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In Search of a stimulating Visual Dance Art medium: Overlapping Realities in Live and Screen Dance

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis paper captures research into historical examples of artistic performance pioneers who integrated multiple layers of imagery into complex dialogue and describes how this research inspired and influenced the creation of an original 17-minute video work, “Overlay.”. My interest throughout my MFA Thesis Project has been to understand the effect of fusing or layering multiple movement-based art forms, the application and integration of modern technology to established traditional stage performance, and the creation of engaging new art form.

Viewing link:

[Overlay - Yael Levitin Saban MFA Final Project](#)

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PART 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

It is the first performance of the evening, the hall is crowded, and people are waiting eagerly for the beginning of the show. The lights start to fade in the auditorium while stage lights brighten, declaring the start of the opening act. A tall man in a suit stands up in the audience obstructing the view for others, and as he starts walking towards the stage, people whisper impatiently and even complain loudly. The man ignores them and walks slowly towards the stage. He makes his way onto the stage, slowly taking off his clothes and folds them in a pile, leaving him in just his underwear. Then between the man, and a woman who waited for him on stage, an intricate and passionate duet develops. It is obvious that both beautiful dancers are ballet trained. As the duet is being performed live, a film of the same dancers executing the same movements, magnified and fragmented, is projected on a full-size semi-transparent screen in front of the stage. The framing of the film reveals arms, faces, and hands moving in and out of view only occasionally in synchrony with the live dancing. At the end of the dance, a door opens at the back of the stage and the male dancer exits, while the film shows him walking down the street outside the theater.

Astarte, choreographed by Robert Joffrey ^{[1][2]}, premiered on September 20, 1967 by the Joffrey Ballet in New York City at the City Center Theater. It was a groundbreaking ballet that integrated video projection and dance, thereby enacting a layering of spatial and temporal realities on the live stage. Joffrey created *Astarte* incorporating a wide array of stage technologies, creating a new form of theatrical experience.

In this paper, I discuss a range of artistic practices that integrate multiple layers of imagery into complex dialogue. Following a survey of historical and contemporary works, I describe the process and product of the creative project that culminated in “Overlay”, an

original dance/video work that I premiered in November 2020. My interest throughout this MFA Thesis Project has been to understand the effect of fusing or layering multiple movement-based art forms, to apply and integrate modern technology to established traditional stage performance, and to learn how this layering of moving imagery can create an engaging new art form. In “Overlay”, I use both dance choreography and video projection that has the appearance of movement. My hope is that the layering of these motional channels creates a visual kind of counterpoint that can, in the viewer’s perception, arouse a sensual “third line” of experience that I believe contains the metaphorical power of poetry. While choreography for the traditional live stage relies on a static frame, movement captured by the camera mobilizes two possible perspectives on motion: one when the object moves within the frame and the other when the frame or point of view shifts. In my film, I juxtapose moving human bodies in motion with traveling images of urban scenes, while carefully transitioning between the flow of the body and the direction of the camera motion. I am particularly interested in how the different directions, flow and movement quality in this juxtaposing process accumulated into expressive and thought-provoking dialogue.

In this contextual research here, I focus in depth on two works by renowned choreographers, Robert Joffrey and Merce Cunningham, who worked in different areas of theatrical dance: ballet and modern, respectively. I discuss each of these works with an eye to how the interaction of video and dance functioned. After examining these two dance pieces, I explore a variety of more recent dance works that utilize multi-media technologies and I refer back to Joffrey and Cunningham as the primary touchstone works to outline the range of possible approaches to the merging of multiple imagery sources.

Throughout my MFA Thesis Project, which included both academic research and creation of a new artistic work, my interest has been in the overlaying and superimposition of

multiple channels of visual and motional data. All of the examples I discuss in this paper reflect this interest in this counterpoint of multiple channels, particularly dance and moving images.

This contrapuntal interest is rooted in the idea that each “voice” has complexity and integrity, is involved in its own right, and can contribute to a rich interaction among perceptual channels. In this model, the channels are independent from each other (for example when a dancer is moving there is no “reaction” on the video channel and vice versa), but work intriguingly together. The process of creating *Overlay* was guided by these themes. My goal was to create an artistic effect leading to palpable emotional impact. My overall artistic interest was in learning how to merge multiple extreme realities like dancers performing at home due to Covid-19 social isolation requirements, and the empty streets of NYC during civil unrest, into a visual work.

