

DANCING TOWARD HUMANITY: ACCESSING EMBODIMENT  
IN ARTIFICE WITHIN THE CHOREOGRAPHIC  
AND PERFORMATIVE PROCESSES

by

Lynn Marie Bobzin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
The University of Utah  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Modern Dance

The University of Utah

August 2013

Copyright © Lynn Marie Bobzin 2013

All Rights Reserved



## ABSTRACT

This thesis research investigates the role of actualized embodiment in the choreographic creative process in order to articulate and access visceral, raw, poetic essences of humanity inside performance. How does one find honesty inside of an experience that is crafted with artifice, or, actualization within representation? Through the research conducted inside my personal choreographic processes for the solo *Slough* and my thesis work *States of Flesh*, this thesis will investigate how vulnerability, empathy and specificity of experience can become pathways toward actualizing embodiment within artifice.

This thesis is dedicated to any artist who embraces their inner grit, their raw humanity,  
and lives vulnerably in the fullness of their being.

“Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth”

Pablo Picasso

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
PREFACE.....	viii
Chapters	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Dancing my humanity.....	1
Crafting art from artifice.....	3
Embodiment and “being doing”.....	5
II. FINDING HUMAN ESSENCES.....	8
Dissecting vulnerability.....	8
Reaching empathy.....	11
Specificity in experiencing.....	13
III. FRAMING THE CREATIVE SPACE.....	19
Entering in.....	19
Tuning bodies.....	20
Making contact.....	21
Improvisation.....	24
IV. TRANSLATING PROCESS INTO PRODUCT.....	27
Section I: <i>Strangers Together</i> .....	27
Section II: <i>Home</i> .....	29
Section III: <i>Exposed</i> .....	32
V. CONCLUSION.....	36
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	40

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude toward my thesis committee members: Satu Hummasti, Stephen Koester, and Juan Carlos Claudio for their support, creative feedback, and guidance in helping me wade through the muck and the mire when concepts felt beyond articulation. To my dearest mentors, Holly Seitz Marchant, Mikey Thomas and Abby Fiat, thank you for being the influences in my life that have illuminated pathways of self-discovery and transformation throughout the years.

A heartfelt thank you to my cast of dancers who lived wholly inside this process, met challenges head on, and investigated the essences of their own humanity in each and every rehearsal. It is because of your open hearted dedication and willful risk taking that my passion for this research blazes.

Special thanks to every friend, family member, faculty member, and stranger who has asked about this process along the way, allowing me to come into a deeper relationship with this research. As always, thank you to my devoted mother and father for nurturing the artist that I am.

## PREFACE

*The steps fall away. I am no longer giving a second thought about where to place an arm, a foot...my breath is expansive and three-dimensional as I inhabit the universe. I am surrounded by space and I define space. I occupy. I am present. I am alive. My skin is sensate and electric. I am drowning in a singular moment in real time and space, possessing and recirculating energy in the room. My breath hitches in my throat and I am in a state of being that is beyond any word I can define. I am moving beyond choreographic structure, beyond content and form, beyond artifice. I invite all sensation. I embrace any reaction. I cleave myself open and shed all self-censoring behavior; I am unbound.*

This is how I come to understand embodiment when I move, most often when improvising. I feel freed from the do's and don'ts of choreography and the watchful eyes of an audience. I can silence the inner dialogue in my mind that distracts me from listening to what my body wants to say. There are no rules or mistakes, only the experiential journey in the moment. During these moments I feel I am truly dancing with a fullness of presence and an actualized embodiment, which fuels my desire to move. The less frequently these experiences occur, the more disconnected I become from myself as an individual, as a dancer, and from the profession as a whole.

Embodiment is a term I have heard referenced frequently in technique classes, in creative processes and in theoretical conversations, almost in an effort to articulate an

idea that is rather cloudy. In my opinion, many people refer to embodiment, though few sit down to decipher it, question how it works, or stew on what it really means for them.

Embodiment can and is arguably achieved in a variety of ways. However, I want to seek what constitutes actualized embodiment. Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg (2010) explain,

the embodiment of movement by performers is a more complex process than the word suggests. It is more than getting movement into the performers' bodies, more than their physical muscle, bone and skin. Embodiment of movement involves the whole person, a person conscious of being a living body, living that experience, giving intention to the movement material. (p. 7)

Technically, any experience can be embodied, because to experience phenomenon means one has to also exist, and existence is corporeal. This is why I prefer the term actualized embodiment, because it suggests more than physicalization.

I define actualized embodiment as a genuine, outward manifestation of an internal occurrence through experiencing phenomenon with the full potential of one's own being. It is a highly sensitive and receptive presence that is viscerally sensate and kinesthetically perceptive in the moment. Actualized embodiment extends beyond corporeality into a merging of mind, body and spirit. It is the convergence of mental, physical and emotional stimuli culminating in a sense of meta-self. The individual is attuned not only to their own three-dimensionality as a human being, but to their coexistence with a force extending beyond the self, on a communal and cosmic scale. It is a vehicle for deepening the intrinsic understanding of one's own humanity. Throughout this thesis, when referring to the term embodiment, it is in the context of this definition of actualized embodiment.

I began formal technical training in dance when I began college, and had ample time to devote to choreography and improvisational play inside the studio. Later, when I devoted less time to improvisation and more time attempting to embody ideas from a source outside of my own body, I felt a shift in my relationship to dancing. It became tempestuous and arduous. It seemed as if I was teetering on the brink of collapse due to dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment, but I never had the heart to quit the art. I was frustrated by this apparent inability to embody material I considered to be artificial, because it could never come from an honest place inside my body, because it was not generated from my body. For me, dancing without embodying is like drinking saltwater to quench thirst. I can never be sated. I questioned if there was a way to work that would allow me to find embodiment more readily, both in my choreographic and performative processes, which led me on a path towards this creative research.

“Chapter I: Introduction” shares several personal experiences that helped me discover initial thesis research questions. This chapter also provides context and definitions for the concepts of embodiment and “being doing” as described by Sondra Fraleigh, Eric Morris, Erich Schiffmann and Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg, while also seeking to establish a deeper definition of my personal understanding of embodiment.

“Chapter II: Finding Human Essences” discusses facets of vulnerability and empathy through research by Brené Brown, Anne Bogart, Carol Press, and Nancy Eisenberg. By working to dissect ideas about vulnerability and empathy, we begin to understand how it can hold transformative power for the individual dancing body. Also within this chapter, I will discuss how qualitative and emotional specificity can lead to

deeper visceral experiences by analyzing the creative processes of Pina Bausch, Johannes Wieland, and my personal experiences inside creating the solo *Slough*.

In “Chapter III: Framing the Creative Space,” I will examine the pathways through which embodiment can be accessed inside the choreographic creative process. The research continues to expand on principles of “being doing”, empathy, vulnerability and qualitative/emotional specificity in relation to embodiment, and how these concepts move from theory into practice. Drawing from my experiences inside rehearsals during the creation of my thesis work *States of Flesh*, presented during the Fall 2012 Graduate Thesis Concert at the University of Utah, I will compartmentalize the various facets of this creative process’s preliminary stages, and how each one has contributed to my understanding of how we can arrive at embodiment within artifice.

“Chapter IV: Translating Process into Product” explores my creative process once it moved towards creating the final choreographic work, and how concepts explored within the preliminary stages of the process were transferred to the final product. Each section in *States of Flesh* is discussed in terms of how it addressed these facets of vulnerability, empathy, and visceral specificity of experiencing.

