PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL STATES OF EXISTENCE: METHODS OF SURREALISM AND INTERMEDIAL CONTEMPORARY DANCE

JESSICA STUART

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Abstract

This thesis draws on the creative method of Surrealism referred to as automatism within the setting of contemporary dance. The research acknowledges the origins of the Surrealist movement, the use of automatism across various disciplines, and its application within the thesis research. The practice of automatism is used to generate unique movement that is organic to the individual. Interested in the unconscious mind as a trove of creative impulses, the performers are urged to communicate with their creative core, without the judgement of their logical, conscious mind. The visual aesthetic of the work aims to model Surrealism's goal to transcend from reality. To further support this, Jessica Stuart relies on the use of digital media to construct what she refers to as a "dreamscape" environment. Film and projections are significant mediums in this exploration of technology and dance. Choreography and technology are combined in order to augment the live performance space, and challenge concepts of reality. The results of this research are used to create Stuart's Master of Fine Arts thesis project, *In Media Res*: an intermedial contemporary dance, existing in both the physical and virtual planes.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Christopher. Thank you for teaching me to be curious and enthusiastic about my passions. Thank you for always being my number one supporter, and for being just as excited about my practice as I am.

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Introduction

The body exists in relation to nature. In life, we are confined by the restrictions of reality, as we adhere to the restrictions of the physical world. Despite this, individuals remain adaptable, as they overcome obstacles, milestones, and stresses. This process of growth contributes to the unique trove of creativity residing in the subconscious of every individual. When this is celebrated, individuals refine their sense of creative self, and indulge in their artistic impulses. With the use of technology, the complexity of the physical individual is enriched by applying their artistry within the virtual world. In this sense, the adaptable artist transcends the laws of reality, by engaging in virtual existence. The result is a sense of digital surreality, in which the body has autonomy in both the physical and virtual world.

Over the years, I have been interested in natural movement patterns as another form of dance expression. I saw this as movement that would occur in the body subconsciously and was functional or habitual. I would use observed movement and pedestrian movement as inspiration within my choreographic practice. My intention was to discover naturally occurring movement that could be emphasised or expanded to create a performance. Understanding, however, that the term “natural” movement is subjective and what is natural to my body cannot be generalised to others.

Surrealism provides a method for exploring these habitual movements, while remaining conscious of the unique movement qualities of the individual. The Surrealist method of automatism aims to create an open line of communication with the creative core of the individual. This encourages the individual to act on their creative impulses with little to no forethought. Ultimately, this reveals the “natural” creative habits of the participant. The use of automatism became a key component in my research, both as an ongoing study of the dancers’ practice, and as a choreographic device.

This thesis explores the use of a Surrealist method known as ‘automatism,’ and its use within contemporary dance practice. The research discusses the origins of the Surrealist movement, and artists who came to refine the use of automatism. In order to discover what is considered as natural movement, automatism is used to explore and refine the unique movement profiles of three performers over the course of several months. This is accomplished with a variety of methods, all of which require the participant to act on their creative impulses that are typically limited in presence of the logical, conscious mind. In doing so, the dancers are able to access their unconscious, creative core, as theorised by André Breton, the founder of Surrealism.

The research explores the relationship of the physical body to various forms of digital media, including film and projections. It explores the existence of an individual within the physical and virtual world. The relationship between synthetic and natural, and how they may coincide. I discuss the therapeutic purpose of automatism, juxtaposed to the enjoyable experience of escapism. Both practices offer a kind of emotional relief when experiencing stress. The focus of this is to expand on the physical practice of automatism, through the inclusion of digital media.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown measures were introduced. These measures resulted in schools and most businesses operating remotely. Many people were spending more time at home, resulting in an increase of leisure time. As I was doing classes remotely, this also applied to me. Much of my newfound free time was spent indulging in hobbies I sparsely had time for before. I spent the majority of my leisure time playing video games. I would get to interact with other players online, as well as explore the visually stimulating and interactive environments of the games. Additionally, I spent more time shifting through social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. While

doing my classes online, I formed ongoing friendships with other graduate students, despite never physically meeting each other.

This increased exposure to consumable media, paired with relationships I was building over the internet, made me consider my physical existence, compared to how I could be perceived through my media interactions. Additionally, I started noticing the parallels between escapism and automatism, both in a therapeutic sense. Ultimately, these interests influenced my research, and were directed towards the overarching theme of "natural" and constructed.

Inspired by the visual aesthetics of Surrealism, my work constructs a "dreamscape" environment. With the use of digital media, the work introduces nonsensical entities that exist beyond the laws of reality. This is accomplished with the introduction of digital ghosts alongside live performers. In order to further construct a stimulating environment, I gained inspiration for intermedial dance choreographers Claire Bandainne and Adrien Mondot, in their execution of digital spectacles through the use of evolving projections.

This collection of research is used in the creation of my Masters creative project, *In Medias Res.* The combination of physical choreography and digital media constructs a challenging, evolving environment that the dancers progress through. Shifting between various states of being, the dancers must remain adaptable, as they continue to trust their impulses. The creation of each phrase is presented with creative conditions, inspired by the exploration of Surrealist aesthetics and nature. These phrases and their significance to the disruption of reality and automatism are discussed.

The practice of automatism yields unique movement from the creative core of an individual. By tuning into one's creative mind, an understanding of one's artistic self is achieved. In a practice that requires only the body, it is accessible and therapeutic. By expanding the fluidity of communication with the unconscious mind, the dancers were able to

achieve intricate movement with more efficiency than before their practice with automatism. A sense of artistic confidence is gained, as the relationship to one's self continues to be strengthened. The inclusion of digital media creates new sources for inspiration, and can aid in the aesthetic production of automatism in a live performance. With this method, the natural movement of the dancers is capable of existing in both the physical and digital world.

Summary of The Levels

The creative work is split into a series of phrases that eventually evolve to become reminiscent of progressing video game levels. Each phrase works towards the construction of a "dreamscape" environment and uses automatism as a choreographic device.

The Trance Solo mirrors the act of being stuck in a trance. The dancers were instructed to create a movement phrase, with an ending that would feed back into the beginning of the phrase. This created a continuous loop, centring around a core movement that could be repeated on end. With each repetition, the dancers were to become increasingly lethargic, as their movement became less precise and expansive. In doing so, the phrase illustrates a hyper fixation on the core movement, and a sloping narrative from full embodiment to an absent mind.

The Backwards phrase aims to disrupt reality. It centres around the concept of time and progression. This is done by having the dancers progress through the phrase in a backwards direction. Similar to the Trance solo, the phrase was made with impulse decisions from each dancer. The only rule was that each contribution must move backwards.

The Word phrase uses the Surrealist method of free-writing as its inspiration. The dancers were presented with three words. They were given a minute for each word to write words that could be associated with the original three words. After this, they were tasked with creating a movement that embodied or represented a handful of their associated words.

The Rushing Phrase explores the element of water in a mediated space. In the pursuit of building a dreamscape, the phrase draws on imagery that frequents the dancer's dreams. One of the common elements that would appear was water. The dancers embody water, as they transition from tranquil streams to the all-consuming sea.

Backwards 2.0 was the re-occurrence of the Backwards phrase, with the addition of a new challenge. Unlike the uniform formation of the first appearance, the dancers move through the Backwards Phrase choreography at sporadic places on the stage. Now they must constantly move backwards while remaining aware of each other as potential obstacles. In addition to the new challenge, Backwards 2.0 exists in a more heavily mediated space. The vibrant environment of the phrase marks the peak of the dancer's exploration of the dreamscape, as well the end of their journey.

Chapter I. Surrealism: Origin, Leaders, and Methods

Similar to the evolving signature of many artists, the Surrealist movement has demonstrated great stylistic shifts. Originally created for its therapeutic purposes, Surrealism and automatism uncovered the potential to liberate the mind. As the art movement continued to be refined, European Surrealism shifted its focus towards stylistic portrayals of the unconscious mind, and the distortion of reality. Once adopted into a Canadian context in the 1940s, Surrealism's focus on liberation of the mind was revived. The multidisciplinary art group "The Automatists" pioneered the Canadian Surrealist movement. Their work evoked change within the socio-political climate of Quebec, as well as the contemporary arts community. Automatist member, Françoise Sullivan continues to represent Canadian Surrealism across the globe, and is particularly recognized for her contribution towards dance and automatism. In the preceding chapters, her methods are analysed and compared to that of Surrealist dance scholar Taylor Nicole. Through this comparison, the fluidity of automatism in dance creation is illustrated.

Origin of Surrealism

The objective of surrealism is to access the creative core of an individual. This is done by exploring the unconscious. Surrealist artists believe that by revealing the unconscious, they may find new aesthetics that would usually be dismissed by the rational, conscious mind.

In European Surrealism, or "Bretonian" surrealism, there is a focus on representing the unconscious mind with the use of symbolism. In this approach, the conscious mind contributes to creating symbolic images that will allow the viewer to associate the work with the unconscious.

Emerging in the 1920s, the Surrealist art movement redefined the mentality of modern artists across several disciplines. During this time André Breton developed new methods of art creation that would rely on the individual for inspiration. While defining the capabilities of the art movement, Surrealism often became used for revolutionary politics (Betts,145).

Surrealism is considered to have stemmed from the earlier art form known as Dada. Dadaism rejected traditional art practices. In response to the violence of the First World War, Dada practices were rooted in questioning what art really is, and in turn the identity of European culture itself. Dada artists would create "non-art" with the intention of enticing confusion or outrage (Moffat).

Despite sharing similar origins with Dada, Surrealism's original intention was much more therapeutic. After the war officially ended, Surrealism began to emerge. The art movement's official starting date was in 1924 in Paris, when French psychologist and poet André Breton published "The Manifesto of Surrealism" (Breton). Fascinated with the work of Sigmund Freud, and theories of the unconscious, the Surrealist practitioner used automatic writing as a way of releasing unfiltered impulses into creative mediums (Voorhies). This idea of acting on creative impulses would later be used in other art forms, including painting and dancing. The Surrealist practice would encourage the participant to enter a trance of creation, as they react to the impulses within their unconsciousness. Breton originally used this method as a way of treating soldiers for emotional trauma. This form of therapy was thought to encourage communication with the unconscious mind, allowing the individual to identify the source of their emotional trauma. With the use of automatism, the individual would be able to traverse their subconscious, confront their innermost conflicts, and begin healing (Betts, 162).

Breton particularly enjoyed this form of therapy because it provided inner refuge from current reality, while yielding fascinating expressions of an individual's subconscious. Breton believed this healing process could be extended to the everyday individual. People

experiencing the ongoing griefs and conflicts of everyday society would be able to find relief through automatism (Betts, 147).

Throughout the refinement of Surrealism, Breton remained an advocate for freeing the unconscious mind. He believed doing so would result in “surreality, an unalienated experience of reality conditioned by an unfettered imagination” (Betts, 147). Once this experience became more widespread, a new morality would come forth, freeing the individual from the stress felt within societal conditioning. The new psyche that would emerge alongside Surrealism would be overflowing with childlike imagination; free from societal judgement. Surrealism would act as an escape for the tired minds that have been creatively drained by the logics of everyday life. The concept of liberating the mind with automatism became a central objective within Surrealism. Surrealism had the potential to revitalise European civilization after the war. First by healing the mind, then by redefining how the individual experiences their reality.

With the fluid creative nature of automatism, it was not long before artists across other disciplines including dance and visual arts were enticed by Surrealism. Artists would use automatism to tune into creative impulses, residing within their core. Moreover, Surrealist artists would be able to provoke inspiration from within themselves and produce unique aesthetics. They would use methods such as improvisation, and automatic writing and painting (Betts, 146).

As a result of the more positive implications, the Surrealist movement quickly replaced the more nihilistic Dada movement (Moffat). Both movements were born from outrage with the war. Dada brought attention to the corruptions of new European culture, while Surrealism questioned the maleffect of bourgeoisie society. While the Dada movement focused on expressing outrage, Surrealism proposed a constructive direction for this outrage (Betts, 147). First by allowing the liberation of the individual mind, then expanding this

mental freedom to the widespread society. Once this became a clear direction for Breton's Surrealism, the movement began its future in revolutionary art making.

Surrealism's continuous theme of freedom explains its ties to revolutionary movements. In 1927, Breton and a group of other pioneering surrealists, joined the Communist Party. With this development, the direction of their public work, including their magazine "La Revolution Surrealist," shifted to realign itself with the Communist Party. Breton renamed their current Surrealist magazine, "Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution" or "Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution." After doing so, Breton and the other pioneering surrealists announced the new primary role of the Surrealist movement was to support the communist worker revolution (Betts, 151).

Despite the initial support of early Surrealist works, the Communist Party later renounced its unification with Surrealist art. As the fluid approach to writing did not deliver the stern strength the Communist Party aimed to present. Liberated art would not have a place in the Communist Party until the "era of moral decadence had been overcome" (Betts, 152). Breton publicly disagreed with this notion, and openly spoke out against this declaration. For his resistance against the evolving policies of the party, Breton was expelled in 1933 (Betts, 152).

After experiencing this backlash from the Communist Party, Breton came to refine Surrealism's purpose in politics. He wanted to focus on the revolutionary potential, without having to sacrifice one's individuality. Rather than aiding a collective, Breton decided Surrealism was best used towards "anarchic individualism" (Betts, 152). However, this phase was not received well by most political parties. Surrealism began to phase out of revolutionary politics within Europe.

In the years after Surrealism's shift from politics, the community began dispersing outside of Europe. With the impending war, many artists took refuge in the United States and

Canada. During the war, Breton lived in New York. He spent the summer of 1945 in Canada, where he met key emerging artists that would later aid in the growth of the Canadian Surrealist movement (Betts, 153).

After the war, Breton returned to Paris. Inspired by the international growth of Surrealism, He organised an exhibition in Paris. “The International Exhibition of Surrealism" was held in 1947, and featured artists from twenty-four countries (Betts, 154). Core members of the emerging Canadian Surrealist group, “The Automatists” were invited, in recognition of the pioneering work they were doing for Canadian Surrealism. However, most of the members, aside from Jean-Paul Riopelle, refused to feature their work. They believed they were still defining their approach to Surrealism, and believed that it should be established before they could align themselves with Breton’s Surrealism.

Surrealist Movement in Canada

In 1942, the Paul-Émile Borduas held the first exhibition of Surrealist art to be presented by a Canadian – approximately 17 years after the founding of the Surrealist movement in Europe (Betts, 161). This event piqued the interest of current arts students within Montreal. These artists began to gravitate towards Borduas, learning all they could about Surrealism. A portion of these interested students later became members of the Surrealist group, “The Automatists” or “Les Automatistes.”

The Canadian Surrealist group, “Les Automatistes” initiated a genre-defying art movement, influencing social-political change. In the 1940s, a collection of Montreal-Canadian artists came together with a common interest in European Surrealism. United by Paul- Émile Borduas, the members included Marcel Barbeau, Roger Fauteux, Claude Gauvreau, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Marcelle Ferron and Françoise Sullivan. Their artistic disciplines ranged from visual arts,

poetry, drama, and dance. The group held two official exhibitions under the name of The Automatists, in the years 1946 and 1947. During this time, the individual artists continued to produce solo work, while continuing to refine their approach to Canadian Surrealism as The Automatists (Betts, 154).

The group gained its name from a critic who called them "Les Automatistes," in reference to their affinity for gestural abstraction and free-form writing, untethered by the conscious mind. Quickly growing in popularity, The Automatists were soon gaining recognition outside of Canada. Organised by fellow Surrealists across the world, The Automatists were taking part in exhibitions in New York and Paris, as they shared their unique approach to Surrealism and practice of automatism (Gérin).

As Surrealism became more widespread within Europe, the Surrealist practices began to change. European Surrealists were inclined to create representations of the unconscious mind by using symbolic images or objects and an attention to the constructed atmosphere in which these images would be presented (Betts, 162). The Automatists' approach to Surrealism was much more reminiscent of André Breton's early work with automatism. In the early use of automatism, the cathartic experience of traversing the unconscious was primary to the practice. The materialistic work that is produced is less important than the experience of the practice.

The Automatists were primarily interested in creating aesthetic objects that embodied unfettered consciousness, rather than representing on a surface level (Gérin). In doing so, they could produce a pure, organic aesthetic. It was viewed as a cathartic release from the over-rational consciousness mind that was present in daily life. Similar to European Surrealism, The Automatists' method used techniques including free-writing, painting, and improvisation to connect with their inner selves. However, The Automatists prioritised uninterrupted communication with the unconscious, without the intrusion of the logical,

conscious mind (Betts, 162). The Automatists would be in a constant state of reaction, as they act on the impulses of their creative unconscious mind. This would result in their final work including less conscious planning, and potentially appearing more nonsensical than that of European Surrealist's work.

