

ABSTRACT

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In the process of creating the original dance-theatre piece *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*, I sought the answers to two primary research questions: “What happens when you realize that your idol isn’t perfect?” and “What happens when you recognize her flaws in yourself?” The work began as a response to and an interpretation of the work of writer and aviator Anne Morrow Lindbergh, incorporating multimedia, spoken word, and movement in an exploration of celebrity, hero-worship, identity, relationship, ambition, creativity and duty. As we investigated these notions, the cast and I embarked on a transdisciplinary choreographic process, one that combined movement-based and theoretical research across dance, theatre, design, music, history, literature, feminism, and women’s studies. This paper offers an explanation of the inspirations behind the piece, how I arrived at the notion of transdisciplinary choreography, what the practice looked and felt like in progress, and a description of the work that resulted from the process.

LIKE A UNICORN IN CAPTIVITY

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
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Professor Karen Bradley
Paul D. Jackson

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To my parents, who told me to do what I loved,
and to all the teachers who helped me realize that dance was, and still is, it.

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I am grateful for and to each and every one of you, always. As Anne Morrow Lindbergh wrote, however, "One can never pay in gratitude: one can only pay 'in kind' somewhere else in life." It is my hope that I will be able to repay you all in kind as I embark on the next phase of my career as a dance artist and educator, bringing all I've learned from you out into the world.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	li
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Illustrations.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	10
Chapter 3: Creative Process.....	25
Chapter 4: About the Work.....	56
Chapter 5: Conclusions.....	69
Bibliography.....	74

List of Illustrations

- Illustration 1: Untitled Photograph of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Photographer Not Credited. Accessed at <http://www.yale.edu/opa/arc-ybc/v34.n30/story21.html>.
- Illustration 2: Photograph of the “Captivity” solo from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 3: Photograph of the “Recognitions” solo from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 4: Photograph of the “Letters to Anne” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 5: Photograph of the “Vivaldi Quartet” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 6: Photograph of the “Double Duets” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 7: Photograph of the end of the “Double Duets” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 8: Photograph of dance Ellen Clark’s reaction to the “The Monologue” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 9: Photograph of the “My Life Began” section from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 10: Photograph of the Final Solo from *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 11: Photograph of the scrim dropping at the end of *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.
- Illustration 11: Photograph of the final diagonal at the end of *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*. Photo by Zachary Z. Handler.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Like a Unicorn in Captivity grew out of one of my first choreographic assignments at the University of Maryland, in which I used three lines from Anne Morrow Lindbergh's biography by Susan Herzog to narrate a short dance about the kidnapping of her son, Charles, Jr. In response to the work, Patrik Widrig, one of the professors of the course, said something like, "Who would have thought to make a dance about the Lindbergh baby!" With that, the fate of this dance was sealed: I knew I wanted to make a full-length piece centered on the Lindberghs.

I had casually picked up *Anne Morrow Lindbergh: Her Life* in a second-hand book store at the New Jersey shore over five years ago, wanting something to read on the beach and vaguely remembering learning about that "Lindbergh Baby" in a high school history class. I became fascinated with Anne Morrow Lindbergh: with her poetic words; with her openness about the difficulty she faced as a "modern woman" trying to balance career, family, relationships, and self; with the honesty with which she wrote about her flaws and anxieties. She seemed so much like me, from the overly-dramatic, scatterbrained thoughts spewed in early diaries to the uncertainty she later expressed about the quality of her creative work.

Creating a dance about such an important figure at first seemed an overwhelming task. While the significance of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's contributions to aviation, literature, and feminism made her an interesting and substantial subject for a theatrical work, the sheer volume of potential entry points into her life and work made it difficult to settle on a single strand to explore. In the

earliest phases of the creative process, I was quite sure that I wanted to create a work of biographical dance-theatre, which would use dance and spoken word along with projected image and text to tell stories from Lindbergh's alternately fantastical and tragic life. Thus, my research initially began by revisiting *Anne Morrow Lindbergh: Her Life*, by author Susan Hertzog.

Born in 1906 in Englewood, New Jersey to Dwight and Elisabeth Morrow, Anne Spencer Morrow was the second of four children. Her father was at turns a lawyer, businessman, Senator, and diplomat, serving as the Ambassador to Mexico from 1927 to 1930. Her mother was a poet, activist, and champion of women's education, serving for a time as the acting president of her Alma Mater, Smith College. Anne followed in her mother's footsteps to Smith, graduating in 1928 and receiving multiple prizes for writing. In 1927, she met aviator Charles Lindbergh, who was already a national hero for making the first successful transatlantic flight from Long Island to Paris earlier that year, and they were married in 1929. Anne would go on to receive her pilot's license and serve as his navigator, radio operator, and co-pilot on several important multi-continental flights, and later became the first woman to receive a United States glider pilot's license. As a pioneer for women in aviation, she was awarded the Hubbard Medal and an Aerospace Explorer Award, and was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame and the National Women's Hall of Fame. Anne authored five books and wrote many poems, many of which were inspired by her adventures in aviation with her husband. One of her later works, 1955's *Gifts from the Sea*, is widely recognized as an important feminist text, and she won many important awards from her writing, including a National Book Award for

North to the Orient in 1935. The Lindberghs had six children together, though tragedy befell the family in 1932. Their first child, Charles Augustus, Jr., was kidnapped from their New Jersey home and murdered, igniting some of the most fevered public outrage of the twentieth century. The family would eventually relocate to Europe to escape the incessant publicity and intense scrutiny of the media, brought on by Charles's success and made worse by the fallout from the kidnapping and subsequent trial and execution of suspect Bruno Richard Hauptmann. Public scandal would surround the Lindberghs once again, however, as Charles's anti-war views caused him to be perceived as being sympathetic to the Nazi cause at the onset of World War II. Their marriage would also be caught up in scandal, though of a much more private nature, as both Charles and Anne engaged in extramarital affairs. However, the Lindbergh's marriage remained intact until Charles's death in 1974. Anne outlived her husband by nearly thirty years, passing away in 2001 after a series of debilitating strokes.

With such a rich life story to draw from, full of adventure, acclaim, heartbreak, and scandal – where would I begin? Many of my previous choreographic endeavors had been semi-autobiographical; that is, they were based on my own personal experiences, emotions, and opinions. Although I initially envisioned *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* to focus on the character of Anne and her events of her life story, the more I researched the more I became enamored with the many books and journals she wrote about it, as well as my reaction to those words. My focus shifted from making a dance about Anne Morrow Lindbergh to creating an original non-

linear narrative that highlighted the relevance of her writing in the contemporary period, especially as it applies to women of my generation.

I found in Lindbergh's writing many themes to which I could easily relate, and I suspected that the accessibility and universality of her writing was yet another reason why Lindbergh was an interesting and substantial subject for a theatrical work. Among the themes she explored were the desire to live a meaningful, accomplished life; the frustration and the beauty of waiting; and the constant search for and refinement of the shape and patterns of one's life. Some of her other ideas challenged me, like the assertion that her life did not "begin" until she met her husband. Throughout the choreographic process, I was led to clarify and reconsider my own beliefs, goals, and desires. I saw my accomplishments and failures in light of those described by Lindbergh. I questioned when my life, as a twenty-eight year old graduate student in the twenty-first century, "began" - or was I still waiting for the start? What were the shape and patterns of my life, and how much of it was shaped by outside forces - like luck, fate, or love? *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* became a danced-memoir, in which I searched for the answers, in and through Anne's writing.

As my focus shifted away from Lindbergh as a historical figure and toward the kinship I felt with her, I wanted to ensure that the accessible, relatable quality I found in her writing and hoped to bring out in *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* would not be lost. I realized that one way to bring out this quality would be to involve many collaborators, and to incorporate their voices as much as possible in the creative process. From the outset, I considered the process of creating *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* to be just as important as the final product. I recognized the transformative

power of Lindbergh's writing on my own life and wanted to use it to create a similarly transformative experience for the dancers involved in this piece. To that end, I imagined a collaborative creative process, during which the dancers would be exposed to Lindbergh's writing as well as to stories, photos, and videos of from her life. Their responses to and interpretations of Lindbergh's writing would be a very real and present part of the finished piece because of the collaborative process taken to create it.

At the beginning of the rehearsal period, I decided that in order to do justice to a piece which was inspired by a historical female figure and performed by a cast of contemporary women, I needed to learn more about feminism and women's studies in general. Therefore, in January 2012 I began an independent study with University of Maryland Professor Katie King in which I participated in an undergraduate course that examined women, art, and culture. Examining the intersections of these three topics led me to incorporate feminist-based choreographic methods in my creative process, which complimented the empowering potential of Lindbergh's word and lead to new avenues for artistic and self-discovery for myself and my dancers.

As I saw the impact of feminist-based practices on my creative process, I found myself becoming interested in feminism and women's studies as its own discipline(s). I enrolled in a graduate level course, Approaches to Women's Studies I, to deepen my understanding of the field and as a challenge to myself. The course concentrated on the concept of transdisciplinarity, which is described by Julie Thompson Klein in the following quote,

Transdisciplinary approaches are comprehensive frameworks that transcend the narrow scope of disciplinary world views through an overarching synthesis, such as general systems, policy sciences, feminism, ecology, and sociobiology. More recently, the term also connotes a new structure of unity informed by the world view of complexity in science, a new mode of knowledge production that draws on expertise from a wider range of organisations, and collaborative partnerships for sustainability that integrate research from different disciplines with the knowledge of stakeholders in society. (Klein)

I quickly saw the connections between collaborative, researched-based choreography and a transdisciplinary approach to scholarship. Both seek new ways to bring knowledge worlds together to go beyond conventional ways of knowing and doing. Because of the historical, feminist, literary, and artistic components involved, *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* seemed to be the perfect project with which to explore the concept of transdisciplinarity within a choreographic setting. What would a truly transdisciplinary choreographic process, one that combines movement-based and theoretical research across dance, theatre, design, history, literature, and women's studies, look like?

An additional element of collaboration involved working with artists and scholars from the disciplines of theatre and music. I have long been intrigued by the concept of *tanztheatre*, or total theatre, in which all elements of the theatrical production - movement, text, music, design, costumes, multimedia –have equal importance. I wanted *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* to embody this concept as much as possible. To this end, I was glad to collaborate with a number of designers who not only brought my ideas about sound and design to life, but also contributed their own ideas about the role of design within the work. Conversations with set, lighting, projection, and costume designers also helped me to clarify my creative intentions

and to distill the at first overwhelming subject matter down to a unified piece of theatre, and led to many fruitful explorations of space, time, character, and landscape. Also instrumental in the process was a collaboration with University of Maryland School of Music graduate student and composer Natalie Spehar. Her musical contributions, brought in midway through the choreographic process, helped clarify the tone of the piece, illuminating the significance of existing choreography and inspiring new movement. Lastly, I worked briefly with two dramaturgs through collaboration with Professor Faedra Carpenter's Dramaturgy class. My discussions with these scholars led to additional insights into themes and messages in Lindbergh's writing that proved fruitful in our movement explorations. These collaborations will be discussed at length later in this paper.

With all of the voices contributing to the project, I did at times struggle to recognize and assert my own artistic desires. As a former aspiring ballet dancer who is still very much enchanted by the form, I saw my own failures in the ballet world reflected in Lindbergh's questioning of her abilities as a writer, wife, and mother. Ballet became a metaphor for the "ultimate femininity" which I, like Lindbergh, secretly desired but felt was constantly just out of reach. While I loved the use of technical ballet vocabulary for its personal sentimental and aesthetic value and audience accessibility, I had to reconcile it with the more postmodern, minimalistic movement generated through solo improvisations and the collaborative explorations with the dancers. Early audiences and advisors seemed to suggest that I choose one style over the other, and I worked hard to balance their feedback with my own artistic ideals. As a result, the blend of the two styles created a unique movement palette,

distinctive to the piece and very much reflective of my personal preferences. Similarly, the non-linear narrative style of the piece was designed to reconcile my desire to appeal to a commercial non-dance audience with my advisors' much appreciated advice to hold fast to more abstract, artistically-based principles. I am grateful to early audiences and faculty advisors who provided valuable feedback, which I was able to meld with my own artistic visions in the final version of the piece.