It is with great hope that others who may be experiencing similar challenges with embodiment inside of constructed work will find this research beneficial and possibly helpful in aiding them to discover a new approach on how to move more openly, viscerally, and with a fullness of presence in the moment. Another aim of this research is to create a larger discourse on what it means to be fully embodied when dancing, in a practice that is largely considered an already embodied art form. How can dance be embodied beyond the physical act of executing steps? What does one gain as a mover

when searching for true self embodiment within material? Hopefully, these questions will be addressed within the conclusion of this thesis from illuminations inside the research.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Dancing my humanity

During the fall of 2010, I came into a truer, more transparent relationship with my physical body, and a more vulnerable essence of my own being. Andrea Miller, artistic director and choreographer of New York City based company Gallim Dance, was serving as a guest artist for the University of Utah's Department of Modern Dance at the time. As a guest artist, she was setting a choreographic work on selected students for the department's biannual Performing Dance Company concert. Having been cast as a dancer in Andrea's piece, *Chanson*, I was transformed by simply being inside her creative process. In one moment inside rehearsal with her, everything I knew to be true about how I embodied movement shifted.

I had been given a short solo during the last section of *Chanson*. When running through the piece, there was a moment towards the end of my solo where I crossed to center stage, knelt down on one knee with my back to the audience, and dragged my fingertips backwards across the floor. The imagery Andrea had given me for that specific moment was to imagine raking my fingers through sand while recalling a memory, any memory. I was fixated on how to manifest the experience and sensation of this image through my body. In that moment Andrea began calling out to me, shouting one sentence

over and over. “Lynn, be a person! Be a person! Lynn, be a person!” I froze, trying to register what it was she meant. My first thought was, “I am a person.”

Then, I exhaled, and perhaps out of exhausted frustration, I let go. I surrendered to the moment, and gave up everything I was hanging onto. My body relaxed, my chest softened, and my posture hunched forward slightly. The gesture became more tender as I felt the invisible sand sifting between each finger. Memories of my past flooded the moment. I recalled being a child at Navarre Beach with my mother; of our night walks along the wet shoreline, smearing our feet and hands across the sand to watch how the granules sparkled like glitter under the moon’s glow. It was a matter of seconds how quickly my brain translated that sensorial memory to my body’s experience of the moment. Swiftly my eyes welled up with tears as I gave myself permission to relive and miss that memory. In an instant, I was rendered emotionally vulnerable and embodying the moment.

“Yes! Beautiful!” Her voice rang out over the music like a beacon of transcendence. Before that moment I had been caught up with the execution of the choreography, the precision, the placement, the form and aesthetic of how it looked. Now, my focus was purely on how it felt. I found how to give weight and presence to the importance of that moment, to share what it meant to me as a human being. Andrea wanted me to be more human and show an honesty and a transparency behind my experience of the moment, not a falsified representation. She wanted it to feel real to me so she could empathize with my experience. I felt I was moving honestly, vulnerably and viscerally, and sensed that I had found the same embodied experience similar to my relationship with improvisation.

There was a realization in that sliver of a moment; I found a way to dance my humanity. Could this phenomenon be repeated? It led to me question, how does one find honesty inside of an experience that is crafted with artifice, or, actualization within representation? How does one access embodiment within artifice inside the choreographic and performative processes?

### Crafting art from artifice

Artists tend to debate the question “Does art imitate life, or does life imitate art?” Rather, I think it is a matter of *when* art imitates life and *when* life imitates art. There is fluidity between living and art making, and I believe it is within this fluidity that artists create. The idea of imitation implies that one thing is a representation of another thing, and not an actual or original version. Art possesses artifice because it is consciously structured, shaped, and crafted into a final product. However, the same artistic product that was built on artifice also possesses some sort of integrity, some pure intention behind its creation. I find that there is always a seed of truth to be unearthed within the artifice of art. My experience with Andrea Miller’s work was incredibly specific and crafted with artifice, yet, it felt palpable and real each and every time I performed the work. The experience was always new, and I embodied it readily despite its constructed nature. How did I manage to fully invest in her material and allow my true expressive voice as a mover to live loudly inside of that work?

Dances remain etched in my mind because of a dancers’ presence; a presence radiating with transparency and intention. One of the most powerful works I witnessed was a restaging of Liz Lerman’s 1986 work, *Still Crossing*, at Washington University in

St. Louis. Lerman is a prominent choreographer, researcher, and lecturer, most known for her engagement with the nondancer community and intergenerational casting. Lerman choreographed *Still Crossing* as an homage to the immigrant experience and the hardships faced during migration to America. The performers flooded the stage, a diverse sea of bodies and personalities. *En masse* they performed a breathtaking gestural sequence that at first glance, was well rehearsed and visually overwhelming. However, upon singling out individual dancers with my focus, I noticed how each mover executed the choreography very differently from one another. They appeared to revel in a sense of ownership and freedom inside of their personal embodiment of the same material. I wondered how Lerman generated space for them inside of the rehearsal process to fully access this.

A central underpinning of the piece is how these people are individual components that form the greater whole of a diverse community. There was specificity and clarity without form appearing restrictive. There was uniformity without conformity. Each and every moment held a weighted importance. Lerman had exposed a deep vein of humanity to me, coupled with a rawness and enlivenment.

I believe this kind of approach to dancing requires an honesty and open intimacy within embodiment. Director and choreographer Anne Bogart states, “in art, the truth is always manifest in the experience of it...it is all visible” (2001, p. 120). I find that if the experiential process (from the beginning creative stages all the way through to the performative stage) is richly cultivated from within the dancer, an embodied experience can take place.

### Embodiment and “being doing”

Humans are complex, diverse, unpredictable beings. We live, breathe, think, and feel, deeply and intuitively throughout our existences. How do we tether ourselves and one another to the deepest, most honest parts of our humanity as beings within a constructed work of art? Dance theorist Sondra Fraleigh argues, “a basic issue in dance is how to link human agency with movement form and expression” (2004, p. 15). As a dancer, I want to discover the methods I can employ to attain embodiment. How does one move from a state of “showing doing” into “being doing”?

The idea of “being doing” is relegated to the realm of metaphysics, which Fraleigh explains as, “a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of being and beings, existence, time, space, movement, and causality” (2004, p.1). I am transfixed by the idea that instead of “being doing,” we are often “showing doing.” It is my understanding that “showing doing” is more performative and generic, while “being doing” is genuine and encompasses an embodied state. Instead of moving as transparent, vulnerable bodies, we create representations of our own humanness (“showing-doing”) rather than actualizing it (“being-doing”). Author of *A Choreographer’s Handbook*, Jonathan Burrows states,

there are other ways of experiencing or thinking about the body than steps or movement. Many dance and performance practitioners build their relationship with the performing body upon other, perhaps less easily definable, approaches and strategies. These include working with experiential or imagined states of being— physical, emotional, or mental. (2010, p. 99)

Personally, I find embodiment is more readily available for me to access when I am working beyond the artifice of the material and translating it into states of being. Eric Morris explains that in order to come into realization of these experiential states of being, there needs to be an attainment of truth within artifice.

No matter what technique an artist uses, he or she cannot create reality from any other place but reality itself...this happens when the actor reaches a state of life in which he or she is experiencing everything that is felt, in which the life that is there can be expressed from moment to moment, in which the actor does no more nor less than what is felt, and can remain comfortable in that state. (p. 13)

In essence, “being doing” correlates with being open to the fullness of an experience, and a commitment to a fullness of presence within the moment. It comes from giving the body permission to focus on what is really being communicated by seeking to understand and experience what one is asked to be or feel.

