

ReCall

by

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B.F.A. (Hons., Dance), The Hong Kong Academy For Performing Arts, 2006

Project Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in the
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Abstract

This document focuses on the choreographic process of *ReCall*, a dance-theatre work that employs choreographic devices through gesture and stories related to the tragedy of September 11th, 2001. The creative process included workshops in dance technique and devising with various collaborators and disciplines. This production was designed to kinesthetically engage the audience through shifting the expectations of the tradition of concert dance.

Keywords: Gesture; choreography; dance devising; habitus; dance theatre

This is dedicated to my family in Hong Kong...

Without them, I am nothing.

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Artist Statement: *ReCall*

Gesture is the basic abstraction whereby the dance illusion is made and organized.

Susanne Langer

The art of dance provides a unique form of aesthetic experience in its immediate reflection of our human existence and expression. Our motions, our feelings, our lives reflected in real time in a shared space.

I am a movement artist who trained in Asia and recently practiced in North America. I am interested in the interplay between theatrical, cultural and choreographic theories in my work. Choreographing in different cities offers me an understanding of different origins of movement patterns, expression and intention. Practicing contemporary dance for me is a constant reflection through everyday human relationships. I am inspired from the post modern perspective on the nature of dance set by the Judson artists in the early 1960's –that the way we move and communicate in the everyday world is as valid material for aesthetic reflection as is the codified traditions of ballet and modern dance.

I am made aware of the habitus of the different urban environments and their effect on the way we move. For example, in Hong Kong the public moves at a faster tempo with smaller movements influenced by smaller spaces and their focus is linear and goal oriented. In Vancouver, people move with bigger strides with conformability in taking space. It is these differences in qualities, intention and trajectory that I use as

material for creating my work. I take more inspiration from non-codified movement, our gestures, than the traditions of dance forms. My goal as a dance artist is to use choreographic devices to create a language that can be read by a diverse audience.

Although there is a strong tradition of site-specific work and performances that addresses the integration of movement and the everyday experience, I am driven by the challenge of crafting performance for the theater. The public makes the choice to attend the theater with a specific expectation, and I can challenge that expectation. I am interested in the challenge of getting an audience to see the relationship of qualities-accessing their imagination as opposed to the instinct of looking for the narrative. I am also interested in the contemporary collaborative process of theater production, which bring together different professions that come together in a shared vision.

Choreographic devices, developed by artists across disciplines, are the tools I access to manipulate or deconstruct movement vocabulary that I collect in a work. In my thesis project *ReCall*, I began with a solo I created in my first year in the MFA program based on events related to the tragedy of September 11th. While this event became a thematic anchor for the full evening work, it was not a political focus or narrative of the specific event. I strived for a more comprehensive picture, one that would be formed by exhibiting fragments and stories. My intention was to focus on moments that deeply connect us and reflect our humanity through the manipulation of recognizable gestures, stories and movement. These devices were designed to kinesthetically engage the audience as well as reflect on universal human connection.

Through my experience of working on theater and dance collaborations at SFU, I was introduced to the concept of 'devising', a theatrical process where by the content of

a work emerges from the collaborative and experimental process of a group. Devising questions the dictatorship of text in Dramatic Theater. In the same way, I wanted to question the recognized status of codified dance technique in dance. In many ways, devising is common practice in contemporary dance, yet there is usually a 'choreographer' that propels the construction of the work. In *ReCall*, my principal role was to be the person who offered the artistic direction. I initiated and held the core of the works; and experimented with taking on several rolls; dancer, choreographer, collaborator, editor, etc... I intended to provide a non-hierarchical working environment that encouraged my collaborators to contribute their ideas. The creative team for *ReCall*, performers, musician, writer, video designer, lighting designer and dramaturge, offered me their ideas throughout the process. The "devising" process allowed the meaning of the work to emerge from the process of creation and experimentation. Through different ways of approaching, a new meaning of our gestures was generated.

Being exposed to theatrical training also led me to work with predominantly actors in my final work. From my previous experience working with trained dancers, I have found that even their simple movement is strongly influenced by dance technique, and their performance of human gesture is disconnected from everyday life. In *ReCall*, I realized, actors have a natural everyday expression, giving them more potential to display the ordinariness of everyday movement. Ultimately, the final performance blurred the line between dance and theater.

In the first phase of the creative process, my goal was to generate movement material and improvisational structures. I held a series of workshop rehearsals with the performers from dance and theatre from the SCA. We created different scenarios that were initiated by a set of motifs generated by the idea of tragic events: *Moment*, *Steps*,

Why, Illness, and Shadow. These workshops generated the building blocks that initiated the structure for the final work. In the performance of *ReCall*, there were moments of set material and improvisational structures. This allowed the performers to build a kinesthetic tension through reading the energy of the performers, space and audience, making choices that engaged the material in the moment.