Thesis Statement

Like a Unicorn in Captivity proved to be a study in paradox. I attempted to marry artistic with scholarly disciplines, personal experience with history, ballet with feminism, *taztheatre* with minimalist postmodernism, and artistic self-fulfillment with audience enjoyment in a single work that was at once the most and the least personal piece I have created to date. Through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection on these contradictory forces at work in the early phase of the choreographic process, I settled on two primary research questions: “What happens when you realize that your idol isn’t perfect?” and “What happened when you recognize her flaws in yourself?” I blended research about Anne Morrow Lindbergh and interpretation of her writing as I sought the answers to these questions in an exploration of celebrity and hero-worship, identity and relationship, and ambition, creativity and duty.

Throughout the process of research and creation, I realized that although Lindbergh, who was in many ways my idol, had always seemed like a fiercely strong,

independent woman to me, much of her sense of self-worth seemed to have been drawn from her relationship with famed pilot Charles Lindbergh. Prior to meeting and marrying Charles, Anne's writing reflected insecurities about her appearance, personality, creative work, and potential, which I had never fully accepted before as they did not fit with my image of her. In considering my own life in this new light, I recognized that I may have shared this trait with her, as I was in a relationship that in many ways changed my view of myself and the world around me. As I have always considered myself to be fiercely strong and independent as well, this came as a second startling recognition, and served as the central theme of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The research process for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* began with written texts by and about Anne Morrow Lindbergh. I first came to Lindbergh as a research subject through an autobiography by Susan Hertzog, titled *Anne Morrow Lindbergh: Her Life*. In the early choreography class assignment from which the piece grew, I was asked to create a dance using text about a historical event. Thinking that the Lindbergh baby kidnapping might be an interesting, unusual topic for such a dance, I turned to Hertzog's account of the event, which had become familiar to me as a result of many re-readings of her book. Moreover, it was in the introduction to *Her Life* that I read the line that would come to be a central theme to the *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*: "My life began when I met Charles Lindbergh."

Wanting to validate Hertzog's accounts and gain an additional perspective on Lindbergh's life story, I consulted another biography, *Anne Morrow Lindbergh: First Lady of the Air*, by Kathleen C. Winters. This brief account of Lindbergh's life focuses on her achievements in aviation and her relationship with Charles, both in the air and in marriage. Information on her mother's early feminist endeavors, Anne's and Charles' views on feminism, and other important female aviators of the time was also presented by Winters and most informative as I began to explore feminist methods and themes in the work.

Through these biographies I was introduced to the key players in Lindbergh's life, the public and private life she shared with them, and primary sources to access,

notably Lindbergh's six published journals. From these journals, I gained first-person insight into their author's inner thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

The first journal I consulted was *Bring Me A Unicorn: Diaries and Letters of Anne Morrow Lindbergh 1922-1928*, the earliest of her collection. *Bring Me A Unicorn* provided a first-person account of Anne's life as a young woman and her early feelings toward her writing and dating. In particular, in this book Lindbergh writes about meeting Charles Lindbergh and their courtship. Most of the quotes used in *Recognitions*, the first version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, which premiered in the University of Maryland School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies' Shared Graduate Dance Concert in February 2012, came from this collection. In the final version of the piece, this quote was used:

“This afternoon I sat and looked for a long time at the sea and tried to write a poem which I shall never, never do. Foam is so beautiful and so manifold in its beauty and so transient. And as always, there are no words, no means of satisfying that feeling...I watched every curve and twist and fall, intimately (foolishly); feeling like a lover watching each careless insignificant gesture, each bearing still (for him) a heavy weight of beauty.” – (Lindbergh, *Bring Me A Unicorn: Letters and Diaries of Anne Morrow Lindbergh 1922-1928* 35)

Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead: Diaries And Letters Of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1929–1932 and *Locked Rooms and Open Doors: Diaries And Letters Of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1933–1935* were perhaps the most influential research texts from a personal perspective. These writings, spanning the course of Lindbergh's life from age twenty-three to thirty-two, offered her private insights into marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and family; career, creativity, aviation, and adventure; and the roles,

duties, and place of women in the society of her day. It was during the years covered in these journals that Anne wed Charles Lindbergh, embarked on two exploratory air trips with her husband, gave birth to her first two children, experienced the kidnapping and murder of her first son, and published her first book, *Listen, The Wind!* I could easily relate to much of what Lindbergh wrote about her desires to have a successful creative career in her own right, as well devoting herself to her husband and family, as these are choices I was faced with during the rehearsal process. Though I am not married, at the beginning of my work on *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, I was in a committed relationship that at times took my focus away from my creative work. This relationship ended abruptly before the debut of the piece, which made me question my ability to maintain healthy relationships and dedicate myself to my artistic work at the same time. These themes ended up becoming central to *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. Reading and rereading these books during the creative process at turns challenged and reaffirmed my own thoughts and beliefs about womanhood, and helped me grow more confident in my own life choices and creative work.

I also consulted one of Lindbergh's later diaries, *The Flower and the Nettle: Diaries And Letters Of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1936–1939*, which I found to be less helpful as Lindbergh's age and life circumstances at the time made it difficult for me to relate to her writing. For this same reason, for the scope of this project I chose not to refer to *War Without and Within: Diaries And Letters Of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1939–1944*, *Against Wind and Tide: Letters and Journals, 1947-1986*, and *No More Words, A Journal of My Mother, Anne Morrow Lindbergh*, written by her daughter

Reeve Lindbergh and reflecting on Anne Morrow Lindbergh's struggle with health issues and memory loss later in life.

Initially, I focused my research entirely on Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and the character of Charles Lindbergh appeared in early drafts of the piece only as a foil to Anne: the man who captured her attention to such a degree that she would claim that her life did not begin until she met him. After the earliest incarnation of the piece debuted in February 2012 to mixed reviews, I decided to flesh out my understanding of who he was as a person. Why might Anne Spencer Morrow have been so entranced by him? To this end, I consulted *Loss of Eden: A Biography of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh* by Joyce Milton. This book dealt with Charles and Anne's backgrounds and childhoods separately, then detailed their courtship, marriage, and lives as a couple. The information provided about Charles's family heritage and early years proved very valuable in helping me understand who he was and why he may have had such a hold on Anne in the early years of their relationship. Though Charles's role in *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* did not change much after reading the text, I approached his character and his relationship with Anne with greater sensitivity because of it.

Books authored by Anne Morrow Lindbergh were also very influential in the making of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. From the initial entry point of, "My life began when I met Charles Lindbergh," I began to notice related themes in Lindbergh's writing. In *Listen! The Wind*, Lindbergh writes about a portion of the first survey flight she and Charles made around the North Atlantic Ocean in 1933, specifically detailing the final leg of the trip, from Africa to South America. A theme

that came up often in *Listen! The Wind!* was waiting, as their flights in this region were often delayed due to uncooperative weather conditions. While I was reading this text, I decided that the theme of waiting would become central to *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. More specifically, the following quote was projected during the piece:

“If one could see ahead in time, as the farmer does; if one could see through space, could one believe that this period was inevitable, too? That in this apparent vacuum something was growing; that even now, in this seemingly inactive period, all kinds of necessary things were proceeding at the fastest possible speed, rushing toward us. That what was happening in Bathurst, in telegraph offices, at official desks, in the streets, in the Health Department—all small events, everything was converging into the pattern of our lives? Perhaps something was ripening for us, even now,” – (Lindbergh, *Listen! The Wind* 105)

This theme of waiting gathered from *Listen! The Wind* brought me to a number of articles about the millennial generation, largely from the websites of National Public Radio, but also from Forbes Magazine Online, Pew Research Online, and USA Today Online. These articles discussed a phenomenon affecting the millennial generation, of which I am on the older end of the spectrum, in which the weak economy, poor housing market, and high unemployment has led young people to delay major decisions about careers, relationships, and investment. In my reading of these accounts, I was reminded of Lindbergh’s statement, “My life began when I met Charles Lindbergh.” For those putting off major life events like finding a stable career, buying a home, and getting married, when might they say their life “began”? How was the prolonged wait for these events affecting our generation, and how might Lindbergh’s words about waiting be relevant to us? These questions helped me to consider the broader application of Lindbergh’s story and writing in this particular context, allowing me see beyond my own personal connection to her work.

Another text written by Anne Morrow Lindbergh that greatly influenced the *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* was 1955's *Gifts from the Sea*. In this book, written during trips to Captiva Island in Florida, Lindbergh reflects on age, solitude, relationship, responsibility, and the nature of happiness. This was another work that I found personally impactful, and so I wanted to include references to it in my piece. Dramaturg Adriana Diaz also read *Gifts from the Sea*, and suggested that I explore the theme "What is the shape of your life?" a question raised by Lindbergh in the piece (Lindbergh, *Gift from the Sea*). I also chose to include visual and verbal references to the sea because of this work. Much as Lindbergh found inner harmony by the sea, I used footage of dancers on the beach as a metaphor for the ideal state of grace I desired to achieve but of which I constantly fell short.

The final two literary sources written by Anne Morrow Lindbergh that became an important part of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* were two poems. The first was "Family Portrait", from which the following quote that was projected during the piece was pulled:

"To answer with a hindsight-given truth
The questions in those wondering eyes of youth.
I long to tell you, starting on your quest
'You'll do it all, you know, you'll meet the test'."
(Lindbergh, Family Album 80-81)

The second was "The Unicorn," from which the title of the dance was derived and the following projected quote was pulled:

"Quiet, the Unicorn,
In contemplation stilled,
With acceptance filled;
Quiet, save for his horn;
Alive in his horn;

Horizontally,
In captivity;
Perpendicularly,
Free.”

(Lindbergh, *The Unicorn* 57)

It was also the idea of the unicorn in captivity that inspired the choice to perform the dance behind a white scrim, placed downstage. This scrim would serve to keep the cast physically “in captivity” while on stage.

The dancers and I used a variety of methods to collaboratively create the movement palate for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. One of the earliest methods employed was creating shapes and movement phrases based on photos of Anne Morrow Lindbergh and important people in her life. In fact, one of the signature shapes of the piece, an off-centered lean with one hand slightly extended, was based on a photo of Lindbergh’s parents, Dwight and Elisabeth Morrow. The photo was also the inspiration for the aforementioned poem, “Family Portrait,” which I also used in the creation of this leaning motif.

Other photos of Lindbergh at work writing, preparing for flight, or posing with her husband and children were also used by the dancers to create shapes and movement phrases for the piece. One of the photos, which was the inspiration for one particular pose within the piece, is shown below as illustration one:



Illustration 1

An additional technique used in the creation and manipulation of movement for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* was derived from a workshop I participated in during the summer of 2011. “How to Say I Love You” was a writing for performance workshop hosted by Headlong Dance Theatre as part of their Dance Theatre Camp Workshop Series and taught by Laura Nueman and James Ijames. During this workshop on writing for performance, I was introduced to a number of different writing styles, the most influential among them being “Erasure”. In this technique, one takes an existing piece of writing (one’s own or from another author) and “erases” words until another, usually completely different, piece emerges. I used this method throughout *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* as I projected her writings and “erased” them on-screen, leaving the audience with a new poem inspired by the writing. Inspired by this, I also used the idea of erasure as a choreographic tool. I explored ways to “erase” thematic phrases into related but completely different movement phrases by minimalizing, softening, decelerating or omitting sections of movement.

