5-2024

Liminal spaces: moving meditation with bodies and clay

Marissa Marquardson

Abstract

In my thesis performance *Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay,* I use dance, poetry, and kaolin clay to explore the phenomenological experience of existing in a state of liminality: a transitional space where the subjective inner and objective outer realities can coexist, and personal transformation can take place. With this thesis, I argue that dance and movement can act as a bridge to connect body, mind, and spirit. I propose that participating in movement practices, as well as witnessing others in their movement practices, has the power to help an individual to become more grounded in their identity, heal from emotional wounds, and ultimately transform into new iterations of themselves.

Liminal Spaces was performed live on March 28, 2024, at 7 pm in the Arts and Culture Center, in my hometown of Marquette, Michigan. The dancers were Maggie Barch and Tara Middleton from TaMaMa Dance Company, and myself. As part of the performance, my mentor, Maria Formolo, acted as a meditation guide and recited an original poem composed especially for this project. The score, *Plan & Elevation* composed by Caroline Shaw, was played live by the Tuuli Quartet.

In this document, I share my critical research on D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena, dance/movement therapy and Authentic Movement, kinesthetic empathy and embodied cognition, and the Japanese avant-garde performance art form known as butoh. I examine how these specific areas of study have enriched my thesis performance allowing me to create metaphorical depth and profound meaning for both performers and audience alike. Furthermore, I deconstruct my creative methodology while offering an analysis of the performance, and shedding light on the future implications of this study for my future creative endeavors.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay

by

Marissa Marquardson

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

May 2024

College of The Arts

Department of Theatre and Dance

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Acknowledgments

My heart is full of gratitude and love for my community during this transformational journey. Many thanks to:

My family—Jim, Cambry, and Ellia—for supporting me in this journey.

Ta and Ma. I love creating with you both.

My mentor and friend, Maria, for all you have taught me about dance and finding the Divine.

All of the Montclair State University graduate dance faculty: Dr. Elizabeth McPherson, Kathleen Kelley, Claire Porter, Stefanie Batten Bland, Christian von Howard, Trebien Pollard, Emmanuelle Phuon, and Dr. Allen Maniker. Special thanks to my thesis sponsor Maxine Steinman for your compassionate support and guidance, and my thesis committee members, Apollinaire Scherr and Diann Sichel, for your thoughtful edits, encouragement, and confidence. I have learned so much.

My cohort: Mandy, Carina, Danae, Sarah, Kristen, Jocelyn, Kiki, and Lola— a support system of infinite worth!

Niikah for beginning this journey into the meeting place of bodies and clay with me; the generous women of the Tuuli Quartet—Danielle, Lauren, Ria, and Kelly—for making beautiful music; Vic for creating literal light and beauty; and the Marquette Arts and Culture Center—Tristan, Tiina, and Amelia—for always supporting the artists of Marquette.

I dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Cambry Claire and Ellia Grace. You are mine, but you are also your own, and you are, oh, so magnificent.

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Introduction

Liminal, from the Latin word *limen* meaning threshold, is a physical, emotional, or metaphorical space that acts as a temporary transition period or site between what was and what will be. Existing in a liminal state is comparable to standing in a doorway, suspended between two worlds, where the old ways of being have been left behind, but the new way has not yet fully emerged. Stepping into the ambiguity of liminality and embracing the duality that exists within it offers limitless possibilities for transformation. In my experience, the process of moving into new iterations of self can be beautiful, but it can also be confusing, uncomfortable, and messy. It requires courage to move from the safety of the known into the uncertainty of the unknown.

My thesis performance, *Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay,* is a meditation in movement that explores the idea of existing in a liminal state and the raw experience of transformation. In the dance, I blend dance and poetry with a soft earthen clay called kaolin to create layers of meaning and metaphor for performers and audience alike. Throughout the dance, three dancers interact with the clay in its various natural states of matter, such as liquid silt, turbid mud, dried fragments, and powdered dust. As the clay and bodies intersect and respond to one another in an act of reciprocity, the clay alters the appearance of the dancers, and the dancers' movement changes the placement and viscosity of the clay. During this exchange, the physical landscape of the small stage is likewise transformed, and by the end of the dance, the remnants of clay left behind by the dancers' bodies serve as a topographical memory map of the dancers' ephemeral movement. The ruminative elements, as well as layers of intention and relationship involved in the creation of *Liminal Spaces,* help to generate an atmosphere of visceral awareness in the present moment.

In support of my thesis performance, this paper introduces my research into D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena, dance/movement therapy, Authentic Movement, kinesthetic empathy and embodied cognition, and the Japanese avant-garde performance art known as butoh. I consider how participating in movement practices, as well as serving as a witness to the movement practices of others, has the potential to heal various degrees of mental and emotional wounds by encouraging mindful awareness and providing a liminal space for transformation. Finally, I conclude this disquisition with a review of my methodology and an analysis of the performance, followed by an assessment of where this line of research will take my future practice.

Rationale

Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay is a response to my research into various philosophical theories and movement practices that strengthen the mind-body connection and offer support for personal transformation and therapeutic healing. My interest in these subjects arose from observing how, over the course of my life, as I have evolved, so has my dancing. Experiences that have shaped my life have also shaped my dance trajectory, my beliefs about dance, my movement style, and my total identity as a movement artist.

A significant personal experience of moving into a liminal state and transforming, was my experience transitioning out of a high-demand religion after 30 years of membership. As I left behind old-religious beliefs, rituals, and spiritual practices, I began to instinctively deconstruct my habits, beliefs, traditions, and training as a dancer. I looked outside my experience of traditional performance and codified technique, seeking more inclusive and holistic perspectives of dance. I broadened my teaching and performing practices to include

those who may not identify as trained dancers. I began experimenting with incorporating elements from other art disciplines into my work to deepen the dance experience. These investigations have not only enriched my artistic practice but, more crucially, have also coincided with my personal path to mental and emotional healing as I worked to disentangle myself from past religious and dance beliefs. It led me to consider the ways in which movement has the power to change how a person experiences and understands their lives, their relationships, and their interactions with time and space. In each of my courses in Montclair State University's MFA in Dance, I have investigated movement as a catalyst for change.

The actual seed for my cumulative thesis study and performance came in my Spring 2023 Special Projects class with Professor Maxine Steinman. I embarked on a collaborative project with Niikah Hatfield, a ceramics artist based in Marquette, Michigan. When I approached Niikah about a possible collaborative project, I was interested in the core material of ceramics: clay. Niikah works with a soft, white clay called kaolin, which is an essential element of porcelain ceramics. On her website, Niikah expresses her fascination with clay: "Clay is an inherently earthen medium that requires presence and patience from the maker" (Hatfield, "About"). In a personal interview, Niikah described clay as having a "fragile impermanence" and explained that she is drawn to the technical challenges of the medium and the need to constantly be in tune with the clay at each stage of the creation process. I felt that collaborating with Niikah would enrich both our creative endeavors and, unwittingly, this inquiry into the space between body and clay was a significant catalyst for *Liminal Spaces*.

Previous to collaborating, Niikah and I had both been creating art that encompassed the metaphor of transformation, and she introduced me to the art of *kintsugi*, a Japanese method of repairing broken pottery. Rather than trying to cover up the broken imperfections, the pottery is

repaired with lacquer and gold which serves to highlight the fractures as an important part of the object's history ("The Japanese Art"). In a BBC reel, Hiroki Kiyokawa, a restorer in Kyoto, describes *kintsugi* as a metaphor for restoring our own brokenness, both physical and psychological. Kiyokawa says, "Try not to hide what you've gone through and your history…you should embrace it and you will be reborn" ("The Japanese Art" 05:14-05:31). As we strip away our old beliefs and shed constructs that no longer serve our new iterations of being, the cracked pieces left behind can be repaired and reimagined into a new form. It is the process that contains the essence of *kintsugi.* It is in the act of repair, the time and attention, that value is found.

