

ABSTRACT

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THROUGH THE DISTANCE

Vannia P. Ibarguen, MFA, 2009

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What is the impact of distance on people's lives? Vannia Ibarguen examines how the established relationships among people change with distance and how humanity has created virtual extensions to continue in communication. Vannia portrays life as a set of departures, journeys and arrivals while exploring concepts like migration, separation and the use of technology. The show includes remote multi location performances developed in collaboration with dancers from California, South America and Europe.

THROUGH THE DISTANCE

By

Vannia P. Ibarguen

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2009

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Chapter 1 How everything started

Through the Distance was born as an idea based on the last seven years of my life after living in four different cities and visiting more than twelve different countries. Through this journey, I have made amazing friends and seen extraordinary places but the hardest part has always been to leave them behind. I would love to be able to bring them with me, to have all the people who I care about the most close to me. Pack them and check them at the airport? Probably not an option. Technology offered me a way to stay in touch with those people and those places, but it has been always limited. When will technology allow me to bring them with me? When will I be able to go to them whenever I want disregarding where I am?

Before starting graduate school, I decided to have a little notebook for me to write down ideas that came to my mind and I considered useful for future choreographies. As Twyla Tharp mentioned in her book “The Creative Habit” (2003), creativity requires preparation, rituals and habits. She brings up this “Project Box” concept where she uses an actual Office Depot box to fill it up with every item that went into the making of the dance. In my mind, after reading Twyla’s book, my notebook would be the portable version of this project box.

When I started my second year at grad school and in order to define my thesis concert theme, I thoroughly reviewed my little notebook and rescued ideas from there to build my thesis concert. I was not even sure about what topic to use. However, the ideas that I had written there were not strong enough to hold more than 20 minutes of performance and keep the audience engaged. I wanted them to have their heads thinking about the piece after the performance and seeding into them the desire of seeing more of my work.

Later, I learned after getting very valuable feedback from Mim Rosen, Karen Bradley, my husband, among others, that it would be better if I tell the audience about something that was coming from my own life and try to get the audience immerse in that concept transforming that experience into a common one for me and for the audience. I knew this idea would work since by that time I had already done a piece about my pregnancy process and another about my childhood and the circle of life. Both choreographies got positive feedback and one of them was selected for the Maryland Dance Ensemble program in Fall 2008. At this point, I had the option of enlarging any of those pieces and make it my thesis concert, or

starting scratch with something totally new but still related to my own experience.

Without strongly thinking about it, the idea of people dealing with time and space came to me. My personal life was part of the inspiration: for the past seven years I have traveled and moved from one city to another.

I remember I stayed at my parent's place when I went to college. Back in Peru, the best education is only available at the capital city and there is where I used to live. However, after getting a UNESCO dance scholarship I had to move for some months to Havana, Cuba. This was my first experience living in a city different from the one where I was born. Then, I moved with my husband to United States to accomplish our professional aspirations. It was difficult to leave family and friends at home but we had each other. Later, when he got a job in the West Coast, we had to live far from each other, even when I became pregnant.

I realized that it was difficult but somehow we could stay in touch to each other and with our family and friends in Peru. How was it? It was through phone calls, email, video chat sessions, and thanks to all the software available online: Messenger, iChat, Skype, Facebook, Hi5, Sonico, Youtube, and many others. I was wondering if technology would be helpful and allow me to stay connected to those I love.

Having all these ideas in mind, I started a new journal and wrote about some concepts:

- Space: Distance, separation, closeness
- Feelings: doubt, solitude, desire of togetherness, nostalgia, resignation, and impotence.
- Philosophical ideas: people towards omnipresence, when breaking barriers of time and space, or being in different places at the same time.
- Technology: help, closeness, virtual, reaching, go through, visual and telecommunications.

The project would produce a performance about the impact of distance on people's lives, how the established relationships among people change and how humanity has created virtual extensions to continue in communication. Could you love somebody at a distance? Could you hate her? People move among cities, they migrate to other countries pursuing their dreams, but they leave family, friends, loved ones and hated ones behind. Is there any way to stay with the people you left behind? Is there any way to keep with you a person who is somewhere else?

Human history is full of immigration, people moving from one country to the other looking for a better life. Pre-historic bones of human beings show that they used to move from one place to the other for food. Nowadays people move for other more complicated reasons: love, for a better work, even for a worse life but to get money sent to their families. Many motivations and motives exist, but all want to communicate with their families from a distance. Communication is like connection: everybody wants to keep connected when they are at the distance, to express their feelings, to be heard, to express their opinions and even to argue with others.

Today, there are many ways to connect people at the distance. Our senses have been extended beyond their natural scopes with devices like telephone or the Internet. We started with the audio on the phone and with the video and television, but several years passed until we had live TV. Now with the Internet we have live video and audio, so the senses of the view and hearing are covered, but the rest of our senses are still in progress. The tactile, the smell and taste are hard to transmit but; will the technology be able to include them in the future in order to have a full presence through distance?

Chapter 2 The Research Process

2.1 Information Technology and Systems Engineering

Welcome to the age of dance and technology. It's a magical place. It isn't a "new" era, but an ever-evolving one that is inspired by artists past and present. These include Loie Fuller and Alwin Nikolais, as well as current choreographers Merce Cunningham and Bill T. Jones, legends who pioneered metaphor using lights, cameras, and computers. But each new generation of dancers pushes the field's technological capabilities, like those today who tap their iPods. The groundwork has been laid, and the possibilities are endless.(Macel)

I used my background in IT and Systems Engineering to organize my choreography and to research about how we can enhance the communication experience through the distance.

There is a phrase commonly used in Computer Science and Systems Engineering, which is "Divide and Conquer" (derived from the Latin saying *Divide et Impera*) that came to me when thinking about my concert. I knew it would be very difficult to work on a long piece while experiencing motherhood. I also knew there was a summer break from classes right before my thesis concert. So I used that phrase in order to divide the work in different pieces, applying the concept also known as Modularity. These principles were of great help in delineating my methodology and creating my showcase. I thought that if I could develop the choreography in components or modules that I could connect up later, I would be able to come up with a cohesive concert.

Although, there was something key to guarantee success at the end of the process using the modularity concept: I would need to have a strong motive or concept that could unify the modules, as well as a good and compatible design by taking into account the interactions of the resources: music, visual effects, props, and dancers. Moreover, there are some additional benefits of modularity: easier testing, easier accommodation of new requirements at the module or component level, and easier accommodation of new components at the system level.

2.1.1 The whole is greater than the sum of the parts

Also, in Systems Theory, there is another phrase that helped me out with the final product of my concert, and to stay sound when thinking about my modules: “The whole will be greater than the sum of the individual parts”. So, even if I planned my choreographies as modules, when they were presented together, the product would be even bigger and stronger than if I had each component alone running one after the other because they serve to one single concept that was strongly defined: communication through the distance.

2.1.2 Computer supported cooperative work

The Computer supported cooperative work (CSCW), also known as e-collaboration or groupware, “combines the understanding of the way people work in groups with the enabling technologies of computer networking, and associated hardware, software, services and techniques” (Wikipedia, 2009).

The result is a very powerful set of principles to understand and guide collaboration depending on if the individuals are in the same place or not and if they are working together at the same time or not.

The matrix considers work contexts along two dimensions: first, whether collaboration is co-located or geographically distributed, and second, whether individuals collaborate synchronously (same time) or asynchronously (not depending on others to be around at the same time).

	Same time <i>Synchronous</i>	Different time <i>Asynchronous</i>
Same place <i>Colocated</i>	Face to face interactions Decision room, single display groupware, shared table, wall displays, roomware, ...	Continuous task Team rooms, large public display, shift work groupware, project management, ...
Different place <i>Remote</i>	Remote Interactions Video conferencing, instant messaging, chats/MUDs/Virtual worlds, shared screens, multi-user editors, ...	Communication + coordination Email, bulletin boards, blogs, asynchronous conferencing, group calendars, workflow, version control, wikis, ...

Figure 1: Time/Space Groupware matrix

Some additional examples based on the Time/Space groupware matrix are:

Same time/same place: Face to face interaction

- Roomware
- Shared tables, wall displays
- Digital whiteboards
- Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS)
- Single display groupware

Same time/different place: Remote interaction

- Video-Conferencing,
- Real-time groupware
- Messaging (Instant messaging, Email, chat)

Different time/same place: Continuous task

- Team rooms,
- Large displays
- Post-it

Different time/different place: Communication + Coordination

- Wiki

- Blogs
- Workflow
- Version Control

I was interested in developing Same Time/different place interaction, as well as the Different time/different place one. The first one would be through video conferencing and the second one with a Blog.

It is also important to highlight here that these principles and methodologies would be used not only for purposes of the choreographies and dance execution but also for the creation and rehearsal processes. For instance, since I was planning to spend the summer at Southern California, I still wanted to gather feedback from people from Maryland and even from Peru and other locations, so I needed tools to keep them posted and give them a common, and remotely accessible, understanding of the progress of my work.

2.1.3 Synesthesia

Researching through the Internet about virtual relationships, I found a very interesting article in a blog about social creativity. There was a very interesting question guiding the discussion: What makes real-life interactions so compelling? The answer was that mirror neurons in our brain replicate what there is going on in the other's brain. "When having a moment of real rapport- our physiology related signs (heart rate, BPs, etc) connect. It's almost like two birds dancing together." (Goleman, 2006)

Mirror neurons "reflect back an action we observe, making us mimic that action or have the impulse to do so. Mirror neurons make emotions contagious, letting the feelings we witness flow through us". (Hit, 2009) This concept is related to how well or easy people get along with each other while interacting depending on how our mirror neurons react and also depending on environmental or contextual factors.

The most interesting part was in a second question: Can this neurological calibration happen even when two people are only connected online? The answer was very open... yet: "That's our job to find out, but what's clear is that enriching the online experience by providing the right platforms, tools, and license to go wild IS transforming what's being created". (Hit, 2009)

As Jessica Palmer (2009) says, synesthesia is a fascinating condition in which inputs to one sensory pathway, such as music or shapes, produce sensations in a different sensory modality. As technology used in social media evolves, it might just become possible to achieve a temporary synesthesia. Through purely an

online interaction, there might come about a way to gauge excitement or tone, similar to the way we do in face-to-face communication. This would mean the birth of 'virtual mirror neurons', and enable a virtual connection between people, a connection that is as rich as a face-to-face one.

However, and that is the million dollar question that would also define the final piece of my showcase, what is the probability and timeframe for this to happen through online interaction? It is for sure slim and distant. On the other hand, what are the implications for creativity? I would like to say infinite and thrilling.