In an attempt to explore new pathways to creativity, I worked with a program called *The Artist’s Way*, which was created by author and filmmaker Julia Cameron.

The Artist's Way is a workbook and roster of activities devised to help artists and aspiring artists alike tap into their full creative potential. An influential component of this program for me was the morning pages, a daily journaling routine. It was through these journals that I developed the idea of projecting questions directed at the audience on the scrim during the pre-show to *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* and at pivotal moments within the piece. These were questions I was asking myself in the journaling exercises, based on themes I was exploring in the choreography. I thought that by projecting these questions, I would draw the audience into the piece and help them find ways to connect to it on a personal level.

Another aspect of *The Artist's Way* were "Artist Dates", in which users of the program were encouraged to take themselves out into the world to enjoy educational and creative experiences they might not normally participate in. Two of my Artist Dates were very influential in the process of choreographing *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. I went to the National Museum for Women in the Arts and the Air and Space Museum, both located in Washington, DC.

At the National Museum for Women in the Arts, I encountered several paintings that I found to be inspirational in my choreography. Several of these were painted by Marie Genevieve Bouliat and Marguerite Gerard and largely featured mothers interacting with children. The mothers' poses in these paintings served as inspiration for movement and gesture in this piece. The final painting was by Constance Marie Charpentier. Not only the subject's pose and manner, but also the color and texture of the painting, inspired the movement palette. I was also inspired by

the description of the work by an anonymous poet of the time, which stated that the work portrayed “Charm in melancholy.”

At the Air and Space Museum, I spent a significant amount of time in an exhibit featuring Charles and Anne Lindbergh. I was impressed by the museum’s recognition of Anne’s contributions to aviation and by the frequent use of her writing in the display. While I did not learn anything I did not already know about the Lindberghs and their flights from the exhibit, it was interesting to see artifacts from their adventures, including the airplanes in which they flew, up close and in person. I also spent some time in an educational exhibit for children about the mechanics of flight. This exhibit demonstrated the four factors needed for flight: lift, weight, thrust, and drag. The dancers and I used these factors while creating and cleaning the movement in *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. We thought about how the concepts of lift, weight, thrust, and drag were present in our movement, and how might employ them to make our performance of the movement more exhilarating for the audience to view.

As mentioned in the introduction, my research on Anne Morrow Lindbergh took me to the Women’s Studies Department, where I worked for two semesters with Professor Katie King. Some of our class texts were influential in the creative process for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*; moreover, this foray into feminist studies led to choreographic methods and thematic material. From Megan Seely’s *Fight Like a Girl* and bell hooks’ *Feminism is for Everyone* I learned principles of feminism, such as consciousness raising, which were employed in the choreographic process.

Donna Haraway's concept of *pastpresent* factored into my thinking about the piece as well. Katie King, borrowing from Haraway, calls the *pastpresent* a "pastiche of timeframes" in which "duration, political meanings, and myriad embodiments and materialities are at stake." (King 6) Because *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* dealt with an ambiguous timeline, mixing my past and present with Lindbergh's, employing the idea of *pastpresent* proved to be productive.

Two writings from Eva Hayward were significant to the creative process for this piece. Hayward's *Spider City Sex*, in conversation with Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*, led me to think about the characters of the female ensemble in different ways, which will be detailed later in this paper. *Fingeryeyes*, the second Hayward piece, informed my personal performance and the way I related to the space and beings around me. Hayward says of the concept of *fingeryeyes*:

"Attending to the interplay of vision and touch, I invoke *fingeryeyes* to articulate the in-between of encounter, a space of movement, of potential: this haptic-optic defines the overlay of sensoriums and the inter- and intrachange of sensations. *Fingeryeyes*, in this instance, is the transfer of intensity, of expressivity in the simultaneity of touching and feeling." – Hayward, *Fingeryeyes* 580

As a dancer, I realized that I use my *fingeryeyes* to connect to the world around me. I connect to my fellow dancers in contact and partnering work, to the floor with feet, toes, hands and heads, to walls, to props, and to the "empty" space around me. Like the coral Hayward describes in the piece, I "navigate by constantly accessing the medium of the meeting and the accompanying beings and things" (Hayward, *Fingeryeyes* 580). After reading *Fingeryeyes*, I actively tapped into my haptic-optic sense as I danced, trying to make sense of the world through my

fingeryeyes in movement, touch, feeling, and proprioception in addition to sight and sound. Making the direct connection between this text and my own practice as a dancer marked another important step toward transdisciplinarity, and led me to search for other ways to further integrate my bodily, creative, and theoretical research.

Another text that changed the way I thought about the performance space and the people in it was Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*. At the earliest stages of development, the things of this piece – sets, costumes, lights, projections – were all intended to create environment, to provide a space for the human action to take place. They were to be decorative and aesthetically pleasing, and set up a sense of space, time, and character by nature of their design, but their function would largely end there. After reading chapter two of Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*, however, I began to see the elements of the design as part of an assemblage with a vitality of its own. I saw a direct link between the idea of an assemblage and total theatre. I have always felt a special kind of energy and vitality present in a work of total theatre; Bennett's argument for the agency of assemblages did much to explain this sensation. While many would argue that the dancer/performers are the sole actant in a dance piece, Bennett states that “an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (Bennett 21). Because total theatre allows for all stage elements (human and material) to share the stage in a relatively equal fashion, the collaboration, cooperation, and interactive interference between performer and spectacle is made possible.

Many artistic influences were important in the creation of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. In 2008, a performance of Tania Isaac's *Stuperwoman* inspired me to use choreography to examine the struggles and triumphs of the modern woman, via my own personal experiences. I remember being blown away by the rhythmic use of text, the visual picture of the stage (created with spectacle, lighting and tableaux of dances), the stillness and subtlety of movement, and the placement of "dance sections" side by side with theatrical monologues and sections that blended movement and text. Also, Isaac's unabashed willingness to bare her misgivings, doubts and failings on stage through storytelling inspired me to take on those challenges in my own work. Like Isaac, I tried to do this in a way that was slightly abstract, poetic, and almost impersonal in my storytelling, while still maintaining the integrity of my personal investment in the work.

Viewing an early showing of *With Love and Prayers, Us*, choreographed and performed by my colleague Stephanie Miracle, and performances of PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATRE's *Sayonara, Dear*, choreographed and performed by Sara Pearson, and *Red Rovers* created by Headlong Dance Theatre all informed my creative decisions about *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. I was inspired by Miracle's matter of fact delivery of the text, seamless transitions between sections, and the heartfelt, autobiographical, but not overly emotional, nature of the work. I based some of my decisions as a performer on Pearson's understated tone of voice in the monologue for *Sayonara, Dear* and her frenetic dancing in the piece's final solo. The use of theatre space and audience involvement in *Red Rovers* captured my

imagination and inspired me to think about the entire audience experience, from the time they enter into the venue until the final curtain.

Also inspirational in the creation, development, and delivery of the stories in the piece was the public radio program *This American Life*, hosted by Ira Glass. I have been listening to *This American Life* for several years. I am fascinated by the content and delivery of the stories, many of which speak of everyday events in eloquent and beautiful ways. The writing style and delivery of the monologue in particular was influenced by this show, as were some of the musical selections and the way the music was brought into the piece (timing, fade out, etc.). Similarly, the album *Metals* by the musician Leslie Feist was influential on my studio work on this piece. I occasionally played tracks from the album as I created, which informed the movement quality and my personal connection to the movement. The emotional, but removed quality of Leslie Feist's performance, as well as the sometimes ethereal and other-worldly sounding production, provided me with inspiration as I choreographed.

My work with instructors at the University of Maryland and beyond shaped the movement palate for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. In my first year of choreography courses at the University of Maryland, Professor Sara Pearson taught me the power of simple, purposeful gesture, performed in "felt" time as opposed to being in time with any standard rhythm. In our graduate dance technique course, instructor Adriane Fang led a unit on about being off-balance, having soft focus, allowing for vulnerable moments, and maintaining a "dreamlike" state while dancing. This unit resonated with me, and I tried to incorporate some of those ideas into the choreography of two of my solos. As an antithesis to this soft, dreamy movement,

and to incorporate my passion for ballet, I commissioned a solo from TrINETTE Singleton, my mentor and a former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet. Combining these different movement qualities proved to be an interesting challenge added another dimension of transdisciplinarity to the piece.

Lastly, personal conversations and feedback sessions with Sara Pearson, Karen Bradley, Patrik Widrig, Adrienne Clancy, Adriane Fang, Erin Crawley-Woods, and Ana Patricia Farfan proved most helpful throughout the creative process for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*.

Chapter 3: Creative Process

I began working on *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* in September 2011, as part of Dance 719, Research-Based Choreography. At this early stage of the process, I envisioned a very ambitious piece: an evening-length ‘dance-drama’ that would explore the life and legacy of author and aviator Anne Morrow Lindbergh as related to the experience of modern day women, including myself. I used the term dance-drama as an alternative to *tanztheatre*: describing the fact that equal emphasis would be placed on movement, original text, the writings of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and spectacle such as film, set, and props. In this phase of the project, I focused specifically on two entry points that I found especially significant; namely, the influence of her life as artist on creative work made by women today (particularly my own), and the beginning of her relationship with the famed pilot Charles Lindbergh. I tried to dialogue with Lindbergh’s writing through movement and my own text about the creative process, the nature and sources of self-worth in myself and other women, and the influence of love and relationships on both. I tried to answer these questions:

- How can her legacy be seen in our lives as women of the present era?
- Are there comparisons to be made between our situations and those she experienced as a wife, mother, career woman and artist?
- Are there lessons to be learned in these experiences that can be related to our own?
- Can we come closer to finding our personal inner truths and greater universal truths by examining, reflecting on, and deconstructing the legacy of Lindbergh?

As part of Dance 719, instructor Adrienne Clancy led us through numerous exercises to help us determine the rationale and purpose of our choreographic endeavors. I knew how influential Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s writing had been in my

own life, and I suspected, based on Patrik Widrig's reaction to my earliest little dance about the Lindbergh kidnapping, that a dance about the family might be interesting to others as well. However, being asked to think about the necessity of and potential impact of a dance about or inspired by Anne Morrow Lindbergh helped me to clarify and shape my intention for the work. I realized that Lindbergh's importance as a national figure, as well as the popularity and duration of her writing alone provided a strong rationale for the piece. In the twelve years since Anne Morrow Lindbergh's death in 2001, the world has changed dramatically, and women continue to find their place in the ever-changing economic, political, and social climate. Lindbergh's life itself spanned two centuries, from the invention of the Victrola gramophone to the popularization of the Internet. She saw two World Wars and many other smaller conflicts, the Great Depression and other economic crises, the women's movement from suffrage to Roe v. Wade to the Equal Rights Amendment, the Civil Rights Movement, and everything in between. Her most renowned book, *Gift from the Sea* (1955), influenced a generation of women who struggled to balance the conventional role of their gender in American society with their own needs, ambitions and desires. She was an influential figure, and I believe we still have much to learn through a careful investigation and deconstruction of her life and work. Considering Lindbergh's words and example in the areas of work, love, and self-worth, I imagined that this project could contribute to ongoing conversations about these important topics occurring in feminist, psychological, artistic, and child-development circles today in a unique, accessible way.

I envisioned that the work would allow participants and observers the opportunity to revisit and reexamine history, as told through the lens of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's perspective, and to see how it can and does relate to their own lives. My goals for the piece were to educate the cast and the audience about Lindbergh, an important historical figure, and about society's attitudes of and towards women, family, and work during her lifetime. Particularly, in this piece, the cast would be given the opportunity to read Lindbergh's work, to respond in writing and movement, and to make connections within their own lives as women and artists. The audience would be asked through the delivery of the content of the piece to make similar investigations and connections, and would hopefully leave the theatre examining their own beliefs about career and creativity, self-esteem and the nature of love.

