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Same, But Different: The Choreographic Process

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Abstract
To explore queer representation through dance can be considered an attempt to identify transgression within and against an established group or collective society. In order to make this attempt, choreographers utilize various forms of queering tactics as choreographic tools. Despite the use of these tools, however, dance critics and scholars frequently avoid outward discourse and analysis of queer representation by various choreographers and dance makers. In an effort to bring more awareness and educate the dance community on the importance of establishing a queer framework for dance criticism, this project examines my process as a choreographer in creating and producing the choreographic work same, but different, which was presented in the Autumn Choreographers Concert in the Tom Miles Theatre at Pacific University on November 13, 14, 15, 2014. same, but different was developed out of preliminary research on the work and autobiographies of various queer choreographers, activists, and scholars as well as my own personal autobiography and experiences. Additionally, same, but different was further influenced by several theoretical concepts and methodologies, specifically, Deconstruction and Queer Theory, which also aided in its overall development.

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Same, But Different:
The Choreographic Process

Presented by
Shaun Keylock

In partial fulfillment for the degree
of Bachelor of Arts in Dance at Pacific University

May 2015

First Reader and Advisor
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Dedication

To my parents for their unconditional love and support and to the dancers to contributed their time and talent to this work.
Abstract

To explore queer representation through dance can be considered an attempt to identify transgression within and against an established group or collective society. In order to make this attempt, choreographers utilize various forms of queering tactics as choreographic tools. Despite the use of these tools, however, dance critics and scholars frequently avoid outward discourse and analysis of queer representation by various choreographers and dance makers. In an effort to bring more awareness and educate the dance community on the importance of establishing a queer framework for dance criticism, this project examines my process as a choreographer in creating and producing the choreographic work *same, but different*, which was presented in the Autumn Choreographers Concert in the Tom Miles Theatre at Pacific University on November 13, 14, 15, 2014. *same, but different* was developed out of preliminary research on the work and autobiographies of various queer choreographers, activists, and scholars as well as my own personal autobiography and experiences. Additionally, *same, but different* was further influenced by several theoretical concepts and methodologies, specifically, Deconstruction and Queer Theory, which also aided in its overall development.
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CHAPTER ONE
Orientation to the Project

Introduction

To explore queer representation through dance can be considered an attempt to identify transgression within and against an established group or collective society. In order to make this attempt, choreographers utilize various forms of queering tactics as choreographic tools. Despite the use of these tools, however, dance critics and scholars frequently avoid outward discourse and analysis of the works of various queer choreographers and dance makers. In particular, the male and female homosexual identity of these choreographers is rarely mentioned by dance critics, especially in reference to classical ballet. Despite this avoidance, however, there is an assumption among dancers that gay men disproportionately represent the field. According to a 1997 study published by J. Michael Bailey and Michael Oberschneider, on average, dancers estimate that 57.8% of male dancers and 3.1% of female dancers are gay (Bailey and Oberschneider 9). While this particular study focused on the homosexual identity of dancers and not choreographers, it can be assumed that most dancers will either choreograph or teach at some point in their careers. In addition, the homosexual identity of dancers and choreographers can also be marked as queer, meaning that they breach the normative binary structures found in conventional western society and provide alternative approaches to understanding human nature and the choreographic process. The representation of homosexual identities in dance, therefore, occurs in a pre-existing heteronormative society. Thus, by using various queer signifiers as choreographic tools to
both inform and inspire the creative process, dancers and choreographers have the potential to deconstruct binary structures and elevate the level of queer representation in the dance community.

In an effort to create more awareness and educate the dance community, my choreographic work *same, but different* considered these choreographic tools and functioned as a commentary on the reoccurring dominance of heteronormativity, as well as the repudiation of individual differences in Western society. In addition, *same, but different* also revealed the importance of queer representation in dance by addressing current issues of morality, as well as the awareness, closeting, and denial of homosexuality. The piece was contrived from preliminary research on the work and autobiographies of various queer choreographers, activists, and scholars, as well as my own personal autobiography and experiences. It was further influenced by several theoretical concepts and methodologies, specifically, Deconstruction and Queer Theory, which aided in the development of the overall concept for the final work.

**Review of Literature**

This thesis interprets the process of creating the piece *same, but different* for main stage performance. *same, but different* was initially inspired by Post-Structuralist theory, specifically, Deconstruction and Queer Theory. The current state of knowledge on these two theories remains mostly in the form of philosophical discourse among scholars. Discussions on dance have been kept to a minimum by these scholars, however, with the primary focus remaining on the separate components of language and its influence on the creation of binary oppositions within Western society. While language remains the common thread that connects these theories, both Deconstruction and Queer Theory also
oppose the idea that meaning is constructed by pre-existing binary normalities and argue that power and hierarchy within these relationships are products of cultural conditioning. As such, these theories look towards dismantling binary systems of polar opposition, in order to illustrate the dependent and unified relationships within both language and society.

