



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Dance Undergraduate Theses

Dance

5-2-2016

Senior Thesis: P.S.

Summer Salazar

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/dance_theses



Part of the [Dance Commons](#), [Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Salazar, Summer, "Senior Thesis: P.S." (2016). *Dance Undergraduate Theses*. 80.
https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/dance_theses/80

This Campus Access only theses is brought to you for free and open access by the Dance at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dance Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Summer Salazar
Senior Thesis: *P.S.*
May 2, 2016
Loyola Marymount University

Table of Contents

- I. Genesis of Thesis Project
- II. Outline
- III. Final product
- IV. Next?

Genesis of Thesis Project

I originally did a physical therapy summer internship for my senior thesis project in the summer of last year. The internship consisted of work that enabled me to shadow a certified personal trainer and athletic trainer at a soccer sports academy on the east coast. Last year I had the intention of continuing school after my undergrad to become an athletic trainer in hopes of working with a professional sports team. I have always been drawn to sports and I knew this internship would provide me with a glimpse of how athletic trainers work and how the job market is. The internship was in a span of two months in East Otis, Massachusetts, specifically at Larkum Lake. I had worked there the previous summer as a camp counselor as well as a lifeguard and the internship position was created for me in order to provide insight and a hands on experience with soccer players.

The soccer academy hosted girls from all over the states as well as outside the country, ages ranging from 7-17. The girls were able to attend either one session, which was about 5-7 days or could do multiple sessions and stay up to 2-3 weeks. While I was there, besides shadowing the athletic trainer, I created an elective for the girls at the academy. A lot were getting injured and worn out from the intense program that was created so I instilled a stretching elective that gave them the chance to stretch properly; the trainer assisted me in helping the girls with injury prevention tips. Upon starting the elective, fewer girls were getting injured and were able to play longer in their soccer sessions, which was a huge help to the athletic trainer. The soccer academy was comprised primarily with soccer sessions as well as traditional camp activities. The girls would play either two or three soccer

sessions per day and have two camp electives in between. For those electives they were given the opportunity to choose from an array of options that consisted of swimming at the lake, paddle boarding, cooking class 101, arts and crafts, wilderness adventures and yoga. The soccer sessions allowed them to scrimmage and to do exercises with their teams and the electives in between gave them a chance to wind down and do non-soccer related activities.

Despite not using this as my thesis I did gain insight on what it is like to be an athletic trainer and how strenuous it can be. There were moments where it did become stressful but I learned as I went along. The person whom I shadowed was great and even when placed in stressful situations, she acted professional and got things done in a timely manner. Pursuing athletic training has been put off to the side because I realized that after graduation I would like to pursue dance for as long as possible.

When deciding not to use my internship as my thesis, I struggled in finding something to do that would interest me. I had ideas but I could not narrow it down to one that I would not get tired of. I considered doing a Pilates or Yoga certification by school but the programs in which I was interested in was only on the weekends and I worked at my part time job those days. I really wanted to be able to make use of my thesis after graduation and am now considering pursuing my MFA (a complete 180 turn from a year ago). So along with this notion, I decided to do a choreographic thesis. I knew that if I went this route, I could easily use this as a template for a project to submit with my application.

One of my favorite dance classes that I took while here was Lillian's counter-technique class. I originally took it two years ago and had the opportunity to take it again this past spring. Upon taking this course again, it really inspired me to use it as a part of my senior thesis project. When I first took the course two years ago, it was definitely something I was not used to; counter-technique enables the body to use less to be more efficient in the dance space. I often got frustrated the first time I took it because it was difficult to simply let the body do what it wants; I kept second guessing myself and kept over thinking the movements. So I challenged myself to risk more when I danced and to experiment with counter-technique this time around. I challenged myself to not overthink and to allow my body to use the toolbox to my best ability.

