Abstract

“The secrets of the body will reveal themselves to you, but you have to want to know.”
-A.P.

For my thesis project, I focused on Embodied Dance, a somatic approach that utilizes movement to connect the body, mind and emotions in support of dance practice, training, and performance. The goal for this thesis was to assist dancers and participants in exploring self-discovery, empowerment and transformation through an experiential creative and choreographic process (my own and theirs). Embodied Dance practices provide support in the examination of restricted movement, tension patterns, personal stories, or limiting beliefs/self doubt in order to allow the practice of dance training to support wholeness and healing (both during the rehearsal process and performance). This thesis production and supporting paper are an exploration into how we can interact with the deeper layers of self through dance and performance by applying somatic and healing concepts that allow for empathetic connection between audience and performer, creating opportunities for connection, integration and empowerment.

My inspiration for this project revolves around my twenty years of study and practice in body language, energy medicine, coaching, psychology and indigenous forms of healing.

The title Body Stories was chosen to speak of the unconscious, unspoken thoughts we hold in our bodies as memories, as tension, as unexpressed parts of ourselves that have a story to tell. The process followed six individuals who chose to explore a common topic of ‘redefining relationships’ through the vernacular of modern dance vocabulary. Over the course of a twelve-week period, each dancer’s story was thoughtfully tracked
and detailed through journal entries and video. The rehearsal process is notated under the section titled “Creative Somatic Investigations” in the Appendix of this paper. In sharing the progression and details of each participant’s ‘body story,’ I aimed to support a perspective of dance training and performance that conveyed healing and personal alignment and growth. This thesis is an inquiry into the choreographic process as a tool to fulfill a journey of healing through movement. This work is also intended to support a sense of empowerment for the participants as they ‘take charge’ of their internal states in relating it to how they move as a dancers and as people the world.
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Embodied Dance Project

“BODY STORIES”

by

Allison Pagano

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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Montclair, NJ 2018
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Project Description

The main impetus for my thesis existed in the investigation of Embodied Dance and how that philosophy could be used as a choreographic process and tool. Within that context, I worked with six dancers within a four-month period through a process that culminated in an evening’s performance called *Body Stories*. The primary intent of Embodied Dance encompasses the personal and physical experience of each dancer in support of the process that evolves as the experience itself does. Although most well-known dance works of our time have built much of their value upon a visual aesthetic, Embodied Dance seeks to broaden the application to include the whole person; physically, emotionally and mentally. A process that works with the whole person is valuable so that self-knowledge is understood, integrated and expressed through the body. Dancers have said that they come to trust their impulses and feel more comfortable in their expression as a result of working this way. There is a direction for the work, but no defined outcome. The emerging stories become the navigation for how and where we complete our process. The main intention is that the process stays ‘true’ to what the individual or groups are exploring.

In a high tech and over stimulated and under functioning world, there is a notable increase in issues such as anxiety and depression which can sometimes stem from a disassociation or lack of connection to one’s emotional, physical and mental body as well as disconnection from meaningful connections, exchanges and expressions with others. An absence of connection with one's self, coupled with self-doubting beliefs, can make empathy very difficult; and I believe empathy is a much needed attribute in the human race in how we perceive and relate to one another.
The development of technology, among other societal stressors, has caused more isolation and often a distorted perception of one’s experience in comparison to others, with our addiction to social media platforms. Relating empathetically with others is a simple solution to a growing problem. When one connects empathetically, they are able to imagine or sense another person’s experience as their own. Often, there is a sense of mirroring or reflection which can create a notion of sharing similar life journeys or experiences. Personally, I was born with a high degree of empathy; so much so, that I sense physical pain in others, such as headaches or injuries, as well as mental and emotional states. Having had this extra sensitivity for a lifetime has led me to create opportunities for students and participants to express what I sense in them, which they have never been able to give words to. In 'sensing,' I observe a person's body language and take in the feelings I have when around them. Then through conversations in class, rehearsal or performance, I coach participants to fully express, experience, and acknowledge their aforementioned withholding or tension patterns.

Over the last two decades in my bodywork and healing practice, I have seen that when a person is able to express, release and integrate unsettled emotions, thoughts or physical symptoms, other aspects of their lives change for the better. They are able to implement boundaries, leave unhealthy relationships or jobs and begin to create and experience a new relationship with how they listen to, understand and interpret thoughts emotions and physical symptoms going forward.

Some of the initial work in this process involves examining limiting beliefs and held tension patterns in the body. When a limiting belief, such as “I’m not good enough” or “I can’t take up too much space” is uncovered, processed and integrated by the dancer,
it allows his or her movements to become more free and unrestricted. Upon finding freedom internally, the body follows, as does new perceptions, communication and expression. An internal sense of freedom could be to experience less repetitive negative thought patterns, less muscular tension and better posture.

While there are similar applications to somatic dance and the field of dance therapy, Embodied Dance intends to support a blending of boundaries between therapeutic and performative dancing. Often, performative dancing carries with it the intention to entertain as a top priority. In other cases, the intention may be to explore and express and question societal cultural norms, values and structures; opening the audience to new ways of perceiving. The Embodied Dance process and practices differ in that it does not necessarily seek to use performance as entertainment, but performance as connection.

Most often, therapeutic dancing is centered on the process of the performers, where the idea of showing the work as entertainment does not have as much value. The intention is to convey expression through honesty in performance which then finds its own artistry. I believe that when dancing is expressed from the performer’s inner process, it has the capacity to impact the audience more deeply, allowing them to empathetically connect with the performer, as opposed to simply observing; this was one of the main points of intention for this work.

Anthropology shows us that many indigenous cultures from the dawn of time have held dance as an integral part of their lives for ritual, celebration and rite of passage. They sought meaning, communication and engagement as a form of expression that honored individuals, brought communities together and served varying aspects of connection to
earth and their spiritual lives. This primal connection they sought and cultivated was a fulfilling and connecting aspect of their everyday lives, which I believe we somehow have lost in our desire to evolve.

Many years ago, my bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology ignited a strong interest in bridging our historical applications of why, how and when we danced. I was interested in how dance brought people together and how it served to unite communities, offer validation and how it helped those address and express the greater aspects of living, humanity and our connections to the earth and spiritual realms. Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus were two modern day examples of pioneers in the field who incorporated anthropological approaches to dance from the 1940’s through the 1970’s. They both sought to incorporate African and Caribbean roots into American culture. Dunham had created the Dunham School of Dance in 1945 where the basic elements of African movements were foundational. Primus, a native of Trinidad received her PhD in Anthropology as well and has become known as a prominent artist of African Dance in the US. Primus’ use of dance in connection to humanity is stated clearly in her own words. "I dance not to entertain, but to help people to better understand each other” (Swartz).

This thesis performance follows a natural progression of independent studies I have explored during my time as a graduate student at Montclair State University. The first study involved working one-on-one with a dancer using the Collard Method of Bodywork. The second study explored sound healing and dance performance based on a theme of relationships, and the third study was a large-scale application of creating personal choreographies within the five stages of grief. The culmination of this work was
performed as part of Francesca Da Rimini (Dante’s Inferno) with the Garden State Opera. Each independent study was built upon the previous; from exploration of solo work, into collaboration, and then creating a group work within a large-scale production. The thesis project culminated into a live performance of personal movement stories and memories that evolved from the process of Embodied Dance as a gateway for creating choreographic work or ‘personal choreographies.’

Embodied Dance attempts to create a healing environment or response through the creative process, so that the choreography then becomes the healing tool or modality through the vernacular of improvisation and contemporary modern dance techniques. A ‘personal choreography’ is created as a story from the dancers’ and choreographers’ collective collaboration on a topic or prompt. Topics can include explorations of memory and emotion, or a limitation (working with only one part of the body or a certain theme). Other prompts include a response to an archetypal or societal conditioning or a particular expectation put upon us by others and by ourselves. Embodied dance provides a safe space and accessible instruction that dancers and movers. They can use it to explore what it means to be human by examining and giving a creative voice to emotions, memory and perception, which may otherwise be unaddressed.