In the second phase of the process, I invited my performers to attend movement technique classes that I facilitated. My goal was introducing principals of dance technique to my performers for greater confidence and articulation in the vocabulary for *ReCall*. I worked on using imagery and intention in the initiation of movement, as opposed to focusing only on the mechanics.

In the third phase, initiated by the performers, I worked with the actors in building narratives for each section. In the beginning of this phase, I assigned each performer a character and a task in order to create actions. These tasks were made by consultation with my dramaturge in the process of *ReCall*. The aim was to generate stories with performers and offer them the motivation for moving.

In the end, the first section of *ReCall*, "The Moment Of", was the most engaging part of the work in the final performance. This was the first section I started with in rehearsals and was the most collaborative in how the content emerged from each performer. This section also had the most improvisation embedded in the structure. I explored the choreographic strategy including both set choreography and structural improvisation. "The Moment Of" became the generator for the building of the other sections of *ReCall* as well.

As a contemporary dance artist we are plagued with the challenge of getting audiences to experience the work without needing to “understand” it. I try to create works that engage both recognition of a relationship to movement through the use of gestures and a kinesthetic experience through choreography. Using gesture and text in *ReCall*, allowed me to provide a context to locate a space for the audience to imagine.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Descriptions of performance, *ReCall*

Date: September 10th & 11th 2012 (Monday & Tuesday)

Time: 8pm

Venue: Studio D, SFU School for the Contemporary Arts at Goldcorp Centre for the Arts
(149 W. Hastings Street, Vancouver BC)

Choreographer & performer: Iris Lau

Composer & performer: Elliot Vaughan

Performers: Davey Samuel Calderon, Elysse Cheadle, June Fukumura, Shannon Lee,
Carmine Santavenere, Manuela Sosa

Guest Artist (Voice Over): Conor Wylie

Text: Adam Cowart

Dramaturg: Angela Ferreira

Stage Manager: Teresa Leung

Lighting Designer & Technical Director: Jonathan Kim

Graphic & Projection Designer: Lain Kim

Assistant Stage Manager: Rui Su

Senior Supervisor: Rob Kitsos

Supervisor: DD Kugler

Technical Counselor: Gary Harris

About the Work

The moment of ending... The moment of denial...

The moment of crushing rain... The moment of collapse...

The moment of indulgence... The moment of silence...

The moment of the moment... The moment of spontaneity...

The moment of never again... The moment of brooding...

The moment of reflection...

Notes from Choreographer

This work is “presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements” of my MFA at SFU. Oh Yes... but other than that, *ReCall* is significant because it fulfills an artist’s responsibility to the society. *ReCall* displays fragments and stories about families after a social event with their absent one. It captures moments of lives up before and after a specific moment, in order to display a more comprehensive picture and story in our society. From my research on “time” to *ReCall*, I am interested in how one social event affects individuals’ life and their stories. Maybe, *ReCall* is the specific event that connects and extends my own story to your stories.

Appendix B.

Text for *ReCall*- Final version on September 3, 2012

Scenes

1. Transition: The Phone Call Part 1
2. The Moment of... The Phone Call Part 2
3. Hair Pulling Solo
4. Transition: The Phone Call Part 3
5. E & E duet
6. Waving Hands Group Dance ("Dandelion Dance")
7. Transition: The Phone Call Part 4
8. Sign Language
9. Balloons "I Knew Something Was Wrong When..."
10. Steps – Group Dust
11. Transition: The Phone Call Part 5
12. Déjà vu Baby's 37.95 Day Slumber
13. Ridiculous Questions
14. Dandelion Monologue + Shannon & Iris's dance
15. ReCall – Solo

Transition: Phone Call 1

Hey, its me.

Just wanted to say hi, see how things are going. So... yeah, hi. Talk to you later.

(Phone beeps)

Scene 1

The Moment Of... and the Phone Call 2

Hey, me again.

There's, uh, I wanted to let you know that, you know how sometimes the hot water leaks a bit in the kitchen sink. So, all you have to do is pop the top off the hot faucet – its really easy – then grab a Phillips head screw driver – sorry, the one with the star – and turn it a few times counter clockwise and it will tighten it up and stop it from leaking. Cool? OK, talk to you later.

(Phone beeps)

Scene 2

Hair Pulling Solo (no text)

Transition: Phone Call 3

Me again.

