

Dancing Beyond the Eye - Using Audio Descriptions to Make Dance Accessible to the Blind and Visually Impaired Community

For my Disability Studies Minor Capstone Project, I collaborated with my faculty mentor, Victoria Marks, in investigating ways to make dance accessible to the blind and visually impaired community. We started by researching and experimenting with audio descriptions. Audio descriptions are the translations of the visual experience into verbal words. I read Georgina's Kleege's *More than Meets the Eye* in order to gain more insight on the significance of blindness to arts and culture. I was then able to connect with Alice Sheppard, an award-winning choreographer and a significant figure in the dance and disability field, about her work with audio descriptions in her recent production entitled *Kinetic Light*. Following the dialogue between the two of us, I started to create my own audio descriptions of the Victoria Marks and Margaret Williams dance film, *Outside In* (1993). First, I divided the film into sections and worked to capture the kinetic and visual information central to the piece. During this process, I noted themes that extended through all of the sections and continued to make a series of drafts to be workshopped with Marks, the choreographer. From this, I completed a full-length script for *Outside In* (1993) that included: movement qualities, filming techniques, artistic choices, and repetitive themes. I then recorded myself speaking my descriptions and layered that audio over the film, making sure to match the descriptions with the movement, while freezing certain sections of the film to give space for my interpretations.

The audio description field is fairly small, so it is rewarding to know that I am contributing to it in its earlier stages of development. Traditionally, audio descriptions identify all that is happening visually, but as a trained dancer, I am aware that movement is subjective and is different for every viewer, so I made it a point to pause the dance film to make room for my interpretations of the movements or of the film so far, in order to give a more well-rounded experience. I was able to send a draft of my completed product to Georgina Kleege for feedback, and very pleased to receive praise and admiration for my work.

Accessibility with dance goes far beyond who can identify themselves as a dance artist, and looks to who can experience the art as well. Dance is widely known as a visual art,

but my capstone project demonstrates that supporting the non-visual experience is possible through audio descriptions, and can serve as an opportunity for both artists and art lovers to dive deeper into these creative works.

2021 Undergraduate Research Week Presentation: <https://youtu.be/xlxuQi37Ja0>