In many instances during a performance and sometimes in the process, sound healing instruments like gongs or singing bowls are introduced to create a bridge between stories or to invoke certain states of consciousness for the dancers and for the audience. For Body Stories I included two musicians to bridge the stories.

Rationale
The thesis project brought together my various backgrounds in understanding body language, how people move, create and sometimes heal, in order to make sense of the greater whole of humanity. As an eighteen-year practitioner of bodywork, energy healing, yoga and dance teaching, I believe there is an importance in understanding how dance processes can affect brain function and potentially create change or transformation; be it a new perspective, releasing limiting ways of moving or emotional resolution. With new knowledge that arises from exploring how we interpret and work with creating choreography in an intentional way, there is possibility to build upon emerging fields in somatic dance that enable both training and performance to enrich one’s sense of health and well-being. Thereby, the key is practicing dance technique and training as a holistic and healing art from. This project included significant research into existing models of somatic approaches in order to draw new conclusions and applications for this type of work. Inspirations were drawn from leaders in this field such as, Rudolf Laban, Anna Halprin and Martha Eddy. Eddy states “…by paying attention to the body, one is paying attention to the mind… this mind of the body has the ability to sense itself, interpret sensations as perceptions and then form thoughts, feelings, associations and imagery from these perceptions.” (Eddy, 6)

As the facilitator in each dancer’s process, my primary intention was to ‘hold a safe space’ for the dancer to be able to access the memories and emotions they felt comfortable and ready to explore. It is a very similar process I use in working with private clients that come to me for bodywork and healing. I’ve found that a client's ‘readiness’ to address a topic, coupled with my guidance and support, can create the most immediate and lasting changes or transformations. My aspiration was to apply aspects of
this process towards creating choreography, so that the choreographic process becomes a story unraveling in someone’s mind and body. Once unraveled, it is then ready to be re woven into the body and mind with empowerment, and integrated at a deeper level; one often free of pain and trauma. In the role of ‘co-choreographer,’ my job is to see and deeply listen to a person, to be and feel with them, so that what we are expressing and creating is the truest, supported reflection of the stories they hold. The dance becomes a healing art form once I ‘see’ where there is confusion (withholding or wounding), and guide them into the next ‘movement exploration’ until we are able to touch the ‘root’ of the source of what we are exploring. The last phase usually involves some form of empowerment or reclaiming of what was lost, taken, or never experienced (such as an unmet need). An example of something ‘never experienced’ might be a new way of moving the body. For one of the participants below, it was a sense of connecting her feet into the earth in a way she never felt safe or sure about before.

**Research**

The focal point of my research for this project included the work of four key individuals in the field of Somatic training, and some additional research into Shamanic approaches to healing. Rudolf Laban, Anna Halprin, Martha Eddy and Patrick Collard, each have a unique perspective on movement qualities, habits, patterns or body language and psychology that have influenced my approach.

Rudolf Laban (1879-1958), one of the earliest pioneers of a somatic approach to dance, left a legacy of dance language known as Labanotation, which is still studied and applied today. His system for analyzing movement was based on four categories: space, time, weight and flow (which I applied in my own process for this thesis). In reading
about his work, Laban seemed to be filling the deeper need he saw in humanity’s lack of connection to body and mind. Laban states, “Movement research and movement education have been neglected in our time and some failures of our civilization are surely influenced, if not produced, by this neglect” (Moore, 5). In Laban’s work, I am particularly inspired by his development and implementation of effort qualities. Yet, my process is more concerned with how these effort qualities most accurately describe an inner state of consciousness and how the changing of these qualities also creates changes of emotion and thought. In my own investigation, a clarity of expression was found in accessing deeper layers with each participant, noting which ‘effort’ qualities best represented the thoughts and feelings they wanted to explore. I worked predominantly in Laban’s ‘Action Drive,’ which deals with weight (increasing or decreasing pressure), time (accelerating or decelerating), and space (direct or indirect).

I have a similar inspiration in Martha Eddy’s work of BodyMind Dancing, which grew out of Dynamic Embodiment, her form of somatic movement education and therapy. In particular, the philosophy of BodyMind dancing seeks community and expression from an internal investigation as well as to “Impart a real meaning to technical prowess. It is inspiring that a process which improves dance technique also leads to a keener awareness of the richness of human experience, and that from this awareness also follows the reemergence of the sacred aspects of dance” (Eddy, 4). The foundations of BodyMind dancing involve attuning to thoughts, feelings and expression, often using them as a guidepost to explore unconscious feelings and information. My process is similar in that a dancer’s internal state is first acknowledged in order to see
how we will work at a given time; and to assess a participant’s level of well-being post session. Eddy states:

“Somatic movement is done with self-awareness and self-reflection. The result is that new behavioral choices often become apparent. When one is locked into habitual patterns, it is common to feel stuck... The release of tension that can come from somatic movement may be accompanied by an increase in energy or a wave of feelings and ideas supporting creativity.” (Eddy, 7)

Anna Halprin is another somatic practitioner and pioneer whose lifetime body of work utilizes therapeutic principles. Halprin has created work that speaks to her immense desire and intent to cultivate dances and dancers that extract raw beauty from the inside out. Halprin's’ process can include ways of working which start with themes that each dancer specifically addresses by examining the meaning it holds within their own movements, expression and relationships “If you do not teach people a traditional or idiosyncratic style, and instead set up a situation to move in, you give people the opportunity to develop a full range of original movement. This will tend to bring up a lot of emotional material, which we then process.” (Halprin, 14) I resonate with how Halprin similarly draws out an individual's inner workings and uses art, improvisation and creative approaches of dance making to honor that individual’s truth. Her unique perspective on and relationship to the audience is also similar to the values expressed in my practices. Halprin states:

“I was concerned we had some kind of power that stirred people up. If we could generate this kind of magical power in dance, how should we use it? This power came from within the dance and also from the space between the spectators and
performers. The power was not contained, and in fact, could not be contained within the confines of a stage... not only could it arise from the whole of life and affect the whole of life, it was most powerful when it did so.” (Halprin, 227)

Patrick Collard (1953-2009) was an internationally renowned body language expert, healer and teacher employed by both government officials and the CIA. His bodywork methodologies and Dictionary of Tendencies has been a manual that I refer to when discerning what particular issues, thought forms or emotions may be held in certain areas of the body. This gives me a foundation to ask a client or participant questions that can dictate where we begin our movement investigations. The Collard Method, developed and coined by the late Collard, is a somatic approach to re-patterning our unconscious beliefs. It uses a system of reading body language to access a person’s core beliefs or tendencies. The Collard Method has been a method of bodywork primarily, but I believe it can bring great understanding to how and why we move as we do, which is why I apply these to dance. My first independent study for this graduate program worked exclusively with Collards Methods of “Bodyworks” in addressing a student’s desire to change habitual thoughts and movement patterns. This study was met with a discernible measure of success. For each rehearsal, the dancers and I created personal choreographies based on weekly explorations of improvisations formed by assessing tension patterns and limiting beliefs.

I believe that the researching of this method as it applies to dancers, can be most powerful in shifting our abilities to understand and inform what is possible; from how we move; to how we express; to who we may become once our stories unravel and no longer carry weight. In my own journey as a dancer, teacher and bodywork therapist, I have
seen the capability of this type of work to enhance and improve my own body’s ability to execute movement, enhance self-trust and understanding of physical communication.

