

# **Movement Matters: The Power of Dance Within an Affective Public Sphere**

**by  
Kaelynn Shinkaruk**

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## **Declaration of Committee**

**Name:** Kaelynn Shinkaruk  
**Degree:** Master of Arts  
**Title:** **Movement Matters: The Power of Dance Within  
an Affective Public Sphere**

**Committee:**

**Stuart Poyntz**  
Supervisor  
Professor, Communication

**Katherine Reilly**  
Program Director  
Associate Professor, Communication

## **Abstract**

As a result of the COVID – 19 pandemic, physical places were removed as an option for gathering for the arts, and thus virtual encounters have increased, and new dynamic exchanges would have emerged. The public sphere can be expanded beyond the linguistic to include non-linguistic communication within a contemporary affective public sphere. Affect and emotion can be critical resources for nurturing publics. Affective modes of discourse and non-linguistic forms of communication through dance, can support communicative exchange, which can lead to social connection, action, and experiences of belonging, all features of an affective public sphere. Affective public spheres embrace an embodied experience that includes non-linguistic forms of affective communicative exchange. Dance can be seen as a medium of engagement that nourishes an affective public sphere. Through a case study of the 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF), I seek to examine how dance can function as a modality of nonverbal communication within a mediated affective public sphere. I use a mixed methods approach, drawing on critical visual and sonic semiotic analysis and autoethnography to examine the expressive work of dance and the way it contributes to local public life. The analysis found that VIDF brought together the elements of dance movement, mise en scene and sonic features to bring together citizen - audiences into a relationship with key matters of common concern. It is in this way that dance can be understood to operate as a medium of engagement that nourishes an affective public sphere.

**Keywords:** Affective Public Sphere; Habermas; Vancouver International Dance Festival; Dance

## **Dedication**

Family is my compass that guides and nurtures me to reach my dreams.

To my parents for supporting my love for dance.

To my sister for providing a listening ear.

To movement, the human body, and its power of expression.

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## **Aim of the Research**

The 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF) transitioned from in-person to livestreamed performances, due to government restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In 1998, the Vancouver-based contemporary dance company, Kokoro Dance, launched the Vancouver International Butoh Festival. Within two years, the festival was renamed the Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF), with the hopes of recognizing Vancouver as an international venue for dance (VIDF, n.d.a). Over the past twenty years, under the direction of Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget, VIDF has featured close to 300 companies, including 172 from British Columbia and 156 BIPOC artists, with over 85,000 people attending the festival (Johnson, 2021). VIDF continues to fulfill its mission of bringing audiences an “appreciation for equity-seeking contemporary dance artists and marginalized dance practices through programming a spectrum of kinetically exciting work that broadens definitions of the form” (VIDF, n.d.d).

Research points to dance as a powerful tool of communication. Studies have demonstrated that the public sphere can be expanded beyond the linguistic to include non-linguistic communication within a contemporary affective public. This study seeks to demonstrate that affect and emotion can be critical resources within a public sphere. The aim of the research is to have a deeper understanding of how affective modes of discourse and non-linguistic forms of communication can support communicative exchange, which can lead to social connection, action, and experiences of belonging among local publics.

As a current Marketing Coordinator with the Arts and Cultural sector at Simon Fraser University Woodward’s Cultural Programs and a dancer - choreographer, I am intrinsically motivated to understand how dance serves as a vehicle for non-linguistic communication within an affective digital public sphere. This research is timely, as there has been a need to envision and implement unique opportunities to continue social connection, action and belonging through dance. The arts have never been faced with

such obstacles and challenges, and this type of research may impact the trajectory of dance in the future.



# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). Significant health measures were implemented to reduce transmission of the coronavirus disease. Strict government stay-at-home orders across the world required school closures, work from home, self-isolation, and social distancing (BBC News, 2020). Public spaces were temporarily closed to physical encounters, and most people were forced to spend time in their own homes. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and suspended the infrastructures of public spheres for physical gatherings. Although, the pandemic was by necessity about informing, communicating, coordinating, and making decisions about private and public life, it also forced the closure of vast areas of public gathering. In the arts, urgent questions were raised about how the arts could continue to connect with viewers to nurture social belonging and a sense of function and purpose (Jeannotte, 2021). As physical places were removed as an option for gathering, virtual encounters did increase, and new dynamic forms of cultural exchange has emerged.

This project examines how dance can function as a modality of nonverbal communication within a mediated public sphere. In traditional frameworks for conceptualizing the public sphere, rationality and debate is facilitated through linguistic modes of communication. More recently, it has become apparent that non-linguistic modes of communication can contribute to public life through affective forms of connection and exchange. Affect is a necessary component of individuals interacting with one another and discourse is not absent of affect (Fleig & von Scheve, 2020). I argue that affect and emotion can in fact be key resources in the service of the public sphere, especially when aligned with forms of rational debate and exchange that support similar ends. Inclusive aspects of non-linguistic communication within virtual environments exist in a democratic society. As an affective mode of communication, dance can support forms of communicative exchange that can lead to social connection, action, and experiences of belonging. “Affective public spheres embrace a more embodied experience that includes sensory communication through multiple forms of nonverbal

[exchange], including affective ones” (Cvetkovich, 2020, p. 157). It’s in this sense that dance can be seen as a medium of engagement that nourishes publics. Cultural connections are facilitated, and new forms of togetherness can happen (Hanna, 2012). Dancers communicate the visceral experiences of movement with others and invite viewers into a conversation that manifests many different feelings and emotions.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media has been essential for bring dance to the public. In this way, digital media interfaces have become a powerful visual platform to support exchange beyond just verbal discourse, expanding the means for citizens to engage in public debate about matters of common purpose. Used by dancers, digital platforms can provide discrete focus on body movement and images, allowing citizen-audiences to engage each other and create meaningful forms of reflection about matters of common interest. This project examines how communicative practice through dance can facilitate public encounters and an affective public sphere.

## Chapter 2.

### Literature Review

Before examining whether dance can function as a modality of communication within an affective public sphere, it is crucial to examine the literature and research on the public sphere, affective publics, and dance as a non-linguistic means of communication. Existing literature serves as a foundation for the research and data analysis of the livestreamed 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF). The festival is an annual local event that features contemporary dance artists as a way of nurturing public life. The primary reason I chose to utilize VIDF as a case study for my research is due to their ability to bring together dance movement, mise en scene (cinematics, lighting, set, props, costumes) and sonic features to engage audiences in an affective non-linguistic conversation about matters of tremendous significance for many. VIDF grasps the notion that contemporary dance is about conversations with and among people and they firmly believe in creating accessible engagement for all. Performances within the festival resonate with citizens and provide a performative environment to engage the public matters that dominate social life today.

As a universal language, the body can communicate through non-linguistic modalities of communication with innovative movement and experimentation that addresses social and cultural issues. Dance is a discourse that creates affective responses from viewers and engages them in emergent, reflective thinking. This literature review examines Habermas's theory of the public sphere, noting limitations that exist with his perspective, including critiques from media scholars who have questioned Habermas' limited vision of the public sphere in contemporary social life. The second section addresses the public sphere as a space of affect, emotion, and resonance. In the final section, I draw on Hanna's (2012, 1977) research to provide a foundational understanding of how dance operates as a modality of non-linguistic communication. The central question guiding my study is: How does dance function as a modality of nonverbal communication within a mediated affective public sphere? In the conclusion to my analysis, I demonstrate how dance serves as a vehicle for communities to form and

engage in social connection through affect and emotion and communicative actions in response to profound matters of local public life.