With this idea of transformation through repair in mind, Niikah and I began a physical practice of dancing in all the various properties of clay (wet, dry, fired, etc.). We observed a symbiotic causality, noticing how each iteration of clay influenced our movement and how our movement, in turn, influenced the clay's attributes. For example, when we moved among the greenware (clay that is shaped and dried but not yet glazed or fired), it responded by delicately crumbling, simultaneously hard and soft, leaving both a layer of fine, white dust and minuscule red scratches on our skin. It was in the meeting of movement and clay that Niikah and I fully realized how the human body related to the strength and fragility of the clay, and how the two mediums could mutually transform each other. We also observed how witnessing each other move with the clay was just as powerful an experience as dancing in it. As a result, we felt that the emerging themes of mutual transformation and duality, would speak to others in a visceral and familiar way. As such, we developed a project proposal for an art installation that explored transformation through the language of bodies and clay.

Our project, titled *Alchemize: On Bodies and Clay,* is an immersive, durational art installation merging contemporary movement, video projections, raw clay, and Niikah's fired ceramic sculptures. *Alchemize* was accepted by the City of Marquette Arts and Culture Center and will be exhibited in the Marquette DEO Gallery in August and September 2024. While the timeline of this exhibit did not correspond with the requirements for this thesis project, the introduction into the transformation and connection between clay and bodies initiated a line of research that I have continued to follow. I think of this thesis, *Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay,* as being both a product of and prequel to *Alchemize: On Bodies and Clay.* It is the beginning of a new trajectory for my creative work in which I hope to expand people's perception of what dance looks like, who can dance, and what movement can do for them.

Research

I begin this section with an introduction to D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena which offers a foundation for entering a liminal state and creating understanding between mind, body, and spirit. Next, I explain how dance/movement therapy (DMT) implements Winnicott's theory, and I explore the DMT exercise of Authentic Movement by examining how Authentic Movement uses movers and witnesses to access liminal space. I explain kinesthetic empathy and embodied cognition in the context of DMT—how dancers in general rely on movement metaphor to communicate with themselves and their audiences. Finally, I offer the Japanese avant-garde performance art, butoh, as a physical implementation of these principles.

Transitional Space as a Conceptual Framework

Transitional Phenomena is a branch of object relations theory and a useful construct in which to view my studies of liminal space in dance and movement. First developed by psychoanalyst and pediatrician, D.W. Winnicott (1896-1971) in the 1950s, transitional phenomena is the "internal representation of the relationship between an individual's inner subjective understanding of the world and the objective reality of the world" ("Transitional Phenomenon"). In chapter one of his book *Playing and Reality,* Winnicott writes:

> From birth…the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of…. The intermediate area to which I am referring is the area that is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality-testing. The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being. (11)

Winnicott describes how infants move through a crucial phase of child development in which they establish a 'me/not-me' awareness. The infant navigates this phase of self-discovery using a *transitional object,* such as a blanket or doll, which serves as an illusion to bridge the gap between their inner (subjective) reality and their external (objective) reality. Winnicott termed this intermediate area between realities *potential space* or *transitional space.* This paradoxical transitional space allows individuals to experiment with different identities, ideas, and emotions without the constraints of reality, helping them navigate attachments and relationships (Winnicott 1-26). An additional facet to Winnicott's transitional phenomena theory is the pivotal role of the

mother (not necessarily the infant's own mother) in establishing a safe *holding environment*[1] wherein the infant can safely develop autonomy and understanding of their objective and subjective world (Winnicott 10).

Winnicott argues that transitional phenomena and object relations theory extends beyond just infancy. Navigating transitional space, as conceived by Winnicott, is the work of existing in liminality. He explains that adults often look to creative fields where boundaries between inner and outer realities remain fluid and flexible, such as the arts, religion, and creative sciences (Winnicott 5, 13-14). Stepping into liminal space through therapeutic modalities allows individuals to glean understanding of their internal and external experiences, develop their sense of self, and find mental and emotional healing. *The Handbook of Art Therapy* describes the art process, including the presence of the therapist as creative facilitator, as somewhat of "a holding environment within which object relations can emerge and develop" (Malchiodi 71). *The Handbook* goes on to say that the art produced as part of therapy can serve as a transitional object, becoming "imbued with meaning beyond what [it is] in reality" (Malchiodi 71). In art therapy, individuals are encouraged to "create a symbolic world in which image and feeling become linked" (Wyman-McGinty 171). This process can be crucial for supporting creativity and imagination (Wyman-McGinty 171) and for supporting overall mental and emotional healing and well-being (Hornthal 3-14). In the next section, I describe how, similar to art therapy's use of art, dance/movement therapy uses movement as a vehicle to traverse through transitional space.

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[1] The American Psychological Association online dictionary defines a holding environment as "that aspect of the mother experienced by the infant as the environment that literally…holds them comfortingly during calm states." The mother also holds the infant figuratively "by demonstrating highly focused attention and concern" ("Holding Environment").

Dance/movement Therapy: Accessing Healing Through Movement

Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is the psychotherapeutic use of movement to facilitate emotional, social, cognitive, physical, and spiritual integration for overall health and well-being ("What is Dance Movement Therapy?"). At its core, DMT is grounded in evidence that body and mind are reliant on each other for optimal well-being and achieving a balanced and integrated sense of self ("What is Dance Movement Therapy (DMT)?"). DMT as a therapeutic practice is not about teaching people to become dancers, rather it encourages the use of movement to facilitate a symbiotic relationship between body, mind, and spirit[2] (Hornthal 5-8). One of the principles stemming from the field of psychoanalysis that serves as a foundation for DMT is that body movement can reflect emotional and mental states (Hornthal 34-5). But in addition to that, DMT is founded on research suggesting that "changes in movement behavior can lead to changes in the psyche," and it is only when this connection is tended to that individual healing and growth can advance (Levy 1). Dance/movement therapist and author of *Body Aware* Dr. Erica Hornthal, observes that when a person moves their body, they move their mind, saying, "only when we acknowledge the body can we then release and repattern the behaviors that limit our potential for change and growth" (60). Ultimately, DMT requires its participants to step into transitional space and make room for the transcendental while simultaneously operating in the objective realm of logical thought and corporeal reality.

In an online Q&A with Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Dr. Jill Hayes, a dance/movement practitioner and author of the book *Soul and Spirit in Dance Movement Psychotherapy: A Transpersonal Approach,* claims that this fluidity between realities is precisely why DMT can be such an effective therapeutic tool. Hayes asserts that DMT "thrives on the premise of transitional space" and "contains a deep respect for a living process which happens despite the rational

[2] By which I mean, the intuitive and immaterial essence of an individual.

ego… constantly weaving connections between the felt-sense *of* life and the imaginings and thoughts *about* life" ("Healing With Body"). In DMT, one of the tools therapists can use to help individuals navigate transitional space through movement is an exercise called Authentic Movement.

Authentic Movement and the Power of Witnessing

Authentic Movement is a two-part improvisational movement practice involving a mover and a witness. The practice originated in the 1960s from work by dance movement pioneer Mary Starks Whitehouse (1911-1979), and later evolved into the refined practice known as Authentic Movement under the guidance of Dr. Janet Adler (1941-2023). As described in Adler's essay "Who is the Witness? A Description of Authentic Movement," this practice asks for an individual to move their body without a predetermined agenda or goal, guided by their inner impulses and body sensations, and performed in the presence of a witness. The mover notices any thoughts, feelings, or memories that may arise; in turn, the witness observes (rather than interprets) the mover in safe, non-judgmental terms. At the end of a session, the mover and witness come together and engage in dialogue about their thoughts, feelings, and sensations (141-59). In an article titled "Authentic Movement As a Meditative Practice," authors Vivien Marcow-Speiser and Michael Franklin describe Authentic Movement as entering "into the realm of the great unknown," and they further state:

> It is not possible to predict what will emerge as the mover/s begin to move in the presence of the witness/es. Moving into the empty space in the practice of Authentic Movement is like moving into the space of infinite possibility and as such contains the potentiality of all human experiences. It is not possible to know what will happen in this in-between realm that exists between mover/s and witness/es. (68-69)

Often, there are recurring rituals adhered to during Authentic Movement sessions: the room is cleared of distractions; movers often close their eyes and move in silence; a chime or bell is used to signal ending; groups maintain circular formations; each session begins and ends with eye contact between mover and their witness; and after a movement session, participants will often journal independently before moving into dialogue with each other (Marcow-Speiser and Franklin 69-70). Each ritual is clearly articulated and agreed on by all participants before the start of a session. The intentional parameters of Authentic Movement invite what Adler describes as, "the conscious development of relationships between the moving self and the inner witness, between the individual body and the collective body, between the self and the Divine" (*Offering* xix).