In my creation of same, but different, I applied Deconstruction and Queer Theory to dance as a direct source of inspiration by translating their basic concepts and various methodologies into choreographed movement phrases. In addition to these theories, I also gathered inspiration and influence from the queering tactics of other choreographers. These tactics allowed me to expand on my research on Deconstruction and Queer Theory, in order to develop various levels of interpretations and meanings behind the movement phrases that were being created in this piece. The three selected choreographers who use these various forms of queering tactics in their work include Ted Shawn, Bill T. Jones, and Matthew Bourne.

**Deconstruction**

The use of Deconstruction as a theoretical model can be attributed to its founder Jacques Derrida. Derrida was a French philosopher and literary critic who is said to have been heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Martin Heidegger, and Frederick Nietzsche (Barrett 159). Derrida introduced Deconstruction in 1967 with the publication of three books: *Speech and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Of Grammatology*. In these books, Derrida illustrated the methods of Deconstruction by comparing his theory against pre-existing Structuralist concepts that surround the idea that language is made up of definitions that are binary, oppositional,
and rigidly fixed (Barrett 159). Structuralists also view cultural practices as being built on this same system of underlying structures and definitions. These definitions are often common relationships that are seen in daily life such as good and evil, male and female, and heterosexual and homosexual. According to Derrida, there is an obvious hierarchy within these structures; the pairings are not always equal and often one term is valued more over the other, leading to a sense of given superiority created through ethnocentrism within Western society. The Structuralist method identifies the more valuable term within the relationship as the “unmarked” term while the less desirable is considered the “marked” term (Barrett 128).

Deconstruction, as introduced by Derrida, opposes this Structuralist concept by stating that individual terms are not fixed and superior to one another, but rather they are ambiguous and interdependent. Derrida does not deny that binary relationships are necessary in order for each individual term to have a logical existence and meaning in relation to each other; however, he does argue against the construction of opposition, as it expresses obvious modes of superiority. Derrida further does not ignore the differences between these individual terms. Instead, he embraces them by stating that their meaning is created through their differences.

To illustrate this important concept, Derrida uses the term *différance* to describe that language is restless and meaning is fluid, thus eliminating the concept of ultimate truth outlined by structuralists (D’Alleva 138). *Différance* is a French term meaning both “to differ” and “to defer.” It is used by Derrida to reference his idea that the meaning of individual terms is not identical, but is, instead, dependent on each partner term and is, therefore, expressed through differences and similarities that are subject to change with
each reading. Thus, every difference and similarity between individual terms therefore produces a new meaning, making the search for an absolute truth regarding these binary relationships endless and the content of each term highly ambiguous. Derrida states that even the author of a specific text cannot know all of the full meanings behind its content because “every reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language” (D’Alleva 138). Meaning is, therefore, always in a constant state of flux based on different interpretations. As such, it is through this method of Deconstruction that culture can be seen as relational rather than oppositional and is interconnected through ambiguous relationships.

Derrida’s introduction of Deconstruction to the unprepared academic community caused immediate controversy and resulted in constant rejection by various literary critics, such as John M. Ellis, who argued against its unfixed methodology, concepts of ambiguity, and discredit to the purposeful content created by authors. In his book, Against Deconstruction, Ellis identifies these ambiguities by stating that:

“It is somewhat characteristic of deconstructive arguments that they claim to seize on unexamined assumptions of all kinds — ethnocentrism being one — in order to explode and transcend them, hoping to enlarge our consciousness of the issues concerned. Indeed, it is easier to see in Derrida’s position here, not a corrective to ethnocentrism, but instead a determined reassertion of the ethnocentrism that Saussure sought to correct and transcend” (Dutton 430-434).

Ellis’ argument that Derrida maintains unexamined assumptions through deconstructive strategies, suggests that Deconstruction, despite its appearance as a theoretical model, is, in fact, anti-theoretical and reduces the role of theoretical reflection in literary analysis.

Despite these criticisms, however, Deconstruction progressively gained proponents, reaching its peak in the 1980s due to the increased interest in social issues
regarding race, class, gender, and sexuality. Scholars during this period often turned to Derrida to deconstruct Western notions of what was perceived as normal or ideal. One of these proponents was Paul de Man, a literary critic and theorist. De Man uses Deconstruction as a method of analysis on several works by Frederick Nietzsche. In his essay, *Rhetoric of Tropes*, De Man argues that, “Nietzsche flatly states the necessary subversion of truth by rhetoric as the distinctive feature of all language” (Tucker 15).

Thus, through this analysis, De Man applies Derrida’s methods of Deconstruction to Nietzsche’s theories, illustrating that language is a metaphor, but is often taken for granted as both an absolute truth and literal meaning by Western society.

