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Janae Angela Williams

Thesis Presentation

**Bachelor of Arts, Dance
Loyola Marymount University
May 6, 2005**

**Under the guidance of:
Judy Scalin
Scott Heinzerling
Patrick Damon Rago
Teresa Heiland**

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this time to extend my most humble gratitude to following people who helped to make my thesis possible. Their donation of time, guidance, or sometimes simply a shoulder and a laugh made the process seem like crossing the street rather than crossing the Sahara.

Judy Scalin
Teresa Heiland
Damon Rago
Scott Heinzerling
Amada Niksa
My mother, Angela
My fellow senior class
All of my interviewees
Part-time faculty

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Words simply cannot express...

Preface

At the conclusion of the interviewing process for my actual thesis I gave each of my student interviewees this quotation by Jack Kerouac:

...and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes 'Awww'

I found this to be most fitting as I realized that my time at LMU has transformed me into a “mad one” as well. Life as a dance major has been more of a dream than I ever realized it could be, filled with laughter, long hours, injuries, ice cream, disappointments, triumphs, and about a million roller coaster rides. This thesis, which seemed so insurmountable a task in August, has become a labor of love and I present it to you, reader, as a testament to the blood, sweat, and tears—and there was lots of all of that—that I have given to the studio floors of Loyola Marymount University.

Moving to a City

MOVING TO A CITY

Chicago, Illinois

prepared by: *Janae Williams*

Fall 2004

Loyola Marymount University

Dance Program

NEWSPAPERS, COLLEGES and UNIVERSITIES with DANCE PROGRAMS

Use these sources (newspapers):

The Chicago Nation

www.clnation.com

Chicago Reader

www.chireader.com

Chicago Sun-Times

www.suntimes.com/index

Chicago Standards Newspapers

www.standardnewspapers.com

Chicago Suburban News

www.chicagosuburbannews.com

Daily Southtown

www.dailysouthtown.com

Periódico La Raza

www.laraza.com

Pioneer Press

www.pioneerlocal.com

Star Newspapers

www.starnewspapers.com

Use these sources (schools):

Columbia College Chicago

<http://www.colum.edu/undergraduate/dance/>

(312) 344-8310

Northern Illinois University

<http://www.niu.edu/theatre/>

no phone number for dance contact

Northwestern University

<http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/dance/>

(847) 491-3147

University of Chicago

www.uchicago.edu

mpschaef@midway.uchicago.edu (new department, all information requests should be sent here)

**Reflections: Summary of
Dance Studies**

Reflection of Dance Studies

Theory

Fundamentals of Dance Composition I & II –Scott Heinzerling

- Fall 2003 and Spring 2004
- Increased ability to improvise dance movements
- Increased ability to compose and perform dance studies
- Increased ability to speak, read, and write about dance
- To build community by dancing together, speaking to and coaching each other and foster respect for risk taking, growth, as well as individual challenges and gifts
- Increased ability to integrate lessons from course with outside life
- To create familiarity with the seven essential areas of dance
 - Creative Process
 - Aesthetic Principles
 - Aesthetic Valuing
 - Physical and Performance Skills
 - Cultural-Historical Context
 - Integration
 - Community Building
- To develop an aesthetic vocabulary
- To attune student to the stages of inward journey
 - Awareness
 - Attention
 - Intention
 - Action
 - Reflection

Dance Styles and Forms

- To review historical contemporary 20th century choreographic aesthetics
- To promote the recognition and development of multiple approaches to dance composition
- To promote a deeper understanding and implementation of Laban's Effort Concepts
- To promote a deeper understanding of dance related to dance composition
- To promote the development of the individual student's personal dance aesthetic

Laban Movement Analysis –Susan Goldberg

- Fall 2004
- To learn historical and cultural context of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)
- To identify several core concepts and principles of LMA
- To demonstrate an ability to embody the movement concepts of LMA and Bartenieff Fundamentals in categories of Body, Effort, Shape, & Space
- To demonstrate an ability to define through words, symbols, and movements key components of Body, Effort, Shape, & Space
- To develop skills to think critically about movement and the possibilities for multiple interpretations of meaning
- To develop skills for discovering and articulating personal meaning in movement
- To demonstrate an ability to articulate their individual interpretations and associations with the material

Music for Dance/Drumming

- To be taken Fall 2005

To Dance is Human: Dance, Culture, and Society –Judy Scalin

- Fall 2003
- To examine the dynamics of DANCING as a human phenomena—dance as ritual, dance as rite, dance as entertainment, dance as art
- To introduce students to the significance of the study of bodymind when investigating the history and culture of peoples—familiar and unfamiliar, too see the body as universal and to investigate the significance of its varied expression culture to culture
- To use the American experience as the point of departure and the point of frequent return. To particularly emphasize dance and dancing that is alive in Los Angeles today.
- To cultivate interest in the stories of people engaged in the human experience. To enable students to research in multiple disciplines in order to arrive at a desired insight. To validate personal experience as a source for research.
- To build connections with what may be “foreign” cultures so that the works and values of those cultures shed light, pose challenges, and otherwise ignite restlessness within the student as s/he experiences his or her own life. To establish the essentialness of studying the “other” so that the understanding of self will be more complete
- To investigate the connections that happen between people of different cultures and how these connections influence the dance and how the dance influences those connections
- To explore the concept of “Who is at the table?” and how this affects dance and dancing

- To develop the students ability to speak and write about movement and cultural issues.
- To develop a classroom that becomes a miniature community of it own kind

Dance History –Jill Nunes Jensen

- Spring 2004
- A study of Western dance development as an art form from earliest origins through medieval religious pageantry, Renaissance court dances, 18th century stage dance, and culminating with dance in the 19th and 20th century
- Evolution of ballet and modern dance forms in Europe and America
- Student is asked *how* and *why* we watch dance as well as the political, social, gendered, anthropological, sexual, and technical and historical constructions around and within Western dance

Kinesiology I & II –Marie-José Blom-Lawrence

- Fall 2004 and to be taken Spring 2005
- To increase dancer's knowledge of and familiarity with physiology thereby assisting understanding of how the body functions to maintain optimal health, as well as its influence on movement
- To understand and learnt he language of basic anatomy
- To cultivate ability to create integrated or supplemental strength and conditioning programs to achieve and maintain optimal levels of "dance fitness." Thus enhancing performance efficacy and quality and to reduce injury potential.
- To point out the intricacies of the dancer's instrument, the body, and develop a deep understanding as to how to maintain, fine tune, and protect it.
- To understand the body and its functions from the deep cellular level

Principles of Teaching Dance—Dr. Teresa Heiland

- Examine the theory and practice of teaching dance through the focus of
 - Why is dance important for education of human being?
 - What does dance education mean?
 - In what ways do people teach and learn dance?
 - What is the role of dance in the context of the Visual and Performing Arts and Physical Education?