I titled my final project for Dance 719 *Recognitions*, and this work became the first version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. *Recognitions* was centered around two entry points to a very broad and multi-faceted story. First, I tried to examine Lindbergh's attitudes towards creative work and relate them to my own creative process, particularly her early hesitations, fears and insecurities, and the reasons these shifted over time to allow her to become a highly respected published author. Secondly, I explored the early development of her relationship with Charles Lindbergh and the impact this had on her confidence and sense of self-worth, and related this to my romantic experiences and the connection between love and self-esteem in my own life. I chose these two entry points because I felt that they are a major factor for women in American society today, where the pull between career and personal life is often apparent, and I thought that most of the audience would be able

to connect with Lindbergh's struggles in these areas. Additionally, I saw a direct connection between career, love, and self-value for Lindbergh and for many people (especially women) in the modern world, an exploration of which could prove productive to the broader discussions on success and happiness occurring today.

With my intention for this first version relatively clear, I set about casting the work and beginning the choreographic process. I had pushed myself as a solo artist during my first year at Maryland, and so I thought it would be appropriate to create a dance around myself as a central character. This was also a matter of convenience; I could work extensively in the studio by myself without having to coordinate rehearsals for a large group of people. I started by choreographing a solo section for myself, consisting of a dance and monologue. The first draft of this solo was rather clumsy, with projected text, spoken word, and intense movement often competing for the audience's attention. The careful guidance of Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig helped me to distil the most interesting movement aspects and to think about how and when text was introduced into the work.

I did not want to limit myself to solo work exclusively; however, so I set about casting a corps of dancers. Inspired by PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATRE's *Drama* (2011), I decided that I would use the dancers in the manner of a Greek chorus. They would add to the spectacle of the overall production, offer additional information and context, comment on the action, and help the audience witness the action by witnessing it themselves on-stage. I had hoped to work with a large supporting cast, both to fill the stage in a chorus-like manner and to create an open, inclusive experience for all interested participants. I had no specific

movement phrase in mind, nor did I picture any particular “type” of dancer. For all of these reasons, I decided not to hold auditions for the piece. Rather, I watched an audition for the Fall Maryland Dance Ensemble to get to know the dancers, and then took contact information for anyone who would be interested in working with me on the project, regardless of their abilities as a performer. I ended up with a smaller group than I had originally anticipated, and started work with six dancers the following week – Jan Beardsley, Allison Bobby, Unissa Cruse-Ferguson, Emilie Davignon, and Tanya Stephens, all UMD undergraduates, and Holly Centino, a Maryland alumnae and friend of Beardsley who had some dance training as a child.

Our early rehearsals for *Recognitions* consisted primarily movement of journaling and movement explorations based on pictures of and writing by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. When searching for photos, I found a picture that captured my attention. The picture was the inspiration for Lindbergh’s poem, “Family Album”, which I first encountered in *Anne Morrow Lindbergh: Her Life*. The photo was of Lindbergh’s parents, Dwight and Elisabeth Morrow, standing together outside of their home. Of her mother’s pose, Lindbergh wrote: “She leans upon her arm/As if to hide/A strength perhaps too forward/For a bride” (Lindbergh, *Family Album* 79) I based one of the signature movement motifs of the piece, an off-balance lean with a slightly extended arm, on Elisabeth’s pose, and used Lindbergh’s line both as thematic inspiration for the piece and as part of the projected media design. This photo and poem excerpt led me to the specific research question, “What do women lean on for support and what are their sources of strength?”

In trying to answer this question, I (and to a lesser extent, the dancers) deconstructed some of Lindbergh's early writings from *Bring Me A Unicorn*, specifically focusing on those that centered on her poetry, her mother's relationship with her father, and the beginning of her relationship with Charles Lindbergh to draw conclusions about the sources from which Lindbergh developed her sense of self-worth and strength. In reading her biography by Susan Herzog and *Bring Me A Unicorn*, her earliest diary, I developed my research questions and came to the realization that would become the central theme of the piece.

In sharing this realization with the dancers, I also asked them to look at the people and things they lean on for support, self-worth, and comfort, to examine why those people and things might be so important to them, and to imagine what might happen to them if those people or things were to be removed from their life under a number of circumstances. The dancers performed a number of improvisations on this theme and turned their favorite moments into a short phrase to show to the group. Participating in these activities, which brought out the vulnerability of many of the dancers, strengthened the bonds of the group and paved the way for future sharings of a similar nature. The activities also proved to be fruitful from a creative perspective, leading to new shapes and movement phrases and helping the dancers find a personal connection to the work. This personal connection brought a unique quality to their performance, and I thought that most of the dancers grew significantly as performers because of exercises such as this.

A few weeks into the process, I began to choreograph some movement material for the dancers, which also drew on the theme of physical, psychological,

and emotional leaning. I initially taught these phrases to the dancers in a traditional choreographer-dancer relationship, with the dancers mimicking the movement as I demonstrated it. After the movement became comfortable, however, we returned to our improvisation-based exercises. I asked the cast to imagine that they were dancing with someone on whom they leaned metaphorically for support as they performed these movement phrases. What would their movement say to this person? What would the connection between them be? When do they lean physically on them, and when do they pull away? Why do they pull away? What is the physical quality of that action? How would they look at him or her? The change in the dancers' performance of the movement phrase after these visualization exercises was notable.

I knew that I wanted to include text, both spoken and projected, in the work. Choosing the text for the first version of the piece ended up being a rather serendipitous process. I knew right away that I wanted the aforementioned line from "Family Portrait" and that "My life began when I met Charles Lindbergh" would be included as well. I also wanted to incorporate the "Erasure" writing technique I had learned from Laura Newman and James Ijames at "How to Say I Love You" the previous summer. I thought that projecting this erasure would be highly evocative, and also indicative of the overall meaning of the piece. I was trying to find myself within the layers of Lindbergh's writing, just as I was trying to find the true essence of the text. The pieces I selected for the erasure section of *Recognitions* came to me by chance; I was flipping through *Bring Me A Unicorn* and happened upon two selections almost immediately. In these pieces, written before she met Charles, Anne Morrow Lindbergh was expressing anxiety over her capabilities as a writer. I

distilled these pieces down away from just creative worries to reflect more basic anxieties about being a woman in the modern world.

During this part of the rehearsal process, I made the pragmatic decision to have all lines spoken by the chorus written out on notecards. I knew that some of the dancers were not very comfortable speaking in public, and thought that having the words in front of them would make the performance easier. However, I quickly saw the value of the cards from a creative perspective. The cards became characters themselves in many ways, and the performers interacted with them by tearing them, dropping them, and crumbling them. I decided to have my text written out on the cards as well. I think that ultimately, the cards emphasized the passivity I experienced in my “Captivity.” In the final version of *Like A Unicorn in Captivity*, these cards – my words - were handed to me by the dancers; it was not until the very end of the piece that I spoke of my own will. I could also express my feelings toward the text as a character non-verbally in my interaction with the cards. Choices could be made to look at the card or away from it, to tear it up or crumble it, to toss it away carelessly or to hold it close to my heart, to let it be ripped from my hands or hold on to it fiercely. Additionally, the fact that the words were written further strengthened the connection between Lindbergh and me. I was reading my own life story, just as I read hers, rather than living and experiencing it for myself.

For Dance 719, we created two reiterations of our work, an initial showing and a revised version, both of which I titled *Recognitions*. From phase one to phase two of this piece, many specific changes and developments took place within the use of space, movement vocabulary, sound score, content, and visual components of this

piece. Perhaps the biggest change was the addition of the monologue at the ending of the piece. In this monologue, I relayed the story of how I met Kyle, my personal “Charles Lindbergh”, and how my life had been impacted by some not-so-great past boyfriends. I thought that this ending would help to articulate my realization that I could perhaps in fact relate to Lindbergh’s statement that her “life began when (she) met Charles Lindbergh”. Even though I had previously considered myself very independent, I realize during the monologue that perhaps I had come to think of my life “beginning” when I met Kyle. This monologue was influenced by the writing and delivery style I have heard on the radio program *This American Life*. Like the stories on the program, I tried to relate what could have been a self-indulgent, overly-dramatic story with a sense of wit and self-deprecation that would keep it light and poignant.

As I choreographed *Recognitions*, I realized how important feedback is for a performance, especially when it incorporates multimedia. This was my first go at using media in a piece, and I learned a lot about various programs involved in the creation and projection of video. The feedback I received from my classmates and Clancy related to the size and duration of the projected text was very helpful, and making the necessary revisions also provided a good lesson. I saw firsthand the patience and work involved in that media design process, and how much that work can pay off in the final piece.

The next step in the process of creating *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* was proposing the concert to the University of Maryland dance faculty. I was pleased with the way *Recognitions* was received by the audience at the final showing for

Dance 719, and decided that it would become a “Chapter” within a much larger work. In my formal proposal, I described three sections that I imagined would be a part of the piece. The first section would be very similar to what I showed for *Recognition*. I wrote that in this section I would examine the idea of woman in relationship to herself by asking the question, “What is her source of strength? What does she lean on for support, and why?” The second section would use Lindbergh’s most well-known book, *Gifts from the Sea*, as an entry point, from which I would examine the idea of women in –and out of - romantic partnerships. Some questions I imagined exploring in this section were:

- What did it mean for Lindbergh to be in a relationship?
- How did her marriage affect the realization of her own personal goals, ambitions, and career?
- How did she grow as a person in this relationship, and how was her growth stifled by it?
- What was the significance of her infidelity, and the subsequent infidelity of her husband, to both their marriage and Anne Morrow Lindbergh personally?
- What does it mean for me to be a single woman?
- How does my relationship status affect the realization of my own personal goals, ambitions and career?
- How has my autonomy helped me to grow as a person, and how has my growth been stifled by it?

The third section would use the infamous story of the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby as lens to examine the idea of women in relationship to the larger world, asking questions such as:

- How did Lindbergh handle the pressures of motherhood, both before and after the scandal of the kidnapping?
- How did her relationship to the press change after the intense media scrutiny she and her family endured in the face of this tragedy?

- What connections can we see between Lindbergh's desire for privacy in the midst of public scrutiny with our modern world where technology is increasingly usurping privacy on a daily basis?
- How do family, children, strangers and the media factor into the everyday lives of this particular cast of modern women?

Structurally, I thought that I would use these entry points as I worked with the dancers and chorus to create a series of letters and short stories, told through movement and spoken and projected text, based on real-life experiences and reactions to Lindbergh's work.

In addition to being a large scale work thematically, I imagined that that the physical scope of the work would be very large. I wanted to continue working with my cast of UMD dancers and a larger Movement Choir of about ten to twelve performers. To find participants for the Movement Choir, I planned on holding a series of free workshops for teen girls and adult women at New Chicago Dance Studio in Greenbelt and other venues. Interested participants could choose to come to additional rehearsals in which the movement and text generated from the workshops would be edited into material to be performed in the concert. I also proposed a rather grand spectacle, consisting of different sets and costumes for each section and a professionally made video. Having spent most of my creative career working with minimal budgets and feeling apologetic whenever I asked for expensive or grandiose elements of spectacle, I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to present a fully-funded, large-scale work and let my imagination run wild.

