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Abstract

Subjectivity: Exploring Transformation Within Historical Form explores modern dance pioneer Bella Lewitzky's historical work, *Inscape* (1976), reinterprets it through a contemporary lens, and implements a collaborative cross-disciplinary approach in its evolution. While informed by my Lewitzky reconstruction experience, this investigation stems from a desire to assertively engage with history while finessing my creative voice and utilizing current technology that was unavailable when the dance work premiered. My process' intricacies were refined through extensive research into: historical dance reconstruction, Lewitzky's collaborative relationship with *Inscape*'s costume designer Rudi Gernreich, imagination psychology, and influential choreographer and multimedia unifier Alwin Nikolais. My project's culminating dance film, *Metaphase*, marks an insightful venture into both filmmaking and my own collaborative partnership with friend and costume designer, Andrew Palomares. These notable outcomes, along with my continued examination of dance history, will propel my creative practice in the future to provide engaging dance works and build a connection between myself and other choreographers.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Subjectivity: Exploring Transformation Within Historical Form

by

Danae McWatt

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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College of the Arts

Thesis Committee:



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SUBJECTIVITY: EXPLORING TRANSFORMATION WITHIN HISTORICAL FORM

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2024

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Introduction

Subjectivity: exploring transformation within historical form explores the connection between past and present, imagination and reality, and movement and fabric. My thesis project unveils itself partly as a performative film supported by written documentation that dives into the historic work of Bella Lewitzky, and it acts as the inspirational catalyst for two original choreographic works. As a West Coast modern dance pioneer, innovator, and arts activist, Lewitzky was a master teacher and a woman of action. Her dance/movement technique ensures a strong aligned body, and encourages mindfulness, while guiding dancers to work safely for the purpose of longevity. As a choreographer, each of her artistic endeavors is crafted with distinct intention and biomechanical efficiency, which are the attributing factors for her dances' uniqueness. My academic, creative, and professional practices are intertwined in my adoration and respect for Lewitzky, as she serves as an inspiration for this project.

My central idea personalizes part of a historical dance work, *Inscape* (1976), while intricately crafting an imaginary world utilizing fabric and technology to bring out different points of view from when the work was first created. The resulting film, *Metaphase*, is a triptych consisting of three solos inspired by Lewitzky's solo from her 1976 dance *Inscape*. My three-part film, *Metaphase*, mirrors my artistic and technical transformation within her choreographic and physical methodologies. Through this process, I demonstrate how I embody history, integrate that knowledge through a choreographed reinterpretation, and present my choreographic voice apart from the initial seed of inspiration. After viewing and reconstructing the excerpted solo from *Inscape* that sets up the creative foundation for the subsequent sections of the film, the opening section, "Crypsis" is a solo work of my original choreography, that is my response to delving into Lewitzky's world. It was shot using immersive film techniques (e.g.,

POV perspective, close-ups, etc.). Following the conclusion of this first solo, the second solo, “Metamorphosis” showcases a variation on the original work, a choreographic reinterpretation that combines my voice and Lewitzky’s. This was shot using different filming techniques and shot from angles that also deeply immerse the viewer. The third solo, which demonstrates how I embody history, is Lewitzky’s reconstructed solo, “The Swan.” In this section, the camera tracks the performer, recreating the perspective of a seated audience member watching the performance. Ideally, this emulates the traditional proscenium perspective that was experienced when the piece originally premiered. The three sections of the project are framed with Lewitzky’s original concept of imaginative exploration. The film progresses and her definitive influence becomes clearer, ending with the dance that initiated my process. My in-depth work with my mentor, John Pennington, and my background in Lewitzky technique connect the dots since I am familiar with the technique vocabulary, her other choreographic works, and the concepts that inspired her artistic choices and partnerships.

For this project, I collaborated with long-time friend and costume designer, Andrew Palomares, who crafted two costumes: one that I wore for the first and second solos and another for the last solo. In addition, Palomares and I collaborated to create a fabric environment that expands upon the idea of fabric having a fluid role as both garment and environment construct in an imaginary landscape.

In this written thesis, I unpack Lewitzky’s historic choreographic work, delving into her creative practices with emphasis on the time *Inscape* premiered, the impact of historical forms on contemporary practices, as well as exercises, application, and analysis of cross-disciplinary utilization of imagination within composition and its inherent place in embodying history. This project is the impetus for furthering future research, understanding, and implementation of other

artistic disciplines and collaborations (fabric or otherwise) in dance, intricately applying different technology forms to my craft, as well as exploring the intersection between Lewitzky and myself as it pertains to dance in the future.

Rationale

I have been fascinated by dance and science for as long as I can remember. As a child, I loved moving, and as a budding critical thinker, I felt accomplished when I understood how something worked. When I engage with science, I am also engaging with the past. My grandfather was a history teacher and my grandmother a civil rights activist, which meant many history lessons garnered a respect for what came before me as I registered how the past, present, and future are intertwined. Fast forward to my young adulthood, where my undergraduate experience consisted of dance science and kinesiology, and I received exposure to dance's biomechanics and anatomical analysis through California State University, Long Beach's Dance Science route. While in college, I was introduced to Lewitzky's movement technique and principles through one of her faithful protégés, John Pennington. I was magnetically drawn to the physicality, but also the emphasis on designing space, safe movement practice, and movement analysis. Technical aspects were no longer shrouded, but clear enough for me to latch onto and make effective changes. These foundational experiences helped hone my critical eye for picking up movement quickly and problem-solving.

2024 marks sixteen years of my being immersed in the Lewitzky technique. I avidly use the movement methods as a teacher in the Los Angeles K-12 setting. Within that time, I have continued working with Pennington as a member of his company, Pennington Dance Group (PDG). As a longstanding company member of PDG, I have not only performed in the director's

works that are heavily influenced by Lewitzky's technique, but I have also had the honor of reconstructing and restaging at least four of her works on other dance companies. As a result, I am well-versed in her technique, performance structure, and methodology. Pennington is preparing me for the position as a legatee of Lewitzky's work, thus giving me the rights to many of her choreographic works. I have been inside of many of her dances, and after currently observing "The Swan," it generated profound personal connections.

