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Poetic Audio Description: The State of the Art in Canada

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Abstract

This article explores the development of poetic Audio Description (AD) in live dance performances, with a focus on the Canadian context. Poetic AD embraces metaphor, sensory language, and embodied descriptions, enhancing accessibility while expanding the artistic potential of AD. Through a reflection on past experiences and the recent *Languaging Dance* project, this paper examines creative and collective approaches to live AD that emphasize embodied, sensory, and poetic language. By integrating improvisational and artistic techniques, poetic AD emerges as both an inclusive and aesthetic form of engagement with dance. This research contributes to broader discussions on inclusive arts practices, accessibility aesthetics, and multisensory engagement in live dance AD.

Key words: audio description, poetry, live dance AD, accessible dance.

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Introduction

Traditionally, Audio Description (AD) is understood as a verbal narration of visual information and content, designed to provide access to visual arts, films, and live events for individuals who are Blind or Low Vision (BLV). Opera, theatre, and dance share similar approaches to AD. In this article, I focus on live dance AD, a specialized form of AD, that requires different considerations than pre-recorded screen AD, as it must account for elements such as music, potential dialogue, lighting, and the dynamic nature of live performances. In contrast, pre-recorded screen AD must fit descriptions into gaps between dialogue, requiring even more concise, precise, and effective language. I approach the complexities of AD from my first-person perspective as a dancer, researcher, and scholar in arts education based in Canada, with a focus on the current state of AD for live dance in the country.

As a kinesthetic art form, dance relies heavily on movement to convey meaning. Therefore, a degree of interpretation, emotional resonance, and metaphor is essential in describing movement. Ideally, AD should enable audiences to "discover the visual image by experiencing it in their own bodies" (Snyder, 2010, p. 36). Snyder suggests that audience members could benefit from a pre-performance workshop conducted by the dance company in collaboration with the describer. This workshop would allow participants to try and engage with movement, not simply as an intellectual concept but as an embodied experience (Snyder, 2010, p. 37).

In this article, I reflect on my first encounter with AD through two dance projects in which I participated as both a dancer and a researcher. I also explore the emerging practice of "poetic audio description" in live dance AD. I define poetic AD as an emerging practice in which dancers describe movement in real time, generating poems read aloud to the audience. There is an inherent absence when we use verbal language to audio describe the dancing body, but this absence is rich with potential. It overflows with the generative presence of poetic language—playing with pause, rhythm, space, and texture.

According to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB, n.d.), approximately 1.5 million people in Canada identify as BLV, while over 5.5 million live with an eye disease that could lead to blindness. Access to the arts is a critical human rights and social issue, as emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and reinforced in the Accessible Canada Act (2019). Since Ontario introduced the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in June 2005, most provinces and territories have implemented laws, policies, and regulations to enhance accessibility. The Canadian government's website guidelines for AD recommend "objective, simple, and succinct" (Audio Description Guidelines, n.d.) language that preserves meaning and intention without censorship.

Additionally, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has launched a regulatory plan to modernize Canada's broadcasting framework, with new policies expected by the end of 2025. However, these regulations currently apply only to broadcasting services. Major broadcasters are required to provide AD for all English and French programming

during prime-time hours (7 p.m. to 11 p.m.) across six categories, including drama, comedy, reality television, and documentary programming (CRTC, n.d.). However, there are no equivalent regulations for real-time content, such as live performances, creating a gap in access to live arts for BLV audiences.

1. Canadian Context

Over the past two decades, accessibility has played an increasingly prominent role in mainstream media culture, with AD research gaining greater recognition within the field of audiovisual translation (AVT). In Canada, however, research on live AD remains relatively underexplored, with only a handful of studies examining the Canadian landscape (Naraine et al., 2018; Udo & Fels, 2009b, 2010; Whitfield & Fels, 2013).

Only one study (Singh, 2022) has documented the recent history of AD in Canadian live performance. Rebecca Singh began this research in 2015 alongside describer Kat Germain. While a complete history is beyond the scope of this article, several key moments warrant mention. The first live AD performance in Canada occurred at Théâtre Nuits D'Encre in Montreal in 2008. The following year, the Vancouver-based organization Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture provided the first live AD training for eight describers. Four of these describers later founded an organization called EarSighted, which was renamed VocalEye in 2011 under the artistic direction of founder and describer Steph Kirkland. The number of dance companies offering AD for live performances across Canada continues to grow. Nevertheless, this work often remains underexamined in research.

