

Digital Storytelling Project *Armor Amour* Independent Study Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project was an Independent Study course for two Kenyon College students, Catherine Kelly '19 and Naomi Lofchie '20 taught by Martha Gregory and me, Kora Radella, during Spring Semester 2019. Martha taught the students editing skills at the beginning of the Spring semester and consulted with them for the entire project.

Creating dance films requires a different editing methodology and this combined with documentary was a unique filmmaking opportunity for students to engage in. I created the reading and viewing assignments on MOODLE about the genre of dance film and had weekly meetings with the students via Skype from Italy and then, when I returned early April, in person. I helped the students understand the genre of dance film, and particular aspects of choreographic processes, spanning the time the choreographer works on elements alone, to working with the performers, to the showing of the work-in-progress. Martha kept the practical aspects, such as the workflow, going smoothly and gave feedback on their film work.

The creation process of *Armor Amour* began in Bogliasco, Italy where I had a month-long artist residency as a 2019 Bogliasco Fellow (<https://www.bfny.org/en/fellows>) to make the seed material for this new choreographic work. I then worked with two Italian theatre artists, first with Lea Barletti in Tuscania, and then with her and Massimiliano Balduzzi, during intense periods to create an initial iteration of a duet. I had previously worked with Massimiliano Balduzzi within my choreography in a work which premiered in the prestigious Harkness Dance Festival at 92Y in NYC March, 2017, and with Lea Barletti, who I worked with in the studio when I was in Berlin in 2015. I introduced them to each other on our first day of working on the duet iteration of *Armor Amour* in Milan. If possible, I will continue with them in 2020 to make the duet tour ready. During the summer of 2019, I am working on a solo iteration of this project with Cleveland-based theatre artist Chris Seibert, which should be completed by the fall of 2019.

Central questions in my research for *Armor Amour* were and continue to be: "What is the armor we hold in our bodies? What can be relinquished?" There are two quotations that served as guides during the creation process: "Somewhere there must be storehouses where all these lives are laid away like suits of armor..." by Rainer Maria Rilke, and "armor is just skin, bones, only bone" by Jamaal May. To make the process clear it will be helpful to see the timeline of *Armor Amour* residencies with film stills from each phase.

TIMELINE

January 7-February 8: Bogliasco, Italy

During this residency I worked daily in the dance studio and filmed the process. By the end of the residency I had created much of the movement language for the piece, including set choreography as well as structures with which to work on with the performers after the Bogliasco Fellowship period. I also wrote a text for the piece during the residency. One of the central parts of the text came from an interaction with filmmaker Anne Aghion at Bogliasco. One of the benefits of these residencies is interacting with the other artists. There is usually at least one that becomes a friend and colleague for life. The gem for this one was meeting and sharing with Anne Aghion who is an award-winning documentary filmmaker best known for "My Neighbor My Killer" which earned her the Nestor Almendros Award for courage in filmmaking at the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. After privately watching early footage at Bogliasco of the project she is working on about trauma, we

spoke in her studio and she asked some questions about my life which led me to the text I wrote for *Armor Amour*. Aside from the studio process, I showed a work-in-progress to the fellows as well as a powerpoint of a brief overview of some of my work as a choreographer up to the Bogliasco residency. Along with the studio work, I created film footage almost daily in the gardens of the Bogliasco estate. These explorations informed the *Armor Amour* choreography, however the garden film footage will be also used to create a dance film once I work with a film editor. Near the culmination of my residency, I was asked to do a special private presentation for the president of the Bogliasco Foundation when she flew in from NYC and the person responsible for the garden, so I made a powerpoint (*pdf version) and a book (via Blurb) for the Bogliasco Foundation personnel.



Film Stills from Bogliasco, Italy

February 20 – 25: Tuscania, Italy with Lea Barletti

During my intense one-on-one rehearsal process with theatre artist Lea Barletti in Tuscania, a village about an hour outside Rome, we rehearsed in a theatre and lived in a dorm-like residence. By the end of the week we had a first solo iteration of *Armor Amour*. I filmed the creative process and also filmed outside on our last day there since it was such a magical environment. The content of the text combined with the context of the stones in the village seemed fitting, particularly since the early versions of this work included a stone as a prop.



Film Stills from Tuscania, Italy

February 26 – March 3: LachesiLAB, Milan, Italy

After introducing Balduzzi and Barletti to one another and having an espresso, we proceeded to rehearse. As I predicted, they were wonderfully strong together. I had to make a hard decision and one that I had also guessed when I set up the project. I had to decide to go with the initial plan on making different solo versions of *Armor Amour* for each performer or choreographing a duet. We went over the pros and cons and ultimately decided for the duet. Very intriguing conflicts about the props came up the first day of rehearsal. It is a complicated issue but has to do with the history of poor theatre, a history which I am well aware generally, but not as specifically within Italy. They had many assumptions and concerns about props and how a rock and/or fabric would be perceived by audiences as in the genre of poor theatre. They wanted to try exact unison with the props to attempt to alter this perception. We tried this, though it is not my style as a choreographer and director. But it was worth the effort since the process helped them clarify the movements regardless of the material being in unison or not.



Film Stills from LachesiLAB in Milan, Italy

March 8 - March 14: The WorkRoom, Milan Italy

During this period we got rid of all the props, after much deliberation. I also cut most of the unison parts. Luckily we did not work with the props in rehearsal too much so that when we did ultimately drop them it was not problematic. What is intriguing about this central issue is that the props were central in creating much of the movement in my initial process in Bogliasco, but the paring down allowed the choreography to be more distilled and potent.