The solo's spatial and movement characteristics drew me in, and conjured questions pertaining to my movement aesthetic and experience. When I first watched "The Swan" and observed its continuous, or sustained and almost meditative quality, I recognized the performer slowly journeying from one side to the other and asked myself, "What happens next? If the character's journey continued, where would they go?" I was compelled to answer those questions by immersing myself in the process. Additionally, I tend to favor quick, complex, and powerful movements, and "The Swan" contrasts my natural tendencies. What does that movement disparity feel like? My reconstruction stems from a phenomenological desire. Considering dance innovations of the past, I readily contemplate and appreciate what history has to offer; however, I realize just how difficult it is to embody rich work outside my lived experiences.

Dance is unique to its performing arts counterparts in the sense that passing on both past productions and movement techniques is a transient physical and verbal practice. There are seldomly any complete scripts, scores, or written correspondences generated during the creative process. Video and film exist, once we get to the 20th century, and serve as a useful tool, but there is still potential for the seed of a work or movement to get lost in translation because most of these videos/films were shot with one camera from one spot. Furthermore, archival footage has not been consistent within dance history due to the expense and limited access to film

technology during the rehearsal process and performances until very recently. Therefore, there are plenty of lost creations, nuances, and insights from past innovators. I am pursuing this film project, because I want to preserve a valuable technique while integrating historical forms into my own evolving creative practices, as well as acknowledging contemporary practices and implementing technology that was not available during Lewitzky's time to initiate new experiences with audiences. This project marks the beginning of an evolution in my creative practices where I am focusing on in-depth research and conceptualization geared to effectively design a world within my dances where each detail is carefully considered, thus avoiding the trap of my choreography looking analogous, stagnate, or arbitrary.

Research

Reconstruction: Considerations and Controversy

Modern dance has been around since the early twentieth century, and while its progenitors may not have been as concerned with their work being preserved and reconstructed, many of their practitioners became concerned with sustaining their teachings and dances. Motives stem from appreciation to analysis, and exploring possible connections between temporal context, physical content, and artistic intent. Modern dance and ballet trusts exist for the sake of preservation. Examples include the trusts of Martha Graham, George Balanchine, and the Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis Foundation, and although each organization implements different methods, the trusted members archive and maintain the artistic legacy of these dance pioneers.¹ My project utilizes the act of reconstruction as a means to explore Lewitzky's form and intent, and enables

¹ Yeoh, Francis. "The Choreographic Trust: Preserving Dance Legacies." *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 224–49. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41723120>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2024.

me to investigate the contrast between a dancer in the 1970's versus a dancer in 2024, executing the same work but through completely different lenses. My reconstruction of Lewitzky's white dress solo ("The Swan" from *Inscape*) allows me to revive a historic work, while my second solo, "Metamorphosis" is a response to Lewitzky's that can be considered as an act of reinterpretation. My inclusion of restaging Lewitzky's solo and reinterpretation response led me to inquire what I should bear in mind.

In bringing dance works back from the past, reconstructors should consider what the dance says in the present and how that information is of value. Art and personal philosophy are intrinsically linked and often portrayed in creative works regardless of time, perhaps even more so since philosophies continuously evolve. Gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and politics are some of the necessary elements artists use as inspiration based on their perspectives. In sociological studies, critical reflexivity refers to an individual's ability to identify their perspective and beliefs and understand how those are socially shaped through critical thinking (Seay et al.). Within the context of dance reconstruction, dance scholar Linda Caruso Haviland believes that:

When one operates from this stance of critical reflexivity then it is impossible to avoid the questions that reveal the political and cultural pressures that decide what is archived or preserved, what is retrieved, why it is retrieved, how it is reconstituted and re-presented, and what it both meant and means. (Caruso Haviland 5)

What choreographers or staggers choose to bring back is just as important as why, and current events (of the respective time) can play a role. Pennington's reconstruction of *The Beloved* is a significant example of how either current social issues can factor into the restaging process, or the restager may bring attention to past issues appearing in the present.

While Horton and Lewitzky's *The Beloved* was choreographed in 1948 and Pennington's reconstruction of it transpired in 2016, the historical social issues of past and present are effectively tied. *The Beloved* was based on a newspaper article about the murder of a woman by her husband. She was beaten to death with a Bible because he suspected her of infidelity. Comparable to a "bird trapped in a cage" (Pennington), she had to navigate being stalked in her own home and the dance encapsulates the implicit anxiety and manipulation. When Pennington reconstructed this piece, it was just before the height of the #METOO Movement (2017), and attention was being drawn to consent and abuse. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is an issue that transcends time, which alludes to a recurring message's invaluableness in art and consequently dance. Finding parallels between past and present, and art and reality is introspective work; therefore, it makes the effort and time that goes into reconstructions meaningful and leaves substantial room for contemporary interpretation.

In the reconstruction world, reinterpretation and reinvention are possibilities that at times lead to polarizing stances regarding how a historical work is used. This stems from the differences in interpreting similar words and acts that seemingly pair with the act of reconstruction. Reconstruct and restage are used interchangeably within the world of preservation; however, reimagine, reinterpret, and reinvent are seen apart from the former. While reconstruction or restaging stays as close to the original material as possible, reinterpretation and reinvention utilize the initial creation as a generator to invent new movement and as a result, shift the intended effect.

An example of this is Mino Nicholas' version of choreographer Doris Humphrey's *The Banshee* (1928). He cast himself and donned Kabuki makeup and a wig while Humphrey was the original performer. Nicholas' gender interchanging choice is considered both a "performer-

oriented intention” (Main 22) and a non-movement-based reinterpretation. Rachael Riggs Leyva, Ohio-based dance educator and Labanotator expresses the importance of contextualization. She expresses that, “the meaning of a dance is changed when its context is changed: who is performing it, why it is being staged, where, what is now going on in the world” (Riggs Leyva 1). The audience will interpret the work differently because of the implications of the performer’s gender and dress. According to both Haviland and André Lepecki, a New York-based performance studies scholar and writer, reinvention is an opportunity because it redirects choreographers to engage with original material with a sense of possibility.

