Process Paper for

“Layered Reactions: Response 1, Response 2, etc.“

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Project Conception

My project began as a challenge for myself. Having spent a great deal of time admiring dance and others’ projects and talking and thinking about how I want dance to be part of my life after college, I looked myself in the mirror and dared myself to get serious about it. For a long time the statement “I will do an independent senior dance project that includes both a performance and research aspect” was just that, a statement floating around both in the air and in my mind.

I wanted to challenge my own performance abilities and to create a project that would act as an accumulation of my progression as a dancer and performer. This, in combination with my love/hate relationship with choreography, pushed me to think about ways to work that would keep me motivated and challenged and that were different than some ways of working I have already experienced. I decided I wanted to work with an outside choreographer and have him/her set a solo on me. I knew this would be a great challenge because it would take me out of the comfort zone of F&M dance, and challenge me as a solo performer—something which I have never been.

Although choreography frustrates me, I understand and appreciate why the creative process is important. To engage myself in the craft is rewarding and all the complications and frustrations that come along with it help me grow as a dancer and a dance appreciator. Therefore, I decided I would choreograph a group piece as well. This decision was also influenced by my desire to provide opportunities for more dancers at
F&M. A goal for the rest of my life is to encourage and help people become engaged with the dance and the type of performance I love and appreciate. I wanted to pass along my passion and love of the work to others, and there is no better way to do so than to provide opportunities for younger dancers to experience the creative process as well as unique performance experiences.

With this concert symbolizing my final time at F&M it seemed only fitting that I ask Pam Vail, one of my mentors, to set a piece for the concert. It also seemed fitting that I ask Tori Lawrence, who has been a creative and dance partner and friend during much of my time at F&M, to perform with me. This duet was the third and final piece set to be in the concert.

Although this paper will break down my experience into individual parts, living it involved a much different experience. I like to think that the title of my concert actually explains it very well. All my attention seemed not to be separated but layered—each layer constantly shifting to the surface or the bottom of the pile during different moments. It is very difficult to articulate in words everything that was going on and how they all connected or were all on my mind at the same time. However, this task to record my experience is important to do, and reflect upon. This process helps me enhance and deepen my understanding of my experiences. I feel incredibly grateful for this opportunity to challenge myself.

**Creative Process**

**Medium, in 3 parts**

Performance experience has always been important for me in college. Technique classes were devoted to challenging the different styles one can perform, and I wanted to
challenge myself to use my performance skills and command an audience alone. I knew that asking a choreographer to set a piece on me would force me to go beyond what I’d learned and that I would have to actively perform differently than I had thus far. I also had a strong desire to look outside of Franklin & Marshall for that choreographer. Bringing someone in with whom I was unfamiliar added another level of risk for my performance and me. I compiled a list of potential choreographers: people who have come to F&M to teach master classes, people I have danced with in dance festivals and workshops, and people I have just seen perform. [The concern about how I would actually pay them was not yet important.]

Rachel Boggia was at the top of my list. She was the first one I asked for a couple of reasons. I knew this whole concert was part of my senior independent project for my dance major, and she herself works in the academic setting. In this way there was a comfort in knowing that she has worked with students and knew the importance of a project like this and also that she understood the time constraints. Rachel also taught a creativity workshop at F&M my junior year. I appreciated how open it and how it facilitated each individual choreographer’s creative process. She really encouraged us to push extremes and approached the class as a steady exploration. Pam, being an acquaintance of Rachel for some time, recommended her as well.

I contacted Rachel with my proposal, and I was thankful that she was happy to work with me. The details were worked out and we scheduled a weeklong intensive of rehearsal together before the first week of school, Monday – Saturday (January 11-16). We spoke on the phone a couple of times before we met in person to speak about what my project was and what I desired to get out of it. The fact that it was site-specific in the
Progressive Galleries, and that it was my goal to work on performance techniques, helped inform what the solo would become.

From the first day the week consisted of me taking one risk after another. It was a week of significant growth for me as a dancer, improviser, performer, creative artist and person. Being one on one in the studio with someone unfamiliar was especially nerve-racking. The first day I was taught a set solo that Rachel herself performed. Immediately, while watching the video version of the solo I realized that her way of moving was much different than mine, and that it would really push me as a performer. Learning the set solo with her during that day was the first step toward independence as a performer. After learning it, I had to “perform” it alone right away. This process was much different than that of a dance class where a group learns and performs together. There seems to be a risk and isolation as an individual dancer. With Rachel’s unfamiliar eyes on me I had to quickly get over being watched and remember that this was a learning process. This was more of a mental challenge than anything else.

The solo itself involved the theme of a “medium” and almost being overtaken by some other force or by a trance to initiate movement. This required the swift control to transition between heavy composure and wild moments of movement, chaînés turns, abrupt and strong shoulder shrugs and dizzying turns on my knee. The solo required a mastering of my weight initiating in my core and pelvis. Learning how to find the breath and to release it within the intensity was challenging. The fact that I was already on edge in rehearsal made using my breath that much more of a conscious, mental activity rather than a subconscious automatic response. The idea of breathing through control continued during the whole week and is still a conscious goal of mine to continue to work on as a performer and dancer.
Although Rachel’s set solo that I learned was the foundation for the final solo, Rachel wanted to collaborate, and since I told her about my interest in improvisation, we decided to go about generating material together. I have a passion for improvisation—both as individual exploration and as composition. Rachel and I took turns witnessing each other improvise. We continued this process of each person improvising for about three minutes at a time for a total of about twenty minutes or so. The experience had a clear progression for me. My improvisation practice and experience challenges me and enables me to find myself in myself, by directing my focus and energy and awareness. I have a unified mind and body moving. The length of time was important in allowing the whole transformation to occur. The fact that Rachel was witnessing me was no longer of importance, because I was able to redirect my attention from nervous to focused.