The idea of actualization versus representation hinges on the genuine presence of embodiment (or lack thereof). I know when I am moving embodied, because I have experienced fleeting, yet euphoric moments when my skin is flush with pulsating energy, and during these moments my presence is truly “being doing.” How could I possibly recreate this feeling every time I am inside a movement experience? As a human and an artist, I am a meaning maker, seeking to craft meaning out of my experiences, creative work, and emotions. It seems like a disservice if I am not actualizing embodiment when dancing because it loses meaning. If I can embody movement fully, I can make meaning from it and give it a purpose greater than myself. I can assign it experiential value; making it more personal, palpable and permeable.

Embodiment is linked to corporeality, but Preston-Dunlap and Sanchez-Colberg define corporeality beyond its textbook definition by explaining, “corporeality sees the human body as a body that is personal, social, emotional...as well as an agent of motion, and one that is given a context, a space, which is in itself socio-personal” (2010, p. 9). If embodiment taps into all of these factors of the individual as well, then in effect, embodiment engages corporeality beyond a living, breathing body as a singular vehicle to

execute movement material. I believe choreographic works can deal with corporeality in the physical sense, but I do not believe all of them deal with corporeality in the way it is defined here. Preston-Dunlap and Sanchez-Colberg further explain, “where the dance’s conceptual content has an effect on its material form, where there is an emphasis on emotion and, with it a focus on the performer’s presence as a central factor of the event, a corporeal work emerges” (p. 9).

Actualized embodiment, corporeality, and “being doing” share central features; the emphasis on experiencing (feeling or emotion) and an invested presence in the moment. It is more than simply occupying one’s own body. So how does one begin to reach a state of being-doing? Eric Morris (1981) uses trust as a vehicle. Morris explains,

Trust comes from a step-by-step process of finding out who you are and what you feel and learning that you have the right to BE and express who you are.....it comes from finding out how you feel in every living and acting situation and allowing those impulses to come out, no matter what you think the people around you expect...It comes from leaving yourself open to ridicule because you are BEING what you feel and the others around you are playing it close to the vest. (p. 60)

By embodying and accessing “being doing” and reaching toward actualization, perhaps one can render the veil between audience and performer more transparent by allowing a deeper humanistic connectivity to the movement evolve.

## CHAPTER II

### FINDING HUMAN ESSENCES

#### Dissecting vulnerability

Decoding a concept such as vulnerability can be complicated, as it resides within each one of us differently, and typically on a phenomenological basis. Gaining a tangible understanding of vulnerability requires an open dialogue about what qualifies as being vulnerable, dissecting the multiple meanings vulnerability owns, and decoding the complex emotional facets vulnerability entangles. By decoding vulnerability and understanding how it affects individuals, one may access greater embodiment through embracing, rather than stifling our vulnerabilities.

The *Webster's New World Collegiate Dictionary* defines vulnerable as “2 a) open to criticism or attack [a *vulnerable* reputation] b) easily hurt, as by adverse criticism; sensitive c) affected by a specific influence, temptation, etc.” (1999, p. 1604).

According to this definition, being vulnerable entails being assailable in some fashion. Risk-taking can engender vulnerability, because fear may be attached to the unknown outcomes of opening up. In any case, vulnerability requires an openness of some kind, and an ability to be permeable to the experience. Carol Press defines vulnerability “solely from the perspective of the openness to experience; the essential quality of vulnerability

is the capacity to be open” (2002, p. 80). The risk comes into play when the outcome is unpredictable, which can cause fear of judgement, criticism, and ridicule, or close off the ability to readily trust oneself or others.

In American culture, vulnerability conjures up connotations of weakness and can harbor negative experiences for those who do not discuss or are not comfortable with vulnerability. People have become afraid to be considered vulnerable. Researcher Brené Brown echos this statement by explaining,

I think people still struggle with the term *vulnerability*. We equate vulnerability with weakness, and in our culture, there are very few things we abhor more than weakness...vulnerability is not weakness. Sometimes we are afraid that acknowledging something exists is going to make it worse. (2007, p.77)

I agree with Brown that vulnerability is not interchangeable with weakness, but rather exposes individual truths, and I am interested in how these individual truths can be converted into a source of transformative power.

Vulnerability is a state of emotion experienced either voluntarily or involuntarily. In either instance, it harbors the potential to be traumatic, as it can expose a previously unrecognized truth about oneself. Vulnerability publicizes the private facets of our personal individuality, and it takes strength and courage to open oneself up to this. Inside vulnerability there is no space to hide or pretend, so it demands honesty. When I am vulnerable, I am casting off the armor that guards my emotions and obstructs my real identity as a human being. I am saying that I am enough, emotionally naked and transparent. Being rendered vulnerable can be an unfamiliar and uncomfortable place, because it forces one to come into a direct relationship with an intimate sense of self. If the perception of self is incongruent to the unveiling of truth inside moments of

vulnerability, then greater transparency and clarity about an individual's identity, personality, values, fears, struggles or hardships may surface. Perhaps there is an aversion to being or being seen as vulnerable because exposing the truth might displease or embarrass us.

However, if we consciously and willingly throw ourselves into states of embarrassment, we can create opportunities to transform genuine and embodied moments into new self-learning experiences. Anne Bogart (2001) advocates for pursuing and opening oneself up to opportunities for embarrassment within artistic choice making by claiming,

To avoid embarrassment is a natural human tendency. Feeling truly exposed to others is rarely a comforting sensation. But if what you do or make does not embarrass you sufficiently, then it is probably not personal or intimate enough...embarrassment is a good omen because it signifies that you are meeting the moment fully, with an openness to the new feelings it will engender. (p. 116)

If we return to the definition of the word vulnerable, we can surmise that Bogart's theory on embarrassment can be linked to vulnerability via the openness she speaks about. Embracing embarrassment is a path toward accessing vulnerability, while providing personal and honest truth inside of an experience.

Judgement and fear are also two common triggers associated with vulnerability, but the context for judgement and fear can be entirely situational. If judgement and fear are embraced via the willingness to be open and vulnerable, there is an opportunity for empowerment, transformation and transcendence. Yoga master and author Erich Schiffmann explains how moving past judgement/fear allows for greater clarity of experience.

Forgiveness is the deliberate withdrawal of judgement. It's the deliberate letting go of criticism, condemnation, and *conditions-of-needing-to-be-met-before-I-see-you-anew* with regard to yourself, others, and everything else, in favor of seeing the deepest truth. It's about removing the filter in order to see clearly. Not judging yourself or others puts you in the position of perceiving accurately. (1996, p. 28-29)

Similar to accessing “being doing,” there must be trust in order to fully embody an experience we may approach with apprehension due to judgement or fear. Bogart explains, “we must trust ourselves to enter this abyss with openness, with trust in ourselves, despite the unbalance and vulnerability” (2001, p. 83). Trust can seem like the antithetical response when dealing with judgement and fear, but it is almost necessary in order to function alongside judgement and fear. Bogart further explains,

In an interview with *The New York Times*, one actor, William Hurt, said, “Those who function out of fear, seek security, those who function out of trust, seek freedom.” These two possible agendas dramatically influence the creative process. The atmosphere in the rehearsal hall, therefore can be imbued with either fear or trust. Are the choices made in rehearsal based on a desire for security or a search for freedom? (2001, p. 83)

I have found that I am able to will myself vulnerable in the moments when I am the most secure inside of who I am. There is no fear in opening myself up to others, so I seek opportunities for freedom through ownership, transformation, and uncovering the essences that comprise my humanity, which lies within the ability to become vulnerable.