There is controversy regarding the need for or act of reconstruction and re-enactment. *The New Yorker* dance critic, Joan Acocella (1945-2024), questions the point of bringing back older works when the creator has passed and touches on dance’s fragility. She reasons that there is an imminent eventuality to these dances because the spirit of what made them special dies with the creator. What is the purpose of re-creating a piece of art that is live, and that is visible yet becomes invisible? Other dance critics and choreographers echo Acocella’s sentiments on dance’s fleeting nature, and that the objective of a dance or any work of art is to capture a moment in time and then become a moment in history shaped by critical reflexivity. These concerns conjure important frames that enter the conversations of reconstruction and re-enactment, and those are nostalgia, misplacement (of history), and imitation. To counteract the tendency to view reconstruction only as a means to acquiesce to nostalgia, make up for a “failure in cultural memory,” or purely imitate choreography Lepecki describes a “will to archive” (Lepecki 32). He proposes, “‘will to archive’ as referring to a capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of ‘impalpable possibilities’” (Lepecki 32). It essentially means that one should allow for unlimited potential within a renewed process.

Collaborative Partnership: Lewitzky and Gernreich

Commissioned costuming and true collaboration maintain notable distinctions when considering the relationship between “motion and fabric” (Lewitzky) artistic disciplines. Regarding Lewitzky and in particular *Inscape*, she meticulously worked with fashion designer Rudi Gernreich. Some notable collaborative partnerships in dance, aside from Lewitzky and Gernreich, were between Martha Graham and Halston, as well as Trisha Brown and Robert Rauschenberg. I unwittingly followed in Lewitzky’s and Gernreich’s footsteps in my fruitful and inventive collaborative relationship with my costume designer, Palomares, over the course of my project. Within Lewitzky and Gernreich’s collaboration existed artistic kinships through shared creative philosophies, mutual understanding, trust, and a willingness to take risks.

Lewitzky and Gernreich met as dancers with Lester Horton in Los Angeles, California, the two forming a bond early in both of their careers. Lewitzky was already a dancer with Horton when Gernreich joined in 1942. After about seven years with the company, he left to pursue a career in fashion. He credits dance for his unique insight into designing clothing. He states, “Dancing made me aware of what clothes did to the rest of the body,” (Gernreich qtd. in *Moment*). According to Lewitzky dancer John Pennington, Lewitzky and Gernreich worked closely with each other. They would bounce ideas, and while Lewitzky as the choreographer provided the initial seed of the central idea, their work combined their voices as innovators in their disciplines, both having notable experience as dancers and designers. Pennington recalls Gernreich’s approach and explains that, “the costumes have life within the dance, they shared an aesthetic, and created a true collaboration.” Lewitzky and Gernreich would come together for several years and one of their most notable collaborations is *Inscape*.

In 1976, Lewitzky premiered *Inscape*. It is a fifteen-minute dance with multiple sections that allude to a limitless interior mindscape. Lewitzky challenges the viewer's perspective in this piece with the creative input of Gernreich. Gernreich pioneered the integration of spandex through avant-garde customizations for this piece. Through the ingenuity of both the choreographer and the costumer, optical illusions are created that seemingly warp the body. There are sections when two dancers share a limb through a spandex unitard, or "duotard," (Bella Lewitzky Film), and moments when the cast appears to have two different faces with the use of masks. Consequently, costumes and props are integrated and amplify the dance's abstract quality, and this includes the white dress' conceptualization.

The white dress crossing solo, dubbed "The Swan" for its costume, is the dance piece that I re-staged and that served as the catalyst for the additional choreographic and research pursuits within this project. The solo consists of a female performer crossing the performance space in a flowy yet constructed costume with wires attached to the left arm and both legs that are being pulled on from both sides of the stage while the performer crosses. In the context of my thesis, I utilized both methods of costume design integration. I commissioned Palomares to make the white dress from the reconstruction, and I also collaborated with him on a shared vision for a newly designed costume and fabric landscape under my initial direction that echoed the imaginative properties of an internal landscape.

Psychology of Imagination, Creativity, and World Building

Imagination, a high-function cognitive skill, is creativity's kindling, and comparable to an atrophied muscle it can become difficult to flex a higher cognitive function without practice or engagement. Producing new dances and restoring historical works requires imagination in the

creative process. It is an attempt to call forth images, emotions, memories, objects, or circumstances from the psyche, consequently, manifesting them into fruition. It builds and depicts a world of the creator's choosing. Aside from imagination's natural place in the act of creating, Lewitzky typically started creating with the question "what if..." and in reference to *Inscape* the impetus was imagining the interior space of the mind, its appearance, possible inhabitants, their impulses and movement vocabulary. In tackling my version of an interior mind space prompt, the transformation that occurs between the sections of my film, and boldly harnessing unorthodox ideas for future projects, I became interested in immersing myself in the properties and theories of imagination and fantasy. Additionally, I am using my imagination to glean insight as to what Lewitzky was interested in artistically or physically, what she experienced during the time the piece was created, and fill in the gaps needed to envision myself learning the choreography from its originator. The psychology behind imagination and the deconstruction of imaginative world-building practices are integral facets for my process of creating believable and immersive dances. Dissecting these components through investigation and research will enhance the believability of my reconstruction of Bella Lewitzky's "The Swan" solo from *Inscape*, as well as making the necessary innovative connections or choices to develop my unique internal landscape within my re-interpretation and original dance.

Within the realm of cultural psychology, there is a link between imagination, fantasy, and creativity relating to how one navigates the world around them and relates to others. Sigmund Freud was inspired to psychoanalyze imagination's potential and manifestation due to the creative writings and musings of writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Freud suggested, "an important part of human experience, deeply emotional and embodied, is partly decoupled from the demands of reality" (Zittoun 139); ergo, one should embrace the dualistic necessity of the

logical and illogical. In the context of creating dances, one entertains what seems impossible, and consequently, determined resourcefulness allows for creative problem-solving to turn fantasy into reality. In the book *The Psychology of Imagination: History, Theory, and New Research Horizons* from the minds of multiple active psychology scholars, the distinction is made between the invaluable embracing of imagination and contemplating creativity's role in the context of broadening one's scope of possibility (Wagoner, Brady, et al.). Fantasy, a catalyst for creativity and counterpart to imagination, feeds off of those phenomenological experiences, elements that become known through the senses, in order to build upon it (Zittoun 138). A person's lived experiences help tap into imagination and fantasy, and that understanding the "dynamic between the self and other" or in other words empathic understanding, is achieved through utilizing imagination (Glaveanu 182). When I use my imagination to tap into Lewitzky's thought process, it is an attempt to understand the dance and by extension her, regardless of not being present during "The Swan" solo's creation. Subsequently, through the process and honing of my active imagination, I am exploring how to build a world for my viewers to experience within my dances akin to how both Lewitzky and other choreographers, authors, and other artists achieve.

