

WRITING LOVE ON MY ARM: FINDING THE  
VOICE OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN  
THE CREATIVE PROCESS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how using subjects that are deeply personal and private, in this case loneliness, can serve as source material for the creative process. How can a choreographer use the act of recognizing intuition and the subconscious as an enlivening choreographic tool? I seek to discover how the choreographic process helps develop a clearer depiction of experiences that have been sublimated in our nonconscious self. I surmise that by giving the opportunity to discuss personal experience creatively, the choreographic process can elucidate the effects these have on our personhood.

This thesis describes the choreographic process of my work *Fallen Inside*, which premiered in the University Of Utah Department Of Modern Dance Graduate Thesis Concert held at the Hayes Christensen Theatre, Marriott Center for Dance on November 11-13, 2010. I explain how I transformed my personal experiences of loneliness and a need for connection in the human experience into subjects of creative investigation. In addition to my creative research, I draw on research by Marcia Leventhal about the use of movement exploration as an inroad to personal growth, and Antonio Damasio, who discusses the process of recognizing emotional reverberations in the unconscious as a guiding tool in the creative process.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Willis Harman, “ To most persons the word unconscious, when used as a noun, connotes a region where we have buried out of sight all manner of rejected and denied memories and urges” (Harman 10). I argue that the choreographic process is a means to reveal the unconscious voice, and that one can use creativity as a means to develop personal breakthroughs. However, in order for the process to serve as such, there must be a willingness to listen and not hide from our realities, the observations and sensations that make up our lives. We must listen to our internal cues, which can serve as reminders and warning signals that something in ourselves must be paid attention to, and be allowed to speak. In doing so, we let ourselves find the healing dance within.

I followed the module of the “Conscious Healing Dance” coined by Marcia Leventhal, a leading figure in the field of Dance Therapy, as an extension of the healing process experienced in the creation of the work *Fallen Inside*. Although Leventhal refers to her method as the process of unfolding the inner human experience through authentic movement, I have employed her process primarily to try and weave together theory, personal experience and my choreographic process.

Choreography allows us to explore elements of life that relate to our humanness. It is a method for self-discovery, a system in which we can voice the unconscious. The choreographic process can act as a module for transference between the psyche and the physical. Acting as a source for expressivity supported by a complex matrix found in the creative process, choreography can at times operate as an agent for change. Complicated networks that are a part of the creative process include our past, present, the conscience, and unconscience, feelings and emotions. As an artist, I wonder how involvement in the creative process heightens this sense of aliveness and perception of life both past and present. How can we use the process of gaining consciousness about our past and current life as a choreographic tool?

The creative process serves as a platform that allows us to speak of intimate events from a personal place and to share them publically. Through choreography we can explore what we conceive to be the unconscious by bringing it to the conscious realm. For artists, recognizing unfulfilled needs and patterns of social behavior instilled in us as young children can provide the opportunity for change and growth personally and creatively. This process of investigation begins by first asking questions about where these ingrained experiences rest in our lives and if the artist has a means by which to recognize them. Have these experiences developed to better serve us or are they limiting our creativity?

My creative work and its culmination with the conception of *Fallen Inside* served as a catalyst for deep introspective observations. In addition, the

creative process has allowed me to further investigate the subject of consciousness and its role in our creative minds. Although the reflections of the work on this paper will only speak to that of *Fallen Inside*, larger themes have risen about the work involved in creating a piece of choreography. In particular, I will discuss loneliness and its manifestations as the subject of choreographic inspiration.

In discussing the theoretical underpinnings and choreographic design of my work *Fallen Inside*, I explain how loneliness was used as an inspiration for the creative research. I focus on how personal encounters with loneliness assigned me a disposition to distrust my creative instinct. Furthermore, I share my story about how early experiences of loneliness set up an emotional disconnect in my day-to-day life. I introduce the discussion on how individuals who suffer from social and emotional isolation often go through their adult lives without questioning a predisposed view about social encounters and the reasons for struggling between the desire to belong and feelings of isolation. I wanted to break barriers between personal inquiries and how this research helps with an individual's progress in moving forward in life. As a result, I used the creative process to unravel my personal experience with loneliness that caused me to disconnect from myself and other people. Since my creative research centers on my personal experience with loneliness, I feel it is important to share briefly the roots of my experience with loneliness.

I met my mother for the first time when I was 11 years old, soon after having moved to America. My father was never a constant presence in my life.

With the exceptions of visits every few months, I can say that I was estranged from him altogether. I believe that the absence of parental figures at an early age resulted in a deficit in attachment building skills as I matured. Such skills include the ability to trust in others and myself. Eric Erickson's observations highlight the importance of bonding in early stages and its relationship to trust: "For the most fundamental prerequisite of mental vitality, I have already nominated a sense of basic trust, which is pervasive attitude toward oneself and the world derived from experiences of the first year of life. By 'trust' I mean an essential trustfulness of others as well as fundamental sense of one's own trustworthiness" (Erikson 96). The concept of trust centers around the ability to establish one's point of view, to trust one's own beliefs and in doing so cementing the ability to be with oneself. Trust is about understanding values, beliefs, our likes and dislikes, and the ability to make conscious and clear decisions about the way we feel. These feelings also include the dissimilar ways in which we connect to others.

Trust serves as a critical component in life outside of the studio and in the creative process. It helps to define personal boundaries, establish clear and fully defined roles in relationships and asserts the individual's ability to perceive a fully conceived identity. As artists we rely on the ability to trust ourselves, the process, and those involved. But if we have a disposition to distrust our creative selves, our work will suffer as a consequence. Confidence in our process, in our art and in our personal relationships is predisposed by our past.

As a neophyte choreographer, I can testify that the majority of my earlier work was conceived primarily out of the need to provide a product, a final dance. I lacked the ability to question, listen and sense the body of the dance. I was suffering from impaired consciousness, and I lacked the ability to attend to the happenings in and around me (Damasio 7). This ability to listen to the components of the process that were nonconscious emerged from having used a subject that was more personal than anything in my previous attempts at choreography. I believe that being able to access the process from a deeply personal and emotional state allowed the whole of me to come alive. After all, consciousness and emotions are not independent.

With the quest to establish a sense of trust with my creative self, I sought to research the subject of loneliness, and how personal narratives influence the creative process. I ask, can the choreographic process help develop a more conscious representation of experiences that have been placed in our nonconscious self? How do artists use subjects that are deeply personal and private such as loneliness as a source for the creative process?

In my theoretical research, I cite notable developmental psychologists Erick Erickson and Marcie Peplau, who write about the relationship between early experiences of abandonment to loneliness in adulthood. I also reference Marcia Leventhal, a practitioner who uses creative movement as an inroad to personal enlightenment, to support the theory that the choreographic process can promote change. I discuss how choreographers such as Anna Halprin, Trudi Schoop and Lloyd Newson's processes were highly influenced by personal

narrative as a means to evoke change on the individual. Finally, I reference Antonio Damasio, a notable author on the subject of consciousness, who sheds light on how the process of gaining consciousness can support the creative process.

