

Self Determined Major Final Project

Collaborative Arts Design

Primary Reader: Janet Sorenson

Secondary Reader: Erika Pujic

December 4, 2017

Dear Self Determined Major Advisory Board,

I have made changes to my proposal in regards to your concerns and suggestions for revisions, I hope that you will reconsider passing my proposal with these edits. This letter aims to make clear some of the changes I have made to the proposal.

In terms of the breadth of work that this project aims to succeed, I feel as though I have gained a significant body of work experiences that have prepared me to take on a project such as this. Much like doing research in a science field, independent studies have given me focused skills that have built upon each other, and lead to this project. I have had many unique opportunities to design and work with professors and working professionals in the Studio Art, Dance, and Theater departments. These opportunities have prepared me to create my own comprehensive work.

In particular reference to the concern about working with a professional choreographer: the dance department follows a normal procedure in aiding students in this search. Finding and securing a professional choreographer is something that capstone students do in the dance department every year. As past working professionals, the professors in the dance department have connections with many professional choreographers and are equipped to help with the search for, and securing of these artists. If my first choice for a choreographer were to fall through, there are other options. I have been in contact with multiple choreographers already, and am currently working with my advisors in the dance department in securing one for this project. Often directors of dance companies have a lineage of dancers that have worked with them who are also creating new works, and with whom they can put me into contact.

For grounding the work in academia, I will also write a paper to accompany the creation and final product of the piece. This paper will include a section that references previous art and dance makers and movements that have foregrounded this kind of work in the world. The paper will also include my own analysis and statement about my composition, including the artistic goals and themes of the work. This paper will mimic the papers that a Studio Art major would write to accompany their thesis. Thank you for your consideration on this exciting project, please let me know if there are any other questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Introduction:

I proposed my major in Collaborative Arts Design in order to explore the ways in which modes of thought from different art forms could intersect. It has become clear to me through this major that space can be crafted both by the body of a dancer and by physical objects, such as scenic elements or interactive sculptural forms. In this final capstone I will explore the ways in which dancers and these physical objects interact. This interaction creates reciprocal relationships. I believe there is an intersection between a dancer's body and physical objects; between physical and spacial texture through movement. Dancers have physical bodies in space that can move and interact with their surroundings, but objects have bodies and can interact their environment as well, in ways that activate the space in innovative ways.

Physical objects and choreography function in a similar way in how they interact with and construct their surroundings, creating a visual story with their presence. I seek to create movement that exists around and inside of these physical objects in ways that can both enhance these objects and bring them to life. Sound as a result of movement—clapping, brushing and sliding motions—also has a life within my work. Working in silence allows me to uncover these natural sounds and the mood of the choreography in its purity. Later in the process, I introduce music that I select and edit into the conversation in order to foreground the minutia of existing tones and textures. The cross-pollination of different techniques and mediums allows the interaction within the piece to grow and expand in ways that are unpredictable and exciting.

In this capstone, I will continue to explore the intersection of sculpture, dance, and music throughout the creation of an original piece that integrates physical objects into the creation process of movement. I hope to explore the physical interaction between dancers and inanimate objects in a more detailed approach than I have used in my previous compositions. My intention is to create a finished work that integrates a section of my own choreography and scenic objects, accompanied by a solo section that I perform which is developed in collaboration with a guest choreographer.

Rationale:

This project is the perfect culmination of ideas and skills that I have gained throughout the course of my major. I have designed two sets for dance pieces in the dance department previously that accompanied

choreography done by my professors. One, titled *Arbitrary Borders*,¹ which was choreographed by Erika Pujic, deconstructed the Syrian refugee crisis. I designed a series of scenic objects for this piece that abstracted the idea of border zones that the dancers traveled through and interacted with throughout the dance. The large structures became inseparable from the dance itself: one did not make sense without the other. The interaction of the dancers with these objects brought them to life, giving them meaning within the context of the piece. For more reference of this interaction please refer to figures 5 through 8. I've also choreographed two original pieces for groups of three and five dancers, and I choreographed a solo which I performed. I created one of these pieces last fall for a group of five Skidmore dancers. This piece was titled *Split Image*,² and in it I used blank picture frames as a basis of movement. This choreography began to include the frames—a physical object—in a way that was more interactive than a typical scenic prop would be in accompanying a performance piece. The objects became a character as the dancers manipulated the picture frames, moved inside of and around them, or mimicked shapes found in the structures with their movement. The presence of these objects enhanced each dancer's relationship to one another and the surrounding space, while the frames allowed audiences to develop their own unique and complex story lines because of the attention drawn to the negative space inside the frames. Please refer to figures 1 through 4 for more reference of these interactions.