Writers provide world-building tips and methods that emphasize the importance of possibility through imagination, but also provide deliverable tools or insight with which to develop one's own world. Author Jerry Jenkins clarifies how considering the world prior to the actual narrative idea is effective in extending details that will answer questions as the creative process unfolds. Some elements include climate, "geography," as well as who or what inhabits the world. Are there differences in the laws of physics? What are the possible consequences? Essentially, many detailed questions need to be answered, and while the articles pertaining to world-building are within the realm of writing, they challenge the creator to be consistent while

working broadly yet specifically. A determined and highly specific vocabulary is put in place. In broadening the mind to generate details, it might call for conceptual blending, or combining aspects from an array of different disciplines, principles, etc.; ergo, the merging of concepts creates opportunities to diverge from one's habitual mode of thought to generate anomalous ideas. "For instance, a product designer might blend [conceptual] principles of aesthetics, functionality, and sustainability to design a product that is not only visually appealing but also practical..." (Manely). In a choreography context, this conceptual merge or blending helps ground my current and future ideas in familiarity, thus making them relatable and easier for viewers to perceive the world in which my dance resides, regardless of how abstract.

Alwin Nikolais: Total Theater

Theater and dance often involve more than movement design and they often incorporate technology and bear notable responsibility for its progression. Dance journalist and filmmaker, Erin Brannigan suggests that the dancer is often overlooked but should be recognized as a, "cultural influence that was translating the forces of technology" (Brannigan 21). Lighting, scenery, rigging, intricate props, fabric, and film are among just a few of the additional elements that have undergone improvements and are often integrated to enhance a dance or illuminate its central idea. Dance challenges the body and the mind to creatively make the impossible both possible and discernable; thus, creating circumstantial opportunities to apply innovative solutions to achieve a desired effect. An influential artist who trailblazed the inclusion of technology within a stage context was Alwin Nikolais. In his time, aspects of theater, including painting, poetry, slide projection, music, and light, were approached disjointedly or hierarchically. Nikolais, often called the "father of multimedia theater," unified all aspects of theater and its

production through a methodology he called total theater. I am using film, contrasting light and shadow, and fabric as costume and environment to define my character because I want to immerse my viewers in a manner Lewitzky was not able to do, lacking today's technology. As well, I interpret what lies in the inside of the mind using what I imagine to be present there. Nikolais considered what was acceptable in the 1950's and contrasted what dance was doing from an ideological and physical perspective.

According to Nikolais, he trained in a time when the sexualization and binary modes of the body were prevalent. He was interested in decentering away from genderization and created androgyny within his dances by focusing on the ensemble, non-gender specific costumes, as well as the assistance of projection and light (Nikolais) to view the body visually so the motion was the message. To achieve this, Nikolais crafted various methods or apparati to create a "different value of kinetics" (Nikolais). In his dance *Prism* (1956), he created an androgynous look for his dancers, and included projections that cast light on the dancers or wearable and portable lights for the dancers to use during the performance. When he used blacklight in his dance *Galaxy* (1965) he did not rest until asking the particular detergent chemist who knew what chemical was needed to bring out the fluorescent quality in a whitening product so the costumes could be custom treated. Regardless of method, Nikolais succeeded in designing and curating each element to serve the dance as a whole in detail. Dance critics and other artists commend his persistence, resourcefulness, and inventiveness in procuring what he wanted to accomplish which resulted in abstract images (Grauert). I examined what seemed unfamiliar or otherworldly as a possible influence.

Methodology

Fabric: Garment and Environment

Inscape, the catalyst and seed of my performative work *Metaphase*, marked the unique and innovative creative partnership between Lewitzky and Gernreich. The collaboration that *Inscape* yielded between them has inspired me to collaborate with Andrew Wroblowski Palomares, a multidisciplinary artist. Andrew is a dancer and costume designer with experience in technical theater as a stage technician and manager. We have a fifteen-year friendship and have danced together for over ten years, and I am increasingly drawn to his attention to detail, impressive problem-solving skills, and diligence that show up regardless of task or art form. As a costume designer, he adeptly uses texture and a fabric's movement quality in conjunction with taking the mover into consideration. Similar to Lewitzky and Gernreich, we pushed each other to take creative risks within all three sections of *Metaphase*: "Crypsis" (Greek for camouflage), "Metamorphosis," and "The Swan." For the "Crypsis" section, we co-designed a new costume and took fabric one step further than Lewitzky and Gernreich with a complete landscape made of fabric, while for the "Metamorphosis" and "The Swan" sections, we agreed on a replica costume integrated with contemporary details.

For all three sections of my film, fabric was a key source of inspiration, a tool I used to embody abstract ideas or movement, and define both my character and the world I inhabited. As an African American woman, I contemplated how my body is rarely seen without bias due to my ethnicity and gender. This was important because I wanted the focus to remain on my connection with the fabric and emphasize androgyny as opposed to what it says for someone with my attributes to exist within that world. This is also akin to Nikolais' utilization of androgyny and desire to keep the focus on the movement and design. Subsequently for the "Crypsis" section, I

examined what type of being seemed androgynous and outside of my realm of understanding, thus leading me to observe videos of insects for movement and appearance. Andrew and I studied and noted how the gender markings on insects are obscure or subtle, especially from our non-microscopic vantage point.² Eventually, we decided on a full gray bodysuit, a hooded mask with foam to obscure my human features, and an outer biketard covered with triangular and mound-like projections. The biketard layer allowed for me to interchange between the two looks and to transform while also hiding myself similar to how we crafted the environment.