After improvising Rachel recognized that my movement quality while improvising is different than that with set material. Improvisation then became an important part of our process. She began to just watch me improvise and compose. She saw detail and genuineness in how my mind and body seemed to work together. Soon it was clear to Rachel that she wanted improvisation to be part of the solo in some way. Although I have faith in improvisation and have performed before with a group, I had great reservations for improvising by myself—and especially in performance. Ideally I know that I should practice and perform improvisation with the same focus—that process and product are one in the same—but in reality performing improvisation, with an audience even of just one, seems to hold more weight than practicing. Improvising over and over again in front of Rachel was exhausting mentally and physically—and the fact that it was a solo performance each time added to the mental effort. However the repetition of this practice helped to relieve some of the pressure I experienced.
To add to the challenge, each time I finished Rachel would inform me of what she saw and drop in some extra details for me to think about or try or push harder. Some of these little reminders were perfect to push me out of my comfort zone, and into that movement that I veered away from—using my face, eyes, focus, relying on my breath, pushing the extremes of range in speed and size, and vocalizing. This intensive week with Rachel forced me to confront each and every one of these discomforts. Because it was only me performing again and again, I had to tackle her suggestions; not doing it, waiting until next class, or falling into the back of the crowd was not an option.

I remember one exercise was especially terrifying. Rachel told me during one of the improvised practices to talk about what I was doing/thinking as I was doing it, but the talking had to be directed to myself, to her, and to someone far away at various points in time. The idea was to play with connecting my voice with quality and volume along with movement. Not having worked with vocalizing much and timid about speaking or directing speech or even knowing what to say made the experience frightening. I remember beginning the piece while she sat across the room saying in my head “here goes nothing,” “just do it.” And I did. Rachel did not have the intention to scare me, but the exercise did. But I did it anyway. It was a big moment for me. If I focus and just literally do it, I’ll do it. Now, of course, “just doing it” is not the end of the practice but it was a big step. My fears and reservations are powerful. I don’t think I’ll ever not get a little nervous or fearful before performing, especially improvisation, but the goal (I have learned through experience) is not to get rid of such feelings but to control and use the feelings in order to grow and push yourself. It is definitely a skill that is priceless to have in dance, and also in life.
The concept and idea of the environment was emphasized during our process of creating. We discussed different types of environments. This concept resonated with the fact that the piece was going to be site specific in the gallery, but it also resonated with the idea of improvisation and being aware of the environment. Many of the improvisations began to involve the engagement of the environment, and exploring how I was related to it. The idea could expand to the whole world or condense to the environment of my own body. This exploration seemed to click organically into what the solo should do, along with the improvisation element: to move in the space, the specific space, and pay attention to how I relate to it at that moment.

This exploration led Rachel and me to collaborate and set a couple of different movement phrases. Each one engaged the space differently and utilized a specific movement flavor. One involved the surface of the wall and the floor. Another was jubilant and traveled through the space; the movement almost ate up the space through its various pathways. To expand the idea of the environment and me, Rachel had the idea to make a phrase based on our own homes: mapping out the landscape of our home with our hands—as though holding our home between our palms. These were “little phrases” but they were specific and meaningful. Then we translated these little phrases to a full-bodied specific phrase that occupied a body-sized square of performance area.

All of these phrases began to be incorporated into the improvisational practices. They would be “available” to me as I worked on my own material. In this way the practice of set material began to mesh with that of improvisation, so that the different “look” between set material and improvisation was beginning to be nonexistent—at least, that was the goal. We tried a ton of combinations of the material, some very structured and
some very free, and many in between. Never before had I worked with both set material and improvisation within a single solo improvisational exercise.

As this exploration continued, the idea of how people relate to what is around them became a question. We did some free writing to explore. Some of the first things we did were just write and rewrite and finish the phrase: “the feeling of….” We also did this with “the idea of….” These free writes became much of the inspiration for the vocal work in the improvisation. The repetition was satisfying and whether or not I would finish the sentence was very interesting. Answering it would bring the words into a specific connection with what I was doing at that very moment. At the same time, if I did not finish phrase, an impression was left in the space instead.

We began to think of the solo as an introduction to the space, in the moment, but also an introduction of the audience to the idea of site-specific work and how it is meaningful and how a site inevitably affects the work.