As a second-generation theorist from Frankfurt School, Habermas is known for his response to the critical theory of the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists. In 1962, Jurgen Habermas published his first major work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Investigation of a Category of Bourgeois Society*, which introduced German citizens to the concept of the public sphere as an idea and ideology (Finlayson, 2005). Habermas detailed the bourgeois public sphere, as it evolved and transformed from the seventeenth century onward, to become a crucial feature of political participation in democratic societies. His work was viewed as a critical response to Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory, which critiqued society but seemed to leave little room to initiate positive social change. Habermas (1974) identified the public sphere as a "realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (p. 49). As citizens gather together out of free will, their ability to express and share their opinions about matters of common concern is the foundational scaffolding that constitutes public life. The public sphere mediates between the state and private life and is dependent on the transmission of information and argument in order to facilitate dialogue and the formation of opinion in response to matters of common concern. The interdependence of private and public realms is a critical element of the public sphere. It is this process that is constitutive of the public sphere as a space for people to gather, but also the context where subjects can organize themselves and their social life in order to shape social change. A certain amount of openness and visibility exists within the public sphere. For instance, Habermas imagined that private individuals come together in public space in order to facilitate social coordination as "interconnected and interdependent subjects" (Susen, 2011, p. 44). As a result, he identified three main conditions for a public sphere: the participants, a rational discussion of common matters, and inclusion of all people. Habermas (1974) believed that the public sphere includes linguistic texts and interpersonal discussion that allow individuals to express themselves and form opinions. Although public discussions do not always operate in this fashion, Habermas' argument is that the public sphere contains a kernel of democratic potential arising from within

bourgeois society that has the potential to challenge and reshape how social and political power and authority are exercised.

Public spheres are located across social life and among other characteristics, it is essential that they be accessible to all. Inclusivity was an aspiration for constituting a public sphere, although barriers to participation in public life, including the forces of race, gender, and class, have always existed (Habermas, 1989; Crossman, 2019). Historically, the majority of people who participated in the public sphere owned property, were educated, male and white (Finlayson, 2005). As such, critics have challenged Habermas' formulation of the public sphere and argued that it is more ideology than democratic resource. One of the limitations of Habermas's vision is the glorification of discourse and language as the primary means of communication within the public sphere. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, print was the primary means of circulating opinions of others, although it was not the only vehicle for communication within a public sphere (Reinelt, 2011). Initially, Habermas (1974) placed importance on dialogic exchange through the spoken word and/or written texts as constitutive of public life. In the eighteenth century, the power of a literary public sphere seemed especially significant in facilitating rational debate and public discourse. Habermas recognized the early power of the press as printed news reports expanded accessibility to audiences and the general public. At the same time, he ignored or severely critiqued the role visual modes of communication and discourse could have in fermenting public life. Calhoun (1992) points out that Habermas re-evaluated his notion of the public sphere, having recognized that newspapers and television could be integral components and visual culture could facilitate public life through his work.

Scholars have challenged the traditional view of Habermas that led him to expand his thinking. Habermas (1974) recognized that he has placed an "overdrawn emphasis on the rational aspects of a public communication whose basis is reading and whose main vehicle is conversation" (p. 424). As a result, Habermas (1974) extended his thoughts of a discourse centered approach to account for various modern forms of public communication as being frameworks for freedom of rational debate, deliberation and social power dealing with matters of culture. By returning to his original concept, he was

able to rethink and make revisions and updates to it. Buehner & Sommerfeldt (2013) proposed that communication is the main element of the public sphere, therefore all communication, including visuals must be included. Finlayson (2005) shares that as citizens unite together in a discourse centered approach, it can result in a development of shared culture towards a common good. Public spheres can allow for a discursive process of generating public opinion (De Blasio et al., 2020), and they need to allow for the freedom to express one's opinions on matters of general interest. Calhoun (2002) contends that the public sphere is not only a space for rationality and making decisions, but it is a milieu of joining together in social solidarity instead of a mandated space for individuals. Citizens can join together via social participation that is created and manifested through discourse and when this type of social solidarity takes place, it can allow for a nurturing of creativity and mutual engagement. Habermas's work does not provide space in his theory for affective modes of communication as a means of cultivating public life, even while discourse cannot occur without affect (Fleig & von Scheve, 2020).

The expansion of digital media has contributed to the importance of non-physical publics. Virtual worlds may offer an innovative means to explore the expansion of social interaction and connection, including the emergence of powerful non-linguistic modalities of public communication (Verhulsdonck & Morie, 2009). However, not everyone has access to the internet, therefore, public access is not equal, which contradicts the notion of the public sphere (Papacharissi, 2009). Governments could address this concern by implementing initiatives and supports to provide for increased access to the internet for citizens, so as to nurture public debate and facilitate the development of virtual public spheres. Habermas's work opens the invitation to reflect on the nature of the public sphere within twenty-first century digital environments and how it is becoming more dynamic and inclusive within society. Dijk (1999) indicates the modern public sphere will diversify and "evolve into complex entities" (p. 165). The internet can provide a space for publics to gather and politically debate, but the public sphere is different in that it facilitates exchanges of thoughts and ideas and enhances democracy (Papacharissi, 2002). Being digitally connected does not guarantee that one is engaged in a vibrant public sphere.

Over the last two decades, there has been far-reaching structural transformations in the public sphere (Engelstad et al., 2017). A sense of communal solidarity can transpire within a digital format and Gak (2016) claims that it does not alter the functional features of the public sphere. Mediated environments can nurture embodied experiences, to support the exchange of the “body/mind, reason/emotion and affect/language” (Cvetkovich, 2020, p. 159). Papacharissi (2015) argues that “networked digital structures of expression and connection are overwhelmingly characterized by affect” (p. 3). Digital engagement between and among people may bring together disorganized crowds and assist in facilitating the formation of networked publics that are connected by feelings of belonging and solidarity, even if they are temporary (Papacharissi, 2015). Not only does affective engagement occur during the interaction, but it can also continue to resonate and impact the thoughts and actions of individual citizens. The main component of creating affective publics with images that resonate with each other is “building a public space itself” (Fleig and von Scheve, 2020, p. 2).

Yetkinel & Çolak (2017) suggest that new media gives an opportunity to connect citizens to express and share opinions and ideas, along with providing shared meaning within a democratic virtual environment. Non-linguistic interaction between citizens-audiences and performers can be affective forms of communication that can make sense of the world and connect with others within a public sphere (Oberkrome et al., 2020). The body is the tool for transmission or distribution of affect through movement and perceptual engagement. With the increase of networked technologies and the various modes of communication, scholars have explored the need for a new understanding of the public sphere and publicness (Papacharissi, 2015). Warner (2002) presents the concept public, as an essential part of the social landscape. People are a group of individuals that gather together as a community, a social totality. They are a concrete audience that gathers with common action and purpose, such as a crowd gathering at a performance. Through a flexible framework, the public sphere is in this sense a form of cultural expression inclusive of embodied performance and various kinds of communication. Lunenborg (2020) draws on the notion of affective publics, to resituate the relationship among individuals and digital technology in ways that allow for public interaction and exchange to occur. Gregg & Seigworth (1978) explain that affect theory is situated in

the intensities, strong or subtle, that are transmitted from body to body and through those resonances one may experience a sense of belonging. Affect can provide a solid foundational structure for understanding how relations between and among individuals can serve as a vehicle for virtual affective publics. The real strength of affect is the capacity of the body to be affected, along with the melding together of affect and cognition.

Fleig & Scheve (2020) indicate that the public sphere is one of the most important spaces in which communication and exchange among people have implications for a sense of belonging and social coexistence, where emotion and affectivity is presence. They contend that the public sphere is a space of affect and emotion, and no type of discourse can be free of affect. Affective modes are those discourses which are “characterized by bodily, emotional, material, sensory and enactive aspects of exchange and communication instead of focusing on thought and deliberation” (Fleig & von Scheve, 2020, p. 5). Within virtual communications, social aggregations form, which allow for discussion “with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships” (Rheingold, 1994, p. 5). Mühlhoff (2019), addresses the phenomenon of affect as a resonance, that is not one-sided, rather a non-linear interplay between many individuals. Affective resonance is a transformative way of explaining interactions where bodies “move from one state to another” (Paasonen, 2020, p. 49). Resonance is being affected or moved through the interaction with others, which leads to connections being formed among individuals (Paasonen, 2020). Communication is a dynamic process that encapsulates multiple ways in which individuals can interact with one another, including both verbal and nonverbal.