I was interested in the fabric as both an environment and a costume. Lewitzky's *Inscape* pushed the boundaries during its time by implementing technical theater apparatus with wires and groundbreaking materials. I wondered what the next step might be, and fabric emerged as a form with evolutionary potential. We crafted a world for the opening section of the film. After coming up with a concept design with Andrew for a fabric installation we settled on four panels of fabric and a centerpiece. There are two gray panels on each side of the stage (matching my body suit) that project from the center, one stretched to the right side of the stage and the other to the left side that together mimics the letter "V" and two blue panels hung up on right and left sides that spill down and intersect the gray panels from underneath that look like water. The panels' purpose was to recreate a camouflage-based natural habitat that alludes to a rocky ecosystem. Lastly, we thought of a cocoon as a centerpiece with our insect theme, and Andrew created a stretchy cream crushed velvet colored cocoon in the center that is able to take on different colors and shapes. These fabric pieces gave shape and design to abstract the space while

² Nelson, Bryan. "11 Amazing Examples of Insect Camouflage." *Treehugger*, May 2022, www.treehugger.com/amazing-examples-of-insect-camouflage-4869256. Accessed 20 Mar. 2023

creating rules in the form of boundaries to the world I inhabited. The other two sections required starkness of space for the sake of the reconstruction of the original costume.

I asked Andrew to recreate the crossing or “The Swan” solo costume but with a unique alteration. While the fabric for the original solo was extremely sheer and flexible, and allowed for exaggerated billowy curves, I chose a reversible fabric which Andrew already had. One side is plain white, and that would serve “The Swan” reconstruction since it is similar to the original, but the other side has an iridescent sheen that was ideal at catching the light and hinting at the idea of transformation for the “Metamorphosis” section. The four-way stretch of my fabric begged the questions of what was possible and how would it respond similarly to the questions Gernreich entertained by pioneering spandex through the customizations he used. The next step was to find the original design and construct my new costume.

Andrew and I met via Zoom with ex-Lewitzky dancer, Diane MacNeil, to procure as much insight as possible into replicating the original costume. I initially thought the wires were attached to all four limbs, but in fact, they were attached to both heels (cuffs of the unitard), and the left wrist. After discussing the structural components, such as the seam placements and jewelry washers needed for the attached jewelry wires, she disclosed that the original costume was stored in the Special Collections section at the University of Southern California’s Doheny Memorial Library. After three attempts across the span of a month and a half, we saw the preserved original costume, and to our astonishment and saving grace the costume Andrew created was almost identical. While the costume construction was underway, I was developing movement for both my original choreographic section and reinterpretation, as well as reconstructing “The Swan.”

*Pre-Production***“Crypsis”**

In working with structured improvisation on the first section, “Crypsis,” I was able to explore the insect world. In asking myself what kind of world is alien to me and quickly arriving at insects, I let my observations dictate the prompts between improvisational scores with strict parameters. After watching documentaries on stag beetles,³ ladybugs, dragonflies, mites, thrips, and the peacock jumping spider,⁴ I developed the improvisational prompts: detect, feed, attract, deter, and attack.

1. Detect (based on thrips and mites) included: waving antennas in the forms of fingers, arms, and feet, wiggling and shaking of the torso, and wringing of the fingers.
2. Feed (based on ladybugs) included: expanding and contracting of the torso, and quick/light repetitive flicks of the fingers.
3. Attract (based on the peacock jumping spider): low-level jumping, side extensions of the leg low to the ground, and pressing the leg into the air as a form of show.
4. Deter (based on the dragonfly): quick and darting crawls that skitter or glide across the floor short distances, head snaps after a long pause, slashes with arms and legs, and guarding my face either using arms or legs.
5. Attack (based on the stag beetle): bound or hunched, ready to pounce, and batting or swatting of the arms.

Following my development of these movement prompts, I started doing practice runs with the fabric installation. Each prompt was then paired with a different location within the

³ Mueller, Oliver. “Medieval Monsters.” *Vimeo*, 15 Apr. 2024, vimeo.com/138236113. Accessed 24 Mar. 2023

⁴ Nature on PBS. “Peacock Spider Mating Dance.” *YouTube*, 16 Nov. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3HlwwJG85c. Accessed 24 Mar. 2023

fabric landscape, because each portion of the environment served different levels of comfort or self-discovery within the performer's journey. The cocoon was the most concealing and the "safest" space where I would "detect," "feed," and "deter." I then move to the stage right gray panel that has no holes and camouflages me, to purposely create an air of mystery that leaves room for viewer interpretation, but puts the performer in a slightly more vulnerable place because the bottom and top of the panels are unobstructed. For the second or stage left panel, I decided to cut holes into it as if another creature left its mark, bit into it, or was battered by the elements. I utilized the holes to "detect," "attack," and "attract" as they provided opportunities to engage with potential prey, predators, or mates. My figure is visible and vulnerable to my observers. Lastly, I ventured outside of the protection of the panels and the enclosure. The movement parameters included: utilizing all five prompts simultaneously, facing upstage towards the cocoon (my safe place in being thoroughly exposed), and avoiding being vertical or standing as this did not serve the insect qualities to which I was alluding. The *Crypsis* section yielded the most play, while the "Metamorphosis" and "The Swan" sections relied on variation, repetition, and replication.

"The Swan": the Reconstruction

The reconstruction process in the restaging of Lewitzky's *Inscape* solo has been a fruitful exploration of logistical movement nuances. I watched the entire dance to contextualize the solo. After compiling observational notes, I ascertained how the dance creates instances of optical illusions where props and costumes, specifically masks, uniquely crafted unitards, and wires, challenge the viewer's perception of the dancer's bodies. After working with my director, mentor, and coach for this piece, John Pennington, it was rewarding to confidently discern the details of Lewitzky's technique based on my lived experience seated within it. The movement

consists of arcing arms, arabesques that transition into flat back balances, and walking. The demanding aspects include maintaining a slow speed, balancing tension through the wires that work in either harmony or opposition as the dancer traverses from stage left to right, and walking in a hinge while the feet are covered. All movement occurred at mid-level moving from stage left to stage right in a single pass. It is deceptively simple and commands subtlety, balance, control, and timing while working with the people pulling the wires from off-stage. After careful observation and in-depth discussion, I stepped into the embodiment portion of the process with ease. Pennington creatively used a shirt to mimic the tension that I would experience with the costume apparatus. This prevented me from moving too fast. The limitation of the wires, “The Swan” solo’s movement vocabulary, and understanding of Lewitzky technique resulted in providing me with a framework for my interpretation, or “Metamorphosis” section.