As the week went along Rachel and I spoke about the question of why I want to perform, choreograph and present work as well as what I find valuable in performing improvisation. I spoke about how I value the body and the expression of the body as well as the universality of the body—since everyone has a body. The process of creation and imagination is important to engage in but to see it is remarkable and can resonate with people during their daily lives. Our discussion actually reminded me of a paper I wrote earlier in my college career about the value of performing group improvisation. I went back to that paper and extracted some phrases from it to use as possible text. We played with the length of the phrases as well as the organization and who it could be directed to or who it could be about. There was a lot of potential with these words. We ultimately narrowed it down: “uncertain and unfamiliar, she deals. She accepts the situation and
gains control. She has layered reactions, response 1, response 2, etc. She holds the moment. Widens the gap. It takes consciousness and patience. Try it. Surprise yourself.” One idea we had was to use this text and the solo as a way to educate the audience—something that I find important for dance as an art and something that I am passionate about doing. I felt these words and phrases might provide “clues” for the viewer about what they were seeing.

For a long time we played with using the text as the opening of the piece, right away acknowledging the audience and its presence and introducing them to the idea of what I was about to do. As we continued working, our interest veered in a different direction, and eventually this idea faded.

At this point the improvisations as practice involved much: the set material, the environment, vocal work—what I am thinking, the feeling of, the idea of, the informative phrases about improvisation—the other set phrases of movement, as well as all the other possibilities in improvisation, which are infinite. Rachel instructed me to do three different improvisational pieces in a row, and focus on differentiating them. This forced me to improvise for a longer time, and pushed me to separate worlds in my work, but also to make clear shifts of tone or mood between the various improvisations. This was interesting. The idea of doing three different pieces takes away extra stress to continue for ten minutes with a world with which I was perhaps frustrated. It also makes me shift my energy or at least gives me a moment to shake off what previously happened and begin again. Beginning again was always hard—but mentally reviving at the same time. Unsure if the audience knew they were witnessing process and product at the same time, I found performing the improvisation a little daunting but also exciting.
Once we were able to enter the gallery and rehearse, the experience of improvisation and environment changed. The gallery had an overwhelming amount of sensory information to process—and not even because of the art work, but because of the space itself: the uneven rustic wooden floor, the symmetrical pillars interrupting and defining the space, the high windows, the length of the gallery, its echoing ceiling, its unfinished industrial lighting, and much more. When I began to improvise in the space, the concept of the solo began to solidify.

In life and dance there are countless ways in which we relate to environment, and the solo became a sample of three ways to engage with the environment of the gallery. The first way involved the set material that shaped the movement because of the space. The second phase of the solo was the actual experience of the space, and the set material as I felt/remembered it in the moment and the past moment. The goal was to shift the mood from the performance of the set material to the actuality of it. I looked for the “gaps” (moments in the movement the presented the opportunity for extending time and space) in the set material and explored them, dived into them head first, and experienced the movement differently. These gaps could come from any moment, but they were moments where as a performer I felt the power to shift the movement to become something other than what it was going to be. One specific example of a gap I continued to explore in the solo was the moment when I stood in relevé with my right arm up in the air slowly descending in a big arch to my side. The energy here could be manipulated, faster or slower, or I could use the arm to completely change direction rather than going to the floor. The possibilities are truly infinite but it was rewarding to try to explore them in the movement.
This phase encouraged immediate honesty in order to connect myself to the space. The final phase of the solo was the departure from the set material, moving toward the connection between me and the space/environment. I explored the space in a sensory way, fully aware of all its characteristics but allowing the information to process through myself and my relation to it—the feeling of, or the idea of.... This level of focus can also expand and condense to other environments, outside or inside of me.

As I performed again and again in the gallery with Rachel as my only witness, I began to gain a command of the material and my connection to the space. After each run through Rachel would explain what she “saw,” what was striking and what she desired to see. This was very valuable because then I was able to become more aware of how my choices were perceived by outside eyes. She mentioned many things as possibilities and things that could be workshopped more. Many of these involved extremes. She reminded me to explore long pathways, abrupt changes of energy, heightened specificity, etc. All of her comments were meant to help keep me interested and to continue to challenge my performance as I improvised.

Some overall challenges I paid a lot of attention to during my rehearsals included the use of my voice, breath, and focus. All of these involve a great potential for vulnerability, which, I have come to realize, is hard for me, especially as a solo performer. However, staying vigilant in my awareness of these elements has helped me gain a command/control over them. All three of these elements of performance are very powerful and it became an interest of mine to continue to practice and use them in all of my work, not only improvisation.

Although I had an intense period of time to practice the solo, I experienced a long pause of rehearsal between Rachel’s departure and when I was able to perform the solo
again. After the intensive week of practice, stepping away from the solo was actually revitalizing. I let it rest and marinate. During the time away from the solo I wrote in a journal (devoted specifically to my creative process for this project) once in a while about the goal and intentions of the solo. I would also try to remember past experiences in the gallery during previous performances of my solo. This practice was actually very helpful. When I knew I was going to get to be in the gallery again to practice for Pam with Tori, I wrote a lot and tried to bring myself back into the “world” of the solo.

When I performed the piece again I was very nervous, not having done it for so long, but I trusted in myself to make the performance unique and include the feelings I was experiencing in the moment into the performance. My whole self and my relationship with the space that day were important and necessary for the solo—because each moment was different and added different factors into the performance. I thought the solo went well that first time back in the space. I pushed myself to avoid the comfort of stillness especially after the first section. With each subsequent run through of the solo I explored new territory in my own performance, involving range, focus and voice.

