

Bard

Bard College
Bard Digital Commons

Senior Projects Spring 2016

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2016

The Queen's Software: A Personal Exploration on Failure, Discovery and a Commitment to Not Knowing

Emma Alicia Lutz-Higgins
Bard College, el4958@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2016



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Lutz-Higgins, Emma Alicia, "The Queen's Software: A Personal Exploration on Failure, Discovery and a Commitment to Not Knowing" (2016). *Senior Projects Spring 2016*. 302.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2016/302

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Bard

The Queen's Software: A Personal Essay Exploring Erring, Discovery and a Commitment to Not

Knowing

Choreographed Works:

Telescope

December 11-13, 2015

LUMA Theater, Fisher Center for the Performing Arts

MESS or it's totally something

May 13-15, 2016

LUMA Theater, Fisher Center for the Performing Arts

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Arts

of Bard College

By Emma Lutz-Higgins

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2016

4/27/16

i don't know where to begin.

and more significantly i don't know how to end.

i save face by having a middle. a disjointed, daily dismantling, mostly not working but sometimes functional middle.

the middle consists of all 9 drafts of my senior project, a piece that is a secret and me.

of the 9 drafts of my senior project over 40 pages have been written. some personal and reflective, some analytical, all without a reason to begin and all with no resolution.

i can't find a way in.

it does not feel cute to not know. it is not an place that motivates a clarifying way to be.

manipulating language to name the not knowing that i am experiencing is something i profoundly believed would be a place to start.

all i came up with is that it matters to me that my process be a platform for the dancers to have rich and fulfilling experiences in hopes that something would be revealed along the way about the work's identity.

but the piece did not get what it needed, the paper got lost in translation. i think i got lost in translation too.

here is what i know:
dance matters to me
i have privileged making a process enjoyable over making a piece work
and...

this.

Without a beginning, I am going to place myself in the center of how I got to the place I am. I have no conclusion, no final thoughts and no way to end it. Read with the knowledge that I have tried to place a bow on something that is still in process for me. I am still figuring out how to enact the things I write about. I am still figuring out that I need to write in the present tense and stop alluding to a knowing that doesn't exist.

so here are some thoughts, they are where they need to be:

I really love to dance. Dance matters to me in a way that evades language. In a way that I have struggled with. Dancing isn't something I do to clarify who I am, though when I am not dancing I do feel less clarified. My grandmother and my mother are both dancers; I have grown up around women high kicking and butt shaking, totally embarrassing me when I was little in their earnest need to move. Dancing has never been a place of shame. Dancing is one of my homes, something I return to in all moods, but something that is not a substitute for a therapy session.

Dancing lives in between knowing exactly what and not knowing at all. I guess you could say dance is my middle, my way of being even when disjointed, discombobulated and on the brink of failure.

I don't always know how to make the work I want to make. But I think I know how to live. At least a little. And somewhere in there lies a discombobulated middle ground that I haven't seemed to locate yet. I think I'm in the right state? I have so many ideas about how I want to make and what the work I make will look like. There's some sort of feeling. Because I don't know what else. I have no ideas that can readily form a piece. But I have a feeling. It's the feeling when I saw Niv Sheinfeld & Oren Laor's *Two Room Apartment*. I thought that it could be built from a rehearsal process that is highly collaborative, where everybody has a voice and where there are good feelings in the room about the collective thing that we are making. I don't think I'm wrong, misguided and too complacent, but there is work that involves me motivating the thing to be anything at all which I think got a little lost. So this is my starting over. This is why I profoundly don't know.

I have noticed, in myself and in general, that dance makes dancers feel some type of **way**.

I want to report these findings because I think it speaks to how I got to where I am and how there is a larger, more fundamental problem about how the system of dance operates.

Where you are is nowhere near as final as it seems.

SOS!

winding up

American Dance Festival 2014

July 7, 2014 : Journal Entry:

The downward spiral of watching someone dance and knowing you could do it better and wondering why Netta chose the people she did. And the age old question,

WHY NOT ME?