Additionally I have completed an independent study in the Studio Art Department which explored taking two-dimensional woodblock prints and transforming them into three-dimensional forms of sculpture. In addition, I have taken the progression of scenic design classes, from introductory to advanced in my time here. I have also taken a scenic painting class, and I assisted in designing the Main Stage production, *Balm in Gilead*, last spring for the theater department. This semester, I was the sole scenic designer for the fall Black Box production of a play titled *Let the Right One In*, which was directed by a visiting guest artist and Skidmore

¹ Pujic, Erika, *Arbitrary Borders*. Fall 2015. <https://vimeo.com/album/3691994/video/148300856>. A password to access the video is included in the references.

² Please refer to figures 1-4 in references section, Huibregtse, Lydia. Figure 1-4. November 2016. *Split Image*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.
Donkin, Nola *Split Image*. Skidmore College Dance Theater, Saratoga Springs, November 2016. <https://vimeo.com/album/4254430/video/191546306>. A password to access the video is included in the references.

alumna, Rebecca Marzalek-Kelly. My design for this show was fully backed and put on by the department, and I was able to lead the process from start to finish.

All of these experiences have given me tools that I will be able to apply to create this capstone. Though they are all wonderful experiences that have given me important skills, they have each been separate from each other. With this capstone I will combine what I have gained from these processes within a cohesive piece of work. This composition will draw upon skills, themes, and techniques with which I am familiar, but will also push me beyond the familiar into an exciting realm of challenge and discovery.

Methodology:

This piece will act as a culmination and assimilation of the skills I have learned during my Skidmore career. As I am a double major with dance, I would like to combine this project with the capstone for my dance major. In a typical dance capstone, one would choose to either bring in a guest choreographer to create solo to perform, or personally choreograph an original piece for other dancers. I hope to create a piece that exists on a larger scale than the typical performance because it will combine both of these aspects. Since there would be multiple sections, I believe it could fulfill the two capstone projects appropriately. Although I would like them to be integrated and cohesive with each other, one could think of it as a portion that fulfills the self-determined major capstone (the section I choreograph on other dancers with the integration of scenic elements) and a portion that fulfills the dance capstone (the collaboration with an outside choreographer to create a solo). Since both sections draw on themes and skills I've acquired from multiple departments, I don't believe that they are really separate at all, which is why I would like to combine them into one piece of work.

By nature of its collaboration—with dancers, another choreographer, and inanimate objects—this piece will require a longer time of development and therefore should begin during this fall semester. It will function a bit more like a thesis in that I work on it throughout the entirety of the year. I have already begun developing the basic forms of the physical objects that the choreography will be based upon. I have also already done the casting of the dancers that I will be working with next semester. These dancers have confirmed their commitment to the process by signing a contract which I created in collaboration with my dance capstone professor, Jason Ohlberg. I have created a rehearsal schedule for this process that fits with the

dancers and my schedule for the Spring 2018 semester. I intend to rehearse four hours a week with these dancers to develop the movement for the piece. When I choreographed the aforementioned piece, *Split Image* which was seven minutes long, it took forty-two hours to create. Next semester, since I already have my cast, I plan on beginning rehearsals the first week of school. Following this model I will have ten weeks to work on the piece, with a total of sixty-four hours to develop the choreography. This increase in time spent on the creation, combined with the progress I have already made will give me a suitable amount of time to develop the piece. Please see the included timeline, page 8, for more details about rehearsals and the progression of work for the remainder of the project.