2.1.4 Video Conferencing

On the summer of 2008, after finishing his Master in Business Administration at the University of Maryland, my husband got a job in Los Angeles. Everything started when he interned, the year before, in the same company in California. Moving to California in 2007 during the summer was a great experience, but in 2008 when his full time offer arrived, it was a different situation. It was recession times. Also, being a foreigner and having a job is really a blessing, but having a pregnant spouse (me) that needed to stay in the East Coast to finish her Master in Fine Arts made life a slightly more difficult. Finally, we decided to balance the situation spending as much time as possible together by moving both to California during winter and summer breaks and having him going back a forth between Los Angeles and Washington DC. We were separated from time to time (one or two weeks at the most at a time), just talking over the phone or with Skype, "a software application that allows users to make phone calls over the internet (...) Additional features includes instant messaging, file transfer and video conferencing" (Wikipedia, Skype)

Being pregnant and living temporarily separate from my husband made me more vulnerable, sometimes I was not able to think clearly and get anxious about the birth date, thinking that maybe he wouldn't be there for me when the day comes. But somehow, watching him through the computer, hearing his voice was a great relieve, and the text messages saying that everything would be fine made me feel better. Also, pictures through Facebook or short texts over Google chat were great ways to communicate our feelings and keep us connected. Sometimes the communication was very difficult because of the limitations of technology, sometimes I didn't have signal and that made me very upset, sometimes he was not able to hear me or I was not connected at the same time when he was.

After Maya, my daughter, was born, Eduardo stayed with me more time. I told him, "This whole communication at the distance topic could be a good theme for

my thesis” and I decided to go for it. My first sketches in my journal were two people, one with a laptop on a stage, and the other in a projection, like if everybody could see what is happening on my screen. In my mind, they were definitely a couple: spouses.

Additionally, when I went to China in winter of 2008, I met a MFA student of the Dance Department of the Hong Kong academy for Performing Arts called Jia Ma. I talked to her about my early ideas for my thesis concert, and she told me she would be pleased to collaborate with me. Later on, she was working also in her own MFA thesis related to Chinese Dance Education, and we didn't have time to collaborate. Also, I thought that it would be too difficult to deal with two different dancers in two different time zones. But it sounded really interesting at the time.

2.2 Trip to the Museum of Latin American Art

While at Southern California during Summer 2009, I went to the MOLAA (Museum of Latin American Art) where they had a very good collection of contemporary sculptural and painting art from renowned Latin American artists from different nationalities. What intrigued me was an installation called “Migrar es siempre una cuestion de espacio” which translated is “Migration is always an issue of space” by Iraheta. The installation was a cinematic version of a class or Prom picture. A group of rural teens slowly fading, one by one, from the group until none remains. The digital effect explained the transitory movement of the immigrants. By that time I wasn't sure about how to integrate or use that idea in my concert, just the title of the installation was very attractive to me because it brought connections to my personal life and helped me relating the migration concept to my thesis concert.

2.3 Music... through the distance?

My previous choreography project before starting my thesis work was called “Little Dances from my childhood”. For this piece I was very inspired by my pregnancy and I wanted to make a dance piece with childlike music. That is how I found the music from Yann Thiersen. I loved it because of the minimalistic compositions and I felt a little bit familiar with it after watching the French movie “Amelie”. Thiersen had a touch of French folk music with strong use of strings. He had other melodies, one of them was called “Monochrome” in which he explains how the world looks like without somebody: In black and white. That was interesting to me especially because it made me thought about the costumes for my thesis. I thought that also I would use just a very clear range of colors in the costumes. But at the end I did not use the song “Monochrome” but

used other music from his album. I definitely wanted to have strings in my music, and two songs were the ones that expressed melancholy and sadness but were strong enough to create movement with them, and for my dancers to like them too.

Later, since I wanted my concert to also have an identity related to my personal background and situation, I thought I needed something to evoke my own family and friends, something from Peru. This is why, when I traveled to Lima in Summer 2009, I looked for different music and albums. I was disappointed after the music research process because nothing worked out; most of the music were either too folk or too contemporary. Afterwards I came back to my iPod and I found an amazing album that I had from a violinist called Pauchi Sasaki. She is a young Peruvian Japanese composer who used to collaborate with dancers and performers for installations, improvisations and performances mainly with the violin and other string instruments. I thought it would be awesome if she could play from Peru and have her video interacting with dancers here in Maryland, so her music could be listened in the Theatre and her image would be projected on a surface. We had a brief conversation about it and she was also embracing the idea, but at the end we could not match our schedules due to her already set commitments around the day of my performance. Finally, since I liked her music and had already identified some pieces that were applicable to my work, I decided to use her recorded music, along with another composition by Shin Sasakubo, a guitarist from Japan but with “Latin Peruvian soul”.

2.4 Surrealism

I knew I would be spending my time in California during Summer 2009, away from my dancers in Maryland. Here is when I started putting work we developed during the spring on Youtube so they could remember the dance. I also linked those videos with my blog to gather feedback.

I planned to build my solo dances and the Skype section during the summer time but at the end I could not start because I was sick and weak for several weeks. This is why I decided to start dedicating myself to the next modules of my choreography by developing some projects with dancers in California. I signed up and took a Composition class at a graduate level (from the Master in Arts for Dance Educators program) at the California State University of Long Beach and in that class I developed two different projects, the first one was to work with a prop, for which I used a suitcase because I knew I wanted to do a suitcase solo for my thesis, and the other project was to do a group piece inspired by a Surrealist image.

For the surrealist work, I selected a painting called “False Mirror” (1928) by Renee Magritte. In few words, the painting shows a cloudscape within an eye. I decided the piece to include video and I thought it was an excellent choice for what I was planning to do. I already had the idea of working with a video projection for this piece and somehow the surrealist painting rang a bell in my head.

I wrote this in my journal:

In the painting, an eye is looking to the sky, and a peaceful iris makes the pupil strong. It actually looked like a web cam, this little gadget that we need to stare to, so the person who is on the other side of the computer can feel that you are actually looking at her/him. I feel observed from the distance, across the sky and the soft clouds. Are you looking at me right now? Yes, but... can you really feel me?

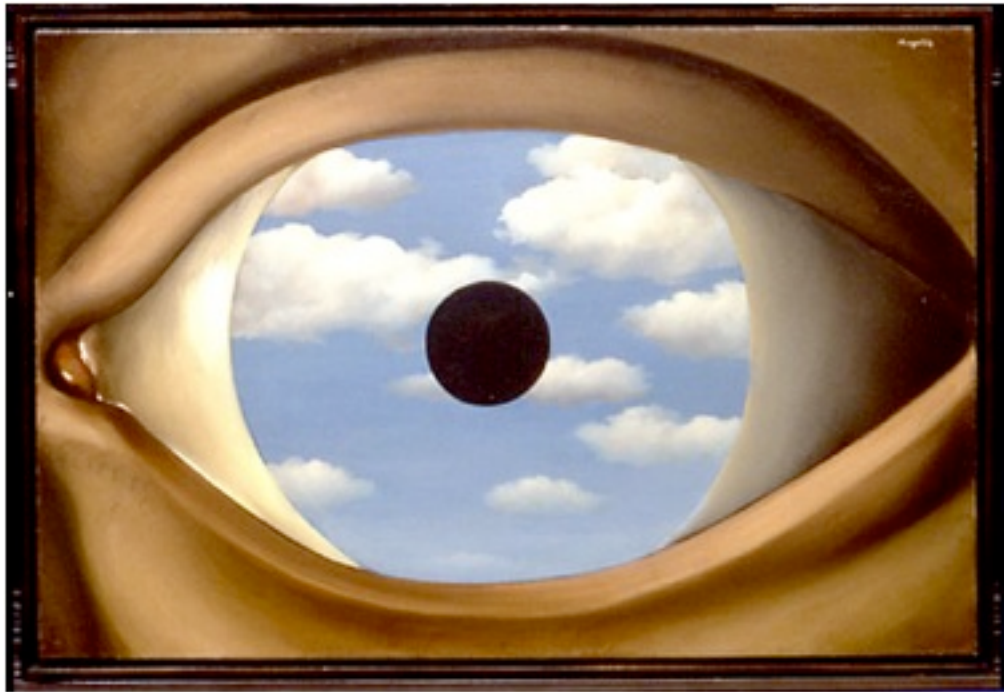


Figure 2: "False mirror" by Renee Magritte

That image gave me the idea of working thinking about the audience as if they were able to see everything from the top, trying to immerse in the experience of the dancers on stage, and their projections on the floor. My own vision of how would it be to “interact” and dance with people through the distance.

2.5 Where our senses are

During Movement Analysis classes with Karen Bradley in Spring 2009 we read Edward Hall's "The hidden dimension" (1990) about how space influences people's lives. There was a chapter about how media and technology were created and developed as an answer to our necessity to extend our senses. In this context, the telephone was created to extend our ability to speak and hear, and the television made possible also to see things that are far from us. But it was more difficult for the other senses like the tactile, smell, and taste to be reproduced and extended artificially. That's a challenge that many marketing businesses and enterprises are looking for nowadays.

Chapter 3 Methodologies

3.1 The Creation Process

According to my “divide and conquer” approach, I planned to create and develop my choreographies or “modules” in the following order:

What?	When?	Where?
Group piece #1 (Migration) Phone Duet (Mentiras)	Spring 2009	Maryland
Solo (Doubt, departing) Group piece #2 (Virtual closeness) Skype section (Through the distance)	Summer 2009	California / Peru
Group piece #2 (Virtual Closeness) Rehearsals	Fall 2009	Maryland

Figure 3: High level plan of choreographies development

This sequence was defined this way based on the availability of the dancers and the fact that some “modules” required asynchronous interaction between dancers from California, Peru and Maryland. The high level plan was also related to my travel plan for the year of 2009 since I had already programmed moving to California during the Summer and visiting Peru for couple weeks towards the beginning of the Fall semester.

Furthermore, I wanted my solos and the Skype duet to be articulated with the whole show, so I left them to the end in order to enrich them better to be based on the results of the group pieces and the feedback from my advisory committee.

3.1.1 Blog

The word blog is a contraction of the words “web log” and it is, by definition, a shared on-line journal where people can post their personal experiences and

hobbies. I thought it would be a useful tool to have an online journal that I could access from anywhere and also grant access to anybody to provide feedback.

The idea of the blog started when I looked for a way to stay connected with my dancers and my committee even if I would be far from Maryland for a long period of time.

The blog was helpful to me as a second journal, an addition to my notebook: a visual journal, where I could add any kind of media on it like text, hyperlinks, pictures, music, and videos.

The second reason for creating a blog was to have a repository of the feedback while I was in California or Peru. The blog allowed me to have feedback not only from my professors in Maryland but also from my dance friends in Peru and my dancers. Sometimes, the feedback was not posted on the blog but in a separate email because the blog sends an alert to the email addresses and then the users instead of signing in the blog they just replied to the email. That is the way I was receiving most of the feedback via my mailbox.

On March 10th, 2009, after the presentation of my proposal, I created the first post in my blog at <http://throughthedistance.blogspot.com>, the blog tool that Google offers for free.

3.1.2 The story behind the Skype section

Since the conception stage, in my mind, the first section of my concert was a piece in which I would make contact with somebody who is not physically with me. And when recalling my days when the videoconferencing was the only way to feel my beloved ones close to me, I decided to use the idea of online chatting for this piece.