The increased focus and positive acceptance of the use of Deconstruction as a means to eliminate power structures within language caused general interest to grow within other communities such as dance and dance criticism. Derrida wrote several books on the visual arts and placed a heavy emphasis on its means to challenge the cultural constructions within society. He believed that a work of art has the power to deconstruct absolute truth and put conceptual meaning into what he referred to as a state of “play” (D’Alleva 139). Choreographers and dance makers have began to use methods of Deconstruction within their work to illustrate their dissatisfaction with the power structures that continue to prevail within contemporary society. These structures often include gender, race, class, and sexuality, and while there is a progressive movement to remove the hierarchy within Western society, these structures continue to create opposition today.
Queer Theory

Several resistance movements were created throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s which directly responded to the continued existence of these power structures. These movements were created to not only encourage the general acceptance of the often considered subordinate groups of individuals, but to also end binary normalities within Western society. One of the most prevalent of these movements was the Gay Liberation Movement, which encouraged the open expression of same-sex relationships during the early 1970s (D’Alleva 69). This led to a new form of radicalism by individuals who did not ascribe to the social construction of heteronormativity. Taking inspiration from the emergence of a increased focus on feminism, this resistance was based on the unequal recognition of homosexual identity. It sought to free gay men and lesbian women from the binary oppositions that placed homosexuality as subordinate to heterosexuality (D’Alleva 69). This increased focus on gay and lesbian politics not only increased a desire for equal rights of all individuals, but also greatly influenced discussions on human sexuality within the academic community.

This general interest of the differences between heterosexuality and homosexuality further influenced the creation of several academic disciplines that debated the ways in which sexuality, like language, can also be constructed by cultural conditioning within Western society. One of the most prominent of these disciplines was Queer Theory, which explores the ways in which homosexuality is expressed in various historical and cultural contexts, and how it can differ from the heterosexual lifestyle that is often placed at the center of Western society. Like Derrida, queer theorists argue that gender identity and sexual orientation are not inherent, but instead are constructed by the
reliance on binary normalities. As an academic discipline, Queer Theory encourages a change in gay and lesbian scholarship and politics, and examines all forms of gender oppression (D’Alleva 69). The changing acceptance of word *queer* within the homosexual community further relates to Derrida’s concept that meaning can fluctuate depending on its relationship within language. For queer theorist David Halperin, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, [and] the dominate” (D’Alleva 70). The dominant, in this case, being the heteronormative lifestyle outlined within the power dynamics of Western society.

The work of French historian, philosopher, and theorist Michael Foucault greatly influenced the increasing development of Queer Theory. In his multi-volume book, *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that homosexuality should be seen as a specific product of a particular society or culture (D’Alleva 71). He disagreed with the nineteenth century categorization of homosexuality as a form of sodomy and stated instead that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (D’Alleva 71). Although Foucault’s work has often been criticized for its lack of historical specificity, his continued insistence that sexuality was a cultural construct, rather than inherently biological, provided a distinct foundation for the further development and study of human sexuality by various Queer theorists.

Judith Butler, a philosopher and gender theorist, is also often associated with Queer Theory and is said to have been directly influenced by the work of Foucault. She argues that gender is performative in the sense that individuals will perform a specific gender by wearing certain clothes, engaging in certain rituals, taking certain jobs, and behaving in certain ways that are seen as normative by Western society (D’Alleva 71).
For Butler, these performances illustrate that gender is a social construct and, therefore, is not a natural or an innate part of human existence. She identifies two kinds of performance in her work: citation and iteration. Citation is the copying of others through performance while iteration is the repeated performance of a specific act until it becomes a subconscious part of daily behavior (D’Alleva 71). These two kinds of performance often appear in heterosexual communities and are based on expectations created through various binary oppositions, which include man/woman, father/mother, and son/daughter. These forms of gender performance create cultural pressure for homosexual communities by creating a heteronormative lifestyle that is generally accepted by Western society.

There is an expectation that if individuals who identify as homosexual hope to receive equal rights, such as marry or raise children, they must conform to what Western society associates with normal behavior. This normal behavior is associated with not only gender performance, but also a cultural construction of masculinity and femininity. In response, Butler states that “Femininity [and masculinity] thus is not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm” (D’Alleva 71). Queer theorists, therefore, often relate this idea of gender performativity to the struggles of gay, lesbian, and transsexual individuals by stating that to talk of male and female is to talk of gender regulation and social norms.

**Queering Tactics of Choreographers**

According to Kyle Dylan de Boer, author of *Queer Transgressions: The Choreographing of a Male Homosexual Presence with Reference to Selected Choreographers*, dance studies and Queer Theory are associated through shared interrelationships (De Boer 6). These interrelationships include sexuality, desire, the body, identity, negotiations of power, and the use of space and context. The mixing of
these two fields allows for the expansion of current forms of dance analysis to include the queering tactics of choreographers. Thus, by analyzing dance and choreography using Queer Theory, scholars can create a queer framework for the study of how sexuality is inhabited, conveyed, and experienced by dance makers.

