

Revelatory Juxtaposition, Collage and Language in Contemporary Performance

by

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ABSTRACT

“Mierda.” was an original 50-minute solo dance and theater performance by Jordan Klitzke along with guest artist Gina Jurek that premiered from September 6-8, 2018 at Arizona State University. The creative tools of sensation, presence, and fantasy were applied in the development of an individualized movement vocabulary focused on the artist’s embodiment of contrasting ideas. That research was then further cultivated into an immersive theatrical collage that stimulated relational thinking and heightened consciousness. “Mierda.” was an example of a contemporary creative process that utilized the languages of dance and theater. The performance was a unique continuation of artistic research undertaken by pioneers in the dance and theater fields such as Danielle Agami, Lloyd Newson, Hofesh Schechter, and Anne Bogart. It was documented and created over a nine-month period including the three final performances. The form and content of “Mierda.” was not predetermined, but emerged throughout the creative process and performance of the work. The resulting narrative demonstrated the revelatory potential of this style of theatrical inquiry. Precise energy, tension and questioning formed an immersive, intimate experience for the viewers and performers and invited the audience to “fill in the blanks” as they connected with the emerging narrative. The final work was a collage of surprising juxtapositions on both the micro-level of individual movements and the macro-level of theatrical structure. Analysis of the work resulted in a critical understanding of the creative tools used along with future proposals for continued research. Not only did the research enlighten and contextualize the practices of an emerging choreographer, it also argued for a new understanding of the value of Dance as a personal practice of reflection and growth.

DEDICATION

First, I would like to dedicate this document to my mother. A hard-working single mother, she raised me with an astounding level of love, patience, respect and support. She taught me from a very young age that I would be happier and healthier if I constructed my own narrative in life instead of following the narrative other people would give me. That lesson and many others she taught me are the invisible pillars that continue to hold up the work and my life. I have been practicing a difficult, often-lonely career in familiar and foreign lands for many years and I truly enjoy what I do. I never would have been able to venture into such rich, vulnerable places without knowing my mother would always be there when I return. If I am able to pass on to others all that she has given me, I believe I will always find joy and purpose. There's no greater gift than that.

I would also like to dedicate this document to all the other people in my life whom I have come to call my family. There are too many to name, but if you continue to make time to see me and care for me, often after years of living in different places, then it surely includes you. You also ground me and keep me feeling like I will always have a home no matter where I currently reside.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of my Masters of Fine Arts in Dance and the performance of “Mierda.” would not have been possible without the mentorship I have received from numerous experts in the dance and theater fields. I would like to especially acknowledge the great influence of three major teachers in my life. Those are former Batsheva Dance Company member and Ate9 Dance Company founder Danielle Agami, Delfos Danza Contemporánea founding member and choreographer Omar Carrum, and Associate Professor of Theatre at Gustavus Adolphus College Henry MacCarthy. All of them have had substantial impact on my physical training, creative process in the studio and application of my craft in performance. All of them are important members of my artistic family. I have also been influenced over many years by the teachings and works of other prominent dance artists including: Israeli choreographer and Gaga Movement Language creator Ohad Naharin (Batsheva Dance Company), Israeli/English choreographer Hofesh Schechter (Hofesh Schechter Dance Company), English choreographer/director Lloyd Newson (DV8), Belgian choreographer/director Wim Vandekeybus (Última Vez), and Spanish choreographers Virginia García and Damián Muñoz (La Intrusa). The diverse geographic locations in this collection of artists should not be overlooked. I am always searching for new ways of working and seeing the world and appreciated all who have added to my understanding.

I would also like to thank my Applied Project committee and other Arizona State University (ASU) faculty members who have contributed time and knowledge during the entire journey of creation, performance and analysis. Every moment with my committee chair Eileen Standley was a fountain of inspiration. Her ability to be both soft and strong in her guidance was something I always greatly admired and aspired to. Carley Conder and Bonnie Eckard consistently gave detailed, encouraging feedback and left me hungry to return to the studio. Daniel Bernard Roumain and Jessica Rajko contributed important thoughts and suggestions including how I can better connect my work with other artists and mediums.

I would like to thank all of the ASU students who worked with me throughout the creation process, all of whom volunteered their time and talents. The openness that they demonstrated strengthened the research and my understanding of the work.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Herberger Institute for the Arts at ASU for a Thesis Research Grant and the School of Film, Dance and Theatre for the Applied Project funding. The financial support helped fund the materials, costumes, and, most importantly, the collaborators who allowed the project to reach an important level of richness and complexity.

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PREFACE

To begin, I feel it is appropriate to acknowledge my unique journey to becoming a choreographer, teacher, performer and researcher. My public school upbringing with my single mother in the suburban town of Eden Prairie, Minnesota gave me a formidable education with the aid of extensive resources and exceptional teachers in a variety of subjects. I was raised in a loving, supportive home where I was treated with respect from a very young age. Since then, my educational experiences have occurred in a variety of disciplines, genres, languages, and geographic locations. I have attended institutions of higher education in three different countries (Mexico, England, and the USA) and four different locations including Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota where I received a BA in Biology, Suma Cum Laude, in 2010. Had I not been positively transformed by the contemporary dance and performance I witnessed during my semester abroad at Lancaster University in England in 2009, I surely would have found myself on a different career path due to my proficiency in many scientific fields. However, when I found myself looking for a vocation after completing my undergraduate degree I felt called to work with dancers, as they were the most alive and interesting people I knew. I don't know how else to put it. Since then, I have performed in modern dance, post-modern dance, contemporary dance, jazz dance, ballet, musical theater, physical theater, theater of the absurd, classical theater, reader's theater, and contemporary theater performances. I have created original dance works with artists ranging from a multi-generational dance company in Minneapolis to a former Mexican friend and partner to the 11-member National Contemporary Ballet of Ecuador. Those experiences, along with the hundreds of performance works I have witnessed around the world, make up what I consider to be my continuing (and arguably more important) education and have helped establish what I find meaningful and inspiring on stage as I begin to create.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

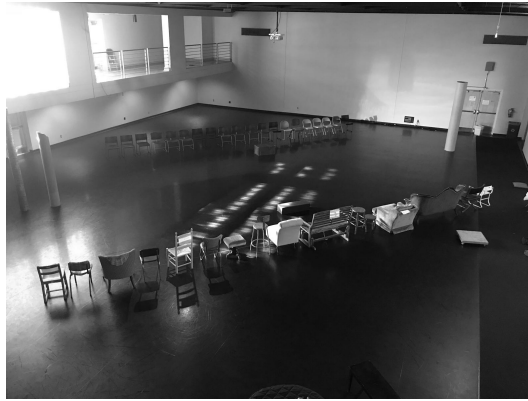


Figure 1. Photograph of “Mierda.” performance space in Nelson Fine Arts Center room 122 at Arizona State University.

What is “Mierda.”?

I believe a stage is an important cultural space where fantasy is encouraged, where the recognizable and unrecognizable exist together in pursuit of greater understanding of what it means to be human today. Peter Brook (1968) states, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (p. 9). In a way, “Mierda.” harkened back to the simplicity of Brook’s 50-year-old statement. While they are important aspects, “Mierda.” at its most basic level did not necessitate props, costumes, lights or music. It needed what lay behind and beneath those things in live performance. “Mierda.” was a space of multiple contradictions: honesty and deceit, time and timelessness, intimacy and distance. This aligned with performance theorist Richard Schechner’s (1985) belief that the stage is “not reality” and “not not reality”. Live performance is “at once the most concrete and evanescent of the arts” (p.123). “Mierda.” is a chronological revealing of juxtapositions. It was my curiosity for the insight embedded in moments of contrast that led me to create a collage of text and movement generated from contradictions in my own life. The realistic fantasies I created from personal experiences required a substantial amount of openness and engagement. In this document, I expand on the value of that theatrical experience.

“Mierda” is a Spanish word that basically translates to English as “shit”. I chose this as the title of the work in reference to a variety of personal connections, especially as it was the first dirty word I learned when learning Spanish and working as an artist in Latin America. The title did not specifically refer to any moment or theme in the work, but sought to spark interest and curiosity due to its open interpretation and odd formality. For me, it also served as an indicator that the work’s primary goal was not to entertain but rather to experience content that was, in fact, “shit” I find important to talk about in a public theatrical setting.

“Mierda.” was performed in room 122 of the Nelson Fine Arts Center at Arizona State University on September 6-8, 2018. The 50-minute work included contributions by guest artist Gina Jurek who controlled the music, sang, played live music and performed a short dance solo during the final section of the work. Quinn Mihalovic designed the lights and was an essential outside eye throughout the process. More detail will be given later as to how these collaborations functioned. I designed the set and costumes in conjunction with the content of the work as part of a multi-faceted creative process. This was done partly due to financial restraints, but also to allow for greater flexibility and adaptability of the scenic elements during the final stages of the creative process. The work was performed with a traverse stage setup (audience on two sides) with roughly twenty audience members seated on each side of the performance space in a diagonal orientation that split the space in two. No one had an obstructed view as there was only a single row of seats on each side. One side of the audience was seated in black, steel-framed chairs while the other half was seated in a variety of different seats, stools and couches. This setup created a physically and visually unique experience for each audience member. See *Figure 1* for a photograph of the layout of the space before the performance.

The show included ten sections. They will be referenced throughout the document. I list them now as they were printed in the program along with the time code in parentheses of each as observed in the online version of the video:

1. The end (0:00-8:16)
2. “Cheers” (8:17-16:33)
3. The suburbs (16:34-20:05)
4. Manners (20:06-24:30)
5. Public enemy (24:31-27:50)

6. See no evil (27:51-30:45)
7. Agotamiento (30:46-36:06)
8. After the after (36:07-41:10)
9. It's personal (41:11-47:34)
10. Don't think too hard (47:35-49:49)

The program also included an English translation of a monologue I delivered in Spanish during section 7 ("Agotamiento"). It is as follows:

How long have I been asleep? Wait for me, I'm coming.

I can't believe it's been four years since I arrived here a lost, longhaired American whose ignorance was so big that he found it surprising that people cared as much about sex as they did about dance. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I had no idea I would be so lonely and loved at the same time. I can't deny it. This place has changed me.

I come from a place where everyone speaks of efficiency. Here people love exhaustion. The value of the process and the product is completely related to the level of physical exertion. And on one hand I don't understand it because I want to justify that level of exhaustion. It feels wasteful to me. And on the other hand I feel I miss the point because that much movement is a declaration of life that I don't connect with. I don't connect with that necessity. With that drug.

Do you know Shantí Vera? He's my friend, a choreographer, who had, a sister who was a journalist. She was assassinated by the narcos for her activism. And since then every dance he makes he dedicates it to her. Not a single work in her memory- every work he makes. He sweats and moves until exhaustion because it's what he has to give and that's all the justification he needs. He's also a super funny guy. The last time I saw him he told me a joke. How did it go?