Technique

Ballet –Caprice Walker, Tekla Kostek

- Continuously since Spring 2003
- To recognize and evaluate the importance of proper placement/alignment as the fundamental base for classical technique

- To engage in simple enchaînements in order to focus on mastering new steps
- To analyze and learn how to breakdown individual steps and simple enchaînements
- To become comfortable and familiar with terminology
- Increased strength and stamina
- Increased muscular control and coordination, as well as flexibility
- Increased knowledge of rotation/turn-out

Modern –Damon Rago

- Spring 2003, Fall 2004, to be taken until Fall 2005
- To demonstrate body awareness
- To demonstrate proper alignment
- To demonstrate an understanding of the mechanics of the body in motion
- To demonstrate the ability to use the body as a tool for the exploration of space, effort and shape
- To demonstrate the ability to use release, momentum, and other movement qualities
- To demonstrate an increased range of flexibility, strength, balance, coordination, and stamina
- To demonstrate the ability to acknowledge and understand the inherent capabilities and limitations of a variety of body types
- To demonstrate the ability to work with others in a nurturing, trusting environment
- To demonstrate the ability to observe, discuss, and write about dance as an art form

Jazz –Luretta McCray, Hassan Christopher, Denise Leitner

- Continuously since Fall 2003
- To cultivate rhythmic accuracy
- To cultivate increased sensitivity to the effective use of space
- Increased ability in the areas of timing, placement, control of the arms, posture and alignment
- To cultivate control and command of the performance through musicality, phrasing focus, and theatrical intent
- To cultivate joy, fire, and passion for the dance

World Dance –Rolanda Reese

- Spring 2004 (Dance of Hawaii)
- Spring 2005 (Music and Dance of West Africa)

Tap

- Not taken

Yoga and Dance Conditioning –Kimberly Fowler

- Off campus, Summer, Fall 2004: Yoga for Athletes @ Y.A.S. 1101 Abbot Kinney Blvd. Venice, CA
- Increased muscular control and coordination, as well as flexibility
- Increased stamina
- Increased connection to breath as an active component in total body health and awareness
- Stress relief
- Increased ability of individual to exist in present moment

Pilates –Yvette Franco, Patricia Caballero-Schillaci, Marie-José Blom-Lawrence

- Continuously since mid-Spring 2003
- Increased ability to access and engage core muscles to aid in stability
- Increased sensitivity to the utility of personal movement patterns
- Increased muscular control and coordination, as well as flexibility

Partner Aesthetic

Partner Aesthetic—Katrina Duncan

Katrina Marie Duncan is an emotionally raw and fearless performer who believes strongly in the artistry of the dance experience. At the young age of 21 years, Katrina is already making a splash into the choreographic world with her work being showcased at both the Loyola Marymount University Student Dance Concert and the American College Dance Festival Regional Gala, both in Spring 2005.

Katrina is by training and focus a modern dancer but she hates labels, preferring instead to cultivate an infusion of all the different techniques she has studied and molding them into a contemporary offering. She takes a Taoist approach to movement emphasizing harmony and balance. She believes that one must be completely open to and humbled by the experience, thereby allowing the movement to create itself.

Abstraction and distortion are major themes in her work as she feels they are the most true and honest to the reality of dance and dancing human beings; out of absurdity lives clarity. Above all she is a relentless performer, constantly seeking out the truth. She says, "I just want to bring myself to the table and be honest with myself for those few moments in time."

Personal Aesthetic

Development of My Personal Aesthetic

"To say [someone is] a Black artist is easier than to talk about what this person has done. It's a bit offensive. It feeds into a sense of alienation, which is the last thing I want. I say I'm a card-carrying member of the human race. I have my particular description and I own that, but I'm trying to understand where I go from there."

--Bill T. Jones

When one learns to write, the first rule that they are taught is to "write what you know," that is to say write to the topic(s) which is(are) the most familiar to you. For many people that starting point requires an inventory of personal markers. One must compose a self-description. In my case a few of my major markers include: gender—female, ethnicity—Black American with Cherokee, Blackfeet, and Irish influences, and religion—Buddhist, from a Christian family. I like to think of these things as being intimately woven into the tapestry of who I am yet, at the same time, not the sole determinants. Like Bill T. Jones, I too am "trying to understand where I go from there."

Typically I am not a person who attempts work with my gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs at the forefront. I cannot say that their presence is completely absent as that would, for obvious reasons, be impossible but, they are not normally a starting point for me. I am sure that there are many reasons for this,

the most salient in my mind being that most of my life's major joys and upsets have not come from places where these issues were highlighted. Especially in terms of my biological factors, I cannot say that I have been the victim of overt acts of racism or sexism. I am not painting this world to be some utopian paradise, in which these evils do not exist—I am very well aware that they are still very much alive and breathing, most of the time subliminally—they simply, and perhaps luckily for me, have been on the periphery of my experience more often than not. This is not to say that I have not been subject to blatant displays of ignorance (a seventh grade math teacher yelling at me in front of the whole class, “Janae, you ain’t Indian!” after seeing my ethnic identification bubbled in on a standardized test) but again, luckily, these have been few and far between.

Religion on the other hand is a bit more sensitive. Being both Black and Buddhist in America means that I am a minority of a minority. Religiously and ethnically, I get the short end of the stick. Especially as a student at a Catholic university I am much more aware of differences in spirituality between my peers and I than in skin color and hair texture, though I do notice both. Reconciling episodes of ignorance based on my religious beliefs is different than those surrounding race and sex because it is the only one I chose. Though I joy in and celebrate my Buddhist practice, it does add another layer of frustration to my life when friends and/or often family do not understand.

Choosing to focus my study on my religious experience was difficult. As I stated above, I am not the type of person who talks about those kinds of things in my work, as dancer or writer (my first love). The germ of the idea first came to me last spring when Jamba Juice, a company that I frequented often and whose slogans and general operating philosophy I found to be very much in line with my own way of thinking, introduced their new line of "Enlightened Smoothies". These drinks with names like Strawberry Nirvana™ and Tropical Awakening™ and the language used to describe them are very blatantly based on Buddhist ideas. The description for Strawberry Nirvana™, for example, reads: "***The much-celebrated karma of fresh strawberries and bananas come together here*** with apple-strawberry juice and our lower calorie dairy base. A heavenly way to get your B6 fix which ensures your nervous system's peak performance!" This comes directly from the Jamba Juice official website (www.jambajuice.com). I found this to be very disheartening as I felt that tenets in my faith were being trivialized. As I allude to in my text, there would never be a "What Would Jesus Drink?" campaign with smoothie names based on the apostles or Ten Commandments. The public would be outraged; but then the public is majority Christian.

I don't necessarily mind the mystification of Buddhism by Westerners. Certain beliefs and especially certain sects of it are mystical in nature. Where the line can be crossed is when people confuse mysticism for a lack of legitimacy. When they equate the smoke and mirrors to a magic show and think that Buddhism is something that can be put on and taken off like a piece of jewelry.¹

¹ I am referring to Cabbala here whose recent "trendization" by many of Hollywood's elite has come at the uproar of many Orthodox Jews.