In my reflection on my creative process in Chapter 3, I include a discussion on Rudolf von Laban, whose theory of movement analysis helped clarify my intent behind physical interpretations of emotional states. These authors guide my discussion on how the choreography of *Fallen Inside* helped uncover the unconscious within myself, thus allowing the creative process to result not only in a product, but also as a process for personal growth and change. My hope is that other choreographers will respond to the choreographic process as a method of sharing one's most intimate skin and that my personal story will support someone else's desire to make the act of choreographing a valuable, deeply personal and life changing experience.

# CHAPTER 1

## THEORETICAL RESEARCH

### Consciousness

Often, I end my days not being able to recap every moment or emotion that I experienced in the course of the day. This does not mean that I was not present or that I did nothing in the course of the twelve hours I spent awake. It is daunting to think that although I am a living being, I cannot explicitly share what I do from day to day or the feelings that surge through my being. I question whether this is something that limits my experience as a human being or that serves to protect me from the overwhelming sensation that comes from remembering everything that happens from day to day. I also find it intriguing to question the process of how if possible one could dissect the way we associate emotional responses with past experiences and to speak of those effects with clarity.

As an artist, I wonder how sensitive we become in the creative process to that sense of aliveness, which serves to tap into our history as a source for creativity. I wonder how we can use our consciousness as a choreographic tool.

According to Damasio, the ability to be present and aware at any given moment is the same as listening to our feelings, "Consciousness allows feelings to be known and thus promotes the impact of emotion internally, allows emotions to permeate the thought process through the agency of feeling" (Damasio 56).

Being able to recall and to create a dialogue with oneself about past experiences grants one the ability to recognize the presence of a self-protective mechanism. This system protects us from past traumatic experiences while limiting our ability to recognize problem areas that hinder a process of change. It is only when a person allows him or herself the opportunity to rediscover these past events, and confront them by bringing them into the light, that one is able to move forward. Damasio, an admired neuroscientist and humanist, said it best: "When the veil is lifted, however, at the scale of understanding permitted to the human mind, I believe we can sense the origin of the construct we call self in the representation of individual life"(Damasio 29). Damasio explains that even when one is able to see the truths of the past, the unconscious limits how much of it is revealed; however, one is given the opportunity to expand the levels of awareness by means of listening to the sensations present in the body.

Damasio presents two types of consciousness, Core and Extended. Each has an effect on our creative process especially as we strive to grow as creative individuals. The first type of consciousness focuses on our ability to recognize what happens in immediate instances of an event: "Core consciousness, provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment--- now---and

about one place--- here” (Damasio 16). Extended consciousness enables the individual to access information of events in our past. Extended Consciousness, “provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self-- an identity and a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it” (Damasio 16). These two consciousness support the process of becoming aware of the events in our lives. They also provide the ability to access events that could have lasting effects on the individual. In my research I chose to associate each type of consciousness with a component of the choreographic process and in doing so I explain the relationship of consciousness to the creative process with greater clarity.

Core consciousness can best be related to the process of improvisation. Improvisation is commonly used in the development of movement that can help bring ideas and images to life. Core consciousness helps map the act of moving by heightening the sensorial experience that can be attained while in the improvisation. This heightened state of consciousness then helps piece together movement as phrases. During this process of aliveness the mover has the ability to perceive and distinguish the different emotional tones that are being experienced in the improvisation that best fit the tone of the work.

Extended consciousness uses the reflection process as a means to inform the choreographer of key moments that ultimately help mold the choreographic work. By allowing the choreographer to access information from the past, this process helps inform the textures and emotive content that is

developing in the work. Artists use Extended Consciousness to access moments or events that help ignite the fire to create. The process of recognizing consciousness can help tether the complexities of ideas to possibilities for new creative work. Damasio states, “We are not conscious of which memories we store and which memories we do not; of how we store memories; of how we classify and organize them; of how we interrelate memories of varied sensory types, different topics, and different emotional significance” (Damasio 226). Because we are not consciously aware of how the mind works to store and access memories, working to expand our awareness allows for better integration of ourselves to the creative brainstorming of future research.

The choreographic practice enables the individual to situate him or herself in a process that induces questions, especially in feedback, promoting the discoveries of elements that help us become more conscious. The majority of my earlier work was conceived primarily out of the notion of needing to complete the dance. I lacked the ability to question, listen and sense the body of the dance. I was suffering from sensorial deprivation, unable to recognize the feeling tones and affecting factors that were unconsciously informing me about the dance.

What turned me onto the process of sensing and becoming more alert with what was happening in the process was my willingness to create a piece of work that was deeply personal. I believe that being able to access the process from a deeply personal and emotional state allowed the whole of me to come alive. While it can be difficult to be clear, transparent and honest while

creating a piece of art about the explicitly personal, it can leave room to question how one can claim success in creating a work that is honest and true to our experience. The challenge is to figure out a way to discuss how the choreographic process lends itself to solidify a form to the deeply personal.

The creative interest for a choreographic piece can start with an idea or a simple desire to move. In the process of creating a dance, one can see the work miraculously take form. I wonder if these magical moments where everything comes together are ultimately choreographic mappings that are present in our unconscious. Thus, true craftsmanship is a product of being aware of what is unconsciously present in the rehearsal process, making it possible to receptively manipulate choreographic elements to fulfill the needs of the dance. It is this shift of consciousness that pushes the dance work to move past being an internal sensation or an idea, and to unfold as a completed piece of art. But also, distinguishing the method in which participation takes form in the choreographic process can help unfold other elements that take personal, internal sensation into a form. In a closed process in which the choreographer is the sole decision maker, he or she can use journaling as a helping tool. In contrast, in a process that is more inclusive, creative dialogue during the process can help dissolve the root of problematic moments in the work.

Damasio speaks of being aware of physical and instinctive sensations, of managing them as a well-constructed maps and using them as abilities that help orient our emotions: “Well-targeted and well-deployed emotions seem to

be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly” (Damasio 42). Having awareness of emotions taking form in physical sensorial cues and their effect on the rehearsal can help the choreographer recognize moments that are pertinent to the work but that are not being attended to. For example, a sensation of congestion in the chest or the physical sensation of wanting to speak but not being able to sound the words may be interpreted as moments that require attention and further discussion of where these came from. As an artist, being able to recognize these physical sensations has allowed me to become more trusting of myself as a creator. I have also gained a better understanding of how this process of listening informs me about being a more compassionate choreographer.

In my process, which I discuss in Chapter 3, I worked with feelings as a way to access and create an emotion of loneliness in the form of a dance. Personal feelings of loneliness as the source of inspiration provided me a direct outlet for creativity. At the same time, access to these feelings interfered with my process due to the complex systems found in describing, with specificity and clarity, the concept of emotions and feelings as felt in my body. Dr. Joseph LeDoux, renowned neurologist on the study of emotion and feeling in the brain, described feeling as being a conscious experience, while emotions originate deep in the unconscious brain. I began to question whether I was listening to my Extended Consciousness or responding to the emotions that were coming up from the process. The process of recognizing these feelings intrigued me as I was becoming more attuned to recognizing the presence of my feelings.

However, I was not able to clearly communicate what those feelings were or where they came from.

