

2016

On Elegance, Form, and Function: Exploring the Nexus Between Scientific Research and Movement Research

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Recommended Citation

Gordon, Naja N., "On Elegance, Form, and Function: Exploring the Nexus Between Scientific Research and Movement Research" (2016). *Senior Projects Fall 2016*. 18.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_f2016/18

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On Elegance, Form, and Function:

Exploring the Nexus Between Scientific Research and Movement Research

By

Naja Nicole Gordon

Senior Projects submitted to the Division of the Arts of Bard College

Annandale-on-Hudson, 2016

Artist Statement:

Live performance is an inimitable opportunity for a transfer of energy between viewer and performer. Through movement, I attempt to provide a foundation for this transfer. At the heart of my practice is a deep curiosity about movement as it relates to energy, a truly indestructible force. Moreover, systems need energy in order to function. When I think of a dance as a system, or a collection of dancers on stage as a system, the energy that feeds them is the energy that makes a composition. There is kinetic and potential energy within physical practice, incandescent energy from the lights, the energy between the audience members and the dancers, the energy of the dancers themselves and even with each other.

As a performer and choreographer with an avid interest in the sciences, I seek to employ the research-based techniques utilized by laboratory scientists to make work, using human bodies as my primary medium. Employing this type of investigative practice, I approach making work as an experiment in space, time, emotion, and energy. Beginning with a movement hypothesis – a quality or a gesture in which I am interested- I improvise freely, tracking my movement by sketching or annotating. Ultimately, my goal lies in using the human form as a vessel of change and possibility, simultaneously encouraging others to view their physical bodies as powerful tools of communication and expression. Thus, I seek to collaborate with humans of various disciplines with similar interests, such as studio artists, videographers, writers, and movement enthusiasts of all levels of experience, encouraging divergent interpretations of physical language, and ultimately reflecting the limitless potential for makers of all ethnicity, gender identity, formal training, and physical ability to have a profound impact on society through creative expression and performance art.

Choreographed Pieces:

One of These Voices Will Lead You To Salvation, May 2016

Performed by: Tayler Butler, Talia Eschel, Megan Abdel-Moneim, Micah Thomas, Ashley Phan,

Sophie Zega,

Drawing inspiration from Dante's *Purgatorio*, passages from *The Old Testament*, and my own personal experience, *Voices* was based loosely on an embodied exploration of the "Cardinal Sins," as defined by the Catholic Church, or more modernly known as the "Seven Deadly Sins" in popular culture. Exploring my interests in sin, carnality, desire, and virtue, *Voices* was created, with my dancers, through guided sensory improvisational scores, using Biblical imagery and text as a backdrop. Each of the seven dancers performed movement based in their own personal research of one of the seven sins. In incorporating a male dancer, I sought to further trouble the ideas of sin and sexuality as they relate to gender.

11, December 2016

Performed by: Skyler Allen, Naja Gordon

11 is, in part, a continuation of the themes that influenced an early piece of mine, entitled *Covalence*. In creating this work, I challenged myself to embrace methods that were foreign to me as a choreographer, such as including elements of chance, working with contact improvisation, performing while simultaneously choreographing, and incorporating a prop as a thematically and structurally anchoring element. Employing a similar slow tempo and narrowness of scope as *Covalence*, *11* portrays the relationship that Skyler and I have cultivated since collaborating years prior, and how we have grown personally and stylistically as dancers and collaborators together. Individually, we craft a relationship to the prop through short, overlapping, solos, only to join together in a task and trust based improvisational score, ultimately engaging us completely with each other and the prop. Set to an original composition of layered recordings of dripping water, radio static, and excerpts from an audiobook of the Chinese fundamental text, *Tao Te Ching*, *11* is an experimentation in trust, friendship, and the joy of live performing.

On Elegance, Form, and Function:

Exploring the Nexus Between Scientific Research and Movement Research

I used to think of my interest in dance and my interest in science as competing:

The finite time and energy I possessed each day would have to be rationed out carefully to studying each subject. I would use my “dancer brain” in the studio, solving problems of space, time, physicality, and performance. In the laboratory, I would use my “science brain”, testing hypotheses, observing data, and manipulating organisms and chemicals to examine reactions. Though elements of these practices overlap, I worried that I would eventually have to choose between the two fields when pursuing a career, or at least find a way to combine them in sustainable and satisfying way.