It was meant to be the central piece in my concert, not the first, not the last, but the core. In the beginning I was thinking that I should have done the piece with my husband, a non-dancer, because of the emotional element that I wanted to represent. But later I realized that I would rather have a dancer on the other side of the screen, to dance also like me, on a stage. At this point, since online chatting allows for two-way video conferencing, I envisioned having two concerts going on, one in Maryland and another one somewhere else in the world, which is an idea that I still have in mind for the future.

For this “Skype” piece (I keep calling it “Skype” piece even if we ended up using a different application) I already had a partner in mind: Antonio Ayesta, a Peruvian dancer who I used to dance with. We danced together in the Ballet

Municipal of Lima, the largest ballet company in Peru, and also we danced contemporary dances outside the company. I found out Antonio was in Germany, dancing for the main company at Magdeburg. This little detail in terms of location within the globe made difficult to coordinate rehearsal schedules because we were in very different time zones. There was no chance at all, due to personal plans and budget limitations, to have face-to-face interactions and rehearsals. Also, he was very busy in his new job in the Ballet of Magdeburg, so we didn't start working until Fall 2009, when according to my planning, we would start rehearsals during the Summer. Even though we stretched the plan a little, we applied same time/different place collaboration very effectively approaching the choreography in a very interesting way that made us work quickly and efficiently. Did I mention he is also a System Engineer and dancer? Good thing he is.

During the creation and rehearsal process I recalled one of the numerous times we partnered together in 2005, with an Italian choreographer. We did it on very tight schedules, but the performance was superb as a piece of contemporary ballet. I am pretty sure that my friendship with Antonio and the fact that we had previous experience partnering with each other played a critical role during the creation of this piece.

3.1.3 Cast in Maryland

As usual for a Thesis Concert, going back to Spring 2009, I decided to work with six students from the Undergraduate Program of the Dance Department of the University of Maryland.

Before that, I asked some dancers I had worked in the past with: Noelle Ribsam, Molly Kirkup and Kathryn Lerner, if they were interested in being part of my Concert. Fortunately they accepted. My experience with them goes back to my first year at UMD when I asked Noelle to perform a ballet piece that I choreographed for the New Dances in 2007. Noelle was very committed and her performance was great. Later on, I saw her in Modern classes and I thought that she had a really good technique and a very intelligent approach in understanding the combinations and feedback. In the case of Molly, I worked with her on a duet project for New Dances in Spring 2008, and she demonstrated great capabilities as a dancer. Finally, I saw Kathryn in an audition for an MDE work, and I noticed she was not only a good dancer but also a great performer, so I picked her to dance in my project for New Dances in Fall 2008.

Later, on February I asked Christina Jackson and Kristen Vlacancich, who I worked with also in the past in some small projects. Christina danced in the same

ballet piece Noelle did, and she demonstrated an outstanding attitude and excellent performance on stage. I worked with Kristen in my first choreography project for my class "Choreography for Groups". She was really quick picking up combinations and sequences and a nice collaborator in the process of dance creation.

Even though I had five dancers, I decided to run an audition to select one more. My audition was scheduled for February 16th 2009, but only 5 people showed up and I chose Emily Schwarz among them. Emily demonstrated to be an excellent dancer. From the beginning she was very committed to the project and displayed special interest in being involved in my choreography.

The next issue was to find common time availabilities among the six dancers. I started on March with partial rehearsals twice a week to build the first group piece that was called "Migration". During the creation process on the spring semester we had several problems with rehearsals. I wanted to have everybody together to do my pieces, but during March and April I could never have all my cast together in a rehearsal because of events, prior commitments, rehearsals for Maryland Dance Ensemble, rehearsals for other different Thesis Concerts, illnesses, changes in schedules, etc. This situation was very difficult to me since I usually worked either with big groups in a company when everybody was committed to be on time for rehearsals, or with small groups of four people at the most. After talking to Anne Warren and Alcine Wiltz, I was suggested to just start sequences with some of them and then try to put everything together as a whole. This was great piece of advice moving forward with all my group choreographies and got along with the modularity concept that I was trying to apply for different choreographies but in this case I was also applying it within a choreography.

To run the creation process around the concept of migration we used different approaches. The first exercise we did was to embody the sense of leaving or absence with a clear action, individually. We put together those individual actions and that was our first beginning of the piece. Later we worked in group sequences in unison, then with duets, and some solo sequences. Also we had some contact improvisations, trying to find the right moment to express the sense of community between them. The early feedback given by Karen was great in the sense that they needed to have some freedom of movement guided by breathing at some points. Breathing as a group, with each other and clarify where the movement is coming from or initiated by. Anne Warren suggested me to highlight clearly the sense of community and how the group is affected by the leave of one of their members.

After implementing all those pieces of feedback and having a better progress with my group piece, I decided to start with the phone duet in which they would be physically separated but in the same building and feeling a real presence in their respective places. I asked to two of my dancers to participate on it

The idea of using the payphone area in the Clarice Smith Center came to me from a choreography I was involved several years ago in Lima, called "Ocupado Dancing" in which we had to portray the problems with the lack of communication, specially talking about telephones. The choreographer was the Argentinean Patricia Alzuarena and almost all the music in the concert was tango. When I saw the payphones outside the Dance Theatre I started to think about the possibilities that that little space was giving to me. First I was thinking of doing some site specific before the actual performance, but it didn't make sense to the other parts that I was creating. I was thinking how a short separation could be seen, between somebody on stage and somebody at the payphone booth, but to express a long distance relationship. In this case I chose dancers with good expressivity and physicality and I created the story, like a soap opera, to work on. It would be a duet about anger through the distance.

Our first rehearsal was outside the theatre, at the payphone booth. I worked with Emily and Kathryn in the first sequence, guided by a dialog that I wrote for them. By that time, I was not sure who would be on stage and who outside. At the end of the rehearsal, my instincts told me that Kathryn, with her experience in Theatre would be excellent outside because the extra force and energy she had to express in a little space and through a projection. And Emily, who has good sense of presence and physicality, would be better on stage.

The story I made for them was like a soap opera scene. It was like this:

Kathryn K and Emily E have been friends since High School. But now K thinks E is cheating with her boyfriend B. E and B are living in the same city, but K is far away, in Maryland. K was told that E and B were seen very often together having dinner, going to see movies, and at school. K believes E, who follows B everywhere, is overwhelming him. But E says that it's not true. K is very upset and she decided to call her ex friend E.

Also, when creating movement by myself or with them, I told them to have different qualities of movement for the beginning. Kathryn would be sharp and directional, using repetition, the torso would move back and forth and hands would be very expressive, by flapping or doing fists. Emily would be more surprised and less sharp, confused and slow in the beginning, like trying to understand why she is been "punched" with words.

My goal was to finish both the group piece and the duet before going to the summer break. But I just finished a solid first version of them. Applying again the Computer Supported Collaborative Work approach (CSCW), I continued developing these two choreographies during the summer, filming myself and posting my videos in my blog for which I gave access to my dancers so they could rehearse before coming back from break the summer. Also I posted the continuation of the duet that I didn't finish so Kathryn and Emily could see separately.

3.1.4 California and Peru

In California, at the CSULB, I started building my solo piece with a suitcase, which I decided to call "Departing". It was very different to the piece I ended up doing for my concert. First, it was a regular suitcase without wheels, and I didn't have music for it.

My first version of *Departing* was more like a prop study than a choreography about departure. I started by writing down properties or qualities of the prop, or actions with the prop (the suitcase): rectangular, handled, heavy, portable, and dragging. After that, I made a sort of poem using the significance of the suitcase.

Suitcase

*It represents the portion of my life
I'm taking with me when going far from home.
It represents my migration status, to remind me that
I'm an immigrant,
a person who is "on the road",
who has a home that is just a temporal home,
with an odd sensation of having loosing the roots,
like a spore.
My suitcase is big for my size,
but at the same time is small for all I want to keep with me,
since I don't want to leave anything,
since I want it all, with me.*

Then I aligned my motifs to those words and used them within different ideas, like space, rhythm and tempo. I didn't have music selected by that time, and I showed my piece to professors at CSULB for feedback: to Cyrus Parker, chair of the Dance Department at CSULB and Andy Vaca, Choreography Professor. Later on, I showed that piece to Karen through two Skype sessions we had and

through my blog when I posted my videos. I was suggested to make a storyline of the piece and to play with the order of the events.

Some of the elements were useful for my opening solo ("Doubt"), because in this first suitcase solo I had also a small sequence where I showed doubt between leaving my current place or not, then I decided to go and I took the journey with the suitcase. I was suggested to enlarge that section, and at the end, I developed that part even more and more, and the Doubt section was born.

Before coming back to Maryland, from California, I decided to change the old suitcase for the rolling suitcase that I used to come to United States. That one worked better for the intention of my piece. That piece of luggage really talked to me, and the size fitted better the movements I wanted to do. Moreover, I used the rolling suitcase for my photo session for marketing and postcard purposes.

After showing my solo piece, I started working on the group project inspired in the Surrealist painting by Renee Magritte.

I had only two weeks to finish this project for the Composition class at CSULB. I also had the opportunity to work with some BA dance students from CSULB who were available during the summer session. Ten of them took one technique class with us at the beginning of the summer and all of them seemed to be very capable. I decided to email all of them explaining them about my project and ask if they were able to rehearse also after the showing at CSULB because I planned to take the video for the actual performance after receiving feedback from my showing in California. Three dancers answered affirmatively and we started rehearsing right away.

I started by setting the choreography for the camera, in which I was playing with perspective and the idea of touching and negative space. Also I played with the idea of somebody looking from the top and dancers doing movements on the floor in which they could touch and feel the texture of the floor, looking high to an imaginary eye (the surrealist painting) and trying to reach the observer.

I edited this video very quickly, and the quality was not the best, but served very well for the effect I wanted. After it, with Gregory Crosby, the Dance Department Technology Advisor, we looked for the best way to use the projection. The best way was to situate the projector and the audience in the second floor behind an open window, and have the dancers performing in the first floor.

The day of the showing, I dressed my dancers in white and they danced in a white 12 feet by 12 feet square made of paper. This square served as a cyclorama for a projection of the actual dancers doing actions in which they couldn't touch each other while one of the dancers was walking towards the

camera until her eye was close enough to “see” through the camera. Dancers on stage were doing actions of real contact, from a gently hug, to an extreme hug and lifts. The action evolved into a frenetic dance in which they were complementing the movements of themselves in the projection. The dance finished when the eye became scarier, as an eye who saw everybody and everything; the pupil grew bigger and bigger and the dancers were pushed off the square.

After creating my piece for three dancers in California, I decided to have a session with them in which I would film them properly for the new video that I decided to make for the actual thesis concert. I had to use again the white paper to have more contrast with the black costumes, and also I bought black plastic to work with black over black, which at the end did not work very well because of the lack of good lighting. I also filmed them outdoors because I wanted to have a reference that they were actually in California so I taped them dancing and doing duet sequences at the University of Long Beach, with the big palms and beautiful shiny sun as a background. I wanted to go to the beach and film there, but because of time and logistics issues, it was not possible.