In Authentic Movement, the two distinct roles of mover and witness create somewhat of a Winnicottian holding environment for each other, and they are inseparably intertwined in a phenomenon of reciprocity. Through the act of being witnessed, the *mover* can learn to witness themselves and, ultimately, begin to learn how to witness others. Adler explains this further: "For no matter how well and objectively one can witness oneself, that self-witnessing is transformed after truly seeing another as she is…[S]eeing another as she is– loving her– enables me to see myself as I am" ("Who is the Witness?" 154). Adler also comments on the potential for an "active internal experience" or "awakening" in the *witness* by observing the mover, saying, "When the witness is fully alive to the mover, [the witness] is, paradoxically, completely present in relation to [their] own inner experience" ("Who is the Witness?" 144). In her essay "Kinesthetic Empathy and Movement Metaphor in Dance Movement Psychotherapy," dance/movement therapist Bonnie Meekums notes that an essential part of being a witness is the ability to observe the mover in an "attitude of 'not knowingness'" because it allows them to let

go of all preconceived notions or judgments, and when this happens, the witness can simply "be with the…mover, in a state of quiet receptivity" (Meekums 59).

Similar to the mover/witness relationship in Authentic Movement, in a performance—-though their relationship is different in intention and in process—-audiences are witnesses to the dancers performing. Concert dance does not have the same controlled environment nor therapeutic intention as a DMT experience, of course. People watch dance performances for many reasons, with each audience member bringing their own expectations, interests, and social and cultural histories. However, in both cases, dance is the mode of communication, and as I began to create *Liminal Spaces,* I wondered what it would look like to blend the intimate, meditative witnessing cultivated in therapeutic settings with a more traditional audience/dancer dynamic. My intent was to invite the audience to enter a state of quiet receptivity and potential transformation, through the phenomena of kinesthetic empathy and embodied cognition.

Kinesthetic Empathy and Embodied Cognition

In the introduction to *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices,* editors Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason introduce the phenomenological exchange of understanding through *kinesthetic empathy*. They describe kinesthetic empathy as the intuitive ability to understand another person's internal experience through observing, or participating in, someone else's movement (18-21). DMT therapists rely on the transference of kinesthetic empathy to create connections and channel meaning with their clients (Hornthal 6). Kinesthetic empathy is influenced by shared social and creative interactions and is, in part, based on embodied cognition theory (Reynolds and Reason 17-23).

The grounding assumption of embodied cognition theory is that cognitive understanding is not simply controlled by the brain, but by the body's sensory interactions with its environment (Shapiro and Spaulding). In his book, *Embodied Mind, Meaning, and Reason,* cognitive scientist Dr. Mark Johnson states that "understanding is not just a conceptual achievement, but rather a whole-body, visceral engagement with our world that defines who we are and how we comport ourselves" (12). Our ability to give thought and meaning to the present relies on past embodied memories that emerge from the body's attunement, reaction, and adaptation of the physical, interpersonal, and cultural environment it moves through (Mark Johnson 166). Essentially, humans are embodied beings. It is impossible to separate mind from body because their interplay results in total understanding of all experience, meaning, and thought.

According to Meekums, understanding kinesthetic empathy in dance first means understanding the "movement metaphor," because words can "remain an inadequate representation of the kinds of knowledge that arise through the moving body" (55). In *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life,* choreographer and author Twyla Tharp describes metaphor as "the lifeblood of all art," saying, "Metaphor is our vocabulary for connecting what we're experiencing now with what we have experienced before. It's not only how we express what we remember, it's how we interpret it— for ourselves and others" (64). In the act of dancing and witnessing, Dr. Rosemarie Samaritter explains the dual appeal that movement metaphor offers, saying:

> Dance symbols and metaphors can give one a physical sense about how to join the dance of another person. The image reveals the quality of the experience and, at the same time, it triggers a potential experience. By joining in with the movement, we can share the

> perception of the situation by the author/dancer/choreographer. And by being danced, the metaphor reveals this quality as an experience to both dancer and witness. (33)

Communication through kinesthetic empathy, embodied cognition, and movement metaphor carry with them "the potential for transformation" (Meekums 55). This embodied, metaphoric communication is found in transitional space where mind, body, and spirit work together creating understanding for movers and witnesses.

Butoh: Embodied Imagery

Butoh is a provocative Japanese performance art form that offers an underlying philosophy of transformation that runs parallel to this study of using movement to access liminal space. In *Butoh: A Mirror of Consciousness,* author Maxine Steinman declares, "one essential concept seems to dominate: the transformational ability of the consciousness as it connects with the physical being" (60). There are different interpretations and lineages of butoh study, but overwhelmingly, butoh uses embodied imagery to present the entire range of human nature, relying on movement metaphor to create meaning. Sondra Fraleigh, author of *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy,* describes butoh as, "Born of mud and morphing to silk, its aesthetic is both beautiful and ugly, and it spirals emotion into metaphysics" (76).

Butoh emerged during the 1950s from a transitional period of overlapping artistic, political, and social movements that contributed to its global spread and acted as a refraction for butoh's transformational philosophy (Fraligh 11). Its founder, Tatsumi Hijikata (1928- 1968), was deeply influenced by the post-World War Ⅱ political climate and physical devastation wrought by the United State's atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*Butoh* 00.08:24; Fraligh 11). From this period of upheaval and rebuilding, Hijikata was inspired to create *ankoku buyō* or "darkness dance" (Baird and Candelario 79) which evolved as a non-conformist and

"radically generative method of dance" (Baird, *A History* 7). Min Tanaka, a dancer trained by Hijikata and founder of the dance company Maijuku, remarked that "the most important [message] was [Hijikata's] belief in perpetual change" (*Butoh* 00:35:12) and that butoh's genesis as a physical protest against Western materialism and traditional European and Japanese dance forms (Bellarose 20; Fraleigh 11) intrinsically "contained within it the freedom to change" (*Butoh* 00:35:12).

Often, *butoh-ka* (butoh dancers) will incorporate natural and synthetic materials into their movement practice. For example, Eiko Otake and Takashu Koma Otake, known as Eiko & Koma, two New York-based dancers who studied with Kazuo Ohno but who do not label their work butoh, have interacted with the natural elements of water, rock, or mud in many of their site-specific, durational installations; Maureen Fleming, a New York-based butoh performer, often works with vast sheaths of fabric; and the all-male Japanese butoh troupe Sankai Juku often brings sand onto their stages. Fraleigh writes specifically about this common practice of using the physical material of sand in butoh dance. She describes how the "mesmerizing qualities" of sand "point directly toward shape-shifting and the transcendence of individual ego" (15). A review of Sankai Juku's dance *Umusuna,* spoke about how their use of sand created an atmosphere in the theater, "drawing [the audience] into a contemplative state" (Kaderlan). Regardless of synthetic or natural, materials help add a layer of intentionality to butoh's metamorphic message for its dancers and audiences alike.

When looking at the physical markers of butoh, some commonalities can be observed. For example, slow, controlled, and repetitive movement with no formal technical structure; improvisation guided by imagery; distorted facial expressions and contorted body positions; and the naked or minimally covered body which is sometimes painted white or smeared with mud.