When Loretta Livingston, coincidentally a fellow Buddhist, came to speak at DanceTalk one of the things that she acknowledged as being integral to her aesthetic was the notion of humanity.” What makes us human beings? What is essential?” For me, I realized to answer that, I had to dig into myself. I had to use this assignment to address one of the areas of discontent within my personal identification markers. That was very hard for as my tendency is more toward external focus than internal; but if I never addressed it I realized that I would never be addressing one of the fundamental ways in which I am a human being, as Buddhism colors the way that I see the entire world. Having initially grown up Christian I understand that the way that I see things now is vastly different from the way I saw things then. Religion is fundamentalist in nature because it fundamentally affects the actions, beliefs, and general worldview of its followers.

In looking back over the text of the piece, I notice an unintentional Buddhist aspect to it: it is non-confrontational. Yes, I present you with conflicts, i.e. my mother the static Christian vs. my body the dancing Buddhist or the Jamba Juice fiasco but I don't tell you how to feel about them. I report on the events with limited commentary and segue into a refrain about who I am: a “typical American girl”. This is because at the core of both my aesthetic and general life philosophy is the importance of subtlety. I believe that subtlety speaks louder than raucous grandstanding, is more effective, and more respected. It doesn't always work and is not appropriate for all situations but when it is I think it communicates a certain level of respect and understanding

between participants. I am saying, "I trust that you are of a certain level of intelligent understanding that you will receive what I am saying. I am not suggesting that you must have the same reaction(s) that I do, based on our differing foundational experiences, but that you will formulate your own opinion." We may disagree but at least we'll be having a conversation.

I think movement, no matter how personal, should engage the audience. Performing arts are just that—arts meant to be performed and with that I think that there is a certain responsibility owed to the viewer to be included in what is going on. I don't think that artists should bind themselves to what they think will be successful, only to what is honest, human, and involving for the audience given the time and/or money spent to view the work. In my own work I like to explore the personal as a conduit into the universal. Not everyone who sees this will be a Buddhist living in a Christian society but they may be some other religious, racial, or ethnic minority. Under all of the colors of the rainbow I don't know anyone who hasn't been disrespected or misperceived. And this is the place of dance and all the arts: to connect the human experience. Regardless of how many choreographic devices one may use or Laban concepts, at the end of the day, the performance has to have something unifying to say and it must engage the audience.

What Is Dance?

**Movement Never Lies: Dance/Movement Therapy
as an Effective Means of Rehabilitation**

Janae Williams
Senior Thesis Prep
Prof. Scalin
17.December.2004

American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham was once told by her psychologist father "movement never lies". It was on this basis that she sought to find truth through movement in her technique of modern dance. Similarly dance/movement therapists work with the understanding that the body is the barometer of the weather of the soul. The topic that this paper will explore is the use of dance/movement therapy in various rehabilitative contexts: with a survivor of torture, victims of child sexual abuse, fibromyalgia sufferers, autistic youth, and finally, cross-culturally, with schizophrenics in Japan; the ages of the participants in these studies range from adolescence to senior citizens. With such a wide demographic pool, the author seeks to discover the effectiveness of dance/movement therapy and its physical, cognitive, and socioemotional risks/benefits across the lifespan. Key questions that will be explored are: Does dance/movement therapy work at all? And, if so, is it a more effective treatment for certain developmental disorders/disruptions than others and/or certain age groups over others?

The roots of dance/movement therapy in America parallel that of the modern dance movement. It is described on the American Dance Therapy Association website (www.adta.org) as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, cognitive, social and physical integration of the individual." In the case of the first article "The Body Remembers: Dance/Movement Therapy with an Adult Survivor of Torture" (Gray, *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, vol. 23 pp.29-33, 2001) dance/movement therapist Amber Elizabeth Lynn Gray documents her experience in working with Rita, a 38 year-old African woman who had been brutally tortured over a one month period. Torture is defined by the World Medical Association as "the deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason." In Rita's case the impetus for her personal misfortune was her brother's political beliefs. He was shot and killed in front of her and their respective children. Rita was then dragged away and taken to a compound where she was "repeatedly raped, beaten, kicked with heavy boots, and dragged across rocks while in prison. She had no access to food, water, or sanitation, and was left to lie on a cold rock floor without clothes or coverings" (p.36). Upon arrival in the United States Rita began dance/movement therapy sessions. These sessions took place just under once a week for 6 months, totaling 19 sessions.

The impact of torture leaves psychosomatic imprints on its victims. These symptoms include, but are in no way limited to, nightmares, dissociation, muscular imbalances, and difficulties in reclaiming early developmental movement patterns. Rita, who self-reported as extremely depressed, exhibited these characteristics. "She looked unsure of her own mobility, and made minimal eye contact... There was a lack of support in her pelvis that resulted in an inability to push through her spine, one of the earliest developmental movements" (p.36). Her startle response had been heightened intensely as she

suffered from nightmares, insomnia, as well as a general sense of anxiety. Her condition was exacerbated by the profound turmoil she experienced at having left her children in Africa until she could secure her place in America and send for them.

As Rita began her treatment, the dissociation of the abused parts of her body was evident by the language she used to describe the discomfort she felt, " 'there is a pain in there...in *the* left arm and shoulder' " (p.37). This area had been a site of repeated beatings. When asked to delve deeper into this pain center, Rita expressed that she felt the presence of a rock there. Counselor Gray, sensing the possible usefulness of this image as a support, gravitated toward it eventually using it as an anchor. With this rock and beginning movement sequences, simple shoulder rolls which helped to open her posture, progress began to be made. By the end of that session Rita remarked, " 'I can breathe better' " (p.37). After three weeks, Rita's posture was noticeably improved: the connection to her pelvic floor had returned, pain in her arm had become less inhibitive and her range of motion increased. As Rita's physical body was changing, she reported similar growth in her emotional body; she was reclaiming the ability to laugh and cry. As Gray explains it, " [h]er body and mind were becoming more congruent and integrated, as she began to work sequentially through her traumatic experience, which had become somaticized" (p.39).

By the end of the six-month period, Rita's progress showed itself to be dramatic. The shell of a woman who once awkwardly navigated her space and held her shoulders and gaze downward was suddenly bursting with *joie de vivre*, proclaiming, " 'I came here to tell you I'm not going to die anymore. I'm going to live!' " (p.39). While the speed at which Rita, with the facilitation of her dance/movement therapist, was able to come to healing is not typical, the end result for someone in her situation is. What this case demonstrates is that, not only can dance/movement therapy be effective in working with the severely traumatized, as torture survivors are, but may be specially suited to do so given its foundational focus on body-mind integration. As torture affects the mind but is done *to* the body, traditional talk therapies that do not include the body may overlook this very integral piece of the wellness puzzle.