I am using *Astarte* as one of my foundational examples for looking at dance merged with video projection; it is one of the first works created for the ballet stage that merged dance choreography with video projection. It is an early example of merging, collapsing, and viscerally blending of the two art forms. *Astarte* is a mystical, erotic blend of ballet and au courant multimedia spectacle about a Babylonian goddess known throughout the Eastern Mediterranean from the Bronze Age to classical time.

This ballet was one of the first “psychedelic rock ballets”. And as critic Herbert Migdoll notes in a review at the time, “Sometimes in the arts, things happen with a certain synergy. Bob wanted to bring film and ballet together at a time when interaction between the arts was a big thing. And he wanted to include rock music, the psychedelic style of the period, the spirituality and the free love” (Smith 6). At the end of the dance, when the duet finishes, the set moves, the male dancer leaves the stage through the back door. As he leaves, a

projected film is showing the dancer walking outside and proceeding into the street. This is a powerful example of how technology can be used to introduce layers of reality.

Biped (1999) by Merce Cunningham ^[3] is another example of the integration of two art forms. In this groundbreaking work, the company dancers share the performance space with geometric designs as well as virtual 3-D figures, shown on a downstage scrim, that are larger-than-life computer-generated models or avatars of the dancers themselves. The live dancing is angular, intricate, and spacious. It is a large group of 15 dancers incorporating Cunningham's demanding technique of bending and curving torsos and the use of complex arms and leg movements. The choreography involves intricate patterns that create fluid dance configurations. The projection includes big figures that are skeletonized dancers' bodies. The images are projected against a massive opaque screen that is hanging from the ceiling at the front of the stage, and reflect off thin white strips at the back of the stage. The live dancers appear to perform behind and within the projections. The figures are abstract in that they are big and out of proportion, one dimensional, and out of sync with the dance onstage. The projections are intermittent and fluid, travelling horizontally across the frame, hovering almost as ethereal suggestions of partially seen entities. The conjunction of these two image systems suspends us between two longings, each marked by what the other lacks, as Roy Sanjoy describes: "The animations have a scale, range and expansiveness that the dancers cannot attain; like essences distilled from the human body, I couldn't help but think of them as spirits, or astral projections. Yet for all their freedom and sheer beauty, they lack the physical presence that the dancers bring, the flesh, the weight, the sweat, the effort – the life" (Roy 5). The images are fragmentations of something live, a suspension of something present while both things change each other's perspective. Cunningham has written of *Biped*: "The dance gives me the feeling of switching channels on the TV...the action varies from slow

formal sections to rapid broken-up sequences where it is difficult to see all the complexity" (Cunningham, Merce 1).

This critically acclaimed work stands as a highly sophisticated example of multi-media and multi-channel work for the live stage. To a great extent, it inspired me to experiment with similar possibilities in my creative work in the Hunter MFA program, starting with special lighting effects designed to define the dancing space, and moving into videos of a variety of moving geometric and organic shapes projected onto the dancers and fabric constructions in the stage space. When the pandemic made a live production impossible, my creative project morphed into a film work based essentially on a similar layering of images.

My search for inspiration from artists that have merged experimental lighting and movement choreography led me to Loie Fuller, (1862 - 1928). Fuller, an American dancer who achieved international distinction for her innovations in theatrical lighting, held many patents for stage lighting technology, including the first patent ever for chemical mixes of gels and the use of luminescent salts. She was an early innovator in lighting design and was the first to mix in colors of light and explore new angles of projection (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). She was also the first artist to darken audience space, and to add a black curtain to surround the stage and as result accentuate the effect of the lighting. "The complexity of the choreography resided in continually changing forms and shapes created as she manipulated precisely the silk and lighting" (Sommer 55).