The complex intricacies of interactions between humans can extend beyond verbal interactions to include the “wordless medium of the body” (Akinleye, 2013, p. 2). Judith Lynne Hanna (2012), a dance scholar and anthropologist, who focuses on the cultural value and significance of dance suggests that through nonverbal communication, the body conveys information through gesture, movement, proximity, facial expression, posture, physical appearance, and emotion. Just as verbal language brings together single sounds to make words, nonverbal language links together movements and gestures to



give meaning in specific contexts. Through basic elements of space, rhythm, effort, shape, and movement, dance can allow us to speak and hear an idea or story with emotions (Hanna, 2001). Bannerman (2014) argues that dance is similar to spoken language. Dance is a heightened form of nonverbal communication, where in movement of the body operates as a kind of exchange of language (Stevens & McKechnie, 2005). As a nonverbal form of communication, dance involves messages encoded in movement that are shared with others through a process of decoding and interpretation. Non-verbal communication can occur between the dancer and their own body, as they take their emotions and feelings and portray them through movement to others (Mirela & Popa Tanase, 2018). Arnold (1995) speaks to the vital role of the elements of sound, set, costumes and lighting to contribute towards the interpretation of dance performances and how they illicit feelings, thoughts, and emotions with the audience. Giurchescu (2001) affirms that dance does not function alone, rather it is a combination of other elements, that produce meaningful performances within an ever-evolving social context. Publics may begin to share in the emotions being expressed through the performers. Kolesch & Knoblauch (2019) discovered that audience emotions could attribute to a better grasp of the contemporary public sphere.

Communication through dance is a powerful tool that has purposeful and intentional movement selected by the dancer to relay a message to others (Hanna, 2001). For communication to be effective, shared knowledge must occur between the dancer, their body, and the viewer (Hanna, 1977). Communication extends to dancers, choreographers and the audience through direct perception, neural mirroring and recognition of patterns and structure (Stevens & McKechnie, 2005). Through the creation of immersive environments, both the artist and the viewers can engage in conversation that produce feelings of affect and emotion, resulting in an embodied experience facilitating social relations among people (Cvetkovich, 2020). Movement lends itself to conveying meaning and sharing feelings and ideas that are integral to non-linguistic exchange within the public sphere. Arnold (1995) speaks to expression as a process that denotes communication for the dance artist. He refers to the struggle an artist experiences as they take their emotional state and give articulated meaning to it, so the viewer can imagine, feel, or think in a certain manner. Engelstad et al. (2017) point out

how the arts have had a major impact on how freedom of expression can be understood. Dance artists attempt to embody the meaning and through dance transmit the message to others. Dance can serve as a means to inject ideas into people, change the behavior of people and instill social awareness. Visual images can overcome language barriers and speak to all people. Through bodily movement, one can articulate socially significant choreographed meanings for audiences. The body can serve as a means of personal expression, and it can be used to create social commentary about issues of importance. Dance includes movement styles which are different from everyday movement and is a way of communicating through feeling and intellect, which meshes together to create a way of interpreting the environment (Blacking, 1984). Grau (1993) refers to dance as a catalyst that is able to take one's knowledge and create an understanding which creates a social experience that can impact one's imagination and decision making regarding social commentary. Dance can serve as an instrument of change within society and sometimes serve as an identity symbol (Giurchescu, 2001). Movement through dance challenges the concept of the linguistic public sphere and allows social exchange to occur through an embodied experience in which aesthetics can contribute towards the affective publics. Hanna's (1983) provides insight in how dance, culture and society are inseparable. Dance is an aesthetic form that opens up the opportunity to engage in emotion as a medium and a message between the audience and the dancer (Hanna, 1983). Despite the abstract and non-linear basis for contemporary dance, there is a consistency in how it moves with affect within and beyond one's body. "Like vernacular and literary language, dance embodies the human imagination, records our achievements, and distinguishes us as human beings (Hanna, 2001, p. 45).

The movement created by dancer's bodies moving with purpose and the viewers interacting with the performance, are critical to the resonances of online affective publics (Paasonen, 2020). Dance can initiate and nurture change through communicative action, and digital technology can facilitate public discourse and public performances which can be a vehicle for shaping an affective public sphere. Through a case study of the 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival, the affective non-linguistic communicative exchange will bring people together to share in meaning and commonalities reflecting upon the human condition.

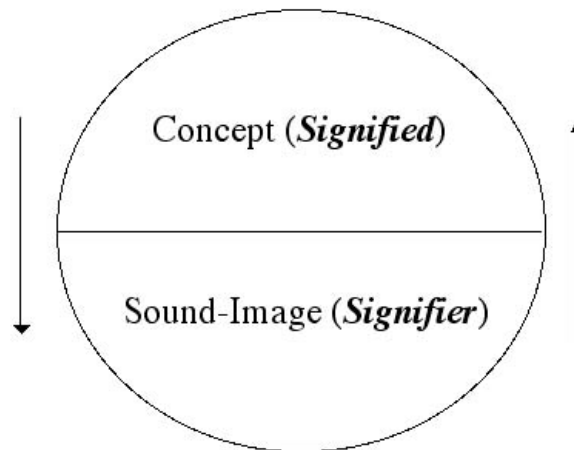
## Chapter 3.

### Methodology

This project utilizes the 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF), as a case study, for examining how dance can function as a modality of nonverbal communication within a mediated affective public sphere? To do so, I use a mixed methods approach drawing on critical visual and sonic semiotic analysis and autoethnography to examine the expressive work of dance and the way it contributes to an affective public sphere. Autoethnography has witnessed increased use for research within the performing arts, as it presents the opportunity to critically reflect on one's personal creative experiences (Pace, 2012). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as a method of research that employs "displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). This approach is a hybrid of autobiography and ethnography, to provide for a qualitative critical semiotic method of data collection. Through autoethnography, I explore my experiences of self-reflection engaging in the performances and connect it to a broader social context to shed light on how dance functions as a nonverbal modality of communication within an affective public sphere. Ellis (2004) found that this type of inquiry is beneficial when an experience challenges one's knowledge or construction of meaning and requires them to re-think about how they understand themselves, and other individuals within the world.

Through an understanding of semiotic theory, I furthered my understanding of dance as a communicative process. Semiotics is the study of signs and their meanings. The early twentieth century work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) (Lagopoulos, 2021) continue to shape and influence how a critical semiotic analysis is taken up in the social sciences and the humanities. Here, I focus largely on the work of Saussure and its role in my study. Human language is a sign system, but almost anything that we interact with can become a sign and represent a meaning. Semiotics is a science that explores signs, of which linguistics is one aspect, within our social life (Helbo, 1987). Semiotics examines the study of how meaning is constructed and understood by others. Saussure's

theory of semiology emphasized language as the primary system through which meaning is communicated via signs. He believed that when one delivers a message, it is with intention and purpose. Within Saussure’s theory of semiotics, he divided linguistic signs into two parts. The first part is that each sign contains sound images or signifiers, and the second part is the messages generated by the signifiers, signified, which highlights the status of the signifier (Berger, 2014). The horizontal line between the signifier and the signified means that there is no natural relationship between the two parts, although they can overlap at times. The outer circle indicates that both parts are considered a whole and they are inseparable, and the arrows indicate harmonious and connected relationship between the signifier and the signified. (Chen & Chengdu, 2019). As the person interpreting the signs, we need to understand what the signified means and how this meaning can alter over time (Berger, 2014). A sign can only be a sign if it is interpreted as a sign.



**Figure 3.1. Saussure’s Model of a Linguistic Sign**  
(Chen & Chengdu, 2019)

According to Saussure, speech combines the “physiological production of sound-images, their physical transmission, and their psychological association with concepts or ideas” (Raber & Budd, 2003, p. 510). Signs are interpreted by those individuals involved in the communicative process through the imagination of our minds (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Within Saussure’s theory of signs, language is a system of signs, to communicate with others. Signs can produce various meanings that are purposely conveyed and are dependent on interpretation. Berger (2013) shares that semiotics teaches us how the

meaning of signs is “based on society and its codes; society creates meaning in signs and these meanings can change” (p. 26). Saussure did not extend his theory to non-linguistic signs, but others have done so, to examine the complexities through which meaning constructs reality (Yakin & Totu, 2014).

Both Saussure and Peirce laid the groundwork for future semiotic scholars to develop their own insight and approaches. I am intrigued by Peirce’s work, but I build my analysis through the work of Saussure and Umberto Eco. Eco’s most valuable contribution to the study of semiotics is his willingness to explore new phenomena, while still grounding his work in the traditional models (Scolari, 2009). Eco argues not all types of communication are based on verbal language (Haaland, 2009). Semiotics can include a variety of systems of signification and communication ranging from linguistic to gestures, visual images of movement of the body to apparel and sonic features (Eco, 1977). His theory explores the wide range that individuals communicate (Bianchi & Gieri, 2009). Eco recognizes that aesthetic texts are among the resources that can shape expression and stimulate interpretation (Thellefsen, & Sørensen, 2017). In this way, semiotic signification, and communication mesh together “with an assumption that any cultural manifestations can be seen as a process of communication” (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Eco’s theory “takes the form of social commitment, revealing the ideological implications in apparently unambiguous images, while also teaching us to alter our perspectives and to approach genuine works of art not for their potential to incite ideological conflict but for the opportunity they afford us for dialogue in a moment when all other channels of communication appear to be blocked by socio-political differences” (Haaland, 2009, p. 168-169).