### Reaching empathy

Vulnerability can also create a pathway toward empathy. In order to discover how vulnerability opens up space for empathy, one must first discover how empathy functions. Nancy Eisenberg defines empathy as, “an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and that is

identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel” (2000, p. 677). While I agree with Eisenberg, her definition seems impersonal and cold. I prefer how Anne Bogart deconstructs the meaning of empathy by explaining,

The German word for empathy, *empfinden*, suggests incisive action. *Empfinden*: to feel *into*. To arrive at empathy, you *enter feelingly*. Empathy in this sense is not something that happens to you; rather it is an action that you take in the world. You will yourself into another person or event. (2007, p. 66)

If empathy is related to tapping into personal lived experience in order to establish a relative connection to another individual’s experience, one must be open to experience, i.e., become vulnerable, and share that experience with someone else in order to create an opportunity for empathy. This includes present experiences, but by allowing oneself to openly access memories, images, and emotions associated with past experiences, it incorporates all that comprises human substance.

The common denominator between definitions of empathy is that it entails a sense of sharing an emotional experience. Empathy allows us to connect deeply to one another through feeling states, fortifying relationships and breeding deep understanding between individuals, but it requires a level of vulnerability and openness, trust, and omission of judgement. By being open and vulnerable, one can move towards empathy and cultivate an environment of intimate connection inside the creative space, making less space for dissonance, misunderstanding, and insensitivity. This environment becomes crucial when moving from the creative process into product. Bogart reasons,

This intimacy is the production’s emphatic baseline-its core and its attraction. A visually arresting, intellectually challenging, or dense production demands concomitant intimacy and vulnerability...The human heartbeat serves as the red thread through any theatrical labyrinth and will lead to the vulnerability at the center of the event. This humanity allows an audience to access the experience personally and intimately. (2007, 65)

This intimacy widens the space for a deeper knowing and empathetic understanding, breeding a stronger sense of community between people, which in turn can provide the individual with a more concrete sense of purpose and identity.

Empathy is yet another facet of being open to experiencing, and ultimately embodying. It erodes the protective armor we wear in order to distance ourselves from others. Empathy can be humbling by leveling understandings of experience and creating mutual territory. It can validate personal experience by reassuring us that we are not alone in the world.

#### Specificity in experiencing

If embodiment can be accessed through states of “being doing,” vulnerability and empathy, how are these concepts infused within the practice of specificity and artifice? Many dancers can embody specific choreography in rehearsal and performance easily. In fact, some dancers require specificity of form and codification of material in order to find freedom of embodiment. However, it does not feel intuitive to me to work this way.

As a dancer, I assess and learn movement qualitatively, metaphorically and emotionally in order to dance it viscerally. It is much harder for me to embody movement when it is given without qualitative information, metaphor, imagery or emotional states to access. This way of working has caused constant mental roadblocks for me when it came to learning material, because the information I needed to embody the material was not always provided, and it was my duty to fill in those blanks.

This led me to wonder if there was a way to choreograph the same way I desired to learn and embody material. I had to admit to myself that my choreography is actually

quite specific, focusing on clear intentionality within the working steps. What makes my process different from a choreographer whose material also contains specificity and clarity? Since no two individuals are the same, no two processes will be exactly the same. However, I think one differentiating factor within my choreographic process is that I deemphasize the specificity of form (visual aesthetic), and focus more on emphasizing the specificity of experiencing (qualitative states, imagery, and emotionality). My first exposure to working this way came when I least expected it.

In the fall of 2011, I had the privilege to serve as rehearsal assistant for guest artist Johannes Wieland at the University of Utah for the work *Everybody Likes Me!* The creation of the work was a volleying of explorations and sharing of discoveries rather than Johannes generating material for his dancers to reproduce. Wieland's movement and choreographic choices were quite specific and detail oriented, however, I recall him demonstrating movement material only a handful of times. The dancers generated a majority of the material via detailed instructions and questions. It was interesting to see how it became an exchanging of ideas, a melting pot of creativity and exploration between participants within the rehearsal space. Wieland approached the act of choreography fluidly, which meant that material could change and ideas could be scrapped as new ones would surface.

I remember the first rehearsal in which Wieland began to generate movement. He sat on the floor, and without demonstrating a single motion, he began to instruct the dancers on the physical action he wanted to take place. I was simultaneously shocked and intrigued. This way of working was a very different atmosphere than any of us had been exposed to previously. As the dancers processed his detailed instructions, each

partnership set to the task of interpreting the physical manifestation. Upon showing what material they had generated, the results were similar between the partnerships, yet each pair possessed idiosyncrasies within their execution that seemed unimportant to Wieland. These first moments of generating material later blossomed into a duet section within the middle of the piece.

It seemed that he was not as interested in specificity of placement, form, or a unified ensemble aesthetic. He consistently told the dancers to make the movement material “dirty,” and I immediately became smitten with his use of this word. Wieland encouraged the dancers to embody and perform the material in a way that made sense for them, and to rough up the material in order to dance it a way that felt full, raw, and honest from the inside out. He spent less time "cleaning" the aesthetic of the material and more time coaching the dancers on how to qualitatively approach to the material.

Reflecting on how my exposure to Johannes’ process has influenced my own, I realize that my technique and approach now values the ability to enter fully into the material. His method of working opened my eyes to realms of possibility I had previously closed off creatively. His work seemed more honest, and I wanted to find out how to bring that honesty to the forefront of my own work. In my pieces, I no longer press the dancers to perfect steps or mimic my execution, but rather to commit to something beyond just the choreography, to evoke felt emotions, to access personal stories and memories, and to execute movement in a way that elicits a visceral response. I never set strict parameters for the material’s form, but I do teach and set material, allowing it to be “dirty” like Wieland. By creating a blank space for them to fill in with the fullness of their embodiment, they can speak volumes inside of their own skin.

Another highly influential artist for me is the late choreographer Pina Bausch. Her processes generated work that was high in artifice, yet her dancers' experiences inside of her work seem palpable, visceral and raw. They dance with abandonment and vulnerability inside of specificity. It seems that Bausch had found a way to push her dancers to transcend the steps by emphasizing emotionality, quality, empathy and vulnerability. There is a deeply lived and felt understanding of what the material is communicating and what the sensing/feeling state of the performance should entail. Royd Climenhaga writes,

when asked how she selects dancers for her company, Bausch famously replied: "I'm not so interested in how they move, as to what moves them" (quoted in Schmidt 1984: 15-16)...Here was work that was not going to be based in technique...but on the emotional ground of the performers themselves, on what made them most human. (2009, p. 2)

I admire Bausch's response because it seems that she was crafting artifice from real phenomena rather than crafting representational reality from artifice. It is simply a differing approach to creating art. The more I researched and reflected on dance artists that I find inspiring, I started to carve out more of my own personal values about making work, one of which is an interest in kinesthetic impulse and intentionality.

In 2011, I created a solo titled *Slough*. Through that process, I discovered my interest was not what the form of the movement looked like, but the way in which it was achieved and executed. My interest was in the embodiment, which in turn gave rise to a specific aesthetic. Rehearsals were slow, not out of arduously judging or debating material to choreograph, but because the dancer and I were new to this way of researching movement invention. By asking the dancer a question or giving her a directive, I could see what would manifest in her body. The demonstrations of

choreography were used more to provide visual examples of imagery and adjectives in order to clarify qualitative states.