However, while these external attributes are often present, they are not always present. In a conversation last year with Steinman, my thesis sponsor, she emphasized the importance of imagery in butoh, describing the dancer's responsibility to *become* the image rather than just imitate the image. She compared the receptive butoh body to an empty bag waiting to be filled; the bag will take the shape of whatever fills it. In butoh, imagery serves to fill and move the body from the inside, rather than moving from the outside in adherence to predetermined steps.

Another pertinent component of butoh as it relates to traversing the liminal space, is the Japanese and Zen space-time concept: *ma. Ma* has no direct Western translation but can be described as the space between—-a liminal space filled with dynamic potential that allows for a deeper appreciation and understanding of the relationship between internal and external realms (Bellarose 11-19). Fraleigh describes *ma* as the "global connective tissue of butoh" saying that *"butoh-ka* awaken self-reflective moments in themselves and their audiences" encouraging an "expansive state of mind… that has been freed from thought [and] can dwell in-between, not looking back with regret or forward in anticipation" (6). As in the Authentic Movement practice, being in *ma* means clearing the channels of attention, allowing things to unfold naturally, and being receptive to the here and now of transformation.

Methodology

Connecting the Conceptual to Corporeal

As I entered my final semesters of Montclair State University's MFA program, I could feel my academic research bolstering my creative work in the dance studio. My examination of these psychoanalytical theories and dance/movement practices all anchored on the common theme of liminal space and transformation. Armed with an understanding of transitional space,

kinesthetic empathy, embodied cognition and movement metaphor, I decided to use my understanding of DMT, Authentic Movement, and Butoh[3] as tools to generate movement and inform my choices as I shaped *Liminal Spaces.* Below, I share two especially salient experiences, both of which stemmed from DMT exercises I had collected in previous semesters, and both of which moved *Liminal Spaces* from a conceptual to a corporeal experience.

First, an experience from when my dancers and I engaged in an Authentic Movement session together. At that point in time, I was two months out of surgery to repair a ruptured Achilles tendon; I had only been weight bearing for one month and it was one of the first times that I had danced in almost three months. Besides the physical disruption to my active lifestyle, I was feeling incredibly discouraged and struggling to see a way forward for my impending thesis creation. In a debriefing session after watching me move, one witness described an image of a bug hitting a windshield then struggling to disengage and right itself only to be blasted with another gust of wind, over and over. Another shared the saying "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results." My witnesses agreed that even in the evident discouragement and struggle, there was an underlying sense of "persistent perseverance" in my movement.

From this experience of being witnessed, I felt profound clarity. Where before, while my mind logically knew that limitations can lend themselves to creative solutions, my body and my heart did not actually see a new way through this obstacle. My devastating physical injury had left me feeling frustrated, angry, sad, and trapped, which blurred any clear path for moving forward. As my witnesses held space for me and reflected the resiliency that they saw in my

[3] I was first introduced to butoh by my mentor Maria Formolo who studied under Yoshito Ohno in Japan. More encouragement to investigate butoh came out of a Special Topics Research Packet when Professor Stefanie Batten Bland observed that I had a "confidence and relationship with time." I do not label *Liminal Spaces* a butoh dance, as I have had no formal training in the genre. However, it is surely inspired by butoh's aesthetic and philosophy.

movement, I felt an actual physical, internal shift happen, as if the gears that aligned my mind, body, and heart had interlocked. I felt an overwhelming sense of permission to let go of my previous self-held expectations related to productivity and planning. I understood that I had the capabilities to move forward, and I felt empowered to initiate action. When I verbalized this internal shift to my witnesses, they observed how much lighter my energy had become, and how my body was even leaning forward in a pose of readiness.

Another significant DMT experiential my dancers and I embarked on during a rehearsal, centered around the use of words and images to inspire and explore movement.[4] We began the rehearsal by free-writing to prompts on the topic of *boundaries*. After we wrote, I scattered dried clay shards across the floor and encouraged the dancers to transition from a conceptual realm into a corporeal one by interacting with the clay through improvisation. Afterwards, as we engaged in a discussion about our experience, one dancer shared a list of questions, beginning with: "Boundaries. What even are they!?" She spoke about how she was struggling to set boundaries in essential areas of her life because she was unclear about what "good" boundaries were. Her movement reflected this uncertainty as she cautiously danced through the clay shards, quizzically exploring them from many angles and rearranging them in various positions. Another dancer, when faced with limitless movement possibilities, was surprised to see she instinctively chose a more introspective and contained approach, avoiding any direct interaction with the clay. My own written reflections centered on the distinction between self-imposed boundaries and those imposed by external factors. I began my movement by surrounding myself with a jagged

[4] In April of 2023, I participated in a six week online workshop with dance/movement therapist, Dr. Erica Hornthal. The workshop, called the *Moving Through Series,* was "an opportunity to heal in community" and designed to "help you move through life's challenges, come home to your body, and recommit to yourself" (Hornthal, "News/Events"). Each week covered a different theme: Transitions, Relationships, Boundaries, Communication, Reparenting/Inner Child, and Identity. The exercise of writing and then moving in the clay shards in response to the prompt "boundaries," was inspired by the *Moving Through* workshop.

perimeter of clay, and then— I smashed the clay barrier to smithereens! I felt irrationally angry by the wall I had created and destroying it felt extremely liberating.

In this exercise, the clay served as a tangible representation of abstract boundaries, a transitional object of sorts, it aided us in exploring and understanding the complex interplay between physical movement and metaphysical concepts. Another lesson I learned from this specific experience was that physically interacting with the clay was wildly different than thinking about interacting with the clay. While originally I had thought I would create the dance first and *then* add the clay, I now understood that I would need to integrate the dynamic presence of the clay into the full dancemaking process. During the creation of *Liminal Spaces,* my dancers and I met for our weekly rehearsals in a basement studio. We temporarily removed the flooring revealing the cement subfloor, thus allowing me to bring in the clay early in the process. To help explain the methodology behind the creation of *Liminal Spaces,* I am combining my creative process with a description of the final performance. I have five distinct sections: Clay, Space, Music, Poetry/Meditation, and Movement.

Clay

Bodies and clay both share a fascinating "action-reaction" dynamic. From Niikah, I learned about the cyclical nature of clay, its transformability, and its reactivity to water, earth, air, and fire. Because of this versatility, I decided to work with the clay in three of its states of matter and set about collecting enough clay to do so. I bought 150 pounds of professionally mixed kaolin clay in a firm sculpting consistently, as well as three 5-gallon buckets of dried remnant clay from Niikah, which I mixed by hand with water until it reached my desired consistency. Additionally, I was given 40 gallons of dried clay fragments from a dancer's brother-in-law, Jay Barch. Jay is a potter and studio owner of Mackinac Mud Pottery, located on Mackinac Island,

Michigan. These remnants took quite the journey— a ferry ride from the island and then a three-hour car ride (in a snowstorm!)— to my home in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Before the actual performance, my dancers and I prepared our bodies by painting a thin layer of liquid silt (a high water-to-clay ratio) on our arms, chest, necks, and faces in non-uniformed patterns. The liquid dried almost immediately, creating a brittle layer that quickly formed a spider web of small cracks along the surface of our skin. Thin chips would flake off as we moved, creating uneven patterns, and leaving our skin with a soft dusting of white powder. At the beginning of the dance, we used the clay mixed to a turbid mud consistency and piled it over and around us. As we diverged through the space, the clay spread across the floor in response to our movement and we left imprints of movement memory. With its transformable nature and reactivity to the dancers' bodies, the clay was like bringing in another performer. It changed movement, meaning, aesthetics, and relationships. And, similar to the use of sand in butoh, it created a contemplative atmosphere with its visceral shape-shifting quality.

Space

I struggled to find a venue that would allow me to spread almost 100 gallons of clay all over their floor. Not only did the location need to accommodate the mess, but it also needed to be a zen environment with minimal visual or aural distractions. The Marquette Arts and Culture Center (MACC) is in the basement of the Peter White Public Library in my hometown of Marquette, Michigan. The MACC has a large, industrial workshop that they rent out to artists for hosting various workshops. The room has a cement floor, 25-foot ceilings, high windows, exposed pipes, and expansive white walls. It is specifically constructed to accommodate artist debris and fit all my requirements. I am very grateful to the MACC for their support of my thesis and allowing me to use it at no cost.