In engaging with both fields, I have learned a lot about what it means to witness . In most of the undergraduate laboratory experiments I’ve performed, it was critical to the outcome that I was an honest witness to whatever unfolded during the process. I had to be diligent about not trying to manipulate the data to favor my own expectations, and subsequently recording the data with patience and accuracy. Similarly, in my time at Bard researching movement, through my choreographical endeavors, directly impactful on the outcome has been the degree to which I am earnestly witnessing what unfolds from the raw materials, and working with them. Thus, the idea that choreography was not as incongruent with scientific experimentation as I believed heightened my curiosity about how they intersect, and assuaged my fear of not being able to fully engross myself in both, for as long as I am able.

In writing this paper, I have found productivity and excitement in exploring the nexus between dance and science-. More exciting, I have found a space for my experience with science to empower my relationship to my own dancing body. Truly, my experience of dance has been transformed by my engagement with science. My studies of anatomy, human physiology, and even psychology have informed and strengthened my movement practices, challenging me to consider movement as a metaphysical practice, creating synergy between body, mind, spirit, and consciousness. While investigating the areas of methodological and ideological overlap between dance and science, questions of how I could apply the same investigative, observation based techniques to choreography, where the materials are not chemicals and microbes, but physical bodies, space, and time, have influenced my choreographic processes and created a richer foundation for my own movement research.

Throughout my history as a dancer and watcher, I've been fascinated by the idea of 'elegance,'. I strive to appear elegant when I dance, and to make elegant work when I choreograph. I believe my elegance is directly related to my expressivity, technical ability, and muscular control. I measure my own elegance by the way that orient myself when learning and executing movement, and the way that my movements and flow together. Within this definition, I understand that the connection between the mind and body enables this type of "elegance," but I didn't much associate elegance with as much cerebral control and intention than I did with decoration and performance quality. But, in continuing to reflect on my fascination with elegance, I realized that my understanding of the term is vague, and that through deepening understanding I could really understand why the idea of being elegant so greatly informs my desire to dance and perform.

By dictionary definition, elegance is: “dignified gracefulness or restrained beauty of style. But elegance is more than just style or “decoration”. There is a grace of organization that is absent within this literal definition. I hadn’t considered much where my understanding of the word originates, and if I could view elegance through a different lens, ultimately enriching my understanding of *why* it is important to me to be elegant.

I suppose that, primarily, my understanding of elegance is entangled in my expectations of aesthetic beauty, which are rooted deeply within the residue of the Romantic era of ballet in the mid 19th century. During that period, a sort of poetic elegance was being embodied by the ballerina, who was the visual cornerstone of the Romantic Ballet. With support from her male counterparts, the ballerina performed complex choreography with dynamism and refinement. This choreography, supported by impeccable technique, was a language used to tell stories with equally complex themes, such as the tension between society and nature, or the power of good and evil.

This era transformed how people perceived the ballerina both visually and emotionally. Largely due to the incorporation of the pointe shoe, and the tutu, ballet dancers now appeared as gorgeous, fantastical, almost supernatural creatures. Renowned romantic ballerina, Marie Taglioni, is a classical example of the poetic elegance highlighted within this era. Taglioni’s performance in *La Sylphide*, for example, demonstrated her remarkable ability to perform ethereality. Praised for her lyricism and soft movement style, Taglioni is often pictured in positions with gentle, rounded arms and chest tilted slightly forward. Poised on the tips of her toes, as she dances, she appears to be floating, effortlessly defying gravity. The residual effect of this pervasive idea of ethereality has shaped my own conception of elegance in my own dancing,

and shaped my belief that elegance is something that is put on, comes with embellishment.

Basically, elegance, to me, had a certain *look*, and had less to do with organization and structure than performance and refinement.