Another area in which I personally struggled with and did not feel quite as comfortable with was improvisation. Each time I felt so awkward and uncomfortable because I simply had no idea what to do with my body! I had a bad habit of overthinking and not being able to release the unnecessary tension in my body I felt as if I was not able to fully explore and engage in the creative process. I would get too in my head and not be able to take risks and explore the space.

Taking Laban Notation my sophomore year with Damon really pushed me to explore outside my comfort zone. That was one of the first few times I explored improvisation and did not enjoy it at first. I found it difficult to explore movement with my body in the space because I was not sure how to approach it correctly, when in actuality, there is no guidelines, unless instructed. I decided to incorporate this into my project as well because I believe improvisation is important because it

enables us to creatively explore the space on our own and do what feels good to our bodies. Improvisation has allowed for me to dive into the creative process more and to not feel judged with my movement quality. I have seen growth in my dancing by incorporating improvisation into my dancing. I decided to incorporate improvisation into my project because along with counter-technique it has challenged me to do my best work and has allowed me to grow more as a dancer.

Exploring movement through improvisation has allowed me to move around in the space not only freely, but to have it feel good as well. I enjoy the process of improvisation because it allows for development of creativity. The improvisation process can be challenging and invigorating, because it allows for your creative process to unfold. I would list out cues to help me in case I go stuck or if I have no idea what to do next. The list consisted of: spiral, twist, quick, retrograde, prick, isolation...a list of words that would just help me to keep moving and exploring with my body. I would write the list with big words and tape it to both the floor and mirror; if I was doing floor work, I could roll over to see a word, and if I was standing, take a glimpse at the mirror. Each time I would investigate with this, I would scramble the words and use different music. I would make a playlist that contained instrumental music on the piano but also music by Sam Smith, Calvin Harris and The Lumineers to change up the music quality. I enjoyed this process of exploration because each time I experimented with it, it was different. On my more tired days I resorted to doing more floor work, and the days where I had more energy I would play around in the space on my feet. One of my favorite days of exploring improvisation was when I made use of the mirror with my body. I would

lean, draw with my fingertips, place weight with my arms, do handstands and just do all sorts of stuff you would not typically do with a mirror. I liked playing around in the studio and being adventurous with choices I made; it made it more enjoyable and it was nice to have the space to myself.

Outline

My thesis project process has certainly not been easy. I changed my mind numerous times and even changed my project in its entirety when starting school. The senior thesis project for dance majors forces you to do this project to the best of your ability; to set your best work forward. At first we are given substantial liberty when deciding what to do our projects on, which is very beneficial especially for double majors in our department. There were moments that I did feel overwhelmed because I found it difficult to narrow down my options and to stick to it. This project gives us the opportunity to personalize it and to make it our own, which makes it enjoyable and not forced.

Once I decided that I no longer wanted to use my summer internship as my project I began looking at Pilates and Yoga certification programs, I spoke to fellow colleagues to see what they were working on as well as past seniors who have already graduated. I was honestly astounded to see and hear about past projects that had been done because each has been so different and it inspired me to do more of a personal project.

When attempting to start my project I originally did not want to perform my work, rather have a group of fellow dancers do the choreography I had done. I originally planned on working with five dance majors in the department all of whom I have had the chance to have class with. As the semester progressed I found it difficult to find a common meeting time that would be most beneficial for everyone, which seemed impossible. I commute to school approximately thirty miles and work two jobs aside from going to school full time. I was willing and able to stay late in

order to rehearse but other dancers had already committed to other senior projects or had already started rehearsing for the faculty show in the fall.

While my cast for my piece was still being decided upon I made the initiative to start the process on my own in the studios. At first I did not do much simply because I had no idea where to begin. I had various music samples, all in which were instrumental variations that were simplistic yet beautiful. A lot of my inspiration came from my time alone in the studio, playing around with different music, improvising, dancing to no music, speaking with the movement, changing the genre of music I was using, starting all over from scratch and erasing old material...it was quite the process. I knew this was the time to experiment and to try new things but I had so much to play around with and that made the process fun yet challenging with all the choices.