There are three Mexican lies you need to know if you're going to go to Mexico. First, "It's barely spicy". Second, "Right now. Right now". Third, "Just the tip". And fourth, "There are only three Mexican lies you need to know".

Crazy dude... Life can be shit, but then what do you do? You dance.

The work in its entirety can be seen [here](#). It my firm belief that without seeing the work much of the knowledge and analysis contained in this document will be missed or generalized in a fashion that misses the intended outcomes of the research.

Why perform "Mierda."?

Throughout the process of creating "Mierda." I was continually reminded of how deeply I enjoy the challenge of creating and performing. To me, each moment in the performance was a small evolving puzzle with a new solution each show. The answer to that puzzle was continually

found anew in the empty, present space between the material, the audience and myself. The moments I became too confident with my answers were the moments I began to disconnect from the present and fall short of bringing life to the stage. Director Peter Brook aptly compares this experience to that of walking on a tightrope because there are many reasons to fall but only one way to keep moving forward (First Run Features, 2013). In other words, there are many reasons to be distracted from the present moment, but taking each moment as it comes is the only way to successfully reach the other side. I enjoyed performing not because I needed to be seen or validated, but because I considered it valuable research into a consciousness that could only exist in the exquisitely present moments achieved on stage. Above all, after the performances I was left with a deep appreciation for the human values that I unavoidably embodied and demonstrated as a creator and performer in front of an audience.

Each of the hundreds of notes given during the rehearsal process and every action taken by a dancer or collaborator during the process was a small window into the mind of the creator. Every new pause or change of focus came from a personal place of fantasy and instinct that was unique to each individual. The creation and performance of this work of live theater was my means of reflection, education and re-education. I undertook the challenge because it grew my understanding of my history, body and identity. In turn, I added my own small bit of knowledge to the collective understanding of human thought and experience. This document attempts to mine value and inspiration from the journey and performance of “Mierda.” for others interested in similar performance and creative inquiry.

What were the concepts used in “Mierda.”?

Sensation is difficult to speak and write about because it is a first-person somatic experience. When two abstract sensations are layered on top of each other, pain and curiosity for example, the complexity only continues to multiply. Philosopher John Dewey (1934) writes extensively about what exactly it means to sense something. He writes, “Sense” covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous” (p. 22). In this research, sensation refers to everything that is felt in and

through the body before interpretation into emotion, rational thought or movement. For example, *pleasure, floating* and *boiling* are examples of commonly referenced sensations in Gaga Movement Language (Vasileva, 2006; Quinlan, 2017). The goal is not to actually reproduce the feeling of boiling water on the skin, which would surely be quite painful, but to imagine what sort of rapid movement the fantasy of boiling reveals. While it is subtle at times, I believe there is an experiential difference between focusing on a predetermined image of boiling versus letting the fantastic sensation of boiling generate movement. That subtle distinction is necessary to establish in this type of work in order for the research to be focused in the body/mind connection as I find it valuable. To clarify, the use of Gaga-specific terminology is generally avoided in my practice as I do not wish to imitate something I am not trained in, but I use a similar approach that uses both common (e.g. pleasure) and imaginary (e.g. floating and boiling) sensations during improvisation.

Fantasy, as defined by the dictionary, is “the faculty or activity of imagining things, especially things that are impossible or improbable” (Oxford Dictionary). In this research, the concept of fantasy is often used instead of the words “creativity” or “imagination”. This is primarily due to its individually specific nature that is often linked with personal desire and freedom. For example, one may use creativity to design a new spreadsheet in Excel, but would rarely fantasize about it. In practice, the discovery of “improbable” sensations and subsequent movements generated from those sensations requires a deep level of engagement with personal fantasy. In performance, I also consistently ask the audience and myself to fantasize, to ask “How?”, “Why?” and “What if?” in each passing moment. In this way, I establish the body as a place of evolving actions and reactions to a shared fantasy. Ideally, this results in a series of unexpected and revelatory moments that create a narrative and transformative experience.

To successfully carry out my research all participants must achieve a sense of **presence** in both rehearsal and performance in order to listen to their sensations and fantasies while simultaneously expressing that experience in the moment. Phenomenologists and practitioners alike have extensively written on the idea of presence as it is elusive yet undeniably perceived. In his book “The Actor and the Target”, director Declan Donnellan (2006) explains, “We cannot struggle to be present. We can only discover that we are present. Being present is given to us,

like a gift, like a present” (p. 24). As dancer and choreographer Emilyn Claid (2006) argues, “Dancing presence is the core, the nugget, the point of friction around which this merry-go-round of watching and writing revolves” (p. 11). While it is difficult to translate into words, I believe presence is sensing what it feels like to do nothing yet be prepared for anything, thus creating a captivating balance between urgency and tranquility in each passing moment. Perhaps animals embody presence most acutely. Philosopher John Dewey (1934) writes, “As you watch, you see motion merging into sense and sense into motion- constituting that animal grace so hard for man to rival” (p.18). In a theatrical setting, Eugenio Barba uses the term “Sats”, which is a Norwegian word that refers to the energy that exists before an action (as cited in Bogart 2004, p. 73). My personal definition of presence is closely associated with Barba’s, as I believe presence is the removal of any expectations that limit the generation of new thoughts and actions once an action has begun. Therefore, no matter how many times I have rehearsed raising my right arm, I raise it anew each time without expectation that it will proceed as it has before. I curiously receive and respond to the sensorial information anew each time. However one defines it, it is essential from the beginning. And then you act.

The concepts laid out above are unavoidably connected with what is commonly referred to as dance **technique**. I do not wish to engage in the conversation of what “good” technique is as it is beyond the scope of this research. However, I would like to comment on how extended repetition of a set of movements, often referred to as technique, is related to this work. Regardless of which codified movement system (Cuban Ballet, Graham Modern Dance, Cunningham Post-modern Dance, Luigi Jazz, West-African etc.) is used as a foundation for the training of a dancer, extensive “technical” training in a defined, pre-established set of shapes or movements risks establishing movement patterns that would not be beneficial in this specific work where spontaneity and freedom when engaging with the fantasy of asking “What if?” is essential. As movement teacher Lorna Marshall (2002) stated in her book *The Body Speaks*, “Patterning takes us out of contact, and we have no sense of what is physically happening, moment by moment” (p. 11). A body with only a high level of physical coordination is not sufficient to engage deeply with this research due to the movement generation reflecting an inner self and not simply

demonstrating physical capabilities. Marshall again adeptly explains, “A body that is fully ‘available’ in the sense that every part is working and able to move well, but which is uninhabited by an inner reality, will be technically interesting to watch, but somehow cold and sterile” (p. 29). And yet, the physical abilities associated with “good” technique are necessary in my research insofar as they permit a sense of urgency and a feeling of freedom in movement while simultaneously producing minimal risk of injury to the mover.

Who and what inspired “Mierda.”?

Over the course of my development as an artist I have not had a single prominent mentor but rather a handful of important mentors over many years, all with unique histories, bodies, mentors, cultures and creative methods. Due to this variety of examples, I am often overwhelmed by the possibilities I can envision at the beginning of a new project. For example, for previous works I have begun by working with a variety of inspirations including a fictional short story in “La Parodia de la Culpa” (2016), personal narrative in “Entre Nosotros/Between Us” (2015), and the general concept of ‘touch’ in “Contact(o)” (2016). In 2016 I even co-created a work, “Judge Me. Hate Me. Love Me.” that was five short dances from five distinct sources of inspiration: physical spectacle, recorded music, codified movement, storytelling, and improvisation. Needless to say, I have long appreciated how unique starting points and creative methodologies can lead to a variety of different performances. However, at the conclusion of each new creation I am often left pondering the question: Am I deepening my craft with each new project or am I sacrificing depth for fear of redundancy in my work?

Before the in-studio creation of “Mierda.” I decided to trust in the value of what emerged during the creation of movement in the studio, both with myself and as I observed in the dancers’ bodies I was working with. I did not intend to turn my back on the years of experience I brought to the process, but also did not want to anticipate where the content of work would emerge. I decided to trust in what Einav Katan (2016) noted while observing Batsheva Dance Company, “The meaning of the dance is shaped and manifested in the process of choreographing and dancing it” (p. 16). I will go deeper into my methods in the following chapter, but I can say that

when I began I had no clear idea of what “Mierda.” would ultimately look like or be about. Even more than in previous works, I decided to let the uncertainty inspire me. I began the process hoping that such openness would allow for a rich collage of materials to emerge in the process.

My creative practice was greatly inspired by both my experience with the dance practice known as Gaga Movement Language (Gaga), the improvisational training method created by Ohad Naharin of Batsheva Dance Company, and from the character-based world of Physical Theater, as seen in companies such as DV8. Gaga emerged as a popular class offering on a global scale in the early 2000’s (Katan, 2016, p. x). Therefore, scholarly writing on the practice is limited; however, philosopher Einav Katan (2016) recently spent considerable time with Ohad Naharin and his Batsheva Dance Company and subsequently wrote the book *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin’s Movement Research*. In it she defines Gaga as researching “habitual patterns of movements in order to achieve physical breakthroughs. Therefore, the practice of Gaga deals directly with the antinomy of the habitus: the comprehension of movement as both a personal experience and as a reliance on technique” (p. 25). She describes how Gaga can be imagined more as a playground for discovering new movements and connections than a set series of exercises (p. 25). My experience with Gaga began in Minnesota in 2010, and greatly increased during the previous year as I worked extensively with former Batsheva Dance Company dancer Danielle Agami. Much of the knowledge and structures in Gaga influenced my creative choices during creation.

Physical Theater, on the other hand, is more of a generic title than it is one specific practice or company. In *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* authors Simon Murray and John Keefe (2016) argue that, “Physical Theatre’ as a term, idea or concept captures the aims of certain movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to confront the continuing hegemony of a theatre defined by its literary and verbal dimensions” (p. 25). I first received extensive physical theater training at Gustavus Adolphus College under the direction of professor Henry MacCarthy. While studying at Lancaster University I later began doing my own research. Frantic Assembly, a highly acclaimed physical theater company out of England, emerged as an important inspiration for me. In their book about the company’s methods, directors Scott Graham and

Steven Hoggett (2009) write, "Physicality works best and offers more when it can be seen to illustrate the subtext rather than the context" (p. 46). While this does not contradict the values of Gaga in any way, the way it is embodied by physical theater companies such as Frantic Assembly have been influential in my thinking for a much longer period of time. Therefore, my class structure and understanding of my movement practice has been greatly influenced by Gaga, while my directorial and compositional practice remains primarily tied to physical theater.