In my decades of exploring various and sometimes, indigenous healing modalities, my study and practice of shamanic traditions has greatly influenced how I work with private clients to achieve profound results. The main method I use is called ‘soul retrieval’ work. In soul retrieval work, the intention is to identify a time or energy when a person experienced a sense of shutting down, which is called ‘soul loss’ by shamans. According to practicing shamanic teachers I’ve had, the shaman journeys alone or with the individual back in time to reclaim that aspect of the ‘self’ and to then integrate it into the present moment. This is a practice I use with clients in the realm of my healing practice. Similar to my working process, it seeks acknowledgement of the wound or trauma, inquiry through intuition and energy work and a final process of integration, where the client receives recognition and a sense of completion from the process and practitioner. When utilizing these concepts and ideologies within the context of Embodied Dance, the intention is to be able to give something back to the participant that may have not been previously received or integrated in terms of their life experience.

Methodology

The Process

The methodology for this Embodied Dance practice includes a specific process by which dancers are motivated to acknowledge, discover, and integrate what they absorbed in order to find a sense of empowerment through the artistry of dance. Acknowledgement is discovering what the initial concern is; where it ‘lives’ in the body and how it best communicates or expresses itself. Discovery involves conversation
and movement exploration in the plight to uncover the ‘root’ of a topic or concern, therefore giving it a ‘movement voice’ or expression. *Integration and Reclaiming Power* involves the participant deciding how they would like the after effect to be: What new qualities would they now like to embody? Where do they sense that in the body and how is it best expressed/ through which qualities/ through which type of relation or support? Which music/ text/ projection may best support the work?

In the following collaborative efforts, trust and flexibility are two components critical in allowing a creative process to unfold and evolve with patience and artistry. Participants who committed to the project had chosen to do so based on the theme of “Redefining Relationships” and were interested in exploring one or more of the topics through movement, as it applied to them personally. Sub topics for the exploration of “Redefining Relationships” with oneself or other(s) in the context of power included an exploration of: boundaries, sexuality, partnership, guilt, shame and freedom to choose.

Each participant was then asked to ‘free write’ on his or her chosen topic(s). Their free writings were then shared with me verbally or written. This sharing was followed by a discussion about where they felt that topic most in their body. An example could be a tightening of their chest or hips when they thought of that topic, or a sensation that their arms needed to move. To bring clarity to ‘how’ the body needed to move, I introduced Rudolf Laban’s work in ‘Effort’ qualities. I asked them to articulate if the energy and movement quality of the topic in that particular area of the body was direct/indirect, light/strong, sudden/sustained, or bound/free.

Once the ‘effort’ qualities of a particular body part were identified, the participants were asked to try some movement explorations based on their findings. We
used the eight effort qualities of ‘Float, Punch, Glide, Slash, Flick, Dab and Wring, Press’ to develop more clarity to each segment of what they were working to explore and express. After participants explored creating short movement phrases with these themes, they were then asked to continue to deepen into the ‘emotional roots’ of the topic as they began to move and new feelings were realized or uncovered. New emotional awareness was layered upon the previous movement patterns.

Working with each individual formed for me a personal, intuitive relationship based on mutual trust. Together, we moved slowly through his or her movement phrases to identify that each part was significantly matched with what they were exploring; that the movement was true and authentic to their concepts and identified energy patterns. Since measuring authenticity is mostly subjective, the goal is to arrive at a deeper understanding of the layers that make up a particular story or emotion. The more layers that become uncovered, the more ‘authentic’ it becomes for the individual. We uncovered these layers through dialogue and guided improvisations. If energy of the work no longer felt connected to the topic, we re-examined and reassessed. I supported their process with feedback and questions. I then guided them to take their movement patterns in different directions or levels; all based on their feedback of what felt most ‘right’ to explore. The choreography then began to take shape and became a flexible choreography that expanded and changed with each session.

In this choreographic process, because I am most concerned with truth, we often went with the first impulses in movement. The process is much like a spiral that goes inward to gather material, then outward to share and reflect upon what was expressed. There was some ‘chance’ at play in deciding how participants would create and interact.
For example, each participant’s schedule availability and context of their topic determined who worked with whom in creating the solos, duet and trio.

In my first working sessions with Andrea Frade (the soloist), our process began with many inquiries about her interest in what seemed most current in her self-discovery process. I asked her: “What do you want to understand most or connect with most?” I identified some of the ‘efforts’ through Laban’s language of ‘flick’ ‘slash’ and ‘press.’ I compiled all information from her story to singular words. We created a short phrase and continued to re-check it for alignment with the intentions of the work. Her movement language is predominantly yoga. Her interest in this project is to find authentic expression through exploring the body’s innate intelligence. “We heal through creating an intimate relationship with ourselves” she states.

In the beginnings of my duet work with Tessa, we decided to explore concepts that drew from our awkward, dissociated selves as children through a journey leading up to expressions we now embody. This method of exploration included writing and sharing memories, dreams and a look into archetypes, as this is a topic we are both currently self-studying in terms of personal growth. Tess stated, “We Were Always Gods,” as she held the image of the awkward little girl in her body and began to work with movement phrases. I decided that was a good working title for the piece. Personally, much of my own struggle with self worth formed as a child, as I experienced a lot of rejection from my only brother and was often left alone most of the time. As emotional as it was to uncover some of these memories and begin to integrate them into the movement story, it also began to feel empowering to allow myself the time to observe my younger self with
compassion, allowing this younger self to develop a language through movement so that she could be seen and understood (if only by me).

The patterning for the trio was created as a solo with Rachel Johnson and a duet with Mellie Lonneman and Byron Romero. Those two sections led into the creation of a trio. Rachel and I worked with short phrases that were taken from a free write exploration that looked at themes of family expectations in relationships as well as common gender roles she wanted to explore and redefine.

Byron shared his interest in ‘redefining his relationship with himself’ by exploring his inner concepts of masculinity. This included how men often feel isolated without support, as women often easily create support systems within friendship circles. Within those themes were ‘vivaciousness of youth’ and the ‘journey to the man he is becoming.’ Mellie’s interests were in exploring where shame and guilt lived in her body and desiring to address certain life experiences and memories to transform previously held negative emotions around issues such as abortion and abandonment. Mellie’s right hip and gut were the areas she felt most called to explore.

The Performance

On the evening of April 13th, 2018, Body Stories was held at the Union Arts Center in Sparkhill, NY. The Union Arts Center is a building that was formerly an old firehouse, reconstructed into an arts center, a space for community and healing events as well as an art gallery. On the night of the performance, paintings filled the gallery walls by an artist who claims to channel his creative impulses from communing with archangels. It was quite special to have these infused works as a backdrop for our show.
The evening began with a brief introduction by myself, followed by a live improvisational score by cellist Claude Gilbert, who set the tone by playing interludes between the first few pieces. The performance also included Peter Alexanian, who played the handpan (sound healing) instrument in support of an empathy driven environment between audience and performers.

Two solos were performed at the beginning of the performance, which were not included in the actual thesis, yet they were both applicable to the program. I had worked with the first dancer Patricia, to support her work, *Irreversible Tendency* remotely, via phone and email to guide her work from an internal process to an outer one. It was a similar process as the other works in the program, except that the rehearsals were done remotely. The second solo of the performance *Heartsick*, danced by Alyssa Padial, was a contemporary piece I had choreographed for her in 2015, based on family struggles. I included this in the performance to see what might emerge a few years since it had been conceptualized.

Claude continued to perform after Patricia and Alyssa, leading up to the beginning of the main thesis work that began with Andrea Frade, the first piece in the thesis performance.

Andrea Frade had never taken professional dance classes or performed before. Our collaborative process was intended to give her a big opportunity to ‘step into’ more of herself and support her comfortability and strength in expressing parts of herself that she wanted to finally reconcile with and integrate. This piece was titled *The Language of Intimacy*, which explored heartache, abandonment and vulnerability. Initially, text was going to be included from her journals, (see Appendix) but she decided within the few
weeks leading up to the performance, that she would rather have the writing remain part of the process. She chose a piece of music called *Nobody’s Fault* by Rising Appalachia, which had a sensual rhythm she felt confident moving to. In holding a ‘safe space’ for her, I had to honor her requests. The piece moved from floor work facing away from the audience (her comfort zone) to walking directly toward the audience (her least comfortable moment). Our choreographic process explored working through emotions and expressions on the journey from the first moment (floor-facing away) to the last moment (standing-facing and moving towards).