**A meeting in an art gallery, some time from now**

I wanted the chance to work with Pam one final time before I graduate. She was happy to choreograph a duet for Tori Lawrence and me. The process of creating and rehearsing this piece did not begin until the second semester. The piece began with set material from Pam. The process also included some free writing, and improvisational practices.

The short time frame for rehearsal put pressure on my ability to learn the movement and *performance* of the movement from the beginning of the rehearsal process. This
process, similar to the intense process with Rachel, contrasted longer rehearsal processes I have experienced in which the raw movement is the initial focus and the performance qualities and details are layered on later in the process. Working with the idea of performance being right around the corner kept my attention on staying aware of focus and of Tori so that the performance could be practiced just as much as the movement.

The choice of the dance/sneaker shoes was Pam’s. Not only did it help with the uneven and unfinished floor, but also it contributed to the informal, pedestrian idea of an encounter. The shoes are much different to dance in than moving barefoot and they give the movement a different quality at times. Also in the space they added to the noise, complementing our own movements directly.

The idea of “meeting” or “encountering” someone became an immediate interest, and Pam requested to see Tori and myself “meet” each other improvisationally to explore some weight sharing. We were to begin across from each other, then come together in a brief weight sharing and then part again. In one of the initial improvisations, feeling adventurous and trusting one another, we met and I rolled on Tori’s back aligning my center on her scapula, but unaware that she was bearing all of my weight, she stood up quickly and I fell forward, top heavy and luckily caught myself on my head and hands in front of her with a thump. This caught both my and Tori’s attention and our level of caution increased as weight sharing continued. The other improvisations were filmed and later rehearsed to use in the piece.

Weight sharing was a big part of the piece that we really focused on and practiced to make it fluid and realistic. One of the problems sometimes was that one of us would not give the other enough weight. We both found it hard to release our weight into the other but when we did—we realized—weight sharing became much easier. There was a
weight-sharing jump that works because the “flyer” has the momentum to rest on the other person’s hip as they create a semi circle in the air, “around a corner.” As the “lifter” I needed Tori to stay as close to me as possible so that I could move her center with my own. If she was close to me and her hip was pressed against mine, I could really whip her around with great suspension, but if she was not connected, our centers were not aligned and we could not achieve the desired suspension. Many times I think Tori was afraid to give me her weight; conceptually that seems “nice” but as the lifter I needed her body to press against me in order to get any lift or momentum. This concept was true for other weight sharing encounters too.

The use of vocals was also a practice that we paid close attention to. To vocalize and move at the same time, especially with a varied dynamic, requires splitting attention. The words came from our three different free writes (mine, Pam’s and Tori’s). Some of the free writes included prompts like, write a list of greetings, fill in this sentence over and over again, “when you do that I….” Speaking with the movement was satisfying especially once it became part of the phrase with its own specificity of performance. Volume and intent of my vocal work was the focus of my practice and improvement—playing with qualities in tension, like how to be loud but intimate, or varying the rhythmic dynamic of a phrase from the way it may be used in common speech.

Almost the whole piece was created in the studio and then translated into the gallery. In total we had three rehearsals in the gallery itself. The pathways and facing of the movement in the space was so much more specific in the gallery because we had a narrower space and obstructing pillars to weave around. Practicing in the gallery was helpful but we needed to remember it would be filled with people during the performance. I mentally prepared myself for the idea that we would have to adjust greatly
for all the other bodies in the space. The possibility of physically running into someone was real. Having so many other bodies in the space would definitely draw some of my attention, but I needed to strike a balance between acknowledging them and also deepening my awareness of and focus on my own performance.

After learning the piece in small segments and practicing parts separately, when we completed the piece as a whole and performed it from beginning to end without any stops, the feeling of the piece from within was very poignant and felt extremely satisfying. Pam talked to us about the concept of the piece deriving from the idea of two people, old friends, meeting again in a gallery after a long time apart—and Tori and I being friends makes this interaction have a real flavor. Our attention toward one another and “seeing” one another was very important. During rehearsal our goofiness made it hard to “drop in” (enter the world of the piece with heightened attention to each other, movement and space) and not giggle but once we began performing the piece as a whole, we immersed ourselves in the movement and what we were doing. Our care and attention toward one another, I hope, was very clear for the audience, especially in the close proximity of the space.

*We the People Forge a Decision*

My process began with the writing of a formal proposal for this piece because although I planned to create it for my concert, I also planned to adapt it for another unique space on campus for the Spring Arts Festival (for which a proposal was required). Writing the proposal was incredibly helpful and important to my conception of the piece as well as to the actual creation. I departed significantly from my proposal in many ways
but it served as a foundation that I came back to. (I have attached my proposal, but I will speak to it in more detail here as well).

Before anything else, at the end of fall semester 2009, I secured my dancers. I wanted a firm commitment from my dancers before spring semester. I wanted five dancers; I prefer to work with odd numbers because of the asymmetrical possibilities. Also, to have five or less increases the chances that the group as a whole can be flexible via schedules. The audition in the fall went well and it was very helpful to have them already cast right at the beginning of the spring. I was able to start rehearsals during the first week of school.