One of the richest elements of this project will actually be the creation process that leads up to the final performance of the piece. So much discovery occurs in the studio during the development of choreography. Dance is an amazingly interactive and collaborative art form because it is inherently fleeting and relies on the human body to bring it to life. By adding another “body” into this process, meaning the objects I create, the exploration increases exponentially. Suddenly there are many more possibilities of movement, textures and interactions to explore. Each element added into the piece requires another layer of collaboration and problem solving. It is within these processes and moments of discovery that I am intrigued. How do the different languages of choreography, music, and even physical art objects intersect? What can they tell us about ourselves and the world?

My intention is to create fully dimensional sculptural elements abstract in nature, that will populate the performance space and interact with dancers. The technology required to carry out the designs of these objects from a scenic design perspective consists of a 3D digital modeling program which I am already proficient in called Sketch Up. In order to design, render, and construct the objects I create I will need to utilize a combination of studio spaces on campus. I will be completing an independent study with Professor Kate Leavitt in the Studio Art department next semester to accompany the creation of the objects for the piece. This independent study will give me access to both a studio space, and guidance from a professor who understands the minutia of the creation process. With this independent study and the additional guidance from my primary reader and advisor on this project, Professor Janet Sorenson, I will be able to successfully design and build these objects.

Additionally, I will need to spend a focused amount of time carrying out movement research and choreographic studies of the objects in the dance studios in order to generate material. Using the form, texture, and physicality of the objects I construct to inform the movement I create will initiate an inseparable connection between the body of the dancer and the object. This will require an exploration and intentional observation of the objects in order to generate movement that stems from what I uncover within. The result of this is that the themes, qualities, and physical shapes from the objects will be repeated and mirrored in the choreography, marrying the two mediums to one another. I will work with my secondary reader, Professor Erika Pujic, from the dance department for guidance throughout this choreographic creation process.

Next semester I will transition from movement-object exploration and begin to work with the Skidmore dancers in order to develop and solidify the movement for the work. I have sent a letter to Brian Brooks, the choreographer of Brian Brooks Moving Company and the person I am interested in working with. He explores the interaction between dancers and objects in his work, specifically in a piece titled “Division” in which his dancers manipulate wooden boards throughout the piece.³ My hope is that Brooks and I will be able to work with either a single object or a set of objects in order to develop choreographic material. I am intentionally reaching out to choreographers that are working in multiple mediums in order to make this exploration possible. By the end of winter break, I hope to have already had rehearsals with this choreographer and have something set. This process of contacting and arranging visits with a guest choreographer is structured and supervised within the capstone class for dance majors. I will follow that process in order to connect and collaborate with the guest choreographer. Since this process is normalized for dance majors, professors in the dance department are equipped to help with the search for choreographers. If Brian Brooks is unavailable, there are other choreographers that I will be able to work with instead to complete the project.

Then, after both the solo section and the group section(s) of the piece are developed, I will work on stringing the two together into sections that will connect to one another. Throughout this process the

³ An interview with Brian Brooks on his choreographic process. Joycetheater. YouTube. August 05, 2014. Accessed September 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HwlaL8Hlfk>.

movement will organically flow together, maintaining a central theme while also integrating multiple elements of process, texture, and discovery.

In terms of the actual performance of the piece, I would like to explore performing it in multiple places in the spring. Since it will have multiple elements combined I would like for it to take place at locations that can enhance the work further. This would allow me to explore how place plays a role in the work, and how it alters the movement. This way, the dancers, costumes, scenic elements, and content will remain the same, but the place will change. I believe this will alter the perspective of the piece and could very well transform the meaning in exciting and unexpected ways.

The first location I would like to consider is the Tang Museum. Exactly where in the Tang I cannot predict at this point. It will partially depend upon what is accessible to me, but also where in the museum fits the piece the best. I have begun conversations with Ian Berry and Tom Yoshikami about the possibility of a performance here. The second location would be the dance theater. This performance would be the one that is a part of the capstone show for dance majors. It would then include other original pieces by student choreographers and be a part of a larger program, and be performed on a proscenium stage which again would affect how the audience views the piece. The third location I am interested in exploring is Falstaffs. The secluded feeling that this place holds draws me, and also the fact that the woods surround the building on the outside. Each of these locations will bring a new layer of meaning to the piece that relates to their place on campus and our preconceived perceptions of those places. Each of these places are also compatible with the equipment needed to carry out the performance as I have proposed. I am interested to see both how the piece will remain true to itself, but also change in each location.