The second piece, *We Were Always Gods* was a duet co-collaborated between aerial performer, Tessa Hinderliter and myself. In our friendship, we discovered that we had very similar childhood experiences such as feeling trapped in our bodies and within family structures that were very foreign and uncomfortable. We explored these concepts in a duet that stemmed from our awkward, dissociated ‘child’ selves, and journeyed to the physical expressions we now embody. Themes of loneliness, shame and innocence initiated explorations on how we came to terms with these while changing into adulthood. We explored how these same themes infiltrated our growing years. The music for the first two sections included a tender cello piece titled *The Farmhouse* by Barrington Pheloung followed by the haunting, *Host of Seraphim* by Dead Can Dance. The ending of the piece was an expression of celebration, embodiment and companionship that exists when two souls share a journey towards self love and empowerment. The music for this section had a Spanish flare and featured powerful children's voices singing intermittently. Our costumes were very prominent in the telling of our story. We began wearing white nightgowns and pigtails that were later tossed aside to reveal red velvet dresses;
signifying the journey of womanhood and finally, exploring Goddess archetypes. The intention of the piece was to journey towards a moment of finding full expression, abandonment and connection with each other. Many movements from this final section were archetypal poses that we both felt drawn to explore. The last piece of music we used with the joyous, powerful voices of children singing felt like it allowed for a long awaited integration. The journey felt complete in that I had a partner (Tessa) to walk through those times where I felt alone.

The last piece of the performance titled *Doors, Pathways and Opportunities* was a trio that began with a solo (Rachel), followed by a duet (Mellie and Byron), and concluded with all three interacting. This trio explored personal relationships in relation to societal norms, and how the individuals were seen/perceived vs. how they wanted to be seen. They also explored how they wished to truthfully interact and relate to one another based on needs and personal responses to questions. The original inspiration for Rachel’s piece (solo) was a short poem she wrote about doors, which questioned who should be the person to open them (See Appendix). For the individual solo and duet, two pieces of sound healing music by Johnny Scifo were played, creating an engaging, yet nebulous atmosphere. The last piece of music added, *Rose Rouge* by St Germaine, was jazzy, celebratory and energizing; where the trio came together in a fun connection that explored their individuality in relation to receiving support.

**Link to the performance**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gCRguLTMon0M9ymdw9uzpVqH3PcV5igU/view?usp=sharing
Assessment and Results

The night of the performance went very well, with only a few inconveniences. We had nearly seventy-five audience members. This was wonderful, but also problematic, since not everyone had a good seat. Many people were standing so they could get a better view of the stage. The cellist, Claude Gilbert improvised as a transition between the pieces. The sound healing music was supposed to start after the 3rd piece, but there was a misunderstanding and the cello played instead. Peter Alexanian played on the handpan between the duet and trio, which still worked.

Post performance, I compiled the written and some verbal feedback I received from the audience. One person wrote:

“I felt a progression. The first piece felt like a struggle of ‘Who am I?’ The second piece felt like a tremendous loss or traumatic event expressed. The third felt like transformation and inspiration. The duet in red felt like coming to terms with difficult transitions to adulthood and sharing your life. The costumes were amazing for enhancing the piece. The final piece felt like both the need and celebration of community. The musicians were a fitting intro to each piece.”

Another person wrote, “This was a moving experience. I could feel the emotion of the dancers. I went through journeys with them of love and loss, growth and change. It was a truly beautiful and memorable experience.”

Another male audience member said that the duet with Tessa and I in red velvet dresses made him think of the particular trials that are unique to women, including menstruation and childbirth. He said he thought of his sisters, mother and in women's
capacity in general to receive and give life; “which is something not understood by most men”, he said.

Anna, a friend, sent to me an email describing her experience of the performance. She described the last two pieces:

“The duet clearly had meaning and symbolism. The movement was easy to track. My interpretation of your dance most likely will be false, but I saw two girls, innocent and carefree awakening to this world, full of hope. I saw them mature side-by-side, aiding each other and growing to become young women. Despite challenges, they remained close and were able to keep their bond as mature women. It actually made my day. Those few minutes watching two of you on stage, knowing exactly what you are doing there and how to do it well was magical. Your partner was superb and a joy for me to watch. The trio was strong also and showed interesting as well as dynamic movement that told the story well. The moment when the girl in the green dress sits on the floor alone, going through her motions again and again, faster and faster and then stops and looks in the audience with eyes full of questions and sadness broke my heart and punched me in the gut at the same time. Was she asking why she was alone and not chosen? Her character in the trio was very interesting to me and I found that the whole piece showed just how diverse and random relationships between people are.”

In my assessment of Body Stories, I asked specific questions in relation to the Embodied Dance process for the dancers to think about and free write on such as: Which body issues felt paramount to you in our collaboration? Was there a level of resolution or
integration? Where were you with these issues/topics before we began? Where are you now as our process completes?

Patricia, who danced in the first piece, had a lot to share about her process. I am including her response, as she was a participant I worked with in the production of Francesca da Rimini, my third independent study. I feel her testimony is valid because it shows how our working relationship deepened on the same concepts we started with.

“What I have been doing has been seeking to mobilize the healing process of working through emotional wounds (a process most often carried out in stillness) by exploring where in the body these sit (also how they move or are stagnant), and integrating the entire body into providing relief, safety, comfort, and very trauma-specific soothing. I was working primarily with the intention of following currents of emotion/intention that felt organic in the moment, following movement that brought whatever I had locked in my emotional body onto the physical plane. I found this to feel more like an integration of the physical body towards the spiritual/emotional experience, rather than the other way around. This process has provided me with a fuller understanding of the emotional plane and has brought the process of healing down to earth for me. Healing has literally become something I can see and move through, and self love has become something that I can almost touch—it has stopped being abstract and belonging to a plane outside of myself. Incorporating the body has brought substantial clarity to all my emotional experiences, as they are now something that I have walked through and have seen.”
Andrea Frade who danced *The Language of Intimacy*, addressed the questions with depth and clarity in relaying both her personal and her movement journey:

“I am reminded that to create means to heal by honoring the wound from within and acknowledging the pain of having lived through it. It means having the determination to be uncertain about the result and claim the transformation that is choosing you. It means becoming more real to you than ever before. It means leaving who used to be behind. It means shedding the old skin and dying to know whom you once were. It means facing the unknown within yourself. It means trusting yourself. It means feeling the discomfort of failure and shame. It means rising above the small stories you tell yourself. It means being of service to that part of you that knows there’s more. It means stepping into the fullness of possibility and not knowing what that looks like. It means believing in yourself without proof or approval. It means opening up to the life force that wants to move through you. It means letting go into the unspeakable presence of new places within yourself. It means facing fear. It means transformation. It means owning your power. It means stepping into something far greater and more beautiful than you could’ve ever imagined.”

In *We Were Always Gods*, Tessa speaks of her integration of the piece and what the title meant to her in reflection:

“The integration and resolution became the title of the piece ‘We were always Gods.’ I was extremely ashamed of my childhood. I don’t hold a lot of good memories. It was always an experience of struggle, disappointment, and extreme patience. What I learned is that I knew enough to play by myself and loved that
most. Play with nature, and let that be my companion, my heart. My little girl has always known how to be discerning with whom you let into your life, and when you find a friend like the wind or the trees, you hold onto them and support them. I learned through the process that I knew a deep wisdom and wasn’t just an empty shell being influenced and molded by others. There was a belief until that little child was able to express we would never be able to fully express and evolve as adult women. What we realized is that no matter whether we were conscious or not, happy or not, fulfilled or not, seen or not...those little girls were always the mythic Gods of our existence. We were Gods trying to become good humans. Integration and resolution is still ongoing and will be for life. This is a piece that could be explored over and over again, with new memories and new connections from child to God. This could also become a much longer more integrated piece that could supply material for a full length show.”