Paul-Emile Borduas often reiterates the importance of impulse within The Automatist practice. While representing The Automatists in an interview, Borduas explains his methods of automatism with painting:

> "I begin with no preconceived idea. Faced with the white sheet, my mind free of any literary ideas, I respond to my first impulse….When I use the word "thoughts" I mean painterly thoughts: thoughts about movement, rhythm, volume and light, not literary ideas" (Gagnon).

Social Change and Political Influence

The time in which the Canadian Surrealist movement took place is often referred to as "La Grande Noirceur" or The Great Darkness. La Grande Noirceur refers to a period of Quebec history in which the Conservative party held power over the province. The Great Darkness lasted nineteen years, between 1936-1939 and then returning in 1944-1959. During these years, premier Maurice Duplessis represented the conservative party. The province's political stance and actions were interwoven with the Catholic church's ideologies (Dupuis).

During the Great Darkness, the Church funded public institutions, including French-language schools and hospitals. This financial involvement with public affairs aided in the establishment of Quebec as a Catholic province, in which the Church held power over the citizen's lives.

Maurice Duplessis' government enforced broad-reaching censorship laws, which limited cultural and political groups not in line with the Conservative party's views. *Quebec's*

Padlock Act (Loi du cadenas), established in 1937, allowed the province to censor any "subversive" material deemed to have "communist" undertones (Dupuis). The criteria for which work may be deemed worthy of censorship was allowed to be loosely interpreted by those in power. This act made it difficult to publicly discuss social issues. Groups that challenged the ideals of the current provincial government struggled to have their work known by the public.

However, despite this, the Automatists used their practice as a way of resisting the severe censorship within Quebec. During their scheduled practices, The Automatist deliberately discussed recent political events, as well as other thought-provoking topics including religion, philosophy, and psychology (Gérin). The artists believed it was important to be knowledgeable about the world around them. The Automatists did not merely make art for the sake of expression. They intended to use their art as a platform to reflect and challenge the corruption within their society.

They shared Breton's belief in the revolutionary potential of Surrealism where liberating the mind would lead to liberating the masses. André Breton, believed Surrealism methods could be used to modify one's consciousness, by coming to understand one's unconscious mind. The result of this would be a "new morality [that would] fundamentally challenge the mechanisms of repression in Western society" (Betts, 150).

While the automatists acknowledge the revolutionary promise of Breton's surrealism, they also believed that if revolutionary politics triggered radical social change before the general population itself had changed, any potential for revolution would fail. Similar to Breton's early work with automatism, The Automatists proposed the use of free-writing as a method for freeing the mind. By actively communicating with one's unconscious, the conscious mind would become more fluid in turn (Betts, 144). Once this had been achieved, individuals would be receptive to acts of change and liberation. It was believed that this

practice would need to be experienced by the majority of citizens before they could successfully unite in revolution. Passionate about sharing this method of mental liberation, The Automatists created one of their most famous, and controversial works, *Refus Global.*

Refus Global was a manifesto which heavily included anti-religious and anti-establishment tones. In 1948, four hundred copies of the manifesto were initially released in Librairie Tranquille; a small, non-conformist bookstore in Montreal (Gagnon). The manifesto was originally intended to act as a catalogue for a future exhibition by The Automatists, but ended up offering insight to the group itself, and their unfiltered political opinions. Each member of The Automatists, except for Roger Fauteux, contributed their work and signed the original copy.

The work addressed concepts beyond the scope of mere artistic practice. It denounced ideologies of the Conservative government and the Catholic Church. Members of The Automatists called for social change, which they believed would be achieved through creativity. With the practice of "automatism," participants would liberate their minds, and become open to evolving recesses of thought (Borduas).

Shortly after its release, the manifesto faced harsh scrutiny and censorship from the Catholic Church, as well as portions of the general public. The arts community experienced a divide between those who support the notions of *Refus Global* and those who did not. Founder of the group, Paul-Émile Borduas lost his job as a teacher at École du meuble, and left Montreal soon after. The rest of the group's members disbanded and drifted to other art circles across the world (Gagnon).

While the release of *Refus Global* marks the end of The Automatists, it also marks the beginning of the Canadian Surrealist movement. Despite The Automatists disbanding soon

after the release of *Refus Global*, by the 1950s the group had become wildly canonised as the leaders of the Canadian Surrealist movement that continued to grow (Betts, 166).

The Automatists are recognized as contributors to great socio-political change in Quebec. The group, and the release of their manifesto, is credited as one of the precursors to the Quiet Revolution; a time of rapid socio-political and economic change within Quebec during the 1960s (Dupuis). This period in Quebec history is discerned by a large shift in political ideals, and the stripping of political power from the Catholic Church (Dupuis).

In the words of art historian Dennis Reid, their manifesto *Refus Global* can be acknowledged as "the single most important social document in Quebec history and the most important aesthetic statement a Canadian has ever made" (Betts, 140).

The released consciousness caused by automatic writing became a focus for those interested in releasing Quebec from the conservative bondage of Catholic rule. *Refus Global* concludes with an invitation to those who were inspired by the manifesto. It offers automatism and Surrealist art as an experience of liberation (Borduas).

It was in this invitation to first revolutionise the mind that led the Automatists to play an influential role towards the Quiet Revolution, and the successful overthrow of the Catholic censorship.

Françoise Sullivan

Françoise Sullivan is one the first connecting bridges between dance and Surrealism. She is recognized for her pioneering work within the modern dance community, as well as her relation to The Automatists and *Refus Global.* A talented artist across multiple disciplines, Sullivan became well known for her courageous approach to artistic practice.

With an extensive and long-lasting career, Sullivan became one of the most versatile artists of her generation.

Hailing from Montreal, Françoise Sullivan was born in 1923. Sullivan pursued arts from a young age, taking part in dance, drawing, music, and acting classes. By the age of sixteen, Sullivan was enrolled in École des Beaux-arts de Montréal. During her time there, she was educated with a strict curriculum on the representation of real-life objects. As a result of this strict curriculum, Sullivan desired to learn more abstract approaches to art, demonstrated by figures such as Pablo Picasso, Pierre Bonnard, and Henri Matisse. This interest grew into a fascination with avant-garde art across several disciplines (Gérin).

During the Second World War, there was an influx of Surrealist artists within Canada and the United States. With her growing passion in avant-garde art forms, Sullivan actively sought these artists out. While attending contemporary art exhibitions and performances, she became acquainted with other artists sharing her passion, including Paul-Émile Borduas.

Paul-Émile Borduas worked with avant-garde techniques as a painter. He began focusing his efforts into Surrealism after becoming acquainted with André Breton. Soon after, Borduas began teaching young artists methods for approaching surrealist art. Françoise Sullivan, and several other students of Borduas, formed an interdisciplinary group of like-minded artists, which would later be called The Automatists (Gagnon).

The Automatists began in 1941. During Françoise Sullivan's time with The Automatists, they focused on the use of Surrealism, particularly automatism, as a means of freeing the mind to new recesses of thought. This direction of their work was intended to be responsive to the restrictive social-political climate within Quebec during the time. It was during this time period that Sullivan became passionate about activism through art.

Recalling this period of the group's direction, Françoise Sullivan explains, "It was about breaking with social values. We wanted to overthrow established rules...We had to strike a blow at our reactionary society"(Gérin).

Upon graduating from École des Beaux-arts de Montréal in 1945, Sullivan became frustrated with painting, and how the medium communicated her idea of automatism. Sullivan focused her efforts on dance as her form of expression, leaving painting behind for the time being. Since there were no modern dance schools in Quebec at the time, Sullivan moved to New York. There she predominantly studied with dancer Franziska Boas.

Boas' approach to dance focused on improvisation as a means of acting on impulse. She also used her work as a platform for social activism. Boas' practice presented similarities to Sullivan's time with The Automatists, as well as her work with automatism. Sullivan resonated with Boas' work, and it would influence her dance practice in years to come (Gérin).

During her time in New York, Sullivan remained in contact with The Automatists. She also continued to expand her artist network, particularly with the Surrealist arts community in the United States. Sullivan became a leader in making Quebec art known outside of Canada (Gérin). She organised The Automatists' first New York exhibition in 1946, titled "The Borduas Group."

Sullivan completed her dance training in 1947 and returned to Montreal. Once home, Sullivan began teaching modern dance, heavily influenced by her work with Franziska Boas. Soon after, Sullivan created a duet with dancer Jeanne Renaud. The duet "Duality" drew from Sullivan's work with Borduas and the dancers' modern dance training. The work aimed to translate ideas of automatism through movement. This task was approached by favoring expressive, creative movement that felt freeing to their trained bodies. Performed on April 3,

1948, “Duality” went on to be known as one of the first modern dance performances in Quebec (Gérin).

While dedicating much of her creative attention towards her modern dance career, Sullivan continued to contribute to The Automatists. A few months after the debut of her duet with Renaud, Françoise Sullivan became one of sixteen signatories of the manifesto “Refus Global.” Sullivan contributed an essay titled “La danse et l’espoir” (Dance and Hope). Her written work proposes dance as “a reflex, a spontaneous expression of intense emotion” (Gérin).

Becoming a signatory for *Refus Global* was especially bold for Sullivan. Her father was working as a commissioner for the Montreal Catholic School Commision at the time. One day he was confronted by a coworker, asking if it was really his daughter contributing to this anti-religious, anti-establishment manifesto. Sullivan recalls her father being initially angry, but overcame this anger in time (Gérin).

Françoise Sullivan shifted artistic disciplines after the disbandment of The Automatists. She took up sculpting. Her early work in sculpture mainly included scrap metal. She later transitioned to lightweight materials such as plexiglass. It wasn’t long before Sullivan was showcasing her works across the world.

In 1970, Sullivan re-evaluated her identity as an artist. During this decade, it was common within the artistic community to decommercialize art. This resulted in a surge of ephemeral approaches to creation. Sullivan shifted her focus to the creation of conceptual work. She no longer wanted to create art that relied on the production of objects. Sullivan chose to return to the movement performance (Gérin).

Between 1976 and 1979, Françoise Sullivan began travelling throughout Europe more often. During this time, she was exposed to various forms of art creation that also sought to disrupt traditional aesthetic values. One form that had a particular impact on Sullivan was

Arte Povera. Arte Povera is an Italian art movement that questioned the established values of institutionalised power (Matfanov). Similar to Surrealism, Arte Povera is an art form that is also recognized for its involvement in revolutionary politics. Sullivan was drawn to this art style because of its similarities to her artistic experience and creative methods.

With her work with Arte Povera, Sullivan's love of dance was revived. After twenty years, Sullivan began choreographing again. In 1978, she started teaching dance at Concordia University in Montreal. From that point on, Sullivan continued to pursue both dance and painting, having successfully established a career in both disciplines.

Methods of Automatism in Dance

The employment of Breton's early depiction of "automatism" is well suited for dance. While the Surrealist work that is produced through dance is ephemeral, it is an arguably more accurate depiction of automatism, than that made with materialistic mediums. This is because the practised body is capable of reacting to the impulses of the mind directly and almost immediately. As Françoise Sullivan explains in her essay "Dance and Hope"(1948), the body is capable of acting as a medium for the unconscious and the conscious mind (Gérin). There is no need for the conscious mind to regulate the strokes of a paintbrush or writing of a pen in order to pursue automation through dance. The Surrealist practice of automatism is ideal for the embodied practice of a dancer.

André Breton's refinement of Surrealism provides a simple approach to automatism for the mental liberation of the individual. The Automatists adoption of this Surrealist technique, and their creation of *Refus Global* acts as an introductory guide to artistic revolution and societal liberation. The collection of this provides a trove of automatism methods that may be used in all disciplines of art. This section will recognize embodied automatism within dance practice, as conducted by Francosie Sullivan. It will also contrast

Taylor Nicole's study of automatism and dance, and her premeditated approach to Surrealism and automatism.

In Françoise Sullivan's early choreographic work, she created two cite specific pieces in honour of the seasons. The dances were improvisational, as Sullivan would react to her environmental surroundings. The first work was created in the summer, appropriately titled "Summer" (1947). In this work, Sullivan moved to the push of the wind, as it guided her from rocks to hills, before disappearing over the curving landscape. The second work was created in the winter and was titled "Dance in the Snow" (1948). Set to the silence of the frigid season, Sullivan constructed a dialogue with the crunching snow beneath her feet (Gérin).

Sullivan frequently used improvisation as a way of allowing the body to act freely. In doing so, the body would use raw energy to react to the impulses of the unconscious mind. This task would become more fluid, as the dancer practised being receptive to their creative core (Gérin). By embodying her practice of automatism, Sullivan produced movement that was organic to her body, and her environment.

Dance scholar Taylor Nicole conducted her thesis research on Surrealism and Butoh in 2014 (Nicole). In her pursuit of using Surrealist methods to choreograph a Butoh dance, she made a dream journal. As often as she could, Nicole would record the events of her dreams by writing them down after waking up. This provided insight to the present themes within her unconscious mind. This included the distortion of reality and shifts in visual atmosphere.

From this record of her dreams, Taylor Nicole would create thematic prompts. These prompts would be used during guided improvisational sessions (Nicole, 35). This method would allow Nicole to reconstruct the subverted realities witnessed within her dreams. Like Sullivan's embodied practice with automatism, Nicole would use improvisation to allow her body to act as the medium between her unconscious and conscious mind. However, she

would use prepared prompts that were reminiscent of her unconscious to support her receptibility to creative impulses.

Both of the methods described above provide insight to the potential of automatism and choreography. Françoise Sullivan's method is an embodied approach, with the inclusion of a practised dancer. Taylor Nicole's approach requires written preparation that offers a concrete entry point to the individual's unconscious landscape. Much like the practice itself, the approach to automatism in dance is fluid, and can be presented in several forms. However, the goal of traversing the unconscious and reacting to impulse within the body remains consistent.

Despite several adaptations over time, Surrealism remains consistent in its core values. Its methods allow the individual to traverse their unconscious mind and liberate themselves from within. André Breton's Surrealist methods offer a refuge from the stresses of society, or a platform for revolution. The practice of Surrealism is fluid, and capable of being used in various mediums of art. As demonstrated by Françoise Sullivan and Taylor Nicole, it is clear that automatism is particularly suitable for dance practice and choreography.

Chapter II. Digital Escapism: Mundane Surrealism

The founder of Surrealism, André Breton, originally intended for the art movement to be therapeutic for its participants. Inspired by Sigmund Freud's study of the unconscious mind, Breton adopted techniques including free-writing and drawing. These techniques would encourage the participant to act on their creative impulses, allowing thoughts to flow freely from the unconscious, automatic mind. This practice came to be referred to as "automatism." Automatism was originally created as a form of therapy for soldiers experiencing emotional trauma during the First World War. Automatic methods were thought to encourage communication with the unconscious mind. When this unfettered communication was achieved, the individual would be able to identify and begin resolving the source of their emotional distress. Breton believed this gave the individual the power to rewrite their perception of the world from within. He believed the therapeutic purposes of automatism could be useful to the general public, who may find themselves exhausted by the daily stresses of everyday life. The participant could alter their perception of mundane stresses by dealing with them on a psychological level, directing their emotional reactions into a positive outlet. Breton believed this change in outlook would result in experiencing the physical world through the imaginative lens of the unconscious mind. Automatism offers a sense of personal control through the therapeutic exploration of one's own mind. Additionally, it offers a brief period of relief. A moment in which the individual is encouraged to release their hold on the physical body and observe the unfettered nature of their inner mind.

Escapism

Modern methods of stress relief offer similar results to automatism. The indulgence of digital media consumption has become increasingly popular. In response to the COVID-19

pandemic, many countries implemented lockdown measures, requiring people to stay home when possible. Non-essential businesses either limited their hours or transitioned to providing remote services. Additionally, capacity restrictions were implemented, limiting the amount of people that could gather in the same place (Eggertson). This resulted in many people working and learning from home. With this increased amount of time spent at home, there has been a spike of recreational media consumption in the past few years. Readily accessible forms of digital media act as stress relievers, offering a brief diversion from the outside world.

The act of media consumption to alleviate negative emotions is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1950s, the term "escapism" has been used to encompass this method of distraction (Klimmt). Escapism refers to the act of using media in order to avoid thinking about life stresses. With the use of digital media, the user escapes from their own self through the engagement of stimulating or enjoyable activities. Types of entertainment media that are used include radio, television, video games, and social media platforms.

Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in the consumption of entertainment media. Research Andrew Kuo claims that there are typically two main types of coping mechanisms people engage in when faced with a stressor. One is referred to as "problem-focused," in which individuals seek to address the cause of the stressor and resolve the conflict at its source. In order to achieve this, the stressor must be something that is within the control of the individual to a certain degree. The second category of coping is "emotion-focused," in which the individual seeks out ways for alleviating the negative emotions incurred by the stressor. This is often done by redirecting their attention away from the stressor, with the use of something enjoyable (Kuo, 498). As the cause of the stress related to Covid-19 could not be easily resolved by an individual, the "emotion focused" coping mechanism would have been more typical. This resulted in the redirection of energy towards

something that could be in the individual's control. Many turned to escapism as a way of alleviating negative emotions and filling the newfound abundance of free time.