Because of the subtle, elusive movements and the contemplative tone of *Liminal Spaces*, I worried that any extra visual distractions would pull the audience's attention. Because of this, I nestled my "stage" area into a corner of the room. By working into a corner, I created a forced perspective effect for the audience, facing them away from the distracting, mundane elements of the room, such as the fire escape and work sink, as well as away from the musicians, who I placed in the opposite corner behind the audience. I used the greenware fragments spread across the floor to define the front edge of the stage. The corner felt too two-dimensional, and I wanted to hide an ugly wall radiator, so I decided to line the back walls of the stage with white pedestals—-like the kind used in art galleries for displays. I layered and stacked the various sized boxes to fabricate uneven spacings, and my lighting designer, Vic Holliday, added backlighting behind them, which resulted in even more dimensionality. In addition to lights behind the boxes, we had uplight from PAR Can lights placed on the floor around the front edges of our stage, and two booms with LED Batten lights attached, one providing crosslighting from downstage right, and one providing high front light from downstage center. (See fig. 1.) Additionally, since the performance happened before sunset, the natural light coming from three high windows was a wild card. Vic did not set any lighting cues, preferring instead to improvise and respond to the dancers and the natural light in real time.

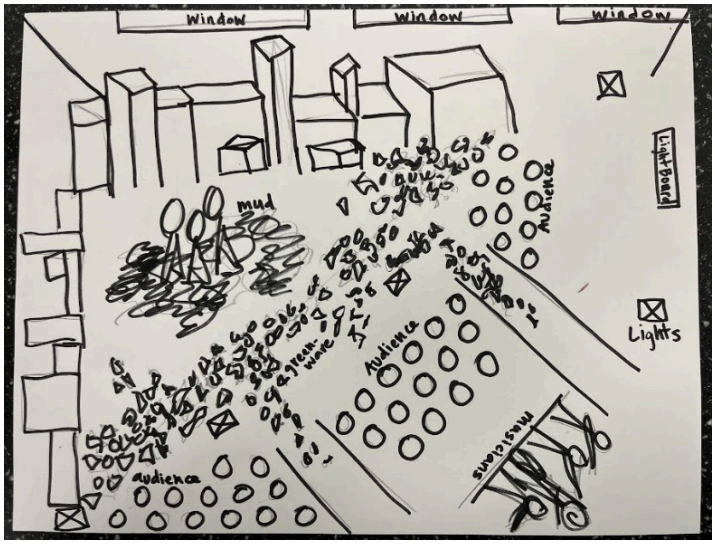

Fig. 1. Initial set/lighting plot for the MACC

Music

The music I chose for *Liminal Spaces* is an arrangement by Caroline Shaw called *Plan and Elevation.* It is a five-movement piece written for a string quartet in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Dumbarton Oaks, a museum and garden in Washington D.C. (Shaw). On Shaw's website, she describes the composition the following way:

> I returned to these essential ideas of space and proportion– to the challenges of trying to represent them on paper. The title, *Plan & Elevation,* refers to two standard ways of representing architecture—essentially an orthographic, or "bird's eye," perspective ("plan"), and a side view which features more ornamental detail ("elevation"). This binary is also a gentle metaphor for one's path in any endeavor—often the actual journey and results are quite different (and perhaps more elevated) than the original plan.

I first heard this piece performed live when I took my eldest daughter (a violist herself) to a performance sponsored by the Superior Strings Alliance Chamber Players in our town of Marquette, Michigan, where an all-women quartet called the Tuuli Quartet performed. There have been a small handful of memorable experiences in which I have had an intensely physical

and visceral reaction to a piece of art, and this stands out as one of those experiences. As the very first somber, haunting notes emanated from the viola, chased by a skittish tremor of notes from the violin, my senses were immediately on high alert. For what could have been two minutes or two hours (but was actually 20 minutes), the women played through the five sections, each one with its own distinct emotional voice, and I felt suspended from all time and thought.

I soaked in the quiet attentiveness of the first movement before relinquishing to the discordant trepidation brought by the second movement. Then, I sighed into the third movement, which provided a brief moment of relief but too soon unraveled into unbearable chaos. The fourth movement brought back the quickening tremor of the violin, but this time it was supported by its stringed sisters in an achingly beautiful melody of hope. The fifth and final movement is best described in Shaw's own words: "strong, simple, ancient, elegant, and quiet." As the women sat in the last poignant pause before lowering their bows to signal the finish, I felt as if I was coming out of a trance.

At some point during the performance (probably when my teenage daughter shifted uncomfortably away from me in embarrassment), I realized I had tears streaming down my face. My heart was rapidly beating, my throat felt raw, and I was literally on the edge of my seat. I was completely engulfed—body, mind, and spirit—in the sublime labyrinth of notes. But more than just the music, I was captivated by the four women playing together. I imagined a shimmering mirage of energy pulsating between them; they were completely locked into each other as they played. As a performer, I know finding this flow is a rare and precious intimacy, and as an audience member, I felt it amplified my experience to witness it.

When it came time to decide on a score for *Liminal Spaces,* I remembered my experience listening to and watching the Tuuli Quartet perform *Plan & Elevation*. As my mind remembered,

my body, too, was overwhelmed with replicating sensations of that first experience. I obtained a grand rights license from Shaw to use her composition, and the women of the Tuuli Quartet graciously agreed to perform the piece live for *Liminal Spaces*. As I began working with my dancers, I used this experience as a compass to guide my choices.

Poetry/Meditation

I knew from the very beginning of graduate school that my thesis would somehow involve my longtime mentor and dear friend, Maria Formolo. Maria often has difficulty labeling what she does, calling herself an "image maker" (Formolo). She is an artist who works with music, poetry, drawing, and dance as cross-cultural healing modalities. Maria's career has spanned over 65 years, and she has traveled extensively teaching and performing in the US, Canada, Japan, and Indonesia. When I brought her my idea for *Liminal Spaces*, she immediately agreed to be a creative contributor. Currently almost 80, Maria finds herself in her own liminal space, in a career phase that she cannot see clearly just yet. She admits that it is a little painful, even terrifying, to feel like her world is in a state of flux; that her body is not matching the youth of her spirit (Formolo). Maria has stepped back from dancing for an audience, but she was interested in composing an original poem to supplement the dance. She brought two poems to me: one narrative and one abstract. Together, we chose the more abstract of the two (see fig. 2) and set about incorporating it into *Liminal Spaces*.

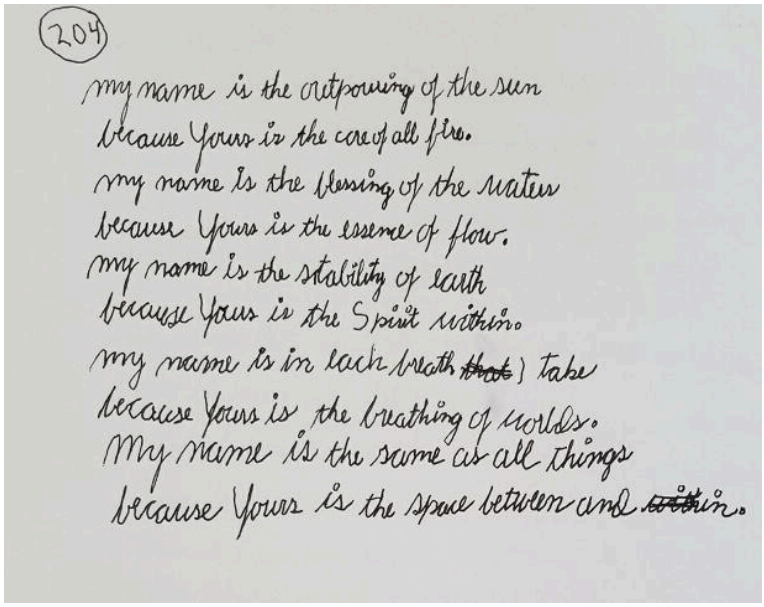

Fig. 2. Maria's Poem

I had previously wondered how to blend a therapeutic style of witnessing with audience witnessing, so I had many conversations with Maria about how to cultivate this dynamic. We tried a few ideas out, one of which was to give each audience member a lump of clay and invite them to participate by bringing it to the stage during the dance. But none of our ideas felt quite right until I found an article titled "Authentic Movement as a Meditative Practice." In it, the authors compared movement and meditation with mindfulness and witnessing as overlapping and integrated practices, saying, "That open and potentiated state of being allows for the unfolding and experiencing of all that is possible and evolves out of the simplicity of the relationship between mover/s and witness/es and the embodied understanding that comes from that subjective inter-relationship" (Marcow-Speiser and Franklin 68). They go on, "The still body allows for an entrainment of following the rise and fall of breath and whatever practice the meditator follows for returning to the body and to the breath" (Marcow-Speiser and Franklin 72-3). After reading this article, I was inspired to treat the audience as if they were active