As difficult as it can be to assess one's own work, especially right after performance, I am pleased with what myself, dancers and musicians were able to offer the audience in terms of sharing our process. Each piece was a ‘work in progress’ that had space to continue to develop and was explored up until the very moment it was shown.

My personal exploration of the duet with Tessa felt extremely vulnerable. Integrating portions of our lonely and awkward childhood selves brought up some new perspectives. One teacher of mine often stated “Most people die when they are 5 or 6 and wait another 70 years before their bodies fall over.” It was my curiosity of how the subconscious undercurrents of what we experience as children often, without question,
dictate much of our adult life and how learned habits influence what we were taught to believe about who we are and what we are capable of.

The process and results in creating Body Stories has felt quite humbling in some ways. The dancers felt supported enough to share some of their most tender, vulnerable selves with me and with a large audience. Holding their trust in performance felt sacred to me. As the last section of the work was titled Doors, Pathways and Opportunities, I also feel that this process of performance was an entry point by which to continue to develop the Embodied Dance Project’s scope, values and trajectory. This process was different than any work I have previously put on stage. Although I used a similar process when choreographing for the Opera, it was under the guise of “Dante’s Inferno.” This time the dancer’s stories were the face of the work, with no other title or context.

As I work with each dancer, each story and each new set of circumstances, the process itself teaches me what it is really about. I have an idea where I want to go, but the end result is always a pleasant surprise. This process has also taught me that people want to be seen for who they really are, despite the initial discomfort that vulnerability brings. I’ve seen shy dancers earn badges of courage and empowerment, not through me, but in their own eyes. In what I’ve learned thus far, I wonder what it might be like if we were able to all experience this type of unveiling and truth telling more frequently. How might the ordinary become extraordinary in experiencing dance training and performance as a communication of souls? How will our relationships with ourselves and with others and be different as a result? Not everyone will value this as I do, but I look forward to continuing to create pathways for dance in order to bring us closer to ourselves and to
each other, with more connection to our bodies and stories; to embrace the humanity we share as a gateway to heal what keeps us separate.

**Conclusion**

I find this working process continues to teach me as I evolve and understand its practices. As I reflect upon the past few months and years spent researching and experimenting, I feel as though I am at the beginning of a long journey that will continue to unravel with time and experience. I see this work expanding to include working with special populations; thereby understanding which groups this work may best serve. Other forward reaching goals include a method and format for a teacher training; one that considers the energetic ties and emotional workings of dance training. The goal would be to create more mindfulness in the practice of teaching any dance form, one that allows a teacher to address mental, emotional as well as physical aspects of any movement practice while creating a safe space for students to feel supported in their own embodiment.

As I receive more feedback from the performance, I hear such a variety of emotions and visceral experiences that the audience connected to in different pieces. The work was felt and understood. In reflection of this body of work, I learned that performances that are designed with expression and vulnerability are effective in reaching audiences; that people are yearning to relate and connect with one another. I’ve learned that dance practices that enhance personal growth for the performers can translate into what an audience experiences and integrates as part of their own life’s journey. The Embodied Dance Project seeks to be one of the many forms of evolving movement practices that incorporate a broader perspective of dance making and training that
enhances well being and satisfies the search for meaningful connection to oneself and our changing times.
Bibliography and Research


Supplemental Materials (photos, postcard, and program)

Photos from Dress Rehearsal 4/11/2018
Photo credits- Lynn Coscia

Pictured left to right- Andrea and Rachel. Below- Tessa and Allison (duet)
Body Stories performers (left to right) Mellie, Patricia, Byron, Rachel, Tessa, Allison, Andrea, Alyssa.
Body Stories is a collection of personal narratives woven into choreography by Allison Pagano and dancers. In unearthing our unheard stories, we begin to transform our relationships with ourselves and each other with the aim of opening to new perspectives, unblocking thought forms and remembering our inherited limitlessness… The secrets of the body will unveil themselves to you, but you have to want to know.

“Irreversible Tendency”
“A celebration of being able to ride the emotional waves… and the body’s humbling, powerful, irreversible tendency to heal all attacks against it”
Dancing and Choreography by Patricia Sagardia Calderon
Music: Chavela Vargas

“Heartsick”
Dancer: Alyssa Padial
Music: Jeff Buckley

“The Language of Intimacy”
Dancer- Andrea Maxine Frade
Choreography: Allison Pagano and Andrea Frade
Music- Rising Appalachia

“We Were Always Gods”
Dancers and Choreography- Contessa Hinderliter and Allison Pagano
(Cont’d) Music- Barrington Pheloung, Dead Can Dance and Dorantes

“Doors, Pathways and Opportunities”
“Share the work, share the time, share the ideas, share the couch, share who opens the door…”

Dancers- Rachel Johnson, Mellie Lonneman, Byron Romero
Choreography by Allison Pagano and dancers
Music- Johnny Scifo and St Germain

Musicians
Cellist- Claude Gilbert
Handpan- Peter Alexanian
Thank you!
Gratitude and many deep thanks to my sponsor and mentors- Maxine Steinman, Diann Sichel, Lynn Needle and Martha Eddy for their guidance and support. Big thank you to live musicians for their artistry and inspiration and to Kevin Lacy for his help with music compilation. Thank you to Tenley Marshall and Jenna Lieberman for tech support! Thank you to the staff of the Union Arts Center for the preparations for tonight’s performance… and thank you to each dancer, who gave their time, passion, commitment and authenticity to this evening’s work. Grateful for each of you!

For more information on the Embodied Dance Project- please visit www.embodied-dance.com
Appendix

Creative Somatic Investigations

The Language of Intimacy
Andrea Frade (solo)

(Notes 2/10/18)

Andrea is a 40-year-old single woman living in Nyack, NY who works in the healing arts, as a yoga teacher and in leading women's workshops. Andrea has not taken a dance class since she was seven years old. Her movement language is predominantly yoga. Her interest in this project is to find authentic expression through exploring the body’s “innate intelligence. “We heal through creating an intimate relationship with ourselves,” she states.

She had a strong desire to revisit some of her more vulnerable work from the past in order to shed light into the present; regarding this theme of relationship to oneself. We sorted through her writings and photographs from twenty years ago to today and chose a section of poems to lovers in her desire to be seen, yet remain hidden. There is a courageous and bold side of her, but she had not yet given ‘permission’ for this side of here to be seen or known. The content of our rehearsals spent time exploring this. Her piece was originally thought to contain some of this content, but she decided to keep it part of the process instead.

This song reminds me of love
or it used to
but it still reminds me

I bed you with me every night even though the second pillow is used unoccupied
by my open arm
lying limp
as if it is waiting for someone to give it a purpose
Always an empty time fulfilled and wasted this doesn’t keep me from dreaming
anymore
What shall I whisper to you tonight
in that darkened room
warmed with body heat
no longer patting my head
with soft breath on my neck
forsaken longing

It always was so wasn’t it
just more so now filled with the concerns of you in the next few days
I just need it organize more than it is tonight

The body and the hands felt familiar like I had known them before but never had
touched them or loved them like I should have or wanted to now

And I wished for sudden move that I knew would never come but I still thought it
the whole time as you stood there motionless before me
it felt like forever just waiting there for you to pass over your fingertips into mine
to press with mine

And I knew to wait was right because whatever was before was vacant and
impatient
it was what it had to be but I changed to let you go for something more fulfilling
something that wouldn’t leave this feeling of hollow inside

Sustaining enough to let someone in
if ever I could comprehend that moment again

Andrea Frade, (notes)

Our process began with many inquiries about her interest in what seemed most
current in her self-discovery process. I asked her: “What do you want to understand most
or connect to most?” I asked for her to identify three things.