I was just thinking... you know the sandwich shop I stop at sometimes? Its called "Slices." Just Google the address. I thought, you know, uh, if I'm not around for some reason and you really wanted a sandwich from there. Now you know the place. And the

place with the dark chocolate and raspberry croissants is called “Comedia Baguette”. I... nothing there is really funny or anything... yeah...

I... I caught my flight. I’m calling from the plane. I didn’t even think the signal would work. But I guess it does...

So... yeah.

(Phone beeps)

Scene 3

E&E duet, Dandelion group dance

Transition: The Phone Call 4

Hey, yeah, its me again.

Listen, when you get this message, just check the flight arrival times. I think we’ll probably be late or something. No point in coming all the way to the airport and waiting around, right?

And I’m sorry about the other night. I’ve just been... stressed out or something. Anyway, you say that I never once in my life said I’m sorry, which is probably true. But... I’m sorry, OK? I... I don’t know if I can ever make it up to you but if I could, I would. Bye.

(Phone beeps)

Scene 4

Sign Language- lyrics from Tender Exchange (交換溫柔)

*能共你活著別分手 怎可當世界沒盡頭

I hope we live and never separate. But we can't pretend there is no end of the world.

寧願任細水再長流 才懷念最歡樂時候

I'd rather "forever". Then we miss every moment of happiness

能為你活著別分手 請假設你我沒然後

I hope I can live for you and don't part (break up?).

Please assume we have no tomorrow... (It means treasure today)

站在暴雨中漫遊 為何還吝嗇所有

I/ we stand and wander under heavy rain. Why can't we be generous?

將溫柔捐給你 都怕未夠

... generous to you with my tender... I wonder... it is never enough.*

在這呼天不應的公路 突然 想好好跟你抱一抱

No one response me on this road. Suddenly, I wish I can embrace you.

也許明日未能坐著共你傾訴 我們 繃小得似螻蟻飛舞

We may not sit next to each other and chat tomorrow. We... are powerless and like an ant.

直到很久不見的恐懼 才突然 想親口跟你說一句

Because of the fear of your vanishing. Suddenly, I really want to tell you in person...

重新愛下去 就當跟最後伴侶

"Can we fall in love, again? Please think I am your last one. (partner)

活到擁抱著沉睡 原來永別兩字太乾脆

Until the time we embrace and sleep (literally means death)."

Actually, the words of 'Good-Bye' too simple (too simple to describe our separation).

Repeat *

在這充滿爭拗的天地 螢幕前巴不得跟你再嬉戲

In this world that is full of arguments. I eagerly look forward to playing (maybe flirting) with you in front of the monitor

如果有運氣 待你好到被嫌棄

If I am lucky enough, I can stay with you until the time that you dislike me.

為你生怎麼怕死 難道我沒氣力愛惜你

I don't afraid of death because I live for you. Why don't I strengthen enough to love and treasure you?

能共你活著別分手 怎可當世界沒盡頭

I hope we live and never separate. But we can't pretend there is no end of the world.

寧願任細水再長流 才懷念最歡樂時候

I'd rather "forever". Then we miss every moment of happiness

能為你活著別分手 請感激你我還能夠

I hope I can live for you and don't part. We feel an immense gratitude/ thank that we still can...

站在暴雨中漫遊 為何還吝嗇所有

stand and wander under heavy rain. Why can't we be generous?

將溫柔捐給你 都怕未夠

... generous to you with my tender... I wonder... it is never enough.

無論我活著活多久 都知道你我在地球

No matter how long I live. I know that you are alive, in this world...

珍惜溫柔 怎捨得獨個享有

Cherish the tender... but please don't possess that yourself/ myself.

Scene 5

Transition: Balloons “I Knew Something Was Wrong”

I knew something was wrong when the little girl's balloon wriggled its way loose and floated up into the sky. The girl screamed, not a sad or angry scream, but one of delight. Like she was just given the most remarkable toy in the world. She pointed and I watched it sail beyond the reach of adults. I was walking my dog and when I looked over I saw my dog's feet leave the ground as it too floated up into the sky. My poor doggie barked and I wondered what sound balloons would make, if they could, when they were released from the earth. More dogs started to come loose. Smart owners latched on to their dogs, but they also started to float, buoyed by their pets. Then the screaming little girl's feet left the ground. All around me people were lifting off into the air and then I was too. I looked down at the world and was happy to leave it. I decided instantly that this was the right thing, to float away and be eaten by a cloud somewhere. And as my happiness grew, I sank lower and lower back to earth, until I touched down, my feet very heavy now against the sidewalk. The sky was littered with flailing human beings. And so I continued walking, wondering if at some great height the pressure would become too great and they would all pop, their remains falling back to the ground, bloody rain.