Andrew Kuo and his colleagues aimed to investigate the phenomenon of escapism involving different forms of media (Kuo, 498). They also evaluated different causes for this phenomenon. Kuo and his colleagues gathered individuals who identified themselves as frequent consumers of entertainment media. The sample group presented a strong interest in video games. Participants expressed their frequent engagement in digital media as a response to stresses within their own lives. They explained that they would use media as a way to make up for something they were lacking in their physical world. In the virtual world, an individual's video game avatar could be strong, courageous, and free. By immersing themself within the game, the individual sees their avatar as an extension of themselves. During this brief period, the person perceives themselves in a way that may not be obtainable in the physical world. In a life that lacks a sense of control, the individual experiences control in the virtual world. They are capable of customising their character to match their preferences. Challenges that arise have tangible solutions and are followed by some type of reward system. Kuo describes this constructive form of escapism as "active escapism" (Kuo, 501). In active escapism, individuals choose forms of media that are immersive and interactive. Their choices in how they engage with the media have consequences within the virtual plane. As a result, participants will make choices that will help compensate for their desires within their everyday life. Additionally, the individual regains a sense of autonomy while existing in the virtual plane. This immersive experience can be cathartic for the individual and help them work through emotional stresses on a mental level.

During the initial lockdown negative emotions such as fear of isolation, arose among the public. Researcher Tim Wulf, claims a fear of isolation influenced an increase in media

consumption (Wulf, 6). Lockdown measures included social distancing and self-isolating, leaving individuals feeling both physically and emotionally alone. Tim Wulf explains that the people experiencing this negative feeling were drawn to forms of media that produced positive reactions and presented a social or interactive function. People would use forms of media, including social media platforms and online multiplayer games, as a way of making up for social interaction that was lacking in their life. The participant's presence would gain significance in the virtual plane, while they continued to build remote relationships with other media users. While physically isolated, a network of companions could be easily accessed through media. This form of escapism also works to compensate for a sense of longing in the physical world, and offer the participant catharsis.

Everyday Surrealism

Escapism has been used during the pandemic to combat arising stresses during the lockdown. The consumption of various forms of media provides emotional catharsis, both individually and within a group. Catharsis is the release of pent-up emotions, by allowing them to manifest in response to an external stimulus. This can be done through the indulgence of media and various art forms, in order to provoke and then purge deep, sometimes stressful, emotions. The result is intended to be similar to a cleanse, in which the individual emerges feeling renewed by the shedding of strong emotions. The methods of escapism popular during the lockdown are reminiscent of the therapeutic methods of early automatism.

Automatism and escapism allow the participant to dedicate their attention to their inner mind. Through the consumption of digital media, the participant is able to tend to their emotions. They seek out and engage in pleasurable activities, including video games, television, and social media. During these bouts of indulgence, the individual is given relief from the stress of the physical world. When immersed in the media before them, they are able

to forget about daily stresses, while existing predominantly in the digital plane. Automatism urges the participant to transcend their physical body, focusing on their mind as well. The participant is meant to focus on the desires of the unconscious mind, and respond to them through a creative outlet. While practising automatism, the individual is meant to communicate with the unconscious mind, discovering potential sources of emotions, and freely react to them. The resulting emotional response can remain purely reactive, or be directed into a constructive outlet. This communication is intended to alleviate the impact of those daily stresses, the more they are acknowledged and worked through.

Escapism provides a feeling of catharsis. The digital world is capable of compensating for things that may be lacking in an individual's daily life. During a time of isolation, digital media including online multiplayer games and social media increased in appeal. These forms of media helped to combat the fear of isolation Tim Wulf claims many people were faced with. In this sense, escapism combats negative emotions and stresses through the use of catharsis. Automatism provides catharsis through the use of creative outlets. The participant is urged to act on their inner impulses without judgement, and direct that energy into a form of action that feels appropriate to the individual. This refers to arts forms including free-writing, drawing, or movement. The participant allows themselves to experience their negative emotions, and direct them into an outlet. This allows the person to communicate with their inner mind, address what is amiss, and freely express what they discover. In doing so, the individual gains a sense of catharsis, as they are able to process through their emotions.

Popularity of escapism grew during the pandemic. When lacking a sense of control, individuals used digital media as a method of regaining autonomy within the virtual plane. The practice of automatism is intended to help free the creative mind. During a time of political conflict in the 1940s, French-Canadians faced many restrictions over their artistic

practice. A group of surrealist artists became enthusiastic about automatism, for its capability of freeing the mind. Indulging in the imaginative freedom of the irrational mind was appealing to those artists who lacked the ability to freely express themselves within their current circumstances. Similar to escapism within the digital plane, these artists were able to regain a sense of autonomy through the exploration of their unconscious mind.

Immersion in digital media is a new way of experiencing surrealism. Technology has the capability to achieve surrealist aesthetics free from the laws of reality. The act of submerging oneself in the media is similar to the act of engaging in lengthy bouts of automatism. Each allows the individual to prime the mind, in a way that is reactive and adaptable. The experience can be enjoyable and constructive to one's personal growth. At its basic function, each act as a brief period of release from the stresses of daily life. It is because of these similarities, that the pursuit of surrealism through digital media is enriched with possibilities.

In the pursuit of a modern approach to automatism, it is possible to consider the methods of digital escapism. While automatism began as a predominantly physical practice, it shares a similar objective as escapism through the use of media. With the increasing popularity of therapeutic media consumption, it is possible to expand the ways in which automatism can be approached. Aside from the traditional methods, including free-writing, painting, and movement practice in order to bypass the logical conscious mind, digital media can offer vibrant forms of immersive stimulus that can bring out the inner creativity of the individual and aid in the release of stress. The inclusion of both practices is a well matched approach to aligning automatism with the current social climate. Escapism is a digital form of automatism. Automatism can act as an analogue form of escapism.

Chapter III. Digital Media and Live Performance

Dance is an embodied practice that requires a certain degree of physical awareness. When contemporary dance enters the virtual world, this sense of physicality is altered. The use of film and projection creates avenues in which the body can be redefined and reframed. My research takes advantage of these avenues in order to construct a dreamscape. Virtual doubles are introduced as separate entities from their original copy, capable of transcending the limitations of the physical body. Intricate projections alter the environment in which the naturally occurring bodies reside. Dancers are encompassed by digital influences, both functional to the work and predominantly aesthetic. This digital augmentation results in work that exists in both the physical and virtual plane.

Virtual and Live Bodies

Much of the projections in my creative project are derived from the body. The function of projected bodies within my work was inspired by Steve Dixon's discussion of "Virtual Bodies" in his text *Digital Performance* (Dixon). Often virtual bodies are assumed to be transformations of the physical body, as it transcends into cyberspace. Dixon's text challenges this assumption by explaining virtual bodies as a depiction of the physical body. He argues that in order for a transformation to occur, the original body needs to be altered in some way. In the creation of a theatrical virtual body, no change is made to the physical body (Dixon, 212). Rather a virtual double is made, and then altered within cyberspace for aesthetic purposes. Therefore, the virtual body is a malleable entity, separate from the physical original.

My research explores the existence of virtual doubles within live space. The bodies represent depictions of past selves. My work relies on the evolving nature of the organic body as it learns and adapts to external stimuli. In comparison, the virtual body is stagnant in

nature. The creation of virtual bodies in my work consists of pre-recorded media. This media captures the physical existence of the performers in the moment of its recording. The recordings are later altered for aesthetic purposes. After the editing process, these virtual bodies never go through a state of change again. By the time these recordings are projected on stage, the dancers interacting with them have undergone several physical and intellectual changes.

During the performance of the work, dancers are conscious of the shifts in their physical state. They are mindful of their increasing fatigue as their final week of rehearsals continues. They conduct warmups, preparing their mind and body for the task ahead. As physical entities, they will always receive physical feedback as they continue to grow, strengthen, and adapt. Their virtual doubles will never undergo that kind of growth. They are depictions of the dancers before weeks of rehearsals and continued practice. They are depictions of past selves.

The performance uses the stagnant nature of the virtual bodies to its advantage. Since the virtual bodies remain untouched by the passage of time they are positioned as entities with the ability to transcend the forward flow of time. In their first appearance, the Premonition Film, they are ghosts of the past depicting the future. In their second appearance, the Virtual Flocking, they represent the past controlling the present. In their final appearance, Stalking After-Images, they are past selves trailing behind their present counterparts.

Premonition Film

The first appearance of media in my work is the Premonition film. Before its abrupt appearance, the dancers are presented in a neutral space. They are amply lit by simple amber. The dancers go through their first two phrases in this neutral space. The attention is solely on the dancers, as they navigate their physicality within the restrictions of each movement

phrase. The Premonition film is the catalyst. Its appearance thrusts the work into a series of digitally augmented scenes. From this point on, the dancers exist within a visually malleable space.

The film is projected on the massive cyclorama behind the dancers. In the moments before this, the dancers are engrossed in a cycling state of throwing and rolling, with no intention of stopping. The Premonition film snaps on, wrenching them out of their trance. In the wake of the film's sudden appearance, they are too compelled to move initially. The dancers remain static for a short period of time, while they try to make sense of what is being projected on the screen behind them. As the space darkens, they congregate to the centre of stage. Their backs to the audience, the dancers are quiet witnesses to the film in front of them.

Figure 1*: Observing the Premonition Film I,* Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Zuri Skeete, Bethany McMorine. Photography: Don Sinclair

The Premonition film is a depiction of the future. The dancers witness themselves performing a seemingly unknown phrase of movement. The content of the film consists of

fragmented video of the Rushing phrase. The film creates a sense of fabricated continuity. While the perspective of the video is constantly changing, the focus of the material leads into one another. Within a wide group shot, a dancer makes her way to the centre and pauses. The film switches to a close up of them moving into the next action within the same phrase. Each dive into the low space is met with a shot on the floor, as they continue to rush past the view of the camera.

The film captures fragments of their bodies in constant motion; glimpses of the dancers as they brush past the scope of the lens. They are cast in rich colours of blue, transitioning to red. Colour bounces off their skin and flairs above their heads. The colour scheme of the film foreshadows the colours of the following lighting and projections that will occur in the live space. The intense colouring of the film supports the dancers' transition from a neutral space to the digitally vibrant world they are propelled into.

The film is a disorienting collection of changing perspectives and overlain video. The intention behind the film style was to imitate the experience of deja vu. The dancers are shown quick bursts of themselves performing something familiar, but not whole. There is just enough information for them to know what they must do next, but not enough for them to be sure they are witnessing the future. The fragmented images are familiar and new.

The film closes as their virtual selves are shown in waves of upward throws and rolling. This footage mirrors their movement from just before the premonition video, and what they will mimic after the film's end. The smooth movement becomes broken by missing frames, revealing flashes of swirling particles. With their virtual selves absent from the screen, they are plunged into the Rushing phrase. After just witnessing their virtual selves move through the work, they confidently move into their live rendition of the phrase.

Virtual Flocking

The second appearance of the virtual selves is during what is referred to as the Virtual Flocking section. The conditions of the phrase are inspired by an improvisational exercise known as ‘flocking.’ Flocking is a type of improvisational exercise in which a group moves in unison, as they follow an unidentifiable leader. The leader is silently decided to be whoever is at the front of the formation. The role of leader can also shift with the directional focus of the group, in order to accommodate for changing fields of view. The rest of the dancers must match the movement of the leader. This task should be accomplished well enough that the leader is unidentifiable to the viewer (Suzanne).

The Virtual Flocking phrase uses virtual doubles of each dancer as additional members to the group. The back screen is flooded with past versions of themselves. Where there were once three dancers commanding the space, there are suddenly thirty-three. The virtual bodies appear in a way that is reminiscent of online pop-up ads. A new video feed takes up a portion of the screen at seemingly random intervals. The video feeds begin cascading over one another, fighting for space on the finite screen. After approximately twenty-five seconds, the video feeds stop flooding in. The screen is filled with thirty virtual selves navigating movement from a long forgotten past.

Figure 2: *Digital Flocking, Feb 18, 2022. Left to right: Zuri Skeete, Sydney Cobham, Bethany McMorine. Photo captured from video footage*

The physical dancers silently watch the wave of virtual bodies enter their line of focus. After the initial flood of stimulus passes, they begin moving with their virtual selves. The dancers were tasked with choosing a leader out of the thirty bodies displayed in front of them. Each dancer was given the option to choose their own leader, and this leader could change with every run of the piece.

In this section, the virtual selves decide the choreography of the piece. For a brief period of time, the live dancers relinquish their autonomy to these digital bodies. In this moment, the past controls the present. The physical dancers merely need to be receptive to the media in front of them. This receptibility is made ready by the sheer abundance of the media's appearance.

After this brief window of relinquishing control, the dancers begin to regain their autonomy. Shifting their focus back to the physical plane, the dancers begin flocking among

their physical selves. The dancers move in unison with one another, unaffected by the massive stimulating screen in front of them. While the remaining memory of their virtual selves may have some lingering influence, the dancers have regained the autonomy to ultimately choose their movement within the physical plane. Having lost the ability to control the present, the past video feeds begin to disappear.

Stalking After-Images

After the shift of power, the virtual bodies are transformed a final time. They appear as walking images, travelling across the screen in sequential frames. The three bodies exist on three different tiers. Their appearances are staggered, but never alone. During their recurring journeys, their focus remains on the live dancers in the physical plane. The virtual bodies have become the silent witnesses to their physical selves.

Figure 3: *Stalking After-Images and Automatism Solo I, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Bethany McMorine, Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete. Photography: Don Sinclair*

This final appearance of the virtual bodies represents the past trailing behind the present. The physical dancers proceed with their movement, untethered from virtual

influences. The virtual selves mimic the walking of the live bodies. Their looping movement becomes a two-dimensional tracing of their live counterparts. The virtual bodies have become decorative, no longer possessing the ability to influence the live dancers. As their travel continues to loop, their bodies become increasingly distorted. The edges of their image are blurred and stretched out. The bodies become vibrate bands of blue and red waving across the screen. The virtual bodies are distorted beyond recognition, until they finally phase out.

Projections and Spectacle

Initially, I was wary of including projections beyond the explorations of digital doubles, which was established early in my process. If the projections did not directly interact with my dancers and the pre-set choreography, I assumed they would be out of place. After researching the work done by Claire Bandainne and Adrien Mondot, I gained a better understanding of environmental augmentation through the use of projections. Their choreographic work *Le mouvement de l'air,* inspired me to indulge in the visually appealing possibility of projections in dance.

Figure 4: *Le mouvement de l'air* (2015), Choreographed and designed by Claire Bardainne and Adrien Mondot. Photography: Romain Etienne (Etienne)

Le mouvement de l'air was performed in 2015, with a duration of one hour. The piece took a team of approximately 22 other collaborators to produce. The work was about the invisible movement of air, and the various qualities it can portray (Mondot). This work was created with pre-set choreography, while the projections continued to be conducted in real time (Jobson). The dancers perform in a large corner of a room. Projections define and embellish the space of two walls and the floor. The dancers are either lit or silhouetted by intricate, cleverly placed projections. Since the choreography is created beforehand, the projections focus on world building around the performers. Images of swirling lines paint the walls; a tornado of dots circle a spinning dancer. The work is meant to be a visual spectacle, enticing the dancers and the audience to experience the new reality unfolding around them.

Many artists are known to juxtapose live performance with projected media, as a way of exciting the audience. Similar to Bardainne and Mondot's aim in *le mouvement de l'air* (2015), this approach appeals to the senses over the rational mind (Dixon, 336). While

discussing scenic spectacle, Dixon explains that using projected media to augment the space often guarantees a certain level of engagement from the audience, as they try to make sense of what is happening (Dixon, 337). This is present in *le mouvement de l'air* (2015) with the consistent cycle of visually appetising and complex scenes among live performers. Just as the dancers continue to explore qualities of momentum and weight, the projections are constantly evolving to symbolically depict the work that is being done.

In the later half of my research, I became fascinated with digital media as a spectacle. A major part of my work was discovering ways to augment reality. This was done by addressing how the dancers naturally occurred in space and finding ways to alter that. The juxtaposition of virtual and organic bodies introduced a synthetic component, thus altering the concept of nature within the space.

However, I also wanted to explore ways I could visually augment the environment around the dancers, beyond the presence of virtual bodies. I wanted to encase them in media that both supported the concept of the work and was simply enticing to look at. I transitioned into the use of projections to support the building of a dreamscape. Once the first set of virtual bodies appear, the dancers are thrust into a digital world. This world is visually enriched, consuming the dancers in synthetic light and visuals. It is in a constant state of change, just as the dancers constantly adapt to new tasks.