My previous experiences working as dramaturg for Danielle Agami in the creation of "Next Door" (2018) with Terminus Modern Dance Theater and her solo performance titled "Framed" (2018) were also highly influential in my conceptualization and crafting of "Mierda." and my understanding of how to take individualized movement and transform it into a meaningful personal narrative. As a former Batsheva Dance Company member under the direction of Ohad Naharin, Danielle has a deep sensitivity to the use of metaphors in performance along with an incredibly adept eye for technique, humor and choreography. Discussions with Agami about the value of her work generated essential inspiration throughout my creative process. For example, the creation of the first section (titled "The end") used a method I had seen in her practice where she created a series of short movement phrases that traversed the space before joining them with varying timings and topographies and observing the emerging narrative. I took that idea before further developing the resulting material into "The end".

Additionally, there are many other dance and theater companies whose work was influential in my composition and conceptualization of "Mierda.". For example, DV8 Artistic Direct Lloyd Newson's work, often categorized as Physical Theater, often uses contemporary dance movement and text simultaneously to animate current political and personal narratives. Newson's pioneering work created validity and paved the way for the juxtaposition in my research of text and contemporary dance movement together. Unlike DV8, I maintained a high level of separation between each medium, preferring instead to research through the juxtaposition of traditional forms of performance as opposed to a novel blending of them. For example, in section 2 of the work ("Cheers") I spoke directly to the audience about my personal experiences with accents. Directly after finishing the monologue a new soundscape emerged as I casually walked over to

the side of the stage, looked out into the audience and began to dance. Further detail of how the juxtaposition of dance and text functioned in my work can be found in Chapter 3.

The Viewpoints method was also a foundational method for me as it was what my first movement class was based in. It is also a large portion of what I have taught in a university setting over the previous two years. The seven original viewpoints of architecture, spatial relationship, topography, shape, gesture, tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition have become instinctual lenses through which to analyze my own work. Additionally, Anne Bogart's writings on theater and performance have helped me to deepen both my interpretation of the meaning created in my work and the theatrical experience of the viewer.

Lastly, it would also be negligent not mention that I was driven to create partly as a reaction to the dance work I had seen performed over many years. To put it lightly, I had been dissatisfied with the majority of contemporary dance performances I had seen in the US since I began attending them in the mid-2000s. I had spent countless hours in discussion with friends, colleagues, and strangers about why I did not often find them satisfying or adequately important in the cultural landscape of the US. In my opinion, the dance performances too often fell into what Peter Brook (1968) labels as "Deadly Theater" as they, "not only fail to elevate or instruct, [they] hardly even entertain" (p. 10). Brook goes on to brilliantly elaborate how dangerous it is when theatrical productions rely too heavily on representation or tradition over presence and honesty.

My most meaningful experiences with dance have occurred outside the US, beginning in England in 2009. The abstract dance, story-driven physical theater and collaged devised theater all had one thing in common: they created a surprising theatrical experience that connected with my lived experience of the world around me. A memorable example of this was seeing Reckless Sleepers perform "The Last Supper" at Lancaster University. I had never before experienced performance where the audience members were treated like dinner guests, not anonymous strangers. The audience members were seated at three long tables covered with tablecloths and food was brought to them throughout the show (Gardner, 2004). The food and text were inspired by the last meal requests by death row celebrities. While I could not connect with what it felt like

to be on death row, the intimate presentation of the show's content allowed me to engage my curiosity for experiences outside of the typical scope.

Another clear source of inspiration for me was a focused rehearsal space. While the existence of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse of dancers cannot be denied, a lack of rigor and demand during the creative process risked a final performance that lacked discovery and surprise and instead simply repeated what had been previously accomplished. I believed it was my job as choreographer and director to create the type of productive atmosphere I desired. As Bogart (2007) states, "A director can bring an intensity of gaze that forces the actors to create in the present moment" (p. 39). It was important to me that everyone involved in the process reflected on the question, "Do I intend to function from the safety of what I already know, or can I welcome the experience of exposing myself to less familiar, more provocative issues?". The personal responses to this question varied day-to-day, but the habit of engaging with that question allowed the practice and research to grow in valuable, focused directions.

In her book *And then, you act* Director Anne Bogart (2007) writes, "if you want the audience to be an active participant, leave blanks for the audience to fill in" (p. 77). This concept of "leaving blanks" will return many times in the following chapters as an important personal value in my work. Some artists may use representational movement or costumes in order to communicate an intended message. In my work, I avoid defining a singular message in order to allow space for a more complex associations and meanings to emerge in the creation process and experience of the content. As with my experience many years ago, I find this type of work is much more effective in creating moment-to-moment engagement as it challenges and inspires. This creative goal makes it harder to answer the question "what is your work about?" because of the multiplicity of possible answers. I enjoy that ambiguity and complexity.

I consume and create art because I want to better understand the messy, difficult, confounding and joyful human experience. Or, as the title of the work suggests, I am inspired to create work that is about "real shit". The ability of contemporary dance to communicate through movement makes it, for me, the perfect medium for that research.

CHAPTER 2

THE CREATIVE PROCESS



Figure 2. Jordan Klitzke dancing in “Mierda.”, Section 1 titled “The end”.

The creation process of “Mierda.” began in December 2017 with these principal research questions in mind:

- How can improvisational experiences using sensation, fantasy and presence produce individualized, personally meaningful movement?
- How can the cultivation of individualized movement produce emerging narratives?
- How can contrasting themes create theatrically engaging content?
- How does an audience experience and make meaning from collage in performance?

The research questions clearly emphasized a curiosity for individuality and meaning making, and many continued to inspire me throughout the process and performances. As the work developed, the costumes, lights, sounds, music, set, space, text, and movement all had to evolve together to connect the themes and questions that were continually emerging in the work. While the research began primarily focused on the first question and movement generation through improvisation, all of the research questions emerged at different points in the process of creating a fully produced theatrical performance.

As I referenced in Chapter 1, I have lived in four different countries, visited over 15 countries, worked a variety of blue and white collar jobs, grew up in the suburbs, went to college

in a rural area, worked in a number of large urban cities, dated women from Mexico, Ecuador, Israel, England, the US, and Spain, learned Spanish at the age of 24, and recently became an Executive Director of a growing, successful dance company. In other words, my complex mix of experiences have led me to my artistic practice of making meaning, curiosity and beauty out of my complex contemporary life.

Part 1: Individual-specific movement generation

The research undertaken in this project assumed that dance and performance were teachable skills that could be developed in a rehearsal space through a practice of improvisation, sensation, fantasy, and presence. It began with the first stage of my project, focused on developing individual-specific movement, which occurred during the Spring 2018 semester at Arizona State University (ASU). Group rehearsals began with twelve dancers who were a mix of ASU students, ASU graduates and dancers from the community. I either personally invited each of them or reached out to me and expressed interest in being part of my process. The two-hour group rehearsals began with approximately 45 minutes of guided improvisation focused on developing each mover's understanding of presence, sensation, fantasy, and sensitivity to emerging narratives as they were to be used in my work.

During the guided improvisations, contrasting ideas and images were utilized to connect the dancers with new fantasies and encourage surprising moments of discovery and expressivity. By observing the dancers in the room I was able to adapt my verbal guidance towards a deepening of their practice while also deepening my own understanding of each mover's quality of movement and movement patterns. Like a comic may use irony to engage and challenge an audience, I sought to produce surprising movements and moments of physical clarity in the dancers that engaged me as an observer. I used a variety of prompts to accomplish this. Generally, proposing the simultaneous embodiment of two contrasting ideas or sensations such as "shy" and "powerful", or "mature" and "child" as an entry into new movement generation was the starting point. It emerged as important to use contrast, not direct opposition. In practice, direct opposition often appeared to produce balanced movements, which lacked risk and deep curiosity.

Other activities I used focused more directly on fantasy and sensation. For example, I spent an entire rehearsal playing with the idea of what it would feel and look like to “see” out of their hands. I was interested not in communicating that specific idea to an audience, but in connecting with the sensations associated with that new reality of alternative consciousness. While I do care deeply about an audience, it was not my focus at this point in the process when I was searching for seeds of inspiration and areas of growth for the dancers. Some dancers struggled to find presence and their own fantasy within the apparently silly task, and I verbally encouraged deep participation when I did not observe worthwhile research. Unlike movement generation based on pre-established movement vocabularies, this improvisational work was the foundational training for the proceeding creation of gestures, tasks, personal movement phrasing, and abstract embodiments of fantasy and sensation.

After the foundational improvisation work, the rehearsals focused on the creation of a 4-6 minute solo for each dancer. Some of the improvisational tasks were returned to in this stage and re-examined for the individual meaning and narrative being created by the dancers. As all of the dancers worked individually at this time, I attempted to efficiently move from one person to the next creating original movement that would challenge and celebrate each mover’s talents and individuality. Each dancer’s particular abilities challenged me choreographically to create movement beyond my personal vocabulary or abilities. At this point, I was largely guided by my own intuition perhaps influenced by earlier observation of the dancers. No greater meaning was associated with the movements as I created short phrases with each individual. Many challenges arose at this point in the process. For example, one participant exhibited a much greater range of flexibility and control in her movement than I possess. It was a pleasant challenge to integrate that capacity into her movement phrases by taking ideas from my own body and fantasizing with her about how to develop those movements even further into her capabilities.

Not every rehearsal focused on the creation of movement phrases, some also involved experiential tasks such as repeating a single gesture many times before finding a single sentence to layer on top of it. The structure of the rehearsals was rarely predetermined. Instead, I focused on what inspired me in the room that day and attempted to bring those ideas to the forefront of a

visual or sensorial experience. I tried not to doubt myself or feel insecure if an idea did not come to me at first. It became clear to me that understanding each dancer's strengths and weaknesses was more essential at this point than the dance movements themselves. As the rehearsals progressed, I did not spend time linking together the new material being created each week but instead chose to continually move forward and find new ideas. Sometimes I gave time at the end of rehearsal to review all of the previous material. In this way, the dancers were physically warm and had new information to apply to the previous rehearsal's material as they reviewed it.

Returning to my notes at the time, a few written reflections jump out at me. I wrote, "Don't be scared of simplicity. Everything is complex if you venture to look close enough" and "Be conscious of the story you write with your body. Feel the moment where you either tell a new story or become aware of boredom in the current story you're telling." It is also at this point in the process that I introduced the same recurring contrasting sensations as inspiration for movement generation. This occurred near the end of February when I wrote numerous ideas on paper before rehearsal, such as "Regret and Confusion", "Melting and Expanding", "Shaking and Bouncing", and "Boredom and Desire". I searched not for a universal understanding of these contradictions, but a clear embodiment in each individual. I left space within the process for the dancers to bring themselves into the material.

One-on-one classes and rehearsals began after roughly four group rehearsals of at least three hours each. The three to four individual rehearsals of at least two hours in length were structured in the same way as the previous group sessions with guided improvisation focused on playing with images and sensations at the beginning followed by creation and rehearsal of solo material. Here the emphasis switched and I began to bring together the scattered parts into a cohesive solo structure. New material often emerged during improvisation and was integrated into the solo. These rehearsals were especially important for me as they allowed time to dig deeper into the individual abilities and expressiveness of each dancer. I observed that the increased amount of personal attention became stressful for some and liberating for others. I was curious to discover that it quickly became too much for a few dancers and I needed to take more breaks than I would normally like to.