Her answers were:

1. The intuitive guidance she felt she was receiving.

2. To find the confidence to receive this guidance

3. To discover this expression in her body
I then asked where in her body she felt each of these themes the strongest. We then identified where those themes felt the strongest in her body and which ‘effort’ qualities most closely resembled that expression. Our exploration began with:

1) The intuitive guidance she felt she was receiving in the midline of the body and spine, which felt direct, strong, sustained, and bound.

2) To find the confidence to receive this guidance, which was realized in the soles of the feet, and this felt indirect, strong, quick, and free.

3) To discover this expression in her body, realized in her hips, which felt direct, strong, sustained and free.

I identified some of the effort qualities through Laban’s language of ‘flick’, ‘slash’ and ‘press.’ Compiling all information from story to singular words, we created a short phrase and continued to re-check it for aligning with the intentions of the work.

This is our first session of stringing movements together to co-create and express the process of this section of the work:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/51134u8w31co73r/20180213_121743.mp4?dl=0

2/16/18

In our post rehearsal conversation, Andrea shared that she was unable to sleep the night after our rehearsal. It felt like the choreography was unraveling or unlocking something. She emphasized she felt terrified of showing this level of vulnerability. She felt that this work was “inextricably linked to her power.” It felt like the old stories of identifying with suffering and sufferable relationships was finally breaking. Writings from Andrea that we used as inspiration:
“For as long as I can remember I was in search of a language for intimacy. I wanted to understand, from the inside, the soft space of what it means to be known. This has always been the driving force behind my work as an artist, healer, teacher and writer. The work for me, in all its forms, is, and always has been a powerful means to reach into a beautiful and passionate understanding of what it means to be human. Of what it means to be alive, what it means to be a woman, in a body, with biology and a deep soul. This is my work, my craft, my art and the essence behind my practice. For as long as I can remember my motivation has been to seek and to find, to lift the veils, to arrive. To touch into the core of our being here, into the very fabric of nature. Our conscious experience of grace. I feel grateful for this sacred process. To stir the beauty that dwells within each of us is an art form. The timeless glimmer of recognition lives and breathes within each of us. It is that inner knowing that calls to us. It is what brings us home to ourselves and to each other. The generosity of this truth flows within us like a river, remembering itself through all the ways love travels to remind us of who we are. It is from here, deep inside, that the greatest wisdom emerges. Greeting us with gentle calm and an open palm, holding the light on for us, illuminating the pathway forward” (Andrea Frade 2017)

Working Session 2/20/18

At our next in person meeting, Andrea said she felt nauseous for three days after our first session; her solar plexus churning. It felt like she was coming into her body in a different way and it felt scary. This session she reported feeling less intimidated by the process and more calm. We worked through each portion of the created movement
sequence, ‘testing’ to make sure it felt in alignment with what she was intending to explore in this section of the work. Themes that came up to explore that day, included safety, balance, feeling grounded and inner to outer. This section of the work felt like a spiral of coming out a little bit and going back within.

New Section 2/20/18

https://www.dropbox.com/s/6675gyp10zaiak5/20180220_121701.mp4?dl=0

Working session 2/27/18

In today’s session, Andrea had stated that she had come to realize how relevant the work we were doing was to when she wrote the text that we are using for this section. She felt rage that needed to be expressed. “I need to dance my rage,” she said. Under the rage, she felt grief; a grieving of a ‘caretaking role’ she had assumed. She located the rage and grief mostly as conflict and stubbornness of the mind and a sense of collapse and expansion in the ‘gut.’ She also commented that accessing anger felt really hard; that it was something ‘nice girls’ don’t do. Yet, she knew that she needed to access this in order to keep moving through the process.

As an exercise, I had her begin moving around the room at a low level, on hands and feet, to access a primal feeling of rage and ‘attack.’ She continued on with these movements for about 5-10 min, almost to the point of exhaustion, as she hurled herself across the floor. She said she could feel the connection to this way of moving as accessing the rage.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/wkcg5amwzg61ctx/20180227_120330.mp4?dl=0

Lastly, we worked with undulation from the core and expansion through the arms

https://www.dropbox.com/s/vmsvrtvc9hgfdf81/20180227_121140.mp4?dl=0
When she completed this movement, she welled up with tears. The movement was accessing what felt stuck.

Rehearsal 3/15/18

Andrea reported a growing sense of integration as well as confidence in showing this work to others. We’ve decided that most of her writing will stay in the ‘process’ portion of our work together and only a few lines will be read or shared.

“And I knew to wait was right because whatever was before was vacant and impatient. It was what it had to be but I changed to let you go for something more fulfilling, something that wouldn’t leave this feeling hollow inside. Sustaining enough to let someone in if ever I could comprehend that moment again…”

She selected a piece of music that is both sensual and curious; with lyrics that speak to what she is interested in emphasizing in her movement. The music selection was called Nobody’s Fault by Rising Appalachia. The Lyric “my mama taught me how to pray” spoke to her because her work is heavily about communicating with the Divine Feminine. This video shows about 2/3rds of the piece. This day we also worked on grounding her movement through her feet.

[Video link](https://www.dropbox.com/s/4j5rvci42g4dt8a/20180316_132457.mp4?dl=0)

3/23/18

This is the first time we came to an ‘ending’ point of the work. I had noticed that when she ran, she did so very lightly. When we addressed this, she said she felt an inner frustration of not feeling settled or balanced. We worked on different thoughts and images and practiced running with these images of safety, groundedness or will.
We addressed then how the piece might end. We created one more traveling section which is one of the few ‘upright’ parts of the work; as one of the main struggles was ‘being seen’ and not ‘hiding.’ She had said throughout the process that the hardest thing for her to do was to face the audience. She decided that because that was her fear, she wanted to end the piece walking forward, slowly, with attention to a grounded connection of the feet. When she finally did it for the first time, she burst into tears. She felt free that she was facing that fear so head on.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/5gxjtyj6azrdjwg/20180323_131849.mp4?dl=0

3/26/18

In this next rehearsal, we worked to fine tune some of the intentions of movement and make any muddied parts ‘clearer.’ We also continued to work on safety in running with the whole foot. She has come into rehearsal a little jarred, having just gotten pulled over by the police, but through her running the solo with refinement, she left with a sense of ease and letting go of fears that were weighing heavy.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/61nqbbklwgwxey0/20180327_121131.mp4?dl=0

4/2/18

As we continue to explore the nuances of this solo, Andrea is finding her ‘edge’ with where she is comfortable exploring. She decided to bring in this urge to be more upright and light towards the end as a new facet. She says the choreography is supporting her to unlock and unwind places that feel ‘stuck’ in her body. I encouraged her to find new ways of exploring timing through her perceived limitations in the work. Issues of self-confidence and setting boundaries were concerns she feels this work is helping her move forward with most. (At the time of our working together, she is also reshaping the
business she is offering and putting herself out there in a different way. We couldn’t help but notice how much our work was intertwined with this).

Our goal moving forward is to continue to explore these truths in how they unravel from one rehearsal to the next until performance. Lastly, my question to her as we gently construct the conclusion to the piece was “What are the movement moments and how do they represent what makes you shift from the journey you are on to that which makes you directly move towards the audience?”