At first I used various tracks from the film *Amelie*, most of which is comprised of purely instrumental tracks. I originally began with that and would improvise in the space, eventually came up with a set choreography and expanded off of that. I eventually became bored with it about four weeks in; I became disinterested with the whole thing-music and choreography. I then came to conclusion that if I became bored with my own work, then others would be too. I was also pretty stressed at this time and perhaps this influenced my work and process as a whole. Moments of stress and tiredness did play a role in the process of this project; it set the tone and sometimes it was hard to shake off distractions that were happening on the outside and to stay purely focused on the project.

My process for my first attempt was a span of four weeks. The first week I improvised to no music; I explored the space with purely floor work and was in the studio four times the first week. The second week I came across an old playlist on my Spotify and saw that the soundtrack for the film *Amelie*; I forgot how much I enjoyed the music and decided upon "Comptine d'un autre ete". It was simplistic and making choreography was not difficult, I came up with it rather quickly. Weeks three and four were comprised mostly of building off of the choreography I had already set. Most of the choreography was set on the floor, mainly because I feel most comfortable when doing floor work; I find it easier to come up with choreography that is set on the floor. The first attempt came about fairly easy and quickly than I expected which surprised me. As thanksgiving came around, I took a break from the choreographic process and left it the way it was. My workload had increased around this time and I was not worried about how the process was moving. I pushed my project to the side to focus on other schoolwork at this time.

Upon coming back from break I was in the studio again and did not feel the same about my piece anymore. I had decided around this time that my piece was going to be a solo work and I considered having someone else perform it as a part of my thesis. I did my choreography and was not as enthused as I was when I first began; I was not sure if school had anything influence on that since finals and papers were right around the corner. So I decided to put it off until after the fall semester was over to pick up where I left off. I decided to do this because I felt as if my other classes and their workload were influencing my overall project.

Anytime I am in my car or studying, I constantly have music playing in the background. For some odd reason I kept looking for something better, music wise, for my project. I became bored with the music choice I had and would even ask friends for music recommendations; I was always looking to improve my piece because I believed it had potential to be better overall. Since I no longer had a cast, it made it a bit more difficult when it came to choreographing for the piece. I did reach a point where I became very frustrated with this process and left it completely alone for about a week and a half; I just was not happy with how it was going. I knew that there was going to be a point where I would get frustrated with the process but I did not expect to get fed up with it; I guess it was not where I expected it to be. I had changed my mind and thought process countless times that I became impatient with myself and the overall process in general. When I reached this point I decided to leave it alone until I returned from Christmas break to start again with the choreographic process.

The frustrations I was dealing with at this time were frustrations with myself and stress in general. I was halfway through my senior year and I was facing an overall stress with not only my project but with life in general. I seriously reconsidered my project in its entirety again because of the external stress I was dealing with. The stress came from my daily commute to not being happy or satisfied with how the project was coming along. But I came to conclusion that my project should not have to suffer because of my stress so I left it alone for another week.

I eventually made my way back to the studio to continue my process and decided on the spot I was going to start over; new music, new concepts and new choreography. I felt good about that decision though, it did not feel overwhelming or more stressful; I saw it as a refresher instead of added stress. I looked at this attempt to achieve what I wanted to and to be excited about this process and not make it seem like work. At this point I am in one week into the spring semester and I enrolled in Lillian's Counter-technique class. I took this course for the first time two years prior and really enjoyed it. It was challenging and frustrating at times because I could not get myself to comprehend the concepts to do less with the body in space. In actuality I was only making this process a lot more difficult than what it actually was because I created a bad habit of overthinking and that did not allow my body to do less.