One note of importance is that a variety of music played softly in the background during the guided improvisations, but the rehearsal period was almost always done without music. This choice was made after an intuition that music would help to connect with sensation, but it would also guide the dancer towards certain recognizable rhythms and sensations that I hoped to complicate. This was an example of an inspiration that emerged in the process, as it was not my initial intention to work in silence. Over time it became a produced a nicely focused atmosphere.

At the end of the first phase, seven of the dancers presented solos during an informal public showing on April 13th, 2018 in room 122 at the Nelson Fine Arts Center of ASU. The 3-6 minute solos were created without music, so in the showing I used a series of natural and pedestrian sounds, such as a playground or a rainstorm in the woods, to use as a foundation on top of which the dancers could encounter his/her individual movement narratives we had developed together. The showing lasted a total of 43 minutes and was attended by roughly 15 audience members. The showings were intended to give the dancers an opportunity to find new meaning in their solos through the presence of an audience and to increase their understanding of presence, urgency, and sensorial fantasy. A video of the solo performances can be found [here](#).

After the showing, I personally thanked each dancer, shared the growth I observed in each solo, and invited them to give feedback on the process. A few recurring areas of growth emerged in the transition between rehearsing movement alone with me and then performing the material alone in front of an audience. The work appeared to be positively received based on discussions with audience members after the performance. I especially appreciated the dancers' presence and ownership of the movement as if it were an inevitably unfolding narrative. Audience members made similar comments. However, one dancer commented afterwards, "I was mostly focused on anticipating the movements that were coming next in the solo because it was recently set" (personal communication, March 2018). Many of those struggles were expected and, in truth, limited the depth of the research up until that point. However, the most interesting feedback for me as a choreographer was when one dancer shared that she felt only about thirty percent of the dance was "hers" until she started to rehearse the material and that number grew to finally feel

like the movement was sixty percent hers. Unfortunately, this was not a group of data I was able to pursue further, but it was encouraging for future research.

I then invited four of the seven dancers to continue working with me during the fall 2018 semester with the intention of creating a longer work using each dancer's solo as a starting point for a new section. At that point no title had been given to the work, and while each solo involved a unique narrative, no larger concept was decided upon aside from the intention of putting the solos together and allowing for new meaning and narrative to emerge based on the abilities and histories present in the rehearsal space.

Part 2: The creation of "Mierda."

What began as a desire to make a work with four of the seven dancers from the first phase of the project soon developed into a solo endeavor as two of the cast members moved to New York and a third cast member also became unavailable during the rehearsal period. This left one of the twelve original dancers still involved in the project. The conflicts were brought to my attention roughly one month before the premier date of the work, which necessitated quick decision-making in order to stay true to the intent of the research while drastically re-envisioning the final performance.

While difficult in the moment of the changes, perhaps the challenge of bringing more of myself into the research was exactly what was needed to bring greater depth to my understanding of my creative undertaking. Unlike in the first part where the content generation focused on the talent and abilities of other dancers, the material in the second part became quite personal as it grew from both my personal movement practice and my desire to create honest moments of insight in an engaging theatrical experience. Had I been working with a group of dancers in the second part my role as director would surely have been greater as opposed to the sensation-focused research I ultimately focused on.

As I needed to act quickly, an important source of inspiration soon emerged. While living in Ecuador in 2014, I created a 20-minute solo titled "Adam Ate the Apple". The solo involved a collage of text, movement, prop manipulation and audio recordings based on a variety of stories

and reports I had gathered about the “War on Drugs” declared by President Nixon in 1971. Many of tools and questions I discovered in the process of developing the work, such as how to effectively transition between text and movement, were still of interest to me. In addition, I believed some of the structures in the work would combine well with the movement research I had undertaken with the previous dancers, including the creative focus on individualized movement and emerging narratives. Using my previous work as a source of inspiration, I became inspired to search for new materials by mining my personal life experiences for interesting contrasts and revelations. This varied from the non-fiction source material of the previous solo. While copying my previous work was never my intention, it did quickly emerge as an unexpected inspiration in the process. For reference, a video of that work can be found [here](#).

With my previous solo beginning to inspire new ideas, I found myself alone in a studio with the premiere of the yet to be created work only a little more than three weeks away. It had also been just over a year since I had last performed in a dance performance. Moments of doubt and anxiety began to creep in, as I did not feel I was in the optimal physical condition for such an undertaking. So, instead of attempting to find the perfect concept to comfort my insecurities, I instead returned to my original research questions of creating through sensation, fantasy and presence to produce individualized, personally meaningful movement. As I had emphasized with the other dancers, I trusted that patient exploration would bring emerging themes and narratives. I was slightly anxious, but my desire to push my creative practice to new places and my previous choreographic experiences helped keep me focused and inspired.

The creation of individualized movement phrasing through a practice of improvisation with sensation, fantasy and presence again became the primary research method for the first two weeks of the new creation. I realized that my relatively short choreographic history since the age of 25 has relied heavily on striking stories, costumes, lighting, and music in an effort to hide what I had always felt was a personal weakness of creating interesting, visually intelligent movement that relied upon the developing experience of the dancer. I chose not to listen to those insecurities. Instead, I entered the studio each day with a clear goal of having my presence and experience of the movement guide my choreographic choices.

During the first week, I created a variety of movement materials and refined them with each passing day, but my anxiety continued to build. I still did not know what would tie everything together into a cohesive performance. Then, as I continued to rehearse the new movement material some of my great personal questions rose to surface of the meaning I was creating while in movement. This included questions about language, identity, education, and choice. The topics I care most deeply about have a way of showing up again and again in my work, but in this process it appeared to happen naturally. It was guided by the movement content instead of the other way around. Along similar lines, dramaturge Katherine Profeta (2014) extensively questions her methods of bringing personal research into the rehearsal space in a fashion that maintains the movement as the foundation. She states, "Research, whether it is gathered inside or outside of the rehearsal room, whether it collates existing information or creates new and unfamiliar information, is at its best a process for recognizing integrity" (p. 77). My creative process gained integrity as my personal research and questions begin to naturally associate with the movement creation. That integrity allowed a variety of very distinct building blocks to exist on their own before eventually being juxtaposed together for the final performance.

I continually searched to identify recurring patterns as I created movement phrases for myself. The purpose of this was two-fold. First, I desired an increased awareness of the values exhibited in my tendencies. Second, I wanted to search for opportunities to surprise myself, as I believed it would ultimately lead to a provocative experience for the audience. During the rehearsal process a few habits emerged. For example, my tendency to initiate movement with my hands and feet became clear as I was drawn to their expressive nature. While I did not purposefully avoid such an instinct, I continually asked myself, "Can other body parts achieve a similar level of expressiveness while also contrasting the expectations of typical movement patterns?" As I dove deeper into those questions I also realized that I rarely entered into my backspace, which is the space behind the forward orientation of the body, with any of my extremities. Once I began to question the expressive potential of the uncommon empty spaces surrounding me I found countless opportunities to surprise myself and enrich my experience in those often-underutilized spaces.

I also recognized my preference of linking large, physically demanding movements with moments that focus attention on small details. I noticed how that habit was clearly associated with my distaste for predictable sequencing in performance. Yes, I could coordinate my movement and manipulate my body in impressive ways, but what lay behind the movement was much more interesting to me. I saw my physical abilities not as an expression of my training, but rather as an avenue for psychophysical research of contrast between large and small, obvious and subtle. For example, during the section 1 (“The end”) there is a moment where my legs are suspended in the air with my ear to the ground and hips perched on my elbows (see *Figure 2* for a picture of this moment). It was an impressive physical demonstration. However, I discovered that the sensorial journey was much more important than the end product. By first bringing my ear to the ground in a listening action and then letting my legs lift from the ground as a result of pouring more weight into the listening action I contradicted the additional physical exertion. The small detail of listening was linked to the large action of suspension, thus creating a more revealing contrast in the single moment. Then, before I let it become over-indulgent, I moved on.

As the second week drew to a close my movement phrases were beginning to take shape and some of my personal stories were beginning to enter into the work, but I still felt the material was too disjointed. Up until this point in the process, interesting movement generation had been my primary inspiration along with a distant awareness of a previous solo I had worked on years earlier. For the first time in the entire process I began to feel the lack of a larger theme or cohesive idea was limiting my progress. Out of this struggle emerged a creative method I had been introduced to years before. When and where I was introduced I am not certain, but in an effort to focus the content of the show I began to focus on three central themes for the work: religion, language, and equality. To my surprise, focusing the work on those three themes not only helped rejuvenate the process; it also began to inspire much more specific memories and experiences. Instead of dealing with large, general questions I began to be inspired by very specific memories and images. Those recollections ultimately became the content of “Mierda.”

As previously stated, “Mierda.” was made up of a series of ten juxtaposed scenes, each with their own internal logic. As has been discussed, most of them began as movement phrases

before evolving in the studio to come to a final product. Others were developed from texts I wrote or memories that inspired a certain set of sensations. Each of the ten sections had its own journey towards discovering the necessary meaning and integrity needed in performance. For example, the monologue about accents (Section 3, “The Suburbs”) at the beginning of the show had multiple stages before arriving to a finished product. In the initial developmental stages of the monologue I spoke about the physical placement in the mouth of English, Scottish, and Russian accents, all of which I had studied and performed in plays. The original version of the monologue ended by connecting that knowledge with the Mexican accent I developed later in life. As the larger themes of “Mierda.” began to emerge it became clear to me that describing my fascination with accents earlier in life was sufficient information for the audience at that point in the performance, as I did not want to bring the Spanish language in at that point. Therefore, I was left with my ability to speak with a few accents as an amusing idea with little direction. At the same time my disregard for the suburbs began to emerge as a prominent idea in the first part of the work. I wondered, “How can my fascination with accents be juxtaposed with my experiences growing up in the suburbs?” While contemplating those ideas together I recalled a memory of being on a bus when I first moved to England and deeply wished the strangers there would not know I was American. There was clearly a strong connection between those accents and my desire to experience life as someone not from the suburbs. Therefore, what began as an explanation of theatrical accents in relation to my Spanish accent ultimately transformed into a new story about my desire to not be identified as an individual from suburban Minnesota.

The opportunity to adapt material with new emerging narratives and themes of the work occurred numerous times throughout my process. As with any collage, choosing the order of the pieces drastically affected the overall experience. It became essential to continually try new configurations again and again to enrich my understanding of the larger resonances in the work. There were instances where I reused material I had previously removed and had to be sensitive to the new meanings that emerged. For example, the “After the after” solo included repurposed moments from a number of the original solos from Part 1. As the strongest order of the collage began to emerge, I soon realized that no singular theme or message was becoming dominant in

the work. The same could be said for the individual sections as well as the overall work. While I understood that some audience members might have become frustrated by this lack of simplicity, I found great pleasure in avoiding such singular themes. In performing the work, I later realized that the intimacy of the space allowed me to create a close, tangible relationship with the audience through which I could invite them to grow with me through presence, fantasy, sensation and relational critical thinking.