Scene 6

Steps – Group Dust

Transition: The Phone Call 5

Sorry I keep phoning. Just listening to your voice on the message, I guess.

And... I just realized on the other messages I never said that I loved you. So – I love you. Look at that? I said “I’m sorry” and “I love you” all in one day. It’s a fucking miracle, hey?

(weak laugh)

Its shitty because we’re passing through all these clouds and all I really want is one more look at the world.

(Phone beeeeeeeeeeeeepppppppssssss)

Scene 7

Déjà vu Baby’s 37.95 Day Slumber

I had a dream where I became very tired and fell asleep and had another dream where I was very tired and fell asleep into another dream where I felt very tired and fell asleep into another dream where I was drowsy and drifted into another dream...

(Pause)

I’m tired a lot.

(Pause)

So... I kept dreaming of falling asleep and dreaming of falling asleep. Then I fell into a dream where I saw these women doing this... and this... and this...

I asked, “What are you doing?”

“I don’t know,” they said.

“Then why are you doing it?”

“You did it first,” they said.

“I did this?”

“You did.”

“But why?” I asked. Then I woke up from that dream, into the next.

In the new dream I couldn't remember the last, but I saw these women doing this... and this... and this...

I asked, “Are you scared?”

And they said, “We don't know.”

I asked, “Are you sad?”

And they said they didn't know.

I asked, are you happy, are you celebrating?

And they said, “It couldn't be that, for sure it could not be that.”

I asked, “Where did you learn these things?”

And they said they had seen me do them.

Before I could ask why, I woke into another dream.

And I was doing this... and this... and this...

They asked me if I was scared, and I said I don't know. They asked if I was sad and I said I didn't know. They asked if I was happy and celebrating and I said I was sure it wasn't that.

Then the waking grew faster. I woke and woke and could never remember what I had woken up from.

And I saw them do this... and this... and this...

I stopped asking why and instead complimented them. "What beautiful movements," I said. "How graceful you all move." I asked what they were doing and they said, "We follow you." So then I asked what I was doing. And they said:

- Measuring the length of sorrow.
- Forcing your body to breathe without the use of your lungs.
- Waiting and watching for a car to come, so you can step in front of it.
- Brushing dandelion seeds from your hair.
- Drying the backsides of your eyes before the tears pool and spill.
- Hiding from a hideous beast that can only see you when you're perfectly still – SO KEEP MOVING!!
- Trying to wake up after sleeping for 37.95 days.

Still more of this... and this... and this...

There are layers of old, dead dreams around me. Sleepy sediment.

It occurred to me that I wasn't even dreaming, but maybe instead remembering a dream or trying to remember because everything is familiar but new. I don't know if I'm sleeping or waking or remembering sleeping or recollecting waking or dreaming memories or... or what...

But I think somewhere in the waking I must have done this... and this... and this...

I can't remember why. And I don't want to. I want to burrow under blankets of black nothing. Dive into sleep. Away from me.

Scene 8

Ridiculous Questions

Note: “/” denotes the next line beginning. More than one is means multiples line interjections.

1. **If there was a God, why would he let me do this?**
2. If happy people dance in the rain, how do sad people get through the snow?
3. Why don't I leak when I drink water, even when my skin is dry and cracked?
4. When was the last time I hung myself upside down and cried?
5. **// Why doesn't God strike me dead when I do this?**
6. Why can't memories of summer warm me in winter?
7. Does praying emit carbon into the atmosphere?
8. When I stopped loving you, why did you continue to exist instead of melting into a chair, a single red chair that is uncomfortable to sit on but good for the back?
9. **If God is watching, why am I allowed to do this?**
10. Is a person buried alive/, or is it a pre-emptive funeral?
11. Why doesn't the moon lighten my skin if the sun darkens it?
12. After a ghost goes to the bathroom, how do they wash their hands?
13. **If God cared about us, why would he let me do this?**
14. If I ate my own stomach, would I still be hungry?

15. Why can't money fall in / love and reproduce?
16. If I killed you right now, would you notice?
17. **Will God ever save me from this?**
18. If I respond to her questions with quotes from famous films, am I still lying?
19. Why don't clouds flip over flip over occasionally, so they don't get too much sun
on one side?
20. If I eat in my dreams, do I need to / brush my teeth before I wake up?
21. **If God is real, why does he let me do this?**
22. If I write you a love song without music, is it poetry or pointless?
23. Who decided earrings were a good idea?
24. If I was born one second earlier, who would I be and would I have asked this
question?
25. **Why doesn't God's tears fall to earth when this happens?**
26. If my shadow disappears, can I park in the handicap spaces at the mall?
27. Why doesn't my head float away / when my neck gets tired?
28. If I were born with two hearts, could I have two lovers without cheating?
29. **Does God laugh when I do this?**

30. Why can't I un-sew these clothes and knit a field of cotton to run naked through?
31. Why do I keep asking these questions?
32. If children have such wild imaginations /, why is there no barber to trim it back?
33. Is forgetting a way for the mind to tidy up
- 34. Why does God remain silent when I do this?**
35. Why are you silent?