The project proposal took place at the end of the 2011 fall semester, and I began work on the full version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* when we returned from winter break. My immediate task was to prepare and revise *Recognitions* for the

University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies' Shared Graduate Dance Concert in late February. Very few changes were made for this performance of the piece. Choreographically, I added a quicker, lively solo to offset the minimalist choreography and quiet tone of the piece, which had been described as just a little too "patient" by early audiences. From a design perspective, I was able to choose large, sturdy desks with the appropriate feel ("contemporary" for my desk, and "vintage" for Lindbergh's). I learned an important lesson in clarity when communicating with prop shop during the design process in choosing these desks. I chose a desk based on look from the props database without reading the detailed description of it or asking the shop what materials it was made of. As a result, I ended up with a bulky, industrial-looking metal desk for the contemporary side that did not really capture the look I had in mind. The desk was functional and worked fine for this piece, but I learned to be much more discerning about scenic design and props choices in the future, realizing that even seemingly subtle design aspects can have a large impact on the look of the piece.

With the knowledge gained from this experience, I went into our first design meeting in February of 2012 with a PowerPoint full of research images for costumes, lighting, and set design as well as the most articulate description of the piece I could muster at that point. I quickly realized that some of the elements of spectacle I had mentioned in my original proposal, such as large Plexiglas boxes full of sand and water, would not be feasible. I limited myself to one "look" for the set design entire piece, a "white room" effect, with feminine elements of lace and pearls subtly interspersed. The two desks – one contemporary for me, one vintage c. 1930 to

represent Lindbergh – would remain, and each dancer would have their own smaller, moveable white desk. I also settled on two simple costume looks, rather than the several costume changes I had originally proposed. The dancers would start in a 1930s-influenced, housewife-inspired “day-dress” and heels, which would be removed in a few on-stage changes to reveal a Grecian-inspired shift dress and bare feet. I asked that these elements of set design and costume be constructed out of as much recycled or repurposed material as possible, in keeping with the Lindbergh’s conservation efforts and my own worldview. Lastly, to give the feeling that the dancers were “in Captivity” - somehow isolated, shielded, or veiled, I requested that a white scrim be placed downstage, and that all the action would take place behind it. Initially, there were some questions as to how the projections would interface with the scrim, so I was uncertain when and if it would drop, exposing the scene and action behind it. However, I kept an open dialogue with Andrew Cissna, the lighting designer, and Robert Denton, the projectionist, and together we decided that projections would alternately appear both downstage and upstage, and that downstage scrim would drop at the end of the work. This openness was a hallmark of the collaborative nature of the project that lasted from our early meetings through opening night.

The design process underway, I returned my focus to the choreography. *Recognitions* was less eagerly received by the general population than it had been by invited faculty and my peers in our final showings for Dance 719. In hindsight, I can see that it was too long and slow-moving, that my character was not fully developed, and that the threads connecting Lindbergh and I – so vivid in my head – were not

quite clear in the production. However, I also received feedback on the piece that took issue with the final monologue and my performance of it. Some audience members clung to the romantic entanglements and breaks-up mentioned in the monologue, to the point that they missed the entire overarching theme of my relationship to Lindbergh and her work. I suspected that because of the monologue, on the surface the piece looked like yet another dance about women in the midst of romantic turmoil. However, I knew that underneath the exterior there were many deeper, more significant themes, and although I had hoped that they would be apparent to the general audience, to many people I came across as just another sad girl lamenting about her singleness. I heard second-hand that a performer in another piece actually hated it for that reason. That was difficult to hear, undoubtedly – never before had I heard such blunt criticism of my work. I knew that the piece was a lot to take in - it involved projected and spoken text, several changes of music, a set, and the incorporation of props, and that it needed some more editing, particularly with timing - but at the same time, I couldn't help but feel slightly frustrated that some of the audience didn't get it.

I realized that this was the great dilemma of an artist: I want to make work I am proud of, work that stands for who I am, work that says something I want to say, but all in a way that lets the audience also take an active role, to figure out what it's about, to interact with it and find their own creative way of interpreting it. I think this left me in a very vulnerable place. Not wanting to be too forthright, I submitted no program notes indicating the theme or arc of the work, leaving the audience at the mercy of their own interpretations. That final three minute monologue – filled with

anecdotes about the perils of first dates, the fickleness of young love, and the scariness of finally falling for someone who may change the way you think about everything – was the last thing the audience saw of the piece. Upon reflection, I realized that I couldn't really blame some audience members for walking away from the piece remembering only the "poor little old single girl" moments in that monologue. However, seeing as they amounted to about one eighth of the twenty-three minute long piece, I could not help but ask: weren't they paying attention to the rest of it?

I had always liked making dances about relationships, as I think that they are one of the few universal in this increasingly fractured world. Most people seem to "get" relationship dances, and I like making work to which the general audience can relate. However, I was frustrated that for all of the other, deeper themes in *Recognitions*, based on months of research and creative exploration, people seemed to get stuck on the relationship aspect. For this reason, when I returned to the rehearsal studio after the Shared Graduate Dance Concert, I tried desperately to get away from the relationship aspect of Lindbergh's story – and my own.

Instead, I turned my attention to the story of the "Lindbergh Baby" kidnapping and trial. As this story was also one of love, loss, idolatry, and dependency, I figured that it would be a good complement to *Recognitions*. It was also a familiar chapter in history, one that might be accessible to the audience. The subject proved quite fruitful; leading to a wealth of choreographic phrases drawn from such disparate sources of inspiration as holding a child's hand, writings by Lindbergh on the topic, and stories of loss from the dancers' personal experience.

This period in the rehearsal process was one of intense bonding between the cast, as we shared painful stories from our pasts. Lindbergh's willingness to bear her private pain in her journals, along with the team-building, consciousness-raising exercises, allowed us to open ourselves to vulnerability as well.

It was around this time that I found myself explicitly designing and implementing feminist-based collaborative choreographic methods during our rehearsals. Without even realizing it, I had been applying a feminist approach to the choreography all along, by actively engaging all of the dancers in the creative process and using the process to empower the dancers as performers and women. The choreography was largely derived from personal and group improvisations, with plenty of room for the dancers' to incorporate their own voices into the piece by contributing choreography and through their performance. By this time, however, I had begun my work with Professor Katie King and started to understand more about feminism and feminist approaches to art and art making. Some of the tactics I employed in this stage of the creative process included consciousness-raising, identity dances, and translating.

Our consciousness-raising exercises were based on those of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Just as these women met in consciousness-raising groups to discuss their issues, concerns, goals, and desires as individuals and for the movement, the cast and I discussed topics that were important to us and to the work. Sometimes, these discussions were broad and informal, while at other times they were more carefully designed and related to specific themes from Lindbergh's life and writing. In either case, the goal of the discussion was raise the

dancers' awareness of issues that were important to *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, which might also affect the way they thought about themselves as artists and people. We talked about personal ambitions, romantic relationships, and motherhood among many other topics. These discussions might be followed up with a movement improvisation, a writing session, or a focused performance of the choreography we had to that point.

The creation of identity dances was based on an exercise conducted by Karen Bradley in Teaching Methods, a class for which I was the Teaching Assistant that spring. I began the identity dance by proposing a series of questions to the dancers, ranging from the mundane (What is your favorite color?) to the more thoughtful (What makes your heart sing?). The dancers were asked to write their answers privately. They then created a short list of their favorite answers, and created an action for each. Finally, the verbal and movement responses were linked together in a way that was meaningful for each of the dancers. Each dancer then performed her dance for the group under a number of conditions to see what these circumstances brought out in them personally and artistically: as a group, individually for an audience, in the studio, outside, with external focus, with internal focus, as a solo and in duets. From these identity dances, the cast was able to discover and share aspects of who they are in words and movement. They learned that they were an important part of the creative process, and were empowered to incorporate something of themselves into their performances. We continued to work with these themes as we created material for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*.

The final feminist-based choreographic tool we worked with was based on a suggestion from my colleague Stephanie Miracle. After I told her I was working with the idea of gathering written and movement-based interpretations of Lindbergh's writings from a number of women, she proposed that I ask those contributors to write out the sequences of movements that made up their interpretation. I could then read their written list of movements and interpret it as I saw fit. Inspired by her idea, I began this process with the dancers almost immediately. They were directed to choose a selection from Lindbergh's journals, create a movement phrase derived from it, and then write the directions for the movement phrase out separately, as specifically or generally as they would like. Another dancer was then asked to translate the direction in their own way, creating a separate but related phrase. These solos were paired to create duets of different movement phrases based on the same written material. I saw this as a feminist exercise for a number of reasons. First, the dancers' personal interpretations of the source material were heard and valued. Secondly, in the act of translating another dancers' movement, they were required to become more sensitive to and aware of the kinesthetic experience of another person. Third, in the act of creating duets, the dancers were required to work cooperatively to achieve a common goal. These are all important elements in feminist practice, and I believe the dancers were empowered by the experience.

By the end of the spring 2012 semester, I noticed significant changes in the cast both as movers and individuals. The dancers seemed to be growing more confident in performance of pre-choreographed material, more willing to take risks in improvisations, and more outspoken in our discussions. I believe that this is due at

least in part in part to the feminist exercises employed throughout the rehearsal process. Things were not always rosy during this phase in the process; however, as casting issues and my own insecurities plagued the course of the rehearsals. Three of the dancers from the previous fall were unable to continue with the project, leaving only Jan Beardsley, Unissa Cruse-Ferguson, and Emilie Davignon to perform in the Shared Graduate Dance Concert version of *Recognitions*. While the trio worked nicely for that show, I wanted to bring additional dancers into the fold for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. I invited several University of Maryland students to join us, but after three declined, only Ellen Clark and Ebony McSwain joined Jan, Emilie, Unissa and I in March 2012.

It was also around this time that I realized that impracticability of working with a large movement choir for this project. I was having a difficult time getting commitment from and coordinating the schedules of my cast of university dance majors; I could only imagine what troubles would arise from working with “non-dancers” who did not fully understand the demands of theatrical performance. The highly structured, rather inflexible nature of the University’s technical rehearsal schedule would prohibit elasticity on my end to work with their schedules. I was also worried about my abilities as a choreographer to incorporate such a large group of dancers into the process within a relatively short timeframe.

This lack of creative confidence was not an entirely new phenomenon. I had, at times, previously questioned my choreographic talents prior to and during my time at the University of Maryland. However, the combination of mixed reviews from the Shared Graduate Dance Concert and looming deadlines made me seriously wonder if

I would be able to pull off *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. I struggled to reconcile the massive project I had proposed with the time constraints at play. As the cast and I continued to generate a high volume of phrases and motifs, I felt unable to piece them together in a meaningful way. At various points, I added monologues from previous choreographic explorations, which were unrelated to the Lindbergh kidnapping story but also dealt with loss and grief. While this was an intriguing exercise, it left the audience at our next showing confused – there were simply too many narratives happening at once, and their relationship to Lindbergh’s story varied widely.

At this point, we were mostly working without music, as Natalie Spehar, the composer, and I agreed it would be best to let the dance shape her musical choices. I realize in hindsight that it might have been better to have started working with music earlier. Choreographing in silence led to a rather flat rhythmic structure, and I struggled to find natural dynamics within the movement without musical accompaniment. I also realized how powerful – and at times uncomfortable - silence can be. At our showing of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* in May 2012, some audience members found the silence distressing. They also noticed that the silence made them focus more intensely on the movement. Small discrepancies in the way the dancers performed unison movement and individual flaws in dance technique were more apparent in silence than they would be with music. The piece also felt much longer than it actually was; without music it seemed to drag on. This was an important lesson for me as a choreographer. Because of this feedback, I decided that moments that would have been in silence would instead have slight accompaniment, such as wind or waves, to ease the overwhelming absence of sound. References to the ocean

in text and video, based on Lindbergh's *Gifts from the Sea*, allowed for the inclusion of this soundscape.