Although dance and choreography are gaining various forms of academic attention, the resources on queer dance history remain limited. This is arguably because the representation of homosexuality in the dance community has continued to be ambiguous, implicit, and covert despite it’s growing acceptance in mainstream society since the early 1990s. In Jane Desmond’s book, Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage, she argues that canonical dance history has made invisible the queerness of gay and lesbian dancers and choreographers, and few texts on dance history would note the sexualities of these individuals, much less analyze their works in relation to Queer Theory (Desmond 15). It is only recently that select choreographers, like Bill T. Jones and Matthew Bourne, have started to make their work more openly queer, almost as attempt to force their choreography to be read in relation to their personal identity and sexuality.

The development of modern dance in the early part of the twentieth century was the first to encourage an open representation of personal identity. In particular, modern dance rejected the rigid structures of classical ballet, which continues to be formed by and reinforce normative heterosexual content. This rejection of not only the parameters of ballet vocabulary, but also of the use of narrative and aesthetic qualities of this heavily constructed dance form, allowed for new innovations in dance choreography by
pioneering members of the dance community, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn, among others.

One of the most influential of these modern dance pioneers was Shawn. He differed from other modern dance makers by strongly defending dance for men. In his article *A Defense of the Male Dancer*, published in 1916, Shawn argues that male ballet dancers, who were prominent in France and Russia at the time, would not find the same support in the United States. Instead, he declares that, “America demands masculinity more than art.” and that “dancing is for men, American men” (Desmond 113). This defense of masculinity in American modern dance allowed Shawn to create and tour his own company of all-male dancers. From 1933 to 1940, Shawn’s company, known as Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, held over 1000 performances in more than 750 cities in the United States, Canada, and England (Desmond 118). During this time of immense production, Jacob’s Pillow, Shawn’s farmhouse property in Beckett, Massachusetts, became the company’s permanent home.

This ideal of an all male performing company rehearsing and living in the country together encompassed Shawn’s homosexual identity and often became reflected in his choreographic works as emboldened forms of masculinity. This resulted in various works that emphasized a hyper-masculine style of movement. According to Shawn, “The movement of men should project itself beyond the body of the dancer and create in the mind of the audience a sense of spaciousness, great distances, and invincible strength” (Desmond 124). This emphasis on hyper-masculinity by Shawn can be considered an attempt to disassociate male dancers from signs of effeminate homosexuality, a negative assumption often tied to male dancers at the time. Rather than being open about his
homosexuality, which was prevalent in his personal life, Shawn’s dances did the opposite and essentially helped to closet the male dancer even further than before. For such an early display of homosexual identity, however, Ted Shawn should, therefore, be considered a pioneer for his use of queer representation in dance.

It was not until the 1980s that another positive and influential shift in the open representation of homosexual identity would occur. Bill T. Jones was especially well-known during this period for using his own personal experiences to create controversial dance works that dealt with everything from sexuality and race, to his HIV positive status (De Boer 19). In 1988, Jones’ partner Arnie Zane died of an AIDS-related illness. Following Zane’s death, Jones choreographed some of his most powerful works, including Absence, Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land, and Still/Here. The direct application of the homosexual experience in many of these works exemplifies the use of personal presence and autobiographical narrative as a queering tactic among homosexual choreographers. The staging of male homosexual identity by choreographers like Jones also exposes both the physical and emotional depth of the homosexual experience in Western society, which had previously remained ambiguous and implicit in mainstream artistic production.

This representation of the homosexual experience expressed through choreography gave queer identity a platform in the dance community, which continues to develop and change in the twenty-first century. The staging of overtly homosexual works remains a prominent method for queer choreographers, which has encouraged the development of a canon of queering tactics to implicitly represent the homosexual experience in dance choreography. In addition to the use of hyper-masculinity and
personal narrative mentioned above, another prominent tactic is the use of gender
reversal and re-appropriation of established narratives. Bourne’s Swan Lake, created in
1995, serves as a noticeable example of this tactic. The original Swan Lake was a ballet
created in 1876 by choreographer Julius Reisinger and restaged by Marius Petipa and Lev
Ivanov in 1895 (Kant 164). While most ballet companies and choreographers have based
their stagings on the original classical choreography, Bourne refashioned the entire
narrative structure, canon, and storyline of the ballet to essentially create a new queer
dance work. In his work, Bourne replaces the female swans of the original with bare-
chested male swans. In addition, he also restructured the established narrative of the
original ballet to focus on this use of gender reversal. The prince now longs for a male
swan, appropriating the heteronormative content of the original to instead express a sense
of homosexual desire. While Bourne focuses less on infusing his own personal
experience as a queer choreographer on stage, his work still expresses an interest in
revealing homosexual identity through the use of these choreographic tools.

