was a crafted moment that led to the next. Each piece was different that what I had observed through my surveillance in *Part I*—instead of seeing "me" or "my body" responding, each movement began to exhibit its own meaning and my body's self-definition seemed to shift with each movement. Although obviously I experienced the solo in a temporal order, the juxtaposed movement pieces began to have individuality and embodied character. The run became "run", the flick of the wrist became "flick"—movements with individualized presence and character.

In *Part 3: Transmit*, I began to look at the meaning created through the making of the solo. I wanted to see how this embodied character of each movement would translate between my body and the body of another. Where did the meaning lie? In the movements? In the idea of the movement? In my body's execution of the movement? In the liveness of the performance? How would my understanding of the embodiment of the piece translate and transmit to other bodies, particularly bodies that were other genders, sexualities, races?

I wrote a score detailing each movement in the piece using only words and images. I then gave it to three performers (Nico Brown, Nibia Pastrana Santiago, and Renee Archibald) to interpret as they wished. I filmed each person individually in the location and costume of his/her choosing, executing the score as they saw fit. I am currently editing these studies together to create a new video version of the dance that attempts to embrace and exhibit the commonalities and differences in the embodiment of each movement that each performer examines.

This structure of transmission allows me to investigate my own interests in the mutable boundaries of bodily meaning. As I discussed previously, if meaning is scalable between the micro (bodily gesture and experience) and the macro (sociocultural systems), then perhaps meaning can also exists in what Johnson terms the ecological body, i.e. the body that shares a unbounded relationship with its greater environment. Can meaning transmit between bodies in a fluid relationship like the structure I have created? Will the different embodied ideas "read" similarly on each of the different performers? On a male body and female body? A gay body and a straight body? An American and a Puerto Rican? A "trained" body and a body that is new to dance training?

Body-Mind Centering offers a unique metaphor concerning transmission: the idea of cellular breathing. In a BMC session, one imagines each cell as a viscous and mutable assemblage. Interstitial fluid flows in and out of each cell, creating an image of a connected and connectable body where communication, moisture, and sustenance flow from cell body to cell body in a rhythmic wave. This idea is deeply anti-modern: as

Cohen writes, “less modern ideas about living beings ensconce organisms in a material world whose vital elements form—and whose fluxes and flows inform—their aliveness.”[39] But does this anti-modern conceptualization propose a new way of looking at meaning transmission between bodies?

I would argue that to allow for the notion of transmission between bodies allows for a more open space for what Muñoz calls “modes of belonging”.[40] Conceptualizing and practicing transmission of bodily meaning has the potentiality to redefine bodies as less discrete organisms. On the practical level in this choreographic practice, transmitting meaning this way allows for intelligible relationships to emerge between three unique performers, both maintaining their personal subjectivity and allowing for a mode of belonging together, even just on the video.

Part IV: Document is the final section of the year-long project; it is the act of writing this paper. According to the Boy Scout Manual, following the tracks of meaning in my bodily practice necessarily requires me to not only follow tracks and signs, but also be able to read them. This paper is my attempt at negotiating the practice of reading choreography and its translations of meaning on and through the body.

I subscribe to Elizabeth Grosz’ idea that composition is a way of writing over and around the chaos of sensation and lived experience. She sees the role of art as that which “slows down chaos enough to extract from it something not so much useful as

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[39] Ed Cohen, ""Opening Up a Few Concepts. Introductory Ruminations."," in *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). 8.

[40] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : the Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Kindle Edition: location 1969-1973.

intensifying."[41] The dance-making process is that for me. It is an intensifying practice, creating a poignant understanding of the body in space and time that is not quotidian or hegemonic. The ways it organizes and intensifies the experience of space, time, and bodies contains potential: for new ideas of embodiment, for new systems of knowing and understanding.

[41] Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art : Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. 3.

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