This time around I was familiar with the concepts presented and felt more confident with myself as a dancer; I was excited to challenge myself in this course. Counter-technique provides its dancers with the tools necessary to do less when dancing. By providing tools to do less, it enables the dancer to be more efficient in the space. A few examples of the tools used in Counter-technique include: Seeing what you see, fuck it, popping, releasing the jaw, distance and covers anatomy to provide a visual for dancers. The anatomy for instance makes the dancers aware that there are four shinbones, and having that visual representation in their minds enables them to be more rooted in the ground. By using 'seeing what you see' as a tool, this allows dancers to focus on their surroundings and to be with one another in the space. By giving them this tool, they are able to do more with facial

expressions instead of having a blank stare. These tools are created to be beneficial to dancers; they are simplistic and effective. I personally found the toolbox to be effective because it did what it was supposed to do to the body; I felt as if I was using my body efficiently since I was using less (releasing tension and not forcing movements). By using the toolbox it made it easier to move in the space and to allow for the movement to occur without placing stress on the body.

By taking this class again I decided to incorporate it into my thesis project. I personally saw and felt the benefits of Counter-technique and being able to explore this twice a week gave me a solid base for my project. Throughout the semester I kept a journal and wrote about my experiences/discoveries when taking Counter-technique. There were some journal entries more descriptive than others but the ones that stuck out to me the most were the ones where I described how I felt when applying the tools to the movement combinations in center. I am not sure what it was about the specific days where it just felt so good to be in class; and most of the time, it was the days where I struggled most to find inspiration to move. One of the earlier entries I wrote described me as being very tired and sore from the long week. Even though I was exhausted and did not want to dance that day, it was one of my best classes I had with Lillian. There was not much of a change from what we did the previous class; we warmed up and reviewed the combinations we learned two days prior. The warm up at the start of class enabled me to just relax and to release the tension I had prior to class. I was able to create distance between the joints, thus allowing me to feel more length and space within my body; I felt longer. I was pretty sore so I made sure to keep taking deep and full breaths so that the blood in the

body would circulate. Once we completed the warm up, I felt a lot more relaxed and lengthened in my body; I described feeling “stretched” in my limbs. In my journal entry I describe feeling more within my body; I was able to have the exercises and combinations feel good. When dancing in class I did not feel as if I had to force my body to warm up or to move freely in the space; it felt natural and was an enjoyable experience. Having days like these serve as a reminder as to why I am doing what I am doing. I think that sometimes we get caught up in the stress and deadlines that dance can at times feel like a task, but when days like these come around, I find them to be beneficial.

I noticed as well that keeping a journal throughout this process made it more inspiring. It definitely served as a reminder that there are certainly good and bad days, and by having the journal it allowed me to reflect on what made the good days “good” and what made the bad ones “bad”. With keeping up with my journal entries each week, it also benefitted me because I noticed that I had a lot more “good” days than “bad” ones. It got to the point where the good days were no longer separated by days; rather there were good weeks! Dance enables us to feel a certain way and one of the most accurate depictions of that is that it made me feel more alive. We get so accustomed to doing the same thing over and over that we ourselves get bored of the daily routine. Going to school, to work, to class, to more class then back home can be draining and can test you at times to see if it is truly what we want to do.

Despite having this project be so up and down like a roller coaster, I would not have done anything differently. I definitely got upset with myself and the overall process but I eventually figured it out on my own and it was quite the journey. This

project enabled to explore and be creative with my movement quality; I even incorporate Counter-technique as much as I can to my other classes and the results have been rewarding.

Final Product

This thesis project has been stressful, upsetting and overwhelming but in the end very rewarding. Despite the struggle and failures I had, it was an individual project and I am content with how I did it. Looking back on the process as a whole, the struggles and stress I faced enabled me to find resolutions and to make it better than the original version I had envisioned. Reflecting back on this project has made me really think as to whether the original version was better than the end product. I have to say I am way more content with this than what I had originally mapped out.

My project challenged me to do my best work because I was never satisfied with the work towards the end or the final product; I still think it can be better. I am happy that I have completed it but since it was a personal choreographic work, I feel as if there is always room for improvement. As dancers we are constantly changing, getting better and making new discoveries, we are in essence a never-ending project as well. We fix, adjust, add, delete and change our projects all the time, what we are able to capture through video or still images is able to capture how we are in the present.