Singh (2022), among others (see also Hutchinson et al., 2020; Penny, 2020, 2022), identifies racism as a persistent issue in AD. According to Singh, for AD users to fully understand racism—"which is everywhere"—describers must explicitly name race (p. 546). However, race is often described only when it is relevant to the plot, and primarily for Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour characters. This reinforces the stereotype that Whiteness is the default or "standard." Singh also warns against using food-based similes (e.g., mocha, cinnamon) or animal husbandry terms (e.g., "mulatto") to describe race, as they can be fetishizing and do not align with anti-racist practices (p. 548). To address these issues, Singh introduces the concept of the "Canadian dialect," which outlines leading practices for anti-racist AD. These practices include prioritizing self-description whenever possible and consistently describing the race of all individuals as follows:

> ACTOR's NAME, who is (choose from this list as they appear to you) Black, Indigenous, a Person of Colour or white, (optionally, you can follow with ethnicity, background and or self-description as described next) cast as CHARACTER NAME . . . then describe the character.
>
> (Singh, 2022, p. 548)

Singh's leading practices on how to be anti-racist in AD were primarily written with live performance in mind, a field that is not regulated in Canada. The importance of AD self-description, meaning "one created by the subject (actor, performer, etc.)" (Singh, 2022, p. 548), is crucial in ensuring we don't

cause harm. In the following sections, I explore the creative strategies employed by the All Bodies Dance Project and my work, *Languaging Dance*. In both projects, the cast included disabled and non-disabled dancers; as such, we employed practices of AD self-description for each cast member involved.

2. Looking Back: Perception Challenges

In her 2014 article, Georgina Kleege advocates for improvements in the AD of dance. Her interest stems from years of dance training, which gives her a unique perspective on the discipline. Kleege asks readers to consider what dance AD should accomplish, posing a series of questions central to my inquiry:

> What kind of aesthetic pleasure do viewers derive from it? Is it simply a matter of watching beautiful young bodies performing acts of physical virtuosity to music? How is this experience different then from watching figure skating or gymnastics? Is it simply a matter of the cultural capital assigned to one type of movement to music versus another? (Kleege, 2014, p. 9)

In my work within the integrated or inclusive dance field—where both disabled and non-disabled dancers participate—the central question revolves around our perception of dance. What is the aesthetic of perceiving dance, and how does this influence AD? For me, it is essential that performers are involved in the AD process to prevent misrepresentation. This ensures self-identification in how they are described in terms of appearance, ethnicity, physicality, pronouns, and more (Hutchinson et al., 2020).

In my dance work, I approach dance AD as a creative practice. Describing her work as a museum curator and educator, Amanda Cachia calls for a shift away from the belief that "audio description must be left solely to the professionals" (Cachia, 2019, p. 100). She suggests that "the curator can provide information about an artwork that is less interpretative and more descriptive, in both subjective and objective terms" (Cachia, 2019, p. 100). Amelia Cavallo and Louise Fryer echo this approach in what they describe as "integrated AD" (Cavallo, 2015; Fryer, 2018; Fryer & Cavallo, 2022). In integrated AD, the description becomes part of the performance itself, rejecting "the separation between the artistic team and the 'neutral' interpreter" (Fryer, 2018). My intention is not to devalue the work of professional describers but to expand the creative, pedagogical, and artistic possibilities of AD as an art form (Udo & Fels, 2009b Cavallo, 2015; Fryer & Cavallo, 2022). Recent studies have described AD as more than "an instrument to make visual media accessible to the blind—it is poetry at its best" (Glos & Toro Franco, 2024, p. 392) or, as Eleanor Margolies puts it: "audio description scripts involve writerly practices analogous to the translation of poetry, particularly when they deal with physical theatre and dance" (2015, p. 17). Poetry flourishes through the use of imagery, musicality, intuition, imagination, and silence. I propose that poetry, like dance, is an embodied experience of our humanity. As such, I invite describers to use poetic techniques such as onomatopoeia, rhythm, metaphor-making, and intonation and tempo in the delivery.