For this piece, the characteristics of the space helped define where the group would perform. I wanted to utilize the length of the gallery, and having the pillars in the middle of the space created two long hallway-like spaces. I liked the idea of making the audience stand behind one side of the pillars, and having the dancers perform in the space on the opposite side. This perspective was not only interesting because it highlighted the length of the space, but also because the pillars inevitably obstructed the view of the audience at one point or another—which I thought would encourage people to adjust their position and move about the space as the performance occurred.

My concept for this piece formed while I conducted research for this project. I am interested in my creative roots and decided to focus on the dance culture that was developed at the Judson Church. The Judsonites worked collaboratively, did not enforce a hierarchy of artist or movement, and rejected assumptions about dance and dancers that had prevailed up to that point in time. The concept of democracy kept surfacing and its influence was further investigated in my later research. Having been exposed to the concept before in a variety of contexts, the word democracy holds many connotations and
it implies a variety of dynamic systems. Although the initial word I drew inspiration from was democracy, the idea of the piece spiraled out from it. I became fascinated with the idea of group organization, deliberation, phases of an argument, and how people conduct themselves when a decision must be made.

Writing the proposal helped me develop my creative ideas, and helped me to secure a hold on what I wanted to project with this piece. I had a strong desire to make my piece come from a human place, rather than an unemotional investigation of movement. I also wanted to work within a limited vocabulary playing with repetition, reorganization, and spacing.

The concept and the space lent themselves to the idea of progression and regression—moving up and down the narrow space. This helped inform my initial movement phrases. I first created a movement phrase, which traveled the whole length of the space. This phrase came from a choreographic exercise using the word “democracy,” which was inspired by various improvisational exercises I have experienced. In essence, I attempted to make the pathway of the body spell “democracy” as it traveled down the space. This was solely a choreographic exercise and not meant to be identified by outside viewers. I found, however, with such a goal in mind while creating a movement phrase, I had a high attention to the specifics of the pathways of the body through space, the feet and legs, the facing, and torso and arms. It was interesting also that when I taught the dancers the phrase the specificity of the body angles and the feet/leg pathways were very hard to translate—that was until I mentioned what the phrase spelled. Once that was made known, the clarity of placement within the space and pathway greatly increased. It must have something to do with visualization. Again the fact that the phrase spells
democracy is not supposed to be noticed, but both the specificity and the pathway it facilitates are important.

The idea of moving up and down this one pathway was intriguing. I thought maybe along this single phrase brief interactions could occur together and branch away, and then come back. The interactions would each be different, just as they would be different in real life depending on the type of person or the circumstance. To help facilitate the idea of different people and reactions to situations, I wanted to get some input from the dancers. I had them free write in response to some specific questions including: What does democracy mean to you? How do you argue? Have you ever had to follow a majority decision in which you actually disagreed? What does it mean to compromise? These questions were used to get them thinking about their own tendencies and the concepts in general. I collected the writings with the intention of using them as inspiration.

I ended up not using the writings as much as I thought I might but they were initially helpful during the conception of movement phrases. I had the original idea of using vocal work during the interactions or movement arguments, using words like “but, listen, I don’t, maybe, fine, no.” However, the use of the words never felt necessary and to use them would have been very arbitrary, superfluous and perhaps forced. I thought that it would be a far more interesting challenge to try to reflect those similar ideas without the voice. My interest in the movement made it more satisfying to work with and explore.

In place of these words I created gestural and fast phrases which primarily utilized the arms and upper body. During the creation of these phrases I wanted to insert familiar human gestures or at least movement that would possibly strike a human note in the audience’s mind. This technique was also used in the traveling phrase. Placing hands near the eyes, on the ears, crossing the arms, rubbing the hands, etc. all were intended to
remind people of the unique human facility of our senses and relation to the world. There is great specificity of initiation, focus, speed, and quality. The ways the phrases are performed also change. At different moments in the piece, similar phrases are performed slowly with purpose, wildly fast, urgently and with frustration, with different focus, in unison and in contrast with others.

I worked with the dancers constantly on gaining a command of the movement, its flow, its specificity and its focus. Clarity was very important to me especially when moving in and out of unison. Knowing the intimacy of the space, I knew I needed to really emphasize the concept of real performance—intentional focus, seeing each other and the audience, active faces and minds. Working with these was a continued effort during the creation of the piece. In order to develop these characteristics effectively I had the dancers perform the movement phrases constantly and with different facings. Sometimes they would face each other, doing different phrases, or the same, sometimes facing different directions, close to each other or far, and sometimes with different qualities. These exercises fostered independence and confidence in performance, but also developed a sense of the “group” and how the individuals fit together or how they conflicted with one another—depending on the spacing, qualities or phrasing.

Realizing the performance was very early in the semester, I wanted to have my own informal showings to force myself to work fast, and get feedback from others. Having the showings scheduled for February 4th was very helpful and forced me to work fast and efficiently.

The informal showings gave me great feedback and allowed me to see the piece with new eyes. I presented the piece in silence and was interested in the viewers’ opinions about what they desired or how they imagined sound might work with the piece. I also
just wanted to hear people’s overall impressions of the piece—what they took away, or how it made them feel.

The feedback was varied. To some, the movement was interesting because of its angularity and how geometric it was. For these people the moments of touch between dancers were moments when they became human and not just figures making angles in the space. There was much for the eye to see; people found themselves unable to take in everything that was occurring. Others wanted to see more variation of group division as well as extreme use of space between dancers. Some thought the sounds the dancers made were striking, especially breath. Because I only showed about two thirds of the piece, people had questions about where it was going to go from there, as well as what the dancers’ motivations were within the piece.

