

...As You Will: SENSING PERCEPTION

THROUGH CONCERT DANCE

by

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ARTIST STATEMENT

“...As You Will” is the work I developed to convey both the process and product of my Senior Honors research. The concept of the work was derived through studio inquiry from topics including the senses as systems of perception, mirror neuron research, and kinesthetic empathy.

I approached creating choreographic material for this dance in a variety of ways. A large portion of the movement was crafted from improvisational work by the dancers, based on memories of past experiences. The creation of four different movement phrases based on memories in each season of the year, served as the foundation. To these phrases, we layered gestural movement to be a thematic element throughout the work. I also incorporated chairs as props, crafting phrase work in and out them, and used elements such as speed, repetition, eye focus, and partnering to alter the seasonal phrases. These techniques were used as a way of making the movement attainable, through familiarity, to the movement histories of audience members so that they would experience kinesthetic empathy through individualized perception and mirror neuron responses.

The choices I made regarding movement development, environment, and structure were also correlated to the response I aimed to elicit from the performance experience. In the course of making the dance, I was able to shift the dancers’ experience from solely using proprioception, or sensing their movement from within their own bodies, to using their perception of the movement, which created a more dynamic connection between dancer and audience member. Capitalizing on this connection, I developed an atypical dance performance environment. I created an unconventional dance sound score and incorporated the sense of smell, use of lighting, and theater space environment to alter typical perceptual techniques in watching dance.

PERFORMANCE ACCESS

Performance Date: April 17th, 2015, 3:30PM

Location: Erma Lowe Hall Studio Theater

Performance Viewing Access: Please visit the TCU Honors College Office of Records to obtain viewing privileges to "...As you Will" or follow this link for YouTube access

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkzH_mdbAmU&feature=youtu.be

ARTIST BIO

Caroline Lloyd (Cartersville, GA) is completing a BFA in Modern Dance with a minor in Arts Administration. She began her training with Steps of Faith Dance Studio in Atlanta, GA and gained supplemental training from the Georgia Ballet and Interlochen Arts Camp. While at TCU, Caroline has performed in works by Charlotte Boye-Christensen, Carrie Hanson, Heidi Latsky, Susan Douglas Roberts, Andee Scott, and Leslie Scates. For the past two summers, Caroline has worked for the Joffrey Ballet School in New York City as a Summer Intensive Resident Advisor. Caroline is a recipient of the Nordan Fine Arts Scholarship, President of Chi Tau Epsilon Honor Society, a John V. Roach Honors College Student, and was named the 2015 Senior Scholar for the School for Classical & Contemporary Dance. Upon graduation, Caroline will be moving to New York City to work as an arts administrator for the Joffrey Ballet School. While in New York, Caroline looks forward to continuing her career in dance performance, choreography, and research.

APPENDIX A: SENSING PERCEPTION THROUGH CONCERT DANCE

When you attend a dance performance, you generally remember the experience by how it makes you feel and how it resonates in your being. There are moments of suspense, euphoria, confusion, resolve; you feel tense and then relief, you grip the arm chair of the seat, or maybe even find yourself swaying with the dancer. Watching movement and attending a dance performance is an experiential event that affects every type of perceptual system you possess, maybe more than you would imagine. As an audience member, you are watching a dancer onstage perform choreography that somehow connects you to them. This connection is created by a specific type of empathy that involves both kinesthesia and perception. Susan Leigh Foster states in her book *Choreographing Empathy*, “To choreograph empathy entails the construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinesthetic experience guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling,” (14). Through my research I have worked to create and deepen this dynamic relationship between dancers and audience members. I aim to make audience members immediately aware of the purposeful stimulation of the senses and the role that this plays in their experience of the performance.

Definitions

In order to fully explain the dimensions and purpose of my research, I will first give working definitions for the key terms I use. The first of these is perception. Simply put, perception is the ability to obtain information from our surroundings through the senses. However, particular to the findings of the research I did for this project, my interpretation and usage of the term perception relies on John Berger’s theory that past experiences, both long and short term, alter how we perceive in the moment.

In regards to long-term memory, John Berger states, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe,” (29). In this way, what we have been exposed to through experience, we reflect upon, and store in our memories; then we are constantly using this information as a filter to shape our perception of current experiences. This individualized process is a driving force behind how we view art, which means each audience member’s perception of the work is different.