Generally speaking, I am continually in search of methods of creation that result in performances full of visual and experiential learning. Throughout the creative process of “Mierda.” I found myself trusting more and more in the visual and personal content of the work and in the audience’s intelligence to find the relevant relationships between them. I have spent much of my adult life in academic institutions and believe they have unfortunately devalued certain forms of critical thinking that art necessitates. Educational philosopher John Dewey (1934) writes in his book *Art as Experience*,

To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being “intellectuals” (p. 47).

The transformative, educational moments in the work necessitated high levels of relational critical thinking by the audience and myself. It became exceptionally clear over the course of the process how strongly I emphasize relational thinking and integrity during creation.

As the performance date neared, it became clear to me that it was essential to integrate additional individuals into the creation as collaborators and/or performers. The most important invitation ended up being Gina Jurek, who I brought into the rehearsal space with me to serve as a performer and assistant director. Her integration became an important point in the process as my research focus shifted from my perception of the scenes to my sensitivity to Gina’s perception of the scenes. The trust I have in Gina through our work on past projects was essential as her

reactions strongly influenced my confidence in each moment. Fortunately, her feedback was a consistently inspiring source as she reinforced and deepened my understanding of the experiential journey through each section. As she once explained in a feedback session, “Jordan is always talking about what is “interesting” to him or not”. As the process continued, Gina eventually contributed her extensive musical and dancing talents. In the studio, we would continually comment on what we appreciated from what the other person shared, suggested other possibilities moving forward, and allowed the other person to decide to what degree she/he wanted to integrate that new information. I soon realized that the collaboration functioned in a repeating three-step process of appreciation, suggestion, and integration.

At one point it became clear to me that I wanted to include her solo from the first part of the process, but I did not know when or why it would occur and did not want to force it. Once she was in the rehearsal space with me an opportunity quickly emerged as I searched for another layer to add on top of my sermon at the end of the work. Our musical collaboration also functioned similarly, as I first gave extensive input into which songs and sounds I wanted to use and how I believed they should transition between them. I then quickly handed over much of the responsibility to her in order to keep my attention focused on my dancing and experiencing of the material. Again near the end of the process her singing was added to the beginning of the work as the audience found their seats due to a suggestion of emphasizing the audience’s awareness of her throughout the performance. Gina’s collaboration was an essential source of inspiration throughout the creation and performance of “Mierda.”.

Quinn Mihalovic began to design the lights only a few weeks before we hung the lights. Our initial meetings included personal drawings and a section-by-section breakdown of what I saw as the overall visual journey of the work. During the week of the performances our collaboration was again carried out in a process of appreciation, suggestion and integration. I primarily appreciated and suggested while allowing Quinn to integrate how he was able. An exception to that standard occurred when I discovered the necessity of having lights low to the ground in order to highlight my body against the black marley floor. Unlike in other instances, I insisted on that change. In other words, I was the final authority, but I trusted the people around

me to make the majority of the decisions. Another ASU student also volunteered to help with technical needs during the week of the show and was integrated into the performance with a timely cross of the space during section 5 (“Public enemy”). This integration emerged from a suggestion by a committee member that the collage of ideas could be expanded to introduce elements from outside of my body and the established performance space. The same suggestion also led to the integration of a mother and child crossing the space linked by a backpack with a leash. Again, with regards to process, all of these moments in the work emerged as suggestions from outside sources that I integrated as I saw fit within the content and integrity of the individual scenes.

The theatrical space itself also presented unique challenges, as it was basically a large open black box style space. I recognized that it could easily feel too large for one person to adequately fill. Like foreplay, the first few moments of the performance became important in order to focus the audience and prep them for the journey ahead. Transforming the spaciousness of the room into a contained arena where intimacy would allow for a collective fantasy to flourish felt essential at the beginning of the performance. Unlike in performance spaces with an established seating and viewing arrangement, “Meirda.” allowed me almost complete control over the audience’s initial interaction with the space. As a solution to the challenge, the moment the audience entered the space they were confronted with a large pillar and two opposing rows of seating on either side of the pillar and stage. One side had simple, black steel-framed chairs and the other had a variety of unique, dated seats ranging from sofas to bar stools to small atamans. Clearly, this was going to be a performance where visual information was going to be presented for personal interpretation. Right before the premier I remember being quite bothered by the number of distractions in the space. I discovered that it would be damaging to allow the audience any time to become distracted. So, as the audience made their initial seating choice the sweet-voiced Gina Jurek also stimulated their senses as she sang and played her ukulele. Her presence and voice filled the space with a young, optimistic energy and focused attention from the very first moment. She appeared content singing for pleasure rather than impressing or befriending anyone in the audience- a carefree vision of confidence and beauty. As Gina moved to the sound board

the lights dimmed and I was already entering the space in formal attire. The light dimmed and focused on the center of the space. The energy that was dispersed in the room just a second ago was now honed even further in on a single figure.

Up until now I have primarily commented on my process up until the performances. In truth, many of the most important research moments and discoveries occurred during the performances, as the presence of the audience is a powerful tool of invention. As theater practitioner Peter Brook (1968) puts it,

A creative actor will be most ready to discard the hardened shells of his work at the last rehearsal because here, with the first night approaching, a brilliant searchlight is cast on his creation, and he sees its pitiful inadequacy (p. 115).

The ability to discard much of what I was certain about up until that point in order to approach the premiere of the work with fresh eyes felt difficult, but essential. As those who were with me throughout the process can attest, I had a greatly heightened energy that created a slightly different narrative when I first performed with an audience.

Many practitioners and philosophers have written extensively about the effect of being observed and having an audience, but in keeping with my dramaturgical focus I will again quote Profeta (2012) who argues, “though [the] artists’ intent does not derive the meaning of the work, the conjured ghost of intention does hover side-by-side with the meaning as constructed, without a clear or necessary connection to it” (p. 100). In other words, during the performance the meaning of the work became predominantly out of my control and yet completely my responsibility. A clear example of that in “Meirda.” occurred when I began to speak in Spanish. I believe a few audience members spoke fluent Spanish at each show, but the range of possible associations with a white Minnesotan man speaking passionately in Spanish are endless. Some audience members who spoke no Spanish remarked that they enjoyed not knowing what was being said and instead focused on observing me move with a different physicality. Another Mexican audience member knew Spanish and the artist I referenced in the text, so she questioned why I chose to focus on the artists that I did. As a performer, I found that fluid context to be liberating and fascinating. My communication of the content of the text was clearly separate

from the multiple meanings being created by the observers in that moment. In other words, I found that my voice was not the only agent creating meaning. My clothing, body language, tone, pacing and focus were all adding to the meaning being created. Again, it necessitated the audience member's visual and relational thought. I, however, was left only to focus on what I could control, which was my honest, present delivery of the text each show.

No drastic changes to the sections were made between performances. Instead, I chose to focus my research in performance again on my initial concepts of sensitivity, fantasy, presence and technique. In other words, I focused on deepening my understanding of the experience and perception of the material over further development of the content and concepts. For example, while the text of the monologues stayed relatively consistent, I found my delivery drastically changed from night to night as I better understood where emphasis and pauses created the greatest energetic response from the audience. Many of the moment-to-moment adaptations were influenced, intelligently or not, by the audience member's body language during the performances. Through my presence I was sensitive and able to adapt. I noticed how many people were leaning forward or reclining. I noticed if anyone looked at their phone or glanced around the room. Of course, other confounding variables such as the projection of my voice and amount of light hitting my body also influenced their experience, and I attempted to be sensitive to that as well. Regardless, the intimacy of the space allowed me to respond to each audience member as they in turn responded to me.

The previous examples are only a small sample of my rapid thoughts, instincts and sensations during the performances. Not all of my thoughts were critical either. There were also many moments of quiet when I simply listened to the empty space around me. For example, when I was lying on the floor at the end of Section 6 (titled "See no evil") I was not thinking about the upcoming monologue. I let my presence speak.

In the end, I greatly enjoyed all of the shows and grew in my understanding of the material with each one. I held a question and answer session after each performance where I was moved by the reactions of the audience and felt inspired by their comments. It felt a part of the performance as it was revelatory and again required me to be present and sensitive.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS



Figure 3. Jordan Klitzke in performance of “Mierda.”, section 8 titled “After the after”.

Entering into fantasy, sensation and presence does not necessitate the “doing” of anything. On the contrary, it is something one receives. Being open to information in the environment (including the space within one’s body) permits observations to emerge. Those may elicit a response. Then a new action can begin. That action can be creative, personal and empowering. However, if one is not able to listen first, then his or her actions are limited to what is already known and acceptable. If one reacts only from what one anticipates it limits freedom. Fantasy flourishes through sensing anew the present time and space.

In the following pages I will analyze the successes and failures of the research through a very specific lens. Namely, how meaning was created through the performance and presentation of contrasting themes. The creative process had many stages, but “Mierda.” ultimately became a collage of juxtaposed images, sensations, stories, and movements presented in a theatrical experience that was intended to reveal something about the contradictions that exist in my life. Therefore, I believe it is appropriate to structure the analysis as such. Like the performance itself, the following sections do not follow a chronological order; rather, they dig into the physical, visual, and psychological aspects of the performance that resulted in a variety of revelations and potential for further research and development. I believe viewing the work in this manner directly connects with what I ultimately found most valuable as creator and performer.

I will begin each section with first-person descriptions of various moments in the work that I believe connect with the themes being discussed. It is my intention that the descriptive analysis of the moments will more directly connect with the experiential aspect of the research in relation to the larger themes that emerged. In truth, there is surely as much insight into my practice and research in those paragraphs as the more analytical paragraphs that follow. I encourage you to fantasize with me in those moments.

The themes and arguments presented in the following sections often refer to the perception of abstract ideas and pre-determined theatrical paradigms. Dance has a unique ability to create meaning that goes beyond verbal definition. That does not make it any less valid or important. Dance has the ability to engage my relational, rhythmic, physical, visual and abstract intelligence like no other art form. As philosopher Alva Noë (2016) states, “We have no choice, when confronted with the nonfigurative, but to free ourselves from normal seeing. Memory, emotion, and past experience become our guide.” (p. 1215). I believe “Mierda.” challenged viewers to free themselves from normal seeing and hope that the contrasting themes tapped into those unconscious places where rich meaning and reflection lives.

Urgency and Efficiency

“... found out as from the suburbs.” I glance at an audience member to my left to make sure the last sentence reached them and to get a quick feel for how long I can hold their attention in the upcoming silence. I walk slowly over to the small black box a mere two feet away from the closest audience member. I put my hands in my pockets as I step onto it and shyly look down at my feet. Up until this point in the performance the text and movement have come in rapid bursts so I feel the audience’s anticipation of my next action. I calmly relax my shoulders down my back and the muscles around my eyes. I lift my head to look at them, acknowledging in my demeanor for the first time that I am alone in the space. They are all looking at me. I do nothing. I look at them for at least ten seconds. Most look me straight in the eye while a few look down as if it would be rude to make eye contact. I calmly return their gaze. I hold even longer than what feels comfortable. I am in no rush. I am just being for a moment- listening to them and the space.