The insidiousness of torture is the fostering of a close, empathically attuned relationship, in order to cause specific and intentional mental and bodily harm. It "disrupts the relationship to the self...destroy[ing] the integrity, creativity, and vitality of the human being" (p.32). Dance/movement therapy can help to repair these wounds by re-entering into this same relationship but using it to promote the welfare of the client, thus restoring their faith in humanity while simultaneously restoring the peace and safety of their bodies.

Sexual Abuse

"Her Body Speaks: The Experience of Dance Therapy for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse" (Mills & Daniluk, *Journal of Counseling &*

Development, vol. 80 pp. 77-85, 2002) is a phenomenological look at the process of the reclamation of body safety for 5 women. As this study was interested in the dance/movement therapy experience from the clients' perspective certain requirements were in place. First, all participants must have had previous exposure to dance/movement therapy, be it in a group or an individual setting, with a certified dance/movement therapist, that they found to be helpful. Participants were to have completed, at minimum, 6 sessions of dance/movement therapy with the range of time since the completion being at least one year and no more than five years. Recruitment was done by word-of-mouth and notices were placed in dance/movement therapists' studios; the women in this study were all Caucasian and between 25-48 years old. Narrative open-ended interviews were recorded and transcribed. The question that this study sought to ask is "What is the lived experience and meaning of dance therapy for individuals who found it to be facilitative of their personal growth and healing?" (p. 80).

The results from this study found that there were 6 overarching themes that the women experienced as byproducts of their dance/movement therapy treatment: reconnection to their bodies, permission to play, sense of spontaneity, sense of struggle, sense of intimate connection, and sense of freedom. For many women the guilt that they experienced in attracting inappropriate sexual attention caused a disruption in their body image. " 'I always felt sort of fractured, fragmented, like parts of my body are on different planes and they're not connected to me personally' " (p.79). This dissociation, the kind experienced by torture victims like Rita, is a coping mechanism that they developed as children but to which they were bitterly tied to as adults. In fact many of the women had gone through traditional talk therapies and specifically sought out dance/movement therapy "as a means to help them reconnect to their bodies" (p.79). Movement helped the women get out of their intellectual critical selves and back into the wisdom of their bodies. As one woman put it, " '...dance therapy is good because it doesn't let you analyze yourself to the nth degree and not come up with any answers...moving repeatedly helps you to stay in your body, and not go back to your head" (p.80). As these women had, in effect, lost their bodies as children this aspect of dance/movement therapy proved especially ameliorating.

Being allowed to play was important as it fostered a youthfulness that many of the women had stolen from them as a result of the abuse; unwanted sexual advances robbed them of being children in that way. It also provided a welcome relief for the women while dealing with serious sometimes painful issues. " 'I...didn't have to be totally serious and really hard all the time.' Indeed *play and work could coexist* and, in fact, that both together could lead to healing and growth..." (p.80).

One of the lasting effects of sexual abuse, especially on children is the effect it has on one's self-image. Similar to adolescents whose egocentrism posits that everyone is just as concerned with them as they themselves are, survivors

of child sexual abuse also feel as though they are living under a microscope. This inhibits spontaneous free-flowing action; movement that is only possible when one feels in control of their body. Finding this movement is so powerful that it can, as one woman stated, open one up "to a 'whole different way of being' " (p.81).

" 'Moving is like opening the book...it wasn't just like opening the book, it was like ripping the book open. It was really difficult.' " (p.81). Progress involves struggle and as the body can often carry more intense memories than the mind, progressing toward a healthy body-mind can create intense conflict as one struggles to not become overwhelmed with the flood of emotions and memories that suddenly need to be dealt with. As one struggles to rebuild their sexuality, the importance of intimate, non-sexual connection is very evident. It creates community to dance together, as you learn to hold, you realized that you are also being held. Many women cited the observational element as extremely helpful in their own healing process, mentioning how they felt honored to be privy to another's pain and that it encouraged them to give more.

Lastly, all of the women reported an increased sense of freedom. This is very important as the experience(s) of being abused robbed them of choice as children. This legacy follows them into their adulthood. The structure of the dance/movement therapy sessions always allowed the women to, at any given moment, choose their level of involvement. This subtle but empowering gesture helps the women reclaim choice or as one woman put it "*entitlement—reclaiming her right to be in charge of her body and her experience*" (p. 80). The women also spoke of being able to enjoy a physical release of their emotional blockage in a way that was not available to them with talk therapies.

Here again dance/movement therapy helps sexual abuse victims reintegrate their fractured body identities into a cohesive body-mind whole. It allows for a reconnection to the body, a playfulness, a sense of spontaneity, intimate connection, struggle, and freedom. " 'It's being able to move and show the emotion in some way that helps the words come out...I don't have to just say how I feel, I can show how I feel.' " (p.80).

Fibromyalgia

Creative art therapies have been proven effective in working with chronic pain sufferers as well, including people with fibromyalgia. Those afflicted with fibromyalgia are subject to a constant physical pain as well as psychological disruptions such as anxiety, fatigue, trouble concentrating, and headache. The fibromyalgia case was the most empirically scientifically driven of the studies. "Dance/movement therapy and changes in stress-related hormones: a study of fibromyalgia patients with video interpretation" (Bojner-Horwitz et. al, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 30 pp 255-264, 2003) looked at changes over 5 specific hormones: DHEA-S, plasma cortisol, saliva cortisol, prolactin, and NPY. Data was collected over 14 months from thirty-six female patients averaging 57 years of

age. Patients were recorded at baseline, 4 months, 6 months, and 14 months and asked to answer three questions in relation to their movements on the tape:

1. What is your perception of your mobility as it appears on the videotape?
2. What is your perception of your movement pain as it appears on the videotape?
3. What is your perception of your life energy¹ as it appears on the videotape?

Findings from this study concluded that while stress hormone levels did not demonstrate a dramatic difference between the treatment and control groups there was a marked difference in the way that the participants answered the three self-report questions. The treatment group reported significant differences in all three areas: increased mobility, less pain, and improved life energy. Results from this study are an example of the curing/healing dichotomy. In *Returning to Heath: With Dance, Movement & Imagery* author Anna Halprin discusses the differences between being cured and being healed. She says that the former is a medical absence of pathology while the latter is an internal state of balance, love, and acceptance. It is quite possible to have one without the other. In this case dance/movement therapy helps heal the fibromyalgia patients, as it improves their self-perceptions but it has not proven an effective cure as the treatment and control groups did not show an appreciable difference in stress hormone levels.

Autism

Working with autistic youth can pose a special problem for dance/movement therapists as the inability to communicate in calmer, more complex ways can easily instigate angry physical outbursts. In "Autism, Aggression, and Developing a Therapeutic Contract" (American Journal of Dance Therapy, vol. 25 pp 97-109, 2003) author Jonas Torrance asks this central question: "*How can a therapeutic contract be created and maintained with clients who regularly display violent behavior?*" (p.97)

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that interferes with a person's ability to process sensory information and communicate with others. This latter characteristic results in isolation, negatively affecting one's socio-emotional development. It has been stated "autistic people 'feel trapped in an isolated idiosyncratic world of bodily sensations that are not shared with other persons and from which there seems to be no escape.'" (p. 99). Autistic people are held prisoner by their bodies, confined by its malfunction. Dance/movement therapy understands the body as the primary medium of expression and can help facilitate re-integration but must be done carefully and strategically in order to successfully navigate the autistic person's turbulent emotional seas.

