

# Tongues Assemble: Inter-mediality in Written, Spoken, and Moved Language

by

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## Introduction

Language can be visual, a vocabulary of feeling can also exist, but regardless of the medium, “language” is necessary to make something. You cannot explore, create, synthesize, or critique without a governing language; language is used to give a framework and context to ideas, so that once a common vocabulary is “agreed” upon, the exchange of ideas, as directed by language, can become communal, public, necessary for human interactions. First you must establish this common vocabulary; you can do it by nicknaming movements or phrases, by doing the same exercises over and over (repetition through practice) or dictating the movements to the dancers, (repetition through imitation).

The ambiguity and fluidity inherent in both poetry and movement are what draw the two forms together. One point of connection exists in the relationship between pointing and naming inherent in performance mediums where the body is highlighted, and poetry, a written-down, legible but not always immediately comprehensible, form of expression that does not necessarily operate under linear narrative constraints. The post-structural concept of pointing and naming concerns the proximity of a reference point. When something is being pointed to, it is within the immediate purview of the onlookers. When something is being named, the reference point is not visible nor within the immediate present of those referencing. To name is to enter something into a dialogue or discourse that has to be referenced towards because it is outside the present context in which it is being referenced.

In discovering how movement can be thought of as a language of its own, I began to think of them not as isolated and self-contained, but two distinct mediums

with a necessary reliance on each other, a vital and inherent inter-mediality as both languages work towards a system of expression. Movement within bodies exists in the spaces between the signifier and the signified, the symbol for the idea, and the mental concept of that idea that can never be actualized. I am looking at movement grammar within the context of semiology established by Saussurean linguistics and the interdisciplinary and dialogic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. Everything relies on and is comprised of a systematic pattern, and the system forms when all of the elements are organized into their sufficient relational patterns (Kaeppeler: 119).

### **Definitions**

Language:

1. a. The whole body of words and of methods of combination of words used by a nation, people, or race; a 'tongue'.
- b. Applied to methods of expressing the thoughts, feelings, wants, etc., *otherwise than by words* (italics mine).

System:

1. A set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent, so as to form a complex unity; a whole composed of parts in orderly arrangement according to some scheme or plan.
2. A group of terms, units, or categories, in a paradigmatic relationship to one another. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. XVII )

These are lexical definitions that point us towards the grammatical rules under which we frame a discourse. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of grammar is

- 1a. That department of the study of a language which deals with its inflexional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage; usually including also the department which deals with the phonetic system of the language and the principles of its representation in writing.
6. The fundamental principles or rules of an art or science.

Every system has a code, an agreed upon, identified set of rules that governs the system. Any grammar is composed of a lexicon and syntax, a dynamic relationship between the lexical elements (Foster, 1982).

In order to be understood as dance (or some other special movement category), movements must be grammatical, they must be intended as dance and interpreted as dance. The grammar of a movement idiom – like the grammar of any language – involves structure, style, and meaning; and one must learn to recognize the movements that make up the system, how they can be stylistically varied, and their syntax (rules about how they can be put together to form motifs, phrases, larger forms, and whole pieces). Competence to understand specific pieces depends not only on movement itself, but on knowledge of cultural context and philosophy. (Kaepler: 118)

Each dance style, or dance piece, has its own lexicon; poetry is a manipulation of written and spoken language, perverting the conventional syntax and lexicon of language to create a new way of speaking and understanding, a new tongue. The recognizable lexicon of a poem gives it structure, situating it within a context and providing the reader with reference points outside the immediate world of the poem, creating a larger foundation of knowledge on which to base the reader's understanding. Movement is a language because it is governed by syntactical rules,

contributing to its status as a system of knowing and of inquiry, a way to perceive and create the world.

Because movement is a mode of inquiry, it is also a system of knowledge. “Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice” (Conquergood: 145). One of the aims of performance studies is to travel between two different domains of knowledge, that of theoretical analysis and active participatory practice. Even though Dwight Conquergood’s argument ignores the active process of engaging with a text, he refutes the false dichotomy thought to exist between critical analysis and artistic and creative performance work, arguing that “the segregation of faculty and students who make art and perform from those who think about and study art and performance is based on a false dichotomy that represses the critical, intellectual component of any artistic work, and the imaginative-creative dimension of scholarship that makes a difference... The ongoing challenge of performance studies is to refuse and supercede this deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating” (Conquergood: 153).

Because the body is comprised of many systems of organization, it has a grammar, a syntax. Syntax is the organization of the relationships between elements within a system, the dynamics of juxtaposition that govern a system. The ordering of a system can make all the difference because it changes the relationship between each element within that given system.

The dancing, moving body organizes in a way that escapes verbal language, as one is not the servant of the other, but rather work in tandem. There is a reason why the language of dance composition and the language of written composition share certain key elements. We can move before we can speak. The process of naming succeeds action, “the sound (and motion) came first” (Johnson: 24). The progression through the act of giving something a name begins with sound and motion that precede it. The nature of naming is transformative, as once you give something a linguistic signifier, it runs the risk of being codified and becoming static. Dance and poetry have discovered ways to avoid this by creating their art through the re-contextualization of conventional lexical and syntactic elements. The level-footing of both spoken and written language, and moved language, is the inherent necessity of inter-textuality, of creating texts through the invocation and reference of other texts. Throughout this argument, I will refer to both moved and written work as texts, and the audience-spectator as both a viewer and a reader. As both Bakhtin and Janet Adshead-Lansdale argue, it is impossible to create a text without causing, in both the reader and the creator, a relationship between the present text and others that came before it. In order to fully value the body, and value the word, we have to look at them on equal footing, operating as a Venn Diagram, or scales that sit beside each other unbalanced, and constantly fluctuating.

Conquergood begins his argument by discussing how knowledge is organized, separating the distanced, objectifying “knowing that” and “knowing about” from the more intimate and personal “knowing how” and “knowing who” (146). Throughout my argument, I hope to trouble Conquergood’s analysis of legibility: “What gets



squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert – and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out. Dominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context” (146). Conquergood is arguing that legibility legitimates, but what he does not do is include certain types of legible texts that are written but not spelled out, are composed of indirect meanings guided by gesture, intonation, and implication. In these terms, poetry is more akin to these “illegible” texts, even though it is a written text, than it is to “legible” texts. In quoting Kenneth Burke, Conquergood invokes the limitations of literacy, instead of using those qualities as a way to open up and expose the possibilities within a written poetic text.

The [written] record is usually but a fragment of the expression (as the written word omits all telltale record of gesture and tonality; and not only may our “literacy” keep us from missing the omissions, it may blunt us to the appreciation of tone and gesture, so that even when we witness the full expression, we note only those aspects of it that can be written down). (Burke [1950] 1969: 185)

In omitting “all telltale record of gesture and tonality,” the written record, instead of limiting the expression, *opens up* all the possibilities within that small fragment. In poetry, this is what creates an engagement between the reader and the text.

The engagement between Conquergood and the grammatical framework that Susan Foster establishes in *Reading Dancing* lies in Conquergood’s juxtaposition of an “ensemble of texts” with a repertoire of performance practice: “Instead of an ‘ensemble of texts,’ however, a repertoire of performance practices became the backbone of this counterculture where politics was ‘played, danced, and acted, as

well as sung and sung about because words [...] will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth” (Gilroy 1994: 37, Conquergood: 150). “Text” implies legibility, but Foster posits a way to “read” dance, a different kind of legibility. Another problem that Conquergood encounters is the “reading gaze,” where “instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity...the ethnographer...stands above and behind the people and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts” (Conquergood: 150). Reading can be thought of as gazing, objectifying whatever text is being peered into, but true reading is more active than that, it is communication, interaction, and engagement.

“Proximity, not objectivity, becomes an epistemological point of departure and return,” (Conquergood: 149), invokes Antonio Gramsci’s “call for engaged knowledge” and his argument for proximity to what is being analyzed rather than perching objectively above it. “Textocentrism – not texts – is the problem,” Conquergood clarifies; this argument is a problem in itself as it excludes creative texts from the host of texts that are always in operation. Conquergood is arguing against reading experiences as texts by applying linguistic rules of analysis to non-linguistic events. “The intellectual’s error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned [...] that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people” (Gramsci 1971: 418). When Gramsci writes of the “elementary passions of the people,” he is invoking a vocabulary of the proximal, engaged but not abstracted.

Because we do not live in an entirely verbal world, as many cultures are without ways to transmit their verbal culture, nor are our experiences limited by

constrictions of verbal language, nor do we live in a world without a necessity for some invocation of written/verbal communication, it is vital that scholarship, especially performance scholarship, become one of both an “ensemble of texts” and a “repertoire of performance practices”: “The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention...by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances” (Conquergood: 151). This living between both forms of research, between critical reflection and creative accomplishment, is one instance of differently-valued knowledges showing their inherent reliance on each other, that one cannot exist, in an artistic or scholarly form, without the other.

A language is a system of knowledge, a way to know things, to perceive them and to communicate through them: “Structured movement systems are systems of knowledge – the products of action and interaction as well as processes through which action and interaction take place – and are usually part of a larger activity or activity system. These systems of knowledge are socially and culturally constructed” (Kaepler: 117). Movement is a language because it is a system of organization, a way to organize knowledge, to further expand upon that knowledge, and to express what one feels and experiences within and about that knowledge.

Syntax exists in the dynamics of a grammar, it exists in movement of the body and within the body, it exists between and within the spaces created by words and the progression of movement within a phrase, how that phrase finds a nook in a movement phrase, how the rhythm of words becomes what makes bodies move. Movement lives within the gap between signifier and signified.

Movement is about kinetic and potential energy. We store up potential energy in stillness before it becomes kinetic energy in action. Stillness can be a powerful contrast to movement, but we are never entirely still, we are always swaying in some way, transferring weight from the balls of our feet to our heels in tiny increments, our organs are still pumping our blood is still flowing our brain is still firing, our potentialities of energy are constantly being realized and recycled, with microsecond pure pauses between the potential and the activated, the unrealized kinetic energy in stillness and the potential for stillness in action.

Poetry is based on the dissonance between the signifier and the signified, the potentialities that exist in the multi-valence of words, how the poetic form is meant to defamiliarize the familiar, no matter how lyrical or mundane the style of the language. In order for a signified and a signifier to be recognized, there must be a governing system under which they can interact. Poetry exists in potentialities, the tension between what is happening, what did not happen, and what could happen, in this tension between the potential and the activated.

By accessing the common thread of language between the two mediums, the unconscious obligation of one medium to another was brought to the forefront, made manifest in both “I noo too” and “tongues assemble,” the products of a full year of choreography. Sounds were used as a gateway to both spoken and moved language, and these two processes were fertile ground for exploring music and words and sounds and body language, dance as a body language, a language of bodies. These processes worked to blur the boundary between written and moved text to create a wider syntax, a globalized syntax.

## 1. Gesture

*“The woman went up the ladder again. She readjusted the rag over the broom and poked it into the next section of crack between the vigas. I saw the ladder teeter and, without thinking, reached out to steady it. In that gesture, I slipped once again into the familiar rhythms of fiesta work. My body adjusted. In the time it took for that single gesture I stepped from ‘outside’ to ‘inside.’”* (Deidre Sklar, “Reprise: On Dance Ethnography”: 71)

For Sklar during her time at the Tortugas festival, “gesture” is used to locate a cultural history through a minute series of movements. The word “gesture” has myriad of functions, ranging from minute articulations to entire performative structures. Gesture is a term that is used in verbal as well as movement language. One can say, “She gestured towards him,” implying a movement that doubles as a verbal directive. This could mean waving for someone to come over, or it could mean yelling “Hey!” Both are gestures towards something, specified references in an apostrophic form. It is also possible to gesture towards something larger, to gesture towards an idea or concept: a poem can be a gesture towards a time in history, a political action, towards another poetic form (a deviation from a sonnet that still maintains some of the formal components that reference a sonnet is a gesture towards that form).

In this small quotation from Sklar’s experience, she describes how one physical gesture of a woman steadying a ladder transported her back to her involvement with this community; this gesture became the signifier of an experience that was recalled by a seemingly insignificant motion of bringing something back to stillness. Sklar’s description of this experience in Tortugas opens up the world of gesture as the middle ground between spoken and written language and movement

language. To begin this discussion of gesture, I must position these two mediums as two parts of intertwining discourses.