This feedback was very helpful. It was frustrating to hear that my movement came across as geometric and angular because I have choreographed like that before, and for this project I wanted to come from a human place and reflect human intention and motivation. However, knowing how people saw the movement was very informative and helped me make the appropriate revisions. It was helpful to know that the moments of touch were noticeable and resonated for some audience members as a shift towards a human relationship. I agreed with those viewers who would have liked a layer of music to help the momentum and build of the dance. We discussed ideas of a pulsing constant sound or a growing powerful sound to complement and push the build of the piece. The ideas about organizing the group in different numbers and extreme spaces was intriguing and I was excited to play with that idea as well.

While watching my own piece I had many notes for myself and my dancers. I knew that I wanted to set the scene for the piece, and ease the audience into the idea of human
relationships. I also knew that I needed to work with the dancers on clarity of movement, quality and focus. It was necessary that the dancers really see each other if I wanted the piece to come across as more than an investigation of pure movement. The sounds the dancers made during some of the phrases were really interesting and I was intrigued with the idea of playing with the sound of the dancers’ weight into the floor and their individual breath.

With all of this feedback and my own notes about the piece I was prepared to go back to the piece and work on its completion. In rehearsal after showings I focused on establishing the group as a “group,” and on the idea of negotiation. I had the dancers try a structured improvisation. While traveling down the space, I gave them a couple of different movement options (walking around, stepping side to side, changing their focus and holding hands) that they could utilize at any moment to travel to the other end. In this way they became individuals making choices by themselves but in relation to the group. I found this idea really interesting because it reflected exactly what my piece was exploring, but in real time and on a simpler scale. I appreciated the time and deliberation it took for them to travel the space; the focus of their eyes and their holding hands really introduced me to the concept of people relating to each other—which is what I wanted to display. This section would set the scene before the movement phrase began. I loved the idea of having a real example of group organization, structurally improvised and negotiated before the piece began.

This improvisation activated the dancers’ minds and focus, which translated throughout the rest of the piece—giving it a different tone than was previously there during showings. As they continued to practice this exercise I responded to them with comments about what struck me as a viewer so they could become aware of how their
choices were translating. I dropped in suggestions of what to think about, such as “would it be possible for you all to make the same choice in the same exact moment? What if you repeated the same thing over and over for a long time? Stillness is a choice, but what if you increased the speed of your walking? How can you play with focus?” These suggestions helped to keep the dancers interested in and aware of what they were doing, which made their crossing that much more interesting.

This improvisation helped to establish them as human and changed how they could move and be seen throughout the rest of the piece. Rather than only being interesting as moving bodies they became humans interacting and relating to each other through movement. Their active minds, bodies and faces were important to the performance of the piece. I wanted them to immerse themselves in the piece so much that their senses couldn’t help but be stimulated and active all the time. I encouraged them to keep their focus active and to really see people—each other and audience members. I wanted the audience to see but also to be seen.

To facilitate the build and momentum of the movement phrases, I experimented with some different music options. I didn’t want something over powering, but a steady pulse was needed. I had some music in mind for the piece from earlier in my process. Many of the songs had strong lyrics or were too complicated alone. The song I chose had a strong and clear rhythm that, to me, acted as an undercurrent to the movement, which rested on top. Even the lyrics were heavy, drawn out and slow, making their influence more instrumental rather than vocal. The rhythm also began to build with percussion and sped up. It also included some nice repetition that I found to be an effective foundation on which the movement could rest, be supported, or contrast.
Later in the piece I wanted a culmination of confusion, sound, and frustration so I thought layering another piece of music on this rumbling steady piece of music would help create an overwhelming environment that impeded productive communication. The second piece of music was a much different quality and I actually wanted the lyrics to be heard. The deliberateness and abruptness of the lyrics on top of the other rolling piece of music created a dissonance that I found powerful. For a moment or so the two sounds did seem overwhelming, together with the movement, but I layered them in such a way that the first piece of music faded away as the other piece of music continued. The second piece of music was high-pitched, almost nasal, and very clear. It seemed to me that as the first music was fading away it was like sand being blown around until finally revealing an intricately carved stone, which was the second piece of music. The music just ended, and all that remained was a thumping undertone that eventually faded. My intention was to use the music in collaboration with the movement to create a kind of cross fade, so that the music continued as the movement began to shift into a new section that slowly began to surface as the music ended.

I had no idea how to end the piece. It seemed so dramatic to make a decision because in life the concepts I am working with, group negotiation, persuasion, decision-making, never really end. I could have the dancers all coordinate and agree, or all disagree, or something in between. The final group organization just seemed arbitrary. I put aside what I wanted the final picture to look like and focused on continuing the momentum. I was ready for the piece to start exploring ideas of confrontation, and the frustration of compromise. But I also remembered the comments from my works in progress showing, saying that the sounds of the dancers—their breath or hitting the floor or their own body—was interesting. I also remember people responding to the final
building phrase of movement that included fast and repetitive pivoting lunges. It seemed perfect to include a repetitive phrase that highlighted the exhaustion and frustration of unending argument through the sounds of the dancers—their breath, the sound of their weight or feet on the floor. The dancers repeated this phrase and showcased real breath and exhaustion. Having this phrase continue by dancers separated by a long distance was very interesting to me. These dancers turned into a supporting event to the emerging duet.