¹ Life energy is a term used by fibromyalgia patients "to describe how their condition has affected both their emotional and physical states" (p.257).

This study was conducted in England with males age 16-18 over a nine-month period with 45-minute sessions held weekly. This was the participants' first introduction to dance/movement therapy and they were not allowed to obtain outside therapeutic assistance. In addition, there was an educational focus placed on the activities to help combat the lack of socialization that resulted from their isolation.

"The challenge," according to Torrance "for the therapist is how to intervene effectively while ensuring that neither the therapist nor any member of the group is engulfed by the ferocity of the feelings of the individual" (p. 100). To do this, he posits, the client and clinician must enter into a mutual contract. Realizing the immense amount of effort and hardship that each of the autistic boys must undertake to faithfully attend, the therapist must recognize the first point of that contract, "I am here" and respond reciprocally, "I am here too" (p.102). The process of building community takes on a special difficulty as the diminished communication capacity of the members of the group hinders the formation of shared symbolic expression by all members of the group. The therapist must set codes of conduct to ensure the integrity of the group yet allow for a wide margin of interpretation. Offering this nest of possibility, the client is free to add on to the contract saying, "I want to be accepted for who I am" (p.103). "Be who you really want to be and I will accept you" (p.103) is the reply.

As the potential for danger is always present, the dance/movement therapist must learn to anticipate the movements/reactions of the boys with the empathic attunement of a parent. Cultivation of this sense hopes to lessen the occurrence of violent outburst but does not eliminate it completely. The dance/movement therapist must be prepared for repeated self-destruction by the client as they struggle to say, "I want to be heard and understood" and respond with "I can hear you and you can hear me: let us create a language which is meaningful, safe, and easily shared" (p.104). These three contractual points are basic; they form the foundation of the social standards we set for everyday conversational interactions.

The creation of an environment where all of these things are in place produced positive results in the group. Instances of violent outbreaks decreased as the group took on a more cohesive nature. Moving together gave the boys, who had no other means of communicating to each other effectively, a sense of shared identity. An example of this was captured on videotape "when a student who could speak, but found speaking extremely difficult and requiring a lot of time, was supported by the other group members, who ceased their usual sounds to create a quiet space for this student in which to successfully speak" (p.107). Group members would also save the place of a member who was absent or had to be momentarily removed from group as well as adopting each other's idiosyncratic ways of moving.

"It is possible to offer dialogue in movement...when people with challenging behavior experience this, it can have a profound effect" (p.108). The

expectations set in a dance/movement therapy setting, though still demanding for the boys, are mutable as to always be in their respective zones of proximal development. We are by nature a social species and the use of dance/movement therapy with an autistic population helps create "an embryonic safe space" in which community can be found and healing fostered.

Dance Therapy in Japan

Though these cases were all very different there was a common theme that runs through them: they all took place in cultures where the societal attitude towards touch is restrictive. The idea of personal boundaries and the integrity of one's kinesphere, personal movement zone, are important in Western societies as they promote the overall values of individualism and capitalism. In contrast, for Japanese people, touch is an intrinsic part of daily life. As a chain of islands, metropolitan centers in Japan, especially, negotiate a high population density. Additionally, ambiguity is honored in Japanese culture stemming from the writing system in which multiple meanings may exist for single characters. The combination of these factors allows for amorphous body barriers that honor the use of touch on a daily basis.

The Christian separation of body and mind into domains of hell and heaven, respectively, is also of no consequence here. Shinto, the native religion of Japan sees no such separation. Thus, as authors Yukari Sakiyama and Nana Koch illustrate in "Touch in Dance Therapy in Japan" (American Journal of Dance Therapy, vol 25 pp. 79-95, 2003) "the body-mind is one and that...body is sacred and connected to the gods or sacred spheres"(p.83). The attitude about touch in general, aptly, affects the use of touch in a therapeutic setting. In the Japan Dance Therapy Association standards of practice, the use of touch is specifically delineated: "We must pay attention to how clients feel about touch in order to help them feel comfortable and maintain boundaries, so that they don't feel invaded" (p.89). There is no touch specific language in the American counterpart.

The Japanese study was conducted as a part of an outpatient group therapy for those suffering from schizophrenia. The group was open and fluctuated between 5-8 members, both male and female, in their 20s. Sessions were 90 minutes long, two times a month, for a period of two years and two months. The purpose was to create a further awareness of the body and improve socialization and communication skills.

Touch was not a specific goal stated by the dance/movement therapists to the members of the group, however, culturally, the inclination to touch was so strong that even "[w]hen they moved alone, for example, they were found engaging in self-touch" (p.90). In fact, in the session, which was split into 5 distinct parts, including one for rest, the patients were found to be spontaneously using touch of some form in three of them. The use of touch sponsors a sense of collectivism; feeling like part of a group can prove extremely comforting to those dealing with internal issues of disconnection.

The openness of the Japanese culture to touch creates, what seems to be, an automatic home for dance therapy and would seem to merit more touch, that which would go above and beyond an American session. This is not something to be assumed. Touch is the most intimate and primary of the senses, its use must be well thought out, sensitive, focused, and useful.

Conclusion

Dance/movement therapy has proven beneficial in many contexts and with people of divergent age groups. The use of movement fosters community helping to give people who had otherwise felt isolated a web of support to yield into. It also gives a voice to the voiceless, offering an alternative when verbal communication does not suffice. The participants in these studies all reported qualitative differences in the quality of their lives as a result of experiencing dance/movement therapy. For those who had also previously sought out traditional talk therapies, the conscious decision to employ dance/movement therapy was inspired by the desire to find reconnection between their bodies and their minds. Reintegrating dual halves into a whole reaffirmed the clients' psychosomatic integrity, offering them more opportunities to communicate.

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ⁱ All italics appearing in quotations are from the source and not the author.

Thesis

**Choreo Ergo Sum:
A Portrait of the Dancer**

**Janae Williams
In partial fulfillment of
the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance
Loyola Marymount University
May 6, 2005
Thesis Advisor: Teresa Heiland**

Okay, so everyday I walk into this room where I have to stare at myself and then I'm asked to do all these things and people always tell me that I'm doing them wrong, and the way I do it right is if it hurts really bad, and then I go back the next day and I hurt really bad, and I feel good because I hurt bad, but I keep doing it and everyday they tell me to do something different and I have to always remember what they tell me to do 'cause if I don't--then I'm worthless. I'm a dancer.