I was cast as an understudy in Netta Yerushalmy's ADF commissioned work, *Pictograms*. It brought up a lot. I would sit in a room for 5 hours while other people danced and I was deemed a second-class-dancer. Being framed in a process as "the one who was almost good enough" made me start to question everything I knew about myself. The rehearsals lasted about four hours, four days a week and at a certain point all the movement was learned and there was little for me to do. It became clear that the role of understudy was not really about replacing somebody if something happened. In this way my value to the process was minimal. If I chose to find personal value I could but the piece nor the people needed me there. I felt alone, used and completely unappreciated in what I had to offer as a mover.

I began to question my worth as a dancer, putting so much time into a rehearsal that was never mine to take ownership of, sitting for hours while other people got to be dancing, seeing people doing the parts I wanted so badly to be doing; what did I so critically lack that squandered my opportunity to be fully part of this piece? Why did it feel like my life was ending? Drama aside, these feelings were very real for me. Everything I had built my identity on began unraveling because I was losing touch with something that felt so vital to who I was. I felt devastated to be part of the process, sharing in the joy, the frustration, the long nights without any of the reward, I was never going to be allowed to perform.

If I wasn't dancing, who was I?

If I felt so terrible at the end of every day, why did I feel so obligated to continue? This was the start of a major identity undertaking: **How to have dance in my life in a way that won't destroy me.**

self when dancing=success=being good=valid person=access to self

failure in dance=less worthy person=not able to access self=NETTA'S REHEARSAL

Dancing is quite literally me. I am my tool, I am the material, I am the performance, I am the personality. Every aspect of myself is called upon when I am dancing and performing because it's my body and self that is being implicated. I am not disconnected from my art the way a painter is disconnected from the object that is painted, or the song that a musician plays. I am the dance, it's on MY body. Dancers are asked to give their literal selves to dance because our

bodies are our art, we cannot go home and get away from what we do, our body can never be an escape because of its presence in the dance. In this way, a challenging day in a dance class or a rough performance does not just live in the studio or theater. I bring my body home with me so those challenges come home with me. My success and my difficulties in dance very often follow me into my life outside the studio.

>>>>> Dance is a way of life<<<<<<

Dance is not some foreign object that I can examine, revel in and disconnect from to go about my day, we cannot escape the dance! It is our performance, our quirks, our moves and because of this ourselves and dance very often become conflated. I see this way of thinking no matter where I go and there is a bigger question that remains unanswered at this point about how to operate differently under dance.

Internal feedback loop=Dancing can fulfill me=No dancing, no fulfillment
External feedback loop=Dancing can validate me=Failure in dance, no validation

These are two different ideas that I am trying to bring forth, both based on the fact that dancers cannot remove themselves from the critiques, compliments, successes, challenges, failures, joys and griefs that happen in a dance setting because those comments are given to *us*, not some external object. Without dance there is often a sincere loss of how to be successful, valuable and important in life. The experience of being an understudy shed light on how dancers participate in the dance world in a way that causes a lot of grief and a genuine displacement of self when dancing stops being something that fulfills us completely. In Netta's rehearsals I was

not able to personally fulfill my need to dance because I wasn't there to dance. Aside from not feeling validated as a good dancer by external sources (Netta, the cast, anybody who knew my position), I felt like I was at a real loss when it came to participating. When I wasn't dancing I didn't know how to participate, I didn't know how to feel good, I didn't even really know how to be myself. This was an internal feedback loop that was not about how I was seen in the eyes of others. I sincerely did not know how to be a functioning happy person because my desire and love for dance was not being fulfilled.

And then there is a dedication to dance that comes from needing validation. Through this unfaltering dedication, dancers sacrifice a lot because as well as being internally fulfilled, we need the validation that the form will give IF we succeed. We come closer to a more genuine part of ourselves if we succeed in dance; that feels like **IT**. Succeeding in doing what you love through external validation is the second part of the feedback loop. In this way, dancers are game for long nights, short breaks, tedious edits and hard classes because in the end we know that it will fulfill an emotional, sentimental and soulful part of ourselves as well as giving us validation for being a worthy person. But what happens when those things just stop becoming access points? What happens when there is no fulfilling or validating that will emerge from the circumstance?

