

August 31, 2015

Professors:

Thank you very much for taking the time to evaluate my research as part of the tenure process. In this letter, I will introduce myself and orient you to the materials documenting my research and professional engagement. You will find all of my materials in a password-protected website at:

<http://rachelboggia.com/tenure-portfolio-main/>

The password is: tenure

By training, I am a performer and choreographer in the modern/postmodern dance tradition with a specialty in multimedia performance and dance documentation. The postmodern dance tradition frames both the creative process and the act of performance as research.¹ Rooted in this perspective, my collaborative research explores and extends the boundaries of traditional choreography to improvised and commissioned performances, online courses, documentary, video dance, video design for performance, and scholarly and journalistic writing.

I have selected 13 projects to include in my portfolio that represent the breadth of my professional artistic work during my employment at Bates College, and have tagged each with the major categories of research I engaged in during the project period. Although diverse in form, the projects in my portfolio are united by my interest in framing bodies as “both a source of knowledge and locus of meaning.”² I am interested in how embodied individuals participate in the construction of culture and knowledge, and in how strong cultural forces can change the ways we experience and aestheticize our bodies, movements, and relationships. I approach

¹ For a survey of the subject, see: Leavy, Patricia. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press. 2009. Print.

² Stinson, S.W. My body/myself: Lessons from dance education. In L. Bresler (Ed.) *Knowing Bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning*. London: Kluwer Academic. 2004. Print.

these questions collaboratively through a mixture of movement research, text-based research, cross-disciplinary art making, and critical reflection.

My portfolio projects include:

[1. Avalanche: Process, Performance, Pedagogy \(2011-2013\)](#)

categories: Pedagogy, Performance, Producing

[2. Meta-academy: Embodied Online Co-Creativity \(2013-2015\)](#)

categories: Digital Media, Improvisation, Pedagogy

[3. We Build Excitement \(2014\)](#)

categories: Choreography, Digital Media

[4. Foreword/Afterword \(2012-2015\)](#)

categories: Choreography, Improvisation, Pedagogy, Performance

[5. HORSES / If Wishes Were Horses \(2014-2016\)](#)

categories: Performance, Producing

[6. Shadow Game/Five on Family \(2012-2015\)](#)

categories: Choreography, Digital Media, Performance

[7. making UNSETTLED \(2015\)](#)

categories: Digital Media, Documentary

[8. Scholarship](#)

category: Choreography, Digital Media, Improvisation, Pedagogy, Performance, Scholarship

[9. Her Story Repeats Itself \(2014-2015\)](#)

categories: Choreography, Performance

[10. Dancing the Edits/Vanessa Justice Dance \(2014\)](#)

category: Digital Media

[11. East/West \(2014\)](#)

categories: Improvisation, Performance

[12. Annie Kloppenberg and Company \(2014-2015\)](#)

categories: Improvisation, Performance

[13. Phantom Ice \(2012\)](#)

categories: Improvisation, Performance

As you can see, much of of my work crosses categories and combines media. I began working with digital video approximately 15 years ago, and now various digital media are integral to my making and thinking. About half of the work I've made in my career features a digital video component, which may take the form of projections for live performance, documentary (such as *project 7. Making UNSETTLED*), experimental installations (such as *project 10. Dancing the Edits/Vanessa Justice Dance*), or digital learning projects (such as *project 2. Meta-Academy*, described below).

In my choreography, video projection often serves as an environment and a conversation partner for the performers. I call *project 6. Shadow Game* a multimedia movement essay, because video projection forms one layer of choreography which interacts with movement and text to form a semi-narrative performance. I am generally a very collaborative artist, but I tend to shoot and edit my own video for performance projection, as well as build my own performance interfaces in the program Isadora. This is a testament to how integral the video is to the choreographic impulse in these works: I am especially concerned with the rhythm, timing, and size of projections in relation to human action. In 2014, I had a wonderful opportunity to choreograph in response to the work of nationally known video artist, Jesse Sugarmann, and created a site-specific looping performance for the opening of his gallery show in Portland, Maine (*project 3. We Build Excitement*). This allowed me to focus on choreography in relation to set video elements, a new approach to a familiar relationship.

Digital media are not just tools, but invitations to novel ways of making and knowing. In the 2013 pilot for *project 2. Meta-Academy*, an experiment in online embodied learning, my collaborators Marlon Barrios Solano, Josephine Dorado, and I worked with the support of the Bates Dance Festival to translate the pedagogy of Contact Improvisation master teacher Nancy Stark Smith to a free online lab. For three weeks, 66 participants from around the world danced, drew, and discussed with world-renowned experts -- completely online. Both my fellow researchers and many of the participants found the results thrilling. According to lab participant

Lisa Parra in an online wrap-up discussion, “The ideas on process, pedagogy and methodology that Meta-Academy proposed has (*sic*) been very useful to my own work . . . Meta-Academy inspired me to rethink ideas of place, language, identity, culture and time within the context of communication and embodiment.”³ Stark Smith also learned from the experience: “Like many of my generation, I’ve met the bounties of the digital age--cell phones, email, Facebook, Internet -- with a combination of thrill and aversion...But this past summer, I had the opportunity to throw my whole minded body, my embodied embedded bloodful dancing self (including my resistance) into creative, real-time, moving collaboration with other humans in far away places through Internet space. And it actually felt like dancing.”⁴ We were invited to present Meta-Academy alongside some of the most innovative dance documentation projects in the world at Motion Bank: Live and Online in Frankfurt, Germany in November, 2013. In the summer of 2014, Meta-Academy focused on pedagogy and creativity in three dance festivals: Impulstanz, The Bates Dance Festival, and Taking Place (Columbus, Ohio). In 2014, we received support from the Whiting Fund through Bates College. Our third lab, *The Pattern That Connects/Meta-Academy@hzt-bates 2105* is focused on choreographic thinking in networked space and will run from September 1 to 12, 2014.