Instrumental in her swirling dance style were many layers of silk costumes. She often manipulated the fabric via custom-designed armature that was made out of bamboo. The silks were illuminated by clever placement and management of lights, some concealed beneath the

floor and projected upwards through her costume. As described by Sally R. Sommer in *The Drama Review*, Fuller's production techniques were revolutionary. She also pioneered the technique of mobile lights, as she engaged a team of men charged with moving light instruments in sync with the dance, while also changing colored gels. This complexity in stagecraft was revolutionary at the time, and much of the complicated, technology-packed showmanship we see in contemporary productions today can be traced back to Fuller. "The complexity of the choreography resided in continually changing forms and shapes created as she manipulated precisely the silk and lighting" (Sommer 55).

Fuller's "Serpentine Dance" ^[4] was a striking white skirt dance where she discovered the effects of stage light casted from different angles on a gauze fabric of a costume. During the dance Loie held a long skirt in her hands, and waved it around, revealing her bodily form inside the draperies. The lighting effects created the illusion that her costume was catching fire and taking shapes reminiscent of flowers, clouds, birds, and butterflies.

"The audience saw not a woman, but a giant violet, a butterfly, a slithering snake, and a white ocean wave. Each shape rose weightlessly into the air, spun gently in its pool of changing, rainbow lights, hovered, and then wilted away to be replaced by a new form. After forty-five minutes, the last shape melted to the floorboards, Fuller sank to her knees, head bowed, and the stage went black" (Garelick 3).

By darkening the audience space and clearing the stage from all decorations, she created a "black box," a setting that helped with her elaborate lighting schemes and created an illusion of her seeming to be floating on air. As written in a *Le Monde Artis* article:

"Like a strange Jewel hidden in the depths of your black velvet case you excuse outwards, heated from the burning cinders. Prismatic rays pay in your hair; the light caresses and lasciviously plays on your hair; the light caresses and

lasciviously play on your plump childish body; exquisitely denuded by the transparency of the rosy silk crepe. A whirlwind stirs you, and like a fabulous salamander you become smoky-colored from the burning flame. It is a mirage, a magic, which burns our vision, intoxicating our spirits...” (Sommer 6).

Her dances created the illusion that the fabric itself was animated and that the dancer and the cloth were one. In the initial planning for my MFA Project, I was inspired by Fuller use of a surface, her multilayered costumes surface, to project lighting effects. When I changed my project to a film, I translated this concept into the editing process of overlaying video files of dancers with films of urban landscapes.

Alwin Nikolais (1910-1993) was an American choreographer, composer, and designer whose abstract dances combined motion with a wide variety of technical effects and complete freedom from established definitions of dance expression. In his extensive repertoire Nikolais devised a methodology of abstraction of the human body that encompassed costumes, stage sets, choreography, lighting, and music. For example, *Noumenon* ^[5] is a duet in which dancers are wrapped in stretchy fabric that is illuminated with diverse lighting schemes while a static projection of an undefined shape, almost like smoke, is on the backdrop.

Nikolais’ projections were usually static, though highly colorful and complex, while the dancers’ movements and actions of sets and props contributed the kinetic element to his stage, while Fuller sometimes put her lighting instruments into motion as well. Given technological advances, Joffrey and Cunningham were able to add fully mobile projected images to the dance movement itself. I was interested, in my project, to overlay independently conceived channels thereby creating a fully contrapuntal array of images. In contrast to my vision, Nikolais projected static images on the dancers whereas in my creation

flowing moving images were used.

I believe that it is precisely the availability of advanced technology and access to vast amounts of digital material that is pushing entertainment and the arts industries into innovative new conceptions. Live dance performance has benefitted and will continue to benefit from these new possibilities. While much of the classical ballet concert dance world is rooted in age-old traditions, with undisputable importance, new audiences and practitioners with new expectations demand that the art form evolve and adapt to the new technological environment. I will now discuss three dance works from this century that continue this trend.

The Australian Dance Theater's *Held* (2004) ^[6] is a work by Garry Stewart that explores physics and perception, via the connection between dance and live photography. The piece was made in collaboration with one of the world's most widely known dance photographers, Lois Greenfield. Here, she captures still images of in the moment of live dance on stage; these photographs are then immediately re-integrated into the stage space in a variety of ways.