My use of projections aids in the construction of this environment. From the moment they enter the digital environment, the cyclorama is always projected. After the Premonition video is finished, the dancers are met by a vast wall of swirling particles. A measureless number of particles congregate and disperse. Their cool blue colour peaks to white as they crash into one another and fall apart. The scene is reminiscent of waves churning together.

Figure 5: *Rushing Phrase, Water Variations,* Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete, Bethany McMorine. Photography: Don Sinclair

These swirling particles accompany the dancers until the Digital Flocking section takes over. The Premonition video that appeared before the particles depicts the future of the dancers. It also foreshadows the colour scheme that the particles will cycle through. As the Premonition film progressed, shots of dancers bathed in red began to frequent the footage. This continued until the film ended with the dancers encased in layers of red. The particles followed the same narrative. They began as a cool blue. This is to represent the waves that inspire the phrase accompanying the projection. As the piece progressed, the colour shifted from shades of blue to deep red. The lighting on stage mirrored the evolving colour scheme of the projections. The rich light of the projection extended into the physical environment. The dancers were bathed in intense blues and reds, just as their virtual doubles had predicted in their first appearance.

While the use of this projection does not directly interact with the movement of the dancers, it aids in building the environment. Allowing the work to have visually appealing media for the sake of creating a spectacle created another opportunity to augment the physical

space. Unlike the research done with virtual doubles, the function of this projection was purely aesthetic. As Dixon implies, the juxtapositions of visually stimulating media and live performance is engaging to the viewer. The choices I made towards virtual doubles and media were significant to my research. However, I also wanted the work to be enticing to watch, regardless of the deeper meaning behind it. I wanted the digital world the dancers ventured into to be visually compelling. Including projections for the sake of creating a spectacle allowed me to achieve this.

In my exploration of surrealism, I intended to create a "dreamscape aesthetic." This was the term I would use to describe the construction of an ephemeral, visually enticing environment. This environment would be in a constant state of flux. In doing so, I aimed to create visual representations of the nonsensical unconscious mind. This approach to surrealism is reminiscent of "Bretonian" surrealism, which uses symbolism to represent the unconscious mind.

Technology became a significant tool in building a dreamscape. The capabilities of what could be done aided my pursuit in distorting reality. With the use of video and projection, I was able to create clones of the dancers and have them exist in a live space. These clones were capable of doing things the physical body couldn't. They could appear as colossal entities conveying the future. Their watchful eyes could multiply, becoming thirty bodies commanding the show. They could become ghostly figures, trailing behind their counterparts before vanishing. The virtual bodies supported the dreamscape for their capability to transcend the physical plane. They represented what the physical body could not do, but the mind could certainly imagine.

In my pursuit of creating a visually enticing dreamscape, the use of digital media took on an aesthetic function. With the inclusion of projections, the performance environment was able to be in a constant state of flux. The performance space evolved, just as the dancers

adapted to the ongoing challenges of each movement phrase. While on their physical journey, they became encased in a digitally augmented space. This relationship between virtual and live constructs a performance that exists in the space between natural and synthetic.

Chapter IV: Automatism and Choreography

Automatism Practice

In automatism, it is common to engage in extended sessions of improvisation (Betts). This is intended to hone the individual's sensitivity to their subconscious. In order to become receptive to inner creative impulses, one must practise this skill. Lengthy episodes of improvisation give the participant time to clear their mind. As movement begins to flow freely, the need for conscious control diminishes. Overtime, the practitioner is able to give in to their impulses. They are receiving and responding in unison, without conscious thought.

In order to practice this approach of automatism, I decided to implement recurring improvisational practice sessions. In the pursuit of creating an unfettered stream of creativity, automatism requires long, uninterrupted periods of improvisation. Since I was given a finite amount of rehearsal time, with much to accomplish, lengthy automatism training was impractical. Therefore, I decided on short but frequent bursts of dedicated practice. This way the dancers could familiarise themselves with this style of automatism, and still have the time and energy for other tasks.

Each rehearsal would start with ten-minute improvisational sessions. These sessions were explored individually. This time was meant for the dancers to tune into their bodies, to listen and respond to any physical or mental feedback. The nature of the practice is meant to create a dialogue with one's unconscious mind. In doing so, the practitioner will be able to discover a new aesthetic of movement that is unique to them. For the majority of these sessions, there were no creative prompts or restrictions that might influence the exploration. The dancers were allowed the autonomy to explore their movement freely.

Over the course of these sessions, I recorded observations about the qualities of movement and physical tendencies each dancer displayed. Each improvisational session yielded new observations. These recurring observations acted as documentation of their

automatism practice. As the dancers became more accustomed to automatism improvisation, their creative outputs evolved. It took them less time to tune into their bodies. The movement they created offered layers of intricacy that would have taken much more consideration to create prior to their practice with automatism. I noted that their personal movement habits were still present. Rather than trying to break these habits, the dancers used them as springboards towards further developing their artistry. Each dancer defined what type of movement interested them and explored how far their interests could take them.

Movement Profile

The ten-minute automatism sessions began on the first day of rehearsals for my creative project. During each session, I would record observations regarding the moving tendencies of each dancer. The collection of these observations acted as a way to track their artistic development.

In the first month of automatism practice, Bethany McMorine's movement focused on environment exploration. Her movement hinted towards expansive but remained withheld in range and energy. She frequently moved in short bursts of explosive energy, before retreating back to exploring the room in a pedestrian manner. Her movement would exhibit sudden shifts in focus, interrupting the previous direction of her exploration. This would occur either in response to a shift in music, or when she became aware of a spectator.

As rehearsals progressed, McMorine's movement became stronger. She directed her energy into the shape of her arms and legs. However, this energy dispersed before reaching her hands, feet, and face. Her exploration of the space became sensation driven, as she found new ways to interact with the floor, walls, and corners.

By the end of rehearsals, McMorine focused on the capabilities of her body. She no longer relied on short, sporadic bursts of energy to guide her into new movements. Instead,

McMorine maintained a steady flow of energy that provided strength to her core and extremities. This presence allowed for the creation of challenging positions and shifts of weight. McMorine remained responsive to outside stimulus, such as the environment and the music. However, these stimuli did not interrupt McMorine's focus on her current physicality. Instead, they acted as reserves she may respond to, should she feel compelled to do so. Near the end of the creative process, McMorine's autonomy over her exploration was predominantly derived from her own impulses. This self-exploration was no longer interrupted by external influences such as music, or the sense of obligation to perform for others.

In the first month of automatism practice, Zuri Skeete's focus remained inward. She prioritised the sensation of the body. Skeete would isolate joints, repeating movements several times. This time was dedicated to gaining feedback from the body. Her movement remained focused and controlled.

Later on, Skeete began focusing on shape. She would sequentially isolate joints, exploring their range and angles before moving on to the next. This exploration would lead her into new shapes. She used her profound sense of control to transition into and hold angular shapes.

By the end of rehearsals, Skeete developed the control of her joints towards discovering new patterns. She worked with repetition to create variation in these pathways. With each repeated movement, she progressively changed an aspect of it. These movements changed in texture, tempo, and energy before she moved onto the next point of fixation. Her exploration of joints expanded beyond just the extremities. She would find isolated movement in vertebrae, ribs, and hips as effortlessly as she would in an elbow or knee. Skeete tangled herself in awkward positions before undoing them and starting again.

Sydney Cobham's initial explorations focused on movement patterns. She exhibited a subtle exploration of weight, while remaining relatively contained to one place. Her exploration was centred on her body, while her visual focus projected outwards. Initially, she was driven by tactile sensation. This exploration of touch was typically directed at her own body and the floor.

Approximately a month into rehearsals, Cobham's exploration became more responsive to her body's relation to space and gravity. She would often begin a minute movement, allowing that movement to resonate and build in the body. Having initiated the movement, Cobham would then follow this momentum to wherever it may guide her. This relation to momentum allowed Cobham to spiral, change levels, and travel around the space with minimal effort. In breaks between momentum, she would float any residual energy into long lines across the body. She created points and curves with her extremities, before falling towards a new direction once again.

By the end of rehearsals, Cobham had developed a masterful relationship to momentum. She required little energy in order to swiftly travel great distances. Cobham explored the capabilities of weight and flow. Dropping and throwing her weight in order to begin sudden bursts of momentum. She maintained these remnants of that energy by floating her extremities or arching her torso. Cobham's body stayed relaxed, prepared for sudden movement. This receptibility allowed the body to guide her into farther ranges of movement.

At the beginning of the automatism sessions, each of the dancers exhibited hints of what interested them. Their exploration was tentative and muddled. As the practice continued, they required less time to listen to their bodies. The dancers began defining what movement fascinated them. By the end of these sessions, the dancers were familiar with their creative impulses. They refined their movement tendencies in order to indulge in their unique movement profiles. Their movement was confident. They continued to expand on their

artistry, discovering new positions and patterns that are unique to them. The dancers became adept at defining their creative impulses and mastering them.

Automatism Solos

The automatism solos were directly related to the automatism ten-minute practice for every rehearsal. During the first three months of the automatism practice, I recorded observations on the movement quality each dancer exhibited that day in their ten-minute practice. I compiled a list of habits for each dancer. This list consisted of observations that had been recorded more than once during the dancer's automatism practice. The result was approximately four movement habits for each dancer.

I gave the dancers their corresponding movement tendencies and had them create a phrase that recreated all of the observed habits. They were given seven minutes to complete this task. Just as in the past, the dancers were urged to trust their initial impulse while creating their phrase.

The creation of these phrases came easily to the dancers. They did not require the entire seven minutes to complete their task. When asked about the experience, the dancers agreed this was one of the easier tasks they had been given. The dancers were able to fulfil each requirement without difficulty, as the specified qualities were already familiar to their unique movement.

The creation of these solos allowed for a chance to acknowledge their movement tendencies, and truly hone in on them. This exploration produced embodied work that was both effortless and fascinating for the dancers to compose. Focusing in on what was familiar allowed for concentration to be on the intricacies of the phrase. The structure came smoothly, and with little effort, which enabled the dancers to focus on the presentation of the movement. They created variety with their use of repetition, texture, and timing. The

resulting movement phrases accessed a more profound understanding of their individual movement profiles, that goes beyond the casual refinement achieved during the ten-minute automatism sessions.

Zuri Skeete's solo exhibits a robotic exploration of pattern and repetition. It highlights the subtle changes in the body while revisiting the same movement several times. She traces fluid pathways in the space around her, allowing her torso to be reactive to her extremities. This is immediately contrasted by the use of linear pathways, carved with angular arms. Her core remains engaged and upright. As she enters a loop of opening and closing, her body begins to soften. Skeete is unwilling to hold onto the rigidity of her previous state. Moving towards a state of direct momentum, Skeete digs her hands towards the ground, before curving them back up towards the sky in a rebounding rhythm. She finishes her phrase by entering a final loop. Skeete holds her arms in front of her at shoulder level. She allows one arm to drop. The arm swings down and opens to the side. Her leg steps back before pivoting her hips to the side. She takes an open position to the back. Her arms stretch to her sides, as her legs enter a wide stance. The loop returns to its beginning by dropping the arm again. It swings back down, causing her body to turn inwards to her starting position. This loop continues until she is swept up by Sydney Cobham and Bethany McMorine.

This solo was placed in the middle of the Rushing section. The vertical nature of Skeete's solo contrasts the dipping and rising of the other dancers within the phrase. Skeete acts as an immovable object that is ultimately overcome by the waves crashing around her.

Sydney Cobham's solo is a tactile exploration of the body and its momentum. Cobham uses repetition as a method of building momentum in stationary places. With each repeat, she finds new parts of the body that can be used to generate movement. She uses this built-up momentum to carry her across the space. She glides, swirls, dives, and rises, using the momentum from the last movement to propel her into the next. These flurries of

movements are interrupted by a sudden tactile interaction with her body. The touch anchors her to one spot, as she spends a moment manipulating her own body. A gentle caress expands her body, while a sudden impact sends her into a new burst of movement. Rushing forward, she slides to the floor. She spins on her hips, rolls across her back, and spirals back and around to a seated position. She begins a tactile exploration with her hands across her torso, bringing her to her knees. Cobham throws her arms up, circling them over her head as she rises. She drops her head towards the ground and rebounds. The force of it sends her arms and legs up into the air. Her leg rounds at its peak, cause her to spin as she makes her way to a standing position.

This solo exists under the rules of an improvisational exercise. Cobham's speed must change, depending on the proximity of the other dancers. While Cobham performs her solo, the other dancers are walking around her. When they notice she is dancing alone, they must approach and circle her. When someone is in close proximity to Cobham, she must perform her solo at half speed. If no one is close to Cobham, she may move at her regular pace.

This was a fascinating solo to place such restrictions on. Much of Cobham's solo relies on the use of momentum in order to perform certain movements. When Cobham suddenly needs to move at half speed, her momentum is interrupted. While soloing near someone, she must rely on her strength to execute the same moves while controlling her speed. When she is left alone once again, she is faced with the challenge of fabricating her momentum in order to carry out her solo at its true pace.

Chapter V: *In Medias Res*: Choreographing Levels

Progressing Through Levels

A major part of my approach to the choreography had to do with tasks and objectives. Challenges would be given to the dancers during guided improvisational sessions. They would be tasked with creating a phrase of movement while adhering to assigned restrictions. Much of this process relied on the dancers' capability for problem solving. These objectives were often timed. The dancers would need to work efficiently, having no time to doubt their creative impulses as they arose. Choreography would later be modified in order to assemble the piece, but the core movement of the work was derived from the sudden choices the dancers would make while adhering to various restrictions. As a result, there was no requirement for the dancers to project a certain range of emotions. The work did not try to hide the concentration that goes into each phrase. Their focus was on the body, as it traverses shifting environments with different challenges.

As the phrases began to lead into one another, the result became reminiscent of a video game. Each phrase presented a new task for the dancers to complete. With these new tasks came an altered environment. The dancers effortlessly transitioned from one objective to the next, as they accomplished each movement task. Connecting all the phrases together gave the feeling of moving through levels in a video game. The dancers needed to make it to the end of each level before moving on to the next. Their acceptance of these shifting environments was due to an objective-driven mentality. They had to remain adaptable, in order to complete each task and move on. This meant their focus was on their actions within the shifting environments, rather than fascination at the visual spectacle around them.

Once they enter each new phrase, the environment becomes more augmented. This augmentation is communicated in two ways. It is communicated through the introduction of

media, and through the increasing quantity of restrictions given to each dancer. Phrases become intertwined with others, creating levels with multiple sources of movement.

My interest in creating an objective-driven piece was inspired by entertainment media, and its increasing relevance over the past few years. I wanted the physical practice of automatism to be an indulgence for the dancers, in which they could focus on the physical presence of their bodies. I also wanted to consider other methods of digital indulgence, such as video games. This association is part of what inspired me to create such a vibrant and challenging environment for the dancers to explore. As I continued to introduce more challenges, phrases grew and branched off to create new environments. Eventually, the idea of progressing through these environments became a prominent narrative to the piece.

The Levels

The dancers worked through a series of tasks. They explored each concept before moving on to the next. They were familiar with the restrictions set for each phrase and adjusted their movement accordingly. This section will explain the task of each phrase, the restrictions they are under, and how it fits into the final product. The levels refer only to the sections of choreography that are not directly influenced by its relationship to technology. The explanation of these levels is focused on the physical body within a live space.

Trance Solo

The creation of trance solos was one of my first approaches to my creative project. I wanted to create a phrase of work that could be performed with minimal cognitive thought. Something that would mimic the displacement of the conscious mind, in the pursuit of an unfettered, creative subconscious. The work would start as a fully formed phrase. Through the action of repeating the moment, and allowing the conscious to defocus, the body would

begin to act on impulse. As the phrase continued to be looped, the dancers would subconsciously focus on the core moments of the phrase. Overtime, the phrase would lose smaller details, until full sections of the phrase were lost. I wanted this trend to continue until the dancers were left entranced in a single movement. They would repeat this final core movement as something purely physical, with no sense of thought or performability.

Since the work would progressively shed sections of movement, aspects of embodiment would be lost over time as well. This started with a receding use of energy, until it progressed to a lack of presence all together. The dancers allowed their expression to become dull, as they were caught in their final core movement.

In order to build the phrases, we had to start from the inside out. For each given task, the dancers were given a minute. This was so they could avoid fixating on the individual movements too early in the creative process. They were urged to trust their creative impulses. Each dancer was told to create a brief movement phrase consisting of one to two moves. After this task, they were given a minute to create an entrance and an exit into their brief movement phrase. Then they were given a final minute to find a way to make their exit feed back into their entrance, thus starting the phase again in a continuous loop.

Once the whole phrase was formed, we were able to start peeling back the layers. With each repetition, I decided what movements would be omitted per round. The removed movements were always taken off from the beginning or end. With each removal, the dancer was tasked with deciding how the new ending of the phrase would feed into the beginning. This process continued until the dancer was left with a single move that could be repeated indefinitely.