-Michelle
February 23, 2005

I was talking to my father once about the sacrifices that one makes in order to be a dancer: the long hours comprised of a never ending sequence of class/rehearsal/class/rehearsal, ever so occasionally punctuated by performance; the physical wear & tear sustained as a result of trying to attain "perfect technique"; and the emotional roller coaster of never feeling good enough. "And even if you do everything right," I told him, "even if you are successful at it, you still may not be able to pay your bills." He was astounded. "And you do all that," he asked, "just for a few moments? Why?"

It's a good question. Why should any of us submit ourselves to the ceaseless masochism that is being a dancer? Why not do something easier, something more rewarding, with a higher public status? As movers, what pulls us into, and pushes us away from, the world of dance? It was exactly the answers to these questions that I sought to explore with this research project and so, armed with a video camera, a list of questions, and my own intrigue, I began interviewing those around me connected to the Dance Department of Loyola

Marymount University. In trying to create as diverse a sample as possible¹ I interviewed sixteen people: ten students and six faculty who are from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, whose training had been anywhere from 4 to 40 plus years. It was important to me that my sample be selective as well as broad. Also, in selecting faculty members, it was important that they all had substantial professional experience in their respective fields as I was also interested in discovering how the professional world reshapes one's ideas about dancing.

These people are my peers and my instructors and each of their unique stories serves to weave my understanding of dance as both a place of refuge and solace as well as a place of battle and heartbreak. Some of their views and experiences confirmed my original hypotheses and some completely and utterly surprised me. The interview process proved to be a highly textured experience and it lead me to conclude that much of the "why" in dancing has to do with dance's chameleonic nature. Simply, the reason that dance continues to captivate people, despite its inherent obstacles, is that dance is as many different things as there are people dancing.

¹ Though I may have preferred a more diverse sample, when one deals with the arts, especially at a private university, one must realize and accept certain cultural/socioeconomic norms about who participates.

To see a cross-section of my interviewees see Table 1.

Table 1

Dancers Interviewed

Dancer	Years Dancing	Age & gender	Ethnicity	Dance Focus
Evan	Student – 4	18 – male	White	Physical Therapy
David	Student - 9	21 – male	White	Performance
Diana	Student - 9	19 – female	White	Performance
Perris	Student – 12	19 – female	Black	Performance
Karen	Student – 13	18 – female	White	Performance & Teaching
Melissa	Student – 15	22 – female	White	Performance
Elaine	Student – 16	19 – female	White	Chiropractic
Kimberly	Student – 18	21 – female	Korean-American	Performance
Susi	Student – 18	21 – female	White	Performance
Holly	Teacher – 12	30 – female	Korean-American	Contemporary Modern
Damon	Teacher – 15	33 – male	White	Contemporary Modern
Tekla	Teacher – 22	27 – female	White	Ballet
Paige	Teacher – 28	34 – female	White	Commercial Jazz
Jason	Teacher – 28	33 – male	White	Commercial Jazz
Michelle	Teacher – 47	50 – female	White	Theatrical Jazz

Dance as Expression

To be a dancer means: to be wholly consumed and driven with a passion and desire to connect with something that is so outside yourself that it takes pulling from what's in here, inside yourself, to do it.

-Kimberly,
February 3, 2005

For many dancers, the love of dancing is rooted in the love of expression. It's knowing that, even in ensemble work, all eyes are on me, I have complete control of your attention and I can make you "listen" to everything that I have to say. I can amaze you equally with virtuosity or subtle nuances and you will believe me, because I am a dancer. In contemporary America, especially, where the culture of individualism can leave the individual feeling awash in a sea of voices trying to be heard, dance gives a feeling of autonomy and self-worth, a feeling of being in control. Corporeality, or the act of making the body real, is a personal task and not one that can be achieved by anyone living outside of that body. For many dancers, the delicious self-fulfillment of spending hours upon hours learning both subtle and gross² manipulations of their bodies, is ultimately driven by the passion and need to express. This is done so much that it becomes second nature. Three dancers describe this authenticity:

My truest self comes out when I am moving. Something inside me, comes over me. It's like this shell, this casing is lifted away and I'm just this free, moving, flowing, pure energy, and it's a very wonderful place to be.

-Kevin
February 6, 2005

² I am normally staunchly against puns, but, in this case, I find it to be apropos.

I'm never more myself than when I am dancing. I'm never more me and I haven't found anything that does that for me more than dancing does.

–Lane
February 28, 2005

When I dance, it's like giving myself dessert.

–Kristin
February 17, 2005

To create authenticity in the body, the dancer's training must focus on one singular task: to take the physically impossible and make it look possible. However, deeper than that, it is to take that movement which may be alien on their bodies and make it look organic and completely necessary. As audience members we may be excited by the dancer who can place her leg ever so gingerly parallel to her ear, but we are enthralled by the dancer who can show you why it belongs there. We want to see your technique but, more importantly, we want to see your spirit and what that shape means: show us who you are with the movement.

Often, dance allows us a resting place from the insanity of our daily lives. As Lane states, "It's solace. It's something you can rely on. You know it. I know I can go dance and it's good. I can be wrong and it's good. It makes me feel that it's okay to be me." Indeed, dance gives Lane a place to call home; a stable and steady support that she knows will always be there for her. Kimberly goes on to elaborate, "There's something really magical for me that happens as I come through those [studio] doors. Regardless of what has happened throughout the day, I leave that at the door. It's like a sacred space for me." It is said that 90% of communication is nonverbal. Indeed babies, who roll, crawl, and sometimes even

walk before uttering meaningful sentences, use movement to communicate. The right and absolute need to dance in human beings predates the ability to speak, making it our first form of communication and connection with each other. This is the reason that dance can be so familiar and unifying for some: it takes them back to that primary form of communication.

Dance as Artistry

When I'm dancing and I come offstage and someone asks me, "How did you feel?" I honestly can't tell them—that's what I love about dancing.

-David

February 18, 2005

When commenting about the role of the dancer, modern dance pioneer, Martha Graham titled us "athletes of God." I find this description to be quite apropos, as the role of the artist and the role of God are one in the same: to create. Perhaps there are some who would call this approximation blasphemous, but, because I have danced, I disagree. I believe that God created the artist to create a little bit of God in the world.

But what does it mean to "create a little bit of God in the world" and how does dance relate to that? We must first start with my definition of what being a God is, and for me, as a Buddhist, that definition is: to be a Buddha. As the Soka Gakkai International³ website defines it, "[b]uddhahood is a dynamic state that is difficult to describe. We can partially describe it as a state of perfect freedom, in which we are enlightened to the ultimate truth of life." This state is the essence of

³ Soka Gakkai International is a Japanese Buddhist organization based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Their American website is www.sgi-usa.org.

the phenomenon David described above: a trip into the beyond where the ego is no more and one can surrender to the infinite nature of the universe. Buddhists often call this the "not-self." Dancers routinely and systematically access this realm of being, thereby endowing dance its mystical nature..

When I'm dancing and I'm in a really great place with myself, it's like an out-of-body experience, as if the movement is happening to me.