### **From Inside to Out**

The discipline of performance studies is a gesture in two directions at once, one scholarly and the other performative, which recognizes that each one plays a part in the discourse of the other. Gesture, when approached in terms of performance, is part of a corporeal discourse that “elude[s] translation into words” (Foster 1995: 9). The Gesture is a way to access the untranslatability of these two mediums of one into the other, they live within each other so inextricably that it is impossible to talk of one without referencing the other. Throughout this process, I examined the scope of gesture, and through its expansiveness, researched how it is a bridging of the interior with the exterior, whether it is housed in a dancer, a performed text, or a poetic text. Even when dance is abstract, it is always referencing something outside of the world of the dance because the experiences of and within the body do not come into being from a solipsistic universe. “Social references remain implicitly ever present” because dance is of the human body and human movements (Novack: 14). When the body is the signifier, the referent becomes all of the experiences, patterns, and organizations that are implicit in the entirety of that sign. Gesture, in bridging the interior and the exterior, is a way of providing the dance with a contextual reference point. Because dance is always referencing something, either a thematic meaning or the body itself, gesture is an integral component of movement’s organizational systems of reference and symbolism. In its consistent and unavoidable referential

practices, the dance integrates the practice of gesture, from its minute to sweeping forms, into its creation of reference and symbolism. Novack attempts to show that “dance combines form and reference” (Novack: 15), citing Leonard Meyer’s argument that literature is primarily both referential and syntactical, and music is primarily both syntactical and formal; Novack argues that dance is primarily both referential and formal. In leaving out the syntactic element of dance, Novack disables dance from being discussed as a language of its own, with a system of agreed-upon rules. In this context, it would be helpful for Novack to access the terms of a language system to frame the referential, formal, and syntactical structures of dance. In following her reasoning, we can see that dance is a combination of writing and music, a combination of form, syntax, and reference.

If I have a system through which to signal towards something, then I can make allusions to what is not in my immediate present. In order to point, to physically gesture towards something, it has to exist in the immediacy of the act of pointing and touching. Once past the possibilities of immediacy, pointing is limited in its scope because we can only reference what exists with us at the time. In order to draw attention to something, we must now experience the process of naming, referencing what is outside our immediate scope. A performance is a complex integration of the two, as gesture is a form of bridging the gap between naming and pointing. A gesture can be described as a motion towards something, an indication that something outside the immediacy of the performance is being called upon through an immediate, bodily point of reference.

A hand motion indicating for someone to “come over!” is a gesture, signaling a one-for-one relationship between movement and speech; this gesture is often accompanied by a verbal exclamation from one person to the other, bringing this second person into the first’s immediate present. A small hand motion in a dance piece is also a gesture, drawing attention to a specific part of the body, isolating focus, bringing the viewer into the present of the world of the dance, from an external point of view to the interior of the movement and the performance as a whole. Communication reintroduces the elusive idea of translation, where every mode of communication is a translation from the context of one person to another, as the process of understanding engenders a response through this contextual translation. That wave, that indication to Come over here! is a culturally constructed directive to move. Gesture, when thought of as a *substitute* for verbal communication, privileges the spoken word over the moved expression, situating the movement of the body within the already established framework of verbal discourse.

“Their [the historian’s body, historical bodies, the body of history] motions form a byway between their potential to act upon and be acted upon. In this middle ground they gesture toward one another” (Foster: 11). In this middle ground between activity and active reception, bodies gesture towards each other, constituting both a subject area as well as a mode of inquiry (Foster: 12). If the body functions as a mode of inquiry as well as a moving text that can be inquired into, then the Foucauldian argument stands that the body participates in the production of meaning, and does not function solely as a vehicle for the synthesizing of an idea that was generated within a different system of knowing that is being put on the body.



Foster's "bodily writing," inspired by Roland Barthes, is her way of showing that the body is capable of generating ideas, initiates as well as responds, and sparks the question of whether or not bodies can make signs as well as embody them. In order to make a sign, the maker must exist in some kind of communication system. To communicate is to gesture from one system to another, to make reference to one thing with the understanding that there is an analogous element in the other person's system of reference and understanding. In this way, "expression is the act of conveying an interior thought or state into the exterior world using words and movement" (Foster: 57). Movement is a product of a subject who uses it to communicate, even though knowledge about non-verbal communication is "seen as a potent source of information about the person and even as a threat to individual privacy" (Foster: 55). Movement's persuasive power is what situates it within the system of communication, whether paired with verbal expression or not; movement always conceals or reveals something.

### **Articulation**

Because the definition of gesture has so many components, I chose to work within its multitude of functions as part of my choreographic process. The idea of gesture as articulation began my exploration in finding the movement possibilities within the word "articulation." "Gesture" immediately brings my focus to the hands, intricate articulations of the fingers and little bones. Then I am drawn downwards towards the ankles and toes, articulations at the ankle and scrunching of the toes, hyperextending then bending as flexion is now attracted to your knee, when does this

stop being gestural? Can you have a full-body gesture? I have reached a larger joint, movement has shifted up the axis of minute and is traveling.

What began as a small articulation was transposed to the entire body, and even though the assumed verbal equivalence has been subsumed by a postural articulation, the body still gestures towards something, either the body itself as a moving entity in the world and within the world of the dance, or something outside that of the body, where the body refers to the experiences that made and make it. Throughout this process, I experienced the infinitude of gesture, as something that is generally thought of in minute terms but operates on a grand scale.

Articulations are expressive, the “articulation” being used in both verbal and physical registers. A joint is a point of articulation, a clarity of pronunciation from one state of being to another. Flexed or extended (elbow). Flexed behind your back (still elbow). “Articulation...is a rudimentary trace or indication of intelligence” writes Foster (Foster 1982: 23). If any sort of articulation shows clarity, shows a reasoning through of a certain logic to express the process of moving from point A to point B, then a gestural language is one of intelligence, a system of knowledge defined by the possibility for action, as suggested by the joint, integrating the combination of potentials and actualities. The body, made up of joints whose purpose is to gesture, is a set of articulations, either verbal or physical, where social discourse can occur (Foster: 26).

What immediately drew me towards working with gesture was the variety of meanings behind it juxtaposed with its particular definition shared among my dancers from “I noo too.” When asked for their first impressions of the word, they wrote

things such as “Gestures illustrate my physical experience of emotions/ideas. I mostly gesture with hands and face, sometimes shoulders” (see Appendix). We all seemed to agree that to gesture is to communicate something usually communicated through a verbal discourse, which finds its equivalent in physical expression. In dance, “gestures” were small articulations of body parts made up of little bones, fingers and toes, but I asked can you gesture with your head? A poem or an entire dance piece can be considered a gesture towards something, referencing a set of experiences, codes, and conventions outside of itself, so why does a physical gesture have to be so minutely specified?

Instead of “translating” from verbal expression or thought to movement, we transposed articulated views about gesture onto the body. I asked all three dancers to use their views about gesture as a way to create a movement phrase “about” gesture, incorporating whatever meaning of gesture that they wanted to work with. What was challenging about this movement assignment was that I asked them to create a full-bodied phrase after we had just had a discussion about their views of gesture as isolated, the exact opposite of full-bodied. Their movement phrases combined what is typically called “gestural” with what is known as “postural”: gestural as “a movement that articulates a shape using a body part,” and postural as “movement that articulates a shape using the whole body” (Foster 1982: 95). Foster offers a very casual difference between gestural and postural by differentiating them in terms of their relationships between part and whole, but what she discusses is foundational to my argument in favor of the enlargement of the understood scope of “to gesture.” Because to gesture is to reference something outside of the movement or act of

speech, gesture is often thought of as a movement equivalent to the verbal; therefore we study gesture within a verbal framework instead of highlighting the power of the physical gesture *in relation to* the verbal gesture. Movement has its own grammatical organization that is analyzed in terms that have been re-appropriated from linguistic theory, but Ray Birdwhistell, who researches movement as social and learned as opposed to biological and evolutionary, presents a research strategy where movement is “approached as a system parallel to but interdependent with verbal language” (Birdwhistell: 34, Foster 1982: 53). As part of these interdependent but parallel systems of organization and knowledge, gesture is a way to show the parallels within and between each, linking each under systems of communication, expression, and knowledge.

When I first approached working with gesture, I asked my dancers to abstract their views of gesture, to force themselves to combine the gestural with the postural as a new form of gesture. But during the choreographic process of “tongues assemble,” I asked both of my dancers to reclaim the specificity of gesture that we had previously abandoned. Even without my instruction, some of their movements extended beyond one body part and became the expression of the whole body, the postural was subsumed by the gestural, merging the two categories into one. If the gesture was the act of grazing the floor with the tip of the big toe, the gesture of the torso was one of being bent to the side, focusing the gaze on the lower body gesture while adapting the facial and upper body gestures to draw the attention back to the lower body, the big toe.

“The gesture is the thing truly expressive of the individual—as we think, so we will act,” said Martha Graham. In Graham’s terms, movement is more direct, real, and spontaneous than words as a way of communicating. The gesture is what prevents this mode of thought from placing the unmediated expressions of the body on the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder of consciousness, intellect, and cognitive thinking. A gesture is a mediator between any mode of generating thought or meaning and its expression. In trying not to abstract from their initial thoughts about gesture, the dancers from “tongues assemble” created phrases that reference culturally constructed, and for this reason understood, gestures: a wink, a chastisement in the classroom. Their movements have external references, they can be placed within a context outside of the dance as well as within it. The connoted meaning of those gestures is secondary to the internal logic of the piece, as the new meaning of these gestures is their function as a transposition from one context to another. “Rhetoric concerns the way gestures, the human body, and the world of the dance have meaning based on their meaning in the culture” (Foster 1982: 88). My question to this concerns what happens when you transpose a gesture, or a series of gestures, from one context to another, as I have done in my choreography and the choreography of my dancers. Under this logic, that of semiotics, the gesture now has a different meaning because it has been separated from the context in which it originated; no longer a signifier *outside* of itself, it has become a sign *for* itself. This gesture now has dual meaning, one that references the original context while integrating references to the newly acquired context of the dance.

Spoken language is composed by one and received by another, either heard or read. The communicative aspect of language is always present, whether its aim is to provide the receiver with a precise or abstract interpretation of what was presented. I used spoken language throughout the rehearsal process and performance of “I noo too” as a compositional tool to translate what began on the page into a heard text, which became the crux of the sound score. Communication was happening between the dancers’ bodies, the dancers and musician, and within the piece as a whole.

You can gesture with your head, your elbow. In this way, to gesture is to convey a meaning through movement, one that will bring another person into your mode of understanding. A “gestural language” does not always imply equivalent meaning, so the understanding must be reached that a gestural language is not always understood by everyone; understanding is not the only goal of a performance, as dance on stage is often an abstraction of reality. Even when the performed movement is intended to be pedestrian, it is still taking place before an audience, positing at least one point of departure from reality. What often helps to understand a foreign language is locating common instances of body language to clarify in what kind of communication people are engaging. But with a dance performance, not “understanding” the movement distances you from what you are seeing.

“The notion that dance is a ‘universal language’ is still too common and is often associated with the idea that ‘outsiders’ can understand body movements of others without knowing the cultural movement language” (Kaeppler: 117). In order to comprehend, one must be versed in the conventions that comprise the grammatical rules of a movement language within a larger system. I am torn by this argument

because on the one hand, talking about dance as a “universal language” depreciates performance movement from a scholarly artistic discipline to an activity that does not merit research and study. On the other hand, the idea that one must know the cultural movement language of the dancing bodies in order to understand it reduces the accessibility of dance as a performance art and greatly limits its viewership. This stance also assumes that there is a pre-existing meaning within the dance that, unless we know about the culture intimately, we will miss entirely. This draws attention to very specific types of dance, such as dances for religious ceremonies or holidays, but it also draws our attention to non-traditional dance that we would only be able to understand if we were well versed in their grammatical code and linguistic conventions. We might miss the “meaning” of more abstract dances because we do not know well enough the meaning-making system within which it is operates.

## 2. The Grammar of Languages

*“If the link between names and referents, being and bodies, were certain, writing and representation would be redundant.”* (Peggy Phelan, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at Choreographing Writing,” *Choreographing History*: 200)

Whereas grammar houses the rules of a system, syntax is the mode of organization of the elements within a system under those specific grammatical rules. Because movement is a language, and a language can only be understood with an instated grammar, movement language must have a syntax, it must have conventions of organization that create what I have been referring to as the internal logic of the dance piece. Organization involves ordering, patterning, layering, and finding meaning within the shifting relationships between each element, as seen in semiotic and post-structural theory.

