

A Sense Of:  
An Embodied Exploration in Sensory Awareness

by

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## ABSTRACT

*A Sense Of* is a performance-based work that addresses the effects of the transformation of space, time, and energy through the various sensory modes. The work is an invitation to the artist's perspective of the world, which is combined with the performers' creative voices and interpretations of the artist's explorations into sensory awareness. The movement installation entitled *A Sense Of* was presented in November 2012. This document presents an overview of the project. It addresses relevant literature, examines the creative process used in the work, and provides an analysis of the project as a whole.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Relocating to the desert meant I was living for the first time away from water. Natural forms of water and the green landscape associated with it no longer surrounded me. The lack of water affected my senses; I missed the sound of it, the way it feels, how it smells after it rains. When I first started graduate school I often felt overwhelmed and found the best remedy was to float in a pool and stare up at the sky. The weightlessness my body felt in the water seeped into my mind and helped lighten the mental load of new beginnings. Recognizing the effects this element had on my mind and body spoke to me creatively. I became interested in exploring how the absence of water informed my creative voice.

Along with the lack of water, this new environment also included an expansive sky, season-less climate, and a completely different botanical life. All of these elements affected my senses and psyche in surprising ways. For example, although I have lived in the desert environment for almost three years, my body and mind still expect the shift of temperature associated with fall and winter. Despite the bright sunshine and summer-like temperatures, my body is drawn towards warm clothing and hot comfort food. There is still an odd contrast of realities: the external reality of a prolonged summer season and the internal reality of a seasonal clock fueled by past seasonal experiences. This conflict of reality can be compared to jetlag. Time becomes scrambled and the body struggles to adjust to the changes in environment. Reality is challenged and the body and mind

have to adjust in order to function in a productive way. It is these body/mind adjustments that I find fascinating and inspiring.

A mundane experience can quickly turn into an extraordinary one if awareness and mindfulness are added into the mix. Repetitiveness can dull the senses, especially when a part of a daily routine, but we are creatures of habit. The choices we make in crafting these routines reflect who we are as individuals and the histories that direct us through life. Our everyday experiences are the bits that make up the whole that is our existence. We have become so accustomed to the instant gratification and connection that technology supplies that we forget about the changes our own bodies and minds are capable of and produce effortlessly. In *A Sense Of*, I wanted to draw attention to these changes.

The presence of memory was another aspect of my investigation. Even though the body is made up of water, when it is submerged in water there is a physical boundary that keeps the two contents separate. It is the same content (liquid) but there is a different relationship (internal vs. external). This is similar to trying to relate a personal memory of an experience to someone else. One can verbally describe the memory in great detail, show pictures, supply scents or tastes associated with the memory, but because the other person did not have the original experience, there will always be a barrier that inhibits memories from being relayed between people.

In making *A Sense Of*, I wanted memories to surface and unfold for the audience throughout the piece in reaction to a visual image or touch, or while the performers were moving and improvising. Memories, as I have come to

understand them, are imprints of life experiences that are collected and stored by both the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. The relationship between sensory awareness and memory provided the primary inspiration and focus in both generating material for the project and drawing the audience into the performance. *A Sense Of* is my exploration into how I can facilitate an embodied connection between an audience and my work by speaking to the senses and, ultimately, what makes us human. This allows for heightening the audience's engagement with and participation in my work without requiring them to physically participate in the performance.

In creating this work, it was important that I find a way to dissolve the space between performers and audience without becoming intrusive or demanding about how audience members experience the piece. I believe that a sense of community is established by addressing the whole space, including the stage, proscenium, and audience seating. In *A Sense Of*, the formal boundaries associated with the proscenium stage were broken down and replaced, providing the opportunity for more relatable and obtainable exchanges of experiences between performers and audience members. Furthermore, I believe that dissolving the fourth wall between performers and audience creates a common ground between them and delivers an invitation for the audience to be a part of the event as it unfolds. Instead of simply sitting and passively observing the changes in the work, I wanted to create an atmosphere that gives the audience multiple opportunities to connect both physically and emotionally to the sensory content of

*A Sense Of.* It was not important that the audience's visceral reactions be positive or negative, but rather that they experience an empathetic reaction on any level.

With extensive practice as both a performer and audience member, I empathize with both sides regarding the discomfort that can arise with “audience participation” during a dance performance. My intention was to facilitate the idea of “whole body” engagement within the dancers during the rehearsal process. By this, I mean creating opportunities for the dancers to embody their kinesthetic awareness of space as perceived through the senses. I wanted the performers to bring these explorations into the performance as a source of mediation for audience participation.



## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early on in my graduate studies I became intrigued with the human body's capacity to experience itself as both external object and internal subject. When I carried this mindfulness into my creative practice, I was pleasantly surprised by a flood of awareness in the senses (taste, touch, smell, sound, sight) that resulted in a heightened consciousness of self. Lost for words and eager to find the vocabulary with which to communicate these experiences, I turned to the philosophical study of the conscious mind and its relationship to the first-person point of view, also known as phenomenology. Phenomenology studies how humans cultivate their self-awareness as a means of structuring their realities. In this genre of philosophy, human knowledge is explained as being constructed through the dualistic relationship between object and subject and the effect they have on the conscious mind. Within this context, subject is defined as the individual within the mind, and object is outside the mind.

Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are two philosophers associated with this school of thought, although they have differing opinions on the subject. In addressing the differing opinions between the two, Taylor Carman (1999) points out that Husserl describes the conscious body as “a thing inserted between the rest of the material world and the subjective sphere” (p. 206). Husserl overlooks the important role cognitive attitudes implement as a means of bridging the gap between self and world (Carman 1999, p.206). In other words, Husserl recognizes the divide between object and subject but does not look beyond it.

Merleau-Ponty took this inquiry a step further by exploring how we engage with the object and subject. Merleau-Ponty believes that we understand the world by creating meaning through the physical sensations delivered to us via the senses (Carman, 1999, p. 206). Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty sees the divide between object and subject as blurred and hazy, and questions the contrasting realities found between the opacity of action and the transparency of thought (Carman, 1999, p.206). He proposes that we build our realities based upon the way we react and respond to these differing perspectives. Merleau-Ponty uses the context of perception to frame his idea of what he calls the “lived-body” experience. By using the information supplied by the senses, Merleau-Ponty re-assesses the dualistic relationship between subject and object--or self and world--and gives it new meaning by showing the influential impact the body has on the conscious mind.

The dichotomy of object and subject is what propels us forward through life; it helps us navigate through the fact and fiction of a situation or experience. Carman (1999) puts it best when he writes “in perception, that is, we understand ourselves not as *having* but as *being* bodies” (p. 208). This shift of *having* to *being* a body cannot happen unless the defining line between object and subject is blurred. The moment we embody an object, whether it is tangible or not, it becomes a part of us. Thus the embodied object becomes subject.

Embodiment is what connects the gap between subject and object, self and other. That gap sheds light on the boundaries and limitations that emerge when the analytical mind overshadows the experiential process of living. MacLachlan

(2004) echoes this sentiment by writing "...our body is our infrastructure with the world. Our experience of the world we inhabit, our subjectivity, is necessarily created from the perspective of the physical form we take" (p. 4). On a superficial level it is our physical form that inhabits the world, not the mind. It is the body that feels the literal effects of the world's environment as they are channeled through the senses. This information is then sifted through the conscious mind and reproduced via the inter-subjective lens that every individual has. It is impossible for two people to have identical experiences due to the fact that we each hold our own physical and emotional histories--histories whose origins trace back to conception.

It is not the body alone that shapes the inter-subjective lens. It is the blending of body and mind that takes a person out of simply existing to existing with meaning--a person who perceives the world not as a series of objects but as a world "pregnant with meanings" (MacLachlan, 2004, p. 5). Attuning my internal focus to the external environment was the first step of my inquiry into sensory awareness. Referring to the body's relationship to the world, Kaylo (2003) writes:

"key to this investigation, and the underlying premise of Phenomenology, is the theory that all of our perceptual orientations arise out of an inseparable relationship between our bodies and our world...The body, therefore, is the ground of both our intentionality -- what we bring to our experience--and our inter-subjectivity--the interwoven nature of our experience of self." (p. 2-3)

How we experience our selves is how we experience our individual worlds because how we perceive our surroundings and environment is completely subjective to us as individuals. MacLachlan (2004) describes how “our body is our infrastructure with the world. Our experience of the world we inhabit, our subjectivity, is necessarily created from the perspective of the physical form we take” (p. 4). Selective memories are triggered by certain sensory information, or “sensory dynamics”, with which an individual constructs a completely different and unique way of engaging with an object or situation than someone else. These sensory dynamics, which I define as anything that relates to the five senses, are what definitively turn space into place. For example, a space may hold a familiar smell that triggers a memory of a place of comfort within someone. That memory elicits an emotional response that affects the individual both mentally and physically. Due to this memory, an association has been introduced that contextualizes this unfamiliar space into a recognizable place. Space is free of expectation and emotional connotation, whereas place has affiliation and purpose.