Dance performances are intricate signifying systems that are informed by movement, costumes, sonic elements, spoken text and camera (Bannerman, 2010). Chielotam (2015) suggests that the interpretive analysis of dance includes the signs from nonverbal movement, music, set design, costumes and the audience. Rudolf Laban, a European dance artist and theorist, known for his work with dance notation, Laban Movement Analysis, classified movement, through four important components, body, effort, shape, and space (Maletic, 1987). The Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) system

is an empirical observational and analytical system of body movement through the use of symbolic representation of dance movement, through graphs, figures, symbols, and notations. Within this research project, although I do not utilize LMA, I align with Laban's concept that motion and emotion mesh together to share a message (Hanna, 1983).

I take up this framework in the context of a participant observation of five live virtual performances. While observing each of the performances five times, I completed written, and voice recorded field notes based on my observations. I drew on my personal experiences to extend a sociological understanding of the performances. By sharing autoethnographic accounts of this process, my aim is to examine how the signs and affective relations inaugurated by each performance foster an affective public sphere. I want to draw in the reader by sharing the emotion and feeling presented in the texts, in a way that highlights how it is that they incite a larger public encounter about the central thematic and focus on each production.

A common thread can be seen within the method of autoethnography that allows the researcher to make observations that contribute to an understanding of one's own experiences with and among others. This is as a result of gathering together to express and share our opinions about matters of common concern. I chose this methodology, because it affords a means to share my emotions and feelings while inviting others into the conversation about dance and affective public exchange. By utilizing an emotive and analytic autoethnography as part of the data collection and analysis, it provides an understanding that will be foundational to addressing my research question.

## Chapter 4.

### Case Study

This year the 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF) celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> season with 18 livestream contemporary dance performances between March 4<sup>th</sup> to June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Broadcasting of the performances took place at the KW Production Studio, located on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish People, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations (VIDF, n.d.b). Located in the Woodward's Heritage Building in the Downtown Eastside, the producers were able to capture the effects of a live performance along with unique visual perspectives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the performances were livestreamed to ensure that all provincial safety protocols were met. The performances were at no charge, but citizen-audiences were invited to donate funds to support the festival. Provincial and municipal funding, such as the Cultural Impact Critical Assistance Program and the Arts and Culture Resilience Supplement provided support for the festival during the pandemic (Takeuchi, 2020; B.B. Gov News, 2020). By livestreaming their program, the festival provided opportunities for dance artists and audiences to continue to nurture the role of contemporary dance in the community. Dance artists were invited to apply for the festival with an open call process and each artist was given the support of a residency, production, and professional fees to create an immersive visual choreographic piece for the camera (VIDF, n.d.b). VIDF had individuals register on their website, for each performance that they wanted to attend. Registrants received an email confirming their registration and on the day of the performance they received a link emailed for them to access the livestream event. KW Production Studio used YouTube as their virtual platform for the audiences to engage in the unique opportunity to participate in livestreamed performances. Since each performance was live, there was a 10 – 15 second delay between the live performance and the viewing on YouTube (VIDF, n.d.b).

As part of the data collection, I observed five live virtual performances, including *Hourglass* by Ne. Sans Opera & Dance (March 5, 2021), *Brimming* by Company 605 (April 30, 2021), *Longing* by Vidya Kotamraju (May 7, 2021), *WANTED* by CAMP

(May 28, 2021), and *Before Dawn* by Lamondance (June 19, 2021) (VIDF. n.d.c). I chose these five performances because of their ability to bring together dance movement, mise en scene, and sonic features to engage audiences in an affective emotional conversation about matters of common concern. In this instance, major issues addressed in each video performance include: aging and losing a loved one, isolation and loneliness, connection and companionship, extremes of humanity, and the challenges and uphill battles in life. This year's festival provided artists with the opportunity to adapt and sustain their work for audiences around the world through a livestreamed format. Festival organizers and artists were able to engage viewers through a new perspective.

Each the chosen works provoke “reflection on the human condition through viscerally physical expression” (VIDF, 2021a). Viewers could not only engage in the livestreamed performance, they could also participate in the live streamed Question and Answer period following the performance. This format provided for an exchange about key issues raised in the performances, along with the feelings, emotions, struggles and new hopes created by the pandemic. In conclusion, the primary reason for choosing the five pieces from the 2021 VIDF was as a result of my inquiry into whether they could facilitate communicative exchange and lead towards social connection, action, and experiences of belonging around matters of common interest within an affective public.

## **VIDF Performance: Hourglass by Ne Sans Opera & Dance**

VIDF opened its 2021 festival with *Hourglass* from Vancouver's Ne. Sans Opera & Dance. Livestreamed from March 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, the performance features a duet with dancers, Rachael Prince and Brandon Lee Alley, along with pianist and conductor Leslie Dala joining them on stage. The piece was set to four piano études composed by Philip Glass (VIDF, 2021b). Cohen grew up in Israel and trained as a child piano prodigy prior to studying dance and theatre. His love for dance and music brought him to collaborate with Dala, Associate Conductor and Chorus Director with the Vancouver Opera. Dala performs live piano work from acclaimed minimalist composer Philip Glass's Piano Etudes No.3, 6, 8, 16. In addition to performing live piano, Dala became a character integrated into the narrative through his movement. In 2017 Cohen relocated from Israel



to Vancouver and opened Ne Sans Opera & Dance in Vancouver to expand work in the area of dance and opera.

Artistic Director, Idan Cohen, choreographs the performance drawing on the theme of aging, losing a loved one and how time passes through an hourglass. The hourglass serves as a symbol for the passing of time, as we observe sand running through the glass we know that the end is inevitable. The performance opens up the conversation with the citizen-audience about the emotions and feelings that one struggles with during the grieving process of losing a loved one. Through a combination of movement, mise en scene and the sonic features, Cohen creates an opportunity for communicative exchange based on feelings of loss, grief, sadness, and depression. Through movement of the dancers, Cohen speaks to the citizens-audience about the importance of being able to lean on someone for support during difficult times. The performance opens up with a black chair with a red seat placed on the dark stage floor with only a spotlight shining on it. Dala initiates this 18<sup>th</sup> century opera inspired performance, as he performs the first gestural movements on stage. Dala placed his left hand around his throat, as he sat on the chair in pure silence with a black tuxedo and a white-washed face. This initial movement made me draw on the feeling of desperation and hopelessness. He stood up and manipulated the chair with his hands, prior to the lighting dimming to pure darkness as he transitions to the piano. He began to serenade the audience with his skill and passion through his precision on the piano.

Dance artists, Prince and Alley, grounded much of their work within classical ballet to share the story of how time passes quickly in front of our eyes. Within the performance, there was a significant amount of hand manipulations representing a motif of self-identity, body and soul, body and mind, and individual relations to myself and my body. The hand gestures performed by the dancers gave me the feeling that they had no sense of self-control. It represented the emotion of panic and despair, as time continues to pass quickly within their lives. Traditional ballet partnering and contemporary solo elements were highlighted throughout the performance. The partnering between Prince and Alley was captivating and breathtaking, as I felt the relevance of having someone at your side as your support system. I felt the emotional need for dependency that was

displayed through the intricate partnering lifts of Prince and Alley. Prince, the female dancer, utilized the floor to perform traditional bouree movement in an unconventional prone position. Many moves were slow and sustained, which pulled me into the struggle that they were experiencing as time superseded their lives. At times, rigorous, experimental movement with increased tempo allowed me to feel their sense of urgency to fit everything into the time remaining in their lives. In contrast, there were circus type movements, such as cartwheels and other acrobatic moves, that made me feel a sense of happiness and openness toward life. The interchange between types of movement demonstrated the contrast between the need for dependence versus the need for freedom. It allowed me to reflect upon how relationships can ebb and flow throughout one's life.