–Tina
February 8, 2005

As everyone I interviewed pointed out, dancing is more than just doing the steps; performing is more than just dancing; being a dance artist is more than just being a dancer. It is the artistry that elevates us. It is the artistry that carries us past the demands of mere athleticism into the celestial realm of Godliness. As Ann said, "this is why I dance: I get to get my spirit out." Dancing has long been described as one of the few activities to unite the body, mind, and spirit. The shared space of this connection is quiet yet powerful. The studio is the place where passion, possibility, and potential can explode, unbridled by the constraints of fear. Dancers come back to dancing day after day because they are coming back to this place. It is one of the few spaces in life where we are not only allowed, but encouraged, to exist this way: fully and courageously. The capaciousness of our life force gives birth to our ultimate artistic freedom.

Dance as Battlefield

It's hard to love something so much and know that maybe it will never give back to you in the way you want it to.

-Marie
February 4, 2005

A political science professor I once had, Anthony Allegro, said that the paradox of American freedom is this: censorship can never be absent, liberty can never be absolute. The argument being that unrestricted freedom for all forms of expression cannot support a stable society. And so, unfortunately, it is in dance as well. All forms of expression are not supported and not everyone who wants to perform is given the opportunity. The dark side of dance is that, sometimes, passion and commitment, and even technical proficiency, are not enough. Sometimes your 100% is someone else's 75% and this is when you have to learn to deal with rejection.

*What we do—any artist—yes, we're learning the technique and we're learning the science but it's also emotional: we're giving ourselves. And when you give your gut and your soul and your being to something and it's rejected, that **hurts**. I don't think you ever get used to it."*

-Jessica
February 1, 2005

As dancers we are continually asked to give more and more of ourselves to our movement experience. We must constantly re-investigate who we are and how this affects what we have to say. In fact, at the root of the word "investigate" is "invest." Investing requires commitment and a full-bodied enveloping, often into the unknown, a scary place for most people. As Pamela illustrates: "You have to

be willing to step out of your comfort zone, open yourself up, and feel naked.” And just as one might imagine the utter humiliation and hurt associated with the rejection of their naked body, so the dancer feels when their dancing body is rejected.

This is especially true in the world of professional dance. As Jessica stated and Lane supported: “That’s when I started to hate dance, when I started auditioning.” It’s a sad fact and one that most dancers hate to admit but, when a dancer leaves her/his protective studio environment and begins to try and make a way in the real world, the beast of body politics rears its ugly head. This fact is most notably present in ballet and commercial jazz work but modern dance is not immune from it. It is no less than devastating as a dancer to know that years and years of training could be essentially “worthless” because of factors like height, bone structure, or ethnicity, over which one has no control. Michelle, David, and Kimberly, for example, all love the world of hip-hop but are not Black or Latino/a. While there is a novelty appeal to, in Kimberly’s case, seeing an Asian-American girl breakdance, her ethnicity could limit the number of roles she receives. Similarly, Diane would like to work on Broadway but is only 5’3. She is an amazing dancer, but simply may not be tall enough for the stage. Even Marie, a fierce and emotionally raw performer, looking to go into the world of contemporary modern dance said, “There’s always that, ‘oh there not going to pick me because I’m not skinny enough,’ which breaks my heart sometimes.”

There is really no reconciling these realities. They are hard, ugly, and, at the moment, not going anywhere. So what does the dancer do? Initially, one

hopes that in their training they work with teachers who appropriately guide them, given their talents and body type, into a form in which they could see someone like themselves thriving. When I asked Heather who, when she began dancing at age 18, was 5'2", and 180 pounds, why she chose contemporary modern work, she replied that it was the only place where she could see herself, that with other dance forms she "never seemed to catch [her own] reflection in the mirror."

Assuming that this realization happens early, it is also vitally important for the dancer to separate her/his identity from that of "the dancer." Chris will tell you without hesitation that his role as husband surpasses that of dancer/choreographer. Jessica dichotomizes her life between dance world and domesticity. Tina reiterates, "I used to think that I was 'the dancer' until I realized I am first and foremost myself, with something to say, and the medium in which I choose to express it is dance." When the dancer can negotiate this perceived contradiction: immerse yourself into the world of dance without allowing it to become your identity, then they can steel themselves enough to do the work, because you have to be tough and you have to love it to do it.

I asked the dancers if any of them had ever wanted to quit and though the resounding answer was yes "when have I not wanted to quit?" the determination to the craft is still unwavering (Elaine). Many cite symptoms of depression when they are away for any longer than a week. When Kristin talks about dance, she uses the metaphor of its similarity to a romantic relationship. "You have to give it your all, 100% of the time, and if you don't you feel hurt, like you've neglected it."

Though the relationship may be dysfunctional at times, it is a constant, and the rewards always seem to make it worth it. Somehow the one yes always resounds louder than the scores of nos.

Dance as Guide

Sometimes my body is not up for the challenge, but I have to say, 'This is the work we have to do—do it.'

-Pamela
February 21, 2005

I asked the dancers what they found admirable in the work of their peers, and while there was the occasional mention of so-and-so's turnout or extension, the truth that came from everyone is the importance of having a strong work ethic, discipline, and passion for the craft. As Diane puts it, "I love somebody who forgets all their inhibitions and just goes for it, just commits themselves. Even if they're totally and utterly wrong, if they have that expression in their body and in their face, their movement still looks beautiful."

One of the most exciting, thrilling, and wonderful things about dance is that it serves as a microcosm of life. Very often the predispositions in one will be apparent as predispositions in the other. "Sometimes it's easier to see my tendencies as a dancer/choreographer than as a wife, or a sister, or a daughter," notes Heather. This is because muscles mirror the emotion(s) through which they are the most consistently trained. If one is a confrontational person in life, one will carry that confrontational blueprint in their muscles when they take dance class and that emotional pattern will become more and more fixed. This channel of

influence is not unidirectional with art only imitating life; life is also a reflection of art.

I have been thinking of three key terms in dance and how their double meaning relates to the “dance as life” concept. The terms are: focus, core, and balance. The use of focus while one is dancing is important as it communicates to the viewer one’s intention. Having a clear and direct, or intentionally indirect, focus clarifies for the audience one’s level of artistry. When watching my peers in class I can attest that those dancers with the sharpest focus are always the most stimulating to watch, regardless of technical ability. Focus, however, can be taken into a larger context. One could rephrase my earlier statement by saying that the use of focus while one is dancing is important because the dancer needs to know where they’re going and what they want out of their training. Someone who takes class to exercise or just to feel their body move is in a different space than someone taking class to achieve and maintain a professional level of viability as a performer and artist. Training oneself with an acute sense of focus in dance will show itself in one’s dealings outside of the studio walls as well.