According to Damasio, there are three stages in which a person processes a feeling. Damasio established these three stages to include, “ A state of emotion, which can be triggered and executed nonconsciously; a state of feeling, which can be represented non-consciously; and a state of feeling made conscious, i.e., known to the organism having both emotion and feeling”(Damasio 37). We often experience this without clear distinction between each state. However, because the creative process can often be inherently personal, it serves as a doorway to reveal the manner in which we experience emotions and feelings. Most importantly, it helps to face these feelings head on, bringing them from the unconscious to the conscious realm.

In academic studies, for example, the field of medicine, one sometimes learns to differentiate the functions of mind and body. To see the function and effect of another, as different, rather than to associate how they connect. The study of movement can help bridge how we understands the interrelationship as, “ Whatever happens in your mind happens in time and in space relative to the instant in time your body is in and the region of space occupied by your body”(Damasio, 145). As dancers, our moving bodies can access the text of our past bodily and mental selves with sensibility and awareness. It is in our nature to conceive and relate to the body and mind as having an intertwined relationship that allows us such access. This is a product of our ability to

relate to our past, as experiences that can inspire creativity and personal progress. Choreography is the gateway to rediscovering ourselves.

## **Loneliness**

Loneliness is like a shadow, always present and unnoticed. It lurks behind you and suddenly you realize something is missing: your ability to control your emotions. I often recall feeling empty, blank, like a white sheet of paper, with emotional peaks that would surge out of nowhere. These were warning signs telling me that something was out of place. It was recognizing these sensations that led me to want to discover what they meant and their place of origin. More importantly, I wanted to know how I could move past these sensations by recognizing and confronting them.

Loneliness should not to be confused with aloneness. Aloneness, as defined by Evangelia Galanaki, author on the subject of solitude in children, “is the objective state of having no one around, or more precisely, the state of communicative rather than physical isolation” (Galanaki 436); in other words, it is a separation from partnership with other humans based on voluntary actions. John G. McGraw describes loneliness as “ a complex of negative affects concerning feeling alone. People can be lonely regardless [of] whether they are physically all by themselves. Consequently, emotional isolation is an (inter)subjective phenomenon instead of an objective one, like, for instance, the physical isolation of reclusiveness” (McGraw 18).

Feelings of hurt or anger support loneliness and are stored without any intention or ability to do anything about them, which in turn can make the lonely person feel rejected and afraid. Social interaction can become detrimental to building the self, and thus the interaction with other human beings who essentially share the same fears and desires can become menacing and endangering to the individual. In my experience, transference of emotions took the form of avoiding encounters and initiating aggressive and often hurtful interactions. I was holding onto these early experiences of abandonment with anger and resentment. But what was most detrimental to these years of personal isolation was the inability to wrap words around the feelings and sensations. In essence, I was lacking a sense of consciousness.

As an adult, I realized that certain individuals in my life were not fulfilling their allotted roles, as I perceived them, leaving me in a state of distrust and maladjusted voids within my relationships. I saw myself reaching out to make connections without having a clear map or idea of what needed to be gained from the relationship. As a consequence, not only was I continuously harboring unfulfilled needs, I was also supporting feelings of rejection. Unable to decipher the reason behind why these individuals were unsuitable to meet my expectations, I realized that it was not anything related to how the present relationships were evolving. It had to do with something in the past, in my unconscious, that was surfacing.

To further explain, it is hypothesized that loneliness in adults is an adapted system from the lack of warm relationships experienced at an early

age (Hojat 130). Some of the factors continually supporting patterns of loneliness considered are “motivational, cognitive, behavioral factors as well as social problems” (Peplau, and Perlman 10), which often manifest in depression, hostility towards others, decreasing motivation and poor self-image (Peplau and Perlman 11).

In a child, “when he or she reaches out for love and it is not returned, the child does not understand intellectually the reason for the lack of response; indeed it cannot” (Tanner 3), leaving the child to question why there is a lack of love reciprocation. This can be said the same for adults. Like children, adults account for their low self-worth as the main reason why they are not loved (Tanner 5).

These early experiences play important roles in how we respond to interactions with other people. It can be argued that the information fed into our system of knowledge at an early age by external sources (e.g., family and peer interactions) is recorded in the brain to be recalled in the future (Tanner) For example:

Having once concluded that the casual manner in which we were being held means “I’m unlovable,” we may discover, much to our dismay some ten or twenty years later, that the same old tape begins to roll again when a friend, relative, or lover hugs, holds, or touches us. “Being touched or held in this manner can mean only one thing-I’m un-lovable. (Tanner 8)

One’s family provides first impressions on relationships in social networks, and on the ability to trust, distrust, and create secure sources of attachment. One’s family provides information to the internal system of knowledge on topics like physical and emotional patterns that can dictate self-

worth and perceptions of being lovable. Trust is built first in the familial context, and when trust is absent from an early age, as adults it “limits the willingness to initiate contact with others and to share personal information with them (Rotenberg, MacDonald and King 233).

These observations allowed me to recognize habitual patterns of false meaning-making moments that were present in my relationships. For example, in attempts to make connections, I placed myself in social encounters with a preset disposition towards judgment and rejection. To me these encounters justified the effects a lack of intimate trust from early childhood had on my relationships as an adult. For example, with newly formed relationships I did not trust that others were not judging me. It was difficult to believe they wanted to build a relationship with me. The battle between my conscious desire to connect and my nonconscious feelings of dissatisfaction created a conflicting paradigm of unhappiness and distrust.

As an adult I sensed that a lack of parental figures as a child informed my episodes with loneliness and in turn had an effect on my creative identity. For example, the ability to trust myself in the creative process often resulted in insecurity about the work, hindering my willingness to be open to other creative possibilities. Consequently the same issues that limited my creative growth served as catalysts for new choreographic work in my thesis research.

Many great artists have based a majority of their creative work on a single experience, in many cases one of anguish and complex emotional turmoil. Visual artist Louise Bourgeois based the greater body of her life’s work

on a single subject- her childhood memories of her father's betrayal: "She confided to the world that she obsessively relived through her art the trauma of discovering at the age of eleven that her English governess was also her father's mistress" (Dorment 1).

However, if as an artist one desires creative growth to happen, healthy and open interpersonal relationships must be established with oneself. I argue that if the choice is made to expand on the creative research of a single idea, especially one that is aimed to personal experience, that there must be a balance between losing oneself in the memory, being able to access the experience at will and also to take part of a process by which to put this into form. In order to make this process possible, an artist must be comfortable enough with his or herself to access the pain and struggles before placing it as an objective creative work. Being alone helps build the ability to differentiate between the past and present, which bridges experience and perspective. It helps to define a point of view and crystallize intent behind the work. Furthermore, as artists, we are made responsible to face our suffering head on, to not hide our pain with manufactured relief that provides short-lived emotional stability. Being an artist is just as much about the process as it is about the journey of being alone with oneself.