!\$!@\$%@\$&^%*^% **CRISIS** !@\$&^%*^%&(%&*

The implication that failure in dance means you are not yourself nor have any way to access yourself grounds itself through this unquestioning belief that our dedication to dance will validate and fulfill us completely. Life has meaning when there is success in dance but difficulty in dance means floundering in life. When dancers feel like they're failing, the entire world outside of dance becomes implicated in this way of thinking because we cannot turn off what happened in the studio once we step outside; we carry with us all that happens when we work. This is patterned in the way that people talk about and think about dance, "Oh, you dance because you love it. That's what all artists *get* to do: do what they love." This sentiment is problematic though because it reinforces the situation I describe: **There is no separation between identity and activity.**

There was no way that I could have disconnected the way I was feeling in Netta's rehearsals with the way it made me feel as a person. That failure I was feeling does not stay in the studio like failures in other fields do (when your paper is reviewed poorly it seems to only be a reflection on that paper, not an entire identity). We are compromised as people if there is no success in dance. The stakes are incredibly high when you are a dancer.

Being an understudy was the beginning of a way to see how dance had a lot of control over my life. Dance perpetuates a gratefulness to the form because it supposedly defines ourselves. However, the byproduct of that unwavering belief in the form took away all of my agency. To be an understudy could be considered very lucky. Of all the people at ADF who auditioned (around

300 people), twenty were cast and four got emailed by Netta to be understudies. I could at least be witness to a creation. I could be flattered that I was even seen enough to be accepted into part of the process. And it is challenging to be critical of the position I was in as an understudy because there is severe risk of sounding bratty in my criticism of such a supposedly amazing opportunity. But I felt totally at a loss of what to do. I couldn't quit because that would be a physical admittance of failure in dance that would have been disastrous to my selfhood. I was stuck between still needing this experience to somehow validate me and knowing that it never would. A difficult place to be considering that what was at stake was my sense of identity.

The actual critique, however, speaks not just to my personal experience, it speaks to a way that dancers have been trained to operate as compliant and grateful in situations that often reinforce the binding of work and self. In actuality the experience of being an understudy took away all of my agency as thinker and a mover. In actuality being an understudy took all of my self respect away because I didn't have the courage to say no or to question the position. It took away most good feelings I had about myself as a dancer because by being secondary to the process I was actively failing in my mind to find the true self that dance had taught me can only be found through dancing. I was taken advantage of because I *am* smart, I *can* move, I *can* contribute but I was deemed to be a mute body because I failed to get the part of an actual dancer. Being an understudy was a nightmare in the form of an "unexpected opportunity." But without a doubt I knew I was supposed to think that the chance to be an understudy was honorable. It was the first time I recognized that something was incredibly unsettling about the way my life and self seemed to fall apart just because I was having a difficult time in one dance rehearsal.

Being an understudy, I began to see that I was being disrespected, that dancers are being disrespected, not by Netta or the choreographer position in general, but by the ideas of some higher authority, of the who-knows-from-where tradition of how we're supposed to think and feel about dance. Dancers are often disrespected by dance because we give up our agency for the unwavering belief that dance will provide us with access to who we really are.

So... That's a lot of feeling some type of way. It was the first time I really questioned myself as a dancer. I had always been sure that no matter what, I would always dance. Dance had always been the sure thing in my life, not the variable that made me feel all the feelings. And I wish I could say that after almost two years I have found an un-discombobulated middle. I just haven't. I don't have any resolution to what this brought up for me. But I do know that it got easier. I was able to let dance go from the most rose covered precious place in my life. Dance moved from being

stabilizer----->VARIABLE----->

to somewhere in that discombobulated middle

This is how.

un-concentrating

My teacher Jesse Zaritt says a lot of things that have resonated with me at different times in my life. I took his class twice at Bard. Once for a semester as a first year, to very new eyes, once for a semester as a second year, and once at the American Dance Festival for six weeks. I know him for teaching me how to mobilize my incredibly long spine into a spiral. I know him as soft spoken but incredibly clear. I know him as someone who cares a lot. He taught me when I was first learning how to be at Bard. He taught me when I was confident and sure of myself. He taught me as I was falling apart. Jesse has a very special place in my heart.