Urgency and efficiency emerged as themes in the work itself and in the creative process. While the initial research took place over many months, I created the content of “Mierda.”, a 50-minute solo performance, in roughly three and a half weeks. Yes, I drew upon previous experiences and material, but the urgency of creation was always present. In the end, the performance occurred in front of an audience with all the necessary elements in place. The limited creation period, while daunting at times, allowed the work to attain a strong momentum that carried me through all three performances, and each performance continued to bring new discoveries. I appreciated the difficulty of the task, as it ironically never allowed me time to doubt myself for too long or let the work feel overwhelming. Each rehearsal focused on what was working in the present moment, and I put the stubborn sections aside until they inspired me again. Sometimes they never did. My extensive choreographic and directorial experience helped me maintain focus and trust myself in the process. I partially credit the many mentors who taught me how to be efficient when faced with difficult constraints of time and space.

Insisting on a rigorous, but patient rehearsal space emerged for me as the most efficient habit in creation. I realized that I prefer to have two hours of intense creation rather than four hours of feeling like time is not an issue. As Anne Bogart (2007) puts it, “by treating the time and the space in an intense and demanding way, a rehearsal room can become the site of creation, where flight occurs” (p. 39). There were many small things that went a long way in establishing a productive rehearsal space including starting on time, turning off all unnecessary electronics, and removing any sort of clock from the space. On the other hand, I also found it immensely important to have moments where I did not feel I needed to end at a set time, even if that meant rehearsing late at night. In order to listen to fantasy and sensations it felt necessary for me to not be distracted by other commitments. This was easier said than done, but I found it essential.

A few other effective methods emerged for me in the rehearsal space. In my effort to not be distracted by technology I did not often video record my rehearsals. Surprisingly, the lack of recording made the rehearsal time even more sacred. While in the space I was able to keep moving forward and not get caught up in the details that often pull attention after watching

rehearsal footage for edits. This became especially important as I found myself as both the director and performer of the work. When those roles became at odds with each other the efficiency of the process was quickly compromised. As a performer, I found my sensitivity to the subtleties of the text and movement was heightened, as it became my primary reference when analyzing the success of each moment. As the process continued, I assumed that I would begin recording rehearsals during the week of the show; however, at that point I had become so connected to my first-person experience of the performance that I decided not to record even the final dress rehearsal. Instead, I focused on my commitment to the material as a performer and let the small audience serve as the mirror through which I evaluated and edited before opening night. While I acknowledge that the choice limited some of the editorial tools I had developed over the years of working with rehearsal footage, it also freed me to not get caught up in small, often insignificant details. As the director of the work I was able to focus on the big ideas and as a performer I focused on the small details of the moment. I believe I stumbled upon an effective relationship between the two roles in this way, though not a perfect one as my ideal would still be to have separate individuals in each role.

Partly because of the lack of video recording, editing the work became my primary challenge, and, in hindsight, is the area with the greatest potential for future development. My applied project committee and Gina Jurek consistently gave important feedback that was incorporated into the work including some large changes such as removing certain songs and costumes. References to these edits can be found throughout Chapter 2. However, due to the urgency of the process much of the project was undertaken alone with limited time for feedback. While I appreciated what emerged from my desire to make meaningful material for myself, I would ideally have integrated more opportunities for feedback and especially play.

Surely due in part to the urgency of the process, the themes of urgency and productivity also appeared in the content of the work. Take the moment described at the beginning of this section. I'm patiently standing on a box with no indication of what I'm waiting for. Urgency is not present. Moments later I will dance around the space as if controlled by an outside force before again returning to the box with patience. In that way, my experience of urgency versus patience

greatly influenced the meaning and overall rhythm of the performance. The theme of urgency appeared not only experientially, but also in the text. During the monologue in Section 7 (“Agotamiento”) I gave an image to the contrast with my observation of the pleasure of efficiency in the US versus the pleasure of physicality in Mexico. I would also argue that simply juxtaposing text and dance next to each other brings up a question of efficiency in communication. Is a picture worth a thousand words? Is text more efficient when telling facts and opinions? These questions and many more live below the content of the work and constantly presented opportunities for the audience to create relational meaning between them.

Narrative and Collage

I hold my right wrist above my head. It is slightly warm from the light that hits it. My head feels heavy on my neck and my eyes are closed. My left hand, almost as if possessed by another person, reaches slowly up towards the other. Slap. It hits the back of my right hand. The rest of my body continues to feel heavy and barely reacts at all. Slap. It happens again, this time slightly more forcefully. Still no reaction. Before a third slap occurs my right elbow animates and pulls my body backwards towards the center of the space. My left elbow pulls back in the same direction. My head and chest don't want to go. Eventually, my right elbow pulls so hard it turns my body around. I reach with both arms extended and a firm stance toward a distant place of freedom.

In her influential *The Viewpoints Book* Anne Bogart (2007) wrote, "One does not speak to a particular audience; rather you speak to a particular part of each individual audience member" (p. 42). “Mierda.” took that idea and ran with it. Throughout creation I insisted that if each moment appealed to a particular part of myself then the audience would feel the same effect. This resulted in performance material that varied in length, style and artistic medium. Crafting a larger narrative through collage maintained the integrity of the material and brought forth a new contrast between juxtaposing scenes and overall narrative arch.

One audience member commented during a question and answer session that watching the show felt like reading a novel. However, as I previously stated, the sections were not

chronologically organized nor did they follow a traditional dramatic arch of rising and falling action. So, what about the performance felt like a novel? I believe the three central research concepts of sensation, fantasy, and presence were what allowed the experience to unfold in a novel-like fashion. My presence allowed for precise intentions on a moment-to-moment basis and created an atmosphere where the audience was engaged in noticing the small details and making some of the same relational connections that I discovered throughout the process. The meaning of the relationships was never directly stated; rather, it was created with the audience over time. Dramaturge Katherine Profeta (2012) writes, "It seems fair to say that when we watch movement, and we watch actions extend, iterate, or sequence through time, we form impressions about how these sequential events might be causally related" (p. 54). In other words, it was a natural instinct to create a cohesive narrative when one observed evolving relationships over time. I trusted in that assumption throughout the creative process, and believe I observed the phenomenon in performance.

Creating a collage of material with potential relationships was only the first part of the process. As I have referenced before, creating material that engaged the audience on a moment-to-moment basis was a choreographic goal throughout the process. It emerged as essential for the collage to engage and create meaning in performance. When the collage of material was brought into the theatrical space it also became about focus, rhythm and commitment. The transformative experience of the performance was dependent upon the environment as a whole. Dewey (1934) defined this important experience as, "the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (p. 22). Both the narrative and the collage of material worked together towards a greater purpose of participation and communication of specific parts of myself. In this way, the themes of collage and narrative, while apparently quite different, developed together in "Mierda." as the audience experienced the material together with me over time.

I found Philosopher Alva Noë's (2006) writing about perception and experience to be helpful in understanding what was occurring in performance. Her non-dance writing was

refreshing as it indirectly detailed the complexity of dance. “It is a basic fact about perception that solid, opaque objects, when seen, have visible and invisible parts. When you see a tomato, for example, you see its visible aspect. Euclid captured this thought when he wrote: ‘Nothing that is seen is perceived at once in its entirety’” (p. 413). This simple quote hints at the hidden experience of each audience member’s viewing of the show from a unique angle and a unique history. As it was an invisible part of the performance, each audience member’s perception of my sensations and fantasies was unique to each individual.

Movement and Text

My strong upright torso suggests I am confident, but I am on my knees. Facing one side of the audience, my left arm reaches straight out to the side as my right hand pulls my shirt across my chest. It’s as if I am attempting to expose something beneath it. I am open and defeated. I crawl slowly closer to the audience, still on my knees. I am small and large. I’m almost begging them to say something, to save me. For the first time in the performance I feel the sensation of sadness, as I see no response or movement from my physical plea.

Director Peter Brook (1968) keenly observes, “One can see that everything is a language for something and nothing is a language for everything” (p. 119). It is from a similar belief that I utilized both text and movement to illustrate different ideas and concepts throughout “Mierda.”. Much has been written about the purity of each medium as some have argued that “Sensitivity to a medium as a medium is the very heart of all artistic creation and esthetic perception” (Dewey, 1934, p. 207). I am not interested in arguing about the importance of the purity of artistic mediums, as both movement and text are uniquely inspiring to me. As Noë (2016) writes, “works of art do not merely cause experience; they also figure into art’s ongoing effort, like that of science, to understand ourselves” (p. 1215). I find it much more interesting to talk about how the choice of using one medium or the other influenced my research into revelatory juxtaposition and meaning making.

I consider myself a dancer, choreographer, director, dramaturg and actor and believe the use of both text and movement in my work is central to those identities. Years ago, I remember the first read through of plays being one of my favorite moments. I was captivated by the power that words had in creating character. Yet, as a spectator I wanted more. Dewey's educational philosophy argues that words inevitably reduce the human experience to "orders, ranks, and classes that can be managed" (Dewey 1934, p. 224). My belief in the unique characteristics of dance, namely its ability to embody heightened moments of sensation, fantasy and presence, was only reinforced in the creation of "Mierda.". Verbal language, on the other hand, can be precise and inspire confidence in audience members who are more familiar with verbal symbols (words) as opposed to physical ones (dance). The crafting of words into stories and logic is an important aspect of my identity that I do not want to hide or ignore in creation. Therefore, the juxtaposition of both mediums became a central component of the performance.

As described in Chapter 2, the physicality and phrasing present during the dance in "Mierda." was unique to my body and training and was the foundational material of the performance. Generating that material did not come easily. As I anticipated, being conscious of how the expression of contrasting sensations could evolve to continually spark interest was a large area of growth for me throughout the process. For example, my sensitivity to movement that expanded energy out into the space and then zoomed it into a single point was a device I used in a variety of contexts. In the first section ("The end") I dove to the ground and let my body fold into my hands before quickly popping up on the side of my body and zooming my gaze toward the movement of my toes. This contrast of throwing energy out into the space and then concentrating on a single point brought a refreshing dynamic that supported the sometimes seemingly random progression of tasks and actions. However, that was just one of many tools I discovered and utilized to engage the audience in the phrasing of the movement.