There is a moment within the piece where the dancer's right hand is clasped at the side of the neck, the gaze turned upwards. The hand becomes heavy, too heavy to resist, and it sloughs down the front of the body until the weight pulls the shoulder downward. The knees buckle under the pull of gravity towards the floor, and the dancer falls forward on all fours into the earth. She scrambles backwards and upright as the hand, desperately magnetized, returns to its starting position. The execution of these actions was framed as a cause and effect that happens within the body, rather than anticipating each movement in the sequence. I encouraged her to experience the weight of the hand as too heavy to bear, the sensation of contacting her own skin, and to the sloughing of the hand down the body. Beyond the choreography, I asked her to think of her own experiences inside of shame, and to allow those emotions to be the motivation for the movement. These factors allowed the dancer to concentrate on the qualitative forces shaping the movement, requiring a visceral presence. Instead of representing the concept, I challenged her to actualize the concept. Climenhaga speaks similarly of Bausch's approach by stating,

The mode of questioning and exploration that the rehearsal process embodies draws on basic assumptions: a concentration on experience as the way we are connected to the world, and a prioritization of process over product and content over technique. The questions are posed to lead toward and uncovering of experience rather than the way that experience may be expressed, and that process is revealed in the performance. (p. 53)

By focusing less on technique inside of choreography, I allow the body to react more intuitively to experiential sensations, creating space for the dancer to hone in on performing the work as honestly as possible. Greater individuality will manifest in

harnessing and emphasizing the experiences of the dancer and encourage a unique expressivity to emerge.

While it is unclear if embodiment can be taught, I believe that personal knowledge on how embodiment is achieved can be shared. By creating a space where techniques on accessing embodiment within the artifice of art are traded, new perspectives on how to approach, analyze and execute movement may be generated. It can deepen the discourse on how movement is experienced, and potentially further the evolution of how the innovation and immediacy of movement is investigated. The following chapters chronicle the stages of the creative process and performance of my choreographic work *States of Flesh*, and the quest for cultivating embodied experiences by artificial means.

## CHAPTER III

### FRAMING THE CREATIVE SPACE

#### Entering in

Rehearsals for *States of Flesh* began with a group of five very different people. Each individual possessed an eclectic training background in terms of experience and exposure, along with their own idiosyncratic movement styles. Most of them had never danced intimately with one another in the rehearsal space. The first rehearsal began in a circle, and I asked them to complete the statement, *I feel the most alive in my dancing when...* I wanted them to say the statement for themselves as honestly as they could. I also did this in part to see if any of my dancers were experiencing the same dilemmas that I was interested in researching.

To much surprise, I discovered that there was a similar desire among them to access enlivened feeling states inside more structured material, along with establishing an intimate connectivity to other individuals while moving. I knew it would require them to gaze into the depths of their experiences and emotions and transition from disconnection into connection with one another. In an attempt to access the embodiment I was searching for, emphasis would be placed on their experiences, emotions, memories, intuitions, and

interactions with one another. I became the architect, but they became the foundation, the scaffolding and the insulation that gave rise to the piece.

### Tuning bodies

The circle in which rehearsal started that first day became “home base” for each and every subsequent rehearsal. For several weeks, before even setting a single movement, rehearsals began with tuning exercises. In the early stages, the tuning exercises extended the entirety of the rehearsals. As the process progressed, the dancers entered the tuning exercises more readily, with such a willingness to take risks, trust one another, and connect with each other almost instantaneously.

The tuning exercises were more like guided improvisations that drew on my personal exposure to a collection of disciplines. The blending of my knowledge of yoga meditation, improvisation, somatics, and theater training served as a melting pot of concepts to serve as the structure for the tunings. Rehearsal would begin with each dancer sitting on the floor in a circle with the eyes closed. The dancers were instructed to focus simply on the rhythm and flow of their own breath cycles, while attempting to silence internal dialogue with the self.

As the breathing tuning progressed, I would encourage them to internally recite a popular meditation mantra, *as I inhale I take in a part of you, as I exhale I give you a part of myself*. This was to continue tuning into self awareness, while introducing an awareness of other bodily energies present in the space. Then, on their own timing and kinesthetic impulse, they were instructed to place one or both hands at the center of the sternum, applying slight pressure at the heart chakra, or *Anahata*. The dancers were

encouraged to focus on the sensation of pressure and the heat energy to generate an image of a bright, circular ball of light radiating in the space between the hands and sternum.

This simple act of taking time to tune into the self, the act of being with oneself on a deeply sensate level, was enough to elicit a high emotional response within several of the dancers. At different times throughout the process, a few became vulnerable to the point of tears and sobs. Other dancers tapped into spontaneous empathetic states by reaching out to comfort one another. Whether it was placing a hand on a knee or a full embrace, something inside of this sensate experience was powerful. It was in these moments that the tuning opened up themes of supporting and being supported by one another, and ultimately, empathy inside my choreographic explorations.

### Making contact

As the tunings gained headway, themes centered around contact and improvisational explorations developed. Inside subsequent rehearsals, the breath and heart space tuning began similarly, but I guided my dancers to go deeper. The tuning continued each and every rehearsal with the eyes closed, in order to center the focus around sensation and kinesthetic impulse. They were instructed to imagine a ball of light within the heart space warming the entire body, concentrating in the center of the circle, and tethering the energies of one dancer to another. At their own pace and using their internal impulses as their guide, they were invited to make contact with another body in the circle.

The first moments of contact mirrored the empathetic comforting offered earlier. Hands would clasp, a head would rest on a neighboring shoulder, or an arm would drape around the back of another body. Time became fluid, and I too became sensitive to the unfolding of the moment. They were prompted to concentrate on the texture, temperature, and pressure generated between points of contact. I continually mentioned focusing on a reciprocity of energy flow, similar to the breathing mantra. This meant giving energy just as much as they received it, so nothing was ever necessarily lost, simply recycled.

Patricia Heidt (1990), writes that “the human being is a field of energy, and all living organisms in the universe are also fields of energy.” (p. 140). Since the law of conservation of energy states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, only converted into others forms of energy, I believe that human beings can transfer, absorb and share energetic fields with one another. Take for instance how the body naturally generates heat. Heat is a form of energy, and one can sense and feel its warmth, or may even perhaps feel the presence of another body in close proximity due to the emanating heat. The idea of energy reciprocity fueled a large portion of these explorations. This sharing of energy can be observed in dance, where a cohesion between multiple bodies in space impacts the experience of the individual.

Each point of contact was also an opportunity to support and be supported by one another, in an empathetic sense. Typically, tunings evolved into full-bodied states of embracing. Tight huddles, enveloping hugs, faces buried in necks, and bodies nestled into bodies became a consistency. Hands tenderly cupped the sides of faces and the backs of heads as they were taking care of each other. I had done previous research on the benefits

of touch, and realized that touch was a tool to evoke empathy and connectivity. Mark Paterson (2007) elaborates on the connections touch can create. He emphasizes,

touch is crucial to embodied existence...touch is a modality resulting from the combined information of innumerable receptors and nerve endings concerned with pressure, temperature, pain and movement. But there is more to touch. It is a sense of communication. It is receptive, expressive, can communicate empathy. It can bring distant objects and people into proximity. (p. 1)

Touch functions beyond sensing pressure and pain or texture and temperature. It is a sensory connection to humanity, a grasping of ourselves as living creatures with desires to be validated and loved, understood and accepted by one another. Desmond Morris (1997) recognizes a societal deprivation of tactile contact by noting that,

unhappily and almost without our noticing it, we have gradually become less and less touchful, more and more distant, and physical untouchability has been accompanied by emotional remoteness. It is as if the modern urbanite has put on a suit of emotional armor and, with a velvet hand inside an iron glove, is beginning to feel trapped and alienated from the feelings of even his nearest companions. (p. 11)

Inside of Patterson and Morris' insights, I sense a linkage between touch, empathy and vulnerability. Perhaps this explains why the tuning exercises created such strong emotional responses within the dancers. They gave themselves permission to be open (vulnerable) to the empathetic experience generated by the contact.