Film Stills from The WorkRoom in Milan, Italy

March 16: LachesiLAB, Milan, Italy: Armor Amour work-in progress showing

Creating *Armor Amour* thus far had been a rigorous and challenging process. Balduzzi had experience working with me professionally and was adept at matching the intensity of movement with vocal work. It was a learning curve for Barletti though she is very talented. She had an epiphany by the night of the performance and is very eager to re-ignite this work in the future. We had a full audience for the showing and a very intriguing Q & A session afterwards. The text for the performance was translated into Italian by Barletti, who is also a writer. The talk back session was in Italian with Balduzzi translating for me.



Film Stills from *Armor Amour* work-in-progress showing in Milan, Italy

April 1 – end of semester: worked with the students on campus on film shorts using the footage

Catherine and Naomi did a wonderful job creating these short films:

Armor Amour film short gives a glimpse into the work throughout the creation process up until our work-in-progress showing of the duet in Milan

<https://vimeo.com/330641894>

&

Retelling film short shows Lea Barletti performing part of the text I wrote in Bogliasco for *Armor Amour*. The film footage is from my work with her in Tuscania.

<https://vimeo.com/335714743>

They also put together the film from the March 16, 2019 work-in-progress showing of *Armor Amour*.

<https://vimeo.com/329169960/e4f68836d1>

There is more footage of me during Bogliasco but we chose to focus on the work with the footage including the Italian theatre artists.

FUTURE FOR THIS PROJECT

Spring/Summer 2019: working on a solo iteration with Cleveland-based theatre artist Chris Seibert with filming to occur late summer or early Fall 2019

2020: make the Italian iteration of *Armor Amour* tour-ready contingent on residencies and funding

I will continue to work with the rest of the footage as I proceed and will also be filming more of the project in the future as I work towards creating tour-ready iterations of *Armor Amour*. It is an involved project of which the Independent Study with Kelly and Lofchie was an integral part.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE INDEPENDENT STUDY

Catherine Kelly wrote about the Dance Film Independent Study:

“This course offered necessary and useful exposure to a thriving area of dance performance today. I was able to gain knowledge in the technical creation of dance films while also being exposed to the history and relevance of this field through weekly viewings and responses. While I would not have been able to edit the footage on my own, I am grateful for the competency I have gained with this video editing software. I am inspired to continue my own work within the dance film format and feel that is possible due to the practical experience I have had in this last semester.”

Naomi Lofchie wrote about the Dance Film Independent Study:

“This spring I had the pleasure of learning about the history of dance film making, production and techniques used to compose dance films, and, in the second half of the semester, I got to put my new knowledge to work when I created short dance films using Kora Radella’s film footage of her new duet, *Armor Amour*. During the first part of the semester, watching so many dance films and footage helped me develop a taste for different aspects of film. I learned that I preferred films that had a narrative or theme. One of my favorite films we watched was called *Boy* (1995), by Peter Anderson and Rosemary Lee. The film depicts a young boy frolicking, fighting, and flying around an open beach. Although the film is without dialogue or a linear narrative, I was impressed at how the film editors were, nonetheless, able to explore specific themes, such as, adolescence and masculinity.

Thanks to having watched and studied a large assortment of dance films, I knew that one of my goals as an editor would be to highlight a theme from Professor Radella’s *Armor Amour*. The first time I watched the full duet, my co-editor, Catherine Kelly, and I kept pausing to write down particularly memorable phrases and moments from the duet. Then, after watching it a few more times, we had a sense of what we wanted to highlight in the different videos.

For the *Armor Amour* film short, we did not want to hide that the duet was a work-in-progress and that this version (the Italian version) was, in fact, only one version of the duet’s forthcoming life. To demonstrate this aspect of the piece, we included footage from different rehearsal spaces as well as an actual live performance. We also relied on choreographic motifs to help connect the footage. For instance, the first and last clips are similar in terms of space (both dancers are lying prone next to each other and are facing upstage on a diagonal), and the movement in both clips is similar. What I liked about sandwiching the promo with these two clips is that, while the movement is similar, the dynamics are different enough so that the energy changes. In the opening clip, following the credits, the dancers sit up abruptly and suddenly, the clip switches. The first clip is like the prelude before the real video begins. The last clip is different because the dancers are moving nonstop, it appears that they are scratching their

chests or pulling apart their chests. Then, when the dancers sit up abruptly in the last moment, the video ends.

For *Retelling*, another short film we made, Catherine and I worked on the footage that Professor Radella was most interested in being seen turned into a short film. We asked Professor Radella what her preference was for this film because, as editors, we felt it was important to communicate closely with the choreographer. Plus, communication is a useful skill for group projects academically and professionally. Using the footage from Tuscania, Italy, Catherine and I edited a short film that featured the poem and prose that helped inspire *Armor Amour*. To make the film, we sorted out the footage based on the spoken word and organized it by location. This film was really fun to make because it challenged us to connect clips that had related movements in interesting and surprising ways. The most difficult part of editing this film was the sound, however, I learned a lot about the importance of manipulating sound. *Retelling* was also an enjoyable film to make because Catherine and I were able to give the footage life outside of the duet.”