These intimate moments are reminders of the dichotomy between subject and object and the contrasting roles they play in the architecture of the surrounding environment. They are also what distinguish subject from object and inform how we orient ourselves in the world (Carman, 1999, p. 206). Embodying these contrasting roles is how we cope with the placement and navigation of ourselves (subject) in an environment (object) that is constantly changing. The physical and emotional adaptations embedded in the process of embodiment are the basis of my artistic research and creative practice.

Dance artist Lisa Nelson's work with improvisation and the senses highlights the direct influence our surrounding environment has on us (<http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=2122>). She refers to this influence as "tuning the senses" or an adjustment between the internal and external environments of the physical and mental bodies (<http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=2122>). According to Nelson, using the reaction and response of bodies to their environments in combination with improvised movement creates an instant composition that illustrates the experience as it is being experienced. If the physical body is what connects the self to environment, then the senses are the intellectual modes that give this relationship a context. These ideas from Nelson's work became highly influential in the creative process of *A Sense Of*.

## Chapter 3

### CREATIVE PROCESS

#### *Framing the Score*

After examining the concept of phenomenology in relation to my own sensory experiences, I began investigating how to communicate these highly subjective experiences in a way that an outside observer could understand and relate to. In order for this to happen, I needed to find a way of translating subject into object and then present it in a way that allowed for the object to be re-translated into subject. In other words, I needed to highlight the sensory dynamics that appeared during the original experiences of the dancers in order for the audience to be invited into the artistic framework of *A Sense Of*.

To do this, I initiated my work with the dancers. Through the trial and error of movement studies, I found the most success in establishing this chain reaction when I stayed true to my own body knowledge and its emotional responses.

Prior to the creation of *A Sense Of*, I had been the sole participant in these sensory explorations in kinesthesia and memory. When I began working with other people, my creative voice was immediately challenged. I was no longer speaking directly to, about and for myself; I was now placed on the other side of the subjective lens, observing from the outside in.

Instead of dealing with one perspective, there were now six (five dancers and one director), clouding the clarity I had when performing my own work based on my sensory perspective. I had to re-organize my creative process to make room for the multiple opinions and perceptions of my inquiries for this particular project. Referring to Nelson's idea of the body being both "proscenium and performer, as container and generator of imagery, as thought and feeling" (<http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=2122>) helped bring structure to these newfound perspectives and experiences. Additionally, the idea of categorizing helped differentiate and organize the material being produced during the creative development of the piece.

The rehearsal process with the dancers focused on experimenting with various improvisational scores that revolved around investigating a space or physical body through the senses. I took on the role of facilitator, supplying improvisational scores and tasks taken from my solo studies for the dancers to explore. These scores (or organization of events in time) supplied frameworks in which the dancers placed their experiences. The result was a series of movement vignettes created out of layers--layers that provided the performers with flexibility regarding what they focused on during the performance. My collaboration with the dancers continually breathed life into the work and kept it afloat during each rehearsal. Eventually, adding the presence of an audience brought a different energy and awareness to the dancers' performances. A giving and receiving emerged between the dancers, audience members, and myself. For me, this

amplified our unique capacity to experience while experiencing, to simultaneously have an objective and subjective existence.

Early in the rehearsal process I worked with having the dancers explore the studio space through their senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste). The intention of this activity was to “warm-up” their sensorial perception of the space by placing special attention on the details of the nooks and crannies of the studio’s architecture and atmosphere. After about ten minutes of exploring, I then asked the dancers to put their discoveries into movement as another way of embodying their sensorial explorations. Another activity I facilitated with the group was taking the concept of a conversation and replacing the verbal dialogue with improvised movement. The score was pretty open with the only set parameters given being the choice of when to enter and exit the conversation and the option to “dialogue” either as a group, one-on-one, or alone. While observing this score, it dawned on me that this is essentially what improvisation is: listening and responding. These are the same components that take place in a verbal conversation with someone. It is also the means by which we navigate our bodies through space and adapt our minds to foreign concepts.