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/44buva8ey6cjseb/AAAwcgnsVh-A8qPjrDi_dg2wa?dl=0

4/5/18

Today’s working session was about integration; Andrea was ready. I was in awe of the confidence and sense of connection I saw in today's work. It became emotional for me to watch her piece really come together, remembering the seedlings of ideas and sensations we began with. Although this continues to be a working piece that will continue to develop until the performance. Today’s rehearsal captured a satisfying culmination of the time we’ve spent working together. Andrea gave me a nice reflection when our work was finished. She said, “You observed, you allowed, you questioned, you guided, you directed, you challenged, you celebrated, you acknowledged... and you pulled out the dancer in me”

https://www.dropbox.com/s/uvv4dl2pdm1pjs1/20180405_112211.mp4?dl=0

We were always Gods
Tessa Hinderliter (duet) with Allison Pagano

Tessa is an aerial and circus performer living in Nyack, NY. In our friendship, we have discovered that we had very similar childhood experiences in feeling trapped in our
bodies and within family structures that were very foreign and uncomfortable. We decided to explore these concepts in a relational duet from our awkward, dissociated ‘child’ through a journey to the expressions we now embody. This method of exploration included writing and sharing memories, dreams and a look into archetypes, as this is a topic we are both currently self-studying in terms of personal growth. Tess stated, as she held the image of the awkward little girl in her body and began to work with movement phrases, the thought kept coming to her “We Were Always Gods.” I decided that was a good working title for the piece. We chose to have these child images under the title of our piece in the program since the use of the projector at the venue was cost prohibitive.

Some of the movement themes explored are: isolation, introspection, invisibility, moving through awkward stages, disappointment, expansion and collapse, eventual freedom, sensuality, embodiment. We explored where these felt the strongest in our bodies and began to create movement patterns based on our findings.

Tess is speaking of her process/ideas in this video link.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/t103e784cdccciq/20180225_125610.mp4?dl=0

This is a short movement phrase based on beginning ideas- child awkwardness being trapped in the body.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/z6mfpsv0g9aa06/20180225_135940.mp4?dl=0

Tess and Allison 3/9/18

Today’s working movement was born out of childhood gestures that were safe, familiar, or sometimes, more in control than we were. There is a sense of playfulness, innocence, mixed with fears and the need for companionship. The movements in this video are representative of Tess playing outside alone, making mud cakes and dancing.
with herself. My floor section is representative of the hours I spent on my bedroom floor, stretching or creating stories. This section is about estrangement from our own bodies and selves mixed with ‘playful coping.’ Some themes represented here are exploration, innocence and often feeling limited or trapped.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/y8ngqivhe065ato/20180309_173828.mp4?dl=0

Tess and Allison 3/13/18

We began working on the second of our ‘three section’ piece. This is a transition piece of realization, separateness and finding support. We also explore themes of unity vs. individuality and breaking free of limitations. These are our personal and collective memories that haunt us in our bodies and we are seeking communication and transformation with them through the exploration of these qualities in this piece. We plan to layer our costumes in this piece; taking off the first layer and wearing it over our hair as we did at that age. (We will also have our hair in the ‘pigtail’ style, which will be pulled out as we transition between pieces) You may see some gesturing of this in the video. This video is a rough draft of our exploration that we filmed in her cabana. (We were not able to get studio space this day) We have not yet completed the ending. (this section may also be shorter than shown).

https://www.dropbox.com/s/3f9446qlw4nweiv/20180313_175428_1.mp4?dl=0

Rehearsal Tess and Allison 3/16/18

In this rehearsal, we work with unison, supportive movement combined with wanting to break free of limitations. There is still an inherent ‘playful’ quality that remains. We both feel lots of emotional unraveling as we take on these roles of younger
versions of ourselves. Yet, this time, we have the unconditional support of the other, who is committed to the journey with us.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/6axlksann312qzj/20180316_161318.mp4?dl=0

Tess and Allison 3/23/18

In this rehearsal, Tess and I worked on strengthening our connection for the first two sections. (there is one more short section we are creating to complete our process). We began sprinkling in moments of gesture from the first piece, allowing each other to be a mirror and a reliable support. We are helping each other ‘learn lessons’ as we grow through the years that this section exemplifies. We worked in much of what Maxine suggested in staying with the emotion and our connection of the piece. Where this video leaves off is where the last minute of the piece will be which is about integration, empowerment and celebration, within the context that was preset (an example is exploring the gestures in new ways in the third section by finding power in what was once ‘limiting’).

https://www.dropbox.com/s/bdpk4wkhqvbvyyg/20180323_165831.mp4?dl=0

4/1/18

Working final section of duet: themes of recognition, integration and celebration; exploring archetypal poses and celebration in truly being seen and understood.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/v6swc4s5fq5wk7t/20180404_205023.mp4?dl=0

4/8/18

Today we compiled all three sections together. (I didn’t realize until I got home that the camera angle missed some of the work). Every rehearsal is a mini ‘inner child’ conversation, where new stories come up, new threads of movement integrate and the
‘whole picture’ becomes clearer. It also struck me that most people have never taken the time to acknowledge some of the traumas that we undergo from childhood and early adolescence. Instead, they become part of our subconscious and we don’t question where we get our thoughts and judgments. I realize in my own process with this piece how much more there is to examine and integrate.

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/upzrtahs86xqm1b/20180408_153112.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/upzrtahs86xqm1b/20180408_153112.mp4?dl=0)

**Doors, Pathways and Opportunities**

Rachel Johnson (solo into a trio- with Mellie and Byron)

Rachel is a dancer, a graduate of Manhattanville College who came to the project in curiosity to explore new choreographic ways of expression, with a particular interest in new ways of perceiving gender. Rachel’s free write on the topic:

“Does it really feel good that somebody gets the door for me? Why does that feel good? I can do it myself perfectly fine; it’s just the fact that Mom always said a gentleman must hold a door for a lady; and now that it’s happening, it feels good to be in tune with what Mom thought. But I can get my own door. What I can’t do is be a second person for myself, when I need comfort or when I need a second opinion. I can play devil’s advocate, but I can’t completely have the different perspective of someone who has never ever been me. I need that person to tell me when I’m being too much, or when something could be worth it to let go of. When I’m not recognizing my own self worth, someone else can be a reminder. I don’t need a car door opener; I need a companion. Someone who will cause actions and reactions in me that will make my life feel worth living. I don’t need muscles, I form my own. I need thoughts, I need words, I need gestures. I need a mind that aligns in some way with mine, helping me grow in life, and helping me see how
another person will develop uniquely as well. And when I mention doors, I also mean money. I’ll make it myself. Car doors and office jobs.... Can we all please stop worrying about them. Maybe I’ll work in the office. Maybe my partner’s hands are full and I’ll open the car doors to help. Will it feel that great? Perhaps I won’t even notice because it’s just the day-in- day-out ways of caring during the daily routine. Share the work, share the time, share the ideas, share the couch, share who needs to open the door. It’s a door, and I just don’t think anyone needs to tell us who should be the one to open it up.” (Rachel Johnson, January, 2018)

My next questions to Rachel were: How does the cadence of what you wrote live in your body? What does it need to express? How does it move? To help with clarity, in thinking of Laban terms, are the movements light or strong, free or bound, indirect or direct, sustained or sudden? Pick 3 themes in your writing and create a short phrase for each

Rachel’s phrases she initiated on her own:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/77f4m8qgj52c3o2/20180218_150021.mp4?dl=0

Rachel and I worked with her short phrases that were taken from her free write exploration “Work, Time, Ideas, Couch.” We uncovered themes of family expectations in relationships as well as common gender roles she wanted to explore and redefine. Using Effort qualities of Laban to get clearer on where the themes felt strongest in her body, we clarified the following in working with the “Action drive”:

Work- Hands- quick, heavy, bound, direct

https://www.dropbox.com/s/x9f9huaev6ofw1c/20180218_152122.mp4?dl=0
Time- Chest- sustained, light, free, indirect

https://www.dropbox.com/s/kcl9uuizp0ggwlg/20180218_152521.mp4?dl=0

Ideas- Neck- sustained, light, free, indirect

https://www.dropbox.com/s/kuaexq31r6zecz5/20180218_152944.mp4?dl=0

Couch- Thighs- quick, heavy, free, direct

https://www.dropbox.com/s/enniriwq81hvzz5/20180218_153312.mp4?dl=0

“I don’t need muscles I form my own”

https://www.dropbox.com/s/chm5vh3ll2qfmhz/20180218_153634.mp4?dl=0

“I don’t need a car door opener, I need a companion”

https://www.dropbox.com/s/2w1mnc4bsd07ts3/20180218_153914.mp4?dl=0

2/25/18

On our second meeting, Rachel and I decided on a piece of Sound healing music as a backdrop for her working choreography. She chose the music based on the lightness and pulse of the rhythm, which seemed to best express the mood of the choreography while gently supporting it. In this session, we layered and integrated some of the more deeply explored movement themes into her original choreography, while examining what still felt relevant. We chose four sentences/phrases from her written reflection to be spoken during her movements that felt most critical. We also decided that an abbreviated version would be read before she began and the sentences would be read one at a time during her dancing. As her work speaks of a door, I am working with the idea of having a physical door on stage, or a projection of one, since it is very metaphorical. (Byron and Mellie will be on the other side and their trio will begin after Rachel finishes her solo section).
Rachel’s working solo 2/25/18

We decided to let the “Door” writings remain part of the process and not to include them on performance night. Integration of all above phrases into one:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/i9pdpd8afy4cq78/20180225_154102.mp4?dl=0

3/30/18 (Skype rehearsal)

Due to scheduling conflict, we had this rehearsal via Skype. We worked on finding connection to the initial motivations of the piece and refining effort qualities. We also worked on traveling some of the gestures more. Other questions we worked with were: Where there moments of quiet/stillness? And how does she relate the clapping of time to her own body? As she completes her piece, I believe she will put her arms over Mellie and Byron as they enter, as this is how she enters into the trio.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/r6129hvwcj68tzl/20180330_095214.mp4?dl=0

Mellie Lonneman and Byron Romero (duet into a trio with Rachel Johnson)

Byron and Mellie are Rockland County, NY natives who have different theme explorations and also felt connected to the idea of exploring these themes in a duet/trio. Our first meeting was heavily discussion based. Byron shared his interest in “redefining his relationship with himself” by exploring his inner concepts of masculinity and how men often feel isolated without support, as women often create. Within those themes were “vivaciousness of youth” and the “journey to the man he is becoming.” He felt the areas of his body most expressive of this were his head, heart and hips.

Mellie’s interests were in exploring where shame and guilt live in her body and wanting to address certain life experiences and memories to transform previously held negative emotions around issues such as abortion and abandonment. Mellie’s right hip
and ‘gut’ were the areas she felt most called to explore. After some investigation of ‘effort’ qualities of both their stories, they began to create some short movement material. Then, I had them travel across the floor, towards each other and we began to find ‘meeting points’ in their movement phrases, where they felt drawn into join another’s movement or to support it.

Mellie and Byron solos into duet of ‘support’

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/gpti2acwekgieo/20180221_211546.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/gpti2acwekgieo/20180221_211546.mp4?dl=0)

2/28/2018

In our next rehearsal, we sought to combine and align the two movement phrases. Since Mellie’s phrase was ‘direct’ and Byron’s more ‘indirect’ I had them form pattern that combined the two. Since we are creating a partnering duet, I asked them each ‘how’ they want to be supported by the other. Byron’s response was that he wanted to feel embraced, cuddled and held. Mellie wanted her support to help her ‘fly.’

Working duet 2/28/18 (apologies - I was unable to rotate this)

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/k0dpy19uscsllif/20180228_201558_1.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/k0dpy19uscsllif/20180228_201558_1.mp4?dl=0)

*Doors, Pathways and Opportunities*
Duet 3/14/18

In today’s rehearsal, we created movement explorations around Mellie and Byron taking on different effort qualities in improvisation and partnering in order to work with ideas of support and influence from each other. Mellie, whose movement tendencies are direct and sudden, was working with flow and indirect qualities of movement. Byron, whose tendencies lean towards indirect and flow was asked to move more sudden and bound. They were asked to find ways of supporting what each other needed. Mellie stated that she would like to feel should could ‘let go of control’ and have him support her head
weight and to also feel a sense of flight. Byron liked the idea of being ‘led’ by Mellie’s impulses, as it served something he wanted to experience; to let go of leading.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/yn97g5970mnxn0v/20180314_200201.mp4?dl=0

Duet rehearsal 3/27/18 (Byron and Mellie)

I worked in some of Maxine’s suggestions in examining the ‘struggle for power,’ how it evolves and how it resolves. We discussed some of their original intentions and desires for this work and began working it into how they relate and why. As Rachel is exiting her solo, she will place her arms around Mellie and Byron, who are entering. Mellie keeps her eyes on Byron as she moves towards center. He sees her beginning to fall and runs to catch her. I asked them to describe how this work resolves for them individually. For Mellie, it was acceptance and forgiveness, which you can see in the soft, gentle moments between them at the end. For Byron, it was joy in being needed, and being accepted for who he is. This is a loose choreography idea of how they are playing with their connection within the context of asserting their needs, desires and finding moments of compassion and lightness.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/ugjcc8usjjw5bc2/20180328_201952.mp4?dl=0

Doors, Pathways and Opportunities
Trio- Rachel, Mellie and Byron

Rehearsal 3/12/18

This trio is working in the context of their relationships to others. (They each had a personal desire to explore this). In the coming together of their stories, we will start with Mellie reading part of Rachel’s words and including her own, and Byron reading his own thoughts on the subject of opening doors. Rachel will then perform her solo piece to the sound healing piece called Alleyways. Mellie and Byron's duet commences.
immediately after Rachel begins to retreat after her piece is complete, but she will not leave the stage.

In this rehearsal, I asked the dancers to create short phrases based on:

1. What they were told about themselves that felt true or untrue and ‘Other people's’ view’ (they were asked to find where in their body this felt the strongest and how it wanted to be expressed).

2. They were asked to create a second phrase or gesture of how they wish to be seen/ experienced by others.

Interestingly, for both female dancers, how they were seen was much bigger and extroverted and how they wished to be seen was softer and gentler.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/xfdu67s1luei720/20180311_160029.mp4?dl=0

When Rachel re-enters, in her phrase where she puts her arms around ‘imaginary shoulders’ She then puts her arms around Byron and Mellie who carry her forward into a playful swing. What follows is a compilation of the trio doing their own each other’s created gestures of being seen by others and self.

Trio rehearsal 3/18/18

In this rehearsal, we continued to define and refine their previous moments of how the group was told they were seen along with how they wish to be seen. We combined the movements and gestures into both separate and unison movement; experiencing and trying on each other's movements. The entrance of Rachel and the ‘swinging’ movements are meant to represent playfulness, which will also lead into role reversal later in the piece. The plank section was also an exploration into changing roles unexpectedly.
Trio rehearsal 3/25/18

We put all the moving parts together for the first time here, creating a story of relationship, support, celebration, and trust in connection; all in a light, free tone. They each support one another and allow themselves to be supported. We have collectively decided as a group that the text written by Rachel will not be spoken. We may add a few lines of it into the program instead.

Trio rehearsal 4/2/18

In this rehearsal, we spoke about how the energy of each section spoke to the ‘whole. ’Rachel’s solo is an exploration of her ideals clashing with what she was always told she should have or experience in regards to relationship. The duet has revealed itself to be an exploration of shifts of power and in having needs explored and met. We discussed how the part of you who is ‘single’ comes together in a relationship and needs to define boundaries and how those can get opened, closed and crossed. Since each person in the trio has their time to develop their story in the solo and duet, the trio has become an exploration of harmonizing those energies and stories in ways that feel liberating and integrated. We are working with more moments of connection and acknowledgement as well as lightheartedness. We are developing their relationship to each other more and more.