At one particular rehearsal, I began with a tuning exercise taken from a master class with Contact Improvisation (CI) practitioner Kirstie Simson, who disclaimed that she had taken the exercise from the developer of CI, Steve Paxton. The exercise progresses with one partner beginning a small improvisation on the floor for the opposite partner to observe. The remaining partner then responds with an improvisation of their own, and this often segued into small CI duets. Improvisational conversations would continue back and forth in a variety of spatial levels, topographic patterns and movement

vocabularies. The duets that would emerge between partnerships included more expansive vocabulary. However, each one always possessed an intimate tenderness, and a heightened sensing of one another. I had removed their primary sense of vision, but they had become even more sensitive to how they occupied and shared the space with other bodies around them. Cheryl Pallant speaks of Contact Improvisation,

The particulars of CI are determined moment to moment, partners allowing the smooth or bumpy course of the dance to emerge on the spot...they follow sensation's interplay with gravity, impulse, momentum, and each other. They enter a mutually reflexive, living relationship with their surroundings, responding to a host of sensory stimuli. (2006, p. 27)

Touch and Contact Improvisation emerged as a tool for the dancers to maintain feelings of connectivity to each other each and every rehearsal. It served as a solidifying of bonds, and as these bonds developed, I capitalized on these encounters by transforming them into duets within the piece.

### Improvisation

Rehearsals shifted from group tuning toward individual improvisational investigations that concentrated on kinesthetic responses. Dancers were encouraged to honor impulses, and were not tied to an impulse once it faded. I directed them to find permission to dance however they wanted, encouraging them not to censor their actions, but rather allow actions to unfold inside the moment.

Strange and peculiar things began to happen during an improvised tuning where vocalizations became involved. Guttural sounds started softly at first, as grunts or tiny noises. Dancers began to work off of this and vocalizations became louder, longer and more abstract. At one point, a hand wound up inside another's mouth and a shoulder was

bitten. This was all done freely, and accepted willingly by others inside the improvisation. By allowing themselves to be open to anything despite the unpredictability of results and immersing themselves inside experiencing without any fear or doubts, they were finding ways to be vulnerable when improvising. If I attempted to dictate action or intervene in order to steer improvisations in a certain direction, the honest essence would be lost and the truth inside of the experience would be watered down. I needed the dancers to experience how embodied and alive they had the capacity to become before I could start crafting it from within an artificial work.

During the tunings and improvisations, dancers were urged to focus on sensations, states of pleasure or discomfort, textures, emotions and anything else that surfaced. This became beneficial when transitioning into structuring movement material for the opening section of the piece since that material is based on qualitative shifts. The desire was to provide the dancers space to cultivate the practice of accessing visceral qualitative states by reexperiencing memories, accessing images or emotions, and concentrating on sensations generated by physicalizing movement.

The accumulative gestural phrase in the first section of the piece started as an improvisation. I never came into the studio with premeditated material, but would be sensitive to what was going on inside of the improvisations. How that either merged with or shifted my own conceptual ideas for the piece guided which slivers I extracted from their improvisations to use as artistic fuel. From there, I investigated movement that was in the same realm, or that sparked an experience that I was interested in dissecting. Sometimes the dancers worked with catching my gestures and then I would distort them. Value was placed on the experiential testimony of the dancers, and a majority of

choreographic decisions were based off of volleyed ideas about what gestures felt like, were reminders of, or sensations they evoked viscerally and emotionally. In the opening sequence of the choreography, a shudder with a rapid intake of breath could generate feeling states of being frightened or a sudden chill. The backwards jerk of the shoulder and the ensuing stumble downstage attempts to capture the feeling and force of being pummeled.

Eventually, tunings and improvisations lessened, becoming nonexistent as rehearsal time was devoted to shaping phrases and developing a loose structure for the piece. After a few weeks of rehearsal without any group tuning or improvisation, morale seemed low. The rehearsal space was being starved of something I had created as essential. Guiding them through abbreviated tuning and improvisations at the beginning of rehearsals seemed to reignite community and keep bonds of close knit partnerships strong. The dancers actually thanked me for reinstating the exercises, which is why I advocate so strongly that those exercises held benefit during the creative process.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRANSLATING PROCESS INTO PRODUCT

#### Section I: *Strangers Together*

A piercing tone resonates through the space as a melodic whirring envelops the air. The curtain opens on a stark and hazy world. Strips of thin, beige cloth dangle at differing lengths throughout the space, blowing side to side almost imperceptibly. The space looks tattered, ragged even. A sliver of dirty amber light penetrates the fog, sculpting several bodies in sharp highlights and shadows in the far upper left corner of the stage. A voice that seems lost in the ether reverberates saying, “we are strangers in a strange land...wandering in a vast and umbilical universe.”<sup>1</sup> The dancers’ faces are turned away as they move backwards. Slowly, they walk, and time becomes viscous. In stillness, their focus tracks a slow scan across the horizon, gazing outward to the right and reaching far beyond the empty space.

Section I: *Strangers Together* in *States of Flesh* highlights a journey of isolation within the presence of a community. This section is performed as an ensemble, yet each individual appears isolated in his or her own personal experiences. There are attempts at connection that never come to fruition connection that never come to fruition. No dancers

---

<sup>1</sup> Khan, N. (2009). Two planets [Recorded by Bat For Lashes]. On *Two suns* [CD]. London: The Echo Label Ltd.

touch until the end of the section, where it becomes more desperate than tender. It highlights a desire for connectivity in a community of disconnect and attempts to solicit empathy where there is none. When one dancer begins to break from the repetitive gestural rhythm, the others immediately engulf the space around her and make attempts to restrain her. A wild arm escapes or a leg kicks mercilessly as her body heaves in any and all directions. She bursts upwards and outwards, breaking loose as the other bodies disperse. In this section, I wanted to create a community of dysfunction; one that was formed on false notions of support and empathy, struggling for connectivity and unity through the idea of a uniform whole. At first glance it appears to be a community, but the infrastructure falls apart.

The first idea I had was to incorporate a group section where the dancers were close in proximity, primarily in unison, and using gestures/actions that were based on qualitative shifts and visceral states. I harbored anxiety about shifting the process from tuning and improvisations into the setting of movement material because I was extremely unsure of how/if the dancers would maintain a sense of embodiment through my approach to choreography. I feared they would turn on autopilot and did not want the dancers to grow tired of researching with me, because they were the main vehicles I used to study embodiment. Inside of this I was manifesting my own judgement and fear, lacking trust, and refusing to give myself permission to be vulnerable for awhile. The irony is undeniable.