Scene 9

Dandelion Monologue- Invisible Duet

He died...

Everything he was, is – though there no longer is an is – and everything he could have been...

We could have been...

Gone...

I mean that.

All that remained was the thing inside me. Where we had created something that was not gone...

It trembled...

Fidgetted...

And paced in my darkness.

I ran to go find the death of him and looked up...

Into the sky to see two massive dandelions...

Bursting into fiery bloom....

I mean that.

The sky was thick with white...

I thought it was snow, then I thought it was ash...

But it was the seeds of the dandelions...

White, thick seeds blocking out the sun...

A pallid eclipse...

I mean that.

I ran, searched for cover but found none...

I wanted to protect the part of him that wasn't undone...

But the white descended...

First one, nestled in the hollow of my neck...

Another in my hair...

Another in the lashes of my left eye....

Each weighed me down, wore me out and more fell upon me until I couldn't run any further...

I cried...

The seeds soaked up my tears...

And still more white from the heavens...

More until the weight forced me to my knees...

Then pushed me down, face first into the street...

Pushed down hard...

They entered me and I felt another child growing...

Some hard and angry alien thing pulsing belligerent against the softness of what he had made...

Finished with me, the seeds scattered to look for new fertile grounds....

I rose and looked around...

White everywhere and the dandelions tumbling down...

Their frail stalks too tender to hold up all that white ambition...

I mean that.

I turned home...

The world a winterland of colourless sorrows...

And I ran through...

I ran through it...

I ran through it all...

I ran.

I mean that...

I mean it...

I do.

Scene 10

ReCall- Solo

The End.

Appendix C.

Sample of Academic Writing

First Version submitted for Graduate Seminar FPA-812, Fall 2011

Professor: Henry Daniel

Revisions supervised by: Rob Kitsos

Choreographing Through Gesture: East and West

Gesture is a communication-based, non-performative action, and functions similar to verbal language. We perform, experience and understand it in our daily life. In tracing the evolution of gesture in contemporary dance performance, I begin to make connections about my own impulses as a movement artist. Pierre Bourdieu's idea of "habitus" refers to socially learned anatomical disposition, styles, posture, gesture and mannerisms that are socially learned and culturally shared within a specific group. (qtd. in Kwan, 16) There is a spectrum of my influences in dance reaching from NYC, to Germany, and my native city Hong Kong. As gesture is interpreted differently in various cultures, the ambiguity of gesture fascinates the contemporary dance artist.

The perception of any gesture is contextualized by specific social and cultural systems. In Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Dance Theatre, Ciane Fernandes, states that "the personal body is a society body- a social construction at psychological and physical levels, constantly permeated and controlled by repetitive discipline within social power relationships." (9) Gestures are a product of what we learn from culture. Our

social gestures are complex systems of communication that we are often not aware of until they are made visible through a form of reflection like the aesthetic lens of performance. Artists de-familiarize the context of gestures, and break the linkage of our perception that we have learnt and practiced since birth. It is this de-familiarization that invites an audience to reconsider the significance of social events.

Since the 1960's, gesture has been a ubiquitous and recognizable feature in contemporary dance. Yet the influence of this era in dance translated differently in Asia than it did in the west. As a contemporary dance artist from Hong Kong living in Canada, these differences in the use and interpretation of our gestures has transformed the way I look and create dances. I will trace the influence and use of gesture in the west and east and then address how gesture has influenced my own process as a contemporary dance artist.

West

The modern dance masters, such as Martha Graham, established various types of codified movement systems. They rebelled against the classical dance aesthetic and defined dance as a modern art form. After Graham, and the height of modern dance in the late 1950's, there was another aesthetic shift in how dance was seen, created and defined. From the establishment of movement vocabularies in modern dance, post-modern dance practitioners questioned the role of movements in dance. The emphasis in modern dance was such that "technical proficiency had become an end in itself ... rather than the means to an end. Technique became set and strict, codified in the style of the originator, with emphasis on greater and greater achievement." (137) The emphasis for the post-modern artists was transparency in process, any movement

(including everyday gestures) is valid, any space is valid and dance is accessible to anyone.