But if it were all about a look, then why do we, as people interested in movement, spend so much time and energy cultivating technique, and practicing form? In attempting to reckon with the idea that elegance is concerned with more than aesthetics, I considered a few questions. Among them were, is there more to elegance than just performance? Can there be an elegance within non-performative disciplines? And, does elegance have a value besides pleasure? Similarly, I had to consider the role of elegance in science, as it could help clarify my understanding of what it really means to be elegant, and why that has been such a driving force in my movement practice.

Searching for answers to these questions, I couldn't neglect that I was similarly concerned with becoming an elegant scientist. Though experimentation is rarely inviting of embellishment or decoration, certainly, there is an element of elegance as it relates to form in science. In microbiology research, at least, I am constantly attending to form. The structure of a microbe, for example, can reveal its function, and how it reacts under different conditions. It is rarely my concern how microbes look aesthetically, yet there is a beautiful way in which inherent in the structure of a single microbe is a wealth of information. In a 2010 paper in "Nature" author Chris Tourney says,

'The importance of "elegance in science" is, first, that it is a source of pleasure, both to the scientist and to those made aware of the elegant work. But partly because it is a

source of pleasure, and partly because of the simplicity, ingenuity, conciseness, persuasiveness, unexpectedness, and satisfying quality that the accolade of elegance implies, it makes the work easier to understand, and more memorable.’

In research, an elegant idea is an idea that is easy to understand, and provides a means of answering our empirical questions. Simply, elegance in science indicates clarity. An elegant theory or model clearly and directly explains a phenomenon. An elegant theory indicates a sense of clarity about a subject or group of subjects, and limits extraneous information. There is an aspect of pleasure central to this notion. This pleasure, I believe, comes from the removal of information and materials which do not relate directly to the integrity of the study, and thus, have potential to fall short of the study’s desired outcome: to reveal new and useful information for further investigation.

In creating an elegant work, attention to structure is as crucial as it is in any other form of experimentation. Elegant creations are driven by clarification and attention to structure. In creating the any final product, economy and efficiency should be primary motivators. Thus, when a dance piece is created with consciousness and emotion, the creator, viewer, and dancer are all recipients of a sublime pleasure. Truly, in viewing something considered “elegant,” the audience feels taken care of. I can think of many examples of feeling moved by watching or performing in works where the structure is so clear to me that I am able to feel the working elements strongly. Something about this feeling draws to mind the idea of truth. Though I have always been unclear about what the word “truth” could mean in dancing, as it is a creative

form, there is something I find to be satisfyingly truthful about dance pieces that are structurally thoughtful.

Jose Limón's, "The Moor's Pavane" is one example of these ideas of content and truth and form and truth materializing, and creating an exquisite structure. In a 2013 dance review in *The New Yorker* entitled, "A Perfect Storm," Joan Acocella praises Limón's adaptation of Shakespeare's "Othello", especially for its economy and necessity. She writes, "part of what makes twentieth-century ballet look twentieth-century is economy, and the same is true in modern dance. José Limón's 'Moor's Pavane,' from 1949, epitomizes the principle. Though Limón based it on Shakespeare's "Othello," he threw out everything that didn't have to do with what he saw as the central theme: jealousy. Limón distilled, from the many supreme and conflicting emotional undercurrents in the play, one central theme. Rather than try to highlight the many ways in which Shakespeare's play was itself a work of genius, he expanded upon one central principle, using a singular emotion as a formative guide.

Limón's work, structurally, borrows from nature ways of manipulating space, and creating beautiful and functional structures. His compositional choices were thoughtful, as he mimicked one of nature's most frequently used structures: a simple circle. Within an ecosystem, for example, abiotic and biotic components function in harmony, and are dependent on each other for information and energy exchange. Every part of an ecosystem is functional and vital, and exists as a part of a larger whole. Thus, an ecosystem's function is directly related to economy and efficiency of materials and pathways. Looking at structures in nature, it is difficult not to marvel at the beauty of their functionality. The manner in which a group of honeybees can