### *A Translation of the Four Parts of Seeing*

When approaching the five senses and how they are translated into the creative process, sight consistently surfaced as the dominating element. Dance is an art traditionally experienced by an audience through sight. Sound, touch, smell,



and sometimes taste, play a supporting role at varying degrees of importance given the context. In her work, Lisa Nelson takes the action of sight and breaks it down into four moving parts: *focusing*, *panning*, *tracking*, and *zooming* (Nelson, 2003, p.6). I experimented with using these parts as inspiration in creating movement vignettes for the project. Some parts, such as *focusing* and *tracking*, were easier to apply to the movement scores than others. Others, like *panning* and *zooming* were more challenging to uncover in a way that was related in content. After trying to find numerous ways to physically embody *panning* and *zooming*, it eventually became apparent that these were strongest as conceptual ideas and that they were in fact present throughout the whole piece. By originally approaching the four parts of seeing as separate entities, I had stunted the through line needed in order to successfully thread the vignettes together. In the same way the senses shape a complete system, so too do these four ways of seeing contribute to sight as a whole part. *Zooming* cannot happen successfully without *focusing*; *focusing* cannot happen without first *panning* to find the desired point; the act of *panning* unconsciously leads to *tracking* the progression from one point to the next; and *tracking* presents options for which to *zoom* towards. The interdependence of the four parts of seeing creates the total experience of sight.

Seeing is not a singular act. It inevitably triggers a need for context. A hand extends to touch what is seen, a nose inhales to smell it, a mouth opens to taste it, and an ear lowers to hear it. Without these triggers there is no deepening of experience and no way of connecting the self to the other. Instead of putting all the emphasis on ensuring that the audience would become acquainted with these

triggers, I refocused on my own responses to what was being created. These first steps involved laying down the framework for the dancers' somatic experiences within movement explorations, which I scored.

Of the four parts of seeing, *focusing* had a dominating presence throughout the piece. Any time one of the senses is stimulated, it immediately brings into focus its instigator. As a whole, *A Sense Of* attempted to focus the audience's minds and bodies in the present moment as a means of fully and honestly engaging with the sights, sounds, smells, and feel of the movement vignettes unfolding before and around them. There were times when the dancers were focused specifically in one location in the space, creating a distance between audience and performer. Other times the dancers were scattered throughout the audience, joining the audience as observers of space and allowing the focus to shift from the bodies of the performers to the sound flooding the space. The underlying emphasis in all the vignettes was the focusing and re-focusing of the experiential lens of performers and audience members.

*Panning* was the most abstract element of all the parts of seeing, and therefore the most challenging to translate into a movement experience. Traditionally, panning is defined as the horizontal movement or rotation of a video or still camera. We began exploring the word literally by examining its definitions. The dancers abstracted these definitions into movement, which were crafted into a choreographed sequence. Out of all the vignettes, this one was more presentational and choreographed in content. In the early stages of the creative process, the panning vignette felt limiting and superficial and it was a struggle to

find common ground between it and the rest of the work. It was not until I pulled back and softened the presence of panning in the work that I was able to move forward. Approaching panning as a supporting element warranted more success than when the lens was focused solely on it alone. I discovered that panning has a discreet presence – it engages intently from the sidelines but only as an observer, never a player. It is a transporter of information, a mediator of the details being seen. Its edges are soft and transitory, forever humble in its supporting role. It was this soft clarity as well as the circulation of bodies through space and the establishment of place through the senses that I attempted to transfer into the movement vignette.

Similar to *panning*, *tracking* had a subtle presence throughout the piece. Conceptually, the tracking took place through the construction of vignettes instead of one continuous movement piece. In practical terms, tracking was facilitated through constructing a clothesline within the piece. Pictures taken during the rehearsal process were collected and displayed on the lines as a way of visually tracking the piece's progression as well as memorabilia the audience could interact with during the piece's conclusion.

Tracking was also used to reflect the progression of time through the senses: visual tracking of time in the photographs from the rehearsal process, tracking of memory through the smell of rose oil, tracking of focal points through lighting, and tracking of space by drawing and re-drawing the placement of objects and people during the performance. Essentially I was attempting to document time and space as translated through the reverberation of sensory

awareness. The result was a combination of conscious and unconscious layers that served as motivating forces behind the placement and framework of each movement vignette. Without tracking the details from all the other parts of seeing would be lost.