“Metamorphosis”: the Reinterpretation

My development of “Metamorphosis” stemmed from additional imagery-based improvisation prompts and movement variation of the original material that embodied how I envisioned moving through the brain. I interpreted Lewitzky’s original “Swan” solo utilizing images such as: a lone dendrite being pulled across the expanse of a hemisphere, an anthropomorphic whooping crane, or even a single thought being stretched through time due to the solo's sustained pacing, length in the arms and legs, and floating quality of the walking. I encompassed those image-born qualities and expanded upon them through amplification or exaggeration because I desired to stay within the predetermined movement framework of the original, thus building a world through specific vocabulary. I utilized my Lewitzky training in isolations, flat backs, and hinges to craft variations within the realm of the original, employing

them to further transform within the dance. Additionally, I added imagery prompts then movement examples that embodied them based on the framework of “The Swan”:

1. Scan: through limbs not with the eyes. Movement equivalent: leading with undulatory arms.
2. Carve: slices of air that float or disintegrate and saturate space around me. Movement equivalent: arcing arms that move in repeated circles, reaching/slashing in the mid-high space.
3. Float: suspend and hover over large distances. Movement equivalent: Flat backs, balancing on one leg allowing the lifted leg to dip then float again. Suspended hinges.
4. Push: through thick membrane, viscous or trapped cerebrospinal fluid. Movement equivalent: Heavy or “sticky” feet, forward locomoting.
5. Pull: myself through gray matter, gyri. Movement equivalent to a sustained undulatory torso forward and backward or side to side.

As for the line-pulling aspect of the reinterpreted solo, I was not able to make a prototype, but I used jump ropes and tied them to the ballet bars of the studios I was practicing in to replicate tension and restriction. With the practiced variations, reconstructed original, and the Crypsis structure complete, I developed a shot list or outline for each section for filming days.

Production

“Crypsis”: Filming Day

The space, lighting, and film elements were the primary focus on the day of the shoot. Filming took place at ARC (A Room to Create) studios in Pasadena, California, the creative

home of the Pennington Dance Group space. My production team consisted of Andrew, videographer, Nathan (Nate) Lubben, and my mentor John to help program lights of my choosing. In ninety minutes, we accomplished rigging the panels and the cocoon, through an extensive process complete with zip ties, carabiners, and pins. As for lighting, the performance space allowed for the purple hues and minor front light I needed. I chose purple and minimal lighting to keep the upstage in shadow as well as the center, thus adding to the ability for me to camouflage myself within the panels during filming. John had programmable colored LED lights that I planted behind the blue curtains to make them mimic water more convincingly. Space and lighting were relatively simple to produce, but filming was complex due to the fabric's spatial configuration and desired lack of visibility for mystery.

My shot listed utilized multiple ranges of closeness, additional shooting techniques, and point-of-view (POV) via two different harness attachments. I did about two to five takes of each shot or fabric landscape stage location over the course of three and a half hours. Shooting my movement within and around the fabric straight on, profile, panning, and tracking created a diverse library of shots and were necessary, because the varying angles built an immersive perspective; however, I made sure that Nate was on the opposite side of the fabric (open full body section aside) from where I danced as if trying to catch a glimpse as a curious spectator or persistent predator, echoing the insect dynamics I observed and committed to during my pre-production conceptualization. With immersion in mind, I shot with my phone secured to my chest harness and head harness to capture POV. This was difficult due to the space out in front of me ranging from being formally a part of the world (the designed landscape) to being informally part of the regular space (off stage). The second day of shooting consisted of the “Metamorphosis” and “The Swan” sections, and the wires involved a highly coordinated effort.

“Metamorphosis” and “The Swan”: Filming Day

While the lighting and spatial demands were not as extensive as “Crypsis,” the challenge lay with a wire-pulling ensemble and filming. The shoot was five hours, with an additional three for set up and tear down. In addition to Andrew, John, and Nate, I had five experienced dancers as line pullers. I wanted to capture the original solo’s simple lighting to connect the reinterpretation to the reconstruction since the costumes would pull out different hues and contrasts. Consequently, since blue was used in the original, I used blue gels and one blue LED that came from stage left to cast cool-tones and side white light from stage right for the desired effect. The minimal lighting also served the purpose of masking the wires. Since I was three-quarters upstage the whole time for a wide enough angle to capture my walking path from stage left to stage right (akin to the original), two lights from upstage on each side were the only ones needed to illuminate my pathway. The iridescent properties of my costume showcased different colors within the light, as intended, to portray transformation as I performed the variations needed for “Metamorphosis.” In terms of space, I would move forward very minimally (about ten feet), unless the shot required full use of the stage’s width. By not utilizing the space’s perimeters, the line pullers were kept out of frame, and I kept the illusion of traveling further on film since the stage is mostly black. After capturing all shots for that section, I wore my costume inside out to make it plain white which was needed for the reconstructed “The Swan” section. The switch predictably de-dramatized the light play within the costume. As for the logistics of managing the costume, integrating the wire-pullers was the most notable challenge in addition to filming.

It took three people to pull a wire on each leg and one on my left or downstage arm, and masking the line pullers so they were out of the shot required careful attention. I was able to

secure five line pullers based on scheduling. Per John's advice from his past observations of "The Swan" solo, I wrapped short wooden dowels with wire, one for each limb. The line pullers were able to anticipate movement and understand counterbalance with the tension needed. Nathan filmed as I simultaneously balanced, danced, and verbally instructed, telling each line puller when to move their wire.

The camera work for the two sections was derived from a general outline and once again, consisted of Nate's DSLR and my phone's camera. I had Nathan white balance for this shoot, since the colors and blurriness were not needed for these sections as camouflage was no longer my objective. Nate had to make sure the wire-pullers were mostly out of frame, and ensure a steady hand since a majority of the movements were slow and sustained. "The Swan" solo and only a couple run-throughs of "Metamorphosis" were done from a wide angle to capture the whole body, while the majority of shots needed were middle to close up. In creating the immersive effect unseen from the original solo, I had Nathan shoot on diagonals, from the back, different angles of the arms, legs, or torso, and lastly, my shadow by panning and tracking me. I utilized my chest harness again. I took shots of my feet, arms, and shadows. With the filming complete, I began the complex puzzle of editing.