After doing this dance, I decided to pull some elements from it for the last piece of my thesis concert, like the projection, the floor work, the need of communication and the white costumes. My idea was to create the effect of having dancers from different locations dancing together in the same stage.

Later, by the end of the summer, when I traveled to Peru, I contacted two of my old friends, from the Contemporary dance group I used to dance with, to be part of the project. Adriana Arrunategui and Elizabeth Munoz already knew about the project after some email communications we had in advance. They were very enthusiastic about supporting for my thesis concert. We didn't have time for improvisation but as they were ballet dancers that went into modern dance, they felt really comfortable with my movement vocabulary.

Applying the lessons learned from my video tapping experience in California, I was able to have everything ready and we spent only one day for rehearsals and shooting with the video camera. Fortunately, I had the help of a Chilean videographer, Mauro Munoz, who helped us made the process significantly easier in terms of camera positioning and lightning.

3.1.5 Title your piece

I think one of the most difficult tasks in the world of the arts is to title your piece. It was on July 2009, when my concept was clearer, and even the components were

already defined, but I didn't have a title yet. It was also time to send the information about the concert to the Clarice Smith Center for the Events Calendar. My concert, programmed for October 22nd and 23rd 2009, would be shared with April Gruber, also MFA candidate in Dance.

Originally, when we sent the first set of information to the Center, April and I decided to have a common title for the night, called "Flying Away", because it made sense to us to have just a shared name for our shared concert and have our sections with their titles. Later, April decided to have a title for her concert and also considering the fact that I had six "modules" or sections, I started thinking about having a title for my entire concert. I already had some titles in mind, but none of them were really convincing to me and also comprehensive of all the concepts and the message I was trying to convey:

- Where our senses are
- I wish I were there
- To the Here and There
- Near Distance
- Keeping extended touch
- Adjacent remoteness
- Extending my senses
- Touch me through the distance
- Connections
- Across the distance
- Touch keeper
- Here, there, anywhere

I was in California at that time and I decided to ask my MA Dance friends at CSULB about it. Somebody told me that just a simply "Through the Distance" would be very powerful and enough to signify my concept. I discussed it with my husband too and finally it was decided, Through the Distance was born!

3.1.6 Marketing

Usually, deadlines for marketing are very early in the process, because it doesn't depend only on the director but on a group of people that it's dedicated to this matter.

I had a friend in Peru, Fabiola Elias, who is a dancer; choreographer and graphic designer and I thought she would be perfect to manage the graphic design

component. At the same time Fabiola could be also involved in the process somehow due to her background. Before taking the decision on this, I asked April if she would agree to have her to do our postcards and she accepted.

To me, it was another piece on my project and another piece of coordination on a same time/different place basis and communication through the distance. Most of the interaction happened via email and chat. We sent her the text and pictures by email and then she sent us the drafts through the same via. After deciding the design model, she sent us the final file and we ordered 500 postcards right away. They arrived to the office really soon, and we were ready to promote our concert.

The only difficulty with Fabiola was to pay her. We had to go through several instances to have the University paying her. But at the end everything worked out perfectly and we were totally pleased with her work.

The other component was the designing of the program. We did it through the Publications Office of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, which was pretty convenient, but their deadlines changed and we had to have pictures, sequence of the program and all the information six weeks in advance to the concert date. The center changed their deadlines because they were combining two performance weeks in one book. At the end, we were able to handle it and gather all the information on time.

In addition to the postcards and program, the online marketing is also very important. The Center usually sends information to different channels, but I thought that also it would be important to announce our concert to our friends. For that reason I created an event in Facebook and I sent it to my six dancers in Maryland. Big was my surprise when a couple of days later, the number of confirmed guests was 99. The power of Facebook.

3.1.7 Feedback during the process

After my committee was selected and informed, it was necessary to set dates for observation and feedback. During spring semester it was very difficult because of the dancers' schedules and the different activities that were taking place. But I could find a time to meet at least once with each one of my committee members to keep in touch with my thoughts and rehearsals.

Through my blog I was able to post videos even if I was far from Maryland. I received feedback by email or in the same blog. Also, Karen and I scheduled some Skype sessions to see my solos during the summer and, of course, I received excellent and sufficient real-time coaching.

Once in Maryland again, I was able to reconnect easily with my dancers and advisors to continue with rehearsals and showings.

3.1.8 Back in Maryland

Once I was in Maryland again, I reconnected with my dancers to start the second group piece called “Virtual Closeness”, and I started to work on the video editing for “Migration” and “Virtual Closeness”. Furthermore, I could meet for the first time with our newly appointed Production Coordinator Erin Glasspatrick.

Thanks to Erin we were capable to set weekly production meetings and two pre-showings. Also it was very important for dealing with certain needs that my concert required.

Costumes

I made sketches of what I wanted for costumes. I wanted seven trench coats, one dress, six tops, three pants and three skirts. I decided to get them through the Center and they accepted. The only problem was that it took more time that I thought to get all the costumes, due to the color I wanted for the six tops and bottoms where white, and, apparently, it was very difficult to find.

Phone Booth Area

One of the issues was to get permission to use the phone booth area. It took several weeks to have the confirmation. Moreover, when we were rehearsing, we found that the phone cords were very small and we couldn't do some of the actions we needed to perform. I requested to use a fake phone or at least to use another phone handle and cord that would be attached to one to the payphones but that was rejected at first because we couldn't alter the area in any way. But we found a solution and we reconfigured the space temporarily for the five minutes of performance.

Technical Requirements

Other issue was to deal with several projectors and sources. Erin helped me by getting another projector and hanging hardware from the Theater Department for the “Virtual Closeness” section, but unfortunately it would be available starting one week before the performance day. Also, as my concert worked with different types of sources and media, we agreed that we would use Catalyst Server, which is a media server used to manage digital media like pictures and video in different layers with a graphical user interface. But first I had to finish the edition of my videos for the projections.

Videos and Rehearsals

For the Migration section, I wanted to have a background inspired in the installation I saw in the MOLAA Museum in California. Once in Maryland I set a day to take pictures of my dancers in the atrium of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. I asked them to go in the space in the same order that they were supposed to appear on stage, until they were together as they were posing for a Prom picture, and then to leave the space in the same order they disappear. While they were doing this, I was taking pictures, even if they didn't know that I was, so the pictures could be more natural. Then I selected and arranged the pictures with a video editing program, added a cross fade effect between them to give softness and convert them to black and white. I had to do this with the music, being conscious of when to add the effect of appearance or disappearance according to the moment in the choreography. I also had to edit the music to select the parts that I wanted from Pauchi Sasaki's "Osoll" and Yann Thiersen's "La Vie Quotidienne".

Simultaneously, I worked on the video and choreography of Virtual Closeness. Virtual Closeness was an extension of my work in California with the CSULB students. The piece I did there, called "El Ojo" (The Eye) and inspired by Surrealism art, was already successful which gave me confidence and reassurance on my work.

My vision of this dance was to have the video of my Californian dancers, that I had ready during the first weeks of the fall semester, so my dancers in Maryland could experience how it is to dance together with the flat bodies of the dancers on the floor, complementing their movement and embodying their actions. For the video, I had the help of Betty Skeen, graduate student and friend familiarized with video editions. She told me how to obtain those vibrant black and white effects. It was time consuming but at the end it worked. I had to get rid of the majority of the footage I got in California for different reasons. It was hard to realize that I invested time and effort in videotaping the Californian dancers but when editing the videos, there were many parts that didn't work together.

In California, at CSULB, I showed my work in a classroom that had a big window in the second floor, where I put the projector, the DVD player and the audience. The angle worked perfectly and I obtained 12 x 12 feet projection on the floor. But in the University of Maryland I had a limitation because the projector could not be somewhere else than exactly the top of the stage, giving me only a 6 x 8 feet projection instead, which was a very small projection for 3 people to be projected and more people to be interacting with the projection on the stage. Some of the people who saw the video of my original piece in California from my

blog told me that the piece would be less powerful since the size of the square was not as large as the original one.

In order to keep my idea about having people interacting with the projection, I started to think about other possibilities. I thought that maybe if could replicate the rectangle on the floor with another rectangle of just light to see a real and a “virtual” stage it would be effective. There would be single interactions between the virtual dancers and the real ones on stage, due to the small size of the window. The other issue was that I wanted the virtual person to be close in size to a real person, so the projection needed to be of a minimum acceptable size.

After setting this option as the best solution, I started to set the choreography for my dancers at Maryland that already studied the combinations on the video. Simultaneously, I went with Paul Jackson to see the dimensions of the rectangles on the stage. They were tiny. The 6x8 rectangles wouldn't work, as I wanted. So the solution was to have the projector further away, and tilted, and Paul gave me an alternative, to be hung from the bar where the front lights are. The issue was that we didn't have anything to hang from and we needed to borrow a projector from the Theater Department. This projector was not available until October 16th, which was exactly one week before my concert. At this point, my intention of having everything set for this piece at the beginning of the semester was not possible anymore. I had to approach my building process in a different way.

We started watching the movements of the Californian dancers on the computer and working separately as if we were two different dance companies trying to integrate their works at the last moment. As I was the one who knew the vocabulary, it was not so difficult. But it was challenging for my dancers, spatially talking, for them to coordinate some actions that were in unison or complementary. Later on we got a projector but we couldn't replicate the situation exactly as it would be for the show. But at least it served as a guide to my dancers to know what the performance would look like.

At the same time I was developing Virtual Closeness, I had to start the Through the Distance duet.

I started building a sequence according to a specific storyline I created for Antonio. My mood and reactions were also established but I didn't create my sequence of movements until we finished with his part. For our rehearsals we used Skype for the videoconference and always using the Wireless access from the University. Sometimes I also had rehearsals at home since I didn't have to move or have a big space for it. I decided to videotape and upload the videos in Youtube after each rehearsal so he could have a way to remember his sequence before the next rehearsal, which worked perfectly.

Meanwhile, I also worked on test with Erin Glasspatrick and Paul Jackson. We had a big issue: If I wanted to be on stage with a webcam on my computer and to project my Skype session on the background scrim, I would need a long cable coming out from my laptop towards the projector. And I really didn't want it. So it was evident that we needed a host computer in the control booth that could either capture what I was viewing on my laptop, or to be the host of a 3-way videoconference.

When we tested both alternatives in October 2nd, the screen capturing was very slow and it had an unacceptable quality. The problem with the second option was that Skype didn't allow more than 2 users for videochat. So we started the search for another software for videoconference that could allow us to do 3-way videoconference.

My husband found a program that worked perfectly: SightSpeed, and the Department bought a trial for a very inexpensive sum. We installed it in the three computers and tried it and worked very well. My image and Antonio's would be seen side to side on the host computer and then that would be projected on the scrim. We just needed to have the Ethernet port in the Control Booth activated to have a more reliable connection with Antonio.