Grammar, the rules of a system, is a code that is culturally constructed; even if we do not know the exact rules to follow the meaning of the code, we can find in it similarities to our own as we attempt to decode it. Our own grammatical conventions become the reference point for how we understand other languages and vocabularies. Mikhail Bakhtin developed two terms, *heteroglossia* and *chronotype* that are helpful in understanding the interrelations of linguistic systems involved in using one to understand another. *Heteroglossia* is the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance, and to make an utterance means to appropriate the words of others as you fill them with your own intention. Here, in order to understand the “words of others” one must be versed in the qualities that are common to both, and use those similarities to relate the known system to the unknown system. In Bakhtin’s terms, the utterance, appropriated words of others with intention, is part of



meaning making. *Chronotype*, which literally means “time space,” gives a name to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature...it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (Bakhtin 1981: 84). An author creates entire worlds and, in doing so, is forced to make use of the organizing categories of the real world in which he lives (Clark and Holquist: 278).

The syntax of a phrase, whether it written, spoken, or moved, affects how the reader comprehends it because order affects comprehension. Movement is not just a form of communication, it is a way of knowing because movement (dance/performance) uses the body as a synthesizer; you can know through the moving body as you know through the brain, using a set of constructed rules to synthesize and comprehend the “meaning” of what you are perceiving. One movement, or one word, does not have meaning in isolation. If it does stand alone, the meaning does not exist solely in that one entity, it exists because the composer chose to position it between moments of stillness and silence; the meaning of the single entity rests in the juxtaposition. The entity is no longer arbitrary once it has a relationship to what is around it.

### **Poetry, Choreography, and The False Start**

Maia, one of my dancers from both “I noo too” and “tongues assemble,” accidentally introduced an idea during a rehearsal for “I noo too” that then began to reintroduce itself, the idea of a false start, of beginning, realizing that a mistake was made, recognizing it in a physical and audible way, and then beginning again, starting

a phrase and saying “Oh! Wait...” as you turn to face the correct direction and then begin. Fake starts reveal a way of accessing the authenticity of trying it again, repetition through a false start by exaggerating the physicality of the mistake, owning the necessary repetition of doing something wrong and trying again, facing the try-again. In this dance, mistakes were treated as forms of repetition, aberrations within a regular syntactic flow. Interruptions produced the same result with a different intention than mistakes did. Both mistakes and interruptions create deviations within a regular syntactic flow, shifting the position of both the viewer and the performer’s sense of expectation and creating something unpredictable while still coherent; nothing we do in life exists on a straight linear trajectory, interruptions force us to go back and start again. (See Appendix for dancers’ writings on interruptions).

The idea of the false start was similarly addressed in a review of Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* that appeared in *The Nation* in 1910: “Whoever can adjust himself to the repetitions, false starts, and general circularity of the manner will find himself very near real people. Too near possibly...these stories utterly lack construction and focus but give that sense of urgent life” (DeKoven: 252). Stein’s use of syntax brings the reader closer to people, brokenly closer to lives of broken syntax.

Melantha liked to wander, and to stand by the railroad yard, and watch the men and the engines and the switches and everything that was busy there, working...For the lazy man whose blood flows very slowly, it is a steady soothing world of motion which supplies him with the sense of a strong moving power. He need not work and yet he has it very deeply; he has it even better than the man who works it very deeply...Then for natures that like to feel emotion without the trouble of having any suffering, it is very nice to get the swelling in the throat, and the fullness, and the heart beats, and all the flutter of excitement that comes as one watches the people come and go, and

hears the engine pound and give a long drawn whistle. (“Melanctha,”  
*Three Lives*: 61)

A second reviewer from the Chicago Record Herald wrote in January of 1910 that “the slow, broken rhythm of the prose corresponds to the rhythm of the ‘lives’ and to the reader’s rhythmic comprehension” (DeKoven: 253). This reviewer understood the importance of the fact that Stein’s syntactical aberrations highlight the content of her prose as well as poetry.

When conventional syntax is disrupted, the perversion of that syntax creates a new variation of the lexicon. Syntax creates new meanings because it shifts the relationships that exist within the system. By disrupting the conventions of syntax, Stein and Frank O’Hara, though in different ways, access new meanings inherent in the language they use, as well as cause readers to create new meanings: meaning is created within a new relationship, the relationship between the reader and the words, the performer and the dance, and the viewer (reader) and the dance. Readjusting the reader’s relationship to conventional syntax introduces a certain amount of humanity into the work because spontaneity and unpredictability, human exercises of agency and free will, are being accessed through the dance.

This sense of the mistake, the false start, lost its urgency and immediacy once it was transposed to the stage. At one point during rehearsal I actually forgot that she was supposed to begin again, and thought she had just made a mistake, but it seemed forced onstage, farther from life but closer to the idea of life, something that happens offstage all the time, a reference to something as opposed to the thing itself. People exist circuitously, we try again, we repeat on purpose, we repeat by accident, the urgency exists in a straight line that does not know how or when it becomes a spiral.

Exploring Trisha Brown's cube chance exercise for generating movement gave rise to phrases that recurred throughout the piece. The exercise begins by first drawing two cubes layered on top of each other. Each point on the cube, as well as a point between each corner point and one in the center of each separating layer, is assigned a letter of the alphabet, going in alphabetical order from top to bottom. I chose to use the line "pony from the mantel and!" from Frank O'Hara's "How Roses Get Black." The dancers made movement from this phrase by following the sequence of letters within it and directing their movement towards the corresponding letter on the cube (see Appendix for an example). For example, the first movement would have to be in the direction of the letter "p" on the cube because "pony" begins the excerpted line. This exercise is effective in generating movement because the directionality and level of each movement is already assigned. Chance assignments can limit the breadth of the exercise which allows for more pointed, in depth explorations. The exclamation point was important to this exercise because it was the only symbol not included in the alphabet. I was approaching the arbitrary nature of symbols in a very literal way, asking the dancers to assign anything to the exclamation point: to see how in a spoken and written context it is verbally manifested one way, while in a movement context it can be manifested in a way unrecognizable to the audience.

The way I framed the exercise gave rise to the importance of symbols, how letters inherently are symbols for sounds as well as meanings, an exclamation point could have meant anything, and now its purpose is to denote an upward change in emotion, a heightened emotional quality in the reader expressed by a raised tone of

voice, noting something big and important. The importance of the exclamation point fell away, but originally careful attention was paid to how the dancers used that exclamation point, that symbol, what they associated with it and how they interpreted it. Where on the page it connotes one course of action, on a body it could have indicated a different task: running to the other side of the room or standing still or yelling your name as loud as you can. By beginning with what we know commonly as a symbol, the exclamation point, I was able to access the link between a linguistic symbol and a physicalized symbol, recognizing and drawing attention to the space between the symbol and the concept for which the symbol stands.

Spoken language is a system of symbols, lines meaning letters composing words as placeholders for sounds, and this attention to symbols led to attending to subtraction.

### **Subtraction and Repetition**

Just as darkness does for the visual, repetition redirects the focus of the reader primarily through sound, as well as vision. The movement phrase where I experimented with darkness in “I noo too” was extremely high energy punctuated by percussive stomping and falling, while the musician matched that intensity with spoken text; as this progressed, the lights faded to black. The stomping and speaking continued until the end of the movement phrase when the other two dancers entered the space for a duet. Now all that could be perceived was the sound of the dancers on the floor, the sound of bodies on bodies, the sound of their breath, and the lack of sight. The duet slid offstage as the stomping solo began again, accompanied by a

return of the text and lights. The audience was permitted both to visually and aurally perceive and receive the dance, with certain senses heightened and others dulled depending on which sense perception was being subtracted or re-added to their overall experience. The audience had two different ways to ingest the same language as well as movement phrase, one only through sound, and the second through both sound and sight. Repetition, a powerful syntactic device, was utilized within the confines of the dance (which movement phrases and spoken phrases were repeated, re-layered, and by whom), as well as a way to create a more participatory feeling in the audience, as the dancers and audience were simultaneously experiencing the same sensory shifts. Through subtraction, the piece explored different modes of perception in taking in the same medium through different senses.

The idea of inserting a blackout into the middle of “I noo too” came from an article by Pirkko Kusemann titled “Thoughts on *Project* by Xavier Le Roy or How Language and Action Inform Each Other or How Discourse and Choreography Inform Each Other.” This article argues that language and action, as well as discourse and choreography, have reciprocal effects on one another. Even though he distinguishes two distinct binaries, Kusemann is looking to compare language with discourse, and action with choreography. Discourse is a use of language, just as choreography is a use of action. But within a movement language, discourse occurs between communicative and intelligent bodies, and choreography becomes a discourse of its own, creating a succession of discourses between dancer and dancer, dancer and choreographer, dancer and audience, and choreographer and audience.

### **Perverted syntax in Stein, O’Hara, and My Choreography**

Gertrude Stein works within a grammar that is not agreed upon by her readers, as seen through critics' negative responses to her work, but with a lexicon that is understood. Because she manipulates and perverts syntax, the conventional lexicon becomes reinvented, made anew into a new written language, a new tongue. The trouble that her readers have in "understanding" or being receptive to what she writes is proof that syntax, the organizational tool for creating relationships between compositional elements, is the main meaning maker in any language, any compositional construction. The power of language is manifold, because words hold so much weight and power in their connection to humans' imaginative powers, but the system in which they function is so arbitrary that they hold no power at all: "The positing power of language is both entirely arbitrary, in having a strength that cannot be reduced to necessity, and entirely inexorable in that there is no alternative to it" (de Man: 116).

Much of the way in which Stein addresses how she writes is closely linked to some of the foundational aspects of semiotics. She writes with a sense of and an attachment to the tension between representation and the thing itself, with the intent to abstract words from their representational function. Stein worked under the idea that the value of words has been lost in their referential utility—she was trying to regain the thing itself, to recapture the "value of the individual word" (Ramazani: 176). Stein's conception of the value of words was originally conceived by Paul Cezanne as he reflected on the general practice of composition at the time. Stein followed Cezanne's philosophy that "in composition one thing was as important as another," which was in contrast to the compositional ethos of having one central idea,

with everything else only included to support the central concept (Haas: 15). One objective of this practice is to rediscover what has been under-discovered, satisfying the human urge to make things new by turning familiar words into a new language. Stein discusses this in depth in *A Transatlantic Interview*, explaining her thought process that was at work to create *Three Lives* as well as *Tender Buttons*: “I was not interested in making the people real but in the essence or, as a painter would call it, value. One cannot live without the other...to recapture the value of the individual word, find out what it meant and act within it” (Haas: 16,18). When Stein refers to the “value” of words, she is referring to the importance of their essence, the evenness of weight that all words share before reference and connotation appropriate them to serve a cultural purpose; her poetry attempts to recapture the signified, the mental concept, behind the word that is being spoken.

I attempted to access the “essence” of a movement through repetition. Emmy, a dancer from “I noo too,” introduced the machine-like nature of repetition, where it initially can seem mindless as it becomes muscle memory, but eventually you reach a point where you can repeat a movement without consciously having to think about it. What happens when you continue with that motion is that it allows you to make choices in how you can vary it, as the movement becomes fluid once you reach that point, the essence of the movement. Repetition is an incredibly effective way to recontextualize a familiarity, where one iteration is in one context while the next is in a new context because time has passed; the temporal nature of dance is what makes the form conducive to repetition as the audience will consider the same movement or phrase within the broader context of the dance as a whole as more of it continues to



unfold, and the dancers experience it as part of the progression of the dance, diachronically experiencing the same element so that it becomes something new.