Post-Production:

Metaphase: Editing and Sound

Film editing and sound came together making the three sections a cohesive whole. The editing was done through iMovie, and Epidemic Sounds' extensive digital and permission-free library contained the variety I needed. Similar to building a movement vocabulary that establishes my world, I used complimenting editing effects as a motif to reinforce my world's

theme. I started test editing a minute of my middle section first, “Metamorphosis,” and the pensive sustained nature and body part-focused shots set the tone for the other two sections. I moved on to editing “Crypsis” in full.

I relied upon quick cuts that change the viewer's perspective: in-camera blurriness, non-white balanced color changes, and cropping effects to employ camouflage, mystery, androgyny, and feed the viewer's imagination. I used the in-camera out-of-focus and the changing of colors to make my figure indiscernible, creating a discomfoting environment for the viewer. The quick cuts and cropping achieved this as well but from a tempo and spatial context. The faster the scenes changed the harder it was to determine my appearance and location. Additionally, I cropped it to enhance the texture of the fabric in both costume and environment, because it aided my placement in another world. Interestingly, I used cropping most during the section where I am unobscured by the fabric environment, because initially I edited the movement for a full view of the body. There was too much visibility after obscuring myself for many sections of the solo. After building a cut movement phrase, I broke it into extremely small sections and changed the amount of each cropped area as well as the focal location, creating a different flow that fit the newly spliced movement. This achieved my desired balance of limited visibility. Another impactful effect was overlaying for a double exposure. I used it specifically for the hole panel section where I repeated variations of hand gestures through the holes, as well as pressing and hanging onto the fabric, to imply the character's growing curiosity and desired exploration. Overall, the techniques I used allowed the viewer into a world that is alien to them and engaged their imagination.

Next, I finished editing “Metamorphosis.” For the reinterpretation section, limited quick cuts, overlay, and cropping were the mainstay effects. Quick cuts were used sparingly to emulate

my literal transformation from one character to the other, the motion of my costume's sleeves, or follow the trajectory of a limb. Conversely, overlay was used as a framing device, embellishing limbs, or to signify a long period of time. I employed both of these effects as a means to immerse the viewer by extending the character's journey, and giving them detailed transformational snapshots in an almost 360-degree manner. Lastly, cropping was used differently in this section because the objective was no longer pertaining to mystery or camouflage; it slowly pieced together transformation over the course of an elongated journey. The sustained quality executed during filming was maintained and mostly unaltered. Lewitzky's original "Swan" solo happens over the course of one minute and thirty seconds and within this reinterpretation, I stretched the moment and did a majority of the filming moving ten feet in front of me for the illusion created during post-production.

The last section needed the least amount of my editing attention as it signifies a complete transformation, an uninterrupted journey or moment, and the moment in the film where I am whole. From beginning to end, the editing became simpler over the course of the film, and the movement became cleaner and appeared organized without interruptions in the form of visual compilation or bodily isolation. The first section's edits were energetic and fast, the middle section combined sustained and faster transitions, while the end is continuous throughout. From a movement context, the first section's movement was edited more segmented via limb isolations, mostly low-level, and quick, while the middle section still utilized body isolations of the arms, legs, and torso, but they were edited (and performed) more fluidly and the movement fulfilled with less interruptions. In the last section's movement, I move through the space fulfilling the movement phrase in full without embellished isolations. After the editing's completion, I moved on to building a score by compiling songs without sentimentality.

Metaphase's soundtrack required an air of mystery without being overly cinematic, and gradual pacing that did not auditorily overwhelm the subtleties of the film. I combed through the Epidemic Sounds catalog, and found the ambient instrumental "Fable" by DEX 1200, which the website described as dark, floating, and suspenseful. The music's drawn-out and atmospheric tones matched the sustained quality of "Metamorphosis." With that ambient score as the foundational layer, I searched for pieces of music using the same descriptors in the search engine. The "Crypsis" section required two songs to match the performer's increased level of exposure; moreover, a minimalist song to build upon. With my insect in-process theme, I started looking for bug soundscapes and found the score "Spider's Room" by Ethan Sloan, which was dark, minimalist, and sounded like a spider skittering, an effective opening sound score. It gradually became more complex in musical textures or melody layering just as the performer was out of the cocoon exploring their space. Following "Spider's Room" was challenging. I desired a more open-endedness for interpretation but continuity. The song "Hostage in Love" by Hampus Naesaleius was a suspenseful counterpart without being overly dramatic that built upon the ambient and dark themes of the first song, and it increases in tempo and indistinguishable sounds similar to the performer's dynamic changes and camouflaging. Eventually, a disquieted and heavy silence in the music correlated with the anticipation of the final transformation at the end of the first section. Lastly, "The Swan" originally had a wind soundscape, "Wind Drone Steady," and I not only honored it for the purpose of it being a reconstruction, but it also corresponded to the simplicity of filming, editing, and movement of the section. *Metaphase* underwent a steady transformation that allowed viewers to undergo a transformation of visuals through their imaginative lens that situated them in between the familiar and unfamiliar.

Results and Future Implications

The livestream of *Metaphase* aired over YouTube on Saturday, April 6, 2024, and I included an anonymous survey that yielded insightful responses. The survey consisted of one poll and two short answer questions. For the poll, all respondents strongly agreed that “there was a clear concept, mood, or theme seen throughout the film” (Fig. 4). The comments and observations reaffirmed the value in giving just enough information to make one’s personal imagination run wild. One viewer stated, “I felt that the fabric created imagined worlds unknown in my current reality.” Regarding how filming played a part in their interpretation, a viewer described how, “the fast-paced movement of the opening really pulled me in. It set up a space for me to question: What am I seeing? How is it evolving? The fast-paced beginning contrasted beautifully with the slower pace later in the film.” Another viewer suggested, “The fabric aided in my interpretation of a creature metamorphosing - sometimes through struggle, challenge and even ugliness - to a smooth, sleek, fully transitioned version of themselves.” It was satisfying to hear how viewers felt there was “space” or an “invitation” to use their imagination. I was also pleased to hear that the pacing, while attention-grabbing, served the piece because they acknowledged a continuous transformation and evolution.