After obtaining the rolling cart for the laptop, the next step was to recreate my part of the choreography in the Dance Theater. This was really challenging, because I had to take in account how I would look in front of the audience and what I would project to them on the screen besides Antonio's bedroom, even if I didn't have the projection available. For this part, I rehearsed online with Antonio, but sometimes I just used a video of him. But after the feedback I got in the showing on October 10th, I decided to recreate my own scenario by connecting another laptop to a portable projector and videotape the whole setting. This was very helpful because I realized I could use different angles and apply several visual elements to my choreography.

3.2 Production Outline

Type of resource	Name
Dancers in Maryland	Vannia Ibarquen Christina Jackson Molly Kirkup Kathryn Lerner Noelle Ribsam Emily Schwarz Kristen Vlacancich
Dancer on videoconference	Antonio Ayesta
Dancers on video	Adriana Arrunategui Lauren Cosentino Sara Loder Elizabeth Munoz Megan Schaffer
Guest dancer (Epilogue)	Danilo Rivera
Props	Rolling Suitcase (reinforced) Black Table Black chair Red telephone Black laptop roll cart
Costumes	1 red dress 6 white tank tops 3 white skirts 3 white pants 4 black trench coats 3 red trench coats 1 black belt 1 red belt
Technical needs	1 projector hung tilted in Front of House for projection on the floor 1 projector for background projection with dowser 1 laptop with webcam and wireless connection 1 computer with LAN (wired) connection to Internet Catalyst Server (desired) Videoconference software installed in laptop and computer (also in computer at Germany)

Figure 4: Production Outline

3.3 The pieces of the puzzle

Once I had clear what each section was about, I started to do a sketch of each one. In the beginning it was a very rough description, but later it took a very specific and detailed form. The final action sketch of my dances is as follows:

3.3.1 Doubt

Why separate miles from your friends and family? Why migrate? Why change? It is challenging to leave your place and go to another. A decision must be taken. Some sort of sacrifice is necessary. Hopefully a rewarding experience is awaiting you wherever you are going.

I chose Doubt as the beginning of my whole concert because I wanted to have a clear storyline. My starting point is in one single place, but I really wanted to express my state of mind, the pending decision between “this” or “that”, the necessity of taking decisions in life to go forward. Sometimes I feel like I would rather be in a river and go to different places just because the river goes towards that direction, but without thinking about where I am finally going. But I know that later I will not be happy with myself and I can regret about not have taken a decision.

My first image would be portraying a binary decision with my arms open to the sides and my hands like holding two options. I decided to show my back so my body would speak instead of my face. The movement is like I had the “change” in one hand and the “stay with family” in the other. The movement, like a scale balancing from one side to the other, starts to accelerate from hesitant to frantic. A series of different actions come in different ways, like flying, hugging, walking, traveling, heart beating, being successful, to be in pain, among others. The end of this piece is the beginning of the migration.

I remember for my MFA audition at the University of Maryland in 2007 we had to improvise around a specific feeling. And my feeling was doubt. I didn't remember that until the time I started writing down this paper. Somehow, while I was creating that piece for my concert, I knew that my movements were coming from years ago. That uncertainty, the “being here but not” at the same time, was something that I had done before, but never for a performance. And now I close the circle, and I feel more relieved. That was a moment of reassurance, to have to perform that in front of an audience, for the first time, and to open my show.

3.3.2 Migration

Communities and groups break up and sometimes they never join again. One by one, everybody leaves saying good-bye, leaving the place empty.

This piece was the first one I started creating and it was changing slightly each time. We started working on it in the middle of the Spring 2009, after all my dancers' schedules seemed to align better. I could see how the dancers were growing slowly at the first time and then during the last week they made a big change to work like a real community. Karen's feedback about starting from the physicality by breathing as one, using the back of the neck and dancing with the intestines were like a mantra for them and they applied it for the dance. Even before entering on stage, after our classical cheering up, they repeated to themselves: "breath, back of the neck, guts", which I found lovely and very clever.

In this piece, I would like to point out migration as an issue of space, how people from different places, who are following similar paths in life, are filling the empty space. Then they realize that they have been working together and relationships emerge within this new group. Later on, the same thing happens but now the individuals follow their own path coming out of the group and leaving the space almost empty with the exception of one lonely dancer that stays on stage to portray the feeling of the person who thinks she was left behind.

The frontal facing came out from a visual image that I had of the Prom picture in the MOLAA museum. These pictures are like a video in slow motion of the dancers' lives in a particular space, for which I told the dancers to imagine their time here in Maryland, how they came from different cities and how they are here working on their degree.

After a silence in music, they start to interrelate to the others and relationships emerge. When each one is departing, they are aware of that and have a response as a group for each departure. Each departure has its reason, and for that reason, the response is more or less deep. I worked with them in couples, by building duet phrases and then working on what happens if somebody is not there, with absences.

My concept of migration for this piece is not about the distance traveled but the change of the space that contained those people. It's a less dynamic concept, seen from the point of view of the person who is staying in the place where

people is leaving. It reminded me to my grandmother, who has seen how her grandchildren and children have left the nest. In Latino families this is always a big deal, I have not seen this situation affects people too much here in United States. In this case, Noelle is the one who stays, and that's why she fights with Emily because she doesn't want to stay alone. Like my mom, I know she wished me the best when I traveled abroad but I know she would have liked me to stay in Peru close to her.

3.3.3 Departing

Once decided, it is time to pack your things, your feelings and your dreams. You will need them all where you are going to.

The section starts with me packing my suitcase without music, downstage right in a pool of light. The suitcase is real, but the contents are not. I really wanted to feel the garments I was packing, so I rehearsed with real clothes but at the end I didn't included them in the performance because I wanted to express the intention without falling in the literality. I needed the suitcase because it was not only the core of my choreography but something really valuable and essential in the dance. During these actions, my feelings are still mixed: I'm excited because I'm going to start a new journey, but feeling strange to have to choose what I'm going to pack because each object represents something that I need to remember my origins, my family and my friends. Then I continue by putting my black trench coat on. I'm ready to move on.

The second part of the piece starts with the sound of steps walking and sound of the streets. Then the Sakakubo's Andean guitar starts, giving me a feeling of home, while I do some folk steps on the ground. I continue in a clear path from stage left to right, and different scenes of myself in an airport occur: like rushing to arrive to the airport, waiting for the call, looking for the gate, seating on the seats of the plane, flying, landing, claiming baggage, and finally arriving to my destination of my dreams. Am I going to be successful? Or not? In any case, I do have what I came with, my origins, my family, my past and present. I arrived. My journey ended, for now, and I express it by taking off my trench coat.

3.3.4 Mentiras (Lies)

Fight between two girls because of love, jealousy and insecurity. Distance creates misunderstandings, lack of communication. The body language is missed. How well you can hate at the distance?

The scene starts with Kathryn coming out from the door entrance of the Dance Theatre. She is looking for somebody, very upset and altered, she wants to speak but she cannot. She doesn't find this person, she somehow knows the person she is looking for is not there, but she wants to project her feelings towards somebody right now. She decides to call to this person who is far away. She goes out through the door, and we can see her going out from the doorway towards the payphone booth thanks to a live feed projection on the cyclorama, stage left. She is still undecided but then she goes to make the call.

Emily answers the call on stage, now we can see her space: a room delineated with lights, where there are only a black chair, a black table and a red phone. Her reaction to Kathryn's phone call is visible, it's like Emily is being hit with the words. Then she starts to move in a smooth and mellow way, trying to calm down Kathryn who is very disturbed. But this is not enough and they start arguing, until at the end is Emily who is completely irritated about this call and takes over by trying to hit Kathryn with the phone, through the projection. Blackout.

3.3.5 Through the Distance

Distance creates absence of physical contact. You can bring yourself and the beloved one to a common space, to see him, hear her, but you cannot touch, smell or taste through technology. At least not yet.

I appear on stage in the same position I had when I finished in "Departing", but now upstage right, and without the suitcase or trench coat. I realize that I'm alone in this place, or at least I can notice that there is something that I'm missing, something inside of me that is not there anymore, or something outside me that I need to feel through my skin.

Then a computer on a roll cart appears rolling from the side of the stage. It represents hope for my lonely heart. I grab it and I make a video call. Music starts and a projection appears in the back, replicating what I have on the screen of my computer, that is actually my own image in one side and the image of my partner in Germany in the other side. He is seated in front of his computer in a small bedroom, and the audience can see a bed in the background. The dance

progresses from an incomplete touch, and a reaching with hands to a short separation between the computer and us.

He abandons the chair and I travel to downstage left. That segment of my piece is the solitude expression: I'm seated on the floor and he seems to be indifferent to my presence, until he realizes what I'm feeling and he tries to go through the walls to travel miles to reach me. But instead of that, we try to hug each other. From the stage point of view, I look like I'm hugging the air that is now shaped like him, but from the projection point of view the audience can see that we are actually trying to go further away of our projected edges to embrace each other.

Then he goes to the back wall and desperately tries to go beyond it, with his hands, while I'm doing the same action but in front of the computer. Then in the next segment, I turn the computer to upstage right and I run in a way to show that I am in a big space, but alone, and how he is necessary for me in this new place, while he is on his bed, bent into himself with pain. I go closer to him (or close to the computer in this case) again and we perform what from the projection point of view looks like a partnering movement, by leaning on him doing an arabesque on stage in the adequate angle, and then we both fall down on the floor to express that we both are one couple, doing complementary and movements in unison.

Then I travel sideways from downstage left to right, we are having a small peak. I desperately turn the cart around, so he cannot watch me anymore, and then I change my mind and stop the cart and grab the computer. I try to keep him even closer to me by taking the computer with my hands and going to the floor while I'm still looking at him through the video camera. He is also doing a frantic dance in his bedroom, and then we stop to have again a reaching action with our arms and bodies, while I'm putting the computer on the floor. This action is like somebody is pulling us away from the computer and at the same time we are being pulled towards each other.

In the next segment, I put the computer again on the cart and I travel closer to my projected image, with the computer facing the cyclorama. What we obtain here while I'm moving is a repeated image of me doing the same sequence but separated by a fraction of a second, like an infinite canon. This action is possible thanks to the natural video delay given by the Internet connection. This effect represents, beyond obtaining a nice visual effect, how people usually want to be in different places at the same time, and how we would like to multiply or have more instances of ourselves in order to accomplish our dreams and be at the same time with our beloved ones. My partner, on the other hand, has anxious arm movements and also reaching actions.

After that, I travel in front of his projected image, but the computer is now facing the audience. We start again a short unison by extending one leg backwards and bending it like if we were ready to run. Then we stop communicating with each other because my connection freezes up. He is desperate because he cannot see me, and I cannot hear him, he screams but there is silence due to the bad connection and he tries to look further through the camera, but he cannot see me moving at all. I try to restore the connection but my efforts are in vain. Finally I give up and fall to the floor.

3.3.6 Virtual Closeness

What if, through the distance, you are able to see people from other places, look at them on the eyes, and interact with them? What if technology brings your friends to you?