We call on short-term memory to make sense of passing moments based on the sequence and duration of the experiences. Berger states, “The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it,” (29). In the field of dance, studies conducted by Ivar Hagendoorn have shown that the brain naturally predicts the upcoming movements when watching a dancer perform. Hagendoorn states, “In forming a prediction of a moving object’s motion trajectory the brain engages in a form of motor imagery which, through a different route, may contribute to a state of arousal,” (80). Thus, because of the way the brain engages, a viewer may experience one of two outcomes: euphoria of successfully predicting the outcome, or frustration.

Proprioception is defined as “awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body by means of sensory organs,” also known as proprioceptors. In dance performances, proprioception is usually regarded as the primary mode of awareness exercised by the performers, while audience members typically engage through perception. My research lies in the theory that it is possible to connect proprioception and perception within the dance itself and through environmental elements. Through crafting this live dance performance, I aim to bring forward the perception of proprioception for audience members while utilizing perception as a tool for the dancers in experiencing

movement as it is being performed. More specifically, by creating a dynamic relationship between the dancers' proprioception and the audience's perception of the work, I will endeavor to involve audience members in a conscious experiential viewing process of the performance through the creation of choreographic work that stimulates an awareness of the senses.

My initial research led me to explore the viewers' ability to connect proprioception and perception by means of Kinesthetic Empathy. Kinesthetic empathy is a combination of kinesthesia, or sensory awareness of movement, and empathy, emotional and cognitive connections to another person.

Kinesthesia is the sensation of movement. Although the terms "kinesthesia" and "proprioception" are sometimes used interchangeably, proprioception is sensing movement from inside, or interoception, and kinesthesia relies on exteroception, sensing movement from an external source. Empathy is an act of feeling an emotion that is similar to another's emotion. An emotional stimulus is necessary as well as background conditions that can be triggered by the initial feeling. Empathy comes in two forms: Cognitive, which includes thoughts, and NonCognitive, such as sound, touch, and other sensory impulses.

Through this definition of kinesthetic empathy, I have found that the experience of audience members observing dance is much more than just witnessing what occurs in the stage space. Kinesthetic empathy is best described in John Martin's theory regarding what happens when we see dance. He states, "The viewer, watching the dance, is literally dancing along," (124). Although the acts of perceiving and moving may be infused with emotion, what mirror neurons indicate is the mutuality of sensing and physical action.

My research has used information on sensory response, perception, and mirror neurons to create a dance performance that captures the depth of experiential viewing.

Mirror Neurons and Kinesthetic Response

Mirror neuron research has proven that those who observe an action and those who engage in that same action experience the same reactions in the brain; the same neurons fire, so the brain reacts in the same way whether doing or watching. Although the purpose for these neurons in the development of humans remains under speculation, the benefit of being able to see and imitate is a fundamental process of humans' learning styles. Particularly in regards to movement, mirror neurons benefit dancers as they learn new movement and details. Research being conducted in the Watching Dance Project at the University of Manchester in the UK assesses the kinesthetic response in dance spectatorship. According to the project's neurophysiological research, kinesthetic response is either more, or less, likely to be activated based on the viewers' movement history. If the viewer is not experienced in the skills required for the movement, the kinesthetic response is lessened. However, if viewers obtain the necessary skills to execute the observed action, their kinesthetic response is more deeply understood. For example, a dancer trained in the technique of ballet is more likely to experience a strong kinesthetic response while watching a ballet performance than an audience member who has never seen or done ballet. In this case, the audience member trained in ballet will be able to read the proprioception of the movements more thoroughly and imagine the actual sensory response.

Environment

Using these previous studies of mirror neurons and spectators' perception of dance, I have guided my research to explore other possible sensory experiences that play a role in the overall perception of observing a performance. Through the particular choreographic choices of choreography, structure of the performance, and overall environment of the presentation I have aimed to create an empathetic relationship between the performers and audience members that is relatable and empathetic through choreographic and environmental choices.

According to visual and landscape theorist Robin Veder, "An environment changes the experience of people's movement and reaction to where they are," (8). Using this information and, given my aim to create a more dynamic relationship between the dancers and audience members, I have chosen to present my choreographic research in a non-traditional performance setting. Audience members will be viewing the work in the round, while standing. I have chosen this set up to place the dancers and audience members on the same level, in the same space, and in the same stage lighting. Therefore, the environment serves as a constant between the dancer and audience member rather than a variable. By placing the audience members in the round, viewers will have a unique vantage point of the action of the dance, offering multiple, individualized ways to perceive the choreography. Also, by having the audience standing, there are more possibilities for their own motion, awareness of their bodies, and increased kinesthetic response to the dancers movement.