During the stripping process, we were also finding ways to pare back the embodiment. As the loops continued, we introduced a sluggish energy to the movement. With this lack of charge, the dancers were unable to carry themselves to the same distances as

before. Their movements became progressively smaller. Not only did the phrase become shorter with each repetition, but the movement became more confined.

Receding embodiment was also approached by addressing the dancers' visual focus. During the first round of the phrase, the dancers were urged to stay present in their focus. They were to be aware of what they were seeing within the space, as well as what they were feeling, the sensations of their skin, joints, hands and feet. As the looping progressed, they would begin letting go of this focus. This would start with their attention to physical sensations, until it reached their eyes. In the final section of looping, their eyes would be fixed forward and glazed over.

Bethany McMorine's trance solo was the only trance solo used in the final work. Her fully embodied beginning was a high energy phrase with a variety of textures. It began with a sudden change of level. Dragging the hands up the torso and undulating the body upwards, McMorine would pull herself back up to vertical. Punctuating the end of her wave, McMorine threw the hands forward, snatching them off of her body. In reaction, her hips pulled backwards. She travelled in an off-balance curve around an anchored spot on stage. Nearing the end of her curve, McMorine would throw herself to her hands, crawling what is left of the distance to her original starting position. Coming to standing once again, she re-entered her sudden change of level, marking the beginning of the next loop.

The process of polishing McMorine trance solo allowed for the chance to highlight the great range of motion and texture within her phrase. The juxtaposition of the fully embodied work to the stripped-down version presented an enticing visual of shelling out a phrase until a single, half-lived movement is left.

McMorine's trance solo was positioned at the beginning of the piece. For the sake of aesthetic preferences, the order of her looping had been reversed. The solo would start lethargic and brief and build to the full phrase over the span of three loops. Lights would

come up on McMorine, already in the middle of her looping trance phrase. She is starting the third of five revolutions by the time the audience witnesses her. The audience's first view into the work is a laborious cycle of movements, building momentum and power with each turn. While producing a chain of increasingly longer movements, McMorine must avoid the other dancers around her. She must remain aware of her surroundings, while becoming entranced in her looping phrase. McMorine's trance solo introduces the theme of task-based choreography, evolving from one place to another.

Backwards Phrase

One of the aspects of reality that my work distorts is time. Time exists as an undisputable force. It constantly progresses forward. The Backwards Phrase distorts reality by progressing in reverse. The dancers exhibit kinesthetic awareness as they explore pathways in reverse. Their focus remains forward, while their bodies continue backwards.

In order to practice our sensitivity to creative impulses, this section was also created solely with quick decisions. Assigned an order, the dancers would take turns contributing a single move. These would be sequentially tacked together. The only rule posed for this task was that every additional movement must move backwards.

As the phrase grew, the dancers found themselves needing to reorient their bodies within the environment. They would find ways to bend and twist backwards into unknown space, while their focus remained forward. Each contribution was made within seconds. The dancers remained focused on accomplishing the task assigned to them, rather than mulling over the aesthetic value of their addition.

The resulting choreography was a medley of movement qualities and problem-solving. While the movement lacked a certain amount of performative embodiment, it

appeared natural on their bodies. The pathways came easily to the dancers, as one third of the movement came from their personal creative preferences.

The Backwards Phrase was continuously refined over the course of my research. In order to highlight the perpetual backward motion of the phrase, I introduced solo moments of forward motion. These solos came intermittently. One of the dancers would begin performing the same movement as the others, but on a forward trajectory. This would separate them from the others, and slightly modify the shape of the formation. After these brief solos, the dancer would re-join the group in their backwards journey.

The juxtaposition of sudden forward movement alongside the backwards choreography outlines the fixation of direction within the phrase. The introduction of forward movement allows the viewer to imagine what the phrase would look like if it conformed to the natural flow of time. These moments emphasise that the directional flow within this current environment is in reverse.

The phrase initially lacked any variety in pacing. This affected the dancers' ability to explore the various movement qualities of the phrase. In the early part of my refinement process, I modified the pace of the phrase with the introduction of pauses and sustained movement. This eased the dancers into the process of embodying the work. In moments of sustainment, they were able to focus on their performative presence.

The pauses acted as sudden interruptions to their momentum. The dancers would begin moving again with the same spontaneity that made them stop. This created an interesting depiction of visual texture. The phrase work became sectioned into bursts of movement and rest.

Words

The Words phrase was inspired by a method known as freewriting (Betts, 146). This method was used in the early days of Surrealist automatism by Andre Breton. It is intended to aid in a free flowing, expressive subconscious. Freewriting has become a common creative method within contemporary dance practice.

The exercise begins by presenting three words. The dancers then write down additional words they would associate with the initial three words. For each introductory word, the dancers were given a minute to write down associations. Their written words can come from any kind of association, be it thematic or seemingly random. During each minute, they are urged to continuously write without any breaks or pauses. This is so the words freely flow from their mind to the paper, without judgement of hesitation.

The three words presented for this exercise were inspired by nature, and sensations found within nature. The words were “forest,” “mountain,” and “heat.” Their associated words ranged from descriptive sensations to simple nouns. After the timed writing portion was done, I had the dancers choose three of their own words from each of the three categories.

The next part of the exercise required the dancers to create a movement for each word. The movement should physically embody the chosen word. This approach was given as a suggestion and was open to interpretation. The dancers were given a minute for each chosen word. Creating with a quick pace allowed them to act on creative impulses and efficiently move on.

After each dancer had decided the moves they were going to do, I began pairing complementary movements. Depending on the directions they moved, I positioned the pairs in a manner that would make their movement appear to be interactive with one another. For the majority of the phrase, there are two dancers interacting while the other spectates. As the

phrase progresses, the role of spectator is passed on from one person to the next. This trend continues until the final moment. Cobham's final movement is the catalyst for a chain reaction. The other dancers react with their final movement, one after the other, before they are swept up in the next phrase.

Rushing Phrase

The Rushing phrase supports the pursuit of establishing a dreamscape aesthetic. This aesthetic is modelled after common imagery within dreams. In the first rehearsal, we discussed common themes we all remembered from our own dreams. A theme that was found in all three of the dancers' dreams was the presence of water.

An objective of mine was to find ways to distort reality in a live space. It was always my intention to do this through the use of digital media, but I also wanted to establish this through choreographic methods. I succeeded by choosing naturally occurring aspects of reality, such as water, and presenting them in a mediated and constructed space. The Rushing phrase became a way to draw on themes present within dreams, while also exploring the relationship between reality and surreality.

The concept for this phrase was the relentless force of water. Something that is always moving, transitioning from one direction to another. The Rushing Phrase explores the potential force of water. This can be presented as something tranquil or vigorous.

In the early conception of this phrase, rehearsal time was dedicated towards exploring the range of textures and speed present within different bodies of water. The dancers would be guided through improvisational exercises that explored the use of flow; what it means to follow a sense of fluid motion, redirect it, or even interrupt the motion entirely.

As the exploration progressed, we focused on finding internal momentum as something that could be built up from within. This sensation of inner movement would act as

the precursor to the beginning of larger movement. In order to provoke such sensations, I relied on the use of imagery. My guided improvisational sessions described swirling energy that would build within the torso. As the swirling continued to grow, parts of the body would continue to be caught in its current. At first, this movement would be small and barely influential. The dancers would begin travelling, spinning, and gliding once they had been persuaded that the current became powerful enough to provoke larger movement.

In another approach to water as movement, the dancers were tasked with creating a short solo movement phrase. This solo would explore the same qualities of movement we had already been working with within the Rushing Phrase. After the solos were created, I had the dancers go back and create two variations: one that was slow and tranquil, and one that was rushing and powerful. These variations came to represent the growing arches and crashes of turbulent waters.

When I think about water in a scenic sense, I have this visual image of tides building and relentlessly washing over a surface. I wanted the movement quality of the phrase to highlight the range of texture found within water. The phrase would begin slowly and build momentum overtime. This energy would rise until the dancers were in a state of urgent rushing, consuming whatever may be in their path.

Two core movements for this phrase are referred to as the ‘scurry’ and the ‘pullback.’ The scurry dips down, anchors the palms to the floor, and slides both feet from one side of the body to the other. The entire movement creates a spiralling action, pivoting around the anchored hands of the floor before pushing off to rise again.

The pullback starts from a low position. The hands trace up the side of the body, reaching diagonally back into the high space. The head follows the hands in their diagonal. Movement of the upper body acts as a guide, pulling the dancer back and up in a chain reaction. After achieving a diagonal line, with the head opposing the front foot, the torso

contracts and the body pulls back into a standing position. As the body pulls back into a neutral stance, the arms carve an arch above the head, before falling in front of the body. At the same time, the head caves in towards the chest. This sensation trails down the torso and resides, allowing the dancer to come to an upright standing position.

These two core movements were often put together one after the other. The dancers would scurry, travelling low in circular pathways. Then they would pull back, ascending in an arching motion before finding stability again. Having these movements together mimics the under and upper currents of waves. By continuing to speed up the ebb and flow, we were able to mimic a growing storm. As the dancers spiral and rise with increasing urgency, the power of the tides becomes great enough to overtake someone. This is witnessed when McMorine and Cobham's movements are concentrated around Skeete's soloing. They crash by her once, diving to the ground before rising again. Skeete remains unaffected. When McMorine and Cobham crash past her a second time, Skeete is caught in their current. The solo is suddenly interrupted, as she dives to the ground moments after McMorine and Cobham. At this moment, Skeete is reclaimed by the tides.

As the storm subsides, the phase ends with a ripple variation. This variation started as one of the water-inspired improvisational exercises. Cobham is trusted with creating ripples in the space around them. The other dancers react to the push and pull of these ripples. This creates a transitional phrase in which the dancers are hyper-receptive to external stimuli. The result is a section of invisible push and pull. These forces carry the dancers from one place to the next. They whirl and weave until they are led into the next section of the piece.

Backwards 2.0

The final level of the piece is a modified copy of a previous phrase. Backwards 2.0 is the recurrence of the Backwards Phrase from the beginning of the piece. In this rendition, the

dancers are scattered at different points on the stage. The same choreography requires them to be constantly moving backwards. Since the dancers no longer move in a unified formation, they become obstacles to one another. As the dancers fall backwards into unknown space, they must now avoid colliding with each other. This requires them to be aware of not only their own bodies, but that of their fellow ensemble members. When necessary, they must shift their direction of travel, so as to avoid collision while continuing their backwards movement.

In comparison to the Backwards Phrase, the environment the dancers were in is heavily mediated. Virtual doubles of their past continue to phase by as watchful ghosts of something once structured. The projections and lighting were vibrant shades of colour. The space was cast in blue, while the dancers were bathed in red. The colours were reminiscent of the Premonition Film, as well as the shifting colours of the light particle projection. This similarity acted as a final show of the digitally augmented world the dancers had come to know.

Backwards 2.0 revisited a phrase of work that once existed outside of the digital, vibrant environment that the dancers delved into. The phrase introduced new challenges alongside old ones, increasing the difficulty of the level. The reinvention of a purely physical phrase within an augmented environment supported the narrative from physical to digital environments. Intertwining these concepts acknowledged the journey of the dancers, just before it comes to an end.

Conclusion

Ultimately the research comes to examine the relationship between natural and digital modes of existence. Drawing on the history of the Surrealist movement, I use the practice of automatism to reveal an individual's unique, creative unconscious mind. Surrealist artists including André Breton and The Automatists relied on this open communication with the unconscious, in order to liberate the mind through various forms of expression. My work draws on this sense of liberation in its journey of physical transcendence, expanding towards a virtual existence.

In an interest of modernising Surrealists practices, my research examines the similarities between automatism and digital escapism. Escapism constructs a relationship with digital media, as a way of achieving similar therapeutic effects to that of automatism. This therapeutic parallel between automatism and escapism leads me to consider escapism as a modern form of automatism. It also supports the relevance of automatism in both a modern and digital capacity, as the trend of transcending the physical body once again becomes popular during a difficult time. Influenced by my personal experience with media consumption, this idea of digital escapism recurred as an aesthetic influence in my creative work. In my construction of a dreamscape, I found myself leaning towards stimulating images, and mirroring the presentation of mass consumable media. This is evident in the appearance of the Virtual Flocking video, which mimics a cascade of popup ad windows while surfing the internet.

In order to expand on my interest in natural and virtual states of being, my research delves into the concept of virtual bodies. It explores the authenticity of the virtual body in comparison to the original version. In doing so, I express the malleability of existence in the virtual world, as well as the restrictions of a virtual existence.

Inspired by intermedial dance artists Claire Bandainne and Adrien Mondot, I work to create a digital spectacle. Through the combination of projections and film, I create a visually stimulating and ever evolving environment in which the dancers exist. This construction of a digitally augmented world is driven by my desire to create a "dreamscape" aesthetic, that is reminiscent of the nonsensical subconscious mind.

The heart of my research focuses on the physicality of the dancers. The practice of automatism has great potential for refining the artistry of the dancers and producing engaging material in a timely manner. Conducting extensive practice with automatism, my research reveals and refines the unique movement profiles of the dancers. Having achieved a fluid communication with the subconscious mind, the dancers were able to create intricate movements in an efficient and seemingly effortless manner. They became confident in their creative impulses and their individual sense of artistry. Along with this, the dancers' adaptability improved, even as the tasks they were given became more complex. This is particularly helpful in instances when rehearsal time may be sparse.

My choreographic habits and personal interest in video games ultimately influenced the construction of *In Medias Res.* My previous choreographic practice consists of creating movement phrases and piecing them together. When I have done this in the past, the phrases fit an overarching theme, and therefore typically exist within the same environment. The phrases created for *In Medias Res* did not follow an overarching theme that could be visually perceived. The focus of the physical practice ended up being heavily task-based, as the dancers were given increasingly difficult restrictions from which to create choreography. Additionally, the work takes moments to explore different aspects of the natural world, including water, heat, and plant life. This resulted in each phrase for *In Medias Res* existing in a different environment, under different rules. When I paired the phrases together, the sheer difference in the sections became reminiscent of video game levels. Like in a video

game, the players do not question the sudden change in environment, but rather focus on the new tasks at hand. This mentality continues until the end of the piece, in the heavily mediated Backwards 2.0, before the dancers collapse, having made it to the end of the game.

Relying on the capability and adaptability of the dancers' refined artistry, we created various phrases of choreography while adhering to certain conditions. Dancers confidently moved through levels of increasing difficulty. They embodied and observed different states of being, both physical and mediated. Relying on their impulses, the dancers explored and mastered the vibrate, malleable environment around them. The result was a challenging progression through shifting levels and physicalites.

Next Steps

I find myself still curious about the relationship of digital media to live dance. Much of contemporary training has been reliant on the physical body and a need for embodiment. I am familiar with the act of physical exploration within a contemporary dance setting, and over the years have come to focus on performative presence in the body.

However, I am still new to the practice of intermedial dance. The inclusion of both the body and media is a form of performance art that intrigues me. My research gave me the opportunity to experiment with forms of media alongside dance. This includes shooting and editing dance film, and the use of projections. I gained an introductory level of knowledge with programming software for intermedial performance, particularly in Isadora. While I did not get the chance to use my introductory skills with Isadora in my final creative project, I was fascinated with the process of creating interactive media.

This research has directed me towards an interest in creating digital media. Along with the adaptive physical practice of automatism, I am interested in the adaptability of technology in the performance space. Most of all, I am passionate about the coexistence of

technology and performance. In order to explore this passion, I feel compelled to learn more about forms of digital media, including interactive programming, while continuing to refine my skills in video and editing. I will continue pursuing this interest independently, through the continued use of the resources I have gained during my research, and the additional use of online tutorials. I am confident this direction of intrigue will lead to satisfying results. I look forward to expanding my artistry across various disciplines.

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Appendix A: Piece Description and Photography

Figure 1: Beginning of the Rushing Phrase. From left to right: Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete, Bethany McMorine. Photography: Don Sinclair

In Medias Res
Choreographer: Jessica Stuart (in collaborations with the dancers)
Performers: Sydney Cobham, Bethany McMorine, Zuri Skeete
Music: Signals by Jameson Nathan Jones, Springs by Jameson Nathan Jones
Cinematography: Jessica Stuart
Costume Design: Jessica Stuart

In Medias Res is a contemporary dance work that combines creative methods of surrealism and technology. The dancers traverse states of being, existing in both the digital and physical plane. In a constant state of action and reaction, the dancers navigate a malleable relationship between organic and virtual movement. They influence and are influenced by their constructed environment. Transcending restrictions of continuity and matter, *In Medias Res* explores the limitations of the physical body, the capabilities of the virtual image, and the perception of both within live performance.