participants in creating a meditative environment, similar to a group meditation or breath class.[5] I asked Maria to open the performance by speaking to the audience and inviting them to bring their attention to their breath, to let their thoughts quiet, and to open their minds in preparation to "gently receive and hold, rather than grasp whatever thoughts arise" (Marcow-Speiser and Franklin 71).

Dance

I have intentionally avoided using the word "choreography" in reference to *Liminal Spaces.* This is because while I started my project by traditionally choreographing set steps and phrases, I soon realized that this approach was not actually supporting my project goals. It seemed that every set phrase I tried to teach did not seem to have the desired effect. It became very apparent that trying to plan, set, and choreograph for a dance that required awareness of the present moment and was about existing in an ambiguous in-between state, inviting transformation into unknown possibilities, was not going to work well. With the encouragement of my sponsor, Maxine Steinman, I decided that what felt most appropriate was to create a structured improvisation. This structure would allow for the spontaneous creation of movement in real time, while still giving the dancers the flexibility to respond to each other and to the clay in the moment. A structured improvisation would enable us to use cohesive imagery and set tasks, creating markers (musical cues, dancer cues, spatial cues) that would act as "meeting points" where we could regroup. My hope was that by meeting somewhere in the middle, a place between full improvisation and set choreography, we could embrace freedom while still holding the intentions of the dance.

[5] Maria's poem and this meditative opening for *Liminal Spaces* will be discussed further below in the section *Poem: Being Named*.

Liminal Spaces was performed by three dancers: myself and two other women from TaMaMa Dance Company, Maggie Barch and Tara Middleton. We have danced together for over eight years and have supported each other through many periods of liminality in our personal and professional lives. I believe these layers of relationship added an unseen, but felt, layer of depth to this performance. Just as I noticed how the musicians of the Tuuli Quartet played together with ease and effortless communication, the trust and familiarity the three of us share was vital when moving away from traditional choreography towards structured improvisation. As I prepared to enter rehearsals with my dancers, I recalled the words of performance artist and researcher, Dr. Christine Bellarose, about asking a dancer for "more *ma"* which is asking a dancer to "perform alchemy." In her MA thesis, *Being Ma in Movement: Space-Time in Butoh, Somatic Practice, and Durational Performance Art*, Bellarose states:

> A dancer who yields ma brings to movement the quality of aliveness to an otherwise neutral, or unborn space-time. Turning the everyday space-time into a space-time of magic is the work of artists conjuring the everyday into the augmented reality movement creates. Beyond a perfectly executed movement, beyond a flat representation of a scripted story, the dancer is asked by the choreographer to conjure and manifest images of a magical and spirited essence-bodies to the audience. The dancer as alchemist brews language, drawing essences from the environment and within the body, (re)constructing narratives. (19)

I knew that with the relationship between Maggie, Tara, and myself, and the art that we've created together in the past, I could ask them to perform alchemy with me, to journey into a liminal exploration of movement, metaphor, and meditation.

I began having us improvise together to different sections of the music. This part of the process was very collaborative; we were trying things out, finding the patterns, looking for what felt "right." In allegiance to Authentic Movement structure, after each improvisation session, we would come together to verbally process the experience. I recorded many of these sessions to reference later in the process. We experimented with improvising to the score and to silence, with the clay and without the clay; we brought in props, constructed compositional limits, and tried it with no rules. After a few weeks of "play," we began to recognize consistent patterns emerging from the improvisation sessions. At that point, I began to make choices and organize the structure, setting guiding imagery and musical landmarks that we could use as scaffolding.

Remembering my conversation with Maxine about the butoh body being moved from the inside by imagery, and recalling Sondra Fraleigh's quote that *butoh-ka* "move from positions of not knowing and waiting, as they excavate the body's cellular memory and allow it to morph from image to image" (72), I decided to assign each section of *Liminal Spaces* a word, a visual image, or an emotional feeling that would initiate our movement from the inside out. *Liminal Spaces* is made of eight total sections that flow one to the next: a beginning ritual, the five musical movements with a poem inserted between movement three and four, and an ending ritual. Below, I break down the images and words I chose for each section and a description of how I shaped our structure into the final dance.

Beginning Ritual: Before Form, Breath

Before the audience entered the room, the dancers half-buried ourselves under copious amounts of clay mixed to a thick slurry and settled into our beginning shape in the far corner of the stage. When the doors opened and the audience entered, they saw the dancers— a jumble of bodies piled together on the ground, a half-carved form emerging from the earth— and quietly

took their seats. Maria, as our meditation guide, gently welcomed the audience and invited them to join in the creation of a "sacred space" with the dancers. She also reminded the audience that this would be a special experience of being in the present, saying, "This is a time that has never been before, and will never happen again—not quite the same way—ever." Maria then transitioned into asking the audience to breathe together. I had hoped that the audience would feel permission to suspend their preconceived expectations and simply be with the performers in a state of quiet receptivity. Based on the feedback I received, this act of meditation was successful in setting the tone for the evening.

As the audience sat quietly breathing, the dancers began to gradually let our breath increase subtle micromovements in our bodies. The imagery I assigned to this beginning ritual blends two origin stories. The first is from Greek mythology, that of the Amazon Princess Diana of Themyscria who was molded out of clay by her mother, Hippolyta, and brought to life by the breath of the goddess Aphrodite (Marguerite Johnson). The second is from my past religious life, the Book of Genesis: "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (*The Bible,* Gen. 2:7). This blending of religious and mythological imagery about receiving form and existence through breath creates a rich symbolic foundation for the opening of *Liminal Spaces.*

Section 1: Collectively Rooted to Tentatively Expand

Out of the room's cohesive breath, the musicians began playing the first section of music. The imagery I assigned to this section of the dance was the idea of the collective identity over individual identity. The dancers were not self-actualized individuals: we belonged to each other, to the clay, to the in-between. It was from that deeply rooted intention that we slowly began to expand our movements. Our hands tentatively began to reach, our fingers gently flexing, as our bodies rippled and shifted, responding intuitively to the ebb and flow from one another's subtle

shifting. Occasionally, as the music built, we would include some small quivers or repetitive twitches. The clay, which had been lumped around our resting bodies, started to spread in the space as we moved. The body parts which had been concealed began to emerge and reveal themselves. This whole beginning was a "slow build." There was no rush to move into the next moment; we were fully present, unburdened with thoughts of getting to the next iteration.