*Zooming* was applied throughout the piece in the video work, as well as in the sound scores. Extreme video close-ups and tight framing were used for the content, which consisted of moving hands, hands and feet dipping into a bowl of water, and legs floating and swimming through water. These strong visual images played both supporting and focal roles in the performance. Overall, zooming was used as a way of shifting the energy in the space, reawakening the sensory modes, and attracting the attention of audience members.

### *Sensory Appeal*

The senses organize and inform the body about its environment, which can evoke physical and/or emotional responses. This sensory organizational system was used as inspiration for the overarching structure of *A Sense Of*. Deleting the traditional notion of a dance piece's "beginning" and "ending" was one example of how I attempted to simulate a kinesthetic reaction in audience members and ultimately shift their physical and emotional presence in the space. The proscenium space was eliminated, thus taking down the "fourth wall" between performers and audience and broadening the depth of perception for viewing the

work. Playing with the boundary between stage and audience also helped cultivate a sense of inclusion for audience members during the performance.

When thinking about costumes and ways to stimulate the senses, bright colors immediately came to mind. Also, given the informality of the performance, pedestrian clothing was chosen over more traditional dance costuming. Each performer had his/her own individual outfit that was different from the other, along with one piece of clothing that was removed and pinned to the clothesline at various points during the performance. These pieces of clothing were handwritten or stitched with selected texts from an article by dance artist Lisa Nelson, the performers, or myself. The idea was to make a literal imprint of a reflection on an experience and leave it behind in the collection of memories that were being collected and put on display on the clotheslines.

The clotheslines, which were constructed as the piece was being performed, served as a way of abstractly tracking both past and present time. Just like the piece itself, these timelines are absent of definitive beginnings and ends. To include these markers would limit the experience of *A Sense Of* to only happening within the container of the stage on one particular day and within a specified amount of time. The clotheslines were filled with clippings of rehearsal photographs, costume pieces, and other small props that the performers came into contact with at any given time during the duration of the work. *A Sense Of* concluded with the performers inviting audience members into the stage space to interact with the hanging articles and add their own additions to the clotheslines.

Three video projections were incorporated into the piece, all happening at different times and in different movement vignettes. Their physical presence echoed the conceptual framing I used in my creative process while designing *A Sense Of*. The videos were exaggerated embellishments that played a supporting role to the other actions taking place in the same space and time. These videos were projected onto 5x7 ft. portable screens that were moved about by the performers. The scales of these screens were important in that they kept the projections from consuming the space and overshadowing everything and everyone else. Another important factor to the piece was that the performers were in control of the video projections and manually pressed “play” and “stop.” This went with the piece’s transparent arrangement and absence of theatrical illusions.

Lighting played a very important role in establishing a sense of connection between the audience and performers. Theatrical lighting was used on the stage to highlight the different vignettes and the moods they evoked. The “house” lighting was never fully turned off, rather brought up to varying levels of brightness throughout the performance. One reason for using this method was to facilitate a feeling of inclusion between audience and performers by literally lighting the gap between them. Another was to create a deeper sense of engagement with the work by changing the point of focus. Sometimes the whole stage was lit with a soft glow that would eventually transfer into the audience’s space; other times the lights were dimmed down low except for a small circle of blue light that encased the performers on a small patch of the stage. These changes in lighting design assisted in creating changes in focus and depth perception within the *whole* space.

The purpose of the sound scores was for a person (performer or observer) to embody sound and “see” the work with the whole body. Sometimes shifts in sound were gradual and dissolved from one into the other. At other times they were abrupt, generating contrast and texture within the piece as a whole. The combination of sound with the other sensory elements in the piece created a multi-dimensional approach to the dance performance.

### *Setting the Stage*

In order to break the fourth wall of the performance space and accomplish the goals of the piece, it was critical to establish from the beginning the relationship between the performers, the audience, and the objects used in the piece. To do this, very deliberate choices were made about how the piece would unfold. Transparently setting up the space as the performers loosely interacted with the audience cleansed the space’s palette of what it previously held. Also, transforming the space altered the audience’s expectations and assumptions of what would take place in it. Introducing changes that trigger the senses is highly influential in generating these shifts of perception, especially when done through sight.

After the props from the previous piece were removed, the curtains opened to reveal a giant piece of canvas being rolled out and secured to the stage floor. The canvas centerpiece extends beyond the stage line and over the proscenium space, ending at the first row of audience chairs. The visual contrast of the light-

colored canvas against the black floor of the stage immediately brought a different coloring to the space, as well as new spatial orientation between performance space and spectator seating.