In Medias Res video link: https://vimeo.com/688635748

Figure 2:Reviewing material during a tech run, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete, Bethany McMorine. Photography: Don Sinclair

Figure 3: Words phrase, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Bethany McMorine, Zuri Skeete Photography: Don Sinclair

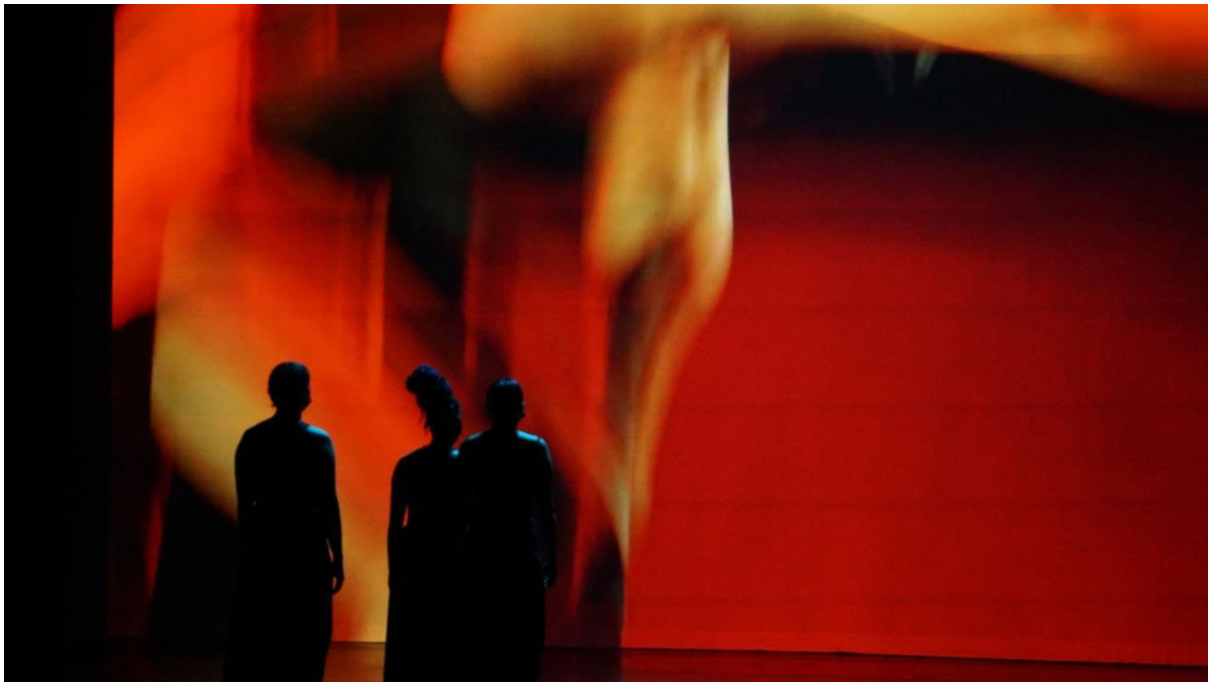


Figure 4:Observing the Premonition Film II, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Bethany McMorine Zuri Skeete, Sydney Cobham. Photography: Don Sinclair

Figure 5: Stalking After-Images and Automatism Solo II, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Bethany McMorine, Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete. Photography: Don Sinclair

Figure 6: Backwards 2.0, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right,, Sydney Cobham, Zuri Skeete, Bethany McMorine. Photography: Don Sinclair

Figure 7: Behind the scenes while running the Promotion Film Section, Feb 15, 2022. Left to right, Bethany McMorine, Zuri Skeete, Sydney Cobham. Photography: Don Sinclair

Appendix B: Rehearsal Notes and Edits

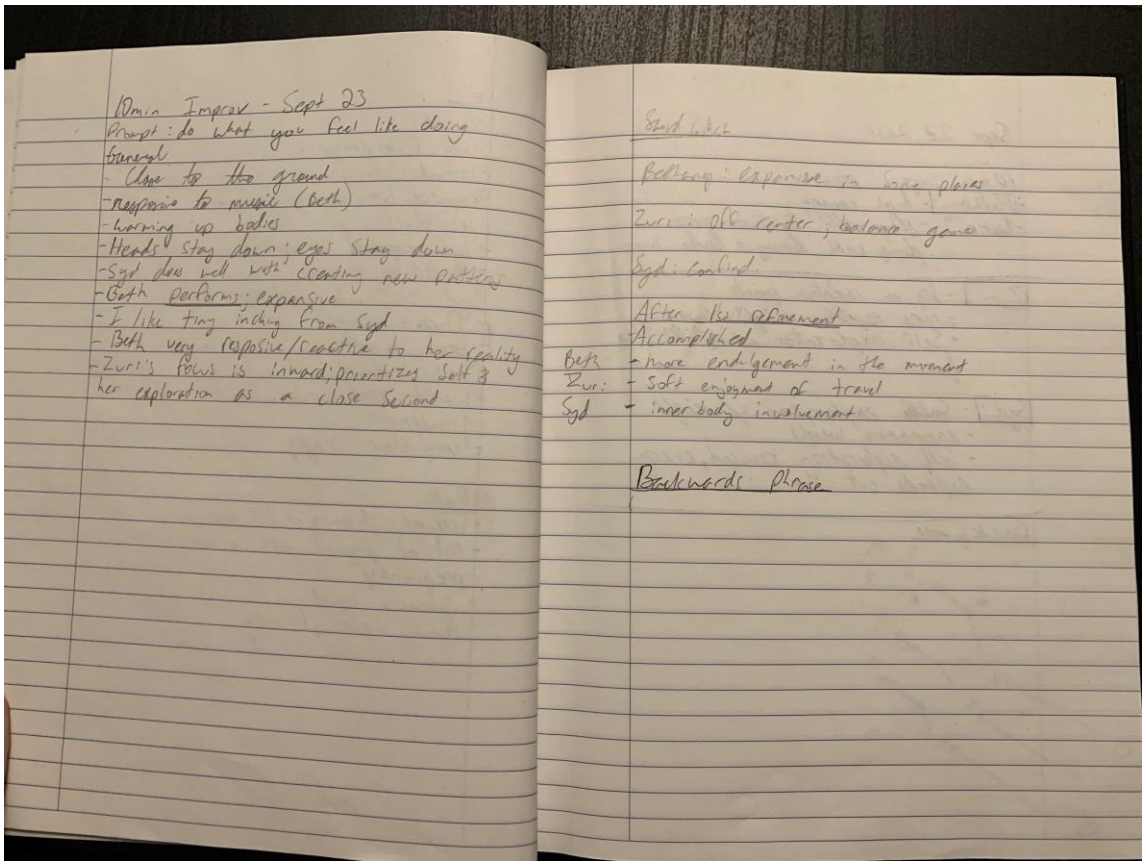


Figure 12: Rehearsal notes, Sept 23, 2021

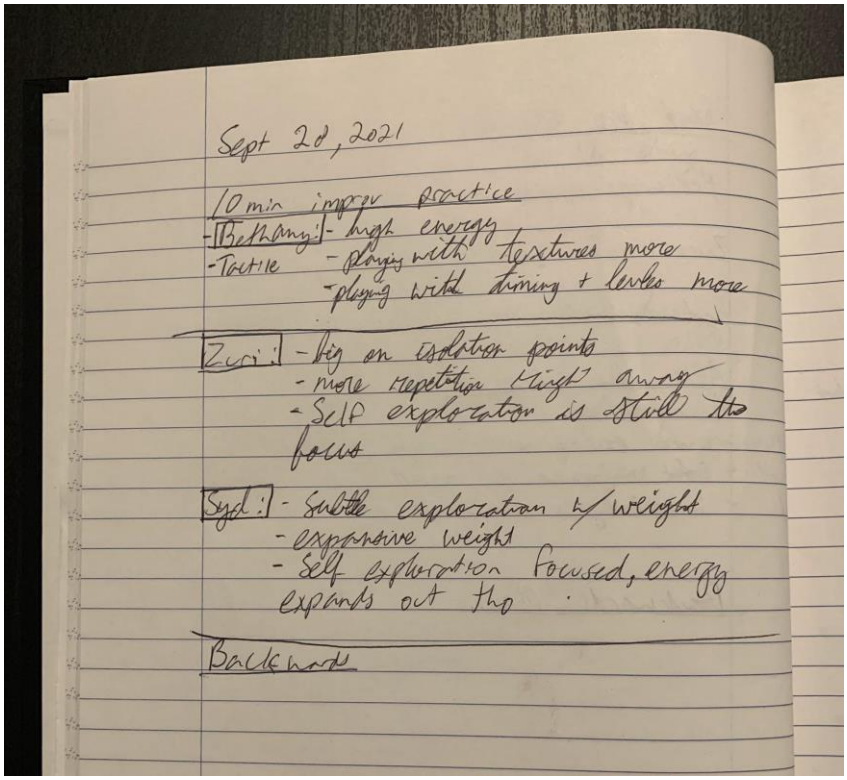
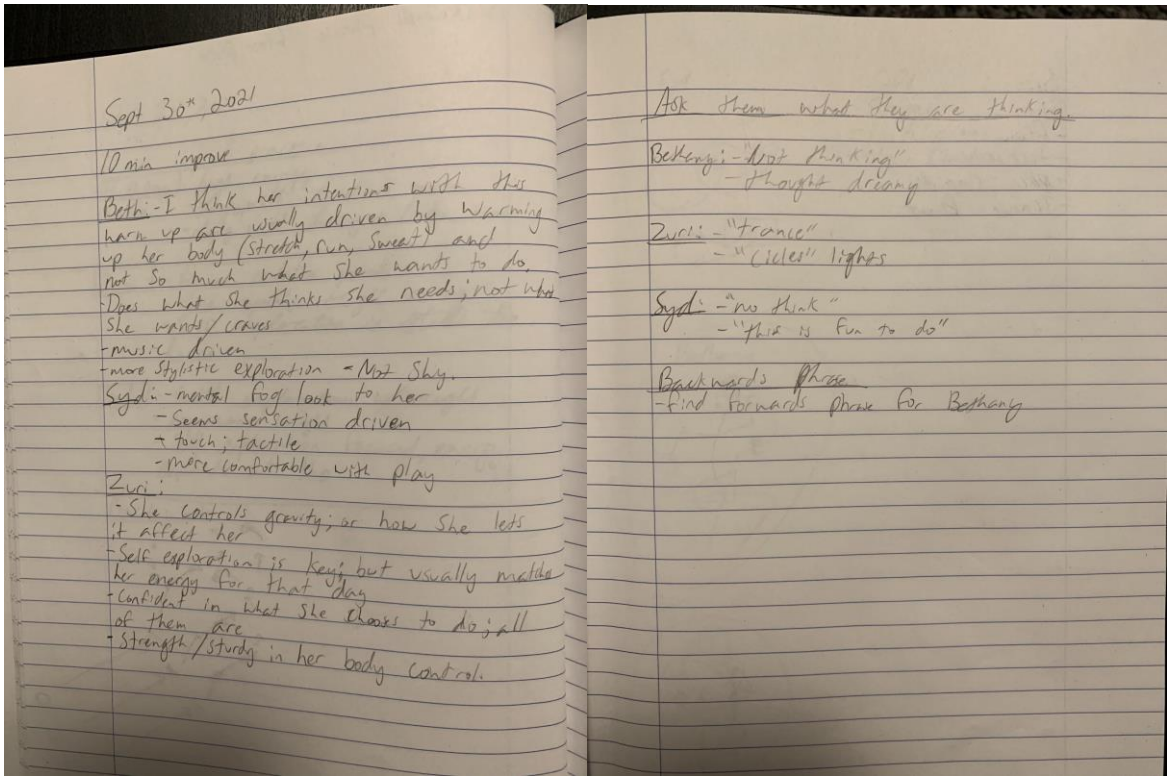


Figure 13: Rehearsal notes, Sept 28, 2021



Sept 30th 2021

10 min improv

Beth - I think her intentions with this warm up are visually driven by warming up her body (stretch, run, sweat) and not so much what she wants to do. Does what she thinks she needs; not what she wants / craves
- music driven
- more stylistic exploration - Not Shy.

Sydi: - mental fog look to her
- Seems sensation driven
- touch; tactile
- more comfortable with play

Zuri:
- She controls gravity; or how she lets it affect her
- Self exploration is key; but usually matches her energy for that day
- Confident in what she chooses to do; all of them are
- Strength / sturdy in her body control.

Ask them what they are thinking.

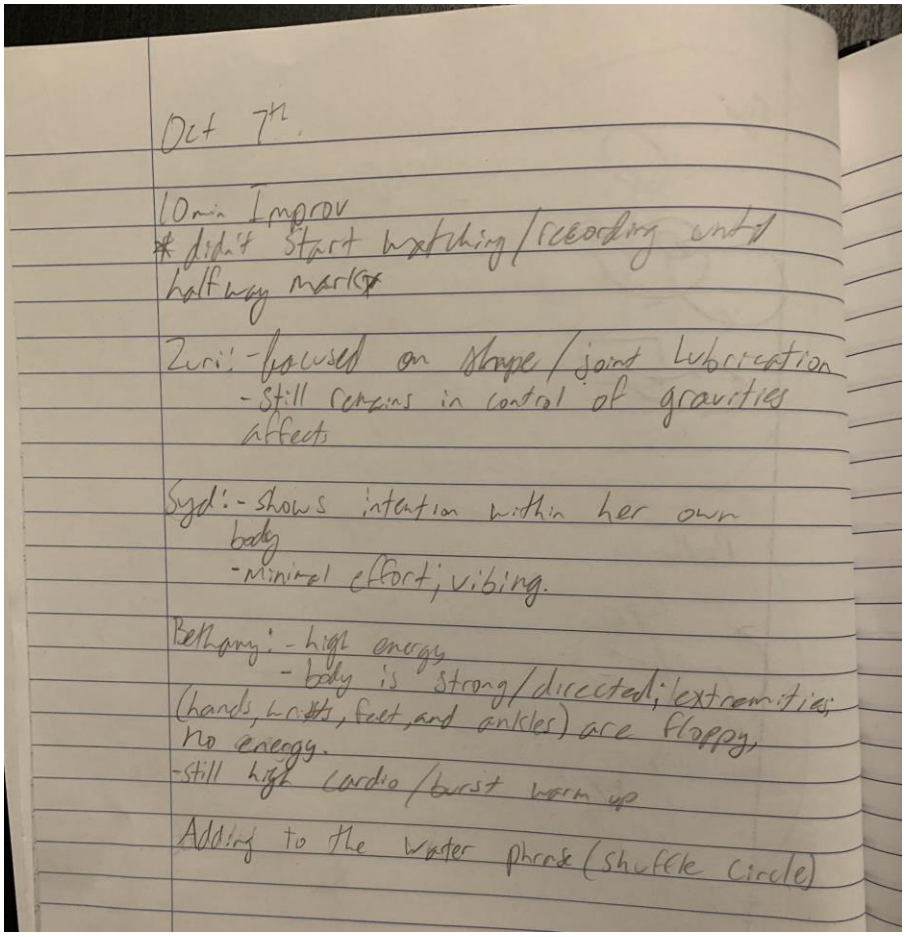
Bethany: - "not thinking"
- thought dreamy

Zuri: - "trance"
- "circles" lights

Sydi: - "no think"
- "this is fun to do"

Backwards Phrase
- find forwards phrase for Bethany

Figure 14 & 15: Rehearsal notes, Sept 30, 2021 (pg 1 & 2)



Oct 7th.

10 min Improv
* didn't start watching / recording until halfway mark*

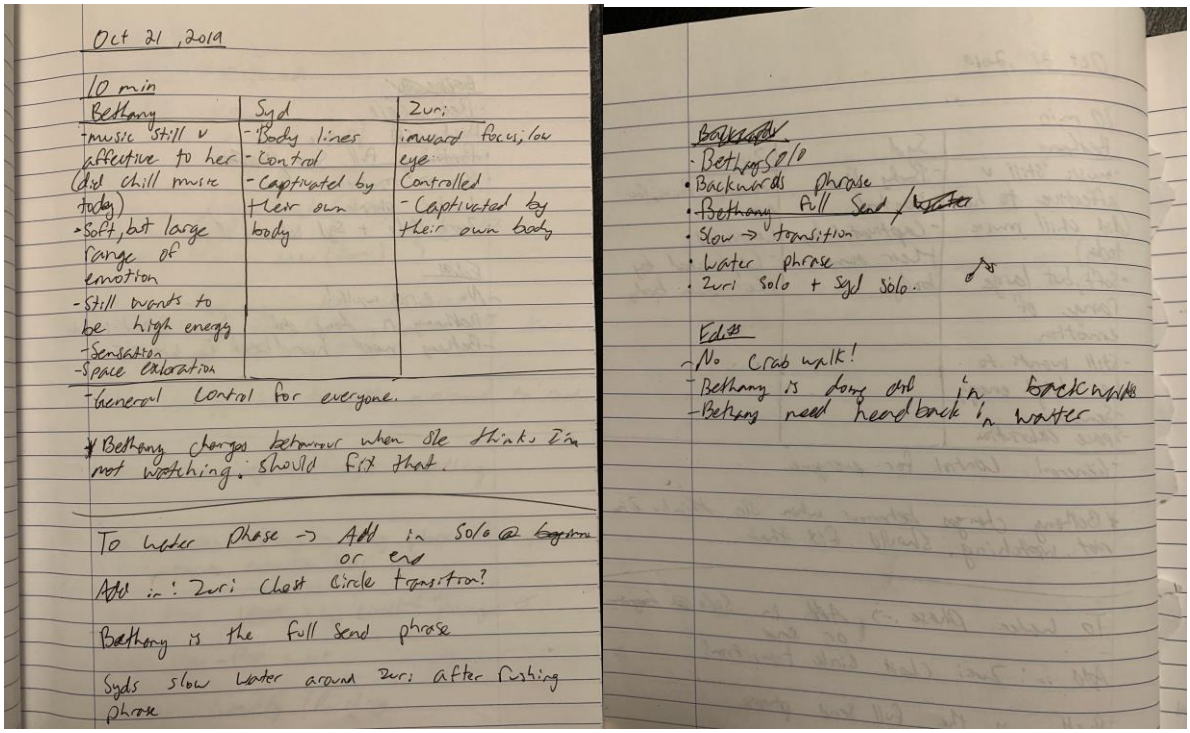
Zuri: - focused on shape / joint lubrication
- Still remains in control of gravities affects

Sydi: - shows intention within her own body
- Minimal effort; vibing.