I was originally planning on performing my solo at Encore at the end of the semester, but due to an injury I was not able to do so. My injury made me unable to dance in my last week of college and despite being very upset, I have come to realize that nothing that I had planned with this thesis came to be how I wanted it to be-and I have come to be okay with that. I had planned for this project to be completely different and it looks nothing like how I envisioned it nine months ago. Even though it is not how I originally envisioned it, I am content with my end product; I figured

out how to complete it and make it entirely my own. The one constant thing throughout this entire crazy process has been my title for this piece, which I titled: *P.S.* I titled my work this because each time we send a message of some sort, whether it is email or text, we often use *P.S.* as a reminder to remind the person to whom we are messaging of something important. I decided to title piece *P.S.* because despite the ups and downs I have gone through not only with this project, but with life, it serves as a constant reminder to myself that I still here; I am present.

My thesis project journey has been an unusual one, yet challenging. At one point I wanted to resort to my original project of my summer internship but I had to remind myself that that specific project no longer excited me and to resort to something that I no longer had interest in would be the easy way out. I knew that if I wanted to use this project again I would have to find something that interests me currently and that would bring forward my best work. As much as I would have enjoyed to perform this piece that I have been working on, I know that taking care of my body properly was the best thing to do.

I find it somewhat difficult to describe how I feel towards the end of this project. With the project completed it also brings up the notion of graduation and it has made me reflect on my time here at LMU. There are times where I enjoyed working on the project and other times when I did not enjoy it as much, which I find to be normal. I think that if the project came to be too easy, it would not have challenged me to do my best work; I would have been comfortable with my work and would not have wanted to push myself to make it better. I am satisfied turning

this project in, but I know that as a dancer, we are never really satisfied with our work; there is always room for a little improvement.

Next?

I am not too certain as to what I want to do after I graduate from LMU and I seem to be very okay with this! I have applied for a corporate position with Hurley, which is owned by Nike, and I hope that I can start almost immediately after graduation if offered the position. The position consists of assisting with the design team in innovation and technology for their main product-wet suits. I certainly want to take time off from dancing for a bit to recover from my injury and also want to continue dancing and going to auditions later this summer when I am healthy.

At some point in about two years I would like to go to graduate school for my MFA. I know that there are many schools that offer an array of options for that and I would love to leave Los Angeles to explore for a bit. And when I do apply for graduate school I would like to use this project as something to submit. I have placed a lot of time and effort into this and to be able to use it again would be most beneficial. I know that I would like to teach at the collegiate level later in life and to be able to do so in another state or out of the country would be an exciting experience.

I would absolutely love to eventually work for Nike corporate in either Los Angeles or in Oregon. Nike has been a company I have always been drawn to and to work for a company such as that one would be an incredible experience. Nike started to come up with dance apparel for dancers and they did not do much to expand it. If able to work with them one day I would hope to expand the dance apparel line and strive to make dance as a part of their main sports. Growing up dancing and playing all sorts of sports such as basketball, baseball, track soccer and

football, it has made me want to give dance that credit too to my overall training as an athlete. In my opinion, dancers work just as hard or harder than other competitive professional sports and it should be placed higher up on that platform as well.

I am surprisingly not stressed as to know what is going to happen after graduation; I am looking at it as more of an adventure and it excites me. It is the beginning of a new chapter and adventure in my life and just thinking about that excites me to travel, dance and explore. From doing this project I have come to learn that not everything goes as planned and in the long run, it may be for the best that the original plan fell through. The process may not be enjoyable but the end result has been a rewarding one. I have learned to be more optimistic when a situation changes. Plans and things constantly change around us and how we react to these situations test us as to how we will react post graduation. We will most certainly be placed in situations that test us and I believe that the way in which we find a resolution reflects how we are as people.