Within the performance, the chair was a central focal point. It was utilized by the artists in unconventional ways and at times it served as an extension of the human body, supporting two bodies, and providing a visual at the conclusion of the performance. The final scene focused on a rectangular light illuminating the floor that symbolized a space for a human grave. Each artist, including the dancers and pianist, placed themselves into the visually created space one by one. The performance concluded with the chair placed in its final resting spot. During this moment, I experienced multiple feelings and emotions, as I felt the grief of a cycle of life coming to an end. The journey of life was filled with many experiences, both fulfilling, yet challenging. Costumes and white-washed face makeup, captured the expression, feelings, and character within the performance. Prince was wearing white, signifying purity and innocence, while Alley was in black, signifying intensity and dominance. Their portrayal of clowns reminded me not to take life too seriously and enjoy the moment. The humour, playfulness and carefree attitudes of the dancers came across within the performance and allowed me to feel the importance of living life to the fullest. The white-face provided a sharp contrast to the dark lighting that allowed me to feel the intensity of their emotions and thoughts of feelings.

The music has a prominent presence on stage, as throughout the performance the camera captured the piano in the background. Moments of silence served as a key element in allowing me to interact with the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of the artists.

I appreciated the rigor and power of movement as a modality of non-linguistic communication. The repetitive structures of sonic engagement, along with the looping and layering of the musical elements assisted me with understanding how at times life feels like a race, while other times I can relax and enjoy. Moments of silence allowed me to appreciate the rigor and power of movement as a modality of non-linguistic communication.

Hourglass spoke to the common issue that citizens of society struggle with as they live their lives and come to terms with the eventual aging process or loss of life. During the pandemic, citizens may have been faced with losing loved ones or even losing the connection to others due to isolation and lockdowns. Cohen and his team were able to socially connect me to their piece through the intricate movement, clever use of props, costumes, and makeup, along with the powerful, yet minimalist sonic elements of the piano and utter silence.

## **VIDF Performance: Brimming by Company 605**

Josh Martin, from Company 605, created and performed his livestreamed solo compilation, *Brimming*, at VIDF on April 29, 30 and May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Led by artistic co-directors Lisa Mariko Gelley and Josh Martin, Company 605 is based out of Vancouver, on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Indigenous territories of the Coast Salish Peoples (VIDF, n.d.a). Their work is a meshing together of people, their ideas and thoughts, their bodies and how the two entities co-exist together. As a result of the restrictions due to the pandemic, Martin understood how audiences may view his performance as a social commentary on isolation (VIDF, 2021f). *Brimming* investigates the body as a solid permeable frame that is trying to contain everything inside, although this space can be continually shaped and molded through our experiences (Minter, 2021). Martin shared that as the container fills the frame can warp and bend under pressure (Smith, 2020a). What happens when we can no longer keep everything contained? During the pandemic, at times I felt alone trapped within my own body experiencing emotions of loneliness from social isolation and struggling with my mental health. Martin pulled on his own emotions and feelings to share with citizen-audiences how affective

modes of discourse and non-linguistic forms of communication can support forms of communicative exchange with others.

Physical movement within the piece was influenced by the embodied state of mind, rather than specific choreography. Martin's emotions led him to his gestural movement, vibrations, shaking of his body and at times mechanical types of movement. He manipulated the confined space throughout the piece by allowing viewers to become familiar and personal with the room. This was captured through his gestures of touching the rug, grabbing the industrial piping, swaying with the rhythm of the hanging lightbulb, and manipulating the chair. At times, the movement was rigid and controlled, by isolating various parts of his body to bend, rotate at various angles. These actions made me feel that he was trying to fit into a certain mold or expectation of himself. In contrast, Martin creates rhythmic motion throughout his bodily movement by swaying side to side. This type of movement gave me the sensation of trying to escape and try something beyond oneself. The arms pushed upon the structure of the walls, which engaged me in the feeling of wanting to escape the confinements of the space. Pulsating movements increased in intensity and then transitioned from the floor to the knees, and to a standing position. This progression of movement gave me the impression of his strength over times. Smith (2021a) expressed that we are seeing emotions that are pressurized and ready to bubble from the pressures and challenges of being isolated. I experienced his sense of frustration as he was wanting to escape his isolation. Throughout the pandemic, there were times that I felt my frustration build, as I did not see a hope for the continuation of social relationships and connections with others. Desperation could be felt, as Martin uses his hands to pull his mouth side to side and look at the reflections of his expression in the mirror. This moment resonated with me, as his true emotions of feeling isolated were evident to the citizen-audience. It was a stark reminder of how I felt socially isolated and claustrophobic within my own home. *Brimming* concludes with Martin contemplating time after isolation, as he took a seat in the chair at the conclusion of the performance.

The camera and its lens encouraged the audience to engage in a conversation and emotional experience about the inner struggles of isolation. James Proudfoot, a

Vancouver lighting designer, created the illusion of an enclosed space through the use of lights. The lighting within the set was created from a standing lamp to a hanging overhead light and finally a single lightbulb hanging against the wall. The light took on its own character within the performance, which interacted with Martin and became part of his existence within the space. Light is an important element in all our lives, as light can shape our mood and emotions. The contrast between light and dark was evident within the performance, and it allowed me to understand how a constant inner battle can occur during times of personal struggle. As I sat in isolation during the pandemic, I craved the sunlight and I desired to escape the dark dreary winter nights of the pandemic. Not only did lights serve as props throughout the performance, a chair, mirror, and an unfinished room, served to enhance the mood. The architecture of the space included plywood walls and partially visible steel pipes to create the visual of an unfinished room (VIDF, 2021a). The 9 by 15-foot space provided not only a physical space for Martin's work, but it gave him a psychological space to share his feeling and emotions of being alone. This temporary space gave me the feeling that perhaps his feelings and struggles were not here too last. The walls that were easily put up, so they could easily be torn down. It gave me a sense of instability that exists within our world, and it brought to mind how the pandemic turned my once stable environment into something less reliable and unstable. Cinematic elements allowed citizen-audiences to focus on what the eye could see, including the emotional rollercoaster of emotions and feelings expressed by Martin's movements and facial expressions. A combination of arial views, long and short shots allowed me to feel part of the confined space as he experienced it during the performance. The camera was able to capture his reflection standing in front of the mirror and subsequently invoke a conversation on the affective mode of communication. At one point, the camera created an image of Martin trapped within the space and multiple images of his face portrayed for the viewer.

From the first moment of the performance, I could hear the buzzing and quiet humming in the background, serving as a compliment to the movement. On occasion, moments of silence were featured as the focus was placed on how silence can serve as it's own obstacle to struggle within isolation. At times, I heard a faint background chanting that allowed me to reflect on how my inner voice exists. As Martin stands with his back

to the wall, the silence overtook the moment and made me feel that perhaps there is hope for the future after this pandemic. Yet, I reflected on the mental health struggles experienced by many and how they may continue to be prevalent post-pandemic.

*Brimming* created the imagery of a confined space which served as a metaphor for the human condition. Whether it be as a result of the pandemic or not, we all struggle with our inner feelings and emotions as they affect who we are as citizens within society. Martin's ability to bring a focus to his embodied experiences within his performance through the movement, set and sonic qualities as was stated by a viewer in the Question and Answer, "I fell deep into your world" (VIDF, 2021a).

### **VIDF Performance: Longing by Vidya Kotamraju**

*Longing* by Vidya Kotamraju was performed livestream at the VIDF on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I attended the livestream performance, followed by the Question-and-Answer session on May 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm PDT. The theme presented by Kotamraju was about human conditions and feeling a sense of longing for connection and companionship with others, both romantic and spiritual. She believes that everyone may have similar, but different needs, yet we all share a sense of oneness that allows us to accept and appreciate the diversity that exists in our society (VIDF, 2021d). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist experienced feelings of longing for many different experiences and she hoped to create a sense of connection with others that may have experienced similar feelings and emotions (VIDF, 2021d). This social commentary weighed heavily on my mind during the pandemic, as I was not able to gather socially with my family and friends. I desired for a sense of belonging and social connection. Kotamraju, is a Bharata Natyam dance artist and a graduate from Vancouver's Jai Govinda Dance Academy. The Vancouver based academy offers high level training for Indian Classical dance style, Bharata Natyam. Traditionally, this style of dance is performed only by women, and it is an illustrative anecdote of themes emoted by the artist through footwork and precise hand gestures. Kotamraju, performs a solo dance that is presented in two acts, based on poetry from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the poetry may be from another century, it still is relevant in sharing matters of common concern in society today.