Most of my projects are created in collaboration. I am fortunate to work in a number of long-term creative relationships with artists Marlon Barrios Solano, Vanessa Justice, Annie Kloppenberg, Carol Dille, Iddrisu Saaka and a new addition, Jesse Sugarmann. I have also had the pleasure of working closely in cross-disciplinary collaborations with a physicist, ecologists, and a philosopher of art (though these projects are not represented in my portfolio, you can find them on my public website, rachelboggia.com). Of course, my students are perennially generous collaborators.

³ Parra, Lisa. Meta-dance-tech. <http://www.dance-tech.net/group/meta-academy-bates-2013/forum/topics/meta>. 17 October, 2013. Web.

⁴ *Smith, Nancy Stark*. Editor’s Note: Moving Without A Body? *Contact Quarterly*. Winter/Spring 2014. 39 (1). 3. Print.

I see the process of collaboration as an opportunity for playful epistemological clash. Each creative partner brings a different method of making sense (or finding beauty, or asking questions, or simply moving) and from these differences emerge dialogue, debate, parallel play, translation, and sometimes shared creativity that reveals bridges between --and cracks in --the ways we understand our worlds. This process of coming together and asking questions is often both the method and the subject of my work, and the audience is invited into this process through performance.

I have looked for ways that my research can respond to the needs and resources in the Bates community. This approach has proven to have regional, national and international implications. For example, working in the Bates Department of Theater and Dance offers me opportunities to work closely with theater professionals. I began to notice major differences in the ways my theater colleagues and I approached the creative process. In response, four colleagues and I from Bates and Colby colleges proposed *project 1. Avalanche: Process Performance, Pedagogy* in order to explore where theater and dance creative processes connect and/or diverge, and to develop a shared vocabulary through making performance.

Over the course of three years and with over \$60,000 in grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Bates College, we worked with Headlong Dance Theater of Philadelphia to create, perform, and examine the curricular implications of *Avalanche*, an original evening-length dance-theater hybrid work. We spent a year touring *Avalanche* to several east coast cities, creating relationships with theaters--especially SPACE Gallery in Portland, Maine-- that would continue to develop for the next few years. After touring the work, Colby Assistant Professor Annie Kloppenberg and I used examples from *Avalanche* to examine how knowledge is produced in performance. We combined the framework of performance theorists

Butterworth and Wildschut⁵ with that of sociologist Hans Joas⁶ to ask how the act of performance can be understood as creating new knowledge. Examples from *Avalanche* illustrated how performers actions and skill sets related to Butterworth and Wildschut's categories of *knowing, being, thinking, and interpreting*. We presented our ideas at the 2014 World Dance Alliance Summit in Angers, France. We are now developing the presentation into a formal paper. In this example, sharing findings through performance and research presentations have shown departmental concerns to be highly relevant to regional, national, and international communities of artists and teachers.

Though I am just beginning my scholarly study of performance as research, the act of performance is vital to my understanding of myself in the world. Whether I have choreographed the work (as in *project 6. Shadow Game/Five on Family*), co-choreographed the work (as in *project 9. Her Story Repeats Itself*), commissioned the work (as in *project 5. HORSES/If Wishes Were Horses*), improvised the work (as in *project 11 East/West*), or was invited to perform in the work (as in *project 13. Phantom Ice*), the complex simultaneity of thinking and acting, of sensing and shaping, of executing and discovering, of negotiating a moment with a larger framework, and the sociality of sharing those experiences with other performers and the audience, provides me a heightened microcosm of my (post-?) human experience. Of all the projects in my portfolio, *project 4. Foreword/Afterword* most directly addresses these complexities. A score for trio performance, *Foreword/Afterword* was developed and is performed by Annie Kloppenberg, Meredith Lyons and I. The two part score, which consists of the silent collective creation of a movement phrase before an audience followed by the speedy construction of a "good" piece of choreography, troubles the notion of authorship, brings embodied intelligence to the fore, and tests the lines between improvisation

⁵ Butterworth, Jo and Lisbeth Wildschut, Eds. *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*. Abdington:Routledge. 2009.

⁶ Joas, Hans. *The Creativity of Action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1996.

and choreography in a live performance setting. We recently taught the score workshops at *idocde*, a pedagogy conference hosted by Impulstanz in Vienna, Austria, and the SDHS/CORD conference in Athens, Greece.

I deeply value scholarly exchange and the community of advocacy that conferences create. As you can see from *project 8. Scholarship*, I regularly present with colleagues on the scholarly or institutional implications of our performance research. However I would like to highlight one work of contemporary dance history. I had the privilege of serving as second author to Marlon Barrios Solano on the chapter *The Dance-tech Project: How Like a Network*, which has been accepted for publication in the book *Transmission in Motion*, edited by M.A. Bleeker for Routledge. The chapter outlines the history of Marlon Barrios Solano's dance-tech projects since 2007 and the philosophy that informs them, with a focus on embodied cognition in networked spaces.

My current research continues many of the projects that I've discussed in this letter: developing *Meta-Academy*, teaching and performing the *Foreword/Afterword* score, and writing on *Avalanche*. During my Winter, 2015 pre-tenure leave, I began two exciting collaborations: *SHAKE*, an short evening length duet with West African dancer and Wesleyan University Artist in Residence Iddrisu Saaka, and a trio choreographed by Connecticut College professor Lisa Race. Both works will premier in the Wesleyan University Fall Faculty Dance Concert in October, 2015. You can find the comprehensive list of my current projects on the first pages of my curriculum vitae.

Thank you again for your time and attention to my work.

Respectfully submitted,
Rachel Boggia, MFA