My work blends the line between dance and performance art, moving sculpture and scenic design. As a part of my discovery as an emerging artist I am attempting to discern where in the world my work fits, whether it be on stages, in galleries, or in other spaces. I am hoping that this exploration of choreography, object, and space will help to shed light onto some of those answers, while culminating my time here at Skidmore as a Collaborative Arts Design major.

Timeline For Project:

Fall Semester				
Before Thanksgiving Break		Before Winter Break		
Contacted Choreographers		Create Rehearsal Schedule		
Confirmed Cast Members: Skidmore Dancers		Clear Rehearsal Schedule with the Dance Department		
Require confirmed dancers sign contract agreement for rehearsals		Independant Study with Kate Leavitt: This will be to create the structures-get this approved/registered		
Winter Break				
1 Develop beginning movement and choreography in studio space at home				
2 Design and create mock-ups of objects: digital modeling program, drawing representation				
3 Work with Choreographer to develop solo (potentially) this is based around their schedule				
Spring Semester				
Working Budget		Access to Space		
\$250.00 from dance department garunteed		Will be doing an Independant Study with Kate Leavitt in Studio Art to develop & build the objects		
\$500 from Student Opportunity Funds				
Weekly Rehearsal Schedule:				
The Performance:				
Friday March 30th at 8:00 pm		Saturday March 31st at 2:00 pm		
Additional Shows TBD in April: Tang Museum, Fallstaffs				
Group Rehearsals				
2 Times a week		10 Weeks of Rehearsal	40 Hours Group Rehearsal	
2 Hours each				
4 hours a week				
Individual Rehearsal (for developing choreography on my own)				
1 Time a week		10 Weeks of Rehearsal	20 Hours Individual Rehearsal	
2 Hours each				
2 Hours a week				
Tech Week: March 26th-March 29th				
2 Additional Rehearsals		4 Hours Group Rehearsal		
4 Hours each				
* For Reference: <i>Split Image</i> was made in 42 hours following the same rehearsal schedule for 7 weeks				
Potential Weekly Rehearsal Schedule				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
6:30pm-8:30pm Group Rehearsal	10:00am-12:00pm Individual Rehearsal	6:30pm-8:30pm Group Rehearsal		