Some of my observations were not consciously made in the moments while invested in the choreographic process, but a result of observations made through reflection. These observations came through an awareness of sensation and thought, and an enlivened consciousness. Awareness is the element of

transition between existing without knowing and existing with a sense of aliveness and recognition of the conscious self. Studying consciousness is an essential component of the creative process, as it gives one the tool to recognize what often goes unseen.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHOREOGRAPHY: A HEALING ACT

The act of choreographing is a piecing together of movements, ideas and the process of finding structure where there is none, to conceive and harvest the heart of an idea. It is a process of invention, re-invention, change, reflection, magic, and felt emotions infused in the language of the body. Choreography gives life and portrays what is often hidden in the shadows of doubt; it serves as a medium by which to interpret what we know, what we have experienced and our most intimate desires. I argue that choreography is all and any of these at any given time; as a result it can serve as a vessel for change, growth and healing. If we give ourselves the opportunity to surrender to the process of revealing who or what makes up the shelled essence of our identities, we can create a healing dance of our own.

There are different manifestations of how this healing dance can take form. Artists like Anna Halprin, who in the documentary *Positive Motion* uses authentic movement and the creative process as a source for healing, provide an example by which the generated movement and the process used to attain it became the medium by which expressive change occurs. Trudi Schoop is a dance pioneer of dance therapy in treating mental illness who, while working

with patients of a psychiatric clinic, used movement and dance to open the expressive voice and playful world of possibilities. She demonstrates that the use of choreography can act as a tool to evoke a type of language where there might not have been any. Choreographer Lloyd Newson creates work that speaks of psychological dynamic principles found in human nature to create a universal platform for observation, study and individual personification. For example, in *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, he enables the audience to explore psychological complexities that allow for a type of belonging and acceptance, without having to lend information about how or why the work was created.

In these cases, choreography is made to allow the spectator to invest in their own journey, to explore, connect (or not) and to witness what is presented on the stage. *Positive Motion* documents Anna Halprin in a dance workshop with people living with HIV/AIDS in San Francisco; *Come Dance With Me*, a documentary of Trudi Schoop with Schizophrenic patients and *Strange Fish* by Lloyd Newson in which he targets topics of conflict and loneliness, serve as examples that illustrate how their work was highly influenced by personal narrative. Each evoked change on the individual and in communities by either using the choreographic process as a means to experience change, or by using the end product to share an intimate experience that for others could act as a moment of personal reflection.

These artists use the creative process and the study of the psychosomatic principles of movement to create work that supports a module

for personal transformation. Psychosomatics is the study of psychological manifestations in the body. All have used the content of someone else's or their own experience as the creative source for their work. This thesis presents a hybrid of these systems. My purpose was to create a work for deep healing that would be presented as a product for public consumption.

I have followed the module of the "Conscious Healing Dance" coined by Marcia Leventhal, a leading figure in the field of Dance Therapy, as an extension of the healing process experienced in the creation of the work *Fallen Inside*. Although Mrs. Leventhal refers to her method as the process of unfolding the inner human experience through authentic movement, I have employed her process primarily to try and weave together theory, personal experience and my choreographic process. In my own journey, unlike Mrs. Leventhal's, the final product is not based on therapeutic movement practices such as Authentic Movement or Inner Imaging of the self. Rather, I focus on how sensitive awareness of self and the opportunity to take part of a heuristic activity allowed the formation of a personal and creative breakthrough. I used the choreographic process as a springboard to map out experiences that had remained present in my life but had lacked an outlet in which I could interpret and discuss their meaning.

Although we have differing inroads into our processes, I share with Leventhal the value of uncovering from within the information necessary for further personal development:

These vague, difficult to grasp impressions are then brought into the outer, reality-defined world via expressive action of the physical body in

a dance movement event. In the healing dance event, an individual begins to create a personal language for stored memory; particularly those pre-verbal memory traces, the shadowy, subtle areas of our being (deepest essence/Soul-Self). In creating a method and a language to discover these non-verbal realms, we are able to re-access feelings, memories and images. In so doing, we unearth knowledge crucial to our continued growth and development. (Leventhal 8)

Using my reflection process in conjunction with the Conscious Healing Dance Matrix presented by Leventhal, a model that helps her clients give form to expressive language and developmental potential, I outline five steps of acceptance that can help facilitate the choreographic process to become more open ended, giving breath to the felt and reflective practice:

- **Safe Environment:** Establish creative trust in oneself, the dancers and those involved in the observation and creative feedback. These individuals are in part support systems and in part subjects of the creative process, there to assist the journey. In my case thinking positively changed the outlook of an entire rehearsal process, thus promoting a positive and safe working environment. Creating a safe environment can also include allowing all people's involved in the process to feel a sense of trust and openness in all aspects of the rehearsal process.
- **Honoring the Building Blocks:** This involves surrendering to change in the process of the creative act; listening to the unconscious and giving permission to not fight the creative process. One might experience the deconstruction of movement and structure of the work, and frustrations with the need to rush the building process.

One might also face moments of loneliness and congested creative flow. In my process, I had to reconfigure entire sections until I felt they were right. It does not mean one needs to throw away any of the material one already has, but it does require patience and cooperation from one's dancers.

- **This Dance Is:** Acknowledge the dance as an extension of the sublime, hidden and the self-expressive, and not a hurdle to leap over. It is my job to recognize every piece I create as an extension of myself. A simple way to look at this is to remember that we often speak because there is something that needs to be expressed. It is the same with choreography; every project, as daunting as it may appear, will only serve you in the long run.
- **Mirroring the Feedback:** Utilizing the creative feedback not as a process of judgment and imposed ideas but a time for guidance, self-assurance, and clarification. More importantly, feedback sessions enable one to uncover what is there for the conscious and unconscious. About halfway through choreographing *The Road to Remembrance*, a dance I made after *Fallen Inside*:
  - I felt a sense of discomfort, I could not recognize where it was coming from; it was not until I received the feedback that I needed to give the eyes a rest, that I realized my sense of discomfort was about needing to slow down the pace of the

dance. Others' observations are merely highlighting what is already there.

- Acknowledging Choreography and the Creative Process: Consider that these systems are about finding a compromise between hopes and dreams and the rawness of reality. The dance as final product may only share an essence of the initial thesis, but the authentic journey may speak of what is missing on stage. What the audience may conceive from one's work could be more than one expected.

What these five points provide is a system of acceptance and creative flexibility that encourages exploration in movement and in the formation of the choreographic work. Individual growth and a sensibility for inclusivity are part of the process that is also grounded on these five steps. Most importantly, it allows the creative process to rest on a foundation of reflective practice that helps the individual to surrender to the choreographic experience. Finally, choreography is just a term applied to a multiplicity of methods that in the end induces a better understanding of self and life.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

#### Inception

“The art of emotive dance can tap into surges of unexplained feelings by giving attention to images from the past or by also over stimulating the process of being fully conscious” (Damasio 42).

Using the creative process and dance as the medium, I created a choreographic work titled *Fallen Inside*, which comments on my experience with loneliness. In the choreographic process, I developed an interest in elements that surfaced in the rehearsal process that were integral to the success of the work. For instance, I became very interested in the relationship of empathy and sympathy in the process of developing a deeply personal choreographic work. I was also interested in how as a choreographer I could explore new methods that could help orchestrate the process of developing a choreographic work. In particular, I paid close attention to the technique of listening to unconscious or intuitive factors in the creative process that could influence my decision making as choreographer.