I view AD as a collaborative practice (Kleege, 2016, 2018; Thomson, 2020) and as an "aesthetic performance" in its own right (Kleege & Wallin, 2015). AD is not simply "a detached, neutral act of translation that functions only as an enabling accommodation" (Kleege & Wallin, 2015). Instead, it offers an opportunity for the describer and the audience to engage with diverse learning modes, cognitive processing, and sensory access. Following Fryer and Cavallo (2022), I propose that creative and integrated AD should move away from centring vision and the describer, offering a multisensory approach to dance in which seeing becomes sensing with the whole body. Standardized, supposedly objective and neutral AD is often controlled by the describer rather than the artist (Kleege, 2014; Cavallo, 2015). As Cavallo describes, integrated AD becomes "a method of connecting both audience and performer to each other and the artistic content of a piece in a positive way" (Cavallo, 2015, p. 133). By challenging the conventions of standardized AD, we open space to question our perceptions of dance and reconsider how we understand and make sense of the world (Kuppers, 2003, p. 123).

Kleege urges us to elevate AD "from its current status as a segregated accommodation outside the general public's awareness and launch it into the new media—a literary/interpretive form with infinite possibilities" (Kleege, 2018, p. 108). In *Translations*, which I describe in the following section, AD was considered from the very beginning as an integrated component of the art piece. Movement, timing, sound effects, materials, and action were designed around the idea of presentation to a blind audience. Those who were sighted were invited to enjoy the performance with sleep shades or to watch it with their eyes as well.

2.1. Translations

From December 2017 to December 2019, the Vancouver-based inclusive dance company All Bodies Dance Project (ABDP) collaborated with VocalEye, "the first dedicated live descriptive service for blind and partially sighted people in Canada" (VocalEye, n.d.), to create a new choreographic work, *Translations*. The piece was co-created by choreographer and ABDP's artistic director, Naomi Brand, alongside Steph Kirkland, executive director of VocalEye. *Translations* was created for small audiences and crafted to be experienced through non-visual senses, including sound, touch, and smell. While I have previously published reflections on this work (Bergonzoni & Brand, 2018; Bergonzoni, 2020, 2021, 2022a), it is important to revisit key takeaways that have shaped my ongoing exploration of poetic AD for live performance.

In *Translations*, we did not rely on traditional AD—also defined as conventional AD (Udo & Fels, 2009a)—rather, the piece was devised to be experienced through the non-visual senses from the beginning. As such, we explored alternative methods for perceiving dance, such as touch and verbal descriptions (both literal and metaphorical). *Translations* embraces a multisensory approach to dance, posing the question: What if sight wasn't the intended way to experience movement? This query led to the development of "tools that shift dance away from the dominant visual sense and toward other ways of sensing and perceiving" (Bergonzoni & Brand, 2018, p. 150). Brand and Kirkland

explain that their choice of verbal description allowed audiences to engage their "own powers of attention and imagination" to "access dance through a form of 'seeing' that happens with the mind, not the eye" (Brand et al., 2019). However, the idea of a "mind's eye" can be problematic. Describing her experience with AD, Georgina Kleege challenges this concept, stating:

> I am not sure that I have a mind's eye, or if I do, its vision is impaired precisely to the same degree as my physical eyes. I am not particularly adept at forming mental images to illustrate words I hear or read. (Kleege, 2018, p. 101)

Some of Kleege's insights into the relationship between language and imagery emerged during discussions with blind consultants throughout the creation of *Translations*. These insights continue to influence my current research on the potential for poetic AD in dance. In *Translations*, using statements and metaphors like "she melts like peanut butter on toast" to describe a dancer's movement spreading onto the floor offered a visceral language that resonated with the audience. The blind consultants involved in the project appreciated this metaphor because it didn't rely on a visual image but rather a feeling they all experienced.

A similar response was evoked by the audible effort in the dancers' voices. Kleege describes her imagination as "not particularly visual," emphasizing that engaging non-visual senses is not necessarily about creating mental images (Kleege, 1999, 2018). This sensory language activates memories in the body, focusing less on the visual and more on an experiential, somatic reference. This approach is central to *Languaging Dance*, which I will explore in Section 4 of this article.