After completing this project, I have learned how to create a clear relationship between digital and movement mediums, and situate myself in a historical context while maintaining my choreographic voice. In the process of making film to support and enhance my movement for immersive viewing experiences, I was challenged to cement both a digital and movement vocabulary that visually and thematically affirmed the other. This was my first venture into extensive film work and the fast-paced turnaround of this process pushed my decision-making to the extent of fine-tuning what was necessary versus arbitrary, or what simply looked “nice.”

Although this was not my first time reconstructing a Lewitzky piece, and while I revere the task, my research into imagination being a means of understanding will transform not only how I enter the practice of reconstruction but also how I situate myself in the work. In my attempt to understand her thought process and artistic or technical interest relative to the temporality surrounding the piece, I have to perform a dualistic manifestation of myself within the work. How do I utilize my lens to arrive at the same central idea and expand upon it? I believe it is an ongoing process with more than one conclusion or method. My work in “The Swan” marks the beginning of opening a type of call and response with history.

The past serves the present and informs the future, and as time marches on, the available technology becomes obsolete, and those that carry embodied knowledge are no longer able to, it becomes harder to maintain connections to the past. Integrating oneself with history and being able to do so cogently while remaining open to personal transformative possibilities are skills that can be harnessed through practice. I plan on serving as a liaison of Lewitzky’s rich history through reconstructing her work for future generations in both my teaching and artistic practices. I am also interested in investigating more of Nikolais’ multidisciplinary approach and pursuing more filmmaking. After collaborating with Andrew and making my film, I value cross-disciplinary intersections within my movement practice as a means of shortening the gap between myself and others.

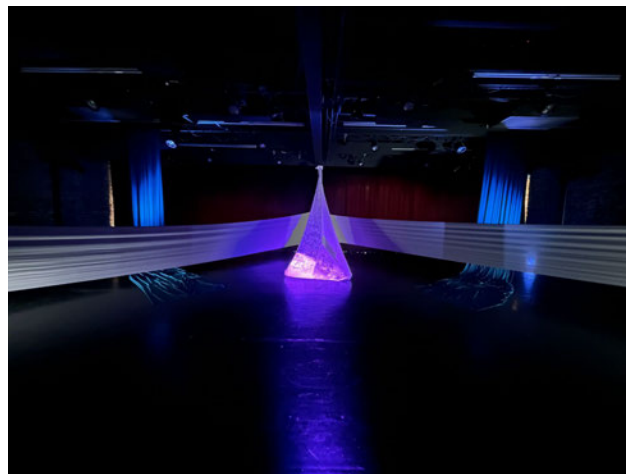
Appendix A: Costume and Environment References

Figure 1.



Original *Inscape* costume courtesy of USC Doheny Memorial Library Special Collections

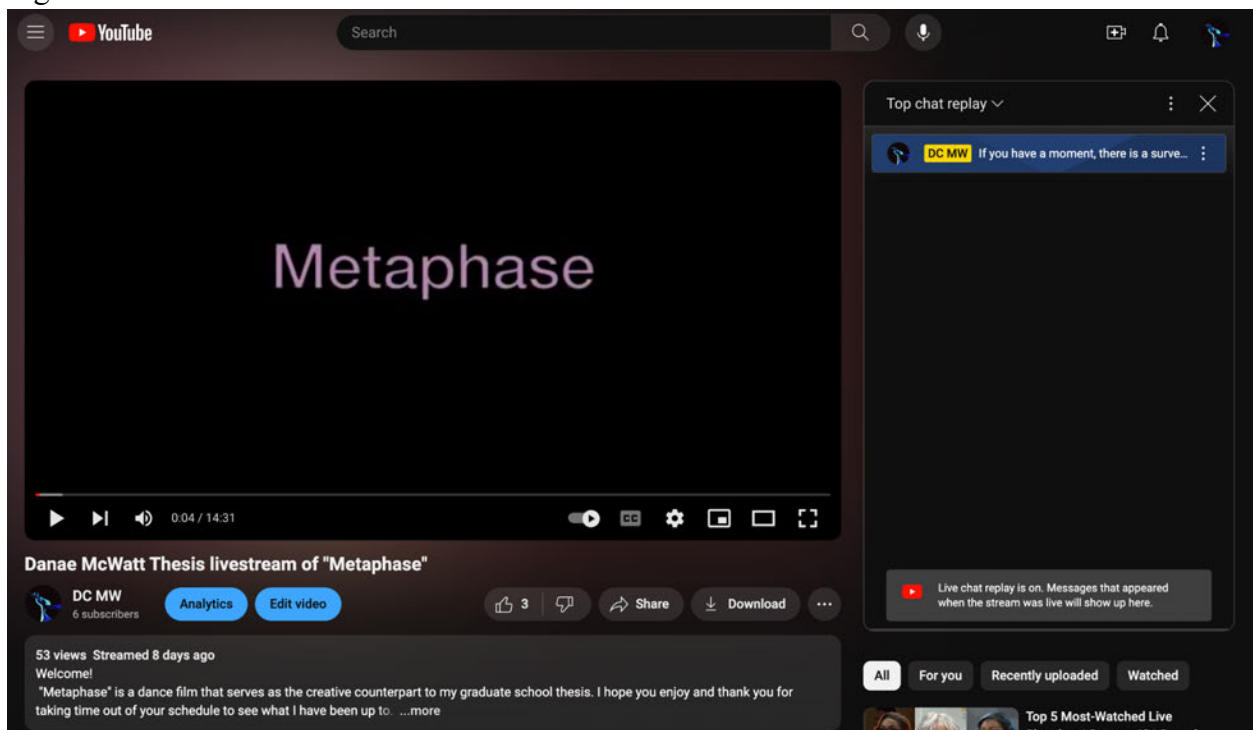
Figure 2.



“Crypsis” Fabric Environment (in full)

Appendix B: *Metaphase* Public Viewing

Figure 3.



Live Stream webpage

Figure 4.

Metaphase Post-Film Survey

There was a clear concept, mood, or theme seen throughout the film.

Strongly disagree 1.....5 Strongly agree

How did the fabric as costume or environment affect your interpretation?

Did a particular section resonate with you? Within that section, what images came to mind?

Viewer response survey after the film

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