The first section of *Held* is a duet between two women, followed by a few solos all incorporating high energy and athleticism. The dancers execute quick, sharp movements that are synchronized with the music, by Darrin Verhagen. On either side of the stage are two downstage screens that face the audience, and the dancers perform in the middle area. The linoleum floor is white and the lights on the dancers are colorless and very bright, making an ideal setting to capture still pictures. During this section of the performance, Lois Greenfield, the photographer, is sitting upstage center capturing still images of the dancers that are then projected onto the screens. These images change every few seconds, and essentially freeze moments of dancing time. Because the dancing itself is so fast paced, the

photography/projection process amplifies the kinetic effect of the movement, revealing intimately the dancers' immense efforts.

The multiple contrasts in the piece: stillness versus motion, present versus recent past, and the live versus recorded realities merge to create an enacted "essay" on time and feeling. By merging Stewart's choreography with the image/time capturing technique, the work offers the close-up reality of small details in the movement and the strength in the muscles, face, and the entire bodies of the dancers, even the way the clothes move, the hair flies, and the intimate facial expressions. Through the contrapuntal highlighting of the temporal contrast between movement and stillness, this work emphasizes the astonishing athleticism of the dancing in a way that the naked eye cannot accomplish.

In another section of the dance, the screens begin moving towards one another and meet in center stage. There is no live human movement on stage while the screens move, but there are projected close-ups of the body in movement, the music changes to classical and the mood becomes more intimate. At this point, the roles reverse, and a new chapter of the dance begins where the movement occurs on the screen while the group dancers remain static. The contrasting stillness and flow create tension and suspense. The projections zoom into the face and catch the dancers' expressions. Then, when there is an aggressive duet performed on the floor, Lois, the photographer, shoots close-up images of body parts that create intimacy. For the audience, the techniques used in the piece aid the viewers' navigation through stillness and flow.

The various uses of image technologies lead to radically different artistic effects. In contrast to *Biped* and *Astarte*, both of which use a front screen that creates the illusion that the projected figures are dancing on air, in *Held*, the screens themselves are embedded in the concrete reality of the scene: they act as objects and as facilitators. In the case of *Biped*, the

projected images are always in motion, which lends them their own animated quality as opposed to the still images in *Held*. In *Astarte*, the live duet is dissected, in a way, by the close-up video. In all three cases, it is the overlaying of diverse image channels that builds toward intense kineticism.

Sixteen (R)Evolution (2006) ^[7], by Troika Ranch, also incorporates projection technology into live dance. The dance, choreographed by Dawn Stoppiello, is similar to Cunningham's work in that both creations integrate emerging digital technologies as essential components of live performance, and by doing so, reshape dance theatre practices. *Sixteen (R)Evolution* begins with several almost naked couples on the stage, which are joined by other dancers entering the stage in large-scale movement behavior. Meanwhile, asymmetrical black-and-white wavy lines are projected onto the dancers, which produce an illusion that the dancers bodies are fragmented. Later, a white rectangle that changes width periodically, is projected onto the back screen, so that a dancer dressed purely in white is alternately revealed and obscured: sometimes the dancer is in view, while other times just a part of his body is visible. His movement is fluid and sensual, which contrasts with the linearity of the projection. As a new group of dancers enter the stage, the wave and rectangle projection overlap and all elements of the projection and dance work together to reiterate this main theme of visibility and concealment as well as creating a contrapuntal visual texture. A similar use of graphic elements projected into the performance space occurs in *Biped*, with a slight difference, as there is no obstructed view in *Biped*. Rather, the moving lines transform the stage into a dynamic space, the dancers work their way through: The outflowing geometrical line groupings exert a strong kinesthetic sensation, as if one is being pulled into the space, drawn into a tunnel and towards the vanishing point out of which the line patterns emerge. They dance without recognizing the outflow of lines behind them, through them, and

past them. In *Sixteen (R)Evolution*, in contrast, the dancers are obstructed and obscured by the projects, as if the images actually shape the space actively. The two dance creations offer a contrapuntal experience that arises from the merge of contrasting kinetic values between dancer and projected moving images in multimedia scenography.