Bethany: - high energy
- body is "strong / directed; extremities (hands, wrists, feet, and ankles) are floppy, no energy.
- still high cardio / burst warm up

Adding to the water phrase (shuffle circle)

Figure 16: Rehearsal notes, Oct 7, 2021



Oct 21, 2019

10 min

Bethany	Syd	Zuri
-music still v affective to her (did chill music today) -Soft, but large range of emotion -Still wants to be high energy -Sensation -Space exploration	- Body lines - Control - Captivated by their own body	inward focus, low eye - Controlled - Captivated by their own body

-General control for everyone.

* Bethany changes behaviour when she thinks Zuri not watching. should fix that.

To Water Phase → Add in Solo @ beginning or end

Add in: Zuri Chest Circle transition?

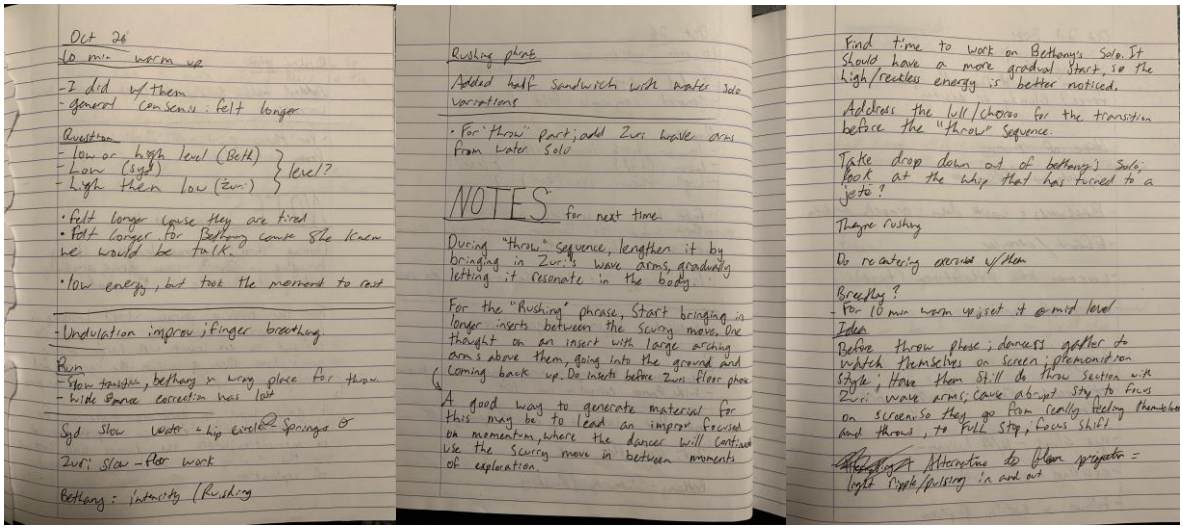
Bethany is the full Send phrase

Syds slow Water around Zuri after Rushing phrase

Backwards
- Bethany Solo
- Backwards phrase
- ~~Bethany Full Send / Water~~
- Slow → transition
- Water phrase
- Zuri Solo + Syd Solo.

Edits
- No Crab walk!
- Bethany is doing arch in backwards
- Bethany need head back in water

Figure 17 & 18: Rehearsal notes and potential order of phrases, Oct 21, 2021 (pg 1 & 2)



Oct 26

10 min warm up

- I did w/ them
- general consensus: felt longer

Question
- Low or high level (Beth) } level?
- Low (Syd)
- High then low (Zuri) }

- felt longer cause they are tired
- felt longer for Bethany cause she knew we would be talk.
- low energy, but took the moment to rest

- Undulation improv; finger breathing

Run
- Slow transition, bethany x wrong place for throw
- Wide dance correction has lost

Syd slow Water + hip circle & Spirals &

Zuri: slow - floor work

Bethany: intensity / Rushing

Rushing phase

Added half sandwich with water Solo variations

- For "throw" part; add Zuri wave arms from water Solo

NOTES for next time

During "throw" sequence, lengthen it by bringing in Zuri's wave arms, gradually letting it resonate in the body.

For the "Rushing" phrase, Start bringing in longer inserts between the Scurry move. One thought on an insect with large arching arms above them, going into the ground and coming back up. Do inserts before Zuri floor phase

A good way to generate material for this may be to lead an improv focused on momentum, where the dancer will continue use the Scurry move in between moments of exploration.

Find time to work on Bethany's Solo. It should have a more gradual start, so the high/reckless energy is better noticed.

Address the lull/choreo for the transition before the "throw" sequence.

Take drop down out of bethany's Solo; look at the whip that has turned to a jete?

Theyre rushing

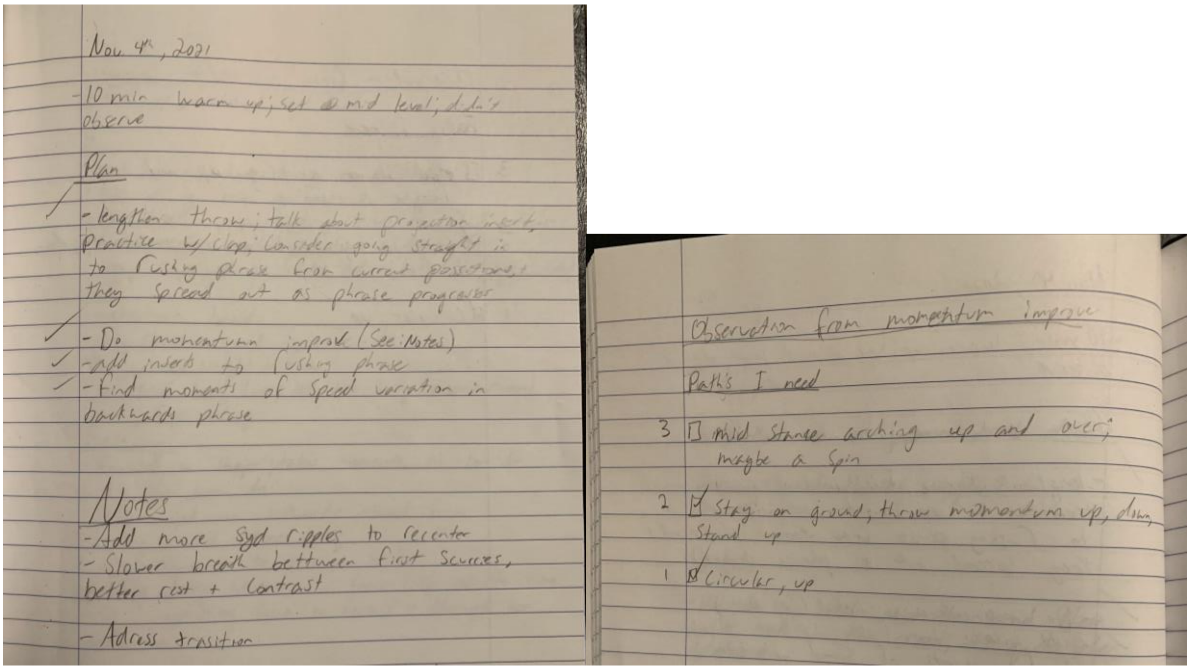
Do re-entering exercise w/ them

Breathing?
- For 10 min warm up just at mid level

Idea
Before throw phase; dancers gather to watch themselves on screen; pheromonition style; Have them Still do throw section with Zuri wave arms; cause abrupt stop to focus on screen so they go from really feeling themselves and throws, to full stop, focus shift

~~Breathing~~ Alternative to floor projector = light circle/pulsing in and out

Figure 19, 20, 21: Rehearsal notes, Oct 26 (pg 1,2,3)


Nov 4th, 2021

- 10 min warm up; set @ mid level; didn't observe

Plan

- lengthen throw; talk about projection inwards, practice w/clap; consider going straight in to rushing phrase from current positions, they spread out as phrase progresses
- Do momentum improv (See Notes)
- add inverts to rushing phrase
- find moments of speed variation in backwards phrase

Notes

- Add more Syd ripples to recenter
- Slower breath between first scurries, better rest + contrast
- Adress transition

Observation from momentum improv

Path's I need

3 ☐ mid stance arching up and over; maybe a spin

2 ☑ Stay on ground, throw momentum up, down, Stand up

1 ☑ Circular, up

Figure 22 & 23: Rehearsal notes, Nov 2, 2021, & initial Water Variation pathways (note: wrong date is written in notes)

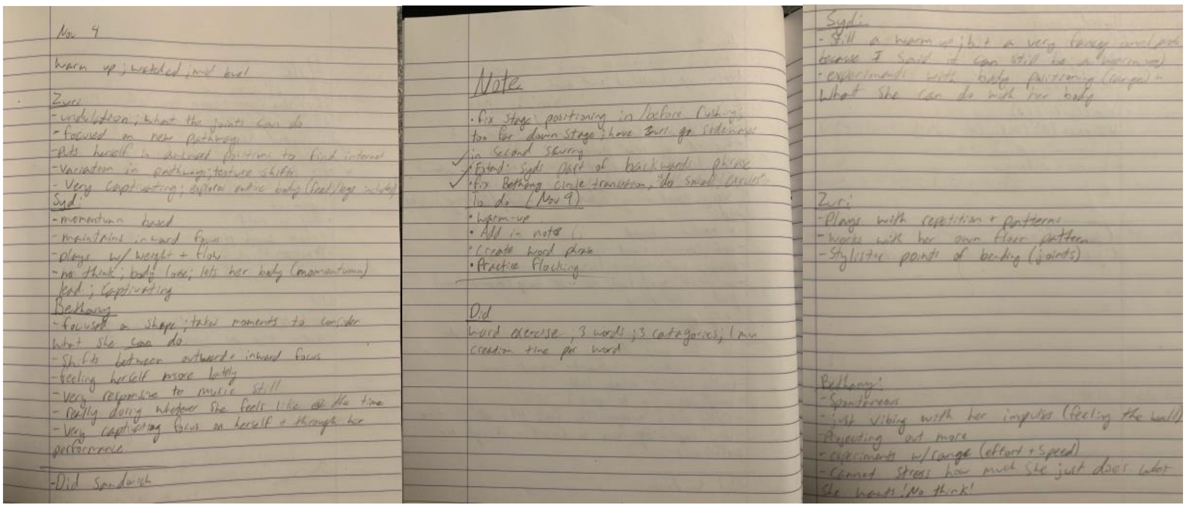


Figure 24, 25, 26: Rehearsal notes, Nov 4, 2021 (pg 1,2,3)

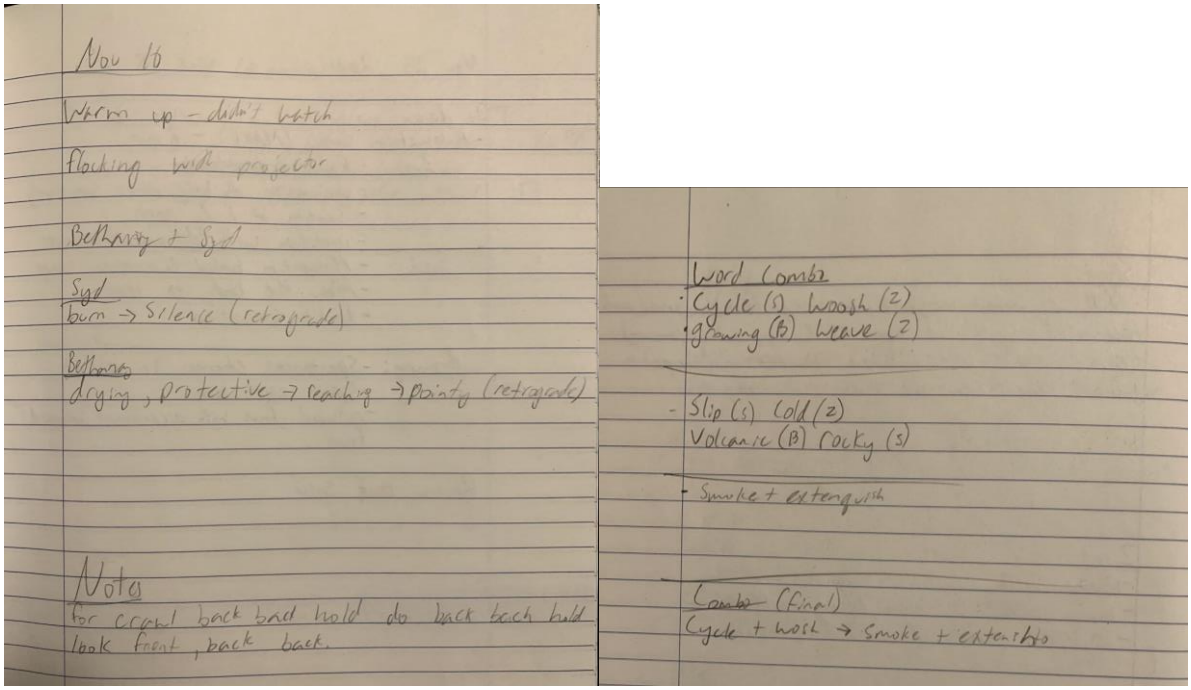


Figure 27 & 28: Rehearsal notes, & word phrase combinations, Nov 10, 2021

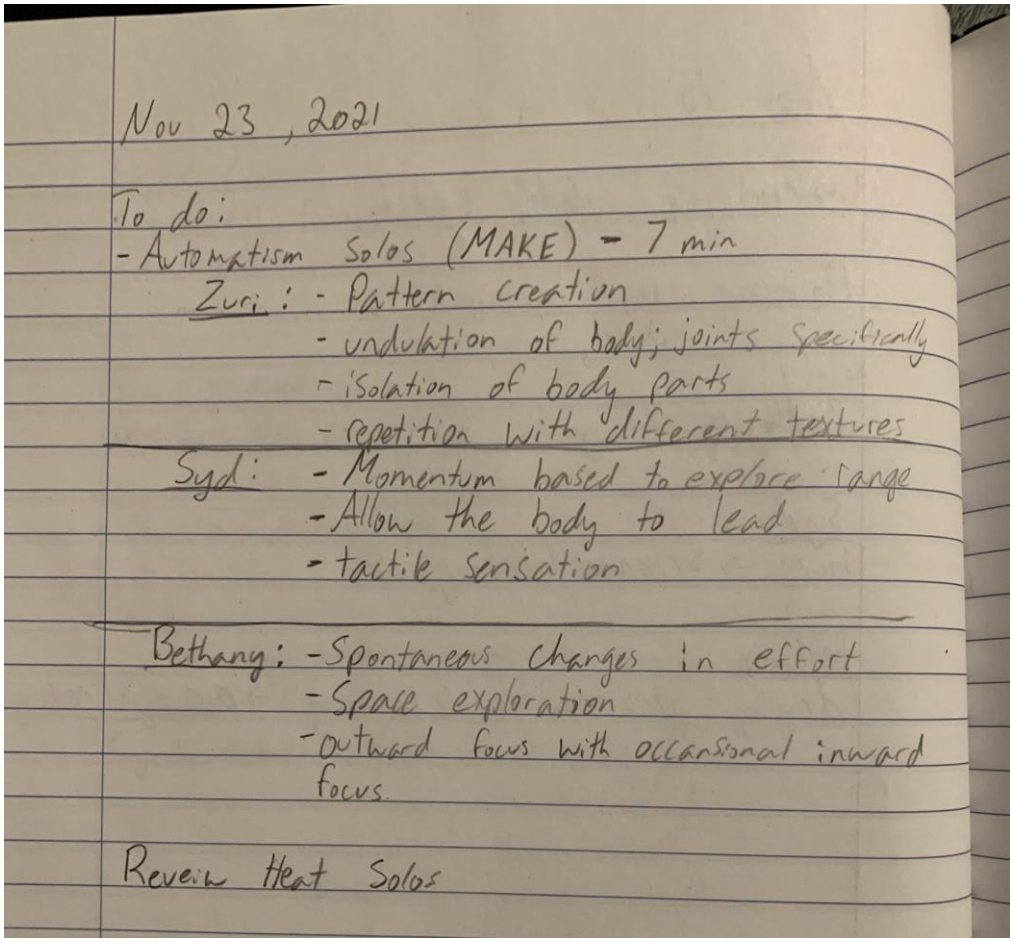


Figure 29: Rehearsal notes, featuring final automatism profiles for Automatism Solo, Nov 23, 2021