Both Bourne’s and Jones’ works illustrate how past choreographers have
approached the difficult task of representing homosexual identity in dance. All three of
these choreographers have created a platform for the use of a canon of queering tactics in
choreography today. I suggest that, by expanding on the body of works created by these
individuals, other choreographers can continue to deconstruct the heteronormative
structures found in classical ballet and concert dance in the hope to advance homosexual
and queer representation in the dance community.
**Artist Statement**

*same, but different* was presented on November 13, 14, 15, 2014 in the Autumn Choreographers Concert in the Tom Miles Theatre at Pacific University. Driven by questions of binary digression, *same, but different* examined the nature of unspoken social constructions and their effect on the individual. In addition, it explored the fear and shame that often accompanies the early part of the homosexual experience and how those emotions can negatively impact individual relationships. By choosing to incorporate an autobiographical narrative in this work, I also considered themes from my own life and experiences as a homosexual choreographer. Despite this personal approach, however, it is my hope that I have created a multivalent work that can apply to all audiences in order to encourage a greater understanding of those individuals who may contrast against conventional expectations.

**Significance of Project**

*same, but different* aimed to promote and enable a male homosexual presence in dance. By using queering tactics established by other choreographers in the field, it placed homosexual representation in opposition of the binary structures that continue to plague the dance community at large. In addition, this piece functioned as a commentary on the awareness, closeting, and denial of homosexuality within the general community. It is my hope that *same, but different* will add a new and unique work to the current body of queer compositions contained within the contemporary dance community. In particular, I hope it encourages the analysis of the effect and influence of the homosexual experience on choreography in order to fill a prominent lacuna within the field of queer dance studies.
CHAPTER TWO

Methods and Procedures of the Creative Process

The creation of same, but different utilized a variety of different methods and procedures, which were divided into three separate stages: preliminary preparation, early creation, and late creation. The preliminary preparation for same, but different specifically focused on selecting the music for the piece, which eventually functioned as a choreographic and conceptual inspiration. This early preparation, combined with research on Deconstruction and Queer Theory, allowed me to begin to create the piece.

During the early creation stage, auditions were held on August 26th, 2014 and dancers were cast. In addition, I was also able to incorporate various strategies of choreographing and teaching during this stage, which included referencing the queering tactics of Shawn, Jones, and Bourne. While some of the strategies that were used during this stage were eventually discarded, each was significant to establishing the final choreographic work.

In the late creation stage, the work-in-progress was reviewed and critiqued by faculty members Jennifer Camp and James Healey, in order to be refined and completed for performance. During this stage, I also met with both lighting designer Tal Sanders and costume designer Melissa Heller, who helped to extend the overall concept of same, but different in order to establish a final presentation of the project. It is important to recognize that although each of these procedures was tackled separately at different stages in the process, they all maintained a contribution to the final work and influenced many other sections of the project.
Preliminary Preparation

After collecting a plethora of information from my preliminary research, I began to explore Deconstruction and Queer Theory further by choreographing an expressive movement vocabulary that paired with the reoccurring themes found within these two theories. These themes included the opposition of power structures created through cultural conditioning and the impact that these binary structures have on the homosexual or queer individual. By pairing my choreography with these themes, I developed a working concept for *same, but different*, which involved relating these elements to my past experiences with rejection based on my own homosexual identity. This working concept was eventually expanded during the creative process in order to not only explore my own homosexual identity, but also other forms of difference as a means of transgression against binary expectations as well.

During this process of developing an overall concept for the work, the music was also being selected. This particular procedure presented a major challenge and took a great deal of time. The relationship between dance and music is important. While movement is the source of dance, music is the companion that helps achieve a work’s conceptual intent. In order to convey my specific concept, I had to be especially critical of any piece of music that did not illustrate my research. In particular, I avoided music that was too lyrical in nature or too well known to audiences in order not to destroy my original concept or establish an overly simplistic narrative. I listened to a number of different pieces over the course of several months and found that I had several credentials that needed to be met before I selected a piece of music satisfactory enough for this particular work. In order to avoid lyrical and popular pieces, the music needed to be
rhythmical, percussive, and complex in order to complement an expressive vocabulary of choreographed movement. After tapering my focus down to a smaller group of individual pieces, three works composed by Craig Armstrong: *Cello Theme*, *Let’s Go to Town*, and *Dream Violin* were chosen. All three of these works were featured in the orchestral score to Baz Luhrmann’s film *The Great Gatsby*, which was released in 2013 and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures and Roadshow Entertainment.

In *Cello Theme*, several string instruments with one solo cello convey a long and drawn out central theme and tone of the music. This theme is reprised in the other two pieces of music and assisted me in recapitulating my choreographic representation of queer identity throughout the work. The solo cello represents the individual and a unaccompanied voice in *same, but different*. This piece of music, therefore, worked to inform my intention of depicting an introduction to a homosexual presence within a pre-existing heteronormative society.

*Let’s Go to Town*, the second piece of music, departs from the slower pace established in the first section and moves in the direction of an uptempo and percussive orchestration. The piece builds in both complexity and volume until reaching a climax of sound in the last remaining seconds. The music is driving and elicits a feeling of nervous excitement, which is juxtaposed against the foreboding quality that was established in the previous piece. This juxtaposition acted as an effective musical illustration of the closeting and denial of homosexual presence and individual differences within already established binary structures.