work in synchronicity to create perfectly prismatic honeycombs, or how ants can coordinate geometrically sensitive tunnels without a blueprint, or even how the human eye utilizes a network of cells and muscles to receive and subsequently convert signals from light to the brain, is astounding. In creating something this complex and functional, there needs to be a relinquishing of ego, and the formation of a hivemind. In the honeybee example, there is a collective intelligence at play, which creates a self-organized system. Acocella writes, “the skeleton of the piece is the pavane, an elegant circle dance from the Renaissance. This is what the four dancers do once the curtain rises. Then, gradually, the circle is broken—the dancers form alliances, one pair against the other—and this signals the coming breakdown of faith and love. All the characters remain on the stage throughout. They are caged in this nightmare.” The stage hosts a beautiful nightmare - dancers telling a convoluted story of love, ego, and envy. The elements are minimal and simple, yet require precision and thought. There is an intention so clear and strong that it is felt. The intricacy of the structure incites pleasure in the viewer. It is as satisfying as looking at a perfectly drawn circle: There is a necessity to this dance, as it brings pleasure to those who perform and experience it.

Other ballets created within the 20th century experimented with less pleasurable motifs, including the use of forms that juxtaposed the regal and balletic qualities of romantic ballet. The most controversial example is “The Rite of Spring,” or “Le Sacre du Printemps” in French. Created by choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, and featuring music by composer Igor Stravinsky, the piece is noted for subverting the expectations of traditional ballet. The piece originated from a dream of Nijinsky’s, and came to fruition through the collective work of many minds. The elements of choreography, set design, music, and all came together to produce a work that was a

shock for the audience to which it was presented. The movements were sharp, violent, and far removed from the dainty and elegant movements normally seen in a ballet at the time. Similarly, the music was unpredictable, bold, and sonically complex. Adding to the experimental nature of the piece were the themes explored in the work. The subject matter was certainly not ethereal: the work conjured images of death, rape, sacrifice, and violence.

The legacy of the piece only enhanced its elusive and disturbing qualities. The energy surrounding the production, and even the energetic inspiration for the movement will remain an important part of dance history, and an inspiration for my further choreographic attempts. According to Hodson, “the ballet released tremendous energy; then it disappeared” (17 Hodson). Hodson describes the nature of the movement as concentrating “energy earthward, literally gathering force from its low center of gravity as do postures in Kung Fu and other martial arts...Nijinsky’s posture for *Le Sacre*, which had so agonized the dancers, was no mere stylization but a means of channeling physical and psychic energy” (21 Hodson).

Nijinsky explored a different kind of elegance and grace, found in the primal. Reflecting on this further challenges my notions of elegance and truth, truth and content, and content and form. Considering a work such as Nijinsky’s, which I find to be incredibly elegant, troubles my original understanding of elegance in way that further excites me, as I try to ultimately apply this idea to another daily practice I engage in, scientific research.

He understood that dancing was not just about patterns or steps, but about energies. A performance is alluring, in my opinion, if it excites an energy in those who view it. The energy does not necessarily have to be positive energy. In fact, I think any work that inspires an energy in the audience, even if negative, is a successful work. That feeling of energy can be used as a

basis for inquiry, and that inquiry as a basis for innovation. The “Rite of Spring” was truly a rite of passage for Nijinsky, and equally for Stravinsky, as it worked to not only entertain the masses but to make important social commentaries and to call into question the traditional ideas of beauty, thus transforming the art form.

Though it is still debated exactly *how* these structures have formed and evolved, it is evident that nature is primarily concerned with a design that promotes economy and efficiency. Superfluous structures have been and continue to be filtered out through evolution, so that structure directly informs function. In a 2015 article in “The New Yorker,” physicist William Newsom says, “evolution just seizes on certain convenient solutions that present themselves...They get frozen in place, reproduced, and used again and again.” There is a strong focus on use and functionality within naturally existing structures. Nature is egalitarian, yet extremely selective. It capitalizes on solutions that are convenient, favoring them over solutions that perhaps have more aesthetic allure.