2.2. *Ho.Me*

In 2020, I worked to add AD to a dance film I had previously choreographed and directed, titled *Ho.Me* (2022b). The AD script was collaboratively written by myself, the dancers, and the narrator. During the process of describing this short film, I encountered numerous questions regarding the role and purpose of the AD track.

AD has been defined as the "process of translating visual information into words for people who are blind or have low vision" (Kleege & Wallin, 2015). Its aim is to "capture significant visual information in a moving scene (as image description does for static ones) (...) and to translate that information into text" (Sánchez, 2021, p. 117). Due to this concept of translation, one of the main objectives of "standard practices for audio description has been that the content must be neutral and objective" (Kleege, 2018, p. 100). Kleege argues that the objectivity standard assumes "sighted viewers enjoy an autonomous, unmediated experience of visual media, which is more or less the same from viewer to viewer" (Kleege, 2018, p. 101). She further contends that objectivity is not only impossible but also undesirable (Kleege, 2018, p. 101).

The debate on objectivity versus subjectivity remains unresolved (Bartolini, 2023; Romero-Muñoz, 2023; Schaeffer-Lacroix et al., 2023). AD is never entirely straightforward and always involves a subjective perspective when "filtering and prioritizing" (Kleege & Wallin, 2015) certain aspects of the visual. Each describer is also a viewer who brings their own history, knowledge, and previous experiences into anything they describe. A describer "makes decisions about the intended meaning of the original and the frame of reference of the audience" (Margolies, 2015, p. 18), and this process is always "partial, reflecting the viewpoint, experience, and limitations of the describer" (Margolies, 2015, p. 18). Language inherently carries political and social connotations, and each describer brings unique associations to their narration. Every image, whether moving or static, is mediated in its description, making the "content that emerges and is remembered as constituting the image derived from both the description user's knowledge and perspectives and those of the describer" (Sánchez, 2021, p. 118).

3. Looking Ahead: *Languaging Dance*

In *Languaging Dance*, an eight-month project I led from September 2023 to April 2024, I collaborated with eight artists who identify as equity-seeking, living with disabilities, and/or BLV. All the artists involved have a writing practice, speak multiple languages, and six are published authors. Together, we explored the possibility of developing a visceral and embodied language to describe dance while simultaneously examining how movement could generate collective poetic AD in real time. In the practice of poetic AD, dancers describe movement in real time using imaginative and emotional language to describe movement. Our investigation centred on articulating the nonlinear, embodied experience of the dancing body, foregrounding the first-person perspectives of the dancers involved (cf. Cavallo, 2015; Fryer & Cavallo, 2022; Udo & Fels, 2009a, 2009b; see also García Vizcaíno, 2023).

Languaging Dance began as a research project on dance AD but quickly evolved into an exploration of the artistic possibilities of collectively developing and writing AD for live dance. The dancers and I (romham pàdraig gallacher, Luciana Freire D'Anunciação, Adam G. Warren, Aviva Martin, Kristy Kassie, Amy Amantea, fanny kearse, and Gemma Crowe) named this practice "languaging." This term encompasses a form of "transcreation" (Eardley et al., 2017, p. 201) that acknowledges our lived bodily experiences as we transform one form of knowledge (dance) into another (poetry/AD). AD is intersemiotic: "the transfer occurs from a visual system to a linguistic one, thus activating different mental processes in the translator or audio describer" (Holsanova, 2016, as cited in Bausells-Espín, 2022, p. 153). I grappled with translating a non-verbal language (the dancing body) into a verbal one (AD), but using poetry opened intersectional spaces where the dancers' whole selves could be present.

Other dance artists have experimented with innovative approaches to dance AD. Kinetic Light, a disability arts ensemble founded by Alice Sheppard, Laurel Lawson, and Michael Maag, has been pioneering new technologies and techniques for integrating AD from the beginning of the creative process, meaning that their work is designed with accessibility in mind from the outset. Unlike