Reference Photographs



Figure 1

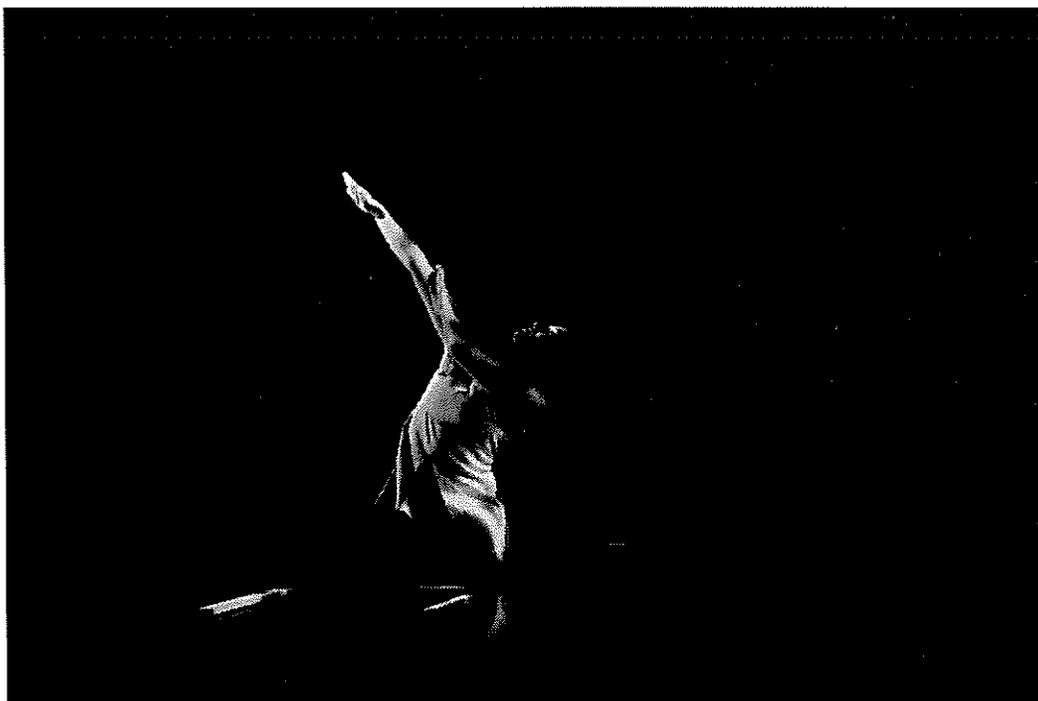


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

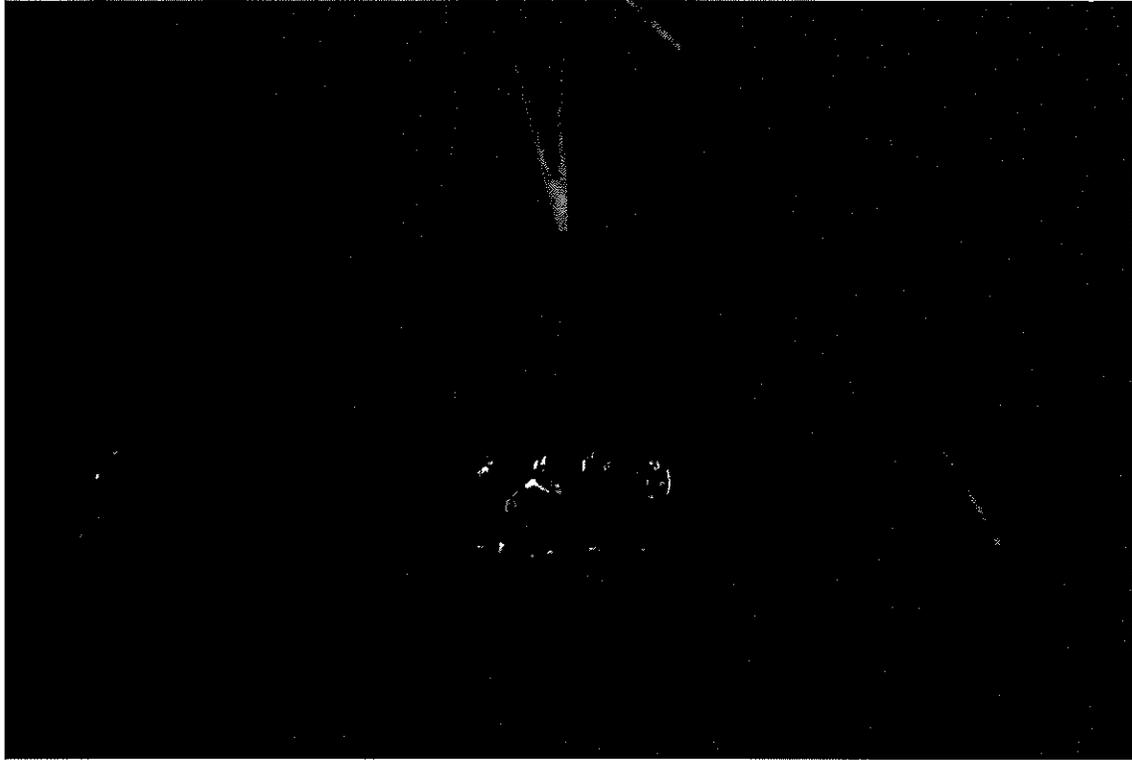


Figure 5

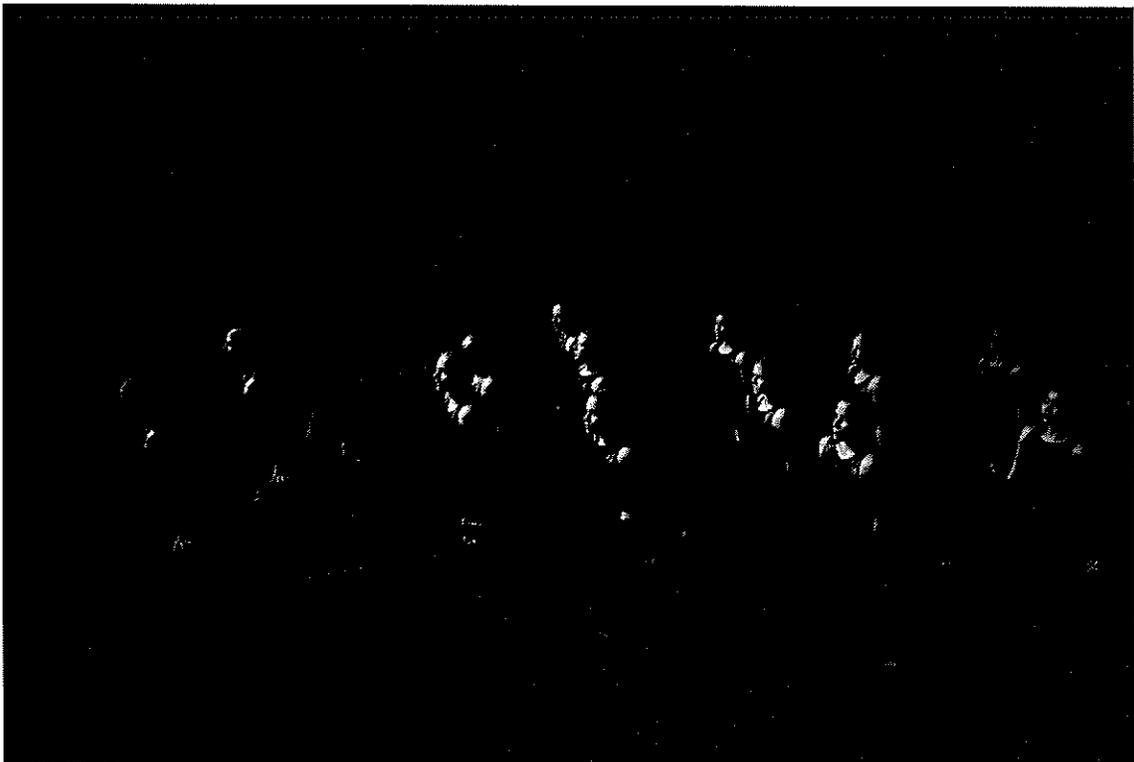
Figure 6





Figure 7

Figure 8



References

Arbitrary Borders. Choreographed by Erika Pujic. Designed by Nola Donkin. Music Composed by Carl Landa. Skidmore College Dance Theater, Saratoga Springs, Fall 2015. <https://vimeo.com/album/3691994/video/148300856>

The Password to view the performance video is “dance.”

Joycetheater. YouTube. August 05, 2014. Accessed September 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HwlaL8Hlfk>.

Harrowed Ground. Choreographed by Jason Ohlberg. Designed by Nola Donkin. Skidmore College Dance Theater, Saratoga Springs, Spring 2017. <https://vimeo.com/album/4548358/video/214347549>

The password to view the performance video is “spring2017”

Huibregtse, Lydia . Figure 1. November 2016 . Split Image, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Huibregtse, Lydia. Figure 2. November 2016. Split Image, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Huibregtse, Lydia. Figure 3. November 2016. Split Image, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Huibregtse, Lydia. Figure 4. November 2016. Split Image, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Split Image. Choreographed by Nola Donkin. Skidmore College Dance Theater, Saratoga Springs, November 2016. <https://vimeo.com/album/4254430/video/191546306>

The password to view the performance video is “Choreo2016.”

Unknown. Figure 5. Fall 2015. *Arbitrary Borders*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Unknown. Figure 6. Fall 2015. *Arbitrary Borders*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Unknown. Figure 7. Fall 2015. *Arbitrary Borders*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Unknown. Figure 8. Fall 2015. *Arbitrary Borders*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs.

Annotated Bibliography

Brandstetter, Gabriele, and Marta Ulvaeus. "Defigurative Choreography: From Marcel Duchamp to William Forsythe." *TDR* (1988-) 42, no. 4 (1998): 37-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146717>.