Act 1 opened up with text flashed across the screen “Dear friend please bring him to me nostalgic as I am. I yearn for him” (VIDF, 2021d). These words set the tone of how poetry was foundational to the artist sharing her message with her viewers. The movement in Act 1 is very gentle with delicate movements emphasizing her hands and gestural work. Kotamraju’s actions and emotions stemmed from a place of lacking and wanting, being nostalgic for one’s past and her connection with another individual. The background of silhouette lighting adds an element of mystery to her sense of longing for social connection. Throughout the entirety of the performance, there was text overlaid taken from a 12<sup>th</sup> century poem scripted on the bottom of the screen for brief periods of time. The text serves as a linguistic method to communicate her feelings and the common theme of the human condition of yearning for love and companionship. Her movement focused on precise finger and hand movements, mudras, along with prominent defined foot tapping throughout the performance. Mudras serve as a form of non-verbal communication and self-expression, that are used to evoke feelings and emotions. Within the web series, she spoke about how foot tapping serves as symbols that produce sounds on the ground (VIDF, 2021d). Through her movement, she communicated her narrative, of longing for social connection and oneness. The slow and quick tempo of movement was accompanied by the instrumental music and a vocalist. In Act 2, the movement focused on precise hand gestures, but Kotamraju utilized her space by moving more freely and incorporating prominent foot tapping. This movement signified that she was leaving her personal imprint with this person that she had longed for. Act 2 came from a place of power and fulfillment which was confirmed at the conclusion of the performance with the text “What you are [longing] for is already in you... You already are everything you are seeking” (VIDF, 2021d).

Throughout the performance, cinematic elements, included the camera capturing a blend of close-up, medium and long shots. Each one of these types of shots had a purpose of focusing on either her movement patterns or facial expressions. The majority of the shots were eye-level shots, so the citizen-audience could view the dancer as they would in real life. This type of cinematic strategy allowed me to feel as if I was with her in person. There were certain instances that I was drawn in by the messaging that was shared through the movement of only her feet, hands or facial expressions. Act 1 began

with the incorporation of props, including candles and gemstones being placed on the ground. For me, this symbolized a circle of life filled with love. Images of cherry blossom trees projected on the screen served as symbols of hope and renewal for not only the artists, but for the citizens - viewers. For many, there is a hope of a future beyond the restrictions of the pandemic. Kotamraju wore a black and red textile trimmed in gold, as she felt that those colours resonated with her in terms of the feeling of longing and being loved (VIDF, 2021d).

The sonic elements of the performance produced a layered effect, adding energy and depth to the dancer and the narrative. Sound can be a key element in creating an emotional trigger, which I felt from the onset of the performance. At the beginning, the combination of the piano and violin, along with the birds chirping and the sound of the waves allowed me to connect with her emotional struggle of the human condition and longing for human connection. Even though the male vocalist recited verses in Indian tongue during the performance, the facial expressions, and engaging eyes of Kotamraju drew me into her emotional yearning for love and companionship. The instruments utilized included cymbals, flute, long pipe horn and a drum which added a layering effect of emotions that one can experience during times of isolation. As the performance entered the second act, the tempo of the music and the intensity of the chanting increased in speed. This section made me feel a sense of fulfillment and hope as she exudes excitement for finding true love. During the pandemic, I experienced a longing for the companionship of friends, family, and the communities of people.

As I reflected upon the performance, I thought about how one's fulfillment does not need to come from exterior validation from people, rather it can come from within yourself. The themes of common matter within this performance were the sense of yearning for love, companionship, and oneness. Kotamraju's movement, the cinematic features, including the camera and projections, along with the costuming and sonic qualities incorporated developed the character, plot, central theme, and emotional connection. Emotions of longing served as the central focus of the social exchange processes that occurred within the performance. *Longing* facilitated a relationship of communicative exchange with the artist based on poetic works from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>



century. Feelings of desire, connection and social fulfillment may have been matters of common concern for many others during the pandemic.

## **VIDF Performance: WANTED by CAMP**

*WANTED* by CAMP was performed livestream at the VIDF on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I attended the livestreamed performance, followed by the live Question & Answer session after the performance on May 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm PDT. CAMP's theme was a cowboy's fantasy about systemic evil that posed the question: What is a hero, what is a villain, what is a nobody? The ensemble of five dancers, including Brenna Metzmeier, Sarah Formosa, Ted Littlemore, Eowynn Enquist, and Isak Enquist, engaged their audience in a narrative that focused on a collective society of panic, blame, and protection of oneself, from harm through escapism and indulgence (VIDF, n.d.b). Escapism has the power to draw one away from their everyday troubles to fantasize or indulge in a vision of an idealistic society. CAMP's artists allowed audiences to feel an emotional connection and to invest in the piece's central theme through the eyes of a theatrical Cowboy persona. Via this figure, the dance artists examined the extremes of humanity, the evil and the good, through the perspective of a mystical cowboy. The concept of hero and villain can apply to all human beings, as the text within the performance calls out, "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being" (VIDF, 2021g). This social commentary pushed me to reflect on what type of citizen I am, or I can be. I asked myself, what is the reflection that I see of myself in the world? CAMP casts light on the feelings of darkness that currently exists in the world. As the artists reflect upon their childhood experiences of cowboys, Eowynn Enquist reflects upon how her grandparents dressed her up as a cowgirl with authentic cowboy gear and Ted Littlemore spent family time on a ranch. Even though I did not have memories of the cowboy life, I drew upon the childhood memories of happiness and joy that I felt riding horses in the Shuswap region of British Columbia.

"There are only three kinds of citizens: heroes, villains and nobodies" (VIDF, 2021g) echoes out in the voice over. Villains may believe that they are heroes in their own minds, but it really depends on perspective and who is sharing their story. Similarly

in life, everyone has their own story, perspective, lived experience and each individual may resonate with a certain type of citizen. I questioned what pre-existing notions that I may have regarding the Hollywood cowboy figure, and I began to see, feel, and embody new insights and perspectives throughout the performance. In the virtual web series, Sarah Formosa commented that there is “a lot of fear and distrust in the community and how we sit inside of the world” which leads to questioning oneself (VIDF, 2021e). Humour was interlaced within the performative aspects, such as the Horse News Talk Show with “Horse Cunning-ham”. This clever play on the intricate use of the body and mind allowed me to understand how the body and mind work together to create strength and flexibility within the world. The Enquists performed a duet that plays with the idea of reflection, duality, facial expressions, along with the intertwining of text accompanying the movement. At this point, their movement and actions led me to reflect upon how I see everything in the world as a reflection of my emotions and lived experiences.

Diverse movement, ranging from strong athletic group sections, slow motion movement, human card shuffles, gestural acts, partner work, and intricate solo work added to my understanding of how I perceive movement as affective experiences that draw upon my emotions and feelings. I asked myself how do I see myself in the world? The strong unified movement represented the strength of them coming together in their struggles. When Enquist and Littlemore faced off in their cowboy duel, I could feel their struggles to find inner peace. Throughout the performance, the camera was able to transform particular moments into slow motion, which painted a picture of uncertainty and chaos. During that moment, I relished each movement, and the effect was visceral. Prominent hand gestures of the dancer’s movement of a gun, along with the overhead lasso movement were both seen as distinctive features that led me to reflect upon who really is a hero, villain, or a nobody.

Dynamic camera angles and cinematic transitions provided perspectives, which gave me a sense of belonging and solidarity with the performers. While engaging in the performance, I focused on only what the eye of the camera captured, as the external surroundings were not visible. For instance, I felt the emotional fear that occurred, as the

dancers held their mouths widely open expressing fear. This type of image captured by the camera drew upon their emotional fear, while it gave me chills of intense fear. A drone's perspective of a card game left me feeling like I was at the same table as the artists and socially accepted by them. Technological advancements with lighting, such as strobe lights, darkness versus light, drew me into the performance and created a sense of mystery of the unknown. Sharp camera angles captured vivid facial expressions, which made me feel connected to each of their emotions. The enactment of a saloon brawl, with finessed controlled movement gestures, created a perceived feeling of power and control versus the emotion of defeat. Throughout the piece, artists engaged with props, such as canes, couch, tables, chairs, mobile clothing rack, guitars, bass string instrument and a deck of cards. As the dancers interacted with the props, it invited me into a conversation with artists that could be seen as everyday people.