Crafting this opening section was the most time consuming, because it involved working inside subtlety and sensitivity with multiple people in a different way than crafting the structure for the embraces or duets in the second section. Perhaps this section

took the most amount of time solidifying in rehearsal, due to the qualitative specificity and the complexity of the phrase. It went through several choreographic “edits,” until I arrived at a version that felt like it truly required a visceral investment. When deciding how to frame the opening section of the piece, I remembered that humans enter into states of empathy. It felt necessary that the piece’s trajectory create a progression for the dancers, in order for them to arrive at empathy with integrity each time.

### Section II: *Home*

The *Home* section in *States of Flesh* begins in a silent moment, with one dancer seizing the lone soloist from behind, stilling her body through a singular empathetic touch on the shoulder. Inside this intimate encounter, there is a surrendering to the act of being supported. The lone dancer turns to embrace her partner and sinks into her arms. She is propped up and turned around, returning once more to the touch of the shoulder. A repetitious sequence emerges, and each time the embrace is disassembled, it grows more frantic as the search for support continues. Her partner pulls away from the embrace and both come face to face for a moment before the dancers part in opposite directions, almost unwillingly. The low humming of organ chords fades in and an omniscient narrator delivers a monologue about “home.”

The concept of home is not just a place; it can be a series of places...and people. Home is a feeling, and it is how I define the elements in my life that make me feel whole, encompassing a sense of security, understanding and acceptance. This section seeks to establish true community through empathetic connectivity and human contact, to create the comfort often associated with the idea of home. The dancers launch into a series of

crossings that create brief encounters between bodies. These encounters manifest in a variety of embraces and evolve into intercepted embraces by other dancers. The crossings and the ensuing embraces encapsulate a simple action that can communicate a variety of information; a collision of bodies entering into physical and emotional partnership in space in time. As the crossings continue, the dancers transition into more abstract systems of mutual support through riskier partnering that eventually leads to riskier, more complex duets that relied on supporting one another, but also entering the duet with a sense of trust.

The key themes explored during the crafting of this section in rehearsal were supporting, being supported and intimacy. The empathetic embracing that surfaced in the tunings, coupled with a recurring motif of touch and contact was the inspiration for me to create a rough score for the dancers to explore. This was the first idea explored in rehearsal before I began to set movement material, and I worked with this for a week before leaving it idle to reflect on how to pursue it. Then, I became so engrossed in the first section that the *Home* section took a backseat.

Inside crafting this section, I was quite leery of it becoming too sentimental or literal. Perhaps it was in fact too literal, but I do not regret keeping the embraces in this section because the more I sought to abstract them, the more I lost the sense of what the embraces provided. Sometimes the answers can be simple, and the simplicity, poignancy and universality of the embraces was enough for me. I was also conscious of the interpretation of this section being misconstrued as an homage to homosexuality. However, when choreographing and viewing it, I personally did not feel it had been sexualized, even though I realize gender and sexual issues will be embedded anyhow.

This section was tender and compassionate to me, and I did not consciously place gender at the forefront of my explorations, but did make it a point for every dancer to interact with one another. I was so moved by their investment in one another that whenever I watched them it evoked empathy within me. There are always going to be alternative choices, and some would argue “better” choreographic decisions, but I find that sometimes simplicity holds far more impact than complexity.

The small duets that emerged out of the embracing encounters were crafted in two ways. The first was a mirroring of Johannes Wieland by verbally questioning if certain actions were possible and observing the dancers attempt to solve the creative tasks. The second was engaging the dancers by allowing them to vocalize the directions or spaces where they were inclined to move next. Based on their impulses, I would provide another directive or question, and material began to build in this fashion. If I have one remaining regret about this section, it is that I did not get the chance to continue developing these duets within the rehearsal timeline. This section could have benefitted from making it a priority to reopen the duet investigations sooner in the process because it felt like this could have provided additional layering.

Apart from the intimacy, vulnerability and shifting roles of support, seeking empathetic connection single-handedly underscores the motivation behind this section’s choreography. The *Home* section touches on a personal core belief that empathy is universal and integral to bridging connections with others. It can be the tie that binds individuals together, like a tether connecting one heart to another.

### Section III: *Exposed*

In the final section of *States of Flesh*, the space goes dark as several bodies lay motionless, sprawled on the floor. An industrial buzzing mixed with a low booming bass rises in volume as a singular dancer emerges from the upstage wing. A fingertip, a hand, then an arm and foot penetrate the void. A shaft of bluish white light shines across the divide as the dancer crosses the stage, weaving between the strips of fabric. The lone dancer's body is sinewy and as the movement tracks through the landscape of the body, initiations shift seamlessly, leading one body part after the other to traverse across the stage with a constant pull.

The desire inside this section was to explore the nature of exposure. Vulnerabilities are laid out in a semiconfrontational way, and there is a greater desperation inside attempts for connectivity and communication between individuals. I sought to capture the messier parts of vulnerability and empathy in an attempt to show how they are multifaceted. As a sense of abandonment emerges when the body fully surrenders to sensate and kinesthetic experience, the aesthetic becomes even rougher around the edges, yet honest inside of the execution. The dancers transcend beyond the codified steps and move as beings of energy manipulating space and time as they search for one another; swirling, colliding, flying. Duets become tinged with traces of recklessness as partnerships are in a constant state of flux. Ultimately, the relationships disintegrate in order for the dancers to return to their individual experiences anew.

However, the emphasis on quality and imagery that I had guided the dancers through became less pronounced within this final section. This section was structured with a master phrase that I choreographed and taught to the entire cast, then let them

choose their own places to begin dancing material. Less time was spent inside the specificity of experiencing the material, as I directed my focus toward crafting transitions, spatial orientations, and topographic patterns in efforts to create a “finished product.”

I was hoping to offer a transcendent embodied experience for my dancers, and to see them come alive onstage in a way that disregarded representation. The goal was for each and every experience with the piece to feel tangible, fresh, and honest. I wanted to watch the work and be able to say, “Yes, I see you. I believe you. I am with you.” There was a clear sense of this for me inside the first two sections, but I began to feel some disconnect between my research and the third section of the piece. For some inexplicable reason, I felt the structural answer was to craft a third section, even though I had spent a majority of my rehearsal explorations inside the other two. It felt unfinished in some regard, and I thought perhaps the addition of a final section would complete the arc. Something was lacking inside the final section, possibly due to the fact that I disregarded combing through material to direct specificity and intention. The focus shifted to simply churning out “filler” material and crafting a structural formula for the piece’s completion.

While it did feel like the final section took the piece somewhere, it never pushed to the edges like I wanted. It lacked profundity of experience for me. Perhaps I was taking the piece in the wrong direction other than where it wanted to go by crafting a section that was something other than what it needed to be. Perhaps I did not pay enough creative attention to it in the developmental stages, or adhere to previous process procedures when teaching material. When I look back at the memorable moments for me inside the piece, the solo crossing in the third section feels like the capstone. After much

reflection, this could have been the main thematic idea present for the entirety of that section.

In hindsight, the final solo crossing reestablishes the isolated and lone individual, although no longer engaging in community or a relationship with another body. It shifts the focus to the individual's journey of ownership and personal vulnerability, making this idea even more intimate for me. It brings concepts of vulnerability and empathy into an intrinsic space, because ultimately these humanistic facets begin and end from the inside out. I envision this would be a more honest ending to the piece.