The first action we see on stage is a projection of a Sara Loder, a Californian dancer. She is waving her arm at the rhythm of the music, and then the other square of light appears with Christina on it, an actual dancer on stage. Both are trying to connect each other. After that, two more dancers enter on stage, to complement Christina and Sara's movements. We have here a clear interaction between real dancers and a virtual dancer, and how that juxtaposition is seen from the audience.

Afterwards, we see another Californian dancer on the projection, Megan Schaffer. Her movements and actions are wilder and talks about really creating connections between her and the other dancers. Emily dances, as Megan, and it looks like if Megan were Emily's shadow.

Then there is a visual shift when the colors turn to its negatives, making the body white and the background black, just for the audience to change their attention to what is happening in the "real" world, in the square of light, where a quartet of dancers are exploring what is to have a full body experience where you can smell, taste and touch. While this is happening, the dancers on the projection square acknowledge the white shadow of Megan. Suddenly, in the black background the image switches to Lauren Consentino, another Californian dancer who makes a circle by doing clear shapes sprawl-like while Noelle tries to be close to her white shadow by doing the same movements a fraction of a second later.

The action changes again to Megan, and all the dancers react to her movements and her desire of enjoying the experience with them. There is a climax when we have the six dancers on stage plus the projected dancer; there are three dancers on each square doing a sequence in a circle, like trying to go away from the ground, the white common space where the connection is happening.

Later on, there is a moment of peace. Two of the dancers leave the stage, and two duets stay on stage, the projection now shows Adriana Arrunategui, Peruvian dancer, resting on the floor, doing slight movements in slow motion, first with the head, to look to her partner, then with the arm to reach her, and finally she moves around, as her counterpart does the same movement. Then they seem to look at each other, trying to get in touch with the dancer on stage, and then she vanishes and switches to other Peruvian dancer, Elizabeth Munoz, who finishes the sequence by rolling on the floor and leaving the projection. Then one dancer leaves the stage, and only three dancers stay, while I appear in the projection. A quartet is shown now, and I am one of them. The dance finishes when they disappear by rolling stage right.

3.3.7 Epilogue

The future. Will technology really defeat the distance? Will people be able to meet each other through the distance?

After deciding the title of the whole concert, I think this was the second most difficult task. I thought it was not enough to put the pieces together to make the concert work. I needed an end in which I could express my position about real and virtual experiences. In the other hand, the end needed to be the ultimate element articulating all the previous “modules”.

The epilogue is the evolution of Virtual closeness and at the same time is the resolution of the three different experiences we saw on stage: My solo journey, the phone duet and the migration group. Any of them has an end per se, because these remote relations are not the ideal we want to have. My position in respect of the entire issue of distant relationships is shown here, the hope of the humanity to have a way to bring people closer even if they are far, to have a complete and real experience even if they are not actually there, changing the concept of what "distance", "real" and "virtual" are.

The duet from “Mentiras” shows up first in the same position they finish in the duet, but now both on stage to continue the arguing face to face. Then, from the

group of “Migration”, Noelle comes out in the same position she finished in the group piece, and one by one the other five dancers enter on stage to join her and help her achieve her dreams.

The projection on the floor is still there, showing a fragment of a quote written by Richard Bach:

“If you want to be with someone you love, aren’t you already there?”

Finally, I appear on the floor, upstage center, in the same position I was at the end of the videoconference duet. Another dancer, Danilo Rivera, playing Antonio, enters stage left with a clear action of reaching with his hand, the same action that Antonio had, and then we touch our hands, action that we had when Antonio touched the wall and I touched in the air. Right after that, the touching evolves in a traveling lift towards upstage right, to finish in a jump in the same shape as the jump with the suitcase, but this time towards him, jump that evolves in a close hug, that in the shadows made us look as only one entity.

At the end, the title of the show, “Through the Distance”, is shown in the projection on the floor, and it fades at the same time as the light for us fades.

3.4 Putting the pieces together

Each piece worked as an individual piece of work, but I had the challenge of putting everything together with a sense of an entire concert by itself, also I wanted it to be recognized as an individual concert piece even if it was shared with April Gruber’s work in order to avoid any kind of confusion from the audience.

The biggest challenge was to reduce the dead time between the sections to have a sense of continuum. In this matter, Lighting director Paul Jackson and Stage Manager Erin Glasspatrick were very helpful because it was key to have a clear coordination between dancers, lights, music, projection and setting of props.

I had a meeting with Paul in order to set the light queues on the week previous to the light rehearsal. Here we set when to have a black out at the end and when to have a soft fade to black to give a sensation of continuity.

There was no blackout between “Doubt” and “Migration” because both pieces are related in terms of movement. My last movement, going out on stage left, and looking to the right, was linked with the entrance of the first dancer of the Migration piece. So, when I started to do that movement and going out, the image and music of Migration started.

After “Migration”, there was a fade to black, and I had to be ready on stage with the suitcase to start the Departing piece. After “Departing”, which finished in a blackout, so the audience could have a snapshot of the last action, the challenge was to set the chair, table and phone on stage quickly for “Mentiras” section.

Since the floor was white, it was near to impossible for the crewmembers to avoid to be seen, so their only option was do their work smoothly and clean. Furthermore, after Kathryn entered to the theater the camera and the shooting of the projection on the screen needed to be at the right time otherwise the audience would miss the opportunity to realize that the action was happening in real time outside the theater. In this piece, the climax is at the end, so we decided to finish with a clear blackout.

Before starting the following section, “Through the distance”, it was necessary to clear the space quickly. Also, after finishing the section, again a blackout after my falling in front of the computer was needed, because for the next piece, six dancers need to move into the space while I leave the space with the rolling cart and computer.

In order to do a smooth transition to the epilogue, I had to make my dancers to exit also in the order they would need to appear on stage. So Emily and Kathryn went out first to put their belts on for the end of “Mentiras”, then Noelle, and at the end the other three dancers.

The epilogue images are divided by changes in the lighting. For the duet, we have the same lights that Emily had in his “room”, for the group is just a general light in the back, and then for my duet we had only the light in the back so our bodies could be seen as shadows. The concert finishes with a slow fade to black of the stage lights and projection.

3.5 Directing a Thesis Concert

When I thought about doing a thesis concert, sometimes I had the temptation to reduce my work only as a “choreographer” and “performer”, and I forgot that my title is actually “artistic director”. I’m pointing this out because I realized on the go that there were several tasks outside the performance and choreography point of view. Dealing with props, settings, costumes, lighting, sound, video, budgets, paperwork, marketing, and much more are only few things that were also part of the show and made my life a little more stressed.

The good news was that we had a person who made my life easier on these matters, our Dance Production Coordinator Erin Glasspatrick. I must say that she

was the angel I needed it to keep myself sane. I could ask Erin almost everything about my concert, ranging from artistic, tech, budget, and have a promptly answer or solution to my needs.

The production meetings were also very useful, because those kept my work on schedule, while coordinating and addressing the right people for each component of my needs. The preview showings were also very helpful to have real milestones in terms of choreography and to push myself to have the things done by the proposed dates.

Chapter 4 Through the distance

"Through the Distance" is not just a concert but also an emotional investigation, and a work of art that is a testament to Vannia's creative intelligence. Of course I am biased. I feel totally invested in every movement, intention, and thought that went into this work's creation. Though I will be sad to see this experience end, as the piece itself has reminded me, I will always have it, and the people involved in it, with me, wherever I go.

Kathryn Lerner, Dancer

4.1 The event

The shared evening for this MFA Thesis Concert was shown on October 22nd and 23rd 2009 at 8pm. Previous to this we had two showings for production purposes, and a tech week that included a lighting rehearsal, two technical rehearsals and a dress rehearsal. During the dress rehearsal, archival pictures were taken.

I was intended to also transmit the concert alive to my friends and family in Peru and California through a webcast, which is a broadcast of an event over the Web. I did the tests previously and the quality was not the best. As the use of bandwidth could interfere with the videoconference section, at the end I didn't do it.

Both days were sold out, according to the information that the Ticket Office gave us, which told us that the event was a success in terms of audience participation.

4.2 The feedback

I am really glad I was able to receive feedback from many sources at different stages of my choreography process. I think they helped me out polishing and shaping my ideas in order to have a better delivery to the members of the audience.

4.2.1 Feedback after first showing

For the first showing, held on September 18th 2009, I only presented the sections I had finished developing at that moment that were Doubt, Migration, Departing and Mentiras. Virtual Closeness was still in progress due to the equipment availability and the changes I had to apply to the choreography, so we

showed just the first part of it, and the projection was on the background instead of on the floor. The *Through the Distance* duet was not shown since I didn't have the rolling cart for the laptop yet. *Mentiras* was shown with the table, chair and phone as props, to be used for first time, but Kathryn stayed also in the stage because the camera and live feed was not set yet. She tried to recreate the phone booth with a bench and a fake phone, which gave her a totally different ambient for her performance.

After the first showing, I felt a little disappointed. I knew that it would be difficult because I didn't have all the elements on stage, and that it would be very different from the final product. However, I felt like I had still to work on many things in the choreography, technical issues, feedback, and finishing the other two sections. Moreover, as we were the first showing, my dancers stayed to see April's piece and she had already her dancers dressed and ready for the performance, and the piece run much more smoothly than ours. The feeling of having still much more to work on was noticeable.

Feedback was given according to what it was shown. In general, the feedback was positive, encouraging me to push my dancers to have more sense of presence during the performance. I was asked to clarify important moments like the waiting in *Departure*, separation in *Migration*, and the communication struggle in *Mentiras*. For the *Virtual Closeness* section, I was asked to establish a clear relationship between movers and projected dancers.

4.2.2 Feedback after second showing

The second showing was on October 10th 2009. This time, we had more "layers" working together and we were closer to what the final performance would be. We showed all the sections with the exception of the *Epilogue*. However, we didn't have Antonio for the *Through the Distance* duet due to unavailability caused by the conflicting time zones. For *Virtual Closeness* we did have a projector we used for rehearsals and we placed it closer to the position it would be for real. But the keystone was noticeable and as the dance floor was still black, it was difficult to see the video images.

As we had the projection for *Migration* for the first time, I was recommended to have the dancers acknowledging their presence in the background.

The general advice was to clarify what each section was about, especially in the *Departing solo*, which looked still theatrical instead of thinking about what I wanted to convey with it or feel.

In *Mentiras*, it was the first time we saw Kathryn projected on the screen through the live video feeding. It seemed like she needed to exaggerate more the little gestures that were obvious before. Emily still needed coaching in having more expressivity, but her physicality was great.

In the *Through the Distance* duet everything was happening on center stage and seemed like I was dancing around the laptop without being aware of the audience. Also, it needed more clarification of what was happening in the relationship, which was a little difficult to express since Antonio was not there and we didn't have any projections in the back.

Even if I was rationally confident on the fact that everything will work out well once we have all the pieces together properly, the overall work still looked very rough, and I was hoping that during production week everything would be on track for the performance day. Since, at this point in time, I was the only one who had a clear idea on how I was planning everything to work out, it was hard for my committee members and even for my dancers to envision how the final product would look like.