As another way to experience the transformative effect of repetition, I asked the dancers from “I noo too” to pick a line from text they had written during rehearsal, or from one of the poems we had been using for the piece, and have that be their internal sound score for their movement improvisation, letting the syntax, diction, and rhythm of the words dictate the quality of the movement, focusing less on the understood thematic meanings. They repeated the word phrase in their heads over and over again as they improvised, and once they felt warm, they switched from the internal to an external repetition, speaking the words out loud (see Appendix for the written text that was produced by this exercise). Saying their words out loud also coincided with the creation of a movement vocabulary established through constant movement as well as the constant repetition of the same verbal phrase. I kept asking them to continue with this activity, even if it seemed tired and obsessive, just to keep going. I experimented with a similar exercise with the duet from “tongues assemble,” but instead of beginning the exercise with the dancers silently repeating the words, I read Frank O’Hara’s “Poem (That’s not a cross look it’s a sign of life)” out loud many times until the words could be examined in all their different layers and the sounds and rhythms made by the words, as well as their connoted meanings, all contributed to the sound score, helping to create the movement improvisation that emerged from a verbal, poetic syntactic structure. Whether the text came from the dancers or from an external source, it became part of the sound score of the piece. Repetition transforms and is transformed.

Stein also works with what she refers to as democracy in writing; for her, the parts are just as important as the whole, “the landscape has the same values, a blade of grass has the same value as a tree” (Haas: 16). Each individual word carries with it the same weight within the overall completed structure as any other: “All the time in it you see what I am singling out is that one thing has the same value as another” (Haas: 16). Stein’s lack of punctuation in most of her poetry does not stem from an invitation to the reader to create his or her own inflection, or to apply accents and importance to certain words over others, but rather from a desire for evenness: “At this time I threw away punctuation.” She grew “impatient with punctuation” because it disrupts a balance, an evenness of value to which Stein was trying to gain access, as well as placing value where it should not be (Haas:17). Discarding punctuation stemmed from a need for evenness, for each word to regain its footing as a sign.

For Stein, structure and pattern disguised the words, and they “began to be for the first time more important than the sentence structure or the paragraphs” (Haas:17). The elements within the structure became more important than the structure itself. The meaning of Stein’s poetry exists in each piece as a whole, the combination of sonic resonance, visual imagery, and repetition working together to construct a logic within the composition. If we are to look at each of Stein’s poems as a complete utterance, then it makes sense that the meaning of each poem exists within the piece as a whole, as the finalization of an utterance is necessary in order for a reaction from the listener (Bakhtin 1986: 76). The listener, or reader, cannot fulfill their active responsive position if they cannot hear the utterance in its entirety.

At the same time that Stein views *Tender Buttons* as a renewal of the word structure, she describes her linguistic process in physical terms, with “weight and volume complete,” physicalizing her language as she turns it into a physical venture, an exploration centered in modes that are used to talk about the body (Haas: 18). *Tender Buttons* was her first attempt at expressing “the rhythm of the visible world” which was an “enormous struggle of creating a new value” (Haas: 23). Stein discusses *Tender Buttons* in terms of completeness, but her continued focus on the concept of value leads me to an interpretation of her work as a reclamation of the signified, the essence of an object or a word describing that object. For example, in “A Dog,” Stein discusses its completeness as a poem because it clearly paints a picture of the quality of movement of a donkey: “That was an effort to illustrate the movement of a donkey going up a hill, you can see it plainly. ‘A little monkey goes like a donkey.’ An effort to make the movement of the donkey, and so the picture hangs complete” (Haas: 24). In creating movement, her poem is complete. Alternately, “A White Hunter” is complete because of suggestion, implication, and popular connotation, “a complete portrait by suggestion.” Stein shows the power of suggestion as a literary tool, as a poem “should allow imagery with it without troubling anybody” (Haas: 28). Poems are not successful, Stein argues, when they use words which carry associations, such as “dirty” in “A Piece of Coffee.” The more abstract her poetry is, the more successful she sees it because the words move farther and farther away from common knowledge. Discarding of punctuation maintains the “even smoothness of suggestion” as the reading and interpretation of the poem is not strictly proscribed, or at all (Haas: 25). In “A Little Bit of a

Tumbler,” Stein attempts to “create a word relationship between the word and the things seen” (Haas: 25). She attempts to individualize the poem, to “indicate it without calling in other things” (Haas: 25). Her essentializing of the objects about which she writes shows a solipsistic quality inherent in her poetry, as many in *Tender Buttons* aim to be entirely self-referential (see Appendix for full texts). Self-referentiality in poetry can be dangerous, as W.H. Auden argues that “a purely private verbal world is not possible” (Ramazani:1008) because words are not private property.

It is both the glory and the shame of poetry that its medium is not its private property, that a poet cannot invent his words and that words are products, not of nature, but of a human society which uses them for a thousand different purposes. In modern societies where language is continually being debased and reduced to nonspeech, the poet is in constant danger of having his ear corrupted, a danger to which the painter and the composer, whose media are their private property, are not exposed. On the other hand he is more protected than they from another modern peril, that of solipsist subjectivity; however esoteric a poem may be, the fact that all its words have meanings which can be looked up in a dictionary makes it testify to the existence of other people. Even the language of *Finnegans Wake* was not created by Joyce *ex nihilo*; a purely private verbal world is not possible. (Ramazani: 1007-1008)

For Auden, language is never entirely self-referential. The fact that written language operates within an agreed-upon lexicon is proof that language is always a form of communication. Dancers, just as writers, have an odd relationship with their audience because they both operate under systems within which people function everyday.

It is noteworthy that ideas conceived pre-World War I resurfaced in a 1960s post-modern cultural context. This approach was the basis for a new model of

language, one where any mode of accruing knowledge is considered a language. The basis of Ferdinand de Saussure's commonly known work in linguistics is the arbitrary nature of the sign. What is interesting about Stein's relationship to naming is that she understands that naming is an arbitrary action, so she uses those arbitrary signs to ground the reader in a familiar semiotic system within a manipulated, defamiliarized syntax.

What is important in semiology is the relationship between the structural elements as opposed to their intrinsic value; Saussure refers to the "individual element" as "meaningless outside the confines of that structure" when he writes that "in language, there are only differences" (Saussure, 1974). The "differences" in written language show that one thing is what it is because it is *not* something else. For example, the word "dog" means dog because it is not cat, or house, or bird. One way we know it as dog is through what it is not, so in this way, we know what it is through its contrasting relationship to other things.

Gertrude Stein and Frank O'Hara both play with syntax and rhythmicity as a means of accessing movement within their poetry. O'Hara does not pervert conventional syntax to the same extent as does Stein, as many of his poems progress along somewhat of a narrative trajectory, but his seemingly random insertion of punctuation marks, such as parentheses and exclamation points, can befuddle a reader into tripping over the distortions of syntax he artfully and seamlessly employs. O'Hara's consciousness of the "everyday" in his poems creates the sense of great movement from one point to another through his choices of lineation, as the never-ending quality of many of his poems, especially "Poem (That's not a cross look it's a

sign of life)” relies on enjambment and juxtaposition of sounds to create the movement from the beginning of the poem to the end, from the beginning of O’Hara’s interactions with the other person the speaker addresses in the poem, through the a-linearity of memory, and back out into the present.

“How Roses Get Black” functions differently than “Poem” in that there is less of a linear trajectory to follow, but the poem itself progresses because it has an internal logic, it makes sense as a cohesive whole, even if the references to the world outside the poem are not entirely clear. By using language that we use every day, the poem is referencing something outside of itself, but the alternate uses of syntax are what create the meanings within the poem as an entity, separating it from while loosely tying it to an outside context. The reading I am doing of this poem is in contrast to that of “Poem,” mainly because of the differences in use of punctuation. In “How Roses Get Black,” there is a pervasive use of punctuation marks throughout the entire poem, not just punctuated diction through lineation and the juxtaposition of sounds. I chose to use this poem as the structure for Trisha Brown’s cube exercise during the first installment of this project because of the use of symbols, the non-lettered notation found in punctuation marks.

### 3. "Poem"

That's not a cross look it's a sign of life  
but I'm glad you care how I look at you  
this morning (after I got up) I was thinking  
of President Warren G. Harding and Horace S.

Warren, father of the little blonde girl  
across the street and another blonde Agnes  
Hedlund (this was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade!) what

now the day has begun in a soft grey way  
with elephantine traffic trudging along Fifth  
and two packages of Camels in my pocket  
I can't think of one interesting thing Warren  
G. Harding did, I guess I was passing notes  
to Sally and Agnes at the time he came up  
in our elephantine history course everything

seems slow suddenly and boring except  
for my insatiable thinking towards you  
as you lie asleep completely plotzed and  
gracious as a hillock in the mist from one  
small window, sunless and only slightly open  
as is your mouth and presently your quiet eyes  
your breathing is like that history lesson

(Frank O'Hara, "Poem (That's not a cross look it's a sign of life)," *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*: 353-354)

Both in a poem and onstage, nothing should be gratuitous; movements are part of the body of the work, the lexicon of the performed language, utilizing poetic conventions that are also movement conventions, such as metaphor, gesture, and repetition. A performance piece is a compositional creation where everything matters; once it is danced by the performer and seen by the audience, it begins to contribute to the meaning of the dance. The kinetics of poetry exists within the text itself as well as in the experiences of the poet composing the text, and the reader actively engaging with the text. In order to read at all, you must use your body to enunciate, to give rhythmic articulation and cadence to the words; reading becomes

an exercise in embodiment in the same way that listening to music very often causes a bodily experience in its listeners.

We are only beginning to investigate this on any scientific basis, but it seems clear from what we already know that rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it, not merely as an “abstraction” or an emotion but as a physical effect on the organism – on the blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain...It is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other. (Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*: 60-69, Susan McClary, “Music, the Pythagoreans, and the Body,” *Choreographing History*: 83)

Within the text itself, movement drives the thematic progression and rhythmic variances of the poem, as well as the movement of the reader from the beginning to the end. The greatest movement that characterizes “Poem” is that of the interior to the exterior. There is a constant bridging between the interior world of the poem and the exterior world in which we read the poem, the interiority of the speaker’s mind when he shifts between stages of temporality, and the exterior linearity of our process of reading. O’Hara accomplishes this through his use of punctuation and lineation, as well as the juxtaposition of sounds, which not only create movement tension between in and out, but between continuously-shifting and unfixed states of time.

Just as do many of O’Hara’s images throughout this poem, “from one/ small window, sunless and only slightly open” (l 18-19) is a specific and minute detail, that in it carries movement from the exterior to the interior, and from the interior back out to the exterior. The image travels from the mist outside the window, to the window itself, to the face of the person in bed with the speaker. Gestural movements, or gestural utterances, are about bridging the interior and the exterior, you can gesture at somebody, gesture towards something to make reference to it, speech itself can be



considered a symbolic gesture towards the mental images and concepts to which we are desperately trying to gain access but through which we can only reach the symbol.

When creating movement from an external rhythm, contrast in syllabic emphasis can often induce visual contrast in movement. Verbs are actions, they are grammatical signs for movement, for a doing-of. Action words form literal relationships with movement, but what is important about these lines is the relationship of the words to each other, the way they sound, the way they flow or stop. This may seem like an unfeeling way to approach language, especially poetic language, but it is acknowledging the larger, foundational connections within the system of written and spoken language that makes it possible for the beauty of poetry to emerge. A part of the connections between verbal language and movement language are the bodily feelings that poetic language produces. Sometimes verbal language is not adequate to translate the unspoken, unwritten language of the body, so understanding their relationship depends on the connection within and between the two mediums, the fact that they both have the capability of producing that inarticulate feeling, and that one produces and transposes an aspect of it through the body, while the other produces it through the relationships between words, transposing it while simultaneously producing it.

### **How Frank O'Hara Entered My Choreographic Process**

O'Hara's "Poem" became an impetus for physical improvisation throughout my choreographic process because it is constructed in such a way that the words chosen, as well as their syntactical dynamic and imagistic relationships to each other,

operates under a similar framework as dance improvisation. The exercise was structured so that Maia, one of my dancers, began by standing still with her eyes closed. I read the poem aloud two or three times before she started moving, then she began to embody the rhythms and flow of words as I varied my reading of the poem with each repetition: “reading each line differently according to the differences in syntax conveys more information: you get the information of the line as well as the information of the syntax. Ideally, you are hearing as much difference as possible, and also hearing the underlying pattern of the lines. And if all lines were alike, then why would anyone write in lines?” (Pinsky: 36) I experimented with repeating phrases that were not repeated in the poem, as well as inserting punctuation through my inflection. My ability to self-punctuate the poem shows the degree of consciousness on the part of the poet on how he chose to construct the poem through movement as opposed to notation. Maia was first able to focus on what I was focusing on, which were the rhythmic relationships, patterns, and deviations within the poem; afterwards she was able to listen to the thematic resonances of the words as a way to vary her movement choices.