The piece occurred in three sections, each focusing on differing components of the experience of loneliness. Section One presented the subject

of personal and social exclusion. Section Two was about self-disclosure and intimacy found in fleeting encounters. The final section was about interpersonal collapse, the defeating experience of lost hope and seeing the self as lacking strength. These three sections speak of three distinct memories that played themselves repetitively in my head as I began to marinate ideas about the work. Specific memories reengaged emotional responses that took me back to those lived moments of loneliness.

The music was a commission by Mike Esperanza, a close friend for a number of years, and an inspiring artist. I had full confidence that he would create a piece that would sympathetically speak to my experience. In addition, I trusted him as a friend and fellow artist, and knew that he would investigate his own experience with the subject in creating the score.

From the beginning I knew that discussing the ideas behind the illusive and intricate system that is loneliness in a single work would be far too daunting and nearly impossible. With this challenge already set in front of me, I needed to decide whether the rehearsal process would be experimental. I felt strongly that because this was my story, my experience, I needed to be responsible for creating the vocabulary. I felt distant and apprehensive of the idea that one's interpretations of the subject would translate as I had lived it. In the beginning I intertwined experimental practices in trying to coach the dancers, but the movement development came purely out of prepared phrases or adaptations made in the moment. The movement progressed from a linear

and what can be conceived as a traditional technical dance form to a vocabulary that was more about the luscious sensation of real time and space.

### **Section One**

The first section begins with me as a solo figure onstage barely lit by a handheld headlamp. Playing with a flow of motion cascading down my body and moments of stillness, in silence I navigate the light to highlight my body. Then the first dancer enters. Captivated by the light I steer her closer to my body and to points in the proximal space where I can fit myself into the negative space formed by her body. Like a whirlwind, the rest of the cast enters in and out of the light as I walk downstage, witnessing their presence, yet keeping defined spatial boundaries.

As the section continues, the group forms a community in which they are emotionally distant even to one another. Like a school of fish, they never have direct physical contact while they change pathways across the stage suddenly and as a collective. They also share a movement signature, in which strength, precision and virtuosity are highly regarded. In the choreography, the lack of physical and visual contact further reveals a distant and impersonal relationship between the dancers. The accented synchronization in the group phrasing demonstrates examples of strength and precision.

Eagerly and desperately I intertwine myself between the group, crawling between them, standing and witnessing from afar, running through them, attempting to situate myself as one of them. In the end I encounter the first

face-to-face contact with one of the dancers, playing a sort of “catch me if you can.” Once again my body tries to fit into the framed body and once again this attempt is rejected. In an emotionless state the group continues.

It was important that this first section set up a theme of exclusion. I wanted to invest in the exploration of personal and public exclusion and how these two happen simultaneously as a consequence of each other. In social interactions, groups are often inclined to exclude new members from entering the pack. When this instance occurs the unwanted subject can associate the rejection with a lack of self-worth. In addition, patterns of rejection experienced in social settings further foster tendencies of doubt, fright and a lack of interest to reach out and make connections. It is a self-defeating cycle. These experiences result in the subject creating a self-imposed system of isolation. In the work, the solo figure (me) was in the same environment as the group, but was never able to make a connection that reciprocated the emotion of wanting to be with. This was expressed in the movement by the absence of phrases that allowed for a communal interaction between the group and soloist.

In order to make obvious the distance and disconnect between the group and the soloist, I wanted to create a clear differentiation in the type of body attitudes between them. I was able to make this possible by referencing the system conceived by Rudolf von Laban referred to as Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). LMA is a system of movement study, divided into four components: Body, Effort, Shape, and Space, each providing a rubric that helps break down

movement to its most basic and expressive form. For this section I focused on two elements, Effort and Shape. These two components were important to me because fundamentally both are supported by the internal desire to communicate a physical expressive attitude. From the four elements of the LMA system, I feel most at home with these two.

Effort was the main focus on creating a vocabulary for the group. Described by Peggy Hackney, “Effort reflects the mover’s attitude towards investing energy in four basic factors: Flow, Weight, Time and Space” (Hackney 219). A physical representation of the impression of confidence was the primary motivation in creating the movement. I generally associate confidence in dance with the balance of a Strong Weight, a preference to Direct Space and ability to access a combination of Quick and Suspended time signatures. This contrasted the Light Weight, Indirect Spatial attention and introverted physical attitude (also referred to having an abundance of Flow) of the solo figure. I wanted to contrast the solo figure with a group accented with strength, clarity and precision as a means to magnify the idea of intimidation, which is seen to reinforce the idea of isolation.

From the Shape category I utilized Modes of Shape Change as an inroad to creating phrases. Modes of Shape Change “reveal an inner attitude about changing the form of the body—whether the shape change is self-oriented or environment-oriented” (Hackney 221). These are divided into three categories: Shape Flow, Directional Mode of Shape Change and Carving. The group used Directional Modes of Shape Change, which consisted of Arcing and Spoke-like

movements, each of which, according to the LMA system, are used to bridge self to the environment. Commonly, these two Directional Movements are used to reach out and connect; however, I used them as a means to create spatial boundaries. For example, in the first encounter between the solo and the group, the solo figure runs into the cluster of moving bodies, stands and longingly admires in an attempt to connect and belong. However, their arms are constantly moving in a Spoke or Arc-like form, not giving room for any connection to be made. Each dancer is highlighting their surrounding space.

Piecing together the first section was most challenging because the tone of the piece needed to be clearly established from the beginning. The process involved a great attention to the structure. I thought it was important to present each section as its own piece, because even though all three sections shared the topic of loneliness, their individual content was not based on the same narrative. Developing this section was also important because it informed me about my own role in the piece. It was not my initial intent to be in the work, but later on it became clear that my presence was integral to the work. The piece was not simply about a subject; it was an extension of my story and in this case, I needed to be present. I had set up the work to revisit the subject of loneliness, and that required my presence as an active participant of that retelling. Ultimately, the first section provided the heart of the piece. It was here that I realized that I was creating a dance for me and my own healing and growth.

In the course of choreographing this work, faculty feedback provided further insight into what was happening in the creative process. For example, the feedback offered in these sessions stated that the first section was not working or that the main intention was not being read clearly. What these observations offered was the opportunity to go into the studio with a new intent, which did not include deleting material or creating new movement. The new process was about deconstructing what already was there to help solidify the statement of the work. As much of this feedback came just prior to the performance, changing the order and the texture of the section was the only alternative left, given my time frame. The ability to rearrange the phrases without the necessity to create new material was freeing. I was able to explore the dance and in the act of recreating the section, I was able to create versions that otherwise would have never been seen. It was as if the process was allowing me to investigate the unconscious dance in *Fallen Inside*.

Others perceived that my presence in the work influenced the dancer's ability to trust the material. At this point, towards the end of the rehearsal process, it became evident that there was an unconscious element of the work that had not come into the forefront of the process, which was my participation in the work. During these feedback sessions, faculty recommended I place myself in the piece. What followed was a shift in consciousness, in which the work evolved from a retelling of an experience to reliving those moments of loneliness. In the shadows of my reflection about being a part of the piece I realized that I had created a dance that was for me.