In Wayne McGregor's *Entity* (2008) ^[8], there are three low-to-the-ground horizontal screens surrounding the sides and the back of the stage, and during the dance, they rise and fall asynchronously. McGregor's movement vocabulary is sharp, angular, and unexpectedly disjointed. The projection on the screens changes from simple colors to geometrical shapes, real size flying birds, and other non-human figures in motion. The merge between the abrupt and discontinuous movement style and the more "organic" visual content in the projections on the smoothly moving screens is another example of a multi-channel or contrapuntal visual array. In both McGregor's and Cunningham's work the movement vocabulary is angular and precise and the element of technology introduces the opposite quality. From the review of *Biped* by Sanjoy Roy at the Dance Service UK: "The dance is densely textured, continuously evolving, commanding attention to its details and its groupings" (Roy 2). The contrasting projected imagery of real and digital figures complements the movement quality, and at the same time adds an element of geometric content, highlighting the movement investigation. The pieces exemplify how the movement research is complemented and enriched by the depth of the videos.

In music, counterpoint is the relationship between voices which are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and contour. It has been most commonly identified in the European classical tradition, strongly developing during the Renaissance and in much of the common practice period, especially in the Baroque. The term originates from the Latin

punctus contra punctum meaning note against note. There are many examples of song melodies that sound well together when performed simultaneously. This practice of combining “voices” has been a highly developed practice for centuries in the European tradition. I would like to create the same symbiotic relationship between projections and my dance vocabulary.

In literature, intertextuality is the relationship between different texts, it is an important stage in understanding a piece of literature, as it is necessary to see how other works have influenced the author and how different texts are employed in the piece to convey certain meanings. Intertextuality is the process of shaping a text’s meaning through other texts. It can refer to a reader's reference to one text while reading another.

Layering is a culinary term that describes how one flavor or texture is placed over another to create a dish that, besides being delicious, is rich, multifaceted, and complex. First, we detect each individual flavor, then we assemble, and then it gradually comes altogether. The layered flavor and texture elements that help to nuance the eating experience.

All of these practices and concepts operate with the notion that multiple independent inputs create resonances well beyond the possibilities of the primary materials.

Film practice: Layering

Layering in a film is something that any video editor can achieve. It requires you to shoot a second reel of footage that you then can layer over the top of your original footage as in the effect of double-exposure. We use the technique of layering in order to increase the suggestiveness of the work through multi-channel density.

Houston (2013) ^[9], is a film feature by Bastian Günther that relies on the layering of images, produces by the use of old lenses that refract light in wildly beautiful ways. During

important scenes the screen images are flooded with multi-colored beams and spots. Günther captures light and layers it over the image to give certain scenes added dimensions. The movie is about Clemens Trunschka, a depressed headhunter from Germany travelling to Houston to hire a high-ranking executive. When Günther overlays certain images over each other, each image conveys a distinct meaning individually, and together they amplify the movie's point that we are all bundled up with money, technology, and corporate centered economy while we are trying to make our way through our lives. The film is intriguing, and every shot has purpose to deepen the message the movie tries to convey. Layering helps the film become dense, complex and beautiful.

Meaning of the Interval (1987) ^[10], by Edin Velez's is an evocative documentary film research that redefines and explores the subtle contrasts found between modern and the traditional cultures found in Japan. The film consists of images he gathered over a year and a half while living in Japan during the early 1980's. The film is a kaleidoscopic, personal view of cultural contradictions that exist in the Far East. In the film he deploys three panels, typically hinged together side by side in a manner of an altarpiece or a triptych mixing footage of a chaotic mob along with scenes of docile Tokyo inhabitants and picture-postcard shots of Japanese water gardens. The film has no narration but rather relies on the contrapuntal effect of presenting multiple visual channels simultaneously.

Dance applications

Video experimentation was established several decades ago and was pursued by small but vibrant practitioners within the fine-arts world: the video artist. Video art, made possible by the availability of inexpensive portable technologies, appealed to artists who were intimidated by the properties and expectations of conventional television. Artsy, intellectually

stimulating and sometimes lacking narration video art, in its most native and raw form doesn't fit into a network broadcaster's menu. It was those trends of the less expensive digital computer editing software and the affordable portable cameras that made my project possible.