One of the aspects of O’Hara’s poetry that is most physically engaging is the way he pays attention to lineation as an alternative to notated punctuation. His unconventional use of punctuation is brought to the reader’s attention at the very beginning of the poem in line 1, as a punctuation mark is invoked but not notated. The choice not to use the exclamation point here but to use it later in the poem clues the reader into the internal logic of the poem, that the poet has a system and a method

within which he is working. Exclamation points at the beginning of a poem set a precedent and a tone for the remainder.

The first image of the poem is an exclamation without an exclamation point, leading into an apostrophe, “look,” that could also serve as an exclamation, as the speaker acknowledges that there is another speaking human involved in this exchange. This line gives the reader certain expectations of syntactic spontaneity for the rest of the poem, providing an entry point into the world of the poem through thematic unpredictability as well as rhythmic excitement and surprise in punctuation. “Look” draws attention to the visual, creating an intense sense of ATTENTION and EYES OPEN in the reader, even without capitalization or additional punctuation. It draws your eyes up, seeing into this world that seems to be somewhat a part of ours, with the difference lying in specificity of detail.

The minimal amount of capitalization in this poem serves a similar rhythmic purpose as minimal punctuation, creating a possible evenness of flow in terms of accent and inflection, because if any given reader would so choose, the poem could be read as one long breath of a sentence; lineation and transient syntax create multiple meanings with every new reading. Just as Gertrude Stein chose to abandon punctuation in favor of evenness, O’Hara’s sparse use of punctuation opens up the possibilities that live within poetic diction.

The punctuation symbol used most frequently in this poem is the parenthesis, followed by the comma and the exclamation point. The parenthesis has three functions as a thematic, imagistic, and formal tool. In terms of imagery and the actions of the poem, the phrase “(after I got up)” (l 3) is a signal to the reader that the

speaker is describing something in the present that happened in the past, O'Hara's "this morning." It might also be a key into O'Hara's process while constructing the poem; if he is anything like the speaker, then perhaps he too had this thought after he had already begun composing the line. The parentheses also provide another opportunity for rhythmic variance, giving the reader permission to change the quality of the reading while also signaling that the poem will continue to move from outside to in, inside to out; the poem will expand and contract, pump and breathe, inviting an interweaving of syntactical utterances and chosen accentuations. When the poem changes from exterior to interior, when it heaves, breathes up and down, so too can bodies in response to and in conjunction with the reading.

The transition from line 5 to 6 is one of the few rare instances in this poem where punctuation is used in a conventional way. The comma has a familiar function for the reader, which in this line is forcing the clause "father of the little blonde girl/ across the street" (l 5-6) to function in a grammatically subordinate way to the rest of the poem. Because "and another blonde Agnes/ Hedlund" (l 6-7) is thematically and rhythmically associated with the line directly preceding it, it too has become subordinate. These two give a fleeting context to the poet's memory, positioning the speaker and his history in time and space by putting the girl's home, across this street, as an equal part of the memory.

The first major shift in tone within the poem occurs in line 4. The two names that O'Hara references are similar in sound, having crucial letters in common which forms a near-chiasmus. Referencing the name of a president expands the poem because it is now referencing something outside of itself, and mentioning the name of

the father “of the little blonde girl/ across the street,” who, we find out two lines down, the speaker knew in sixth grade, contracts it, bringing the external references back to the internal memory life of the speaker, and the source of repeated images of the poem (the repetition occurs in stanza two). The drastic change in tone of images can also change the inflection of the reading, including rhythmic variance and intonation. Or, it could create an evenness of staccato because of the dropping down onto the consonants as you read them; there is no upswing in any of these words, each syllable seems to have the same feel and rhythm to it. Each word has the same weight, you can drop into an evenness of proportion within the dismantled hierarchy of the line, no one word has greater value than another.

Lines 5 and 6 have less of a precise, pronounced rhythm than the previous lines of the poem, as the words seem to flow together in a rolling of the tongue. The images are grouped together in such a way that it is hard to consider these two lines as separable from each other: both lines are enjambed, the image of “the little blonde girl/ across the street” bleeding from line 5 to line 6, and relatedly, “another blonde Agnes/ Hedlund” running from line 6 to line 7. These two lines are connected thematically as well as rhythmically (both lines feel as if they are falling over themselves to reach the end) because they are *the* straight forward descriptions within the poem; these two lines have an evenness to them, just as in line 4, but in contrast, it seems that instead of all words having a high value, none of the words in lines 5 and 6 have a strong enough value on their own. The prevalence of the “l” sound casts a blanket over the specificity of rhythm in these two lines, which is contrasted with imagistic clarity.

Deviations from reader expectations is another characterizing component of this poem. The use of the word “but” at the start of line 2 acknowledges that the speaker is introducing a deviation from line 1, signaling to the reader that we too are meant to shift gears in some way. The line very quickly shifts our focus between tenses, and by playing with temporality, O’Hara is not creating a linear narrative trajectory for the poem, but rather is creating a world, a contained universe in which to house the actions and the language of the poem. The deviation acknowledged by the word “but” also permits a rhythmic variation in how this poem is read, adding richness and complexity to the world of the poem.

What adds to the temporal confusion of the poem is that we cannot rely on tense as a guide for narrative trajectory or linear structure. Just within the first three lines of the poem, O’Hara jumps back and forth between past and present tense, telling us we are in the present NO now we’re in the past WAIT we’re back in the present! What is so engaging about the third line in the first stanza is the possibility it holds, even before we begin to read the actual line itself. The beginning of line 3 could be the enjambed with the end of line 2, so the poem would read “but I’m glad you care how I look at you this morning,” with no sense of caesura or delineating punctuation between “you” and “this.” In this poem, tense gives structure to the speaker’s thought process, how the speaker was and is thinking about the thematic content of the poem, as well as how his thoughts are unfolding. Just as anyone experiences interrupting thoughts while trying to recall a place or an event, this speaker’s mind is jumbled by and filled with all sorts of past associations that have survived the jumble, beginning in clarity (l 1-3), and ending in clarity with the

conclusion of the poem. O'Hara juxtaposes the interrupting thoughts of the speaker with his insertion of parentheses. The grammatical function of parentheses are to interrupt the syntactic flow of the poem; because they act as an aside, they have their own syntactic organization within that of the poem as a whole, creating smaller and smaller worlds within an overarching context that continue to bring us closer to the speaker.

### **O'Hara, Imagism, and Improvisation**

Line 7 is an exciting crossroad in the poem, as it effected the trajectory of the movement improvisation in changing the way I was reading the poem; it is the last line in the first stanza that has taken the reader through the temporal and spatial jumble that is memory, while it reintroduces syntactical tools that we have not seen since line 3. Line 7 begins the poem's second phase, as stanza two is potentially rhythmically and syntactically much more complicated than the first. Even though line 7 belongs to stanza one in physical structure of the poem, the parentheses surrounding "this was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade!" the exclamation point at the end of that interjection, and the position of "what" at the end of the line, belong to stanza two in tone and syntax, creating a rush of movement back and forth between the two stanzas. Once again, parentheses are used to mark a deviation from the linear thought process of the speaker within the line, taking us back to a very specific moment, presumably a significant amount of years ago, which could be the thematic reason for the exclamation point. The section of the line partitioned by the parentheses signals a downswing in the flow of the poem, moving from the big exterior (another person

who lived across the street, in spatial opposition to the speaker) to the interior (a young version of the speaker, an interpersonal relationship between him and an old schoolmate recollected many years later from memory). The parentheses give us access to his identity as now a poet and a man, in our and his temporal present. His morning of line 3 could be the morning of the day we read the poem, or we could be looking at his present from a future stand point, but because of the sequential nature with which the poem unfolds, with the tug between linearity of action and non-linearity of thought, our present is one with his.

Structurally, “what” is part of line 7, but the spatial gap on the page between “grade!)” and “what” is a much larger demarcation between words than previously in the poem, visually showing a partition between the beginning of the line and the next line that “what” connects to. It could be read as an exclamation (without an exclamation point) or it could be read in conjunction with line 8 as “what now.” This large gap on the page creates a confusing but compositionally exciting dynamic when the poem is read out loud because the reader can either choose to acknowledge the space and exaggerate the amount of time for the pause, or can push through it and decide to pause after “what” (as it is the end of the line).

“HE came up” (capitalization mine) has a similar upswing force as does “I guess I,” whereas “to Sally and Agnes at the time” has a similar evenness of tone and meter to lines 5 and 6. This section of the stanza is an exercise in effective repetition as a way to structure a poem through movement. “In our elephantine history course everything” (l 14) is the first repetition of “elephantine,” which recalls the rhythmic and tonal importance it held within line 9, as well as the imagistic and figurative



slowing down of the traffic, signally a slowing down, a decreasing of the intensity and height that the poem reaches in this stanza. “History course” reminds us of the blondes in stanza 1, and that this poem is a memory of the speaker’s 6<sup>th</sup> grade self, with all of the intensity and non-linearity that a memory, and a poem, can and often do invoke.

Imagism, associated with poets such as Ezra Pound, encounter a similar gap between, and subsequent reunion of sight and sound. The way the reader comprehends Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” is first to hear the combination of words, understand how they relate to each other sonically, the weight they hold, the speed with which they travel:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

This poem must be read multiple times before the images begin to appear as their words describe them, but the transition from sound to sight is what completes the poem. In “Poem,” O’Hara’s lack of punctuation provides a different entry point of insight to his work, as the aural is less explicit than Pound’s “one-image poem” (Norton: 351); we must first hear O’Hara’s poem in its entirety to feel where the movement permits us to stop for breath, and where the sonic juxtapositions give room for it.

O’Hara creates continuity in his poem through lineated punctuation as opposed to a more conventional use of notated punctuation. The rhythmic continuity between “in my pocket” and “I can’t think” is what connects lines 9 and 10. The cadence, the up down up, symmetry of cadence and meter in these two lines creates the relationship within the poem, the reason why marked punctuation would be

gratuitous in most of the lines. The punctuation that is effective are the marks that are unexpected, that do not serve their normal grammatical function, but are rather keys that lead us further into the poem's content as well as its structural and formal logic.

“Everything” of line 14 marks the second major tonal shift within the poem. The syntactical flow of this line is not differentiated by a visual symbol but by a transition into an alternate sonic texture. Lineation as punctuation, as an alternative to a vocabulary of visual denotations, is a way to bridge the gap between sight and sound, living within the interaction of the senses, as well as creating a sense of motion within the poem as a whole.

O'Hara uses certain repeated sounds throughout the poem that cause different physical reactions dictated by the sounds. The prevalence of the “t” sound in line 9 helps the reader to pay more attention to the syllables forming each word, forcing the reading to slow down (in the manner of the elephantine traffic). The crispness of the “t” also gives each word extra emphatic importance; even though the content of the words themselves signal a slowing down, the “t” drives the progression of the line through its sense of punctuation and percussion. The gentleness in sound of “soft” and the aggressiveness of “trudging” is bridged by O'Hara's use of the word “elephantine,” as it contains the slowly pushing nature of the action to trudge, but has the crispness of the “t” sound, as well as the long, languid vowel sounds that create a tone similar to the one invoked by the “soft grey way” of line 8.

What makes the last four lines of stanza two some of the most interesting lines in the poem are the rhythmic relationships between each of the elements, as well as within the structure of the poem at large. The up-down-up (“I can't THINK,”

capitalization mine) sets up the reader for the same cadence structure in “I guess I” of line 12. The established rhythmicity of “Warren G. Harding” returns as his name is repeated in lines 11 and 12. When I read “I guess I was passing notes” I immediately hear and see this line as an impetus for physical movement because of the use of the gerund to accentuate the process, the present-ness of this small moving moment; “Longer words tend to move faster than one-syllable words, and sentences whose parts keep going across the line move faster than sentences that make more of a stop at the ends of lines” (Pinsky: 37).

The extreme circularity of motion that brings the reader back and forth between each embodiment of memory and temporality is halted by the sonic fabric of line 15, which is one that slows, that forces the reader to treat the next stanza not as a direct continuation of what came before, but a progression through its function as the foil to the rest of the poem. This stanza returns the reader’s focus to the images of lines 2 and 3, slowing the reading of these lines to the speed of the elephantine traffic of stanza two.