This article explores the concept of "figure" from the standpoint of image, body, and language and its relationship to choreography, specifically the configuration and reconfiguration of shapes and structures. Brandstetter and Ulvaeus analyze the structures of Forsythe's choreography specifically and where he draws references, specifically the connection to Duchamp and Laban.

Forsythe, William. "Choreographic Objects ." Accessed October 11, 2017. <http://www.williamforsythe.com/essay.html>.

In his short essay, well-known choreographer William Forsythe captures his concepts of what he calls choreographic objects and their relationship with dancers.

Franko, Mark. "The Readymade as Movement: Cunningham, Duchamp, and Nam June Paik's Two Merces." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 38 (2000): 211-19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20167516>.

Franko's article is an analysis of the ways that critics and historians of dance have increasingly drawn connections between visual artists and choreographers. Frank uses the connections between Merce Cunningham and Marcel Duchamp's work to center his argument and explain the expansion of choreographic work to involve other mediums.

Homans, Jennifer. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*. (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 290-341, 470-540.

Homans' book is an extensive record of the history of ballet throughout its development around the world. She examines how the different styles and cultures of different regions had an effect on ballet and how that informed the style that we are familiar with today. These particular chapters, "East Goes West: Russian Modernism and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes" and "The American Century II: The New York Scene" focus specifically on the ways in which scenic elements, objects, art movements, and specifically modernism influence the dance world and more specifically alter ballet movement.

Huschka, Sabine, Leslie Allison, and Mark Franko. "Media-Bodies: Choreography as Intermedial Thinking Through in the Work of William Forsythe." *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 1 (2010): 61-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23266987>.

This article looks into the work of William Forsythe since the inception of his company in 2004, specifically at the ways in which his newer pieces bridge the worlds of art and dance. Huschka analyzes specific pieces of Forsythe's work and their connection or classification as "Performance Installation" while defining the meaning of this category, both in a final product and throughout the process of creation.

Joycetheater. YouTube. August 05, 2014. Accessed September 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HwlaL8H1fk>.

This is a rehearsal video capturing Brian Brooks Moving Company and includes an interview with Brian Brooks about the process of creating his work. His piece "Division," which uses boards that slide, initiate movement, hold weight, and interact with the dancers, is of specific focus in the interview as he talks about his choreographic process.

Management , Elsie. YouTube. March 05, 2014. Accessed September 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edrBoyhIzxM>.

This video titled “Big City Excerpts” features a collection of works created by Brian Brooks and performed by Brian Brooks moving company. The video captures different kinds of movement style which sheds light on his the ways in which the pieces come together.

Spier, Steven. "Inside the Knot That Two Bodies Make." *Dance Research Journal* 39, no. 1 (2007): 49-59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20444683>.

Spier's article analyzes the ways in which the film “*From a Classical Position*,” which was created in 1997 as a collaboration between William Forsythe and Dana Caspersen, sheds light on their innovative ways of generating movement. Specifically exploring the ways in which these artists involved other platforms and mediums in the choreographic process.

SUTIL, NICOLAS SALAZAR. "Laban's Choreosophical Model: Movement Visualisation Analysis and the Graphic Media Approach to Dance Studies." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 30, no. 2 (2012): 147-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23326531>.

SUTIL's paper explores the graphic and analytic methods to choreography that Rudolf Laban developed and utilized throughout his life. This article both explains the structures of, and argues the importance of Laban's graphic, three-dimensional, and notation systems in formulating his theory of harmonic space, and in informing our understanding of movement.

Vail International Dance Festival . YouTube. August 09, 2012. Accessed September 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBQTTBZ7hWE>.

Interview and excerpts from “Fall Falls,” a piece choreographed with Brian Brooks in collaboration with ballet dancer Wendy Whelen

Woodbridge, Patricia, and Hal Tiné. *Designer drafting and visualizing: for the entertainment world*. 2nd ed. Focal Press, 2013.

This text is a comprehensive reference guide for the process of creating visual representation in scenic design. Details from how to create mechanical drawings to renderings are included with examples, explanations and the minutia of each piece.