Rehearsal Edits Nov 30

- After Bethany water bend transition, syd should stand up first; not the other way around
- For rushing phrase resonate variations; can Bethany be in the handstand for longer?
- Can we try working in a little hop before the new slide to the floor
- With backward fall; don't worthy about being in time, fall when you fall
- Do we still basket ball dribble
- Come downstage more for rushing phrase; keep it downstage
- Can Zuri flow phrase pivot in canon? Is that ugly
- For syd flocking: when coming around to the front, do some move to the side with your head in profile to the back, before fully transitioning to front
- When walking real close to syd, slow down as well

Figure 30: Rehearsal notes, Nov 30, 2021 (Digital format written on smartphone)

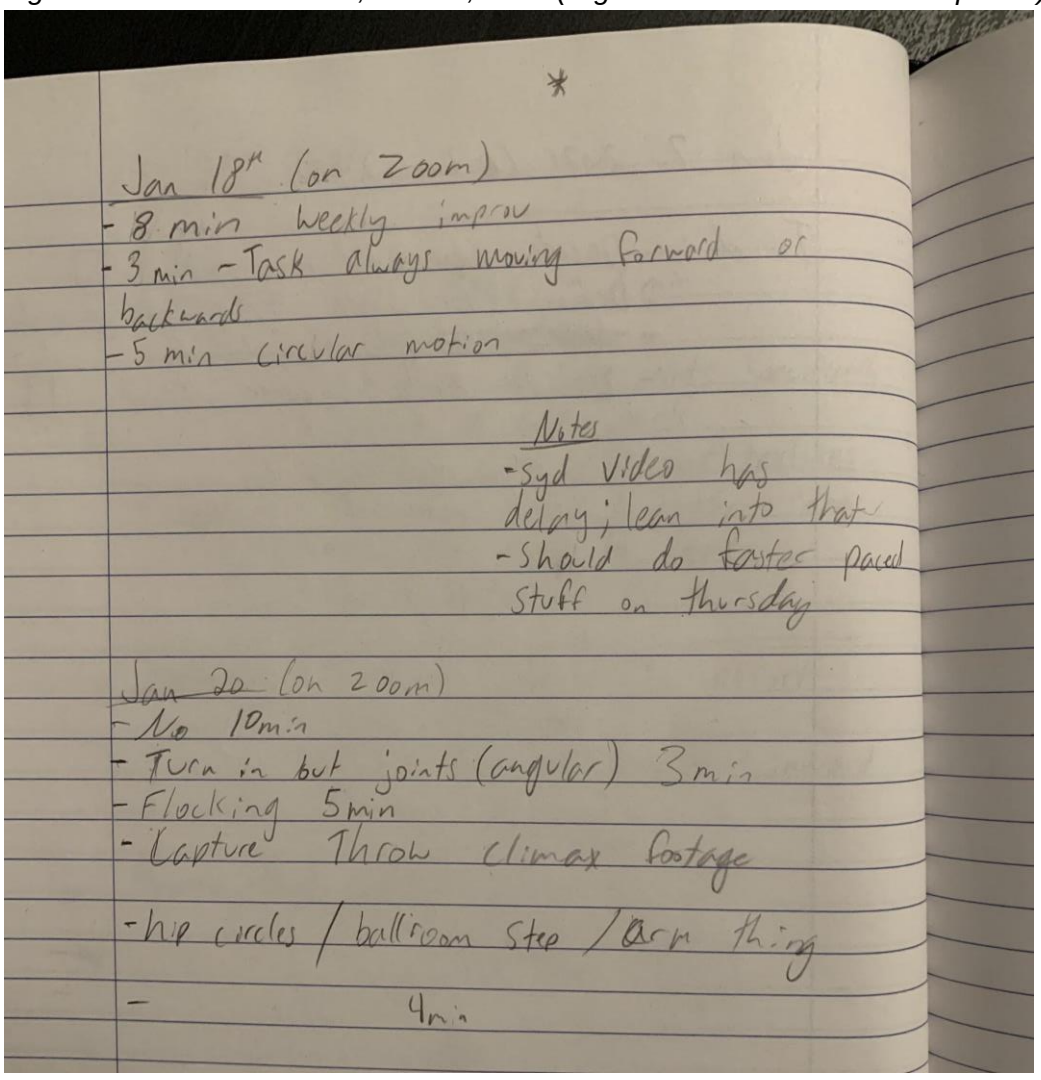
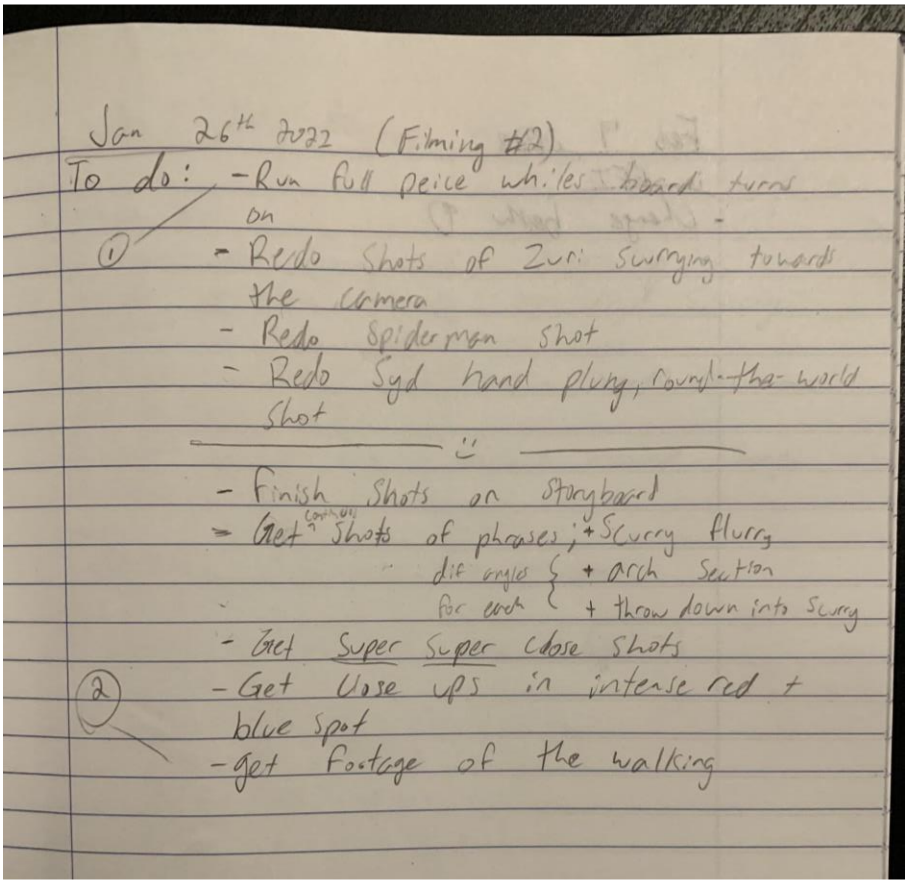


Figure 31: Rehearsal notes, Jan 18, 2022



Jan 26th 2022 (Filming #2)

To do: - Run full peice whiles board turns on

① - Redo shots of Zuri scurrying towards the camera

- Redo Spiderman shot
- Redo Syd hand plung, round-the-world shot

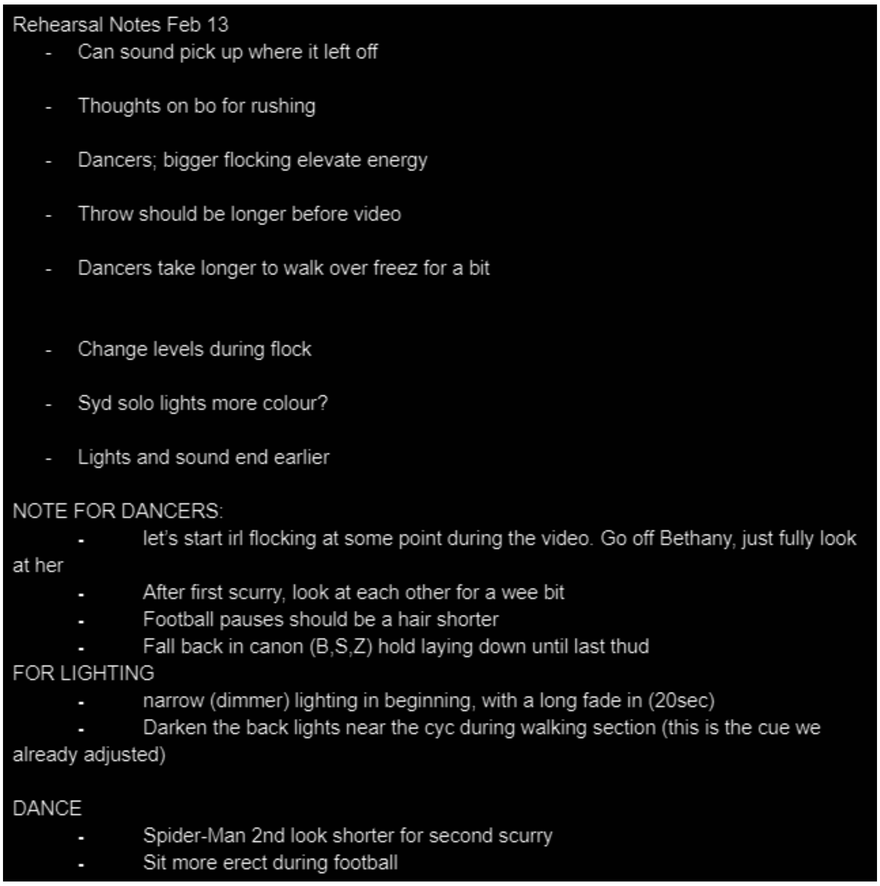
:)

- Finish shots on Storyboard
- Get continuous shots of phrases; + Scurry flurry
  dif angles for each { + arch section + throw down into Scurry
- Get Super Super close shots

② - Get close ups in intense red + blue spot

- get footage of the walking

Figure 32: Rehearsal notes, filming day for Premonition Film, Jan 26, 2022



Rehearsal Notes Feb 13

- Can sound pick up where it left off
- Thoughts on bo for rushing
- Dancers; bigger flocking elevate energy
- Throw should be longer before video
- Dancers take longer to walk over freez for a bit
- Change levels during flock
- Syd solo lights more colour?
- Lights and sound end earlier

NOTE FOR DANCERS:

- let's start irl flocking at some point during the video. Go off Bethany, just fully look at her
- After first scurry, look at each other for a wee bit
- Football pauses should be a hair shorter
- Fall back in canon (B,S,Z) hold laying down until last thud

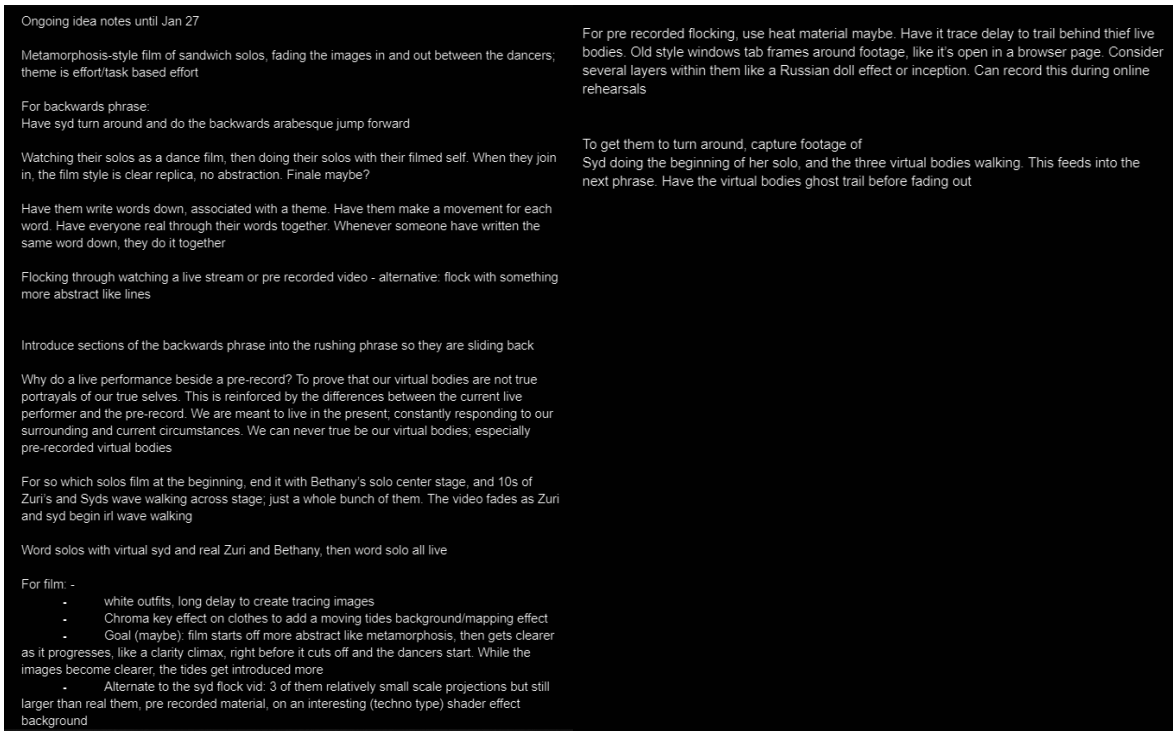
FOR LIGHTING

- narrow (dimmer) lighting in beginning, with a long fade in (20sec)
- Darken the back lights near the cyc during walking section (this is the cue we already adjusted)

DANCE

- Spider-Man 2nd look shorter for second scurry
- Sit more erect during football

Figure 33: Rehearsal notes,Tech Week, Feb 13, 2022 (Digital format written on smartphone)



Ongoing idea notes until Jan 27

Metamorphosis-style film of sandwich solos, fading the images in and out between the dancers; theme is effort/task based effort

For backwards phrase:
Have syd turn around and do the backwards arabesque jump forward

Watching their solos as a dance film, then doing their solos with their filmed self. When they join in, the film style is clear replica, no abstraction. Finale maybe?

Have them write words down, associated with a theme. Have them make a movement for each word. Have everyone real through their words together. Whenever someone have written the same word down, they do it together

Flocking through watching a live stream or pre recorded video - alternative: flock with something more abstract like lines

Introduce sections of the backwards phrase into the rushing phrase so they are sliding back

Why do a live performance beside a pre-record? To prove that our virtual bodies are not true portrayals of our true selves. This is reinforced by the differences between the current live performer and the pre-record. We are meant to live in the present; constantly responding to our surrounding and current circumstances. We can never true be our virtual bodies; especially pre-recorded virtual bodies

For so which solos film at the beginning, end it with Bethany's solo center stage, and 10s of Zuri's and Syds wave walking across stage; just a whole bunch of them. The video fades as Zuri and syd begin irl wave walking

Word solos with virtual syd and real Zuri and Bethany, then word solo all live

For film: -

- white outfits, long delay to create tracing images
- Chroma key effect on clothes to add a moving tides background/mapping effect
- Goal (maybe): film starts off more abstract like metamorphosis, then gets clearer as it progresses, like a clarity climax, right before it cuts off and the dancers start. While the images become clearer, the tides get introduced more
- Alternate to the syd flock vid: 3 of them relatively small scale projections but still larger than real them, pre recorded material, on an interesting (techno type) shader effect background

For pre recorded flocking, use heat material maybe. Have it trace delay to trail behind thief live bodies. Old style windows tab frames around footage, like it's open in a browser page. Consider several layers within them like a Russian doll effect or inception. Can record this during online rehearsals

To get them to turn around, capture footage of
Syd doing the beginning of her solo, and the three virtual bodies walking. This feeds into the next phrase. Have the virtual bodies ghost trail before fading out

Figure 34 & 35: Ongoing idea and edit notes, updated multiple times between Sept 23, 2021- Jan 27, 2022