Instead of completely abandoning my ideas of elegance as a decorative element, I tried to relate it to science. If my ideas of elegance were partially inherited culturally by me and a generation of dancers, I had to ask myself, where did my ideas of elegance in science come from? And, is there way a bridge my understanding of elegance and creation in dance to elegance and creation in scientific experimentation? Implicit in Romanticism was also a profound appreciation for nature, and the rejection of the intellectualization of nature, particularly within the natural sciences. English scientist Sir Humphry Davy, a prominent Romantic thinker, said that understanding nature required “an attitude of admiration, love and worship. ”This concerns a proposal that knowledge is only attainable by those who truly

appreciate and respect nature. Rather than trying to control nature, one must try to understand one's self and find the emotional truth available through connecting with nature, seeking understanding through harmony and experience and not manipulation or control.

In continuing to reconcile areas of tension between these two disciplines, I wish investigate the notion of elegance as it relates to truth in dance. Elegance may be a guiding principal for my "dancer brain", but for my "science brain," this wouldn't be accepted as easily. While in dance it can be extremely desired, in research, it can still lead to total failure and wrongness. An elegant experiment or proposal incites curiosity and satisfaction, yet does not always guide or further the actual study. Scientists are often torn between theories that are elegant, and theories that are empirical, begging the question, "should elegance be a criteria in which we operate?" In terms of research, elegance should not be a guide, as it does not necessarily communicate truth. And, "can elegance help us access truth"? In terms of research, elegance should not be a guide, as it does not necessarily communicate truth.

A means of continuing this thinking, for myself, is to further compare the process of making pieces to traditional lab research, focusing specifically on what the role of the creator, or witness is. As a researcher within any discipline, it is imperative that you are an objective witness to your subject matter, regardless of your personal interest in or connection with it. To react, based on your findings, is the first step in the destruction of the credibility of your conclusions. A major form of reactivity within research is known as the 'Observer Expectancy Effect', or experimenter bias. This happens when the experimenter's expectations about the results of his study distorts the outcome. For example, the experimenter may be subtly and unconsciously communicating their expectations to the participants. This could cause them to

perform in ways that adhere to these expectations, distorting the results. Another way in which bias can emerge on the side of the experimenter is if he selectively records his data, for example choosing to only record results that conform to his expectation or desire. There are many other ways in which bias can emerge during research. This effect is almost universal in human data interpretation and is difficult to actively avoid. Bias, ultimately, is a human tendency.

Bias also applies to non-human research. While working in a laboratory, for example, it is imperative that a scientist enter the lab with as little extraneous material as possible - jewellery, coffee mugs, and even cell phones stay outside. Even the most seemingly small pathogen can set off a molecular or chemical chain reaction that compromises the integrity of the study. He also must rid himself of expectation and preconceived notion, lest he interpret the results through a biased lens.

Choreographers must engage in a similar ritual when entering into the process of creating work. As makers, we want to peel back the layers of ourselves, like the skin of an onion, in order to more rationally witness what we are creating. I normally think of a witness as another party, but when there is a self, there is already witness. To become a dispassionate witness, one must inhibit the 'self'. The self referring to the mental construct, a subject of introspection. We aim to be more active and less reactive. If we let ourselves get too precious, too wrapped up in present or showing the sense of self within the material, then our focus shifts from the work to the self. Much like what we want to occur in a petri dish, an organic organization of materials, we want the information to come *to us* rather than to impose our biases onto them. So to speak, we are shedding mental pathogens when we try to reduce our subjectivity.

To reduce the potential for inconclusive research is to limit the amount of bias that can emerge. This requires extreme composure, neutrality, and an impartial disposition. Simply put, one must be a dispassionate witness to the process. When you test a theory in science, or make work in art, passion is usually a driving force. Though passion definitely excites process, it also has the power to overpower it. Thus, there is an advantage in seeing it dispassionately, so that the possibilities remain varied and visible. The self, as an influencer, can restrict the creative process by imposing its own opinions onto a piece.