Sonic elements were woven throughout the performance, including music, audio recordings, voice overs and sound effects from the dancers. The text had a very powerful affect on me, as the main message was repeated multiple times throughout the performance, at different tempos, and layered within the movement of the dancers. The repetitive nature of the statement "There are three kinds of citizens. Villains, heroes and nobodies" (VIDF, 2021g) resonated with me, as I reflected upon what does each type of citizen contribute to our society. I felt the text enhanced my embodied experience and I pondered the messages conveyed throughout the piece. The curation of the text with the music emotionally drew me into the piece, as it was not created as one, rather separate entities then paired together. During the musical interlude of the wild west cowboy music at the beginning of the performance, the tone of struggle and conflict was evident as a matter of common concern within a collective society. Heavy breathing by the dancers allowed me to internalize their feelings of panic and despair. The strong syncopated beats and the oscillating vibrations created a mood of intensity and conflict rather than happiness and fun. At times, a strong presence of silence overtook the performance. During this moment in time, the cameras focused on the facial expressions of the dancers. This strategy facilitated a strong connection between me and the dancers' feelings and emotions. This was the moment that I pondered how evil and good can exist. CAMP

redefined the form of dance, by having a significant amount of innovative sonic text, theatrical scenes, and innovative cinematics to engage the multiple senses of viewers.

At the end of the performance, they shared hopeful messages, as they gathered together on the couch to play their guitars, bass instrument and blown bottle while singing *Home on the Range*. Even though they may have ventured at various times within the performance between good and evil, they shared the collective message that we can all hope for a place that you feel like you belong. This performance leaves me reflecting on matters of social concern and questioning who I am as a person. Is it the hero, villain, or nobody? My lingering afterthoughts left me with the sentiments that I have to live life to my own values and beliefs, rather than being that person that everyone wants or expects you to be. Engaging in the performance *WANTED* was a communicative process through dance movement, mise en scene and sonic qualities. This performance made me question who I am in society and how I can be a positive contribution to myself and others. Emotions of panic, despair, blame, and hope were part of my experience and served as a central focus of the social exchange.

### **VIDF Performance: *Before Dawn* by Lamondance**

VIDF concluded their festival with the presentation of the livestreamed performance *Before Dawn* by Lamondance. The final three performances took place on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 featuring the North Vancouver-based contemporary dance company, Lamondance, under the direction of choreographer and producer Davi Rodrigues. Lamondance looks for new ways to create performances that can resonate with viewers and “evoke all the senses taking the audiences on an unforgettable journey” (Lamondance, n.d.). A performance created specifically for the lens, was intended to allow citizens-audience to think about life (VIDF, 2021c). The central theme of the piece was a metaphor for the past fifteen months of the pandemic and how we have all had to face challenges and uphill battles. At times the pandemic has provided us opportunities to stop and reflect upon the fortunes that we have around us, but other times we faced turbulent times. A troupe of dance artists including Hayley Galati, Oksana Maslechko, Caroline Kiddie, Isla Spotswood, Katrina Del Villar, Piper French, Mackye White,

Danielle Drach, Will Jessup, Lazaro Silva invited the audience to be part of their emotional feelings and vulnerability. The title of the piece speaks to hope for the future, as the world opens up again after the pandemic. *Before Dawn* drew upon the emotions of the viewers, as restrictions of the pandemic were beginning to be lifted by the government of British Columbia.

Kinetically engaging movement was a focal point for understanding the struggles yet hope dancers experienced throughout their journey during the pandemic. Through a blend of strong athletic movement, along with classical ballet inspired repertoire, each dancer shared how at times they had strength, yet other times they felt powerless. Natural organic movements, such as walking, sitting, and sliding elevated this contemporary dance piece to heights of new hope for the future. I felt the power of the emotional struggles and conflict of the dancers through their movement. Throughout the performance, dancers utilized two white wooden ramps that served as an extension of themselves and their movement. Running, walking, jumping, rotating, sliding up and down the ramps were all strategies that facilitated the theme that life has its ups and downs. For many people, the pandemic was devastating, as some may have lost loved ones, jobs, housing, or deal with social isolation. Through vulnerability of the dancers, a conversation was created, in which I thought about some of my own accomplishments and challenges during the pandemic. As I watched in awe, I was appreciative of the struggles that Rodrigues must have endured to bring together this piece in the absent of masks with the numerous dancers performing intricate moves that involved physical touch and close proximity. The investigation of human movement resulted in the mind and the body producing fluid like movements. Multiple solos, duets, trios, and various other configurations offered citizens—audiences an understanding of how there are times that we may want to be alone, while other times we want social connection and human contact. At one point in the program, I experienced their sense of panic and despair as the dancers' body began to vibrate and the eye contact intensified with a deep stare into the soul of their partner. Expressive movement invited an open ended conversation to occur between the choreographer, dancers, and the citizens about common issues.

Rodrigues full-length piece features a key prop, two onstage ramp structures, which represents the ups and downs endured during the past fifteen months. Each white coloured ramp served as a focal point that was leveraged for the dancers to extend their movement. As the dancers utilized the ramps, their center of gravity shifted and altered to compensate for the movement (Smith, 2021b). Not only did the ramps provide opportunity for visual kinesthetic moments, but they also represented the metaphor of the ups and downs that we have all experienced during the pandemic. Rodrigues shares with his dancers that props are not just props—they're an extension of your body or they are another being. We see these two ramps as *life*" (Smith, 2021b). Cinematic features were unique in this performance, as Rodrigues took control of the Steadicam, being a member of the camera team capturing the movement (VIDF, 2021c). He was able to interpret the piece through the camera and invite the audience into the performance. As a choreographer and member of the camera crew, he had more opportunity to tell the narrative of *Before Dawn*. A combination of long shots focused on the entire set to close shots that zoomed in on the facial expressions, I shared in their times of frustration and hope. The ambience created by the lighting included periods of spotlights focusing on the dancers to fade outs that left me thinking about what the dancers will be faced with next. The combination of street-like clothing and black latex type body suits accentuated the dancers' movements to share their language of movement and complimented the sonic transitions within the music.

From the beginning of the performance, the strong drumbeat provided a rhythmic connection to support the movement. Throughout the various duets, I experienced music that provided the foundational framework for the mood that was being evoked by the dancers. For instance, the piano accompaniment gave the hope for freedom, while the quiet panic-stricken mechanical vibrations allowed me to feel the frustration and fear of the unknown. At one point, the increased tempo and clapping pattern demonstrated to me the determination for a new future of hope at the conclusion of the pandemic.

In the final moments of the performance, all the dancers performed a powerful, strong movement sequence before leaving the set. Two dancers remained on stage and proceeded to join hands at the crest of the ramp, prior to looking back to share with the

citizens-audience that there is hope for the future. We can overcome the ups and downs of life and remember the good fortunes that we have moving forward. The final message of *Before Dawn* takes place as the words slowly appear on the screen, “Let it become foggy or clear, dark or bright with ups and downs; there is still time to love and forgive, laugh and cry” (VIDF, 2021c). Even though we all faced challenges during the pandemic, citizens were still able to gather together out of free will, express and share their opinions about matters of common concern.

## Chapter 5.

### Discussion

Due to the COVID - 19 pandemic, the arts were faced with obstacles and challenges, on how they could envision and implement unique opportunities to nurture social connection, action and belonging through dance. This paper examined how the 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival (VIDF) transitioned from in person to livestreamed performances. Dance is a powerful tool of communication and my case study points to how a public sphere can be expanded beyond the linguistic to include non-linguistic communication within a contemporary affective public. Each one of the performances demonstrated that affect and emotion can be critical resources within a public sphere. As an affective mode of communication, each one of the performances supported forms of communicative exchange that led to social connection, action, and experiences of belonging. “Affective public spheres embrace a more embodied experience that includes sensory communication through multiple forms of nonverbal forms, including affective ones” (Cvetkovich, 2020, p. 157). Within a public, sharing feelings can transform the public sphere, as they are forms of rational communication that that can facilitate the exchange of ideas. At times, it may be difficult to listen to the feelings of others, as one may be still coming to terms with their own feelings, but the communicative dialogue exists. In this sense, dance can be seen as a medium of engagement that nourishes an affective public sphere. The 2021 Vancouver International Dance Festival provided me an opportunity to expand my thoughts that livestreamed dance performances can serve as a vehicle for affective public spheres. I have brought together the elements that were present in each of the dance performances to provide clarity on how each one of them brought the audience into a relationship with key matters of common concern.