With influences from other Post-modern art movements, like Pop Art, Conceptualism and Minimalism, dance practitioners in the 1960's revolutionized the way the body was presented and interpreted. The Judson artists, a group of experimental dancers in NYC, were recognized as creators of the Post-modern aesthetic, staged everyday functional situations on stage –leaving out the codified systems of the traditions of dance. A typical example of Post-modern dance is Flat in 1964 by Steve Paxton. Paxton simply presented walking, standing, sitting, dressing, undressing and posing, an ordinary daily routine. An American Post-modern dance critic, Jill Johnston further analyzed the walking in Flat as 'a relaxed, efficient walk, with no excess movement of the arms and legs' (234). Paxton revealed his refusal of artificiality in art and reality in the interview "Steven Paxton: Speaking of Dance - Conversations with Contemporary Masters of American Modern Dance". He states that; "people in the Modern dance period were awash by the artificial stuff". The performance space became a vehicle for reflection upon how our bodies (trained or untrained) could be expressive - the ordinary was recognized as a provocative action, bringing awareness to life through our everyday physical experiences.

It was this transition in dance aesthetics that gesture became a formal movement vocabulary in dance practice. In the early 1960's this new form was in an experimental stage and didn't capture the attention of large audiences, yet this philosophy of ordinary and prosaic movement permeated the world of dance globally and is still prevalent in contemporary dance today.

“The post-modern aesthetic is not a monolithic one, and in it one can find many contrasting concerns and method.”(Banes, 1977 17-18) The changes this new movement inspired was much more than just the use of everyday gestures in their dances- new spaces were used, new choreographic tools, the role of the artist, form and content, and the idea of virtuosity was challenged. The new ways dances were constructed transformed notions of form and content established by modern dance practices. Where in the modern dance tradition audiences focused on the content of the dances, the theatrical expression, or the story, in post modern work the form was often the content itself. The focus of these new dances was placed on the pure function of the body in space.

As human gestures carry meaning and expression, the use of gesture in post modern dance would often focus on a new context or form alone, like in the work of the transitional artist, Merce Cunningham, who believed “... in dance as an independent medium of expression with its own laws and objectives.” (qtd. in Anderson, 206). For Cunningham, dance can be plot-less, include any movement, and exist independently. Cunningham’s conceptual breakthrough coincided with the minimalist idea in the visual art painters like Robert Rauschenberg, who combined non-traditional materials and ordinary objects in his “Painting Sculptures”.

Hong Kong

My training started in Hong Kong, where modern dance became a term used to encompass many styles of professional dance. Although Hong Kong was one of the pioneer cities in Chinese society, which adopted and developed Modern dance, the development was comparatively different than Western society –only formally taking

hold with the establishment of the City Contemporary Dance Company in 1979. Post modern dance didn't take hold aesthetically as it did in the west, and even today it would be hard to find the aesthetic of pure human gesture on stage. The arts in Hong Kong are very interconnected to social status and tradition in a way that discourages artists from challenging cultural conventions. There was less room for experimentation or re-contextualization of the nature of art. This separation of politics and art restricted dance practice to the traditional aesthetics of virtuosic technique and codified systems of movement vocabulary. There was, however, a desire for the reality of political and social change brought on by the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 and the sovereignty's handover in 1997 that made its way into the content of theater dance. Inspired by these events- the decade of the 1990's was the beginning of contemporary dance in Hong Kong.

Choreographers in the 90s, inspired by the enormous social and political changes taking place, celebrated the modernization of Hong Kong culture. Hong Kong's unification with China inspired artists to question the self-identity as Chinese, adopting a mix of influences from the west. While pedestrian gesture remained absent from the general array of work in concert dance, there was the use of modern and ballet aesthetics and other contemporary performing elements such as text and the use of popular culture.

Choreographers in the three generations during the 1990s worked in the Hong Kong Modern dance field with different source of influence. They began to explore with their own sources of inspirations from both traditional and modern movement theories to create their own art works. They brought in American and European Modern dance system while

traditional Chinese dance and Ballet systems were in the mix.
(Lau 165)

Unintentionally, there became a hybrid of "Chinese and Western" movement vocabulary, as a result of Chinese artists in Hong Kong who wanted to preserve a self-identity yet embraced new western aesthetics.

In a way, Hong Kong dance society skipped Post modern dance moving from Modern to Contemporary. Today, while there is a small contingent of artists experimenting with postmodern ideas, the modern dance aesthetic within a blend of contemporary forms dominates the stages in Hong Kong dance.