Because our primary material as choreographers is the human body, a sociopolitical, emotional, dynamic, unpredictable and unique entity - it is difficult to work in dance and not make assumptions, or at least connections. Ultimately, subjectivity is the main source of bias- but how can we be objective as both subjects and object? How do we shed the self, something we cultivate continuously to distinguish ourselves from others? And what happens when we create work that doesn't aim to validate our sense of self? A primary part of this means inhibiting the first reaction, allowing ourselves immersion into the unknown. In an attempt to moderate into the Dance Department Program at Bard, a process that I consider to be my first formative and deeply challenging investigation of choreography, I entered into the choreographic experiment with a really strong bias. I was concerned with what my work- or results - would look like, how much of my own "stamp" or signature I could communicate through the dancers on the stage, and how quickly I could generate material.

By the midway point, I was struggling to create anything pleasurable or communicative. Around this time, Leah Cox had written of my progress in dance class, "What would it look like if you studied dance in the way that some study biology, or literature?" The question confused

me, and when I truly thought about it, the answer was intriguing yet intimidating. What could I learn from the way I approach biology that I could apply to dance? What changes when we use the studio as one uses the lab? And...what does that mean?

A quote that I found from Joan Acoccella, in her essay entitled “Imagining Dance” aided me in articulating my conception of the relationship between dance and energy. She frames pieces in terms of their energies. She writes, “when we look at dance not as a moral fable but as an orchestration of energies, I think we reach a psychology that lies entirely apart from morality- something deep in our experience, something that may correspond to actual biochemical processes. This idea of dance as an “orchestration of energies”, able to be broken down into “patterns of energy flow” reinforces the very reasons why this work is so rich.

This word, “energy” began to excite my process more. In elementary science, we learn the laws of thermodynamics prior to any experimentation. The first law states: Energy is essential matter that cannot be created or destroyed and is usually transferred through a system. These living systems need energy in order to function. Within nature, or the physical universe, structures, systems, and organisms necessarily work in symbiotic relationships, exchanging information through energy. Considering a dancing body, or a collection of dancers on stage as a living system, the energy that feeds them is the energy that makes a piece truthful and intriguing to me. Furthermore, in live performance, there is an inimitable energy - the unpredictable energy of the audience, the incandescent energy from the lights, the dynamic energy between the audience members and the dancers, and between the dancers themselves. Microscopically, the energy powering our bodies are found within the orchestration of our cells, fascia, muscles,

bones, ligaments, nerves, and other organelles intertwining in an intricately designed network to power us through complex activities, all controlled by the brain.

Using this idea of energy to inspire my creative process, I went back and redesigned my experimental approach to moderating. In redesigning my approach to making *Covalence*, I employed some of the techniques used in working under the scientific method. The first procedure when following the scientific method is always to form a hypothesis, normally in response to a question. But, what was my true question? My “science brain” had roots in portraying dancers in a state of dynamic equilibrium, as water molecules exist in when they transition between liquid and gaseous states. I used this idea for visual inspiration. But, regarding my movement research, I couldn’t figure out what I was looking for. Perhaps it was, what can I learn and create using three movers I consider to be extremely distinct from each other? In which ways can I use space to create layers of dynamism within the extremely slow tempo? I considered a few questions, but relied mostly on my scientific sketches and notes on water molecules to guide my process.

Instead of forcing choreography onto my cast, I began to encourage them to listen to their own energies and create movement for themselves, by themselves, through the process of structured improvisation. Rather than consider my dancers as the *people* I think they are, or the movement styles I think they represent, these dancers became for me organisms packed with history, information, and potential for movement- or what I may think of as “results”. Rather than try to manipulate their bodies to perform my own choreography, I began to use the materials they already provided me. These ideas deeply ingrained in their psyches and repertoires - ideas which were the results of their training, personal histories, movement interests - which are

some of the tiny fragments that make up our “dance DNA”. In working with extremely slowness and stillness, I was able to focus in on some of the relationships they were building free of my influence - much like looking through a microscope. This movement was now my raw data, material that I observed yet did not produce. I would capture the results in video and sit by myself and combine, refine, and splice what I saw, much like a biologist recording field data. These results, I found, were far more satisfying than those I was observing in trying to teach and manipulate their movement to resemble mine. This process of discovery through observation on my uninhibited subjects was similar of the process of seeking empirical knowledge , and proved to be more elegant and informative than my previous approaches.