For number of reasons, I was unhappy with the version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* that I presented for the showing in May. Jan Beardsley had quit the piece just two weeks before for personal reasons, and so we had to rush to adapt the choreography to a smaller cast. These frantic changes, in addition to more run-of-the-mill end of the semester stress had taken its toll on the remaining dancers physically and mentally; therefore, the overall performance was sub-par. As detailed above, the lack of music had a big impact on the work, and the incorporation of new, loosely-related monologues was not as effective as I had hoped. Lastly, I had underestimated the effect of my desire to remove my personal story, as well as references to relationships, from the piece. Without the spark of a unique personal connection, the story itself seemed flat and dull, and my performance felt disconnected. I knew that I wanted to make some major changes to the piece after this showing, and the summer break proved to be the perfect time to do so.

The long stretch of summer, without the distractions of other university obligations, gave me time and space to create, reflect, and reimagine what *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* could be. I felt free to take chances and make mistakes as I worked alone, without the cast (who had returned to their hometowns for the vacation) and without questioning from the faculty and design team. While I had appreciated their input to that point, I knew that what I needed most now was space and time for the work –and myself- to breathe.

It was around this time that I made the return to my balletic roots. I was unsure how a ballet solo *en pointe* would fit into the grand scheme of the piece, but I felt that there was a connection between the idea of a mythical creature, such as a unicorn, and the image of a ballerina on her toes. In June, I traveled twice to Allentown, Pennsylvania to work with Trinetta Singleton, my former teacher and a ballerina with the Joffrey Ballet in the 1960s, whom I had commissioned to create a solo for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. The solo consisted of quick, athletic pointe work and graceful *port de bras*. I spent much of the summer working up the cardiovascular endurance and pointe technique to perform it as well as I could. I also found ways to “deconstruct” the solo, changing the speed, quality, rhythm, and order of the steps in ways that could be incorporated into the rest of the piece.

From a research perspective, I spent much of the summer working with *Listen! The Wind*. I discovered the theme of waiting within Lindbergh’s text, and drew out many quotes directly related to this theme. This reminded me of the quotes, “What is the shape of your life?” which had been pointed out by dramaturg Adriana Diaz that spring, and “My life began when I met Charles Lindbergh”, the theme of *Recognitions*. I found myself reflecting on how much my life has been shaped by waiting, and how often I feel like I am still waiting for *my* life to begin. The confluence of these three themes allowed me to more clearly see the connections between my life and Lindbergh’s, and inspired me to once again incorporate aspects of my personal story into the work. I discovered new ways to link our stories, beyond – but including – romantic relationships. I worked these themes into a script for the “dance-drama” that would become *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, which

included lines of spoken dialogue, monologues, projected text and images, and movement sections. This script proved to be an invaluable way for me to organize my ideas and communicate them clearly with the dancers.

One final summer project was the filming and editing of video footage to be used in *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. In my original proposal, I wrote that I wanted to include a professionally-made video in the work. Budget and logistical issues prevented this from happening, so I set about shooting and creating the film myself. I enlisted some friends from Pennsylvania to perform in this film. I had danced with these women for almost ten years, first as students at DeSales University and then in New Street Dance Group, a project-based dance company I co-direct in the Philadelphia. It was important to me personally to include them in my thesis concert in some way as they had been such a large part of my dancing life for so long. Together, we traveled to Stone Harbor, New Jersey, where there was a rather secluded inlet beach suitable for filming. We taped several movement phrases, both selections created for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* and previously choreographed material from the New Street Dance Group repertory. I then edited the footage into two videos, one that I imagined for the opening of the show and one to close the work.

At this point, I turned again to composer Natalie Spehar. I asked her to create music specifically for these videos. I imagined that this music could be reused for other sections throughout the piece, scattered among the other classical and contemporary selections used in *Recognitions*. Using the video as a reference point, Spehar created original pieces to compliment these existing musical choices, which

ranged from selections by Vivaldi to contemporary electronic music by The Album Leaf. Her music bridged the gap between the classical and contemporary worlds, much as Lindbergh's words served as a bridge between her life and my own.

At the beginning of the 2012 fall semester, I requested to have an additional showing as so much had changed in the piece. This showing proved to be the most difficult part of the entire creative process. My cast and I had worked very hard in a week-long intensive prior to the showing, and completely revamped the work. Though I knew there was still more work to be done, I was very proud of this version of the piece, which consisted of much more of my personal story, a new series of monologues, and the challenging pointe solo choreographed by Singleton.

I was disappointed, then, when the piece was not very well received by the showing audience. In a feedback session after the showing with Sara Pearson, Patrik Widrig, and Karen Bradley, issues with tempo and dynamics, performance quality, vocal production, specificity of initiations, and attack of movement were raised. The faculty also questioned the linear structure of the work at this point. As I worked alone that summer, my desire to create a piece that would be easily understood by non-dance audiences grew, and I decided to step away from the "Letters and Short Stories" structure of my original proposal and to focus on a single story. Furthermore, I laid out that narrative as explicitly as possible. The story unfolded in a very linear way, which left little to the audience's imagination. The story was so explicitly stated, in fact, there was no struggle or turning point. Without a conflict, it was easy for the audience to lose interest in what was happening on stage. Karen Bradley pointed out that she saw the potential struggle as being a quest for the

“ultimate feminine.” Specifically, she picked up on references to ballet, my ex-boyfriend’s broad shoulders, and my desire to be a mother, which led her to the pursuit of femininity as a theme.

While I had not had this theme in mind exactly, as soon as it was brought to my attention I realized that it was, indeed, the major through line of the *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. Much of what I loved about Lindbergh was how she struggled so honestly to balance her ambitions as a modern woman of the first and second feminist waves with her desire for femininity in the traditional sense. She was a role model for me in that respect, but for some reason I did not explicitly make this apparent in the piece. Once I made the conscious connection, I began to see ways to express the story of this struggle in a non-linear way.

The concept of struggle also resonated with me. I realized that as a performer, I needed to put up a bit of a fight! One of the responses I received about *Recognitions* was that my character came off as weak. I originally thought that people picked up on this because of the previously mentioned “poor single girl” through line of the monologue – I thought it was the words themselves that were the problem. Thinking about struggle, however, I began to wonder if it was not the content, but the performance of it, that led to this reaction. *Agency* was a term that came to mind during this reflection. This was a theme in my women’s studies courses, and I thought it could be easily applied to performing. As I worked on my performance of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, I tried to figure out where my agency lay within my performance. I decided that I needed to take a more active role in the piece. At the suggestion of Pearson, I thought of the work as a *reenactment* of past experiences – I

reenactment that I was inviting the audience to witness. I was choosing to relive the experiences, choosing to invite dancers to be a part of it, and choosing to allow the audience to bear witness to it. I asked myself: Who am I, and what do I want in this experience? What decisions am I making? How am I choosing to react to what was happening around and to me? Thinking about *reenactment* and *choices* allowed me to find my agency: I was not at the mercy of the whirlwind of experiences unfolding around me.

Similarly, I reflected on the agential capacity of the chorus of dancers. In the strangest of coincidences, around the time we read Eva Hayward's *Spider City Sex* in Katie King's Approaches to Women's Studies class, I began to notice spiders everywhere – large brown spiders with thick legs spinning delicate webs on my front porch and window sill; smaller and brighter red spiders hanging from doorways in my office; tiny, delicate spiders with dark bodies and thin legs fluttering across floors; references to spiders in television, movies, and books. As these webs crisscrossed throughout my personal and academic life, I began to see them in the dance, as well. I had been struggling to characterize the four female supporting dancers in the piece. From the inception, they had been not-quite-human – spirits, ghosts, or memories, perhaps – the spirit of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, ghosts of the women in the lineage between Anne and I, my memories intertwining with those Anne shared in her journals and other writing. This characterization, though poetic, did little for the dancers' performance. Thinking of themselves as spirits, ghosts, and memories left the dancers disembodied. Dance is physical, dance is of the body, and asking them to portray intangible beings caused the dancers to detach from their physicality. The

audience at the August showing did not read their disembodied performance as an expression of the spiritual and ethereal; rather, they saw the dancers as subjugated human characters lacking agency. As spirits, ghosts, or memories, the dancers were passive, subject to my will as the active character within the piece. This was not my intention.

During a free-writing session about the piece and my process, I wrote that the dancers might actually be spiders, or some sort of spider-woman hybrid. They cast webs which served as both home and trap, webs that were “an extension of the surface affects of the spider” webs with which, as Eva Hayward suggests, they could feel (Hayward, *Spider City Sex* 231). At first, I hesitated to explain this revelation to the dancers, fearing they would think me somewhat crazy – the movement did not look “spidery”, there was no reference to spiders in the Lindbergh text, and at no point in our process had we mentioned or even alluded to any animal species besides the one to which we belonged. How would they react to my sudden insistence that they were no longer some essence of humanity, but a completely different species?

As it turns out, I had little to fear. The dancers found agency in this characterization – they had a body, a very specific body, not human but still corporal, to inhabit in their performance. This body was powerful, perhaps venomous, feared by some, but also fragile – capable of being stepped on or stripped of its fear-inducing quality in comic portrayals at Halloween, for example. The dancers saw the spider as a metaphor for woman, her power taken from her by a male-dominated society suffering from something resembling vagina-envy (a phenomenon about which Lindbergh wrote in one of her journals). They recognized their own agency and

fragility in this portrayal. They related to the space differently, feeling it with web and multiple legs, spinning webs through it to serve as homes or traps for themselves, each other, and me.

I knew that the manifestation of that agency needed to occur both vocally and physically. To capture the vocal agency, and improve the tone and quality of my voice, I worked with Professors Karen Bradley and Ashley Smith from the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. Bradley and Smith introduced me to a variety of techniques, from the Laban/ Bartenieff and Roy Hart traditions, respectively, which helped me to moderate pitch, find greater breath support, and find natural phrasing to the text. In one session with Ashley Smith, we worked on using story-telling methods to capture and hold the attention of the audience. These methods involved agency and choice, and my experience of the act of performing deepened by employing them. In terms of the physical performance of the movement, Bradley also suggested that concentrating on sitzbone-heel connection and pelvic floor support would enable me to find more power in my movement, and I found this suggestion very helpful as I rehearsed.

Between the showing in late August and performance in mid-October, I worked intensely on these aspects of my performance. I also set about making changes to the structure of the piece to make it less linear and to find levels of abstraction. Most notably, with help from Patrik Widrig, I decided to incorporate a pre-show portion of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. This served to set up an environment for the audience. As they entered the theatre, I was on stage, in simple dance clothes and work light, “practicing” the solo Singleton had choreographed for

me. All the while, questions directed to the guests in the second person appeared on the downstage scrim. This pre-show served a variety of purposes. The questions invited the audience to think about ways they might connect to the experience that was about to unfold, and helped them become more invested in the dance. Putting the solo first, rather than at the end of the show as I had envisioned it originally, allowed me to perform the challenging, quick movement it when I was still “fresh” and not exhausted physically and emotionally from the performance. It also set up a frame for the audience; they saw that my desire and struggle to achieve success in the ballet world would be an important part of the piece. Lastly, it enabled me to abstractly reference that dream at the end of the piece, by putting on a pair of pointe shoes and *bourree-ing* into the unknown world offstage. This ending brought the dance full circle, even though the material in-between followed a more circuitous path, and allowed for a bit of an ambiguous, yet still satisfying, ending. While I had imagined that Singleton’s solo choreography and a triumphant video full of lush, seaside footage and Lindbergh’s text would make a dramatic ending statement, I realized with the help of my faculty committee that such a statement was not necessary. Ending on a subtler, more elusive note would keep the audience engaged, leaving space for them to make their own interpretations about how the story would end. Additionally, it was important that I end the work with a strong sense of personal agency. Throughout the work I reference rejections, those I had faced in love and in the pursuit of a ballet career. In this new ending, I chose to rise above those rejections in a way that was understated, but still strong, and realistic, but still theatrical and slightly magical. I ended the work by putting on my pointe shoes

(which had been alluded to but not yet seen), and walking *en pointe* through and past the space that represents Lindbergh, symbolically leaving the past behind. The scrim dropped as I made my way off-stage, signifying the end of my captivity: I was no longer stuck in my past and in my idolization of Lindbergh. I had finally seen both of us for who we really were, and thus, the audience was allowed to see us clearly as well. Free of self and societally imposed restrictions, romantic entanglements, and the shadow of my idol, I tiptoed confidently into the unknown, finally ready to let my life begin.