I had created an environment that allowed me to share my episode with loneliness by living the experience firsthand on stage. The work was about the opportunity to face my emotions head on, unapologetically in the public eye. This piece became a triad: a work that was of me, by me and for me. This work contextualized the subject of loneliness as an extension of my experience and as creative impetus in the choreographic process. The dance was also for the dancers in that their investment of time; energy and physical presence were always the underlying component of the work. However, the dance did not focus around their experience with loneliness or provide them an opportunity to revisit the subject. In the dance, they were part of the subject of the work, not the point of reference from which the piece developed.

Because I had been too close to the work in rehearsal, I had failed to realize that what was missing in the piece was me. The structure of the section may have been faulty, but in reality the piece lacked a point of reference. I was the reference point between the dancers and the subject of loneliness. After the first rehearsal in which I introduced myself as the new protagonist of the work, the vocabulary and attitude of the dancers' bodies took a different direction in the embodiment of the work. The performative qualities I was looking for became alive. There was a subject to which they could direct their attention and intention.

## Section Two

The second section begins with the dancers clustered, slowly meandering between each other. A cymbal in the music cues the group to explode into solos that end with each dancer finding a partner. Like stars circling a planet, the duets orbit themselves off stage with the exception of three dancers. Here duets and witnessing of these partnerships begin to unfold. Transient partnerships are relayed one after the other as the section continues. Without a lasting connection between partnerships, the final image is one of dancers taking breaths just before falling off into the wings.

The heart of Section Two lies behind the intent of developing short-lived moments of false intimacy. These moments of false intimacy are a way to avoid feelings of loneliness and are primarily a one-sided experience. The subject (myself) created a subjective connection to strangers in close proximity; however, the intimacy of these affairs was a product of the imagination. These encounters were primarily a fantasy; direct social interaction between the strangers and me was not real and never would be. For example, while riding the trains to the city I would find a subject to my liking and would purposely sit next to him or her in close proximity. The spatial association triggered in me a form of imitation intimacy; the sheer idea of the potential to belong to a most intimate relationship settled the emotional unrest in me.

To me, this experience provided a type of momentary support, comfort and self-assurance. During these encounters I often thought, “One’s not alone when these strangers are around,” and at the time it was enough. Although

hypothetically speaking these encounters were fulfilling what was missing, in reality, short- term fulfillments hardly solve the issue; they further perpetuate isolation, social incompetency, inability to surpass self-imposed fears and ideas of failure.

In this section I wanted to set up a theme of trios that included a couple seeking to connect and a third figure acting as an observer. My intent was to have the third dancer stand in as a representation of myself, the agent from whom the experience stemmed. The relationships represented in the duets referenced the transient encounters I illustrate above. These were not direct representations of the actual events. These vignettes were about the internal desires to want to connect that were alive at the time. A clear example of this can be found in the trio at the end of this section. A dancer stands off to the side, witnessing a duet in which the dancers long for one another by reaching, collapsing and furiously moving through space. The soloist is left in a state of aloneness, arching her back with arms reaching out to her sides while her mouth opens in exasperation.

The process for the second section was grounded on using text as a choreographic tool to help with movement invention. For me, using text introduced a new way to approach the creative development of movement in the choreographic process. Although I had worked with text in short assignments, I had not experienced using it as a major source of inspiration at the scale it was used in this work. For instance, the following text, which was

written by me, was the inspiration for the duet in the trio at the end of the section:

*Listen to the unfinished words*

*Listen to my held & weakened body*

*Hold my head up before*

*It falls and tears emerge*

*But be present*

*Do it with a caring touch*

Transcribing emotions into text helped ground my inspiration for movement by making it possible to reference a more concrete and textured source. The use of the text above not only gave me the opportunity to transcribe the emotional experience of feeling lonely, but also to take the pressure off of creating a vocabulary that brought internal sensations outside of me, grounded by a clear representation of these experiences. The final product did not include any text as a component of the performance. Reading the text out loud allowed me to express these experiences in a way that the dancers could create their own interpretation of the work. By hearing these words, the dancers were able to initiate their own meaning making. Listening to a small portion of the experience of loneliness in the form of transcribed text, helped the dancers bridge between completing empty actions to sharing their own understanding of loneliness.

I had now become more open to the idea that the dancers too could contribute in the meaning making of the piece. The responsibility of making

the piece shifted; it no longer rested solely on my shoulders. I found that by allowing something that was in me to come out to the open, I was able to experience sympathy from the dancers. They were able to respond to my experience of loneliness, which in turn allowed them to invest their newly found understanding to be a part of the dance.

### **Section Three**

The final section of the work begins with me as the solo figure walking on stage looking to the fleeting shadows of the dancers before me. Gradually the stage dims to display a lit rectangle extending the full width of the stage. As I stand downstage and the music begins to play, with full force the dancers begin to merge into the light and against my body. One after the other each dancer crashes against my back and with everybody I gasp for breaths that help me to rebound just before the next hit. The dancers continue to run in and out of the light and in each instance a new event unfolds. In revisiting phrases from earlier in the piece, including duets, solos and longer groupings, the initial solo versus group dynamic established in Section One is reestablished. At the end, is a lonesome figure shaken by unfulfilled emotional voids left on the stage.

For the third section I wanted to embody the feeling of collapse. I did not want to represent the decayed body, but to use the visceral experience of collapsing bodies as a metaphor for the inability to react, to give up all hope, to surrender without fighting. This is a product of emotional aloneness, where the necessity to function for oneself is less than ideal, making one feel void

and less human. The concept of “less-than-human” forms in the simple necessity to belong, to be a part of; if one does not belong, who are we then? I feel that a strong example of this idea can be found at the very last moment of the piece. The soloist sits, shaken, alone, while the group stands afar, leaving room to see the clear disconnect and abandonment. A journey for longing and expressing a desire to connect ends in dissolution. There is no happy ending. The purpose is to illustrate the perpetual cycle of isolation that often people who experience loneliness find themselves in, and how little we do to change that.

Within the choreographic process for the third section I integrated lessons learned in the previous two sections; I mapped out a simple structure with strong images. The two main elements that were incorporated in the process included the use of text as an extension of the moving body and the use of time as a means to present moments as events and not just short-lived images.

Similar to Section Two, the use of text helped to inspire movement invention. I wrote text to help express emotional tones that I wanted to access in the movement or the overall arc of the phrasings. For example:

*After all- when I have fallen*

*Even while grazing the floor with the most sensitive part of my body*

*It is- after all*

*My breath keeps my body moving.*

Using written text helped design the image of bodies collapsing as a motif. This helped illustrate how these bodies appeared to use an exhale of breath as an important element in embodying moments of collapse. Breath helped the dancers access the use of release in the movement. This was important because I wanted to portray the idea of collapse through a weighted and released body. It was my intent to use this imagery to represent a lack of strong and emotional grounding.