As I continued to study dance and make pieces, and study science and work through experiments at more challenging levels, it was more critical than ever to me that I allowed myself to let the two disciplines intersect, and influence each other. While I had less physical energy to experiment in science as the demand increased for me to dance, I shifted my focus to approaching dance composition in an unbiased and observation based manner, the way I would do if I were in the lab.

I began creating my second senior project the same way I did my first: with a strong bias: I was extending a work that I had already created, and so I had a plethora of ideas of how I wanted the piece to be designed spatially and energetically. And, I knew I wanted something simple, and elegant, no pun intended. After a few weeks of struggling with myself and Sky about aesthetic preferences, movement qualities, and spatial relationships, I took a step back and allowed what I *wanted* the piece to look like to take a back seat to what the piece *needed* to be. This was a turning point, for me.

This moment of patient, or non-action, re-energized my process. I knew that rather than succumb to the pressure of creating something that expresses mine or Sky's prowess, which are both important to the piece still, the outcome would maximally satisfy me if I stepped back, and dispassionately witnessed what the two of us are capable of creating when patiently use our materials and resources.

The rest of my studio times, thus, were my petri dish. Drawing on a similar water motif as I did in *Covalence*, Sky and I created improvisational scores based on different relationships to water. Among them are , primarily, the movement of water in different chemical states and in different environments. In addition, we based the ending sections on research I conducted about the history of water as it relates to femininity - this included an a humorous week of watching Calgon commercials, and studying Middle Aged paintings featuring women sprawled out in antique bathtubs.

In addition to water and energy being prime motivators of my second senior piece, I've been using my year practice of the Alexander Technique with Peggy Florin, and on my own, to delve deeper into my own daily physical organization relationship, and incorporate it in my creative process. In Alexander, a struggle of mine has been "not doing". Though it sounds like a simple, and even luxurious concept, it has been one of my longest existing challenges as a student at Bard. Relating back to my second piece, which I approached with trepidation, my adoption of "not-doing". Though I was a dancer in my own piece, I also had to remind myself to serve as an unbiased watcher. Simply, I gained patience, and improved my ability to practice mindfulness. Like an undergraduate chemistry experiment, a clinical study, or even a simple gram-stain, success is best achieved when the experimenter allows

Lastly, cathartic for me in completing my senior project is my realization that experimentation, though so vulnerable, can be incredibly rewarding. Referring back to the example of Nijinsky, he accomplished something radical by bringing to the stage a work based in cultural practices that were not seen in 20th century France. Premiering in 1913 in Paris, the work excited Parisian audiences and had a polarizing effect. While dance was typically an expression of creative stories performed for an audience with expectations of gratification- an event at which one could be impressed and inspired- Nijinsky's piece was more concerned with something sensational, and perhaps even avante-garde. Though I am still struggling to experiment with different types of movement, or ways of looking at movement that challenge my conventional ideas of what I should create or operate like, I have come closer to being able to answer the questions that motivated this year-long project.

Though I still can't fully answer, what really creates elegance? I can certainly ascertain that it involves refinement and organization, and not just decoration. It is some kind of combination of structure and intention, but is it about simplicity or complexity? Or both? This inquiry about nexus between art and science practices, and what can artists learn from science and vice versa in terms of approach to experimentation has been informative and electrifying.

In reflecting on this process, I still cannot fully answer what is truth in dance? But I have delved deep into my own experiences and made significant progress in understanding my place within the discipline. Perhaps in dance, the truth is whatever your own emotional truth is, or maybe it's being true to intention and inspiration. Ideas, using a physical practice as a medium, that we cannot communicate using solely words. Perhaps it is emotional truth and your own

emotional truth, perhaps its being true to your impulses. Our pieces come through us and come to us, communicating truths that perhaps we cannot in words. Something that I have learned, is that our pieces come through us and come to us, communicating truths that perhaps we cannot in words. Employing the “dispassionate witness” allows for the emergence of a different form of consciousness, which can inspire action.