Section 2: Tremors of Growth

Shaw named the second movement in *Plan & Elevation* "The Cutting Garden." When I listen to it, I imagine a mad gardener furiously deadheading flowers—leaves and buds and petals flying everywhere, a rainshower of flora. Of all the sections, this one was the most difficult for me, because in the world I was creating for *Liminal Spaces,* it was not time to embrace such a wild and eclectic energy. I decided to maintain a slow build and juxtapose our subtle movement and internal focus against the increasing musical fervor. However, I also inserted two types of repetitive movement, done at the dancer's discretion: first, a steady pulsing of a body part and, second, a twitch or a tremor of a body part. We called these movements "tremors of growth," and I imagined the quivering of an aspen in the wind or a drooping branch rebounding as heavy snow cascades off it. In our first attempts at inserting these tremors of growth, I thought I wanted them to happen frequently to create a popcorn effect for the audiences' eyes. However, when we put in too many tremors, there was nothing special about them, so we tapered it down to just a few each.

Another important part of this section happened at an unexpected musical crescendo. The image I gave my dancers was of a newborn baby reacting to stimuli change with a moro reflex. As if we were startled, we reflexively threw out our upper bodies from core to distal edges. Immediately after this surprising burst of energy, we punctuated it with stillness. Out of that

freeze, a second more gradual musical crescendo began to build, and together we let our upper bodies begin to whirlpool, round and round, accelerating in tempo and creating distance between us.

Section 3: Shadow Self

During the third section, our focus gradually shifted from internal to external, as awareness of our individuality began to set in. The music had a sense of wondrous relief after the schizophrenic disarray of the previous movement. We serenely began a repetitive ritualist gesture in cannon. While kneeling, we drew our hands up our trunks from our solar plexus to our throats, then pushed gently up our throats, lifting our chin and face to the ceiling before continuing the line upwards as if our hands were tied to a string being raised to the ceiling. After this calm interlude, a violin began to undercut the peaceful music with increasing fervor. It built, becoming more chaotic and difficult to listen to. Our serenity was erased, and our bodies experienced a drastic change of quality. The image I gave my dancers was that of a tin can slowly being crushed, its sharp metal edges popping out unevenly to catch the light. This time, we did create a popcorn effect, and the random patterning pulled the viewer's eyes in all directions. With the tension in our bodies matching the tension in the music, it was quite uncomfortable to watch.

The other dancers and I spoke many times about what was motivating each of us to move that way. For me, I had to allow part of my shadow self to surface, that hidden part of me I would rather not look at in the light. I have noticed that a shameful memory will literally evoke a bodily response in me. When I feel shame, my insides cringe and compress, causing my shoulders to hunch and my stomach to involuntary jerk in. Internalizing this image and letting it truly move my body from the inside out was the hardest part of this piece.

Poem: Being Named

Out of the chaotic, uncomfortable section, relief was brought by the viola and cello's gentle plucks. The dancers' bodies began to relax as tension dissipated and we melted into the ground. Spread out among the wet clay, we lay still, waiting. In silence, Maria, who had been sitting in the opposite corner with the musicians, stood and walked across the threshold of greenware. Small and stately, Maria turned towards the audience and threw her arms into the air as she spoke the first line of her poem:

My name is the outpouring of the sun
because Yours is the core of all fire.
My name is the blessing of the water
because Yours is the essence of flow.
My name is the stability of the earth
because Yours is the Spirit within.
My name is in each breath I take
because Yours is the breathing of worlds.
My name is the same as all things
because Yours is the space between and in.

In rehearsals we tried many iterations of this section. I did not know if I wanted the dancers to be still or to move while Maria spoke, or if Maria should be inside the stage space or on its outskirts. Ultimately, I decided that what was most appropriate was to lie still, listening to Maria's voice wash over us like a soothing blessing.

Section 4: Compassionate Parts of a Whole

Following the poem's recitation, section four of the music began. It is by far the most traditionally beautiful, its melody shining like a ray of light slanting through the wall cracks of a dark room. During one rehearsal for this section, a dancer made a comment about extending ourselves grace as a necessary step in healing. She said we have to recognize *all* parts of ourselves, whether we want to or not, as they are what make us whole beings. This extension of

grace and self-compassion for all the past versions of ourselves served as our foundational image in this fourth section.

At this point, the dancers were spatially separated from each other. As the music developed, we came back to each other for a brief section of contact improvisation. We had preplanned pathways in order to be sure to meet each other, but when we came together, our movement was completely improvised. Our driving purpose was to offer our bodies as support to each other, responding in the way our partner needed in that moment. As we rolled, pushed, and morphed against each other I imagined all our past versions coming together in harmony.

Section 5: Receptive Stillness

Stillness is part of the spectrum of motion, and time for stillness can solidly etch experience into our hearts. For this reason, I felt it important to echo the minimalist movement and breath from the very beginning ritual. We returned to our breath and met the last part of our experience in quiet receptiveness. Only our fingers danced gently, and the light caught flashes of the clay caked onto our hands. After this quiet moment, we gradually spiraled ourselves to standing—the first time during the entire dance that we have stood erect—and gently drifted close to one another.

End Ritual: Alignment of Gratitude

With the last plucks of the viola and cello, we performed an ending ritual together. It is a four-movement phrase, one of the few set phrases in the dance and which we now refer to as "Receive. Gather. Internalize. Let go." During one of our improvisational rehearsals, one of my dancers did this quadruplet of gestures. She said that when she did it, she thought about how much gratitude she held for that current moment in space and time, and that even when that moment would inevitably change and no matter what came before or what comes after, she had

this moment woven into the pattern of her life. We moved through these gestures as we slowly walked off the stage and out of the room.

Once we left the room, our plan was to quickly wipe off some of the clay before reentering the space. In the program I had instructed the audience in the program to hold their applause until the dancers returned to the room. The audience did hold their applause, and to my surprise they held their chatter as well. For several minutes, while the dancers prepared to come back out, the audience sat in complete silence. Later, when I viewed the video recording, I watched the audience sit in silent contemplation and simply observe the topography of clay that our bodies had left behind.

Performance Results

Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay was presented at 7 pm on March 28, 2024, at the Marquette Arts and Culture Center in Marquette, Michigan. There were about 40 people in attendance. Following the performance, the dancers, poet, musicians, and lighting designer mingled with the audience to answer their questions and hear about their experience. The feedback was positive and gratifying; it was wonderful to hear that all the elements I had so carefully woven together had the desired effect on my audience.

The audience seemed to like the abstract structure of the boxes in relation to the more organic quality of the bodies in clay. Many people mentioned the lighting and its effects on both the atmosphere and the clay itself. In the words of one young audience member, the lights “made the clay look like it was alive.” People also had positive reactions to the opening meditation saying it set the stage for the rest of the evening. One viewer commented that it was a

“meditation for all the senses” and one gentleman said that he enjoyed the beginning breathing so much, he would have liked it to stretch out even longer.

A cellist friend, Adam Hall, described his favorite part as “the section when the three [dancers] rotated places on the floor, and as a body moved [out of its spot], seeing the imprint their body left behind, was like a memory. And then the memory was filled by [another dancer's] body.” I loved that he used the same memory analogy that I had also used. After the performance, several audience members walked through and around the clay landscape, touching the various textures. I watched one little girl, around age 10, sit quietly on a pedestal, rolling clay in her hand for well over 10 minutes.

Writer and artist Roslyn Mcgrath commented,“Nothing was out of place, everything worked effortlessly and cohesively together to create an atmosphere.” One of the musicians from Tuuli Quartet, Kelly Quesada, said that the choice to use Caroline Shaw’s *Plan & Elevation* made sense, “because it is a piece with a lot of elongated space written into it.” Another friend told me she was “taken off-guard– but in a good way!” by the vulnerability a dance like this seemed to require, saying it was both “touching and captivating.” Several people expressed their initial surprise at walking into the MACC and seeing the bodies in clay, as they weren’t sure exactly what to expect. However, after a short time, they were able to settle into the piece and let it “wash over” them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploration of liminal space through dance and movement encompasses a rich tapestry of psychological, therapeutic, and artistic dimensions. Winnicott’s seminal work in transitional phenomena lays a foundation on which to understand the

potentiality of liminal space. In dance/movement therapy, movement acts as a vehicle to cross the bridge into liminal space and can assist an individual in aligning body, mind, and spirit, resulting in personal healing and growth. Through the power of witnessing, either in a therapeutic relationship, or in a performer/audience relationship, there is communication through movement metaphor and understanding through kinesthetic empathy and embodied cognition. Furthermore, butoh, with its emphasis on imagery and the Japanese concept of *ma*, illustrates a metamorphic physical implementation of these principles.