The contrasting kinetic values between dancer and projected moving image in multimedia scenography provide the viewer with a particular type of synesthetic experience. Projected moving images radically transform the stage, whether the images are live, pre-recorded, figurative or abstract; whether they are used as decor, part of a narrative, or as representations and in whatever space they occupy on or around the set. Kinetic synaesthesia is a transdisciplinary concept formulated in light of psychological, physiological, and phenomenological discoveries and it accounts for both synaesthesia and kinesthesia. "The word synaesthesia was coined to refer to a neurological condition where the stimulation of one sensory channel elicits an impression in another, as in coloured hearing" (Boucher 2). The experience results from the proper interaction of kinesthesia to each medium, the dancing body and the moving image.

Today, as a result of technological innovations that have made cameras and editing equipment accessible to the general public, there are a wide variety of possibilities for integrating multimedia into the process of creating and performing dance. In my ongoing work I aim to investigate the ways in which multimedia creates a new experiential layer in the aesthetic experience. I find the intersectionality of the dialogue between two art forms, dance and video, to be deeply compelling. Therefore, in creating a hybrid art form with both video and movement, I seek not to allow either art form to overpower the other in the final product. I am driven to create a dynamic interaction among powerfully independent channels, each having a separately rich meaningful substance. The extensive use of projected moving images in performing arts is part of a cultural trend.

PART 2: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

For over two decades my experience in dance was mainly as a performer with major repertory dance companies and I was fortunate enough to dance for many renowned choreographers. I danced with several professional dance companies such as Bat Dor National Contemporary Dance Company of Israel, Ballet Hispanico of New York and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago to name a few. As a result of my vast performance experience with such companies, I acquired a deep understanding and appreciation of diverse dance works from around the world covering a wide range of techniques and dance styles.

Throughout my journey at Hunter College, my intention has been to merge my prior classical dance experiences, cultural background and musicality with a new interest in multi-channel art making to find my own voice as a choreographer. At the same time, I have intended to explore the richness of my own experience as a performer, actively trying not to follow any style or idea that I was exposed to in the past.

As an artist, I primarily initiate my work from the physicality of the body, and I continue to use my body as the source of my artistic process. However, I have come to understand that it no longer challenges me to create work in the “pure movement” mode. Instead, my interest now lies in exploring lighting, scenery, props, and projection. My approach is invested in abstraction as opposed to direct narration, in poetics rather than discursiveness. At the same time, I continue to understand dance as an avenue to encourage a sense of belonging, and connection to our memories, emotions, and ultimately our senses.

Since my second semester at Hunter College, I have been researching multi-channel production in my choreographic process. For my first piece premiering in Fall 2019, I used two large white wooden screens onto which I projected a film. A projector was set in front of the stage, and the dancers danced between the projector and the panels, so the reflection

appeared on the dancer's bodies and on the white panels. In another creation premiering Spring 2020, I explored working with fabrics (in homage to Loie Fuller): using white sheer cloth that was hanging from the ceiling and loose fabric that was manipulated by the dancers. In preparation for these projects, I assembled simple footage, such as screen savers or moving geometric shapes like kaleidoscopes. My objective was to create a strong simultaneous connection between the two channels of video and choreography. However, I was not satisfied with the banality of the video footage. For my Thesis Project, my original plan was to use my previous creations as guidelines and to develop my basic videos into more substantial image channels while continuing my body-based movement investigations. As a result of the global pandemic, however, I was not able to present a live show. The alternative result is now a dance video called *Overlay*.

My goal in this MFA Thesis Project was to explore multimedia and movement as two intertwining art forms, to showcase functional connections between them: My interest was to overlay two different and independent media channels, each of which had substance and complexity, that when merged create new, invigorated work.

Thus, my plan became to revisit my previous projects, revise and upgrade the material while working separately on the video presentation with a videographer. Due to covid-19 home isolation, and the absence of work obligations, I was able to learn several completely new skills such as video editing, music editing, choreographing via zoom, and orchestrating digitally an entire artistic creation. Additionally, my plan was to challenge my choreography in a separate process, so I called upon my old highly professional dance colleagues and upgraded my dance material emotional and physical requirements to fit their extremely strong abilities and performance quality. My goal was for the result outcome to showcase a much more mature and highly committed work. The second phase of my creation was to

organically merge those elements. Through the academic research described above, I identified those pioneering artists that also used video projection in the past and better understood their immense contribution to the contemporary dance world. This information was quite inspiring and enabled me to develop new ideas for my project.