In the livestreamed performance, *Hourglass* by Ne Sans Opera & Dance, Artistic Director, Ida Cohen, drew upon the matter of common concern, the process of aging and losing a loved one. Communicative exchange took place with the citizen-audience focusing on the feelings and emotions that one experiences during the grieving process.



Through a combination of movement, mise en scene and sonic features, feelings of loss, grief, sadness, and depression were evident throughout the performance. The affective states brought forward were not just abstract concepts, rather they were part of the language spoken through key elements. As Cohen speaks to the citizens-audience about the importance of being able to lean on someone for support during difficult times, it allowed me to reflect upon how important it was to be able to lean on my family during the pandemic. The nonverbal communication between the dancers shared their yearning for social dependence, while at times the need for independence. The movement spoke to me from the onset, as Dala's hand gestures and facial expressions gave me the sense of desperation and hopelessness. This initial movement pulled upon my feelings as I struggled at times through the pandemic. Embodied hand gestures by the dancers elicited feelings of panic and despair, as a result of the lack of control over the issue of common concern. As the dancers took on the portrayal of clowns, it reminded me that the feelings of humour, playfulness and having fun are critical elements to enjoying life. Within the moments of silence, I felt the strong power of their facial expressions, as they pulled me into a mutual conversation. The sensory communication occurred in a range of nonverbal forms, all of which facilitated a dialogue around the medium of expression and matters of common concern.

*Brimming* by Company 605 investigated the common concern of how our bodies face challenges and pressures that cause us to feel trapped within ourselves. The feeling of frustration and despair of being confined to a small space was conveyed by dancer / choreographer, Martin. I related to his feelings. During the pandemic, I experienced feelings of loneliness and I felt trapped within my own body. Martin invited the audience into his space and created a level of comfort through his gestural movements of connecting with the props. His rigid and controlled movement of body isolations, along with the grasping at the walls, compelled me to feel that he was trying to fight negative feelings. Desperation and defeat were part of our conversation, as I often felt socially isolated and claustrophobic within my own home during the pandemic. The camera and lighting created the illusion of an enclosed space. The contrast of lighting, light and dark, allowed me to understand how there was a constant inner battle that occurred during the performance. The set not only provided a physical space, but it also provided a

psychological space to share feelings and emotions of being alone. I reminisced on the current instability within our world, and it brought to mind how quickly everything can change. Cinematic elements focused on close shots of Martin's facial expressions, which invoked a dialogue grounded in the affective mode of communication. Sonic elements of buzzing, humming, background chanting and pure silence served as elements to highlight the intensity of feeling alone and socially isolated. *Brimming* spoke to the matter of common concern regarding human condition. Whether it be as a result of the pandemic or not, we all struggle with our inner feelings and emotions as they affect who we are as citizens within society.

Vidya Kotamraju's performance, *Longing*, was based on human condition of longing for connection and companionship with others. She facilitated a conversation with the citizens- audience about feeling socially connected with others. During the pandemic, I craved for the feelings of belonging and social connection. Kotamraju's precise finger and hand movement, along with defined foot tapping served as a form of non-verbal communication and self-expression, that were used to evoke feelings and emotions. Cinematic elements, invited me into her space and I was drawn into the feelings of yearning to feel connected to others. The sonic elements of the performance produced a layered effect, adding energy and depth to the emotions within her narrative. Sound was a key element in creating emotional triggers, throughout the performance. The combination of instrumental and sounds of nature elicited feelings of struggle of the human condition. During the pandemic, I experienced a longing for the companionship of friends, family, and the communities of people. The themes of common matter within this performance were the sense of yearning for love, companionship, and oneness. Kotamraju's movement, the cinematic features, including the camera and projections, along with the costuming and sonic qualities led to a relationship of affective communicative exchange. Emotions of longing served as the central focus of the social exchange processes that occurred within the performance. Desire, connection, and social fulfillment were universal matters of common concern for many, especially the pandemic.

*WANTED* by CAMP concentrated on the theme of hero and villain, through the portrayal of a cowboy persona. Via this figure, the dance artists examined the extremes of humanity, the evil and the good. This social commentary pushed me to reflect on what type of citizen I am or can be. The ensemble of dancers, engaged their audience in a narrative that focused on a collective society of panic, blame, and protection of oneself, from harm through escapism and indulgence. The dancers engaged in a conversation that examined the feelings of darkness and despair that exist in our world. This matter of common concern drew me away from my everyday troubles to visualize life after the pandemic. The overlaying of the text echoing the words “There are only three kinds of citizens: heroes, villains and nobodies” (VIDF, 2021g) allowed me to reflect on how everyone has their own perspective of their lived experiences. Diverse movement, such as the cowboy duel, allowed me to experience their struggles and challenges. Dynamic camera angles and cinematic transitions invited me to engage in dialogue around the current fears that exist in society. Strobe lights, and moments of darkness drew me into an affective conversation about the mystery of the unknown. Sonic elements captured the intensity of the emotional struggle and conflict facing society. Multiple emotions of panic, despair, blame, hope, and curiosity were part of my dialogic relationship during the performance and served as a central focus of the social exchange.

*Before Dawn* by Lamondance was a reflective piece that was a metaphor for the challenges and uphill battles that we have all faced during the pandemic. The dancers displayed a high level of vulnerability and invited me into a conversation with them about the emotional turbulence during the pandemic. During the performance, dancers utilized two white wooden ramps that served as an extension of themselves and their movement. By running, walking, jumping, rotating, and sliding up and down the ramps, I could feel their emotional struggles of the ups and downs of life. Through the emotional vulnerability of the dancers, a conversation was sparked, which allowed me to reflect on my own emotional roller-coaster. Multiple dance groupings offered citizens—audiences an understanding of how there are times that we may experience loneliness and isolation, while other times we want social connection and human contact. Expressive movement invited an open ended conversation to occur between the choreographer, dancers, and the citizens about matters of common concern. Cinematic features allowed me to feel an

emotional attachment to the piece through a combination of long and short shots. I shared in their times of frustration, yet sense of hope that the future will be brighter. The sonic features provided the foundation for the mood being evoked by the dancers. For instance, the upbeat piano accompaniment gave hope for the future, while the quiet panic stricken mechanical vibrations allowed me to feel the frustration and fear of the unknown. Increased tempo and woven in human clapping sounds allowed me to pull on my feelings of hope for a post-pandemic future. The communicative exchange of common concern is our ability to overcome the ups and downs of life, yet keep in mind our blessings and good fortunes.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

“Affective public spheres embrace a more embodied experience that includes sensory communication through multiple nonverbal forms, including affective ones” (Cvetkovich, 2020, p. 157). By engaging in the livestreamed dance performances, I was able to bring together the elements of dance movement, mise en scene and sonic elements that addressed matters of common concern. By reading the meaning of each one of these nonverbal texts, it opens access to facilitate an affective public sphere. As I collected the data, it was evident that citizen-audiences were engaged in a communicative exchange in which affect was present. Each one of these performances highlighted how non-linguistic forms of communication can be powerful resources for the kind of connection, engagement and response that is part of the dialogue that occurs within a public sphere. Discourse cannot occur without the presence of affect. An affective public sphere is dependent on expression of emotion and feelings that has evolved as a dialogue resulting from engagement with the key elements. The public sphere can be expanded beyond the linguistic to include non-linguistic communication in which affect, and emotion are critical resources within a contemporary affective public. Dance can be seen as a medium of engagement that nourishes an affective public sphere. The experience of an affective public sphere through dance relies on an audience that has evolved in a communicative exchange with the form of expression, but it does not take away from the power of that expression. Through the findings of this research, I have demonstrated how dance serves as a vehicle for communities to form and engage in social connection through affect and emotion and communicative actions about matters of common concern within an affective public sphere. This project has expanded my understanding of the forms of communicative practice that can facilitate public encounters and an affective public sphere.

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