Germany

In the late 20's-early 30's, expressionist artists in Germany performed the complexity of human psychology using gesture to a more dramatic effect. In Switzerland, many artists and art movement (like the Dadaists) collaborated between the two world wars and rejected or re-evaluated the tradition of art practice, incorporating irrational and expressive subject matter. German dance artist Mary Wigman performed an experimental dance and included painting, sculpture, and graphics with musical interludes to Friedrich Nietzsche's poem in the opening of Galerie Dada (Bergsohn, 15). This cabaret-like performance initiated the Ausdruckstanz- German Expressionistic Dance between the two World Wars. This movement was marked by "a rebellion against classical ballet and a search for an individual expression linked with universal human struggles and needs." (qtd. in Fernandez, 3)

Meanwhile, Rudolf Laban and his student Kurt Jooss developed a system analyzing primary elements in dance and researched connections between space, body,

emotion and movement. Jooss developed sociopolitical themes in his choreographies with his theories of movement analysis. In this way, dance artists provoked audiences from primal sources through human gesture and struggles against the social constraints and powers of authority.

Tanztheater, (the developing new form dance theatre), inherited the concept of German expressionism and developed with the accompanying minimalist movement technique and choreographic ideas from Post-modern dance. The German movement artist Pina Bausch was pivotal in contemporary performance in that she synthesized influences from German expressionist works and the pure movement aesthetic from the American Judson artists. Theatrically, her works brought attention to our psychological and emotional experience as human beings in the real world through glimpses of gestural interactions on stage. These interactions are situated and arranged compositionally with bodies in space creating a visceral experience. The use of gesture in Bausch's compositions re-situated the pure use of the everyday through compositional devices like repetition, tempo or spatial variations. Bausch's strange and new performances, which merged dance and theatre, successfully established this original and influential aesthetic. Her work was "made up of the realities of the imaginary" (qtd. in Price, 322); and strived to create "a space where we can encounter each other". (qtd. in Servos, in web site of Tanztheater Wuppertal)

Both the Judson and German artists removed understandable symbols from their original context. For the Judson artists, this change was simply placing the everyday on stage. For German artists, it was infusing these gestures with dramatic intensity. These new movements in the aesthetics in dance performance broke conventional expectations of audiences and introduced new methods of creating live performance.

Choreographic Gestures

Audiences tend to analyze dance work with movements that they are familiar with or understand. The familiarization is prelude, which draws audience to contemplate unconsciously. Gesture is the symbolic movement, which conveys information and attaches to an audiences' physical experience. Thus, audiences will be kinesthetically influenced by the motion on stage, and intellectually analyze the performance within the framework that the choreographer creates.

The European dance scholar Jeroen Fabius mentioned, "Kinesthesia is defined as the ability to feel movements of the limbs and body. The art of choreography is specialized both in training dancers to develop kinesthetic expertise and in creating formats for spectators to access particular fields of movement experience." (331) In contemporary dance, the intention of choreographing with gesture is not connected to the conventional viewpoint of bodily beauty, (as it was in the tradition of the classical story ballet), but does synchronize both performers' and audiences' kinesthetic experience through recognized everyday symbols. Gesture is the signifier that directs audiences to reflect and recall their actual life, influencing their bodies' histories and physical experiences.

My Process

Choreographic devices are regarded as the compositional processes that modify movements and design in space. This is also the process that produces the de-familiarization of gestures. This process adds layers of ideas -polishing and vitalizing movements with meaning, and rearranges intellectual content and the kinesthetic perception of gesture -using what the audience knows to make new ideas.

Considering the logical meanings in our gestures, I deconstruct movement through various choreographic devices and present the familiar gesture in a new context through four major elements of composition; meaning, dynamics, repetition and spatial design.

As the recognized meanings of gesture is based on the context of different societies and cultures, one gesture can communicate a multitude of meanings. As a choreographer, I try to use this to my advantage. In some cases, the meaning of gesture heavily relies on the body parts that perform. Instrumentation is a device that regards that the entire body as an ensemble of various parts and proportionate groups that are interchangeable. For example, the “waving hand” gesture is a simple and powerful gesture to present either “good-bye” or “hi”. However, when a dancer performs this quality of waving upside-down with his leg and feet, the quality of movement in the wave motion hasn’t changed, but the waving feet movement is interpreted as a sense of leisure. Audiences understand one gesture not only from the kinesthetic movement, but also from the body part.

Dynamics is the interaction of force with time. The specific dynamics of gestures influence its interpretation. With everyday gestures, the intention of what the performer wants to communicate dictates the specific dynamic performed. Through the deconstruction of the typical force or rhythm of a familiar gesture, new layers of meanings are generated.