Referencing the beginning charge through the space, I had two dancers do a similar improvisational charge. Their focus and phrasings were directed at each other. While conceiving of this progression I kept thinking of the idea of getting someone’s attention: “see me,” “listen,” etc. For me it was about getting another person to hear you, acknowledge you and your point of view. I liked how it was very similar to the opening phrase but also had striking differences. The interaction was more aggressive and only involved two individuals. They faced toward each other, making the interaction more private, as though the audience was outside looking in—whereas before I saw the traveling as an invitation to the audience to see a group respectfully organize themselves together. This specific interaction between two individuals was important for me to highlight—so the repetitive unison in the background with their unified noises of breath and feet landing on the floor was a powerful support to the duet. I used the same vocabulary for the duet as the repetitive unison in the background. This familiarity maintained a “group” aspect that I appreciated because they remained a group during the whole piece.

I seem to be naturally inclined to the ABA form, as well as to the idea of an over curve in a single piece. Although I would like to eventually play with my assumption and inclination to remember what was past and tie the piece together, for this piece a
resolution of energy seemed appropriate and I chose not to fight it. I found that I liked the idea of some individuals agreeing, one having to be persuaded, one disagreeing, and one who remains frustrated at the lack of complete compromise—in a sense at least. Because the piece consisted of quick phrases that moved with momentum, I decided that the resolution and final movement phrase should display a whole other movement quality. I wanted a striking contrast to the pumping repetitive unison that the other three dancers were tediously performing. The final handholding and replacement of positions united the piece as whole. I was extremely satisfied with the progression of the piece, from beginning to end. The patience and relative simplicity of the beginning improvisation, the build to a chaotic height, then the spiral back down to a final resolution and organization was very satisfying.

**Production**

Besides acting on the creative side of a site-specific dance performance, I was also on the business and technical side as well. It was an educational experience to learn about all that goes into a performance and how all the little details take time and do matter. The balancing act between practical concerns and creative concerns was challenging. I tried to devote the appropriate time to each area of development but sometimes one issue or another would have to be temporarily favored over another because of deadlines, snowstorms and schedules. However, I feel, in the end, that not one area was sacrificed—each was honored and given the appropriate attention.

From the conception of this project I was interested in taking my project away from the theater. I was eager for the challenge and opportunities a unique space would give me over a traditional proscenium theater (and a good thing because the theater is very busy
already). Although I was interested in alternative performances spaces, I had no particular idea where to hold my senior concert. Tori Lawrence actually introduced me to Progressive Galleries. She had seen the space while wandering around downtown Lancaster and thought it had potential as a performance space. She brought me to the gallery and I fell in love with it. I spoke with the owners and because this is an academic project they agreed to provide the space for free—under the condition that the performance was free (which I intended anyway). It was a relief to know where my performance was going to take place and that the space would be completely free. With their generosity I was able to step away from campus and venture into downtown Lancaster.

One of my first steps in the planning of my senior concert was the creation of a budget. With this estimated budget in mind, I began to think about ways to gain funding. I applied for the Nissley Grant. While preparing my application I had many questions and scheduled a meeting with Dick Fluck. He was very helpful and informed me about what the application should focus on. I felt confident sending in my application and eventually learned that I was awarded the grant to help fund my project. This was quite a relief because I already contacted Rachel Boggia and secured her as my outside choreographer—telling myself I would raise the proper funds for her whether I received the grant or not. Having secured Rachel Boggia actually helped my grant application—making it clear that I had already taken steps to solidify the elements of my intended project.

Although I received this grant, I knew that I still needed to raise some funds to help with all the other production logistics and still pay Rachel Boggia as she deserved to be paid. I was not looking for an excessive amount because I knew that my expenses were
minimal for costumes, reception, advertising, etc. I decided to write a simple personal fundraising campaign letter to family and friends that not only invited them the performance, but offered them the opportunity to help support my project by donating a small amount. I received an overwhelming response, not only in the number of donations but also in the size of them as well. From this fundraising letter I received over $700 and therefore was able to pay Rachel as I originally intended.

Because the performance was so early in the spring semester, and already knowing my dancers for the group piece, I decided to look for potential costume ideas over winter break. Trying to stay within or under budget and knowing I wanted something basic to be a foundation for the costume, I decided to go to Old Navy. I found some very inexpensive loose dresses, which were appealing to me. I knew the group piece would travel the length of the gallery and so the idea of a fabric that would swing and move with the dancers made sense to me. Originally I bought a variety of styles but after trying them on the dancers I realized I favored one in particular over the others. I attempted to find more of those dresses and fortunately found them.

With the five dresses I then approached Ginny West for her expertise in costume design. She graciously offered to help me. I told her I liked the simplicity of the dresses but wanted to make them more “costume-y” and that my initial idea was to add some kind of texture, maybe lace I thought, to the dress. She liked my idea and sewed the accent lace patterns around each dress. She was very helpful and I really appreciated her skill and willingness to take the time to help.