The senses are stimulated by the numerous tasks being played out through the set-up of the canvas and props. The space is filled with sounds of tech crew and dancers giving direction on what needs to be done along with the ripping of gaff tape for securing the canvas edges. Photographs taken from previous rehearsals are scattered along the edges of the canvas, a tub of water is placed on the far downstage right corner edge of the canvas, and an empty water pitcher and cups are placed randomly underneath audience chairs. The legs of the stage wings are tied back to reveal lighting instruments and the soft glow of their illuminations. Two projector screens are wheeled out and placed on opposite sides of the canvas stage as projectors are set-up and videos are adjusted and tested. A few of the performers begin to mill about the audience space, murmuring their hellos and making offerings of rose petals. Some audience members absentmindedly explore the petals through smell and touch as they observe the construction on stage; others simply hold the petal expectantly, as if they are awaiting further instructions.

Thus, the beginning “edges” of the piece are soft and undefined. Using these strategies, the audience is drawn into the work slowly and mindfully. A mixture of emotions and intensity is presented through a series of contrasting elements: silence and noise, gestural movement and full-bodied dancing,



introspective focus and comedic projections. This mixture reiterates the kinesthetic effect of the senses and the memories they bring to life.

## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS

Overall, I feel that I was successful in creating a piece that was a true reflection of my research into sensory awareness and perception as well as finding an embodied approach to audience engagement. I believe the canvas and clotheslines transformed the space by breaking down the formal boundaries of the proscenium stage. Another sensory aspect I received positive feedback on from my dancers and various audience members were the rose petals handed out in the beginning of the piece. The dancers felt they were able to connect physically with individual audience members in a casual way. Audience members received one-on-one interactions with the performers and had a prop of their own to explore. The simple act of accepting a rose petal instantly exposed the audience to a similar experience the dancers explored during the rehearsal process. This is one example of how the rehearsal process informed the performance process.

Another example of a successful strategy was when the dancers drank water during one of the movement vignettes. They began by sitting in a small circle, watching one of the dancers perform a movement phrase in front of a video projection of her legs floating in water. The only sound was water being poured from the pitcher into the cups. The vignette progressed into the dancers improvising as they announced aloud the initiation point of their movement. The dancer originally dancing in front of the video projection transitioned into refilling the glasses and calling to the dancers to run back and quickly gulp down the water before they went back to their improvising. This score was repeated

over and over, with each cycle becoming more frenzied and uncensored for the dancers. An atmosphere of over-stimulation began to take over as the dancers struggled to gulp cup after cup of water as they danced and yelled physical initiation points. Audience members reported being swept up in this change of energy. Some felt a shortness of breath in reaction to the dancers' own labored breathing.

Rotating the performers and audience members through the roles of mediator, interpreter, and observer was a key factor in the successful progression of *A Sense Of*. For example, there were times in the piece when the audience observed the performers, such as when all the dancers were onstage dancing to music with lighting that highlighted their space and not the audience's. At other times the performers joined the audience through a previewed interpretation of the sound that faded in and filled the space as the performers experienced the sound side by side with other audience members. At the conclusion of the piece, the performers invited audience members onto the stage. They had the opportunity to stand back and observe how the audience interacted with the installation and what "artifacts" they added to the clotheslines. These shifting roles brought new energy and perspectives for both audience members and performers.

Along with my success, I did encounter challenges during the process. I did not want to be a choreographer who only generated technical movement for dancers to learn and perform. Instead, I was interested in introducing movement explorations that I had experienced in my solo work and letting the dancers find their own understandings of the practice. As a result, I was hesitant to give

feedback on movement material created by the dancers. I found this a necessary approach when handling other people's sensory driven material, though I recognize that this was a source of frustration for the dancers.

Another challenge I faced was the transient nature of the content. The dancers reflected and took note as to how a small movement such as opening the eyes could make a drastic impact in the way they experienced the movement phrases. It was shifts like these that I wanted to explore further and find multiple variations of for both performers and audience members. However, the challenge the dancers and I were soon faced with was the delicate and transient nature of these incidences and, most significantly, the irreplaceability of a first experience.