Because of this new beginning and end, I decided not to use the full videos I had edited over the summer. Instead, I incorporated relevant footage throughout the piece, and used Spehar's music for new dance sections. Other changes made to *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* at this time involved finding ways to edit the *Recognitions* section by cutting the number and timing of the projections, tighten up the transitions between sections, finding the overall pacing and flow of the piece, and figuring out ways to work with our props and costume changes in a smooth, efficient way.

About two weeks before the performance, at our final studio showing, the piece finally felt as though it was coming together. The dancers were capturing the desired quality, I was able to incorporate the coaching of Smith and Bradley into my performance, the projected image and text were fully incorporated into the live performance, and the costumes were nearly perfect. I had some initial worries about the costumes, particularly as they were being made of repurposed materials. Because of this, we were not in as complete control of the look of the costumes as we could have been if they were designed and built from scratch. Our open lines of

communication as collaborators allowed for Chelsey Schuller, the costume designer, and I to work through my initial reservations to find looks like were both aesthetically pleasing and functional. She and the costume shop ended up creating really beautiful looks for each of the dancers, and after a few minor changes following the showing, they were in great shape for technical rehearsals. Similarly, scenic designer Douglas Andrew Clarke's look for the set turned out wonderfully, and needed only a few minor adjustments during tech. I can safely say that the technical rehearsal process for *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* was one of the smoothest I have ever been involved in. The open communication between myself, the dancers, the design team, and stage management throughout the entire process paid off very well. I felt comfortable throughout the week of technical and dress rehearsals and completely ready to go on opening night.

Chapter 4: About the Work

On opening night, *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* began with a pre-show, setting the stage for what was to come. The space was fully dressed: white marley, white scrims upstage and downstage, two wooden desks (a vintage-look workspace placed in the upstage left corner and one with a more contemporary-feel in the downstage right), four white metal desks placed on their sides on the right and left sides of the stage, small chandeliers made from recycled soda bottles hung on the downstage right, and a large wooden arc draped with white lace, fabric, beads, and more small chandeliers at the upstage left, creating a frame for the vintage-look desk. Simple work light was used on stage, and the house lights remained on. Fifteen minutes before the show was scheduled to begin, I entered into the space. I wore a leotard, sweat pants and a jacket, and carried a blue shoulder bag. I walked casually to “my” desk (the contemporary-look workspace in the downstage right corner), set my bag down, changed into a dance skirt and ballet slippers, and began to “warm-up.” A series of questions, directed at the audience, were projected on the downstage scrim throughout this pre-show: *Do you remember your first love? Do you remember the first time you learned the world was not a perfect place?* Intermittently, these questions were mixed with soft footage of a ballerina *en pointe*, clad in a long white chiffon dress and dancing on the beach. At various intervals, I turned on music from a set of iPod speakers on my desk and “practiced” the solo which had been choreographed for me by Trinette Singleton. After a few rounds of projections, stretching, and marking the solo, the Assistant Stage Manager came on-stage to give me an update as to when the show would begin. This was a very practical moment in

the work, but I found it to also have artistic merit. It helped to highlight the immediacy of the performing experience as it was happening in real-time, which then contrasted with the sensation of reverie created in the actual performance. It created the feeling of *pastpresent*, as described by Donna Haraway, where the past and present collide and exist at once.

Once given this go ahead from stage management, I prepared for the piece to begin. The Performing Arts Center's welcome announcement played, the work lighting became softer and more theatrical, and the music for the solo was played loudly over the theatre speakers. I began the solo once again, dancing full out and performing in earnest. As I was dancing, the chorus of dancers emerged from behind the white metal desks, costumed in 1930's inspired day dresses and heels. They walked towards me in a pattern of simple walks, small circles, and pauses, eventually forming a box around me. When they entered, the lights and music changed again, creating an almost ghostly atmosphere. We heard the first strains of composer Natalie Spehar's music, a piece I called Anne's theme. As I heard the changing music, saw the change in lighting, and sensed the dancers closing in on my, my dancing became more frantic. Finally, I landed in a long lunge in a pool of light at the center of the stage, surrounded by the dancers. I stood up, at once questioning and confronting them. They encircled me, stripping my ballet skirt and slippers and dressing me in a yellow housedress similar to the ones they wore, complete with a ribbon in my hair.

Once clad in this new attire, I begin a solo section that I called "Captivity", which was inspired in part by a movement exploration in Adriane Fang's Modern

Dance Technique Class in the Fall of 2011. The music for this short solo was another selection by Vivaldi, which I had altered slightly by adding reverb and slowing down the tempo. The chorus sat around me, at times echoing or responding to my movement with gestures of their own. I was trapped, both inside the circle they formed around me and in the unfamiliar clothing in which they had dressed me. The movement of the solo reflected the struggle to escape from these confinements, and saw the introduction of a contemporary dance influence into the balletic movement palette of the piece. By the end of this section, I come to terms with this captivity, ultimately deciding to strap on the high-heeled shoes which had been delivered to me by the dancers.



Illustration 2

As soon as my shoes were fastened, signifying a reconciliation to the situation, I was interrupted by the dancers again. Ebony grabbed my arm and swung me out into the space, beginning a brief but chaotic transitional period. The dancers

ran around the space, grabbing me as I passed by them and swinging me around. After about a minute of this, the chorus ended in a diagonal line, and I ended up downstage center. Reeling, I looked at them, and a quote by Anne Morrow Lindbergh appeared on the scrim behind them. This began the “Recognitions” section, a revised version of the piece that premiered in February 2012. The chorus danced in this diagonal formation, performing duets with an imaginary partner. Drawn to them, I walked along side of them as they made their way along the diagonal and toward the “Anne’s” desk in the upstage corner. I was challenging them to meet my gaze. They looked away, and I retreated to “my” desk.

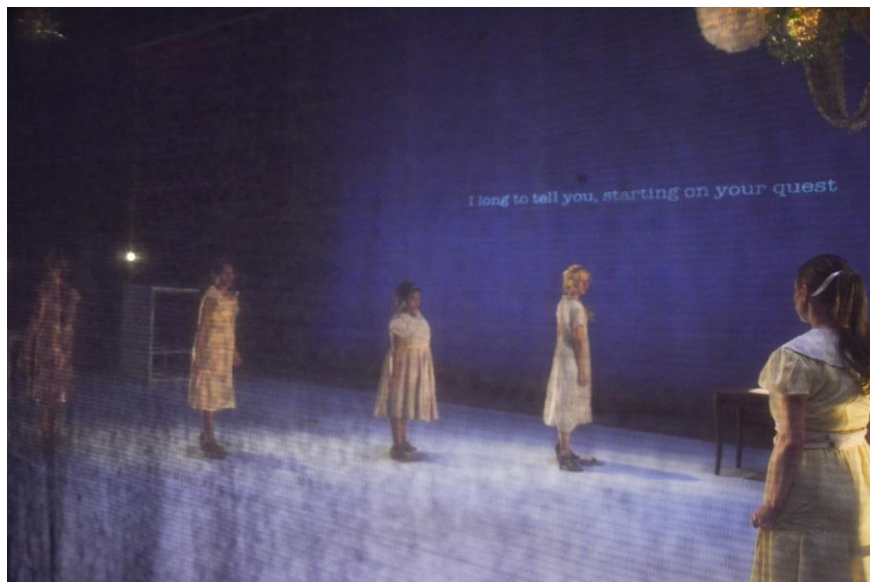


Illustration 3

Once at my desk, I proceeded to pull a small make-up bag out of my belongings and applied power and lipstick, trying to make myself look like the chorus. Emboldened by this new face, I rose from the desk and began another solo. The movement in the beginning of this phrase was feminine, slightly seductive,

reflecting my effort in becoming “like” the chorus of dancers. They remained in the corner by Anne’s desk throughout this section, but occasionally turned toward and away from me, continuing to express their disapproval of me. By the end of the solo, I returned to the balletic roots of the piece, performing a series of wistful pique turns in my high-heeled shoes, wishing for what might have been had they not interrupted me. The music for this section ends, and I turned back to the dancers, charging them. However, they passed me by, shooting me a haughty glare on their way to downstage center. I retreated again to the comfort of my desk, where I proceeded to wipe off the make-up and take off the heels, defeated. As I went through these motions, the chorus recited a series of facts about Anne Morrow Lindbergh and myself, introducing the audience to our stories and the ways in which they were intertwined. They tore up the pieces of paper on which their lines were written, coyly, and withdrew to the back of the stage.

This began a small section I called “Letters to Anne”, which was also a part of *Recognitions*. Frustrated by what I heard in the stories as my lack of success compared to Lindbergh’s, I called out to her: “Dear Anne!” before sweeping the contents of my desk to the floor in a moment of despair. At this, she “answered” me, through a passage from her journal projected on the back scrim. I stood up on my desk and performed an “erasure” of one of the phrases from the *Recognitions* solo – a smaller, scaled down, sketch of the movement. As I was doing this, the text also erased from the scrim, distilled to a new poem which appeared on the screen in front of me as I melted off my desk and onto the floor. I called out to Anne once more from the floor as the poem faded - “Dear Anne, I’m stuck.” At this, the chorus became

animated once again. A third selection by Vivaldi began, ushering in the section we simply called the “Vivaldi Quartet.”

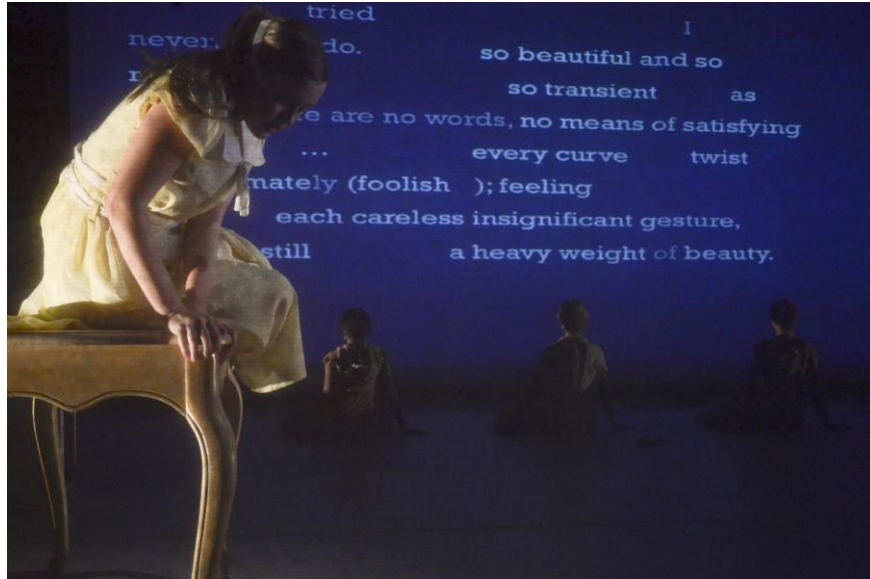


Illustration 4

The Vivaldi Quartet was a section that caused me a great deal of struggle during the choreographic process. The repetition of themes and constraint of the movement was meant to portray the senses of waiting and being held captive by that phenomenon. After many drafts of this section, I believe we finally got that point across. The tension in the dancer’s bound movement phrases, giving way to frustrated, flinging arms, legs, and heads by the end of the piece, helped enormously, as did paying attention to the tempo and phrasing of the movement. In the beginning of the duet, I walked back to join the dancers lined upstage, and on the third repetition of the theme I rise to join in their dance. Rather than follow their movement, however, I return to variations on original ballet-based phrasework from the opening solo. The chorus begins a physical transformation during this section; at turns they

remove their shoes and hair ribbons. Lunging, rolling, and leaping made up the final frenzied moments of the section, which ends with the dancers on the floor in pairs.