Another element I have chosen to include in my attempts to alter the traditional concert dance environment is the sense of smell. Scent is a sensory factor that has the potential to have a significant influence on the perceptual system. Certain smells hold connotations from the past, which can evoke particular emotions based on memories. In

American culture, cinnamon holds a close relationship to the holidays, fresh oranges may remind you of the summer, and often times certain perfumes may bring back memories of people in your life. Charles W. Rusch states in his article “On Understanding Awareness,” what one experiences in the present can be altered by what has already been similarly experienced in the past. Engaging the sense of smell will offer differing perceptions of the movement for audience members.

I have also chosen to use chairs in this choreographic presentation. The chairs serve several different purposes: They give tactile feedback to the dancers that can be more easily read in the kinesthetic responses of audience members, they add to the element of environment by acting as a set, and they are objects that audience members see and use daily. By having a strong familiarity with the objects, there is a greater likelihood that aspects of the movement are in the movement history of the audience members and will increase kinesthetic response.

Choreographic Process

I began to develop the movement from my initial research of the literature. In each session of studio research with the dancers in my work, I developed several improvisational scores to explore based on research of the senses as systems of perception, proprioceptive systems, and task-oriented movement. For example, one workshop included exploring the idea of visual feedback. Based on Gibson’s research outlining vision as a way to observe both the self and the environment, the dancers and I experimented with using eyesight as a way to fully experience proprioception – that is, orientation - as opposed to the normal vestibular system. What we found was that when eyesight is used for the purposes of proprioception, tension in the neck and upper body is

released, vision becomes less focused, and there is a dizzying effect. Viewers can see all of these elements externally as well.

Much of the choreography is based on gestural movement that almost anyone, not just dancers, are capable of doing. These types of movements that usually do not require excessive thought to execute are also referred to as psychomotor capabilities. By weaving these types of movements throughout more technical dancing, I can offer glimpses of movement that is more attainable to the wide range of the viewers of dance. The dancers and I developed these movements from observing TCU students on campus. One rehearsal was solely dedicated to observing the motions that were frequently and easily executed by students walking around outside. After gathering these movements, we began experimenting with making them larger, faster, slower, etc., in order to thread the thematic elements of the movement throughout the choreography.

One of the interesting aspects of this piece of choreography is that the concept of the work emerged from the research process. I wanted to focus on the individual ways that the movement and environment would impact the audience members rather than aiming to convey any specific concept. Developing choreography in this manner resulted in a less traditional choreographic structure, which has encouraged me to broaden my views of how a dance can be created.

Qualitative Feedback

The full creative presentation of my honors thesis project was performed on April 17th at 3:30pm in the Erma Lowe Hall Studio Theater. As a way of gaining insight into the overall experience of audience members, an informal post-performance feedback session was held with everyone present: dancers and audience members. Because my

research is tied to the experience of both the dancers and audience members, the qualitative information gathered in this section of the process was insight into how the research of this topic was conveyed and experienced.

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ABSTRACT

Dancers typically experience movement in their own body through proprioception while audience members typically experience dance performances through personal perception of the work. Through these means of experiencing dance, there is a dynamic relationship between dancers' sensory responses to their proprioceptive experiences while performing on stage and audience members' perception of those responses as they view the work and experience in the moment. Through research to complete this Senior Honors Thesis, I have worked to craft an experiential viewing for audience members through stimulation and awareness of the senses, via the dancers' actions and responses as well as some key environmental factors.

Charles W. Rusch states in his article "On Understanding Awareness," what one experiences in the present can be altered by what has already been similarly experienced in the past. Rusch also states that past experiences are constantly being reconfigured in our memories by present experiences. Applying this theory to dance performances, breaking the norm for concert dance experiences can change the overall perception of the work, creating a dynamic response in audience members. In this research, breaking these norms involved specifically crafting choreography such that dancers' engage in a heightened awareness of proprioception in order to better create the link between their own proprioceptive responses and the audience members' perception. Through academic and studio research, I explored specific ways of enlivening the senses of audience members during performance and building an environment that takes viewing the work outside of traditional performance parameters.

I crafted a dance based on my research of published literature in topics including the senses as systems of perception, kinesthetic empathy, mirror neuron research, and proprioception. The result was a creative honors project characterized by breaking dance performance norms, a deepened performer/audience relationship, and a specific aesthetic stemming from movement derived from studio and academic research.