traditional dance AD, which tends to be objective and descriptive, Kinetic Light's approach offers interpretative possibilities. Their descriptions function as works of art in themselves, akin to "ekphrastic tone poems for each performance" (Dinneen, 2019). Their research and experimentation on immersive and immediate AD have emerged from conversations and feedback with non-visual audience members, embracing a user-centred approach that allows audiences to select their accessibility preferences (Lopez et al., 2021). Their most recent work, *Audimance*, is an interface designed to let non-visual audience members choose from different audio tracks, offering a variety of styles and viewpoints, such as live microphones on the dancers, poetry, and soundscapes. According to Sheppard, they "are not describing" but rather "rendering a dance in sound" (as quoted in Dinneen, 2019). Sabry describes his experience with Kinetic Light's AD as deeply engaging: "All of these different tracks for you to choose from—some were traditional and objective, some were like a friend whispering in your ear, some were metaphorical, and others were spaced out to avoid overwhelming you with language" (as quoted in Lord, 2023). When AD is treated as a one-size-fits-all solution, limiting the options available to BLV audience members, it removes their autonomy and choice, while sighted audiences can freely decide where to focus during a performance (Fryer, 2018; Lopez et al., 2021, p. 158).

Throughout *Languaging Dance*, we continued to challenge preconceived notions of what AD should be and how dance can be perceived. This process involved making creative choices in the moment while staying true to our collective artistic vision. I believe that AD for live dance should be seen as a performance in its own right—more than just a translation of the visual; expressing intent, and emotion in the language of their description and the way it is delivered. Viewing it merely as a translation reinforces the primacy of sight over other senses, limiting the potential of AD as an artistic and sensory experience. Cavallo challenges the dominance of the visual in AD by employing strategies that "deliberately avoid an 'accurate' description of the visual by offering either an abstract description or conflicting descriptions from a range of perspectives," creating a "cacophony of AD happening all the time" (Fryer & Cavallo, 2022, p. 91). In *Languaging Dance*, we embraced uncertainty and the unknown. Each cast member described what they experienced, creating a rich tapestry of sensory expression. While our explorations may not fully meet the access requirements of all BLV audiences, the findings presented here offer meaningful questions for consideration within the growing sub-genre of live dance AD.

3.1. The Process

During the research process of *Languaging Dance*, we met in the studio twice a month for sessions lasting three to four hours. Each session included a check-in, a warm-up, and a series of activities, followed by a discussion. In the final two months, we developed a repeatable structure that could be presented in an informal setting. To conclude the first phase of this research, we held a 30-minute informal sharing in Vancouver in April 2024, with an invited audience of both BLV and sighted individuals. The audience understood that the performance would not feature traditional AD but instead offer an experiential practice of poetic AD. Everyone in the audience identified as an artist

and was therefore eager to engage with this research-in-progress, approaching the experience with curiosity and openness.

Exploring dance AD from the beginning of the process rather than after the completion of the piece led us to question why the proscenium is often assumed to be the default perspective. Traditionally, audiences sit in front of the stage, and AD is delivered from a frontal viewpoint. Instead, we worked in a circular formation, allowing each dancer/describer to contribute a unique perspective. These diverse viewpoints combined to create a richer, more multidimensional experience of the dance. The dancers/describers moved inside and around the circle, allowing both the sound and the dancers to shift—moving closer, farther away, and across the room. We began with one mover, gradually adding a second, and eventually worked in trios. When not actively dancing, participants took on the roles of describers. On rotation, one of the dancer/describers in the circle took on the role of the *typer*, transcribing the spoken words in real time. Another became the *reader*, who shaped a poem, from the collective responses to the movement, to be read aloud at the end of the dance. As the choreographer/researcher, I initially envisioned a layered, an overlapping "cacophony of voices" (Fryer & Cavallo, 2022, p. 91), but this proved too complex for the artists to track. Prioritizing accessibility, we collectively decided that each performer would speak one at a time, following the order of their positions in the circle.

The AD emerged directly from the dancers' movements, with the dancers and describers influencing one another. There was no scripted AD in this work; both the movement and the words were entirely improvised, considering the "embodied rather than literary aspect of performance" (Margolies, 2015, p. 23). We witnessed the dance and the poem come to life in tandem. The writing was unedited, raw, and visceral. The language emerged naturally from the movement itself, shaping and evolving in real time, much like an improvised dance. Collectively and individually, we observed how words combined to create unique melodies, paying attention to our bodies and how they responded to hearing these sounds and tasting the words in our mouths. As Pallant (2014) notes, "this visceral approach to writing requires a facile tongue and flexible mind that is inclusive of the body" (p. 141). Our bodies, possessing a language of their own, became the orator and speaker through which our describing voices emerged.