Illustration 5

The next section, the “Double Duets,” started off slowly and patiently, a drastic contrast to the previous outright display of frustration. The dancers remained on the floor with their partners in relative stillness, while I crossed upstage in a series of lunges and falls on the diagonal, struggling to reach Anne’s desk. One dancer in each pair was still wearing shoes; these were removed by their partner, marking another moment in the transformation of the chorus. The partnerships were broken up shortly, as one dancer in each set rolled toward stage left. The remaining dancers rose, threw the belts from their dresses, and began a duet of their own.



Illustration 6

About halfway through this duet, Ellen and Unissa, who had left Emilie and Ebony, started their own duet. Ellen taunted me by removing her hair ribbon, freeing a massive set of curls, while Unissa dropped a piece of paper in my lap. Then, their movement traveled diagonally downstage left and centered around one of the portable white desks, which Ellen dragged along. Eventually, each of the four dancers brought one of the desks to center stage. Once there, they began the final stage of their transformation by stripping their dresses, revealing a soft white shift dress underneath. In this scene, the dancers led the way for me, showing me the path that I should take. Ignoring them, I danced behind the desks as projected images of women dancing by the sea are shown on the scrim.



Illustration 7

Torn between the idyllic images behind me and remarkable shift happening in the women before me, I called to Lindbergh again. This “Dear Anne” turned into a full monologue, in which I confronted Lindbergh about her statement, “My Life began when I met Charles Lindbergh.” Almost immediately, another monologue was sent to me via a set of notecards, thrown by Ellen as I reflected on a picture of my own “Charles Lindbergh,” which I previously knocked off my desk in the angry beginning of the “Letters to Anne” section. This monologue was based on the ex-boyfriend stories from *Recognitions*, slightly pared down and staged in such a way that the self-deprecating nature of it was more visually apparent. As I told the story, I walked along the front of the stage, stepping over the chorus members who were now posed down on the floor in front of the desks. Ellen followed behind me, rolling her eyes and making other faces that indicated she was not taking my romantic peril seriously. It was as though she was my subconscious; that voice inside my head that said, “You know it is silly to get so worked up over a boy, right?” Finally, she

confronted me, demanding the last card, which I had tried to tuck away close to my heart. I reluctantly handed it over to her, and am once again grabbed by Ebony and swept into the next section of the dance.



Illustration 8

The dancers again launched into short snippets of stories from my life and Anne's, this time more personal, and even less flattering. Ebony pulled me onto her desk and wheeled me to center stage, where she dumped me to the floor unceremoniously. After the chorus finished their lines, Unissa tossed me a set of cards. These cards contained yet another monologue, this time reflecting on my decision to pursue ballet as a profession – maybe *this* was where my life began? This pattern repeated three times, with the dancers maneuvering their desks – and me – to a new part of the stage, where a new set of cards was revealed to me and a new story

was told. While I was speaking, the chorus performed bits of movement to frame the text, accompanied by quiet strains of classical or contemporary music.

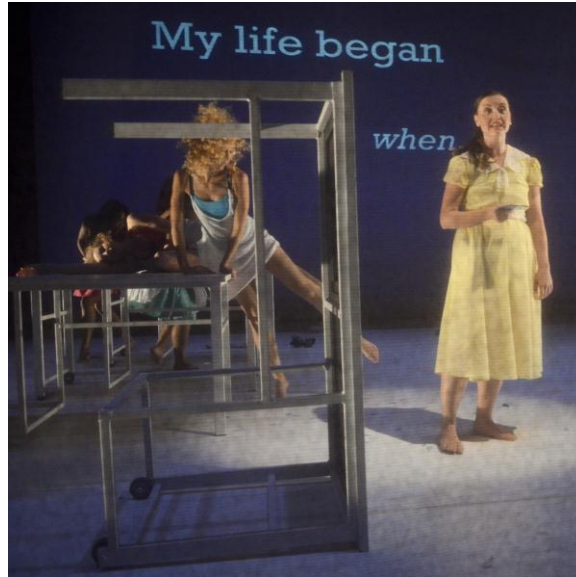


Illustration 9

After the third monologue, I performed a final solo, this time set to a composition by Spehar. The music began with “Anne’s Theme,” but built quickly into something more lively, more immediate – I called it “Shannon’s Theme.” Similarly, my movement began with an incredibly slow and almost passive version of the ballet solo. The dance then morphed into contemporary movement, performed with more abandon. During this section I began a physical transformation of my own as I removed the belt from my dress and tossed it toward the dancers, who were arranged on the original diagonal and standing on their desks.



Illustration 10

The solo ended abruptly; however, as I fell on my rear in line with the dancers and the music cut out. Another set of cards was tossed at me by the dancers, but I chose to ignore them: I had to speak my own mind now. I began one final monologue, admitting that perhaps I used my vision of Lindbergh as a shield, behind which I could hide from my own shortcomings. I realized that by admitting what I perceived to be Lindbergh's shortcomings, I could reconcile myself to my own. In my final interaction with the chorus, *I pulled them*, changing the course of their action by making them roll off of the "pedestals" on the desks and onto the floor. Finally, I completed my physical transformation by stripping off my housedress, revealing a goddess-like, white shift dress of my own. I also put on my pair of shiny satin pointe shoes, that ultimate symbol of femininity referenced throughout the work but never seen, and *bourreed* up the diagonal and off-stage as the scrim fluttered to the floor. My captivity finally over, I tiptoed confidently through Lindbergh's representative space and off stage, finally ready for my life to begin.



Illustration 11



Illustration 12

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In keeping with the relationship theme, the day after the closing of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*, I felt as though I had been through a break-up. I had had a thirteen-month relationship with the piece, much longer than the normal time spent on planning, preparing for, and choreographing work in my previous career as a freelancer. I was grateful for the experience, and certainly sad to see it end, but also full of excitement about the possibilities to come.

Perhaps the greatest lesson I will take away from this experience is that great dance takes time and work. I knew this, of course, but it had never been more apparent to me as it was after *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. The long duration of the process allowed me to work in many drafts, some shown to the public and some shared only with select faculty members and the designers. It was very helpful for me to “purge” each draft; that is, to let whatever we had been working on to that moment out. The dance became more and more real after the showing of each draft. There was something in the act of sharing, and in seeing and hearing how people responded to what I had shared, that helped me to experience and think about the dance in a new way. The end result was a very satisfying final (for now) product of which I was extremely proud.

I will certainly take with me the lesson of working in drafts, with frequent showings for trusted and new audiences alike. I will also remember the importance of both research and autobiography as a pathway to specificity – and good art. The final version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* incorporated themes and stories which

many choreographers have tackled (yes, even romantic relationships!), but I believe it was the careful balance of thorough research into the life and writing of Anne Morrow Lindbergh and the inclusion of my own personal experience that made this work a success. Being able to incorporate particular details about Lindbergh's story and my own gave the audience something to hold onto as they watched the dance, which I believed allowed most viewers to understand and relate to the dance.

The final lesson I will take from this experience is to focus on the process over the final product as often as possible. Seeing the change in the dancers as artists, performers, and people throughout the rehearsal process was more fulfilling for me than the thrill of the actual performance and the warm reception of the audience afterwards. It was during the process that I realized that I find my true joy as an educator, and that role can influence all aspects of my dance career. Through careful planning and creatively incorporating holistic methods into the rehearsal process, I was able to teach the dancers as we worked to create the piece. I hope to apply similar methods in other choreographic situations whenever possible.

The dancers provided valuable feedback throughout the process. After the performance, I asked the cast for a more formal write up of their experience. Ellen Clark, a University of Maryland sophomore, also picked up on the importance of drafting and research. She wrote:

“While working with you on the thesis performance, I was very intrigued by the way material was so frequently generated, added, then finally discarded, moved, or changed. Actually being part of the process first hand made me realize how much the creation of a dance piece was similar to writing and revising a paper! It was exciting for me to reflect back on the final product and actually see how I, as a dancer, contributed to it. I also enjoyed learning

about the ways in which the research inspiration of Anne Morrow Lindbergh was utilized and evolved as the "meaning" behind the piece. My time working with you on "Like a Unicorn in Captivity" has been one of the most fun and memorable experiences in my college career."

Ebony McSwain, a 2012 Maryland alumnae, pointed out that sometimes during the process my care and concern for the well-being and comfort of the cast went beyond what was necessary, stating:

"I felt more connected to the dance because of the journaling and explorations we did; I didn't feel like just a dancer in your piece. I also liked the atmosphere you created for this project. It was a calm yet productive environment where we could take our time learning and perfecting everything, while still making good use of our time and having fun. The only thing I would say is to not doubt yourself and to not be afraid to try even the most ridiculous things out on your dancers. There were some times when you seemed more concerned about our well-being than what your dance needed; and, although I appreciated your genuine interest in us as dancers and people, I know for me, I was willing to do anything you asked or needed me to do."

Emilie Davignon, also a sophomore dance major, wrote about the collaborative nature of the creative process and its capacity to create change on many levels. She wrote:

"Working on this thesis was a much more collaborative process than I am used to. Under normal circumstances, I am extremely uncomfortable with the idea of choreographing, but the group and the exercises that we did together immediately transformed our rehearsals into a safe space where I could feel comfortable opening myself up and putting forth ideas. I feel blessed to have had the chance to work on this piece because I enjoyed every moment of the process and I learned much more about myself and the choreographic process than I could have anticipated when I first began working on it over a year ago."

As I move on to new professional endeavors, I hope to find ways to revive *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. While there will be many difficulties in remounting the piece, specifically in finding appropriate sets, props, costumes, and a scrim on a minimal budget, I do hope that I will be able to present the large-scale version of the

work again at various venues. To that end, I am working to learn as much as possible about the art of theatrical projection so that I may properly restage and perhaps even improve the media materials used in the original version of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity*. I became fascinated with the use of multi-media while working on this piece, and hope to become proficient in the field so that I might incorporate it into revivals and new works in the future.

However, I see smaller-scale versions of the material of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* being effective as well. I have already presented two excerpts from the piece, the “Captivity” section and the “Vivaldi/Double Duets” section. The first was presented on a mixed bill at Publick Playhouse in Cheverly, MD, with dancers from New Street Dance Group stepping into the chorus role to frame the solo movement. I showed the group section as a part of *Bridging*, a repertory concert of my work presented by the College Park Arts Exchange at Old Parish House in College Park. The original cast performed in this concert, for which we had to change the ending of the selection because we did not have use of the chorus’s white desks. Also on the *Bridging* program, I reimagined the “Boyfriend” monologue as an unrelated solo piece, adding a bit of new movement and new music. I could easily see showing *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* as a cabaret-style solo evening of monologues, short dances, and projected text and video.

Creating *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* was both a challenging and rewarding experience. Like the cast, I also grew artistically and personally throughout the process. I learned to work through frustrations and embarrassments, to articulate my creative goals and visions clearly and without remorse, to work with artists from other

disciplines, to dream big but to accept compromise when necessary, to know when to ask for help and advice and when to trust my own gut, and to balance competing professional and personal demands without losing sight of the artistic task at hand. I found renewed confidence in my abilities as a choreographer and performer, and uncovered hidden interests in media design and theatrical writing. I am grateful to the collaborators and all those who guided and supported me throughout the process, and I look forward to the future growth and development of *Like a Unicorn in Captivity* in years to come.

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