At ADF, I took his class. I *really* took his class. After a cumulative year of his teachings, I felt I knew how to articulate his movement so I was able to go into a deeper, more personal, more expressive place. In the midst of figuring out how to be in Netta's rehearsals, his class was a homecoming. He was a homecoming. I talked to him a lot about everything that was happening at ADF and he received me in a sensitive and thoughtful way. There were many things that he said that helped me that summer.... BUT THIS THING...

“UN-CONCENTRATE”

In a long-term reflective sense it registered as a way to uncoil the emotional grip that held me captive to one idea of how to feel good in dance. In the moment, it registered as a way to calm down. Un-concentrate was one way out of of thinking that dance could control every part of my life and reduce me to a vessel without will or whim. Un-concentrating meant letting go of the idea that I would feel fulfilled by being part of Netta's process. It meant I had to search elsewhere for fulfillment. It meant I needed to find quirks in Netta's rehearsals that could resonate with me because I was certainly never going to feel successful just by being there.

I realized I had made very clear definitions for myself about what success looked and felt like, how I fell apart when I did not feel like I was "succeeding." Un-concentrating was my way of changing how I operate. In an effort to un-concentrate I began to recalibrate what I thought I knew about being a dancer.

After those three weeks of being an understudy, something shifted. I still had a hard time but I now had a secret mantra. Part of being cast as an understudy was learning how to detach emotionally from the implications of what being an understudy meant to me. Un-concentrating meant and means allowing ME to have the authority instead of relying on dance, the attention of others and socially recognized definitions of success for an access to selfhood. Finding the line between committed and focused without having an emotional stake in Netta's process was part of what un-concentrating helped me find. And through that I begin to see how I could contribute to her process in a meaningful way even though I wasn't dancing. Sometimes Netta would ask questions about the piece out loud, to no one in particular and they would sit in the space while she would think. I began to answer the questions. She listened to my ideas about the spacing

issue or a certain person's part and would often agree with my offering. It was small, but through the ability to find a different access point into the process I felt like I regained some agency.

And yet, the entire experience left me very raw and without resolution on how to continue. I could find a more balanced place during the rest of ADF but what was brought up during that time was an all encapsulating sense of identity failure. I am interested in bringing up the personal resonance I find in this problem because the comment I am trying to make is not just about the understudy role and my personal grief, but about the way dance is organized. It is through my experience that I was able to glimpse a collapse of selfhood through my unwavering dedication and love to dance. An identity formed around something less inherent to people (everyone needs to move but not everyone is born needing to be an educator, a scientist, a pilot) will not collapse a person because of one failure in the field. A dancer's identity is always on the line. Dance is something we NeeeeeeEeeeeeEEEEEEED because we conflate it with living itself. In this way,

Dance is authoritarian.

Being part of Netta's process was the initial springboard for a massive identity undertaking that has shaped everything after that. The fall of my junior year after ADF was incredibly challenging. Especially taking Leah Cox's class, my professor and advisor at Bard. I was not able to translate the fundamental patterns she was teaching into my body. Showing up took immense mental strength because I knew something was not clicking. I could not understand how to operate with the information she was providing and it made me feel the most defeated I have ever felt in a dance class. Not getting it every day is hard. Not getting something that defines who I was as a person made me really reconsider why I am doing this thing that I

supposedly could not live without. My body and mind needed to catch up to each other, so much language and so little body understanding; I was unsure about how to proceed as a dancer. I had to recalibrate, I had to find another way to un-concentrate because it became clear that my hard time was not just about not getting chosen to be in Netta's piece. Un-concentrating needed to transition from redefining success to being able to laugh at myself despite difficulty in a dance class.

I took the next summer off. I came into class my final year at Bard with a completely different set of priorities. I came in more relaxed, more eager to find subtlety. It was a shift I noticed in taking Leah's class again. Taking a couple months off from dancing has always been a good thing for me. It is where most of my growth happens. I let my body settle into archiving all the information I received over the past year and a half.

Coming back from that summer off, I felt I was able to understand the patterns in Leah's class that had so choked me the semester before in a functional, beautiful and less precious way. And I wasn't any less able the year before; nothing happened over the summer that made me a better technical dancer. I was always physically able but I realized sometimes my body learning is stalled when my mind is trying to digest something that is challenging. This is how un-concentrating helped me. I needed to let my body process the wealth of new concepts my mind was trying to reckon with. It took me a while to realize that unlearning what I thought made me **me** was an incredibly clarifying step forward even if I wasn't ready to take it.