When I began creating a structure for *States of Flesh*, I immediately saw the piece's first two sections clearly. Section one would be a journey of isolation within the presence of a community, and the second would be the actual forming of community, showcasing facets of empathy, supporting and being supported, and intimacy. I also envisioned the stage space transformed into another environment. The image in mind was of a tattered and ragged space, which is where the suspended strips of muslin cloth originated. I felt it reinforced the feeling of rawness, provided texture, and moved as a result of the dancers manipulating the energy and air around them. It created a space that was all their own; an experience of the moment that unfolded inside an environment that was not one to be influenced by the presence of an audience. The costumes were plain white undergarments (which was the closest choice to the dancers being nude), to reinforce the idea of being vulnerable and exposed.

If there is one overarching lesson this creative research has yielded, it is that this was a delicate process. It required a longer period of time to create a finished product

than it would if had I showed up to rehearsal and set phrases immediately. I was consistently fighting my own anxieties and the urging of others to solidify the product, because I felt I would be abandoning the true essence of my research. In hindsight, this may have been stubborn of me, as there was a deadline for debuting the work. For all intents and purposes, the piece was already finished had I seen the simpler solution inside the existing structure. I felt pressured to craft an ending without fully investigating the possibilities that seemed right for the context of the piece.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

I fell wholeheartedly into this research because I was searching to fill a void within my own dancing. I needed fulfillment inside of creative artifice, and it seemed like the only avenue towards that was by finding a way I could truly embody material. I now believe this comes from embodying the experience of the moment. The material is just the loose matter from which the real thing is formed, but its presence is like a compass that points toward how one arrives at embodiment. Embodying the experience allows for understanding of an abstract concept to emerge from the inside out, making it concrete and tangible, allowing one to gain the power of observation and clarity through experiential awareness. At the end of the rehearsal, the choreography is nothing more than a series of structured steps and movements. My visions and ideas are lifeless without the willingness of other bodies to take them on and embark on a transformative journey.

Whatever can evoke an honest embodied state drafts new experiential realities. It is not about imposing outside elements onto movement material, which can feel oppressive or force the unfamiliar. If key elements already exist inside personal lived experience, granting oneself permission for those experiences to inform personal performative movement choices can allow for one to access the full potential of being. It

becomes about embracing the layered nature of reality by acknowledging that experiential phenomenon are influential to the composite self.

I find that research on embodiment in artifice can aid dancers in discovering a greater connectivity to the creative work they engage in. If the act of dancing is considered an embodied practice, then I feel that dancers should seek ways to access embodiment inside of constructed choreography. Through my experiences, I have found that as a living being capable of emotionality and experiencing sensate phenomenon, it is not always possible to experience embodiment on an internally palpable level inside of artifice. I chose this profession because it nourishes not just my physical body, but also my emotional and spiritual body. Engaging in choreographic or performative processes that do not provide this nourishment for me seems counterintuitive to dancing in the first place.

Throughout this research, I have discovered that as a choreographer, it is acceptable for me to relinquish a certain amount of control over my work. I used to possess a slew of insecurities about the quality of my choreography, which resulted in me guarding my ownership of it. I was putting the artistic values of others before my own in order to make work that I thought people would enjoy. It can be beneficial to possess a consciousness about how the audience might receive the work, but it should not dictate whether or not I get to investigate the work that interests me most.

The moment I shifted my own perspectives on the kind of work I should be making, which is work that I personally find value in, I had become vulnerable inside of how I created work. I had fear of showing others the work I genuinely wanted to create in case it was seen as invalid or was misunderstood. By acknowledging and embracing my

own judgements and fears, I was refusing to be rendered powerless by them and being met with skepticism only strengthened my passion for the research. This granted a different kind of ownership over my own work, an ownership that established security. No longer was I validating my creative work based purely on aesthetic form, but also from seeing others live inside of it fully, no matter the steps. My emphasis on this falls short without testimonials from those inside the process, as I can only provide my personal experience as “an insider on the outside.” The dancers were the ones who felt and lived through the process moment to moment in a different way than I did. Ultimately, they were thrust onstage faced with how to actualize embodiment inside the artifice I had created.

If the main pathways to actualized embodiment lie within vulnerable and empathetic facets of one’s own humanity through specificity of experience, dancers may be able to find a way to consistently transform artifice instead of allowing it to be seen as a restriction or hindrance. How one experiences and comes to know the world can also manifest in how one experiences the dance. These concepts can inform one another to create a more honest portrait of how art imitates life, and vice versa.

This quest for embodiment has since permeated all aspects of my dancing. It has transformed the way I engage in technique, how I approach choreography and performance, and even influences the way I guide my own students. Through continuing to delve into this concept with the other works I am currently developing, I have found that by pushing qualitative specificity even further (which may seem counterintuitive as far as creating space for ownership and freedom), dancers can hone in on creating and embodying a detailed experience. The things I have seen and experienced inside the few

months of rehearsing *States of Flesh* amazes me, considering Brené Brown spent over 12 years researching and gathering data on vulnerability alone. I genuinely believe there are alternative practices to cultivating more transcendent and embodied dancing beyond relying solely on the movement, and that it is capable to cultivate the skill of actualizing embodiment. This particular process is just one attempt.

Since *States of Flesh*, I have created two additional works. The first was a solo, *To Plead for the Mercy of All Things*, which I envisioned as the second in a series, the first of which was *Slough*. The second work I created was a live performance installation project entitled *Mi Cuerpo, la Tierra*. Inside the creative process for both of these pieces, I was able to reproduce similar results for actualizing embodiment by focusing more scrupulously on specificity of experiencing material, from which vulnerability and empathy were then able to emerge.

Human beings are consistently investigating the purpose of existence, searching for answers to existentialist questions, and to make meaning from experience. I believe existence is marked by experience, and one's experiences comprise the facets that make them unique and human. This research has shown me that being human is enough, that being emotional is a part of being alive, and that embodying the moment is to dance and live loudly with the full potential of one's own being.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allain, P. (2002). *The art of stillness: The theater practice of tadashi suzuki*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bayles, D., & Orland, T. (1993). *Art and fear: Observations on the perils (and rewards) of artmaking*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Image Continuum.
- Bogart, A. (2007). *And then, you act: Making art in an unpredictable world*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bogart, A. (2001). *A director prepares: Seven essays on art and theatre*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Brown, B. (2007). *I thought it was just me (but it isn't): Making the journey from "what will people think?" to "I am enough"*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Burrows, J. (2010). *A choreographer's handbook*. New York: Routledge.
- Climenhaga, R. (2009). *Pina Bausch*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eisenberg, N. (2000). Empathy and sympathy. In M. Lewis & J. Haviland-Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of Emotions* (2nd ed., pp. 677-687). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- Fraleigh, S. (2004). *Dancing identity: Metaphysics in motion*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Khan, N. (2009). Two planets [Recorded by Bat For Lashes]. On *Two suns* [CD]. London: The Echo Label Ltd.
- Morris, Desmond. (1997). *Intimate behaviour: A zoologist's classic study of human intimacy*. New York: Kodansha International.
- Morris, E. (1981). *Being and doing: A workbook for actors*. Los Angeles, CA: Whitehouse/Spelling Publications.

- Pallant, C. (2006). *Contact improvisation: An introduction to a vitalizing dance form*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers.
- Paterson, Mark. (2007). *The senses of touch: Haptics, affect and technologies*. Berg.
- Press, C. (2002). *The dancing self: Creativity, modern dance, self psychology and transformative education*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Preston-Dunlop, V., & Sanchez-Colberg, A. (2010). *Dance and the performative: A choreological perspective-laban and beyond*. Hampshire, England: Verve Publishing.
- Schiffmann, E. (1996). *Yoga: The spirit and practice of moving into stillness*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.