In *Dream Violin*, the third piece of music, the reoccurring theme that was featured in both the first and second pieces retrogrades to express a new slow and sustained,
almost atmospheric, melody. The solo cello that was originally featured in the first piece of music is replaced by a solo violin, which evokes a feeling of distant wistfulness within a somewhat familiar context. While this piece sounds different compared to *Cello Theme* and *Let’s Go to Town*, it still maintains recognizable traits that place it comfortably next to the other two that came before it. *Dream Violin* ends in an extensive slow fade of the music, which gave me the choreographic freedom to express my own reflective ending to the piece.

I do not have set rules or procedures to selecting the music for a dance work. The process is always unique and time consuming for me. Despite the various obstructions during this stage, the final selection of these three pieces of music allowed for the effective use of an expressive movement vocabulary that conveyed both the complex and conceptual non-narrative structure of *same, but different*.

**Early Creation Stage**

During the early creation stage, several choreographic methods were used as a form of data collection including, dance improvisation, partner work, and the integration of the queering tactics introduced by Shawn, Jones, and Bourne. These various methods enabled the occasional repetition of certain unique phrases, which established a reoccurring theme within the work. The use of reoccurring elements allowed the non-narrative composition of the piece to be understood by both the selected dancers and future audiences that would eventually view this work.

Auditions for this project were held on August 26th, 2014 and were part of the auditions for Pacific Dance Ensemble, the pre-professional dance company at Pacific University. During the audition process, I was allotted thirty minutes to present
movement phrases to those dancers in attendance. After reviewing their capacity for these phrases, I selected nine dancers and three understudies who would learn and perform the full work as part of the Autumn Choreographers Concert.

One of the most important elements of the creative process was the integration of the dancers’ own choreographic voices. During one of the first rehearsals, I prompted the dancers to generate several phrases of movement based around two separate ideas: sameness and difference. At the time, the overall concept for the work was still unclear, but I knew that I wanted to incorporate autobiographical and personal elements in the piece, not only from my own life but from my dancer’s lives as well. The use of this particular queering tactic and the prompting of improvisational techniques allowed the dancers to invest their time and energy into the creation of the piece. By allowing the dancers to have a hand in creating the work, I feel as though I gained both their respect and overall interest in the creative process. I was hesitant to prompt the dancers with too many conceptual ideas, however, in fear that it might construct an obvious narrative and premature character development. During this early stage, the only goal was to create a surplus of movement phrases, which could be pulled from and used throughout the entire body of work.

While most of the phrases that the dancers created were discarded later on in the process, several unique gestures were taken from these early improvisation strategies. The most prominent included an individual “embrace” and a repetitive “washing of hands” gesture (See Appendix A). These two gestures were integral to establishing a conceptual structure to the piece and were used throughout the entire work from beginning to end. The repetitive use of these actions, as well as several others that were
created through the early use of improvisation, allowed for a connective pairing between individual sections created by the arrangement of the three pieces of music.

The particular grouping together of the three pieces of music influenced the creation of various sections of movement. In order to maintain the balance of the disparate forms of instrumentation in each piece of music, I separated the sections using individual and group movement vocabularies. The individualized movement led to creating a duet between two male dancers using the first piece of music, Cello Theme, and the remaining group vocabulary was used in the other two pieces, Let’s Go To Town and Dream Violin, due to their expanded use of instrumentation (Chapter Three will discuss further detail of the choreographic design and artistic intent of each of these sections).

**Late Creation Stage**

This final stage of the creative process proved to be the most challenging. At this point, the piece was roughly put together and still missing an ending. I found myself losing energy and inspiration as I kept lacking progress towards completing the work. Since I was struggling, I prompted my faculty advisors, Jennifer Camp and James Healey, to provide me with guidance on the concept and the movement vocabulary of the piece, as well as how to inspire the dancers to convey the right emotional quality for the work. These select faculty members provided me with useful responses and thoughtful questions, which aided in the refinement and the eventual completion of the work.

During this stage, I also met with the costume designer, Melissa Heller, and the lighting designer, Tal Sanders, who provided the final technical aspects to the piece. These theatrical elements were equally as integral to development of *same, but different*
as the movement, music, and general concept. By working with both designers, I was able to extend my concept and ideas to establish a final staged presentation of the work.

Similar to the selection of music for the piece, I wanted to keep away from distracting or obvious costume and lighting choices. Specifically, I wanted both of these technical aspects to be minimalist in nature in order to avoid producing unintended meanings from the movement or concepts already present in the work. In order to assist in the process, I arrived to my meetings with Heller with several visual sources to give her an idea of the concept and the emotional intent of the piece (See Appendix B). To create the look of a uniform and contemporary society, I wanted each individual dancer to have a unique costume that also looked similar and complemented the costumes of the other nine dancers in the work. The selected color palette used for these costume pieces included, beige, black, and grey with slight pastel accents. Several of the costume pieces were individually purchased by the costume design team and constructed specifically for this work.