I knew advertising was important and so at the beginning of the semester I began thinking about different marketing techniques. I bought mini-advertising cards, which I distributed around campus. I designed a poster, and with some help from Anita Focht got
it printed to post around campus. I also made a Facebook group to help get the word out
among my peers. My event was on the F&M website as well as the events calendar and I
made it a goal to personally invite as many people as possible. The Brooks House was a
supportive part of my advertising endeavors, helping me send out mass emails and
covering some of my printing costs. In addition they were willing to supply school vans to
transport students to and from the performance but in the end these were not necessary—
it was a great thought though.

The program was a challenge because of all the detail of content and production. I
created the design myself and spent many hours formatting, cutting, and pasting all the
pages. I also had to consider what to write as the instructions for the audience. I thought it
was important to have a note to the audience from myself to provide some insight into my
interests and goals for the performance. I wanted it to be open but also articulate enough
to get the audience thinking and following their curiosity.

The actual time in the gallery to rehearse and work on the technical logistics of the
program was very limited for a variety of reasons. The gallery is a working business and
needs to be open and accessible to the public. In addition, the gallery owners travel to
and from Harrisburg frequently for business and with the bad weather, time in the gallery
was extremely limited. We used the limited time given to us (approximately four
rehearsals for the solo, three for the duet, and only one for the group piece, besides
tech/dress rehearsal) in the gallery very effectively and it was an exciting challenge to
adjust as necessary to the new space.

Post Concert Reflections
I was very satisfied with the program as a whole. The flow and organization of the concert was great because of my well-trained and active ushers. I was very happy with the turnout for each of my performances, and thought the space held everyone well. Most of my audience was from the F&M community, and I was grateful for the support. However, learning from this experience I think in the future I would take more time to engage the community in the immediate surroundings of the location of the performance. Because of time constraints and mobility constraints my priority for advertising was for the F&M community rather than the greater Lancaster area. In addition, reflecting on the performance, I think I would not provide as many chairs for the audience as I did. I think fewer chairs would have encouraged more mobility and freedom of movement for the audience, which I would have liked to see.

Performing the solo was an amazing and satisfying experience. I recognized my growth as a performer, dancer, and improviser in so many ways with that piece. I felt proud of each of my performances. I challenged myself to be honest in the moment about what was happening, to allow the space, audience, and day to influence my choices, and I took great risks, pushed the extremes of movement and dynamics, and stayed aware of all the feedback that Rachel gave me throughout each of my former improvisations. I felt I commanded the performance, as well as truly experienced it. I never got caught up in my own self-judgment, such as comparing the success of one performance over another. Finally, I think I accomplished the goals for the solo in each performance—exploring the environment, recognizing what was happening in the moment, making purposeful choices, and introducing people to the concept of actively relating both to that which is around you and to yourself.
I was unable to see the group piece performed with an audience. However, based on some audience members’ feedback and the dancers’ opinions, it was well received. The closeness of the dancers as well as the obstructed view from the pillars gave each audience member a unique perspective.

I am looking forward to continuing to work with the piece. I have never before had the luxury to revise a work after it has been performed. After gaining much new information about the piece from the performance, going back to it and revising it and altering it will be exciting. I am also eager to investigate a new space for the piece. The idea of even more possibilities for perspectives is very intriguing—maybe points of view from a higher level or from the other three sides of the long performance space. I am also interested in going back to the ending, and maybe developing it more or reworking it.

My experience of performing the duet with people in the space was much different than during rehearsal. I really enjoyed how we faded into the crowd in the beginning as people reorganized themselves in the space. Our focus throughout the whole piece was extremely satisfying. We really were aware of each other and saw each other. With so many other people around I had to immerse myself in the piece. It was an interesting sensation of being totally in the performance of a piece and yet having to negotiate the space filled with so many additional people. My awareness and concentration had to shift seamlessly from my internal experience of performance to an awareness of my external surroundings. Our timing together and dynamics were clear and thoughtful and from feedback I think these were evident to the audience as well. For me, there was a tender realness about the piece, and I believe it was present because of the real connection between Tori and me as well as our devotion executing the movement with care and
attention. It was a joy to work with both Pam and Tori to create such a powerful duet in such a short amount of time.

The question and answer sessions were very interesting. I enjoyed answering people’s questions about my improvisation, the use of the space, the themes of the group piece, etc. People seemed to be very interested in the conception of pieces and how the space was used. An issue that was brought up in both sessions was the role of the audience. One of my intentions of using a unique and intimate performance space was to explore the role of the audience. When the question came up about the overwhelming stillness of the audience I enjoyed hearing the audience’s experience. Some said that “not disrupting the dancers” was the formal role of the audience and so moving around, to them, was seen as an unwelcome distraction. Others mentioned, especially in the group piece, that they were afraid moving around would cause them to miss something—their own stability was comforting to them as they viewed the dancers’ movement. I intended to engage the audience and, with the program note, I encouraged them to make choices and follow their curiosity throughout the performance. The progression of the concert directed the audience to see the pieces from different points of view, but in hindsight I realize I was not explicit about the possibility of movement for the audience during the actual dancing. For this and other reasons, the audience did not feel the freedom to shift around the space as much as I had hoped. This is something I hope to explore further in the future: the shared experience between audience and performer.