In this process, the dancers/describers had opportunities to articulate their experiences as either movers or witnesses. Using first-person AD added agency and self-description, which was especially meaningful for equity-seeking artists who may not often see themselves represented (Cavallo, 2015) or feel misdescribed when consultation isn't involved in the AD process. As a collective of artists, we questioned how to invite an audience into this experience and explored the distinctions between a live dance AD research project and a creative writing practice. We focused on building suitable vocabulary that could be used as a glossary to support more traditional dance AD. However, we approached this process playfully, allowing ourselves the freedom to explore, experiment, and redefine the possibilities of dance AD.

3.2. The Discoveries

As mentioned, AD is approached here as a performative and collaborative practice. It moves beyond conventional verbal language, creating space for the diverse forms of languaging that emerge from our bodies. When language flows through and from the body, its purpose shifts—we begin to write, dance, and describe with the intent to touch others through words, breath, and rhythm. Writing from the body and the dance allows language itself to begin dancing.

In *Languaging Dance*, words become a conduit for the visual, and we, as performers, act as somatic conductors. The term *conductor* derives from the Latin "conductus," meaning a carrier or one who unites. In the act of languaging dance from the body, writing becomes a bridge between the non-linguistic language of movement and the spoken (and later written) language that emerges from it. This process transforms verbal language into a physical extension of the body. We begin to articulate our experiences—drawing from the Latin "articulatus," meaning to separate into joints or to divide speech into distinct parts. Each joint, muscle, bone, and organ in our bodies contributes to speech, forming a collective poetry that shapes our narrative.

The dance and the AD were developed simultaneously. We danced with the awareness that we would be described and that we, in turn, would describe in real time. Moreover, we recognized that our words could influence the story we were crafting. This interplay led us to question the relationship between dance and description: Are we, as dancers, allowing the description to shape and change the dance? Should the describer chase the dance, or should the dance chase the description? Because both were created in real time, each influenced the other, allowing us to experiment with the timing, intonation, repetition, pitch, and tone of the descriptions. Following an accessibility aesthetic, we structured our descriptions predictably, using phrases such as "if…", "as…", "what if…", and "as if…". We extended the space between "what," "as," and "if," crafting sentences open to multiple interpretations by each audience member. This process required the dancers/describers to maintain deep focus and attentiveness.

This creative and poetic approach to AD challenges the conventional understanding of audio description as requiring "grammatical and lexical specificities" (Perego, 2024, p. 23). In *Languaging Dance*, we embraced an AD style that "goes against conventional neutral and objective [museum] description" (Perego, 2024, p. 50), instead taking risks with a form that leaves room for subjective, interpretive, and poetic expression.

In his workbook on AD for contemporary dance, Greyson argues:

> AD users want concrete language. In a poetic or artistic description of dance, however, it is also important to give a place to the abstract value of contemporary dance and to develop a suitable vocabulary in which abstract and concrete reinforce each other. (2020, p. 14)

Languaging Dance explores something entirely different, employing visceral language that emerges from the body and the dancers' expertise to describe movement itself. Poetic writing allows us to

move beyond conventional syntax and linear narratives. Snyder and Geiger (2022) suggest using the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS)[1] as a way of "observing objectively, editing critically, and selecting words that are vivid" (p. 174). They further explain that "describing each movement, however vividly, does not convey the essence of a choreographic piece. It is like just listing the ingredients in a recipe; the ingredients are not the finished dish!" (Snyder & Geiger, 2022, p. 174). Poetry captures this essence. Its power lies in its ability to "synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (Prendergast, 2009, p. 545), aligning with Perego (2024) and Snyder and Geiger (2022) in their analyses of live dance descriptions. They emphasize the importance of selecting the most precise words to convey movement quality rather than simply cataloguing body actions (Snyder & Geiger, 2022, pp. 175–176).

One challenge we encountered during *Languaging Dance* was the absence of a choreographed piece with a clear narrative. The improvised performances explored our relationships with the body, as well as spoken, non-verbal, and written language, making it difficult to pinpoint: What main idea does the dance communicate to the viewer? What is its essence? (Snyder, 2010, p. 32). We discovered that the more direct and precise the verbs we used, the greater their impact on the dance. Rhythm, pacing, and cadence shaped movement as much as the movement shaped our word choices.