A structuring power of this poem is its use of contrast. Even though the second stanza is marked by a speeding up, an increase in the intensity of reading, it begins with the unceasing slowness and slug-like static immobility of traffic. The traffic provides a segue into the stillness of unthinking, even though “I can’t think” is where the poem picks up speed (the space between the words, symbols, and their meaning is where movement finds its place through of poetic possibilities. To take artistic license, whether it be written or moved, is to coax your audience into permitting you to suspend them above reality and expand their preconceived

possibilities of that reality. Movement finds its place in that middle area between their assumptions and suspensions because it maintains the abstraction while grounding it within the body).

The act of passing notes (l 12-14) is an act of transition from one state of being to another, but localizes the movement as it occurs in a state of stillness by not traveling through space. What keeps the movement alive at the end of this stanza is the “small dance,” what Steve Paxton refers to as the tiny undulations and rhythms of the body experienced when still, “the paradox of motion in something static” (Pinsky: 46). This layering of different stages of motion provided fertile ground for the development of movement improvisation. The dancers could choose either to stay with the running rhythm of the words, or act as their foil, accessing the possibility for minute movement within a rushing syntax.

The alliteration that begins line 15 contributes to the slowing down of the reading; the “s” sound requires deliberate placement of your mouth and tongue, as they must work together to produce the sounds, most notably the “s-l” sound of “slow,” which takes the most time and effort to pronounce. “Seems” implies the act of reflection, and the long double “ee” sound continues to stretch out the word, washing over you with a sense of languid contemplation. “Suddenly” exists in somewhat of an ambiguity in that suddenness implies a jolt, an unexpected event, but this line is languid and organic when preceded by “seems slow;” nothing about this line is syntactically sudden at all, especially when “suddenly” is juxtaposed with “boring,” a word that is characterized and overpowered by the long “o” sound of tedium. The only sudden occurrence in this line is “except;” something is going to

contrast the heavy feeling that the repeated “s” sound and its variations produce, something is going to happen at the conclusion of this poem to make a transition between the middle of the poem and the end, to tie everything back to the beginning.

In reading line 16 aloud, I can never think only of the sounds of the words, but am instead always drawn to the idea of “insatiable thinking;” it is not only that this wholly internalized act cannot be stopped, but it also does not desire to be stopped. To be insatiable is to be unable to be satisfied, to constantly want more, can never be satisfied. What contributes to the power of this phrase is the way in which those two words fit together, the roundness of “insatiable” sitting adjacent to the directness of the hard “nk” and “ing” sounds of “thinking;” the thematic meaning of this phrase contrasts the sonic tenor, creating a compositional irony to guide the reader through the conclusion of the poem. “Towards you” directs the focus of the speaker’s unceasing thoughts towards the other person (whose reference begins in stanza one) but it also directs the reader’s attention to a place outside the poem, outside of the purview of the speaker’s mind and thoughts, again creating movement within the poem from the interior to the exterior. Here, the end point is not a memory or an intangible concept, but it is “you,” the person in bed with the speaker, the person to whom the apostrophe of Stanza one is directed; here, the poem creates connections not just within itself, but with human elements outside of the language of the poem.

In continuing to read the third stanza, it becomes clear that, unlike the previous two, the seven lines in this stanza comprise one long sentence, one unfolding of a continuous stream of images that takes us from the one person lying asleep, to what is outside the window (possibly of this room), to the window itself, and back to

the sleeper, with heightened specificity of observation and careful attention paid to the individual features, the smallest details giving the largest framework to this memorial experience. This sense of unfolding, of one thing illuminating the next, is indicative of the different syntactic structures that govern the sense of movement in the poem. “As you lie asleep” provides the same sense of rhythmic clarity as previous phrases such as “I guess I” and “I can’t think,” all composed of one-syllable words, giving equal weight of enunciation to each word. This particular phrase, however, straddles the line between the slowing down of the stanza and the punctuated drive of the elements within the phrase.

“Completely plotzed” serves as the sonic foil for the first half of the line. “Plotzed” holds a large part of its power in its juxtaposition with “gracious as a hillock in the mist,” a hard, blunt word as part of a description of something that is also described in pastoral and natural terms. This hillock in the mist could be something that the speaker can see from his own window, but as he was walking along Fifth Avenue earlier in the poem, the image is being used as an idealization, removing this intimate event from any larger context, and bestowing the weight and power of it into the relationship between these two people, not between them and any definite scene around them.

“As is your mouth” returns us to the rhythmic specificity that runs throughout this poem, bridging the ideal image of the previous two lines with the percussive rhythmic thread that is characterizing of O’Hara’s work. The last two lines of this poem function as one continuous breath to close the poem with a human quality, to resituate it in the present, the happening is now, and to close on a note that also gives

weight to the ineffable connection between the present and the past: “as is your mouth and presently your quiet eyes/ your breathing is like that history lesson.” O’Hara’s phrasing is what enables the reader to choose where to insert invisible punctuation marks, such as a comma at the line break between “eyes” and “your,” as well as a period at the end of line 21, which O’Hara does not insert in the actual text. He has provided enough of an ending that a period would be gratuitous. As a reader, it is necessary to take a breath and slow down to read these last two lines.

#### 4. The Reader

*The reader is not, then, a parasite upon a fixed object, sucking its life blood, but a co-creator of a mobile text, breathing new life into a dancing text.*

(Janet Adshead-Lansdale, *Dancing Texts: Intertextuality in Interpretation*: 21)

In this chapter, my aim is to look at written language and moved language as two different forms of text that can be read. It is possible to think, at first, that reading is a strictly objectifying experience, that one actor exerts a gaze upon a text and consumes what is being presented to them. But what is most interesting about texts of all mediums is that they do not exist in static form, but engage with the reader (spectator), offering different meanings depending on the position and experiences of the reader: “the dance text as an open construction, having the fluidity and enigmatic quality of art” (Adshead-Lansdale: 7). Anything can be “read,” as long as it has codes to which it refers (Adshead-Lansdale: 9). Every speech act must have codes to follow, as speech, no matter how varied, is grounded in structural linguistic elements. Bakhtin’s construction of the utterance possesses the same fluid quality as a dance text, as the utterance is entirely situational – the boundaries of a concrete utterance are determined by the speaking subject, “by a *change of speaking subjects*, that is, a change of speakers” (Bakhtin 1986: 71). Just as with a dance text, Bakhtin’s utterance depends on both the speaker and addressee, and the meaning of the utterance changes depending on the variance of its boundaries.

Bakhtin’s discussion of the utterance addresses the application of linguistic structures to communication between two speaking subjects, who alternate between occupying the role of speaker and listener.



Language is realized in the form of the individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. (Bakhtin 1986: 60)

Bakhtin's theory of language and the utterance provides a counterargument to Saussurean linguistics, as Saussurean linguistic theory is limited in tending to issues of the utterance. Saussurean linguistics does not fully address the forms of combinations of linguistic elements, nor does it address the necessity of the utterance. Saussure combined what he posited as an individual act with one that is entirely social (Bakhtin 1986: 81). The utterance (unit of communication) is important to study in contrast to Saussurean linguistics (units of language), as well as alongside a study of moving, performing bodies because life and language enter each other through concrete utterances (Bakhtin 1986: 63).

It is necessary to "show how dance is...not only text, but that it is *also* text and can be better understood by being viewed through the prisms of intertextual gazes and speculations (Adshead-Lansdale: x). The reading of the dancing text will be most complete and nuanced when looked at as part of an intertextual web. Bakhtin's argument for the necessity and unavoidability of intertextuality returns to my argument for the inter-medial nature of art, that any medium not only exists as an individual medium, but that it exists in the middle ground between mediums, as well as through and between texts separated by time as well as artistic medium. Each text is dependent on the others: "any utterance, in addition to its own theme, always

responds (in the broad sense of the word) in one form or another to others' utterances that precede it" (Bakhtin 1986: 94).

Even though utterances are situational, and, in Bakhtin's argument, are dependent on the change of speaking subjects to determine its boundaries, the construction of an utterance still relies on an agreed-upon set of rules governing the structural units from which the utterance is made: "What may be obscured is the equally valid perspective that the very construction of these dance and movement systems relies upon codification in *both* non-verbal and verbal languages" (Adshead-Lansdale: xiii). The ability to read a text hinges on perceiving that text in relation to a stable set of rules; units of language are stable, units of communication are not.

Because dance is a text that can be read, just as a written text is also read, we must look at the difference between the utterance as a unit of speech and other units of language, such as words and sentences. The main differentiating factor between the utterance and units of language is the neutrality of language units: "The sentence as a unit of language lacks the capability of determining the directly active responsive position of the reader (Bakhtin 1986: 82). With any language, the speaker, or performer, uses their language to become simultaneously the subject and the object: "language arises from man's need to express himself, to objectify himself" (Bakhtin 1986: 67). Language units lack both a speaker and an addressee, therefore there is no subject to express or create. These language units are neutral because they exist entirely detached from human experience. Because an utterance always has a reference point of a speaker, and that speaker has intention (which leads to the finalization of the utterance, enabling the listener to be actively responsive towards

that utterance) the utterance can function in the same way as a gesture, bridging the interiority of the speaker with the external act of communication. The meaning of a word comes from “the genre in which the word usually functions, but *not* the word itself” (Bakhtin 1986: 88). Lexical meanings are neutral because they are not part of an utterance, an exchange, between the texts and utterances that have come before.

Conventions need to be in place in order to organize our interpretation and perception of what is being said. The agreed-upon rules of a system of conventions are what give structure to the non-standard form of the utterance. Because utterances are entirely situational, there is no standard structure, as they depend on the speaker, as well as the influence of the listener on the speaker: “We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*...If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time speech communication would be almost impossible” (Bakhtin 1986: 78-79). In utilizing language forms in poetry, Gertrude Stein is facilitating the transition of language forms into generic forms, taking a structured linguistic convention and freeing it of its conventional neutrality: “generic forms are much more flexible, plastic, and free” (Bakhtin 1986: 79); she positions the language units between a speaker and addressee, while simultaneously playing with the reader’s understanding of syntactical and lexical conventions.

There is often a confusion between the sentence and the utterance, as they are both composed of language units, the difference being that “one exchanges utterances that are constructed from language units: words, phrases, and sentences” (Bakhtin

1986: 75). Within a performance, what we are seeing is an exchange of utterances between the choreographer, performer, and audience, as formed from a combination of language units used to construct those utterances, as well as previous utterances that are referenced by the present performance that contributed to its creation. “A great many linguists and linguistic schools (in the area of syntax) are held captive by this confusion, and what they study as a sentence is in essence a kind of *hybrid* of the sentence (unit of language) and the utterance (unit of speech communication)” (Bakhtin 1986: 75). Bakhtin separates the real from the conventional unit of language, such as pauses. Pauses are not grammatical constructions, they are real, and are inserted into an exchange by the speaking subject. This type of interruption can cross over into a performative construct, where the artist can insert calculated pauses for a specific creative purpose.

### **The Audience and the Listener**

The situational nature of the utterance leads to its fluidity in linking the speaker with the addressee. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the reader-spectator is just as much a part of the meaning-making of a dance as the choreographer is, as well as having the added element of a moving, dancing body on stage as one more aspect of making meaning in performance. Susan Foster’s view of the audience’s relationship to a dance can be looked at in terms of Bakhtin’s listener, as the spectator is now “the co-producer of the performance...in short as the only producer of the semantic and communicative potential of the performance text” (de Marinis 1993: 158, Adshead-Lansdale: 16). The audience, the addressee in an

utterance, produces the communicative potential of a performed text because each audience member, each reader, approaches a text with a new set of experiences, and previously read texts, that influence how they perceive the presently viewed text. Bakhtin argues that no reading of any text is every passive, that the reader and listener engage with the written or spoken text in an actively responsive way: “when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it... Thus, all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized)” (Bakhtin 1986: 68-69). Bakhtin places most of the meaning-making on the shoulders of the speaker, as an utterance is completed when combined with intention, but also recognizes that one of the boundaries of an utterance is created by the addressee, the listener; meaning is a combination of artist intention, the inherent intertextuality of any text that can be read, and texts brought by the audience that they incorporate into their own readings of the text. Only the reader (audience) can complete the meaningful communication begun by the choreographer and performer; this transforms the reader from strictly a consumer into a producer (Adshead-Lansdale: 55). But what separates de Marinis’ argument from Bakhtin’s is the presence of the dancing body; even though the reader completes this exchange, the reader is not the only producer of meaning, as meaning is a combination of reader, performer, and choreographic intention.