More times than I can count I have heard the phrase, or some variation of it yelled out at dancers during class: “Dance with your core!”. For a long time I focused that correction anatomically, to a physical place between my ribs and pelvis, spanning the anterior surface of my body. I have studied Pilates, yoga, massage therapy, and kinesiology in attempts to better understand and improve this special region in my body. But the core is more than a physical powerhouse; it’s a mental powerhouse as well. It represents all of a dancer’s likes, dislikes,

attitudes, values, disappointments, and questions. To dance with the core is to dance with everything one has. It is to bring oneself to the table and use the choreography as a means to express some message or statement. “As an artist you’re giving something to the public for them to question and think about” and that awareness has to come from one’s core (Tina).

Then, there is balance. There would be no pirouettes, suspensions, relevés/élèves, passés, pointework, inversions—the list goes on—without the ability to balance. Weight shift is a fundamental element to all dance technique and one of the very first things that a dancer must learn to do. If a dancer is unsuccessful in learning what it takes to balance and shift weight they will likely be unsuccessful as a dancer. Again, in the larger context, balance between a dance life and a life outside of dance is of paramount importance to the dancer’s sense of sanity. As the song “I’ve Seen All the Good People” by 1970s rock band Yes advocates, “don’t surround yourself with yourself.” To maintain social and emotional health, dancers must spend time with others outside of the dance world. The nature of dance training entails a lifestyle of constant criticism, far more than would be expected in the lives of those not associated with the arts. If a dancer does not step outside of that world to a place that makes them feel validated, not only do they risk eating disorders, paranoia, anxiety disorders or other psychological breaks, but the quality of their dancing deteriorates as well because the dancer lacks the depth from which to draw upon to bring choreography to life.

In the university environment, it is always a bit frustrating for the dance major when other friends in academic majors complain, “oh, dance, that such an easy major” because the dancer may not have as much tangible homework. What they fail to realize is that, for the dancer, sleeping, eating right, spending time with friends, practicing yoga or meditating, and zoning out in front of a television or computer screen *is* our homework because these are the activities which gives us balance in our hectic lives.

Dance as Life: The Hard Part

To be a part of the dancing world is a challenge; we all know that. My favorite request, and the one that I chose to end every interview with, was this: Name one reason why you think that dancing is hard. The responses to this query were as diverse as the people whom I asked, each one illuminating a completely different yet completely legitimate aspect. I choose to share these answers here in the original words of their owners for the reader to ponder, perhaps adding one or two reasons of their own.

You're taking the unnatural and making it natural in your body and what is natural is not what they want at all—except your spirit.

–Kevin
February 6, 2005

The amount of bodywork, understanding, and innate awareness that it takes to be a normal dancer, not even exceptional, just regular, makes it hard. I think many people can't love dancing because they can't quite get to a place where they feel successful at it.

–Lane
February 28, 2005

It's hard because you can never quite have it, you're never finished."

-Kimberly
February 3, 2005

It's hard to know that you might not get to be that shining star because of politics.

-Diane
February 11, 2005

It's the ego. Yeah the technique is hard, the performance is hard, the lifestyle is hard, it wears you out: trying to survive. Your body aches and hurts and you're neurotic about 20 million things but, in the end, it's the ego. Once you can get past that, everything is possible.

-Marie
February 4, 2005

It's hard because you make it hard.

-Ann/Elaine
February 15, 2005

The possibility for transformation is ceaseless.

-Heather
February 15, 2005

There's more failure than success and even if I achieve the highest level, it's still going to be a life of financial struggle.

-Chris
February 17, 2005

It's hard because your head gets in the way of your body.

-Jessica
February 1, 2005

It's hard because you have to discover yourself, your inner voice, what you want to say.

-Tina
February 8, 2005

Dance is difficult but dancing is easy.

-David
February 18, 2005

In collecting these responses, like shiny glass marbles into my velvet pouch of dance truths, I stopped to ponder my own answer to this question. Why do I think that dance is hard? After a very short period of contemplation, I realized that my answer is this: Dance is hard because it asks the dancer to engage in the fullness of their potential while simultaneously locking them into a perpetual state of contradiction. We are told to pick up the choreography and to forget the steps. Remember all of the corrections you have ever received on specific technical elements, but don't think while you're dancing, just move. Eat, sleep, and breathe dance while also maintaining a rich outside life. It's as if dance asks us to run and walk at the same time. It is this contradiction that makes dance both endlessly frustrating and endlessly rewarding. The honest truth is that if dance were as easy as it looked, it would not keep us as enthralled as it does. Many of us would have given it up a long time ago because it is the passion and the sacrifice that drive us. It is why we can proudly proclaim, "Choreo ergo sum" I dance, therefore, I am because at the end of the day, as Heather so simply put it, we "...don't know how to want to be anything else."

The Process and My Reflections On It

All interviews were conducted between the first of February and the third of March in the year 2005 at the Loyola Marymount campus. Interviews were filmed on my personal video camera to ensure transcription accuracy. Interviewees were asked approximately thirteen questions and were not apprised of the questions beforehand. Interviews lasted anywhere from 25 minutes to just under 2 hours, with the average lasting about an hour.

It was a difficult decision to make regarding whether or not to give the questions beforehand, but in the end I chose not to for two reasons, the first of those being that I wanted freshness and authenticity. Also, there is a tendency with dancers, and this became very apparent during the process, to please. It is how we are trained. There were a lot of “Am I answering the question right? Is that what you wanted? Am I saying the right thing?” moments; places where the dancers wanted to check in on how they were doing which was curious to me because I felt as if I had been transformed into both teacher and mirror. I felt that not giving the questions beforehand ensured a certain level of genuineness, similar to an improvisation class. The second reason was much more practical, I know that my teachers and peers are extremely busy people whose time is sacrosanct. I did not want to extend their generous contribution of time to my project by assigning them homework.

Overall, I was greatly pleased by the interviews. Each one was so unique and inspiring that it became addicting and I wanted to interview the entire department, not so much for my own benefit, but to give all of the dancers the

opportunity to remind themselves why they dance. Most people spend so much time out of their bodies and in their heads that they forget what being connected feel like. As dancers, we can spend so much time in our bodies and not in our heads that a re-clarification of our own motives can prove humbly enlightening.

There is a poem by Adrienne Rich entitled "Diving Into the Wreck" in which the protagonist is engaging in a deep sea dive examining the rusted remains of a sunken ship.

I came to explore the wreck.
 The words are purposes.
 The words are maps.
 I came to see the damage that was done
 and the treasures that prevail...

the thing I came for:
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck
 the thing itself and not the myth

In undertaking this project, I channelled this spirit. I didn't want to merely talk about dance with the ideas that I had, but rather, I wanted to dive "into the wreck" of my associates and find the universalities of the dance experience. In fact, by the end of the process I realized that the question had transformed for me from: "Why do you dance?" to "Why doesn't everyone dance?"

If I could do this study again there is very little that I would change. Perhaps, I would substitute a few questions here and there, start earlier so that I might have interviewed more people or gone off campus to tap into more resources but, all in all, I am very pleased with the outcomes. I find myself extremely grateful that everyone whom I interviewed allowed themselves to be

honest enough to dive into their own wrecks to show me why it is that they dance.