4.2.3 Tech rehearsals feedback

Patrik Widrig and Sara Pearson, Modern Technique and Choreography professors, respectively, gave me their feedback after my second tech, which was extremely helpful. I really needed at that moment some words to bring back my self-esteem, and to know if my work was really making sense to the audience. They told me that the group seemed to be a dance company, which was a nice comment they made in front of my dancers. They were also very relieved, because during the whole process I told them always what was going on with the feedback and they were feeling like there were always something else to work on, and they didn't feel they were reaching the maturity point that everybody wanted from them until the very last week. I think there was also some stress among my dancers on the last piece going around the fact that we did not have the projection layer that was planned to be available until the last week, because of logistics issues. Also, they were not able to see the duet with my friend in Germany and they were not sure how it would work and how it would get along with all the other pieces.

Additionally, Sara made a remarkable comment about the duet "Mentiras". She told me that it would be interesting to have Kathryn, the dancer in the projection, on stage in the end or the beginning for the audience to understand that the projection was a live video. I told her I planned to do that before, to have her

entering on stage in the epilogue but it would be very time and tech consuming for only a few seconds of performance. And she asked me, “what about before she shows up in the phone booth?” I thought that it would be awesome! I told Kathryn if she would be able to do that change in just one rehearsal (we just had dress rehearsal by that time) and she agreed with that. So the only change for the camera was to catch her when she was exiting from the theatre into the phone booth. It worked perfectly, not only because it made more sense for the audience but also because I had a component of closer interaction between one of my dancers and the spectators. Also, Kathryn was the right person to do that among my dancers, due to her acting background.

Before the dress rehearsal, during warm up class, one of my dancers got injured in her ankle. She was not able to move and she did not dance during that night. It was a very scary moment since we did not know if she would be able to recover soon. But I knew I had to remain calm.

However, the dancers seemed strong and remained together overall. I received a really positive feedback this time by Sharon, Karen and Alvin.

Kathryn seemed much grounded in her part of the duet. Her exit was clearer at the end. The group in “Virtual Closeness” was working better with the projection during the last section in terms of acknowledging it and not covering it inadvertently.

According to Sharon’s feedback, the “Skype section” had already evolved at this point. It seemed like that could continue developing and become a whole piece in itself at some point in the future.

The *Epilogue* was first shown in full during tech week. This section brought different reactions among the professors and peers. The idea of having a real person on stage playing Antonio looked like the magic of the distant relationship through video chat was gone. The dancer was not alike Antonio and the movement vocabulary was different, so my idea of “bringing him” on stage wasn’t working.

Alvin suggested that if I were using the actual dancer to portray Antonio on stage, I would need to have a common language between the two dances. There were so many lifts and movements that were in some ways different than those during the “Skype” dance. The audience needed to see some motifs developed in the previous section, like the girls duet with the phone, or Noelle reaching upstage center. After Alvin’s suggestion, I decided to change the end of the Epilogue sequence to include some of the actions I had with Antonio. Also I changed his entrance, so he could be in less light and look more like a shadow. Finally I

changed the projection at the end with the words in white written on black background so the floor wouldn't reflect the light on him.

4.2.4 Dancers' responses after process and performances

Noelle Ribsam said:

I felt this performance to be really sentimental and able to hit home to many people because it related to multiple situations. I could relate having missed my family in New Jersey while I've been here at college in Maryland. I could also relate to missing my friends from my hometown who are now all over the country and the world in college or studying abroad. I also used to have a long distance relationship and I knew how it felt to want to see and touch that person. I used iChat with him and my friends to remain connected and have that sense of touch through the screen. It was a great piece that really connected dancing, feeling, and emotions all through technology. I felt like the scariest challenge was not being able to work with the actual projector until very close to the show and the actual size was not used until very last minute as well. I wanted to have more time to embody the way the dancers in the projection were moving and feeling which is hard to do in a few weeks. The timing I felt was the biggest challenge. The use of breath really helped us all remain as a unit and feeling each other's energies through our breath kept us all together.

Kathryn Lerner said:

I am so grateful for this opportunity to perform and work with Vannia. I really appreciated the concept behind the choreography, and I feel my ability to connect with it made me able to connect with the movement.

I feel like I haven't "just danced" in a really long time, and doing this concert allowed me to do it. I was feeling my dancing, intention, and emotion and it was just great to be performing, as opposed to working in a class setting. I really think we came together as a "community" by show time, and I am so grateful that I have all of you ladies as part of my life. The fact that we became good friends in real life, made dancing about separation, and distance between us, easier and more authentic.

Personally, I haven't moved with such freedom, and lack of inhibitions in a long time.

In her blog, more about her experience during tech week:

The competing feelings — I just want rehearsal to end and perform already but I don't want the process to come to a close — are quite familiar, and seem to dominate every performance with which I am

involved. I have been working with Vannia Ibarquen for a year now, seen her baby daughter go from a belly-bump to a bouncing, curly headed person, and grown attached to Vannia and the dancers in our piece. I have danced alongside these girls since my freshman year in classes, but nothing compares to the connection that develops while working towards a performance. I am blessed to work with such artistically gifted women, but my fondest memories with them will ultimately result from the numerous inside jokes and hilarity occurring behind the scenes. If you only knew!

I feel torn. That is by no means a sensation unique to the performing arts world. Vannia's very concept of her thesis centers around feeling "torn" between places, and the loved ones we cannot always be with, but forever have with us in our hearts. This juxtaposition reminds me of the comic and tragic masks, which have symbolized theatre for centuries, and I am comforted by the normalcy of this complexity. We are doing something right around here, putting humanity's trials and tribulations under a microscope so to speak, that only the stage can provide.

Emily Schwarz, said

As a performer, I felt that this choreographic process was very enriching experience. Yes, I know every performer might say that from any choreographic process, but they might not necessarily mean it. I do. I don't know if it was because I had a personal connection with the concept of the piece, or because the environment of the process was comfortable and encouraging to work in. What gave this process its individual strength was the concurrent use of imagery in order to achieve a purpose behind the movements. More than a physical connection, the emotional connection was what attracted me the most to this process and kept me engaged in its development.

One very specific challenge I found for myself was the aspect of finding, and communicating, the interpretation through the movement I was given. My sense of artistry is one of the characteristics that I need to work on as a dancer. I have received this comment in some classes and it has always been a challenge in some choreographic processes. The approach I was given by Vannia and her use of imagery and examples of hypothetical situations helped me immensely in achieving a clearer movement interpretation. I felt I learned new ways to approach this challenge, and it was, personally, successful. Whether I accomplished this through performance can be judged by the audience's feedback.

An aspect of the process that inspired me every day, and that encouraged me to give it my all, was Vannia's attitude towards the work, towards her

dreams, towards us. If I said I ever saw a negative expression on her face, I would be lying. The positivism that surrounded this process was definitely the main reason why the result was a total success. Respect, laughter, positivism, great people and an amazing human being as the choreographer, made this process unforgettable

4.2.5 Comments from the audience

There was a talkback following the performance on Thursday October 22nd. After I finished performing I was wondering how many people would be waiting for us in the theatre, and for my pleasure there were more than I expected. The audience was really eager to know what was behind our works: the process, the technology we used, details about behind the scenes.

Questions like “how did you manage the delay in duet sections?” “Did you have a contingency plan?” “Why was Antonio in a bedroom?” “How did you manage to have those moments of unison between you and your partner in Germany?” reflected that they were very interested in the videoconference section.

Two of my dancers were with me during the Q & A session, and they gave their opinion about rehearsals and how they managed to be in clear relationship among themselves even if they couldn't see each other, and how they used their imagination for the “Mentiras” section.

Many students came to me during the following weeks to follow up on the performance, to give me congratulations or to ask me questions about the show. Also professors, staff, and people in general who did come to watch the performance talked to me to express their thought about the show. I am reproducing some of the reactions I have read in blogs, emails or that I received verbally.

Alexandra Dongala, student and CSPAC blogger:

Vannia came in dressed in a red dress. Her music is very much Asian inspired and her movements seemed at time both joyous and timid. The combination was oddly compelling. She was then joined by five other dancers and this group was very much in synch and their movements had much better control (...)

The previous performance was a good headway into Vannia's solo performance. We see her with a bag, acting out the motions of putting clothes in it, sounds of taxis, shoes clapping against the floor, sounds of flights being announced in different languages all while she is progressively advancing across the stage and dancing. The announcements in different languages made me think of the places she

must have gone and the same places she's left behind. Then we see her communication through phone and a web camera with a person from Germany (Can I say awesome? Awesome!) I think that it speaks to the wealth of communication we (humans) have developed. Did I mention that they danced simultaneously, mirroring their movements? Yes, they did and it was pretty ingenious.

I think there are two other performances that I haven't mentioned and my comments would be redundant if I were to mention them, as they were both pretty good and conveyed the theme of this work in straight fashion. The show was pretty good. No. I lied. It was great.

Aleksandr Pokalenko, UMD student

Choreographer Vannia Ibarquen raises an interesting point of how technology helps people stay connected even through long distance. First time I thought of this idea when I saw a dancer Noelle Ribsam, lying on a floor trying to copy the movement from the video that was projected from above right onto the dance floor. It almost looked like a dancer in the video on stage in front of us with Noelle as her shadow.

The live web cam dance was probably one of the most unique things I will ever see. As Vannia moved around space on the floor, bringing her laptop and capturing her dance from all sorts of interesting angles, the audience saw a projection of a web chat right onto a screen. It sometimes seemed as if Vannia and the dancer from Germany who was being filmed from his room were dancing side by side together, even they were separated few thousand of miles. The climax of the show was when she pointed the webcam onto the screen creating an infinite loop of images from the Skype screen that was delayed by a portion of a second. As she moved on stage, this set up made copies of her move behind, creating an interesting illusion that awed the audience.

Cheles Rhynes, Technical Director M/RP:

I was impressed by the entire spectacle, the choreography choices, the use of video, props, costume selection, and lighting. And I don't get easily impressed.

Richard Bell

I think it was the best performance on 15 years of watching dance.

Jessica Marchant, CSPAC event coordinator:

One of the best dance shows I've seen in the Dance department.

Maria del Carmen (Tati) Valle Riestra, DTSB & Co. dancer:

I was very pleased by the high quality and coherence of the work. Vannia's choice of theme -modern day communication among people who are close

(emotionally or because of work) but physically apart, and the technological devices that make this communication possible - was I think very interesting. The technological aspects were not the only or the main ones to move me; I thoroughly enjoyed the dancing and choreography and felt personally identified with the work. Being myself a dancer and a Peruvian living and working for some years in the US, making a home here but at the same time trying to keep my connections alive with my closest family and friends and dance colleagues in my home town Lima and other cities, made me feel particularly involved with "Through the Distance". All my thumbs up and congratulations to Vannia. I anticipate a very productive and talented career for her in the future and hope to see more of her work soon.

Chapter 5 Lessons learned and Conclusions

5.1 Lessons learned

5.1.1 About sharing a concert

When I thought about my thesis concert, I envisioned it as an evening length show. But because of budget and organization purposes, the department decided to stop having a production for only one MFA candidate.