In studying the movements of the body, the performing moving body is made an object as it remains the subject of its own moving presence. It is easy to equate the

moving body with a text that is strictly read, the body as a text that is examined by an anonymous reader. What differentiates between the moving body and read text is that the dancing body is a text that is engaged as it engages. Movement language has rules in common with music and poetry, but arguments against “using terminology adapted from linguistics and literary criticism” posit that this way of thinking leaves out the added element of the human being who is participating in the movement.

The reader-listener is always active, creating a text that is not fixed in time and space, but is mobile. Any text is essentially “unstable” because a shifting reader, a shifting audience, a shifting performer, causes shifts within the meaning of a text (Adshead-Lansdale: xiii). Foster highlights the performer’s role in constructing the meaning of a text, as the dancing human body separates the reading of a written text and a moved text. The reader of a written text engages with the text in a similar way as the reader of a dancing text, and is in no way exerting a gaze on what is written on the page, as Conquergood argues in his article “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” A good reading of a text occurs when the reader searches through the nuances and intricacies of the text and finds what is not blatantly available on first reading. An incomplete reading of a text, whether it be written or moved, is one that concludes while still floating on the surface. Reading is an active experience; there is nothing passive about it. Conquergood flattens out his text, disregarding the double-edged engagement that occurs while reading.

In addition to the ethnocentrism of the culture-is-text metaphor, Geertz’s theory needs to be critiqued for its particular fieldwork-as-reading model: “Doing ethnography is like trying to read [...] a manuscript “(10). Instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity with the protest performances of the people...the ethnographer, in Geertz’s scene, stands above and behind the people

and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts, like an overseer or a spy. (Conquergood: 150)

Reading can be thought of in terms of the gaze, but true reading is more active than that, it is communication, interaction, and engagement through intertextual references and gestures. Whereas Conquergood argues that reading a text of another culture from an outsiders standpoint is a form of cultural theft, Bakhtin provides a counterargument for a single meaning-maker within an interaction. Conquergood's mistake comes in that he does not view reading as an interactive experience.

Reading is an interactive experience because of its inherent intertextuality: "every text is bound up with a host of other texts...as he or she engages in the process that is reading" (Adshead-Lansdale: x). These other texts may be ones intended by the creator, or unintentionally referenced but perceived by the reader, therefore contributing to the process of meaning-making: "It is impossible to determine its position without correlating it with other positions" (Bakhtin 1986: 91). Bakhtin argues that you cannot read one text without referencing all the texts that came before it, and that its position within a viewing, comprehending, cultural context, can only be determined by understanding its relationships to other texts. Meaning is created in the spaces between these texts, in their relationships to each other as well as to those participating in the engaged reading: "Interpreting dances using textual analysis requires a multi-disciplinary approach, one which 'risks putting together in a single framework elements belonging to very diverse universes of discourse and research fields'" (de Marinis 1993: 6-7, as quoted in Adshead-Lansdale: 17). The reader is always both subject to and in tension with the multiple discourses being brought into

the reading of a particular text (Adshead-Lansdale:18). The role of the reader is just as fluid as the text itself.

There is a constant tension within any artistic text between artist intention and meaning of the text. The meaning of a dancing, performative text is the combination of this tension with the performing, dancing body, as well as other texts invoked by the choreographer as well as the reader. Meaning is a “constant flickering of presence and absence together... carrying traces both of what is *not* said as well as what is said” (Sarup 1988: 35-6, Adshead-Lansdale: 16). This ambiguity of how much influence any of these contributors have over the meaning-making process shows the power of a text to generate multiple meanings: “if a ‘text’ is a tentative and potentially changing construct in dance, then the making of ‘meaning’ is equally elusive” (Adshead-Lansdale: 20). The ambiguity of contributors of meaning to an artistic text, as well as Bakhtin’s argument that the speaker determines the boundaries of an utterance, denies Barthes’ claim of the “death of the author”: “a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author” (Barthes 1977: 148, as quoted in Adshead-Lansdale: 54).

### **Competence of the Reader**

Because meaning is made through relationships of the elements composed on stage, leaving the performance with a full “understanding” of what you have just seen is not the only goal of a performance. Because the audience and choreographer may



not be within a similar frame of agreement in terms of the elements of the language within which they are working, it may be impossible for anyone to receive fully what the choreographer is presenting; but a choreographer understands that, and presents something onstage so that the reader (viewer) may experience the intertextuality that is a performance contribute to their own meaning-making of the piece, adding and subtracting texts and references to their previous and present reading experiences.

“Meaning is usually associated with communication and the presentation of the self to others and ourselves... ‘Competence’ or knowledge about a specific dance tradition is acquired in much the same way as competence in a spoken language is acquired. Competence relates to the cognitive learning of the shared rules of a specific dance tradition as *langue* is acquired in a Saussurian mode. Competence enables the viewer to understand a grammatical movement sequence that he/she has never seen before. ‘Performance’ refers to an actual rendering of a movement sequence, *parole* of Saussure, which assumes that the performer has a certain level of competence in order to understand movement messages.” (Kaepler: 121)

This idea of a necessary competence in a reader shows the required agreement of a set of rules between participants in the language system, as communication is only possible when both the speaker and addressee are working within a similar framework. We must learn the shared rules of a tradition in the same way that we must learn the rules of spoken language in order to participate in verbal communication. In the above quotation, the performer is the mediator in question, as Kaepler argues that the performer must have a certain level of competence in order to understand the messages of the movement that he or she is performing. This idea is about embodying the performed movement; not just the reader, but the performer as well, must acquire a certain competence of movement language in order to be a part of the language system.

In order to highlight the necessity of agreement within any language, “tongues assemble” contained an improvisational structure where the two dancers created a unison phrase as part of the performance, without communicating through speech. They began by improvising individually, then beginning to make eye contact across the stage, gradually incorporating movements from the other into their own improvisational score. Throughout the structure, they were able to construct a short phrase composed of the same movements and done in unison through a tacit agreement across the space. This in-performance structure highlighted the immediacy of live performance, and the necessary agency of the dancer to create meaning within the piece, as well as the process of creating a new agreed-upon lexicon of movements for each performance, creating a continually-evolving agreement of vocabulary and lexical elements explored through a repetition of practice.

The viewer is fully integrated into the process of meaning making, so the viewer must possess a competence in synthesizing, as opposed to understanding something that is being presented to an audience as a static entity, as there is no established lexicon of every possible movement of the body. In referring to processes of meaning-making, it is important to separate artist intention from meaning. The point of view that the artist is imparting on the dance, or any sort of codified message that is invoked throughout the dance is part of the intention of the creator, not the actual meaning of the dance. Meaning is a combination of artist intention, viewer’s reception and interpretation, and performer’s presence and input. The difference

between a written text and a moved text is the presence of an active human with agency and will.

For certain texts, there exists a necessary integration of texts, where some literature cannot be understood without the reader already having previous knowledge of certain other texts. Kaepler argues that a viewer cannot understand movement without understanding the cultural context from which it came. But if you are not aware of the intention behind the dance, the movement becomes something else; the dance may mean one thing to a specific group of people, but if another set of viewers does not have the same background knowledge, the dance will have an entirely new meaning, whether it was intended or not; audience understanding does not bring “success” to the performance.

The idea of specialized knowledge introduces the issue of the knowing vs. unknowing reader: “the knowledgeable reader is expected and invited to pick up the appropriate references when required to do so by the text” (Adshead-Lansdale: 19), but what about the unknowledgeable reader? What can the unknowing reader obtain from watching a dance (reading a text) without being fully versed in the cultural background and referential texts that situate this text within a context? There are always reference points within a text to which a reader can grab hold: “accounting for the addressee (and his apperceptive background) and for the addressee’s influence on the construction of the utterance is very simple: it all comes down to the scope of his specialized knowledge” (Bakhtin 1986: 96).

## Conclusion

My investigations throughout this project have revolved around the idea of inter-mediality, how in order to create a comprehensive, whole, art piece, one must integrate more than one artistic medium. I first realized this through rhythm as the overpowering sonic thread between movement, poetry, and music. In “I noo too,” I began by exploring this connection through sounds made by the body, of bodies on bodies, so that, as Jill Johnston put it, “each sound may be heard only as itself and not depend for its value on its place within a ‘system’ of sounds” (Johnston: 33). I used bodily sounds as well as linguistic sounds to distance them from common references, accessing Gertrude Stein’s tactic of revaluing the word. The text I used within that piece was written by both my dancers and me, and became the main structuring component of the sound score. What was important about reassigning the value and function of words in those ways was to disassemble and then re-create meanings of words that are normally housed in our commonly-understood lexicon of spoken and written language. This process was a main factor in my reaching the conclusion that the main source of meaning in any artistic work is the relationships between the elements organized into syntactical relationships with each other.

Linguistic theory provides a necessary inter-textual framework through which to view dance, but does not replace the dancing body in a performance text. In order to more fully understand the place of the dancing body in meaning-making theories, it was necessary to combine Saussurean linguistics with Bakhtin’s theory of the utterance. This juxtaposition of theories of language and communication creates a fluidity of motion between static conventions and performative practices. Because

the meaning made in a performance text is jointly constructed by the choreographer, performer, and audience (reader), it becomes clearer that meaning of a text shifts depending on the texts introduced by those contributing to creating the meaning of the present text. This necessary inter-textuality shows the inherent integration of one medium with another, as each one is vital to the survival of the other. Texts are manifestations of their mediums, so by constantly introducing new texts to a reading, new mediums are being introduced to the construction of a comprehensive whole.

In using rules and terminology adapted from linguistics and literary criticism, I have searched for ways to integrate the dancing, moving human body into a system composed of rules and understood agreements. Even though I am using a semiological framework within which to house my dancing arguments, I am not intending to privilege verbal communication systems, or a verbal system of knowing. Susan Foster is clear to distinguish between positioning dance for meaning analysis within a Saussurean linguistic framework, and how she approaches movement analysis and the dynamic relationships that constitute meaning-making, “the *langue* of Western theatre dance” (Foster 1982: 8). Foster also clearly distinguishes between linguistic analysis and poetic analysis by “utilizing categories from poetic analysis – lexicon, grammar, syntax, style, and mode of representation” as a way to construct knowledge of dance composition in order to comprehend dances (Foster 1982: 8). One question that I have kept at the forefront of my research is how the two mediums exist interdependently while remaining singular, maintaining the integrity of their artistic medium while seamlessly and necessarily integrating with others.

A one-for-one relationship between individual words and physical movement does not exist. What I have intended to do in this paper is to show how one end of this relationship cannot exist without the other. I am relying on a language of movement as well as a movement of language, languages of cross-pollinated vocabularies, using the inherent intertext within each medium to further integrate themselves in the art of the other.

We cannot always talk about poetry in the same way as we address a critical text because the foundations of the form, lineation, syntax, and other literary devices, prohibit it from aligning itself with the structure of a critical text. Poetic diction highlights the power of words to express, to communicate and to give and receive knowledge through the relationships they form, and the subjects, material or ethereal, that they represent. Poetic language has immense power, no semiotic dissection can remove that. But they do so because the poet possesses a gift-like quality of being able to spot the nuanced relationships that we are daily unaware of, and bring them to our utmost attention. A similar translation occurs within a choreographer, who figures out a way to defamiliarize bodily movement in order to construct a composition that references reality while simultaneously deviating from it.

Gertrude Stein seeks to access these relationships by reorganizing syntax, operating within a conventional lexicon but a yet un-coded syntax, or a lexicon with a not-yet discovered syntax. Frank O'Hara does something similar, working with a conventional, understood lexicon and a slightly altered syntax that creates an organic flow to his poetry, one that mirrors life in its spontaneity and non-chronological temporality. Written language does hold power, even if the signs that comprise it

originated arbitrarily; their power lies in how they orient or disorient their readers to the outside world.