The lighting plot for this work was simple and understated. Long transitions were placed between cues in order to avoid distracting the audience from the movement and concepts being presented on stage. One particular aspect that I required of the lighting and technical design team was the construction of a stage device that would allow gold mylar confetti to fall slowly on the dancers in the final section of the work. I met with Sanders early on in the process and purchased several bags of gold mylar for this requirement. This device was positioned above the dancers’ heads, upstage of the proscenium, and lit by a single amber light, which caused a shimmering effect as the confetti was slowly released at the end of the piece.
After several months of rehearsals, *same, but different* was completed in advance of the technical and performance week on October 30th, 2014. By completing the piece ahead of schedule, I was able to answer questions and make final clarifications of the choreography to the dancers before the performance. It is my hope that this particular attention to details allowed the dancers to become more comfortable and confident with their dancing. While this last stage may have been the most challenging, I believe the refinements made at this point in the process were necessary in order to fully complete the piece and prepare *same, but different* to be performed.
CHAPTER THREE

Choreographic Reflection

The choreography that was generated during rehearsals allowed for *same, but different* to be divided into four distinct sections: an opening group section, a duet, and two other group sections. These four sections helped to establish a non-narrative structure that could be easily followed by the audience in the final performance of the work. Since the piece lacked an established narrative and most of the choreography was generated through improvisational techniques, the relationships between the dancers and their interaction with the selected music became a key component for conveying the conceptual elements of each of these sections.

The first section was performed in silence and featured all nine dancers who repeated both the “embrace” as well as the “washing of hands” gestures in different directions before they stopped and intermingled with each other and eventually exited the stage. Both of these gestures reoccurred throughout the rest of the piece and functioned as a means to connect each of the four sections together. The movement for this section was originally set to be entirely in unison, however, the different facings of the dancers and the use of no musical cues or counts caused most of the choreography to be executed at a different timing by each dancer. This had an interesting effect in the final performance of the work. Instead of the movement remaining in unison, all nine dancers started the phrase together and almost immediately became out of sync with each other. This created a sense of separation between the dancers, despite the specific movement being executed in a similar way. While this may have not been the original intent of the choreography, it helped to emphasize the notion of individual differences within an established group
dynamic and, in turn, helped to convey the concept of a collective society becoming worn out or breaking down under the weight of constant repetition.

The second section was set to *Cello Theme*, composed by Craig Armstrong, and consisted of two male dancers. This section proved to be the most challenging for me to create as this was the first time I had worked with other male dancers using this kind of choreographic format. I experimented with several different ideas and partnering exercises in rehearsal, but because of my lack of experience, as well as the comfort level of the dancers, most of these early applications were discarded. In order to continue to finish the piece, I choreographed a unison movement phrase that was able to work for both of these dancers and only had to be altered slightly to fit the duet structure. The use of so much unison in this section, however, had a negative effect on the potential impact of this duet as a possible queering tactic because of a lack of personal interaction between the dancers. In the future when I restate the work, I would like to revisit and expand on my choreography for this section in order to further emphasize a queer interaction between both of these dancers. Despite my choreographic struggles, I was still able to incorporate clear elements of my personal autobiography in this section through brief moments of physical contact between the dancers. These moments included the touching of each other’s hands and bodies, as well as a fall, catch, and embrace that was used towards the end of the section. The use of subtle queering tactics in this section allowed me to thread a conceptual component throughout the rest of the piece and establish a non-narrative structure that could be easily followed by the audience when viewing this piece in final performance.
The third section was by far the longest and most elaborate. It was set to *Let’s Go to Town*, also composed by Craig Armstrong, and featured all nine dancers performing several phrases that had been generated through early improvisational exercises. Due to the length and the intricacies of the selected music, this section took the most time to develop and was continuously reworked throughout the extent of the creation process. In particular, I wanted this section to illicit the representation of a collective society at work and in motion. This was a chance for the audience to peer into the basic parts of this particular society and see how each individual functions as a cog in the construction of binary expectations. The music was driving and full bodied which required the choreography to have a dynamic energy to match it. One of the primary methods I used to create dynamic movement in this section was to accelerate the choreography through the use of an increasing amount of repetition, which helped to convey a sense of manic urgency to match the continued escalation of the music. The section ends with bold full unison choreography to emphasize the sameness of each of the dancers as a final conceptual element. The combination of the conceptual elements and musicality in this section most clearly fulfilled my vision and was a major influence on the development of the rest of the piece. When I revisit *same, but different*, I would refine the timing on some of the phrasing in this section to make the choreography even more precise and fit more honestly with the music. Most of these adjustments are minor, however, and could be easily fixed when this piece is restaged in the future.