While creating my final project *Overlay*, my primary anchor remained in my academic and artistic research about the mixing of two channels, which was the idea that I sought to convey so strongly. Although it was tempting to go outdoors and dance, to look for an interesting site, an interesting camera angle and explore its effect on my project, I was reluctant to do that because I wanted to keep an honest connection to my thesis of the overlapping realities. My connection to and passion for my research has guided me through the process of continuing my research despite many obstacles. When the pandemic hit there were two extreme realities that stood in contrast to one another, one being the stressful isolation of humankind during uncertain times and the other the constant serenity nature has always offered us. For this reason, I first captured moving images of waterfalls, flowing clouds, falling leaves moving in the wind, while improvising with movement at home, exploring free flow without any specific content drive. However, a preliminary merging of those two elements into one video, did not give the desired contrast effect I sought. On the contrary, my movement style, which is flowy and calm, was only echoed by the video imagery, and overall, my project radiated beauty and tranquility but not anything deeper.

As a result, I changed my shooting sites to man-made elements in urban landscapes such as roads, concrete, metal bridges, and industrial areas around the city, places where humanity has intervened with nature. The pandemic gave me the opportunity to capture the city in its quiet time - its empty streets, boarded stores, and fallen traffic cones. To me, the images that I sought to incorporate in my project suggested an isolated environment and

humanity during trying times.

Secondly, I worked with my dancers on Zoom to create a movement sequence based on intimate physicality. My dancers were all ex-colleagues from Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and we shared the same background, having worked closely for over a decade. During these times of social isolation, working through zoom provided the opportunity to engage and reconnect with my old friends and amazing artists from around the world. We worked collaboratively using a metronome set on three different tempo versions from slow to fast which enabled me to easily add music to it later. Joe Tucker composed the soundtrack for the piece. He created several tracks of different styles of music that I then edited and merged with pedestrian, voice-over and nature sounds.

The short dance film *Overlay* can be viewed as a personal work-related travel from my home in New Jersey to Manhattan, a trip to which I and many who live in the greater New York City area could relate. In it, the viewer follows my daily travels as a student and faculty member at Hunter College: my journey starts at the George Washington bridge and ends at Hunter College. I started shooting in March 2020 when the city was under lock down due to Covid, which gave me a surreal opportunity to document the sparse traffic on the George Washington Bridge leading to Manhattan. When I reached the city, I roamed and looked for places that have connection to the arts, in particular dance: For example, City Center, Broadway district, Lincoln Center and Hunter College. The streets were vacant with signs everywhere about cancelled shows and performances, and Covid restrictions. When the social turbulence started in the city in April 2020, I returned for my second search for footage, and this time I was able to capture the city one day after the peak of the demonstrations. The streets were empty, the stores were boarded up and only the police force was visible. My footage was all taken in motion either through walking alongside an object or while driving.

My first inspiration for movement investigation involved walking in my own home with socks and filming only my feet. The frustration of not being able to practice dance and move led me to improvise walking in one place. I created my first dance movie called *Legs* featuring my feet on one track overlaid with footage of New York City, which was the seed for the creation of *Overlay*. I kept shooting the city and continued to accumulate interesting footage and material prior to my collaboration with my dancer colleagues. When I found a desired image that inspired me, I worked with each dancer separately via Zoom and we improvised and researched movements that I had in mind according to my footage of the city. I introduced each dancer in their home as well as on different sites in the city and when I edited the film, my main objective was to alternate the flow of images.

The creation of *Overlay* was the result of a change of plans, self-teaching, and rejuvenation. The dance is intended to be a reflection of my own self, my own world, in my own private home, in my own seclusion. I filmed my dancers and myself at home on a white plain background. The reality on the other hand is New York City, that is empty, hurt and lonely due to a world pandemic, subsequent extreme social isolation, and intense social turbulence.

Overlay is very personal work that was achieved through a challenging process of self-learning self-teaching of a movie editing software, and an iterative trial and error process of refinement. After this laborious 6-month process, I reached a version that matches my original ambition to create a vibrant multi-channel work that reflects both my concept and my experience of the world in a deeply troubled time.

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