A third challenge was a pull between the investment of the performers and my vision as a director. A dichotomy emerged where the dancers started to become less emotionally invested in their movement experiences while I, the director, gained clarity and confidence in my overall vision for the piece. The dancers had difficulty maintaining the essence of the inspirations behind their movement vocabulary and choices. I was split between my subjective opinions of how the piece as a whole should be crafted and presented, as well as my disconnection with not truly understanding the intimate movement vocabulary and material being generated by the dancers. A divide was created between my facilitations as an outside eye and the dancers dealing with the dullness of performing the same experience again and again. I gained clarity in how to craft the piece as a whole but the dancers became disconnected from their movement.

Finally, I was documenting the piece by taking pictures and journaling about the process but these efforts were only from my perspective. By not including the dancers in the documentation practice I was actually isolating myself from them. It would have been beneficial to the work to have documentation of all the creative voices involved in the rehearsal process. Not only would it have helped me gain a deeper understanding of how to facilitate the experiences of others, but it also would have helped the dancers understand and connect more with the how and why of the choices I made while constructing the piece.

There are some aspects of the work that I am still investigating. I consider these undefined inquiries as a successful part of my research. One of these questions is how the primary senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing, sight) inform the secondary senses (kinesthetic sense, temperature, equilibrium, acceleration, pain) and the relationship they have to memory. The presence of questions such as this one means that my interest and curiosity have been heightened and expanded through new thoughts and responses that were not present earlier in my research.

The process of this piece allowed me to make many discoveries as an artist. Having the opportunity to create a piece that developed and unfolded without a time constraint was enlightening to me as an art-maker. I was unconcerned with time and the worry of being able to hold an audience's attention. I enjoyed presenting work that gave the audience the freedom to drift in and out—an action reflected in the waves of sensory dynamics and energy that factor into the establishment of space turning into place.

Additionally, the process of creating *A Sense Of* has given me clarity and confidence in my intention as an artist. I have a better understanding of my creative practice with sensory awareness and how it influences the choices I make as a director. I have also learned how to be respectful of time, discovering how to stay patient and engaged with the slow moments. These slow moments have been the source of some of the richest material I have created and performed.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

My research was continually guiding me away from the proscenium stage and towards site-specific inspired environments. Referring to this work as “movement installations” instead of choreographed dances is both intellectually and kinesthetically appealing. Intellectually, this term creates space for interpretation, allowing the work to exist in the realm of art and sensory experience instead of being pigeonholed as dance, a term which often implies the viewing of a specific event. Kinesthetically, the term speaks to my original question of what makes a space a place. The movement is the lens from which the mover perceives and experiences his or her world in space and the installation provides a place for the framing of that sensory experience. Also, the context of an installation invites varying degrees of participation from the observer.

By reflecting on the challenges of the process and the discoveries made, several thoughts arise regarding how to integrate this experience into future artistic endeavors. In regards to the role of facilitator, I need to investigate clearer ways to communicate my research. The documentation of the creative practice is an important aspect of the work, however for it to be relevant to people other than myself there needs to be multiple ways for my collaborators to actively participate. This could include them taking their own pictures as a way of literally explaining how they visually frame an experience, or journaling the details of memories and emotions that were triggered in the practice of sensory awareness.

Designing production elements such as sound, video, props, and costumes in collaboration with dance is a very satisfying combination. For example, incorporating video projections enables me to show another perspective of my concept through the literal lens and framing of a camera. A simple image can be distorted by tampering with its speed (sped-up or slowed down), color (black and white or color saturated), or focus (blurry or sharp) as a way of re-naming what it represents. In the same way that memories are distorted references of past events, video is a tangible element that can be utilized to explore and express my perspective of memories.

Simultaneously using video projections and live performers echoes the juxtaposition of past and present realities. Even though video can portray a hyper-reality through the addition of special effects and manipulation of time, its two-dimensional form keeps us at a distance. On the other hand, live performance is three-dimensional. A kinesthetic empathy arises when watching a live body move. Not only can we see it, but also touch it, smell it, and hear it. We are able to look at a sweaty body and taste the salt because we have experienced it ourselves. With video there is an image to see and sound to hear, but nothing to touch and connect with through the other senses. It is the same process as hearing about or seeing pictures of another person's memory. Only you can connect with your past; it is the present that is relatable.

My research into sensory awareness has left me feeling more grounded, both in my body and mind and the space I inhabit. The most meaningful experience that surfaced for me during this process was the ability to be truly



moved—physically and emotionally—by my body’s natural capacities. Having found such a rich source of inspiration and intrigue gives me an immense sense of excitement for what my future findings will uncover.

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