"How to create space for vulnerability, absence, doubt, memory and learning processes in our self image?"

-Jeroen Peeters, *Through the Back: Situation Vision between Moving Bodies*

tHE dooRway



Recovering sense is a surreal experience. Flailing comes to mind when I think of myself trying to reorient my sense of being after losing a sense of identity. It's so enticing to see something that interests you when you're flailing because you think 'maybe that could be me.' But then you see something else and you think 'no *that* could be me.' Your 'me'ness starts becoming a '*maybe* that could be me.' Everything looks simultaneously rosy and bleak when you're flailing because you just can't figure it out but there is also so much to be that the possibilities excite as much as they intimidate. Somewhere in the middle of knowing me and being excited about all the possibilities of me I started becoming interested in a couple different ideas.

There are two different texts that really influenced how I began to see dance and how I wanted to make dance. Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" was one of the first essays I'd ever read that felt like it was articulating a lot of disparate ideas that were starting to percolate in my head. She was giving such clear, assertive language in proposing how we can see art differently. I was struck by her disdain to dissect a piece of work for its content: "By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable" (Sontag, 6). The cheapness in searching for the meaning seemed to live in a world where art's only purpose is to get, get, get something from it. This was the first text I had read permitting the idea that art could be nothing. That art could be anything. That art doesn't have to subscribe to clear content in order to legitimize its very being and further that content does not make a work of art more important. Sontag iterates this in a quote that I keep coming back to as a source of inspiration, "Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all" (7-8). I realized that I had been under the impression that content makes work important. Once the pressure to make something with content, and therefore something important, was lifted, there was freedom to see what is already being revealed in the room and in this way I could privilege the process over the product. I could be relieved from the idea that my work had to have clear content to be considered legitimate.

This resonated deeply with me. Maybe I could make work that doesn't have to mean anything, thus the space could be opened for my work to be awful, sincere and weird; my work could be anything! It meant I had the space to flail and question and unravel through not seeking work for its content because sometimes I feel like I have no content to offer. In this way, maybe I

could make work from a process-based place of seeing what happens when we all get to the studio together rather than trying to imbue what I make with some external meaning. Maybe the meaning could come from the inside instead of the other way around. It felt like a relief that somebody was acknowledging the problems that arise when we look to art to justify itself through having a legible meaning:

To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world - in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings." It is to turn the world into this world. ("This world"! As if there were any other.) The world, our world is depleted, impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates of it, until we again experience more immediately what we have (5-6)

Reading about a way to appreciate art that doesn't have a prescribed or legible meaning was the genesis for another idea that came up for me after reading this text. I began to think a lot about how I am in relation to the art that I make. Though Sontag does not say this explicitly, I came to the notion through her text that my art and my self do not have to be synonymous. If art can truly mean and be anything then maybe I don't have to create work that will define me, reflect me or even resonate with me. My work's identity does not have to be MY identity. The work's identity can be formed as it is formed. In this way, I can separate myself from the work so as not to be implicated in the work's successes and difficulties. Just like un-concentrating helped me find in my dance practice, I could let my work live as its own thing without feeling like its critiques and compliments were a reflection of who I was as a person. Which is not to say that I am always succeeding in these ideas but that I try to live by them in hope that I might be able to make without fear of being personally destroyed. And through this I became very attracted to the idea that not knowing might be a creative and interesting place to be.

Another text I read was Andre Lepecki's essay "Rethinking Dramaturgy." He asks in the essay, "Who actually knows what the work-to-come truly is, what the work-to-come wants, and

therefore what the work-to-come needs?" Lepecki brings forth the notion that the work is its own thing, with its own desires, needs and wants. The work has an ego very different from its maker, its performers or its viewer. As I was reading that sentence all I could think about was, *I sure as hell don't know what my work needs*. Employing this idea in my dance-making practice, I sought to start from a place of not knowing as a way of departing from thinking that I had answers that I honestly didn't have. I didn't want to know what the work was before it was made because that would be subscribing to the idea that art should only be seen for its content. This was my way of un-concentrating in my work practice. Knowing has often been equated with success and not knowing with failure, but after reading this essay I realized that maybe not knowing is the fertile and radical place to be. Not knowing allows for play and exploration. Not knowing allows for anything. It reinforced Sontag's argument because while she was in disdain about art needing meaning, Lepecki was congratulating not knowing. These two ideas seemed to link in a really delicious way.