The appearance of spoken word in the "Cheers", "Agotamiento" and "It's personal" sections attempted to strike a balance between telling and showing the underlying themes they touched on. In previous works, I had chosen to use text written by others due to my extensive experience acting in scripted performances along with my knowledge that my own writing too

often became overly didactic. In “Mierda.” my method of choosing three specific themes focused the personal text on specific memories and generally allowed the relationships and meaning making to occur in the empty space around the text instead of in the content of the text itself. Perhaps the same could be said of the meaningful relationships being created during the moments of stillness without either dance or text. For me, the two modes of communication together gave the entire work a nice cadence as words and movement went in and out of drawing attention and creating relationships. The work’s primary intention was to express, but it also educated the audience in the moment as to how I wanted to create the importance of the moment. As Noë (2016) says, “We learn to be moved by art” (p. 1215). I would even argue that I avoided an oversaturation of either movement or text as switching between them became a sort of theatrical palate cleanser. This, in turn, allowed audience members to create connections and relationships using different forms of intelligence.

An important discovery of an effective use of text came with the first monologue in “Cheers”. Unlike text I have spoken in previous works, this was relatively trivial in its content as it described where to place accents in the mouth and a short story about saying “cheers” on a bus in England. What was effective was not what was said, but rather what wasn’t said. Profeta (2015) had a similar revelation while working with choreographer Ralph Lemon when she realized that text that can “move in its import” is less threatening to dance and movement (p. 45). Unlike text derived from large personal or cultural issues, the text focused on drawing relationships between small experiences in life, a theme that emerges throughout the work both in text and movement. Not only did the small personal details make the text more engaging, it allowed for an easy transition to dance movement by also deemphasizing the direct meaning and focusing on the sub-text.

Sound and Music

I slowly remove my shoes with my feet. In the distance I hear crickets and a blowing wind. It sounds cold and dark in the room even though my clothing removal would suggest that I am quite warm. The lights are dim. I seem at peace, as I remove the formal clothing from my

body and begin to walk around the space with a newfound urgency. I feel alone even though forty audience members surround me. I traverse up the far side of the space with an anxiety that comes either from inside me or from a fear of the space itself. It feels forced and nonconsensual that I am there, but I keep moving. I stop on one leg. It becomes cemented in its place. Voices emerge from the distance and creep closer as I struggle to move forward. My breath becomes short. I softly beg with my hands reaching forward. I feel fragile and insignificant.

The soundscape created for “Mierda.” was a diverse collection of materials including live singing, contemporary songs, classic songs, field recordings, natural sounds, live instrumentals, and silence. The sound and music component was added quite late in the process, as I created much of the movement in silence as to not greatly influence my experience of the sensations and fantasies that emerged for me in the process. Collaborator Gina Jurek contributed to the work by mixing the music, editing various tracks, singing, and playing an electronic keyboard. Gina controlled the music from a mixing board while seated in the same line as the chairs on one side of the audience. Her control of the space and presence in the performance space was intentionally not hidden and easily observed throughout.

While the soundscape rarely became the primary focal point, it emerged as essential in reinforcing many ideas present in the performance such as a repurposing of pedestrian movements and juxtaposing different temporal spaces. It also supported connection with the fantasy and sensations in the space by bringing specificity to each moment. Sound was the audience’s first interaction with the space, since when they entered it was filled with live music. Soon after, when I entered the space the sound shifted to that of wind and crickets with a dimly lit stage. It brought chills to me as it helped transport us together to an alternative fantasy. The interaction of audience, performer, space and sound continued throughout the performance to transition to various states of sensitivity, fantasy and consciousness.

Gina’s presence in the work as musician and dancer continues to this day to be a pleasant mystery to me due to her lack of a concrete relationship with me in the performance space. I discovered that I enjoyed having Gina as a foil to my often-tortured character. I entered

the space as a conflicted soul while Gina had been there all along. She brought a lightness and ease to the performance during her appearances throughout. Instead of struggling with difficult subject matter it felt to me that she had seen it all before. It was almost as if she was watching over me the whole time and letting me go through what I felt I needed to experience. And yet nothing felt concrete about our relationship. I enjoyed the ambiguity of our relationship.

Coming back to the themes of sound and music, I believe I stumbled upon something very important when I began to integrate natural sounds into my work. I remember being very moved by the sound of streets in Latin America that I found in sound databases online. During creation I continually wondered how I could transmit that sensation to an audience. When I was living in foreign places all of my senses became heightened, especially my hearing. The sounds added precision and depth with unexpected efficiency to the slices of life that I was exploring throughout the work. They also literally filled the room and made it feel full without pulling attention from the movement or text. As the date of the premier drew closer I continued to fill nearly all of the work with some form of sound, either in the background or foreground. Many of the sounds acted as a foundation upon which I created different rhythms and also spatially supported me as they opened up or closed in focus.

Recognizable songs with lyrics were included in the work, but I admit I continued to doubt their necessity. I enjoyed the fluidity of time period that was created by using songs from different eras. M. Ward's "Let's Dance" cover from 2003 felt young and innocent in a contemporary way next to the nostalgic guitar of Nancy Sinatra's "My Baby Shot Me Down (Bang Bang)" from 1966, also young and innocent in its own fashion. The songs gave an impression of timelessness to the work that again opened up a variety of personal associations depending on the age, culture and history of the audience member. However, this was only partially successful as I ultimately discovered that my lack of a strong personal connection with the songs I chose limited the connections and meaning I created while dancing to them. In the future, I will likely stick to songs (and sounds) I have a stronger personal association with if using personal memory and individualized movement as source materials.

Spanish and English

Giro y me enfoco en un punto específico de la sala. Empiezo a recoger la energía con mis manos hacia ese punto. Lentamente. No pasa nada. Pero adentro de mi toda la sangre está hirviendo. Me acerco al punto. Pateo el espacio y me salto por atrás. Miro hacia la izquierda. Miro hacia la derecha. Salto una vez mas hacia atrás. De repente, me convierto en un animal rígido y agresivo. Me reboto. Me caigo. Duermo.

When I began to speak in Spanish was arguably the most memorable moment in the performance for me. Already over thirty minutes into the performance, the introduction of a new language added a new color to the collage that had not previously been present. Potential new relationships between the previous materials were abundant and the surprise of the moment encouraged those associations. I felt the moment I introduced the language shift was correct specifically because of how satisfyingly it connected to previous moments, especially the text about accents and not wanting to be associated with the suburbs. The Spanish was also unapologetic in that it made no effort to justify its existence or simplify the content. It was also the most personally important moment of the show, as I believed many of the larger questions of the performance would never have emerged in my work without my experience of living in Mexico and learning Spanish.

The performance program, in addition to the credits and section titles, included a translation of the Spanish monologue on the back. The question I was faced with when doing work in multiple languages was how to create the sense of disorientation that comes with learning a new language or being an “other”. That desire contradicted my desire for the audience to also understand the content of the text. Not surprisingly, I have found that audiences in Latin American countries often speak better English than the other way around, even in a highly Hispanic setting such as Phoenix, Arizona. I decided to place an English translation of the text on the back of the program. It was a functional choice that hopefully allowed the audience to engage with both the content of the text and the experience of the Spanish in separate moments of time. As the text was present from the moment the audience members received the program it also allowed the

text to become part of the larger environment in which the performance took place, just like the chairs and the lights. This again reinforced my desire to be true to the integrity of each moment in performance while encouraging relational thinking on various levels throughout.

Not only did the language I was speaking switch during the show, it also affected my physicality as I embodied the different personas I have created in myself with those languages. The physical shyness in Section 2 (“Cheers”) was completely absent in the Spanish monologue. This was not something I developed in the process; it was an embodiment of my physicality in the world at different points in my own life. The concept of associating language with physicality is interesting on its own, and in the context of the overall collage of material it gained even more potential for meaning and association. For example, the text of the Section 2 monologue hinted that from a young age I was more confident using a voice different from my own and that same concept was again presented later on in a different form. Not only was it embodied in the Spanish text, that physicality continued into the movement phrasing as well, hinting at a connection between verbal language, embodiment of language, and dance language.

English is my first language and will always be the one I am most proficient in. However, learning another language taught me more about my own habits and values than any other task I have undertaken as an adult. One of the unintended themes that subtly emerged in the work due to my interest in the experience of learning a foreign language and living in a foreign land is the idea of whiteness versus otherness. While I do not wish to dedicate an entire section to the idea, I believe it is worth briefly noting as it was commented on after the performance. The theme of whiteness became unintentionally present partially due to my use of partial nudity in the work. In the process of developing the costumes, it became necessary due to my desire to change costumes without leaving the performance space. The clothing choice of Banana Republic pants and a designer t-shirt during the accent monologue only served as further indicators of my whiteness and suburban upbringing. In the end, I believe the nudity became an important reminder of my identity and my body. That moment especially appeared to have remained in the mind of audience members while I changed costumes, accents, and languages. My whiteness was always present. I admit that I never considered my whiteness would become a central

theme, but I believe it is something I will continue to reflect upon in future works as I investigate my whiteness and “otherness” living together as a foundation for my research.

As with many works of art, the question of whom the work is “for” became a major point of reflection for me as I looked audience members in the eye while performing the work and spoke in multiple languages. On the one hand, I wanted to insist that the work was not created for any specific group of people. I believe humans are fundamentally alike and therefore it is unnecessary to claim that a work will only be understood by people of a certain background, identity, heritage or taste. I hoped that since the work emerged out of my presence, fantasy and sensations, all fundamental human capacities, that it could be meaningful for all. Choreographer Ohad Naharin once stated in an interview that he believed the difference between a dancer and a gymnast is that one is listening to his/her body while the other is telling it what to do. Naharin goes on to say, “I really believe in universal ethics, and this is how I will educate my child. I feel that what I share with people, whether they’re from Israel, Finland or Australia, has very little to do with what colored us by our culture” (Perkovic, 2014). I often think of my work in a similar sense. However, as I stated in the introduction, the work is essentially a reflection of my values. Therefore, in an odd way, the work was likely most strongly received by audience members who would enjoy being around me and hearing me speak. It did not have much to do with the color of my skin or the birthplace of my great grandparents, but it had a lot to do with the questions I enjoyed and the physicality I valued.

Much of my artistic research in performance involved breaking down the definition of the “other” and even creating an experience of otherness for the audience. That idea is strongly tied to language due to my experience of discovering my identity and creating a new consciousness through language. As a straight white male I was in a unique position to encourage audiences to go with me to those uncomfortable places. As I once mentioned during a question and answer section, if you saw only my headshot you might think I would be as likely to play Benedict in the next production of “Much Ado About Nothing” as to put on a contemporary dance performance titled “Shit”. And yet it was important to break those stereotypes and put my image and talents towards performance research that I believed had the power to heal and positively educate.

Religion and Control

I'm a little bit ashamed of the power I feel when I put on my jacket and turn to address the audience with a relaxed confidence. Like the jacket, my new persona feels comfortable and cheap at the same time. I connect with my desire for people to like me and care about what I say and immediately a smile appears. I feel handsome. I feel inspired. I am prepared to provoke a change in habit. As I walk across the stage I feel very little energetic difference between the dance I have just finished and the sermon I am about to give. Except the ground on which I stand has shifted. It feels more solid and also thinner. I begin to speak as the contradiction between my authoritative voice and my uneasiness merge in my body.