Repetition is a simple yet powerful device. It is the reproduction of movement or a sequence of movement in order to emphasize a specific idea or allow a transformation for new ideas to be communicated. A durative repetition of gesture emphasizes the

inertia in movement activities and provides audiences a longer time to analyze. This kind of repetition moves beyond the kinesthetic experience of the movement and is transformed into a question about the connotations of the action itself. Through an extreme use of repeating action, the meaning of the gesture is paradoxically ignored. The three inter-relationships between intention, reception and interpretation have been redirected by the notion of interruption. In consequence of interrupting the dynamic flow of movement, audiences reconsider the relationship between intention and performance as it pertains to their habits and to reality.

To examine this assumption, I performed a “heart beating” gesture for a 6-minute video projection in my solo choreography *ReCall* (2011). In the projection, I placed my left palm on my left chest and lightly beat with my right hand repeatedly. This work combined a live solo dance with this projection, and was about a personal view on the tragedy of 911. The origin of the “heart beating” gesture is from children’s behavior suggesting “scary”. But in the context of *ReCall*, audiences might conceive the gesture as “love” or “treasure”.

Spatial design is recognized as a non-verbal manner of communication within a culture and represents norms of order in society that we learn and practice everyday. Spatial design is regarded as the arrangement in a performing space, which includes the construction of distance between performers and audiences, traveling pathways on the floor and the moving pathways in the air.

When I compare physical behaviors from Hong Kong and other Western cities, I recognize how a city’s urban design and architecture influence the gestural habits of her

residents. In this way, cities' spatial design influences the vocabulary a dance artist may utilize.

In my own practice, I have explored spatial relationships created through simple walking patterns, which facilitate a range of relationships between performers. Even in a the simple movement of walking, I discovered that the spatial design is crucial to constructing relationships between performers, between the space and performers and performers to audiences.

In my thesis project *ReCall*, I choreographed the section "Steps" with the movement motif of pedestrians' walking. A group of performers walked from one side to the other side on the stage repetitively; and moved gradually from upstage to downstage. I attempted to imitate pedestrians' escaping pathway in the street during the tragedy of September 11th. The walking in "Steps" was inspired by the cityscape of New York City. My spatial design of walking pathways aimed to present the tension in that specific moment.

A performers facing plays a significant role in what is communicated. In contemporary dance, artists often perform in non-traditional settings and performers are not necessarily facing the audience. Unlike traditional choreographic spatial arrangements, centre stage is no longer conceived as the only spot to communicate something powerful. Performing gesture with various facings diversifies both intellectual and perceptual levels of experience.

Experimenting with different staging facings, I performed the same sequence of gestures, which resembled children playing (*1"* -2011). Audiences only watched this movement sequence from the side. During the meet-the-artists session after the

performance, audiences shared their analysis of this scene with various reactions and meanings. The most impressive interpretation was “a helpless adult”, which totally differed from the origin of the sequence. This interpretation was evidence that a new meaning can be generated when a performer simply changes a spatial relationship.

Conclusion

Although I recognize that gesture in performance is the most direct way to connect with an audience through our shared experience, as an artist, I don't intend to lose these gestures through choreographic deconstructions. I conceive that dance performance is a discipline that can use our everyday experiences as a tool to create transformative aesthetic experiences.

My observation evidences a strong bond between artists and cities where they live. Gesture in my native city Hong Kong, is usually moved at a faster tempo. Gesture with smaller movements influenced by our smaller living space. As a performing artist practicing in Asia and North America, I observe that gestures are comparatively ambiguous in Hong Kong, where there still exists a tension between Chinese and Western cultures and the innovative discoveries in performance and the traditional values of history. As Hong Kong citizens, we inherit movement habits and customs from both Western and Chinese traditions, which causes a less specific gestural system. This ambiguity in Hong Kong provides me an abundant resource for choreography and a large potential to research in this non-verbal language that bridges the mainstream and cutting edge performances.

In terms of gesture and live performance, there is still plenty of room for artistic and scholarly discussion and explorations. I realize that this future research in Hong

Kong would contribute to the local cultural studies and provide a more comprehensive perspective on global contemporary dance and choreographic development.

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Appendix D.

DVD contents

The DVD attached, is the video document of the performance, *ReCall*, on September 11th 2012 at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts. The total duration is approximately 60 minutes. The order of dances presented at this performance are listed below.

The moment of...

Hair Pulling - Solo

E & E Duet

Dandelion group dance

Sign Language - Tender Exchange

Balloon walking - I knew Something Was Wrong When...

Steps

Déjà vu Baby's 37.95 Day Slumber

Ridiculous Questions

Dandelion Monologue - Shannon & Iris's Duet

ReCall - solo