Liminal Spaces is the beginning of a new trajectory for my creative work—one in which I hope to expand people's perception of what dance looks like, who can dance, and what movement can do for their mind-body-spirit connection. I am interested in making dance that focuses on process over product and invites healing over entertainment. I want to use movement as a vehicle to access the in-between space where inner and outer realities can meet, inviting my students, performers, and audiences to feel aligned in body, mind, and spirit.

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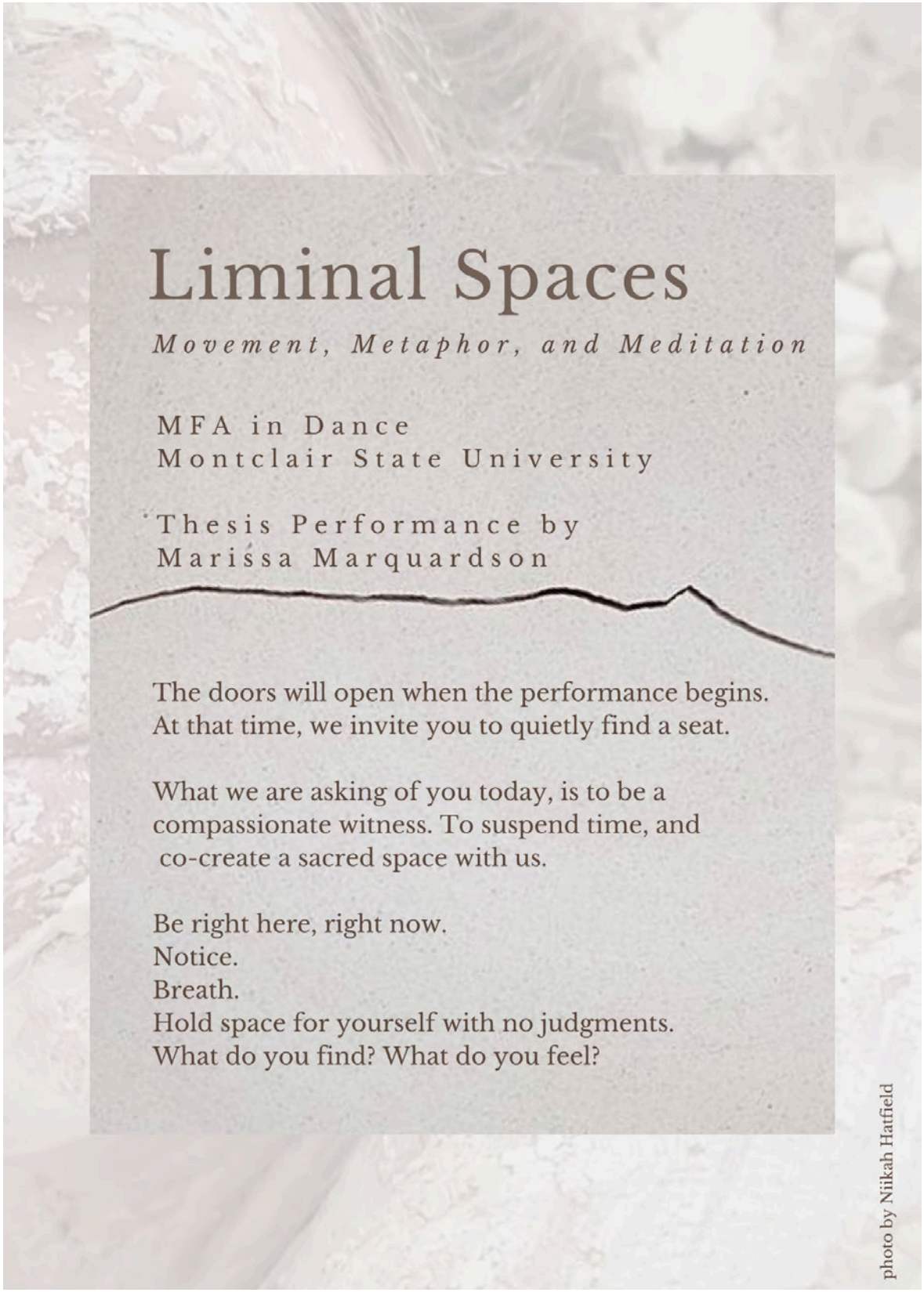
Appendix A – Performance Program



A note from Marissa:

Liminal, from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, is a physical, emotional, or metaphorical space that acts as a temporary transition period or site between what was and what will be. The transformational process of moving into newness can be beautiful, but it can also be confusing, uncomfortable, and messy. It requires courage to move from the safety of the known into the uncertainty of the unknown. By stepping into the ambiguity of liminality and embracing the duality that exists within it, we open ourselves to limitless possibilities for transformation.

Liminal Spaces is a response to my critical research into various philosophical theories and movement practices that strengthen the mind-body-spirit connection and offer support for personal transformation and therapeutic healing. My interest in these subjects arose from observing how, over the course of my life, my dancing has evolved and changed as I have evolved and changed. Experiences that have shaped my life have also shaped my dance trajectory, my beliefs about dance, my movement style, and my total identity as a movement artist. This observation led me to consider the ways in which movement has the power to change how we experience and understand our lives, our relationships with others, and our interactions with time and space.

I call *Liminal Spaces* a moving meditation. While there is no linear story being told through this performance, the ruminative elements and layers of intention and relationship involved in the creation of Liminal Spaces help to generate an atmosphere of visceral awareness in the present moment. I invite you, dear audience, to commit yourself to witnessing and co-creating a beautiful liminal space with us, where thoughts of before and after are suspended, and you can simply be with the dancers in a state of quiet receptivity.

There is stillness and silence in this 25-minute performance. You will know the dance has finished when the dancers leave the stage. After a short intermission, the dancers will return to spend time speaking with whoever wishes to stay. Please hold your applause until the dancers return.

Meditation Guide/Poet

Maria Formolo

Dancers

Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch,
Marissa Marquardson

Music

Plan & Elevation by Caroline Shaw

Played by the Tuuli Quartet
Lauren Pulcipher, violin
Dani Simandl, violin
Ria Hodgson, viola
Kelly Quesada, cello

Lighting Design

Vic Holliday

Special Thanks To:

Niikah Hatfield @ Niik Creative Co.
For starting this investigative journey with me into the meeting place of bodies and clay.

Jay Barch @ Mackinac Mud Pottery
For donating and ferrying over gallons and gallons of clay.

Tristan, Amelia, and Tiina @ the Marquette Arts & Culture Center
For supporting Marquette art. (I promise, we'll clean up!)

No photography or videography during the performance.
This performance is being videographed for educational purpose only.

Appendix B – Photographs of *Liminal Spaces: Moving Meditation with Bodies and Clay*

A. Beginning Ritual: Before Form, Breath

Dancers from left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch, Maria Formolo

B. Collectively Rooted to Tentatively Expand

Dancers from left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch

C. Collectively Rooted to Tentatively Expand

Dancers from left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch

D. Tremors of Growth

Dancers from left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch

E. Shadow Self

Dancers left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton

F. Poem: Being Named

Dancers left to right: Marissa Marquardson, Tara Middleton, Maria Formolo, Maggie Barch

G. Compassionate Parts of a Whole

Dancers left to right: Tara Middleton, Marissa Marquardson, Maggie Barch

H. Compassionate Parts of a Whole

Dancers: Tara Middleton (on bottom), Marissa Marquardson (on top), Maggie Barch

J. Receptive Stillness

Dancer: Tara Middleton

K. Receptive Stillness

Dancers left to right: Maggie Barch, Marissa Marquardson

L. End Ritual: Alignment of Gratitude

Dancers left to right: Tara Middleton, Maggie Barch, Marissa Marquardson