The suburbs, in my experience, are communities that are highly focused on control of habits in pursuit of comfort and wealth. The primary forms of art I grew up consuming and practicing while attending high school in the suburbs were musicals and American plays written before 1980. I cherish many moments I experienced during that time. The groundwork for my current curiosities and confidence as a performer were established in an important fashion. However, when I left Minnesota and was exposed to other styles of performance I quickly became disappointed with the lack of physical and emotional risk involved that my theater roles there displayed. There was some risk involved with exposing myself in front of an audience, but it felt safe in a manner I was uncomfortable with. This was just one small example of the general distaste for the suburbs that I had developed since leaving them.

The themes of religion and control emerged in the work partly due to recent discussions with Israeli choreographer Danielle Agami about our upbringings in dramatically different places, namely Jerusalem, Israel and Eden Prairie, Minnesota. It became clear to me that religion was present in both places, but with dramatically different manifestations. While the reasons for this are too extensive and complex to get into, the intention of the final preaching scene with Gina dancing was to put the two ideas of religion and contemporary art next to each other in a similar fashion as I have experienced in my own life. The control and positive confidence of religion was placed next to the fluid, present lens of dance. The storytelling of dance was put next to the

storytelling of preaching. I made no direct effort to coordinate or syncopate the delivery of the two stories; I simply let it occur naturally and encouraged Gina to listen to the audience instead of to my voice. My intention was to let the best storyteller win.

As Gina moved through her solo between the audience members her movements always fell at different points in the sermon, highlighting different moments and allowing for the energy in the room to stay alive through the contrasting tasks of each performer. The result was a scene full of “happy accidents” or chance relationships that resulted from layering the work without needing to know exactly how things would align. This concept emerged as valuable for me as a choreographer only after years of experience. In attempting to sharpen every moment for the greatest level of engagement, I sometimes enjoyed not knowing how the story would unfold. It tapped into a different fantasy of mine as a creator. That fantasy allowed me to layer the movement, text, sound, costumes, lighting, and set into the performance without needing to know exactly how they would align at times. Therefore, the unintentionally coordinated moments were numerous and new ones were discovered each night. For example, I only realized during the final performance that there are church bells ringing as I take off my pants during the costume change at the end of Section 1 (“The end”). While unintentional, the ringing created a sense of holiness or inevitability in the moment that helped to justify the strong action of removing clothing. I enjoyed the moment my lack of control created.

Aside from her performance in the work, Gina also served as my primary collaborator, which necessitated a handing over of control in some instances. Perhaps influenced by my upbringing as an only child, I often choose to work alone when I am given the option. In this case, I had a history of working with Gina as a performer and I trusted in her musical and dancing talent. This led me to realize that I did not truly wish to work alone. Rather, I simply needed to find people who I artistically trusted. I realized it was quite easy for me to give up certain aspects of the work and allow Gina to create within them as she saw fit. Of course, communication and feedback were essential, but I also recognized that giving a collaborator freedom to add to what they believed were the strengths and central themes of the work allowed the complexity of the work to grow beyond what I could discover on my own. For example, Gina’s relationship with the

audience while she sang at the beginning of the work was a common point of discussion. Gina felt a desire to connect directly with the audience member's while I felt it better to embody the reflective nature of the work. After voicing my understanding of the scene I ultimately told her the choice was hers and she should do whatever she connected with in the moment. In the end, she found something in-between, reflecting during the singing and interacting between the songs. This was just one example of how Gina's contributions grew my understanding of collaboration.

While not directly part of the work, the question and answer session after each performance became a valuable moment of sharing and reflection with the audience members who chose to stay. It was also the part of the experience that was most out of my control. The value of those brief moments of discussion and reflection have greatly evolved over the past year for me, largely due to my time listening to choreographer Danielle Agami's use of those same opportunities. As opposed to using those encounters to explain the work or argue for the social or political value of the work, I now see them as an extension of the performance questions and research. They were an opportunity to continue posing questions and extrapolating on themes present in the work in dialogue with the audience I had made the work for in the first place. However, I also had to be conscious that they didn't become one sided, but instead continued to be revelatory opportunities that encouraged new relationships between myself, each of the, and the work to be considered.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION



Figure 4. Jordan Klitzke and Gina Jurek performing in “Mierda.”, section 10 “Don’t think too hard”.

While the final performance of “Mierda.” was a solo performance, it was interesting to see how my individual work with the seven original dancers laid the groundwork for the solo creation process that followed. While much of the research was unique to each phase of the project, the opportunity to observe so many dancers perform my movement was undeniably helpful and inspiring. I was especially impacted by the hunger of the dancers to explore what internally motivated their improvisational movements. I am grateful for the participants’ time and talents.

It is my hope that this document adds knowledge to the field of dance performance studies and serves as an example of a revelatory contemporary creative process that uses multiple mediums of communication. I believe it adds also to the ongoing discussion on the use and practice of sensation, fantasy and presence in creation and performance. I also believe it serves as a unique example of how meaning can be co-created between performers and audience when relational thinking is encouraged and fantasy is allowed to lead. It is my hope that all performers and audience members benefited from the research and performance experience. I have also clearly furthered my own understanding of this methodology for future use and development.

I do not want to dwell on the areas of the work that I believe needed further development before the premiere; however, it is undeniably part of my methodology to continue investigating

how the performance could have been even more effective, sensitive and precise. For example, I believe Section 8 (“After the after”) was an attempt to push my movement vocabulary to new extremes of flexibility and coordination, and it had mixed results. I would be curious to find a different, less recognizable musical choice to better support my personal associations with the section. I would like to edit the movement to be more sensitive to both my strengths as a mover and the limitations of my costume at that point. I would also enjoy one more short section before “After the after” instead of taking the obvious pattern of dance-text-dance-text at the end of the work. While I was satisfied with the final image of the work (see *Figure 4*), I also believe another section of movement could have been quite powerful after the sermon. Having more time to work with Gina may have allowed that to emerge sooner in the process. As previously mentioned, I would also like to bring in an outside eye to help edit sections of the work. I believe an outside director could help to improve the flow and transitions between movements and ideas, especially in the second half of the show. Perhaps because I was not able to see things from the outside I too often relied on concrete gestures and movements to communicate more complex ideas. I believe there is much to develop with the spacing, architecture, repetition, and rhythm of the work as a whole. While the urgency present in the process did lead to new discoveries, it also limited the maturity of the work in this way.

The lighting and costumes were relatively simple in the work partly due to my limited time and multiple responsibilities as creator, performer, director, set designer and costume designer. I have limited my comments on the success of those aspects of the performance as I honestly invested a relatively limited amount of thought and energy into their development. While I believe they supported the larger themes of the show, such as the collage of clothing choices and the collage of chairs types in the diagonal use of the square space, the decisions ultimately lacked the depth of artistic research I was able to accomplish in the other aspects of the performance.

For me, the effectiveness of the collage was grounded in the acknowledgment that my life is a mix of different surroundings and expectations in which I need to continually adapt. I believe I successfully convinced the audience to adapt with me throughout the journey of the performance. I acknowledge that it is a privilege to have time to create work about the moment-

to-moment experience of sensation, fantasy and presence. That being said, I chose to focus on those personal, subjective experiences in order to avoid difficult ethical situations of representing or speaking for groups of people with whom I differ both culturally and privilege-wise. In other words, I created from my experiences with Mexican people without speaking *for* Mexican people. As I previously stated, the work does not attempt to create meaning through representation, rather through a revelatory experience involving sensation, fantasy and relational thinking.

Since I received a degree in Biology many years ago I have often reflected upon the connection between the arts and sciences. Perhaps a future work could dig more into those questions. There is something primal and important about the research conducted in this project that other scientific research often shies away from. I believe Dewey (1934) touches on one aspect of it when he writes, “Even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience” (p. 11). Some of Dewey’s wording feels dated. Nevertheless, it is my hope that my performance brought some insight into the wisdom embedded not only in the objects on stage, but also in the crude experience. The qualitative nature of my research attempted to walk a line between absolute truths and personal anecdote. Its scope was limited at times, but I believe it was worthwhile research as it brought understanding to my human experience and potentially impacted the audience’s consciousness. I continue to be inspired by the freedom and ambiguity I am able to maintain in researching through the arts and hope others are able to learn from my experiences as well.

While this may seem trivial to some, the fact that this work was not about a romantic relationship was also a success in my choreographic journey. All my previous autobiographical works were inspired by a romantic relationship I was in at the time. Romantic relationships have been hugely important in my development as a person, and I don’t regret the work I have undertaken to better understand them. However, “Mierda.” successfully pushed me to bring forward other aspects of my life that have had a deep impact on my understanding of the world in a larger context beyond my relationship with important individuals. In addition to the new areas of myself this work allowed me to explore, it also artistically freed me from the linear narrative often

associated with romantic relationships that have a predictable beginning, middle, and end structure. Not to take away from the value of my previous work, but I believe “Mierda.” presented a new level of complexity unlike what I had previously accomplished.

In the end, the creation and performance of “Mierda.” was an important affirmation of my identity. I was able not only to create and perform a work of performance art that I was proud of, I also explored my insecurities, strengths and struggles through the work. At one point during section 3 (“Cheers”) I stated that I am quite a shy person. I was not lying. I also struggle with my insecurities as a choreographer and dancer. I struggle labeling my thoughts and creations as important or interesting enough to put on stage and have other people pay to come and see them (although this specific performance was free). However, as Dewey (1934) writes, a meaningful work of art “accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities- to imagination and art” (p. 35). The performance of “Mierda.” was not only a success because of the arguments laid out in this paper; it also was a personal success as it reaffirmed my understanding of the value I create when I engage other humans in a meaningful personal dialogue.

I was recently in a group of young artists when the question arose, “What makes good art and what makes great art?”. There is not one true answer to this question, but it is a question I have since come back to on nearly a weekly basis. In a personal correspondence with choreographer and author Liz Lerman, she articulated that great performances occurred when 1) people were 100 % committed to what they were doing 2) people understood why they were doing what they were doing and 3) something was revealed (L. Lerman, personal communication, November, 2018). At the moment, my response to the good versus great art question is, “Good art keeps my attention. Great art impacts my consciousness.” That was my ultimate goal for “Mierda.”. I hope it did not simply hold attention (difficult in its own right) but also created a small shift in consciousness in those who occupied the fantastic space we shared together. What did it look like to shift consciousness? It looked like someone hearing a foreign accent or experiencing the sensations associated with being alone in a foreign land and seeing the beauty and the opportunity behind that foreignness and anxiety. It looked like someone appreciating the

complexity and holistic nature of expression and language as they move on the dance floor. It looked like seeking out educational experiences where the relationships being formed in the present moment are the most important.

I believe sensation, fantasy and presence are the earth, water and sun that allow the plant of consciousness to continue growing. I believe my performance and research was a step forward toward that ideal.

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