Lepecki also opened the doorway for me to see how erring can be a vital part of any process. I found that Sontag and Lepecki were both helping me to make a distinction between the work and myself. That if the work experiences mistakes, misleadings, wrong directions, or general not knowing, I am not implicated in those defeats. I began to appreciate how my errings in a work-process could be entryways. "Erring into texts [dance process] allows us to extract from them possibilizations that would otherwise remain hidden, or dormant, or repressed, or censored, under the imperative of <<proper use>>" (Lepecki, 193). Lepecki emphasizes that failing or erring allows for new availabilities to be brought forth from the work. This text, like Sontag's, does not explicitly make the distinction between the work and self but both laid the groundwork for me to see the work as something with its own identity. If I could analyze the

work for the work and find myself able to acknowledge my mistakes, and further, able not to conflate them with my personhood, maybe I could get inside what Lepecki was offering about erring. Maybe I could see how erring is a fertile place to be. I was enamored by the idea that erring in a process, instead of destroying the work and oneself, could disrupt the work to allow for new visibilities and dimensionality. The work has the possibility to err without consequence of death. The work is separate from the artist. The work is the work. And erring in the work is actually exciting. This felt vital to me.

“The work is the work, is the work, is the work”

-Leah Cox

Lepecki brings up a strong point about why it is helpful to see our erring. “These actions open a space that at least delimits other fields of possibilization for traces and forms to find space” (196). I am excited by this, yet know that it is so hard for me to do just that: see my errors while I am in the midst of a dance-making process. Lepecki continues this essay defining the importance of the dramaturge’s role in helping us see the erring. While I don’t have a dramaturge, this text opened me up to the idea that having other people comment and discuss my work while in process of making can be a good thing. If I can let go of the preciousness I place on my work as an extension of myself maybe the erring can be made visible through discussion and thus the erring can be an exciting place to work from. Through my own experience I began to see how erring during the process of making a piece can actually be an exciting problem, not a detrimental outcome.

“Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. “

-Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*

I entered my second semester process trying to enact all of the ideas that I was reading about while also attempting to address the things that made dance life or death to my identity. I thought in order to practice the ideas of un-concentrating and not knowing I would have a really enjoyable rehearsal experience. So I made that. I had rehearsals that were rich with discussion about what we were doing and full of a type of dancing that reflected each dancer's sense of self and sense of play. The improv scores I developed were creative, bold, and emotionally fed the dancers. And cool things came up. We talked about how dancers can stabilize and instigate the space and how we were fulfilling or departing from those ideas. We talked about what an improv score needed in order to feel like we found the work's identity. We talked about how to make the score the most fulfilled in what it was. We talked about how to follow your impulses in a score and thus what space is opened up when you follow them. We talked about how to compose the space while still supporting the group and without sacrificing personal impulse. We talked about why dance is permissive of some behaviors and not others, how things can be revealed in such different ways and how we want to be collaborative.

But the piece ended up looking like a private dance, a dance for the makers, for us and no one else. I had such difficulty transitioning from the play space to the making space because I was working with the idea that not knowing was what the piece would be. I had made such a rich and fulfilling experience for the dancers that the audience couldn't participate because I was only showing the process. We had fun, talked, and explored but I couldn't make the shift to actually shaping the piece.

I didn't mark, notice, or hold on to certain moments that happened in the improvisation scores that I had led for the better half of the semester; I let them all pass by in an effort to keep the idea of unknowing the overtone. But starting from a place of not knowing does not mean that I couldn't eventually find out. I think I fell into a classic artistic problem where I attempted to make the source the substance.

Who knows what the work needs if I never try things out?
How is a piece made when all of the ideas aren't shaped?

I let everything pass me by in an attempt to hold fast to never knowing anything, thinking that constant not knowing was being process-oriented. But there is such a great delight in knowledge, especially when it is revealed in a process-based way.