The notion of using “real time” was something new to explore. The concept of “real time” involves the process of giving the movement or action the full length of time and space that it would take to happen without having to rush, take away elements or manipulate the physical reactions in the body. As a mover it is in my nature to keep the flow of motion in an ongoing state, which prevents me from having moments that illustrate the full intention of a single movement. Often while in the rehearsal process, the need to keep moving prevented newly uncovered images and ideas from being investigated and fulfilled. Again and again, I would have unsettling feelings about moments where new discoveries were being neglected. What I realized is that these feelings of agitation were my unconscious speaking out.

When one finally realizes what it means to let things breathe, to give them their time to shine and to resonate, the dance is able to speak. One has to yield and to let go of the work and to honor the dance that is present. I gained an understanding of how to sense my need for motion and how that often prompted the “on-going-ness” in my choreographic work. Using these

observations helped to further my understanding on how these instinctive feelings could be used as part of the creative process.

## CHAPTER 4

### COACHING

I was highly interested and passionate about coaching the emotional intent *Fallen Inside*, as I believed it would be the way to create vibrant emotional expression on stage. It was through coaching that I hoped to get the dancers to gain an embodied familiarity of my experience with loneliness. However, the challenge I faced was the reality of how much of an emotional invocation was necessary in order to make these physical experiences come alive.

Dealing with an emotional subject like loneliness, I was at a loss for words that could describe the experience. I turned to experiential exercises to help the dancers understand the experience of feeling lonely. The intention behind these exercises was to also connect the theory of loneliness to physical sensations, so that the execution of the movement could be textured accordingly. During the half-way point in the rehearsal process, I realized I did not have a creative or personal history with the dancers and as a result lacked an emotional connection with them. Without an emotional relationship, I was limited in what I could expect or ask from them. Having realized that the dancers' commitment was not on the personal level, I began to question: does

one need a close and trusting relationship with the dancers in order to create work that is deeply personal?

I tried to bring the dancers more into the process after that. I asked the dancers to close their eyes, to picture themselves in a dark room, alone. I asked for them to see the space, feel its emptiness and to see themselves searching and reaching out in front of them. I wanted them to tune into the sensitivity of their skin and aliveness of breathe, so that the slightest breeze would create a sensorial reaction and in turn summon the slightest aperture for an emotional response.

I realized that you cannot rush an experiential process which asks the individual to invest in the experience in an authentic manner; the experience is not a series of steps to be followed. I rushed the process and I felt that the dancers were not able to grasp a concrete physical experience that would help them to relate to the movements emotionally. An example included in my process draws an experience in which the dancers are asked to imagine themselves in a dark room in search of another person. They were asked to create an environment, place themselves in it and to reflect on the sensations incurred by the experience. When used with consistency in the rehearsal, this process can help integrate the personal experiences of the choreographer and dancers, by asking them not only to connect to one's experience, but to also tap into their own. I now see that experiential exercises combined with personal reflection are the inroads to cultivating empathy in the creative process.

Furthermore, in my most recent work *The Road to Remembrance*, I was able to implement methods that were more inclusive. While making *The Road to Remembrance*, I realized that by making the choreographic process one-sided and less inclusive, I was muting a shared process that encouraged an empathetic creative relationship. A practice included in this new project was asking the dancers to create phrases and problem solve on their own. I was sharing the responsibility of creating and forming of the work. Methods like asking dancers to create their own movement and to share their own experiences, although not revolutionary, nonetheless help focus the level of commitment by the dancers. Situating a strong level of commitment to the work is integral in helping to form mood and tone in the work.

In my reflection on *The Road to Remembrance*, I realized that by providing the dancers simple images in place of descriptions of complex emotional states, they were able to have more access to these emotions and their embodiment. I discovered that providing examples of physical effects that rise of deeply felt emotional surges, like crying intensely, helped their cognitive ability to associate their own experience to the work. In essence, a simple approach to complex systems provided an easier inroad to an embodied subject.

From the inside out, to me, the attempt of relating an emotional tone to the movement was not successful in the context of *Fallen Inside*. However, having seen the dance on video, the dancers were in fact engaged in the

dance. For me there was a clear intention in the group, although whether that was clear to the audience is a different question.

In watching the dancers in the last stage of the rehearsal process, I realized that they were not grasping the concepts of Direct Space and Strong Weight. To me these two factors work to categorize a strong grounding, and it is also what I associate with a demeanor of confidence. First, I encouraged the dancers to dance with space and envision their bodies approaching specific points in space while following attentively the pathway of the movement.

In trying to access their Strong Weight, I requested dancers to play with sound. Breath was ultimately the instigator for that Strong Weight, as it would provide them an internal connection to feeling Strong and Weighted. The dancers would focus on expelling a loud grunt and switching between high and low pitch. These experiences helped clarify and define a difference between feeling strong and being grounded to not being aware of the two. Of course, these associations and preferences are my own and are by no means definitive, as someone else may have experienced my observations differently.

Coaching was the thread that connected my experience to the performance. Coaching the emotional intent of the piece was the most vulnerable component of the choreographic process. I poured my physical experience with the subject into my coaching and relived the experience for the third time. The first two times included the theoretical and creative research on loneliness, and my experience with being a dancer in the work.

In comparing the process for *Fallen Inside* and how it differs from that of *The Road to Remembrance*, I realize how coaching is not about directing the body to become explicitly emotive about a single idea. I realize that coaching is about the process of gaining access to all of the life experience that can affect a moment at any given time. As performers, we rely on the ability to consciously weave through blocks that prevent us from letting our most fragile human element, the ability to feel, from being seen. But, when we are able to surrender to that, we are able to transcend from mere movers to illustrations of what it is to live and to feel the good and the bad. Coaching and being coached is a product of time and a willingness to expose oneself. But most of all it is about the willingness to share oneself.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINAL REFLECTIONS

*We move through a wide range of feelings, thoughts, bodily changes as they are shifting and releasing the patterns which will lead to a paradigm/life view shift. When, where and how they are affected is really not predictable, but with close scrutiny we will notice various areas of our lives becoming softer, more manageable, more enjoyable, more personally successful (Leventhal16).*

The over-arching intent of the work *Fallen Inside* was to act as a choreographic study about emotional isolation as a product of loneliness. I feel the work was a success on two levels: as a production and as process for introspective healing. As a production, all of the elements created an event of technical finesse; images came alive and the dancers were embodied extensions on the subject of loneliness. In the end, the piece found breath and the choreography found a form that spoke of loneliness. The work was a successful representation of a system that provides its participants the opportunity to grow. Creative growth also includes the ability to recognize instances in the choreographic process that limit the expressive flow of the work.

For example, being a dancer in the piece provided me with a point of view that questioned the cast's ability to be emotive during the performance. I realized their devotion to the work would be only physical. What I desired was a combination of the physical and emotional, but how could I achieve such a central goal? I often asked myself, "I got them to move but how could I get them to feel?" In my reflections I realized I had not provided enough experiences to guide the dancers into a state where they were able to understand my experience firsthand or to feel like they had ownership of the piece. They had no personal association to the subject, only to themselves as dancers trying to accomplish the task as performers.