In this case, I shared the concert with April Gruber, whose theme and vision for her concert was somehow similar to my concept, so we thought it would work very well. And, in effect, it did.

On the road, however, we had some issues to solve. One was about sharing or not sharing dancers. We both were starting our processes almost at the same time and many dancers were already committed to other choreographies. So our options to work with outstanding students were limited. We tried to work out by sharing dancers but at the end it didn't work out because their schedules would've been worse and they may have ended up failing to commit to either of us.

Also, in regards to Marketing, we needed to clarify that we were working on separate pieces but they would be shown in the same venue and at the same night. In that case, our postcards worked really well because we agreed to have our information listed separately. But we also had to be clear with the Clarice Smith Center and the Publication Office.

Another issue was the coordination of technical concerns, such as deciding to work with white or black dance floor, to coordinate availability for rehearsals in the dance theater space, and how to organize the program by paying attention to the technical requirements for each piece and taking into account each other's artistic needs.

Finally, even though we knew each other and worked in a friendly way, the expectations about each other's work during the showings were also an invisible pressure. Sometimes it worked for the good, to enhance our individual work and show the best of us in the performance, but sometimes I felt left behind due to the great amount of progress April had made before each rehearsal and the fact

that the technical details were not ready for my production. Lastly and by the final weeks of preparation I felt like I had caught up once my piece started showing maturity and being ready for the day of the concert.

5.1.2 Working with dancers' schedules

I learned that sometimes, when availability of dancers is limited, I could have started with some of the dancers to create sequences or snippets of work and then build a dance from those little snippets. I did not need to have the whole company for the creation process during the whole time. I just needed to have clarity of what I wanted to do and have had the right elements to start.

5.1.3 Warm up classes and injured dancers

April and I had decided before production week to teach warm up in order for us to perform more relaxed. But I learned that when asking somebody to teach a warm-up class, we needed to specify how our dancers needed to warm-up and what they needed to warm-up for.

One of my dancers was injured during warm up class for dress rehearsal, the day before the opening day, due to the demanding type of warm-up session they were doing. Because of that, I had to rearrange my group dances so she could perform just what she was able to with minimum changes in the overall choreography.

I also learned a director needs to stay focused in the overall show, while taking care of the health and feelings of the dancers. The opening day, the injured dancer said she was able to perform, but I saw her in pain. I was afraid that she could get worse while dancing or fall down during the performance. I recommended that she just dance a portion of "Virtual Closeness" but she wanted to perform everything. I knew that for a young dancer it is very difficult to accept that is not possible to perform after months of rehearsal, so we agreed that she would appear in some sections of "Migration" too. And we kept the same strategy for the second day of performance.

5.1.4 Working with technology and "layers"

Working with technology was not something new to me, but working with dance and technology was somehow new. It was a new form of collaboration, and it

made me realize the impact of having limited technical resources in the dance performance.

The preview showings without media did not have the desired effect to my advisory committee and it was difficult to tell what was going on with the choreography and to express what I wanted with each piece without the different technical elements in place yet. This situation made me feel that my choreography wasn't good enough. However, I kept a positive attitude and I knew, from a rational standpoint that everything would work out.

The wireless Internet connection we had in the University of Maryland was not so reliable during our rehearsals and showings. Even during a tech rehearsal, I couldn't connect with Antonio until the very last moment before our entrance. I learned what the problem was but that never happened before during previous rehearsals because we were using a different videoconference software for the performance.

This last affirmation also made me think that I needed to have an alternative or a contingency plan. That is something that I always had to do as an engineer. After thinking about that, I actually came out with the alternative in case the connection with Germany failed. The contingency plan was to have a video of Antonio running at the same time as the video chat session and switch to it in the moment that the connection would be dropped. But we never tried it and we just did our best in order for everything to work well.

The wireless connection and the considerations around it are things that I need to take into account if I want to do this project again. My only "available" solution for the performance was to continue my dance alone in front of the dropped call so the effect of the lost communication would be more realistic. But for sure the results and the impact of the dance to the audience wouldn't be the same.

5.1.5 Teamwork

I am sure the best thing I learned is that I can rely on my dancers more than I thought. I'm usually very positive and respectful with people I work with, especially if they are investing their time and effort with me. I learned almost at the end of the process that the group of dancers I worked with could help me with my performance, take care of me and give me suggestions, comments about the choreographic process. We were really open towards the end of the process and that helped them also to speak up confidently while giving me feedback or recommendations. I think I can enhance the communication with the dancers at

the beginning of the process to tell them about what I am envisioning for the choreographies and get their full feedback earlier in the process

I felt that towards the last month we became like a real “dance company” and had reached the synergy needed to excel during the concert.

5.2 Conclusions

I consider this work as a very challenging one, and towards the end of it I started having more and more ideas on how to improve each one of the choreographies. My desire of including these ideas within the choreographies was really strong. However, the day has 24 hours and the piece needed to be finished at some point. Even though I felt the piece had enough level of maturity to be presented, I am sure it has a lot of potential as a concept, not only choreographically but also with the use of technology. I am seriously thinking about developing this work further as part of my artistic goals and my professional career as a dancer/choreographer.

It is also important to recognize that technology develops everyday at an unbelievable pace and I am sure it will always provide new ways to improve and to make this work more impactful and richer in order to convey a clearer and stronger message to the audience.

In terms of the nature of the project, and the fact that it required several technical elements to work, I felt I should have ready all the technical requirements before showing the work to the faculty and my dancers. It was clear to me how the final product would look for each choreography and for the whole showcase and I was relying also on the systemic principles to guarantee that the whole show would work out once the pieces were put together. However, I had a hard time transmitting that vision to my dancers and the faculty who, naturally, needed to see the complete work in order to understand and gave me appropriate feedback.

Even if I felt that my information technology and systems engineering background was aligned with this piece, technology applied to dance is totally different from information technology applied to business. My experience with IT was more oriented to guaranteeing that a specific component or application would work and was ready to use. In the case of technology applied to dance, the artistic component supercedes the application, guaranteeing accessibility and functionality were not even the first step but the basic layer to start building the choreography and dance.

This process also brought controversial thoughts about technology that my piece was unfolding. Usually people think of technology as a set of “cold” tools and applications that can assist them with specific needs, but my research process reveals how those “cold” tools can help people communicate not only in writing

but also with audio and video. This allows them to express feelings and even helps personal relationships overcome distance.

Technology is very helpful and offers an alternative for people to stay in communication, however, as people become used to it and take its correct functioning for granted, significant issues within relationships and miscommunications can arise when networks do not work or tech problems happen.

I also noticed that most of the feedback from the audience was positive in the sense that the people who attended the event understood the piece and assimilated the concepts applied to their personal situation. Almost everyone is familiar with situations when one has been far from friends and family either because of college, work or particular personal and job related traveling events.

The previous paragraph leads to a discussion of how to measure the success of the piece and this is related to the conceptualization of arts and the reaction of an audience. An artist creates expecting that people will admire or be interested in her work. However, the virtues of a work of art should not only be described in terms of popularity. There is a delicate balance between promoting the understanding of the audience and falling into self/referential ruminations. I think I achieved that balance in my piece since the topic resonated with regular people's lives, but the way it was structured and the final message was original and illuminated new grounds of imagination.

And, what is the final message? This question brings us to the Epilogue and its meaning. Even if it was criticized during tech rehearsals, I felt I had to have an epilogue at the end. After the performance, I asked to some audience members, among professors, dancers and non-dancers for their opinion about this section and their feedback was very dissimilar.

I identified three different types of opinions: The first group of people said the epilogue was a reaffirmation of what they saw during the evening and made complete sense as an end to the concert. The second group said that it was unnecessary to have the epilogue; they were satisfied with what they saw previously and thought it could finish without it. They said it looked like the end of a ballet performance, which is always a short coda. The third group didn't pay attention to the end and perceived that other segments, like the video chat section, were more compelling and shadowed the end.

These reactions make me realize that if people don't remember a section or feel like it was unnecessary it may be because it was not powerful enough, so I have

to think about how to make it better for a future restaging. Some suggestions were to make the epilogue even shorter by transforming the sequences into tableaux or snapshots or by making the whole section longer for a stronger finale.

On the other hand, feedback helped me confirm that every person has a unique aesthetic and that is very difficult to please everybody. I feel I have to stay honest with my own artistic instincts and ideas. To me, instead of representing the future of communication through the distance or how the technology will look years from now, I was more oriented to representing the hope that I have about overcoming distance in order to express love, hate or other feelings the same way we do it face to face.

In a sense, the final message is that love goes beyond the distance. This conclusion goes along with what I have learned during all these years of traveling, meeting and missing people from different places: if you really care about somebody it does not matter how far are you from that person, you will always find ways to get there and to be there with him even if you cannot go there or you cannot be face to face with him.

“Can miles truly separate you from friends? If you want to be with someone you love, aren't you already there?” (Richard Bach)

Chapter 6 What is next

One of my short-term plans was to perform part of my concert outside the school environment. For this reason, I've recently auditioned for the "Dance Project Fall 2009 – a Choreography Showcase" with the choreography "Through the Distance", the duet with videoconference. This piece was selected to be shown at the Jack Guidone Theater of the Joy of Motion Dance Center in Washington DC. The show is going to take place on December 5th 2009 at 8pm. The Joy of Motion Dance Center is a dance institution which was granted the Mayor's Art Award for Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education in Washington DC.

I would like to develop the Through the Distance duet further to make it a stronger piece about same time/different place communications and become a whole showcase in itself.

It should be also interesting to expand the Virtual Closeness section by first bringing it back to the idea of a big floor projection that takes the whole stage to include several dancers in the video. In a second stage, I would like to do it in real time, having two performances going on in two different places, where people can work together, by projecting themselves on the floor, and interact through the dance, experimenting in how the delay, flatness and loss of some senses affects the experience.

After finishing school, just to continue the cycle of my departures and arrivals for now, I'm going to go back to Peru with my husband and daughter. After moving to Peru, there is also a strong probability that we will move to Amsterdam for a year during 2011. Based on those plans, I am right now in conversations with different organizers and producers to present my thesis concert in Peru, and it seems like the next year I'm going to have a performance there. In order to do that, I'm going to cast dancers to participate to form an ensemble and work on the show. Hopefully I would be able to implement some of the ideas I couldn't during this process.

Also, as part of my professional plans, I am coordinating with Peruvian education entities, including one of the two most renowned universities of the country, to be an advisor, accelerating the process of having a formal dance education undergraduate program.

Overall, this thesis concert experience has given me the opportunity to enhance not only my performance and choreography but also my production skills, and has made me feel like I am able to continue successfully in dance making.

Finally, I strongly believe in the potential of remote collaboration among dancers disregarding their locations and it is also something I would like to explore further. Imagine a performance that includes very skilled dancers performing and interacting at the same time from three different places and having three different audiences who are able to see the whole showcase. The combination of dance and remote collaboration brings numerous and interesting opportunities to enrich the dance creation process that are potentially applicable from anywhere, and, through the distance.

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