3.3. Examples

My perspective on using poetic language to describe dance is that it opens access to words in new ways—through a bodily aesthetic and visceral imagination (Snowber, 2007). Integrating poetic language transforms descriptions into embodied experiences. Description becomes writing; writing becomes dancing; and dancing becomes description once again. In *Languaging Dance*, we use this process to capture the bodily nuances that might otherwise be excluded from traditional ways of describing dance. Poetic writing serves as an invaluable tool for articulating the vibrancy and vitality of the art form. Languaging dance through poetry cultivates a unique spectatorship, expanding the ways we perceive aesthetic values.

The two unedited poems I have chosen are the results of the collective poetic descriptions that emerged from Kristy and Luciana's solos. Words spoken by the dancers themselves appear in brackets. For each poem, Kristy and Luciana danced in or around the circle while the other dancers took on the roles of describers. One dancer acted as the "typer," transcribing the spoken words in real time, while another served as the "reader." At the end of the dance, the reader recited the poem, adding their own intonation and interpretation. They had the freedom to skip lines or repeat them

[1] The Laban/Bartenieff Movement System, commonly referred to as Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, is a method used to describe and document movement. This system originates from the work of Rudolf Laban and has been further developed by other movement experts, such as Irmgard Bartenieff and Lisa Ullmann. The Laban/Bartenieff Movement System is applied in a variety of fields, including dance, theatre, music, athletics, as well as in physical and occupational therapy, psychotherapy, and leadership.

as they felt appropriate. The audience experienced these dances in a multisensory way. They witnessed the live, improvised movement, heard the sounds of the dancers' bodies in motion, and listened as the describer made quick decisions about what to convey. Finally, they experienced the dance as poetry, as the spoken words transformed movement into a literary and auditory form.

Kristy

This is familiar
and all the more beautiful
because it's familiar.

Exploring the air

(Still feels new, tho')

Innocence
all at the same time

Beaming towards the sky

(I look at my hands)

As if shadow puppets
As if the moon has set
This is the end.

Luciana

If I could just feel it
maybe I could heal it.

Tracing the spots
where it once was

The weight is different from down here.

(My arms are finding places that are NOT familiar)

Shapes
from right inside
Like guts

Searching for something I could never find
Through sand, soil, self
Moving across landscapes

(Almost)

Feet.

This is what I am stepping into
tomorrow

(Almost)

Connection

(That's it)

Stomp hand
This is the end.

4. Conclusions: Moving Forward, While Looking Back and Ahead

In this article, I began by contextualizing the Canadian landscape for live dance AD, then reflected on my initial introduction to AD through *Translations* and examined the challenges and discoveries of my most recent project, *Languaging Dance*. I propose that creative and collaborative approaches to dance AD can foster a more enriching and fulfilling experience for BLV audiences while also ensuring and promoting the employment of BLV individuals in the creative process. Poetic audio description in live dance highlights the importance of collaboration, creativity, and embodied engagement in AD.

Specifically, I explored the potential of incorporating poetic descriptions from the perspectives of the dancers involved. I asked: What if languaging dance became a lingua franca—a common or bridging language used for communication between individuals who speak different languages—between the poetic language of and from the body and the written language that transforms into AD? This language that dances can reveal nuances that might otherwise remain unknown. Poetic audio description allows for richer, nuanced experiences that prioritize a multisensory approach and artistic expression of AD.

In 2022, Singh stated that her research "will assist academics in doing more research on AD in Canada." I hope this article will continue to spark interest in the unique Canadian context and that the "Canadian dialect" (Singh, 2022) will become part of a broader discussion on AD in live arts. Looking ahead, I am eager to develop resources for students enrolled in arts programs and those training to become teachers. Incorporating AD into the curriculum can normalize its importance in educational contexts (Bardini & Espasa, 2023). I align with Eardley et al.'s view that AD is "intrinsic to human communication," representing a natural skill for educators and parents (2017, p. 196).

Furthermore, I draw from Cachia's perspective that "aurally describing images" (2021, p. 163) enhances students' ability to discuss and write about art and dance. Cachia notes that this practice benefits BLV students while also expanding all students' skill sets by improving their ability to engage in visual analysis for art discussions and writing (2021, p. 163). Ultimately, we all use description to articulate our perceptions of the world and ourselves.

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