What I have come to realize is that the dance was what it needed to be at that point in my life and that I was giving myself the opportunity to embody feelings of self-restraint, social disconnection and emotional detachment, which were far more essential to the core of the work and to the makeup of my creative identity. In fact the lack of emotional responsiveness from the dancers augmented the experience of reliving instances of isolation, and emotional desperation. It was in fact the lack of emotional investment that granted me the opportunity to relive my experience with loneliness.

I created an environment full of rejection, moments of self-professed failure, feelings of not being loved or wanted, and finally, I had created a way to interpret my own collapse. Creating an environment filled with insecurities was a result of the choreographic process being influenced by behavioral patterns that rose out of an inability to create trusting social bonds outside of

the studio. Some of these social patterns include a belief that the dancers were always judging me. Even in the core of the creative process, doubt was always present. Doubt that the dancers were not enjoying the work, that they did not respect me as the choreographer. These feelings, stemming from dispositions of self-professed failure, though intimidating, pushed me to take command of the work. In the course of the rehearsal process, I was able to gain confidence and the strength to make decisions free of doubt.

The work was no longer just another choreographic piece; it had become a way to face a series of instances in my role as a creator that were often unexplained. My choreographic process had become an unconscious habit, but being able to sense how emotional tones were having an effect on my decision process, changed the manner in which I choreographed. I was able to develop a stronger sense of confidence, something that I wasn't able to do before in my creative research. In addition, I believe that now I am able to listen more to the work laid in front of me, to let ideas that I am already investigating to flourish. I have learned to become more conscious of what I am saying with my choreographic work.

It is true, language is power and I had just experienced that first hand. Moving and talking about those feelings as a means to inspire movement that then needed to be supported by further dialogue allowed me to bridge between the unknown and my conscious self. Bridging between the two helped me realize that choreography is not just about me, that unless the work is a solo performed by me, the choreography belongs to everyone involved. It was

here that I learned how to make the process more inclusive, less threatening and a catalyst for personal growth. I was able to break past the ideal of thinking that the work was mine alone, that I was made responsible for the end product, to being able to stand back and let the process guide the work. It helped me grow as an individual, consequently as an artist and in the long run as a more empathetic human being.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“The real spiritual progress of the aspirant is measured by the extent to which he achieves inner tranquility.”- Swami Sivananda

From our prenatal stages, movement is the main identifier of life. We move as a product of breath and out of our desire to find sustenance. As we grow we move because we can, commonly with a lack of awareness of the possibilities for expressivity that are intertwined in our daily interactions. We forget the most basic elements that make up who we are as physical beings. Dance reconnects us to that lost self and in the process works to connect the whole of our identity.

We live in an era of social isolation, where our ability to reach to our neighbor and connect with them can be limited by social networks. The ways in which feelings are shared can be viewed as socially unacceptable because culturally we choose to not listen to others, but to force them to listen to our grievances. In reality, we do not validate emotions but more so glorify their absence or find the necessity to put them into neat and 'fixable' categories. In turn our experience of sharing an emotional phenomenon with sympathy and empathy are far less frequent. Often, the absence of sympathy and empathy results in a person who identifies as someone who is lonely to be considered socially unappealing and weak.

These acts of emotional isolation often filter into our microexistence, and as a result, a cycle of social isolation and rejection is reinforced. By placing that which makes us feel most vulnerable and is deeply personal on the stage, as choreographers and performers we are attempting to connect with the audience. I know that I strive in some way or another, consciously or unconsciously, to share enough of who I am so that others recognize they are not alone. Our ability to express, discuss and create work based on intimate experience helps break taboos of what is socially acceptable. If we cannot speak up about these emotions, how else can we learn about how we all share similar experiences? By sharing part of who we are with others, we learn how to care for each other. Caring is primarily an emotional state, and a resource for a better life.

In my creative process, I began from a very nebulous place by speaking about my feelings and then forming a choreographic work that translated these feelings into movement. In turn, I was able to recognize the strength I received from the act of choreographing as I revisited a time of emotional hardship. The creative process, granted me the opportunity to glorify an imperfect experience; that I could not live my life avoiding my emotions and their effects in my life. This experience also encouraged me to function as a more empathetic person towards others.

It taught me the value of creative honesty while using deeply personal subjects for choreography. How one must be willing to surrender to the past in order to create a transparent piece of work that reveals the bare essence of

the experience. Ultimately it revealed how using the concept of consciousness as a choreographic tool can serve to ignite, within the individual, a type of confidence and trust about the work and role as an artist. Furthermore, having the ability to trust the work as it unfolds, the creative process and the conscious decisions making process, allows for the act of creating to be seen as more formed and with a clearer intent behind all elements that make up a work. Finally, the combination of these elements grants the ability to communicate one's creative voices with sound reasoning.

Certainly the process of becoming more in tune with my consciousness in the choreographic process was illuminating and pertinent to my work. For this reason, being able to listen to the work, finding the moments that matter and support the tone of the work, to me have, become more clearly accessible. Soon after choreographing *Fallen Inside*, I was honored with the opportunity to work with the Utah Regional Ballet in Orem, UT. I worked with the company in creating a work titled, *The Road to Remembrance*, in conjunction with their Choreography Design competition, in which the work won second place. This was the first project where I was able to integrate the lessons learned from the process of *Fallen Inside*. I found that by taking the time to witness the work in front of me, I was able to sense the structure with greater ease, to rest and give attention to tender moments that otherwise I would have dismissed early on. The way that I worked with the dancers, I believe, was even more compassionate.

I surrendered myself to the experience the dancers provided in rehearsal. I allowed myself to give up control as the choreographer, by focusing my attention to understanding how a sense of heightened awareness in the choreographic process ultimately helped dictate the end product. In addition, I focused on how the steps from Chapter 2 about reflective practice in choreography, helped me to actually enjoy the act of choreographing.

The most effective tool I had as part of this new process was the ability to let the dance speak. Sensations of unease, comfort or what may have felt as a bit of congestion were moments that needed to my attention. My sensations (or my creative unconscious) were trying to say something. For example, halfway through the choreographic process, I began to see moments where the flow of how relationships were developing felt congested. I instinctively felt that more time and breath were needed in order to allow the images presented to settle before moving onto the next idea. This process of stopping to recognize a sensation, playing with whether it needed more time or it was not needed at all, was a pivotal component of how *The Road to Remembrance* was created.

I was also more open about creating a state of mind that supported an environment that was safe; if there was judgment while in the rehearsal process, it was not for me. I had something valuable to offer, which was my experience and that was enough. As a result, I was able to honor the building blocks of choreography, which include the deconstruction of material, frustration and even brief moments of loneliness. I gave myself the permission

to not fight the creative process but to embrace it. Ultimately as a choreographer and performer the dance is about you, from you, and you are of the dance.

As I aspire to further invest in the field of choreography, I strive to create work that speaks of the power found in revealing the unconscious realm within. I want to make work that reframes contradictory and evolutionary elements that are pertinent to the human experience, which includes the desire to connect and reconnect with self. Finally, as I move into future phases of my involvement in the field of dance, I strive to share the possibilities for personal change and growth that can be a part of the creative process, choreography and movement.

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