I was so adamantly opposed to knowing anything about my piece that it passed me by and I was left with a piece that only resonated with the dancers. And I actually don't think that is a failure, I think it is so interesting that in such an earnest effort to go against product I began to see that process in dance could become this intangible, watery thing without direction or specificity. I think starting from not knowing is radical, but ignoring the knowing that begins to come up through not making choices or shaping the thing misses the entire point of process-based work. I was not left with a piece, I was left with a score that didn't really need to be public.

So I changed it. I realized that just because I don't know what I'm looking for does not mean that I can't find out. I still don't know if the piece really succeeds in what it could be, but I tried giving it shape and specificity in order to see it at all. In my effort to not know, I think I sought to codify the 'not knowing' as a place to be, as a thing to be so I could retain some sense of what I am doing. It sounds so backwards: I wanted to know so badly that I tried having 'not knowing' be the thing that I knew but I threw away any chance of knowing or figuring it out because I thought not knowing was the resolution.

AH!

HA_{aaa}

i was in my head a little.
i was out my mind a little.
i'm a little lost.
i'm a little messy.
and what an interesting place to be.

I think I'm on to something about being in the middle. I think life might just be that middle. Discombobulated and full of unknowns but always delightful and completely intolerable. The sense of an arrival, the "I've made it" moment is not really real. I don't think there is a resolution to motivate being alive. I think there's a big messy middle made up of all of the grief and joy and wonders of being a human.

5/29/16

Stuart Singer, a teacher and friend, told me honestly that he was feeling some type of way about his life just as I was feeling some type of way about mine. As we were talking I realized that this person, who in my mind is the epitome of success, who embodies the career, teacher and person I aspire to be, was feeling lost.

Just like me.

And I was reminded that we are all living in the big messy middle of life, no matter what stage we are at.

He imparted this phrase that I think is the truest thing a person could say. My heart stopped when he said it, he gave language that perfectly encapsulates the big messy middle...

life is:

“an intolerable miracle”

Life is an intolerable miracle. We are so alive, dancing, wondering, not knowing, erring, grieving, experiencing. The totally intolerable miracle of being alive, makes me think that the middle is an O.K. place to be. So without resolution, without knowing where I go next, I hold with me the small secret that we are all living the intolerable miracle and I am overjoyed to be alive.



Bibliography

Lepecki, Andre. "Rethinking Dramaturgy." *Repensar La Dramaturgia: Errancia Y Transformación*. Murcia: Centro Párraga, 2011. N. pag. Print.

Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*. New York: Dell Pub., 1966. N. pag. Print.

Images

Flavin, Dan. *Untitled (to Barnett Newman) Two*. 1971. Installation. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

Endless Thanks....

Mom.

I know whatever I say you will shrug off but you are my life. I am in constant awe of your light, your competence, your hilarity and your groundedness. Thank you for always leading me and supporting me endlessly while I work out this big messy middle.

Dad.

My dream interpreting, soul pondering, junk collecting, creative thinking and understanding Pops. You are an endless source of rejuvenation. Thank you always for your stories, life advice and ability to see the world through such youthful eyes. You are a truly special person. Your deep understanding of all things soul related help me to see that I am not alone in the universe.

Clay.

For opening my eyes to other ways of being. For making me a more gentle person (yes, it's true, I can be gentle). For your endless generosity and love even when we are foes. You can make me see the world through a different lense even if for only a second. You have a coveted place in my heart, and secretly, I am always your friend.

Sissy.

For being the little squish that you are.

Grandpa and Grandma.

You guys are the most uniquely amazing Grandparents a girl could have. For always supporting me, for all our laughs, for sushi, for letting me into your lives, for literally showing me the world, for letting me revel in your trinkets, for telling me your stories. I am honored and beyond lucky to have you two.

To the amazing faculty of the dance department.

I am overwhelmed by who you are as women, as teachers, as artists. You each embody a powerfulness that I admire beyond belief. I don't know of any other department that gives us as much dedication and care as you do. When I think about my time at Bard, I think of you.

Eamon.

Life is just better with you. You make the middle the most exciting place to be.

Dancers and friends.

I could not ask for anyone else. You guys are my blood, my sisters. I am with you in the middle until the end.