Metaphor, just as gesture, suggests relationships between elements without telling us what they are; it shows, but does not tell. The joint power of movement and poetry lies in their ability to suggest through the imaginative minds of the readers. Because the concept of the gesture has such a multi-valence of meanings, its presence in my choreography fluctuated throughout both processes. I began, in “I noo too” by abstracting common conceptions of gesture as physically-manifested verbal equivalents, experimenting with how to take a narrow view of gesture and abstract it. “tongues assemble” followed this with a desire to return to the specificity of physical gestures while expanding its scope, using gesture not just as a reference to a verbal equivalent, but as a reference to other texts moved, spoken, and written. This desire to simultaneously gesture in two directions towards the idea of gesture integrated the improvisation that accompanied the reading of Frank O’Hara’s “Poem.”

Robert Pinsky writes that “poetry is a vocal, which is to say a bodily, art. The medium of poetry is a human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth. In this sense, poetry is just as physical or bodily an art as dancing” (Pinsky: 8). The experience of conducting a close reading of “Poem” enabled me to locate the compositional and structural components that contributed to my bodily reading of this poem, as well as the communicative aspects of O’Hara’s writing that created so much movement within the lines of the poem as well as between the poem, its readers, and author: “he makes the sentence perform like the body of a great dancer, as the syntax – the words in their

arrangement, and the dynamic energy the arrangement creates – sometimes pauses at a line ending, and sometimes streaks or leaps or strains across it” (Pinsky: 27).

An important topic that became apparent at the very beginning of this project was the issue of translation. I questioned whether or not it was possible to directly translate something from one medium to another, and I still do. Many people address the idea of translating an activity or an idea from one medium to another, exploring the same topic through a different lens, operating under new rules within a new system. I do not think this is entirely possible because of the inherent and necessary intertextuality of every art medium. Because media straddle the line between isolation from other mediums in order to create and maintain an integrity within their own direct sphere of knowledge, and integration with other media, it is exciting to see how one text, generally thought of as belonging in one sphere, can be manipulated by the rules of another. But because everything is so necessarily integrated, there can never be a direct translation from one medium to another. Bakhtin addressed this tension within translation, drawing attention to “the centripetal force of unification and the centrifugal force of diversification, the two forces always in dialectical tension” (Cooper: 81).

I saw my project manifest itself in the struggles I had with my musician for “I noo too.” Working with a musician became about translation, maneuvering between two texts while figuring out how to strip away the notion that processes of the mind and processes of the body are separate from one another, that they exist as single entities without interweaving and relating. Solving this problem answered my question: at first it seemed to be about negotiating a dichotomy, translating my



process from one medium of expression to another, but everything began to make compositional sense once I realized that it is about finding the in-between, the way each medium exists in the other, enveloping one in its similarities with the other, not its differences. The spoken and movement texts of “I noo too” spoke a common vocabulary of intention. What was seen and what was heard spoke in dialogue with one another, often changing and re-changing roles, helping to produce an intertwining kinesthetic logic through repetition.

We had to go through the process of figuring out how the syntax of language could be singled out and used to embody what used to be words, and what had become rhythmic sounds that generate physical impulses. In order for “I noo too” to be successful (as I worked with a drummer who performed live onstage, as well as spoke a portion of the text during the performance) the spoken text needed to be thought of in just as physical a manner as the movement itself, fully employing the rhythmic, bodily experience of reading poetry. What is so difficult to grasp about the issue of translation is that, in essence, everything is a translation because “any act of understanding is a response...it translates what is being understood into a new context from which a response can be made” (Cooper: 85). In this quotation, translation is being referred to in terms of shifting contexts, but what is being “translated” is integrating the elements of both contexts as opposed to discarding one in favor of the other, managing the tension between the urge to maintain a separate identity that is countered by the urge for greater integration.

We learn through practical applications of rules before ever knowing the rules, just as we discover the utterance through practical application, and we know how to

produce sounds without ever having studied them (Pinsky: 4). The “hearing-knowledge we bring to a line of poetry is a knowledge of patterns in speech” (Pinsky: 5), as the seeing-knowledge we bring to a dance is a knowledge of bodily movements in relation to other bodies. Speech, and its use of language, is dialectical in nature, as are thought and understanding. Therefore, meaning is also dialectical, shifting over time along with intentions of a speaker and the situated response of a listener; this idea enables you to avoid the problem of believing that what you say means only what your hearers take you to mean. The fluidity and ambiguity of poetry are what create multiple meanings within each poem.

Meaning is made through the relationships of the words, the relationships between movements, but we have predetermined constructed conceptions of how those movements, how those words, relate to our lives outside the dance. Poetry has meaning because poetic syntax is more carefully constructed than most other functions in the universe of speech, but it also creates meaning through the relationships that we as readers have with those words, how we have encountered those words outside the life of the poem. Those words house meaning because we have been conditioned to understand them as such. At some point, the question of whether or not they are arbitrary, becomes irrelevant because this is the system within which we have to work. Poetry is beautiful because it in some way connects us to an alien way of interacting with the world. We make meaning every time we read a poem because the reader is bringing new experiences and new frames of knowledge to the act of reading that no one else is capable of bringing. In the end, meaning *is* made by the relationships of the elements within the system, but as an active reader,

audience member, performer in a dance, or creator, we become an element that is functioning within this system of knowledge and communication.

## Appendix

### Poems by Gertrude Stein and Frank O'Hara, used for research

#### Gertrude Stein

Idem the Same

A Valentine to Sherwood Anderson (1923)

I knew too that through them I knew too that he was through, I knew too that he threw them. I knew too that they were through, I knew too I knew too, I knew I knew them.

I knew to them.

If they tear a hunter through, if they tear through a hunter, if they tear through a hunt and a hunter, if they tear through the different sizes of the six, the different sizes of the six which are these, a woman with a white package under one arm and a black package under the other arm and dressed in brown with a white blouse, the second Saint Joseph the third a hunter in a blue coat and black garters and a plaid cap, a fourth a knife grinder who is full faced and a very little woman with black hair and a yellow hat and an excellently smiling appropriate soldier. All these as you please.

In the meantime examples of the same lily. In this way please have you rung.

(Ramazani, Jahan, ed. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, vol. 1. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003: 194.)

#### Excerpts from *Tender Buttons* (1914)

*A Dog*

A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey.

*A White Hunter*

A white hunter is nearly crazy.

*A Little Bit of a Tumbler*

A shining indication of yellow consists in there having been more of the same color than could have been expected when all four were bought. This was the hope which made the six and seven have no use for any more places and this necessarily spread into nothing. Spread into nothing.

*A Piece of Coffee* (excerpt)

More of double.

A place in no new table.

A single image is not splendor. Dirty is yellow. A sign of more in not mentioned. A piece of coffee is not a detainer. The resemblance to yellow is dirtier and distincter. The clean mixture is whiter and not coal color, never more coal color than altogether.

(Haas, Robert Bartlett, ed. *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974: 23-26.)

**Frank O'Hara**

How Roses Get Black (1948)

First you took Arthur's porcelain  
pony from the mantel and! dashed  
it against the radiator! Oh it was

vile! we were listening to Sibelius.  
And then with lighter fluid you wet

each pretty pink floored rose, tossed

your leonine head, set them on fire.  
Laughing maniacally from the bath-  
room. Talk about burning bushes! I,

who can cut with a word, was quite  
amused. Upon reflection I am not.  
Send me your head to soak in tallow!

You are no myth unless I choose to  
speak. I breathed those ashes secretly.  
Heroes alone destroy, as I destroy

you. Know now that I am the roses  
and it is of them I choose to speak.

(Allen, Donald, ed. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. Berkeley: University of  
California Press, 1971: 3)

## Performed texts

### “I noo too” Fall 2008

to take away to weep they there to WENT to hold the taken aparts, to throw he goes  
they there to mold the same  
to deem to take APART they came to PART to keep the throw away the seeming  
keep to PART the taken-aparts the trash to weep the parts unkept the same to seem  
apart to weep the seem to keep the same

I go to them she went through them I told her not to go to them he goes he went I  
went to throw away the trash a part of them take part apart their parts and go through  
them I know she goes to them they there to go apart > they there to go apart to keep >  
they there to stay the same they there to went the taken-a-parts to go to them > to  
keep the trash to weep to take a part

(Samantha Sherman)

*The capitalizations are to show the speaker/musician where to place a greater accent.  
The “>” shows where pauses should be inserted into the performed reading of the  
text.*

**Rainer Maria Rilke** (excerpt from “tongues assemble” Spring 2009)  
(translated from German)

The lady with the unicorn

We know of and because there are letters that look like a miracle is received, or  
popular books sounded or the poems, or pictures that look at a gallery in a wine by  
the painter succeeded because he not knowing what it was.

(<<http://seriealfa.com/varia/varia1/rilke.htm>>)

## **Dancers' Writings**

I have included the writing from my dancers that were produced during rehearsals, as a way to process either what we were discussing, or what they had just experienced in a movement exercise. The texts beginning “Even when he didn’t see” and “I saw that it then rang” were performed during “I noo too.” These writings, as well as my own, beginning “to take away to weep” were an exploration into the process of revaluing the word, to re-contextualize and de-familiarize common lexical and syntactic elements, and to reorganize them to create a new grammar, a new tongue.

### **Writings on Gesture**

a gesture is a placement of a word into a hand, that hand pushes and pulls the air, breathes the air, like the head can, too, like your back can, when you turn it, and it wants to push you or pull you with it. the gestures are the active part of the words: they are the life in the words and the person. attach human bodies to language. mimic and taunt, pantomime and speak the language one most wants to hear. the language beneath the language. the language in, trying to come out or the movement trying to sit still. (Emmy Levitas)

When people do a lot of physical gestures they are called animated and lively. This makes sense to me. I gesture when words aren’t enough either because the feeling I have is too big for words, goes beyond them or when words don’t fit my feeling what I want to say. I gesture to express intangible wordless ideas. And people *understand* gestures! If I want to describe how an interaction was my wiggling my fingers in



front of my scrunched up face, most people know what that means, have felt that wiggly physical sensation in their bodies. Gestures illustrate my *physical* experience of emotions/ideas. I mostly gesture with hands and face, sometimes shoulders. Sometimes a foot. (Maia Weiss)

When I think of gesture, I think about this couple I saw as I was walking to my car in a parking lot last week. At first, it looked like they were having an incredibly intense discussion – hands flying everywhere, exaggerated facial expressions. But I couldn't hear any of it. As I walked closer to them I realized they were speaking in sign language. Having really never witnessed sign language outside of my little sister's performance of "The Circle of Life" in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade when they had to sign some of the words, I was surprised by how much the entire body was involved. If the gesture itself is the word, the rest of the body, very much including the face, is the intonation. Without knowing what the words meant, through these motions, I could tell that the man was shocked and then the woman was condescending. The man was amused and then the woman was irritated... (Sophie Sotsky)

## **Trisha Brown Cube Exercise**

p – kick right up to left corner, snap twice

y – elbow right

f – phoo

r – drop walk right

om – two snaps

t – thigh

h – right arm thrown up

e – phoo

m – sharp curled

a – down with hands out

n – snap

t – thigh

e – phoo

l – ease steps back

a – hands out

n – snap

d – phoo

! – HA

(Emmy Levitas)

**Performed Text (written by dancers)**

Even when he didn't see

he didn't see

didn't he see

See, he didn't even see

(Maia Weiss)

and then it rang. it rang and then. I saw and then. I saw it rang and rang rang and I  
saw it. it saw it rang and I saw it. I saw. I saw and then. then I saw then it rang then it  
rang then and I saw it. I saw that it then rang I then rang. I rang and rang and then  
rang. and it saw.

(Emmy Levitas)

## **Writings on Interruptions**

The first interruption that comes to mind is my dad walking in on my boyfriend and me my junior year of high school. I remember my head going blank, trying to decide if it had the potential to be funny, trying to remember where my clothes were, what I would say to him after. I also felt embarrassed with my boyfriend – the simple act of my dad seeing us naked together made us evaluate ourselves differently, wonder what it would be like to interrupt ourselves. The ease or rhythm that we achieved was cut into which took away the value of what we were doing, even before we were caught.

(Maia Weiss)

Ways to physically interrupt people...

1. Talk louder over them while they are trying to talk
2. Walk directly in front of them while they're walking
3. Spill something (coffee etc.) on the book they are reading or work they are doing
4. Walk into their room while something important is happening
5. Walk in between two people who are talking and say something to one of them
6. Waking up my dad while he was in the middle of dreaming about my cousins learning to drive
7. interrupting my roommate's phone conversation because I was locked out

(Sophie Sotsky)

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