The purpose of the fourth and final section was to act as a summary and conclusion to the piece. It was set to *Dream Violin*, composed by Craig Armstrong, and recapitulated many of the conceptual elements that had been outlined throughout each of
the previous sections. Like the last section, the music was intricate, but also much more emotional, which allowed for a full exploration of the movement vocabulary. Several of the movement phrases that were introduced in previous sections were brought back in this section. In addition, after working with this particular group of dancers, I made the decision to create an ending that would hopefully inspire greater discourse on the topics of gender and sexuality within the context of binary expectations. As such, the piece ended with all of the dancers exiting and leaving only one of the male dancers remaining on stage, abandoned by his counterpart and his community. The gold mylar confetti, which fell on this dancer as he collapsed to the floor at the end of the piece, emphasized a connection with the divine. In particular, it depicted the sense of divine radiance and existential revelation that is thought to be realized in the final moments of life. I believe that by making this choice to leave only one of the male dancers on stage, I was able to convey the impact that these expectations and structures have on the queer individual, thus further emphasizing the need for deconstruction of these normalities.

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with the final result of same, but different. Despite some of my early choreographic challenges, the completion of my preliminary research and the development of the concept provided the desired emotional effect for the final performance. Even though there are areas of adjustment still needed for the choreography in order to add additional queer elements to the work, I believe most of these modifications are minor and their absence did not negatively impact the premier of same, but different.
CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

On November 13th, 2014, *same, but different* debuted in the Autumn Choreographers Concert in the Tom Miles Theatre at Pacific University. It ran for three consecutive nights with what appeared to be positive reactions from both the audience and the dancers following the performances. One audience member described the piece as “multivalent and sophisticated.” While another commented on the choreography, saying it was “fluid like water, like nature, like bulbs emerging in the spring.” The dancers also described their experience in similar terms. One mentioned how much they loved being a part of the process. While others described the piece as both “beautiful and powerful.” After the arduous process behind the research and creation of this work, these positive comments from the audience and dancers were incredibly gratifying. Based on these reactions alone, the overall project seemed to have been a success.

I believe that dance critics and scholars are mistaken to not consider a choreographer’s sexuality when analyzing their body of work. Choreographers who make the decision to incorporate autobiographical elements and personal identity in their work are making distinct choices that have an impact on the context of the choreography in question. For critics and scholars to ignore this fact is to take a risk in inaccurately reading the original intention or context of a work. I propose, therefore, that in order to accurately analyze a dance work, an individual must first deconstruct and remove heteronormative expectations in the interest of acknowledging the homosexual presence of the particular choreographer or dance maker. For a creative field to contain so many members of the queer community and not to acknowledge how their personal identity has
shaped their work is extremely deplorable. In this sense, what remains is the need for choreographers to embrace their sexuality and openly integrate queer identity in their work. As seen by Bourne, this integration has the potential to counter — and even reverse — the binary constructions that continue to exist within the dance community at large.

After viewing *same, but different*, it is my hope, therefore, that critics and audience members might have gained an appreciation of expressing queer identity through dance. In particular, I hope that the subtle references to homosexuality throughout this piece has allowed for a greater attention to the development of a queer framework in which scholars, critics, and audience members can approach viewing other dance works in the future. My choreographic strategy included the use of Deconstruction and Queer Theory as well as a variety of references to the past queering tactics of Shawn, Jones, and Bourne. As such, I have opened a variety of possibilities for establishing a queer dance history in which the sexuality of these, and other choreographers, can be considered an extension and influence of their artistic body of work.

In conclusion, the aim of *same, but different*, as described from the outset of this thesis, was to explore my own queer identity through dance as a means to illustrate the impact of binary constructions on the homosexual individual. In particular, this piece has strived to create more awareness and educate the dance community on the reoccurring dominance of heteronormativity, as well as the repudiation of sexual differences in Western society. It is my hope that *same, but different* has succeeded in this regard and, in addition, has opened up the opportunity for future discourses, practices, and ideas surrounding the future representation of queer identity in dance.
Works Cited


left: “Embrace” gesture.  
Photo of Sarah Whitehead, Jonathan Schell, 2014

right: “Washing of hands” gesture.  
Photo of Jesus Contreras, Jonathan Schell, 2014
APPENDIX B

top-left: Sanna Berger, Study of Anti-Neutral Clothing (Adaptation of the Futurist Manifesto of Giacomo Balla), 2014, live performance
source: http://tankmagazine.com/issue-60/features/towards-anti-neutral-clothing

bottom-right: Sanna Berger, Study of Anti-Neutral Clothing (Adaptation of the Futurist Manifesto of Giacomo Balla), 2014, live performance
source: http://tankmagazine.com/issue-60/features/towards-anti-neutral-clothing

top-right: Nadine Goepfert, Expressions of Hastiness, 2014, wood

bottom-right: Nadine Goepfert and Sanna Berger, Variants of Wear, 2014, live performance