

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: JOURNEYING THROUGH  
EXODUS, DISPLACEMENT,  
AND MY CUBAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY:  
THE ODYSSEY OF MAKING AND BECOMING  
*WAKING DARKNESS. WAITING LIGHT.*

Colette Krogol, Master of Fine Arts, 2017

Thesis Directed By: Associate Professor, Patrik Widrig, Dance

*Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* was an evening-length dance/multimedia event performed on October 7-9, 2016, in the Kogod Theatre at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. Created in collaboration with my artistic partner, Matt Reeves, the work explored themes of identity, family, displacement, journeying, and exile through the lens of research into my maternal family's stories of life and exodus from Cuba, as well as investigations into my own identity as a Cuban-American. This paper journeys through the autobiographical research and collaboration process that went into creating *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* Sewn into the fabric of this paper is personal poetry written as part of my creative practice. The performance work and this paper journey between the start of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and present day America.

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by

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## Preface

My maternal family was seven out of over 125,000 Cubans that left Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. Throughout my childhood I heard stories time and time again of life in Cuba, before and during the revolution, as well as countless stories of voyages to America. Being born and raised in Miami, Florida I was surrounded by Cuban exiles and children of Cuban exiles. Their stories quilted together my upbringing, leaving powerful impressions in a child's imagination. Throughout my childhood, I placed myself in these stories. Many of them found themselves in my dreams. At times these stories became vivid memories in my mind where I could not distinguish between truth and fiction. These memories began blurring the line between reality and dream. I myself felt as if I had journeyed through ninety miles of open ocean that separate Cuba from Miami, and swam so far from the Cuban shore with my teenage mother for a taste of freedom. Deep within me I knew I had never been to Cuba and to this day I still have not smelled her air, touched her sands, or walked along El Malecón. However, these stories of daily life, courage, strife, imprisonment, displacement, love, and hope have brought me to the shores of Cuba and back again, time and time again. Throughout the years each telling of a story, has brought me comfort and brought my heart, body, and soul closer to my family and their history. The people and places described in these stories have become a part of me.

What you are about to read offers you a look into the research, creation, and performance process of my MFA Performance thesis work *Waking Darkness*.

*Waiting Light.*, which was performed on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> in the Kogod Theatre at The Clarice Performing Arts Center on the University of Maryland campus, where after years of research and searching for my identity within these stories, I created a world where I can honor my past and find myself.

I must mention that *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* was created in collaboration with Matt Reeves, my husband and artistic partner, who also created this work as part of his culminating thesis research. Like in life, our varied research interests inspired and deeply affected one another and in turn, the creation of this work. Matt has focused his research into dance, dream, and mythology through the work of Joseph Campbell and the theory of monomyth, where all stories come from one universal story. Matt's way of unfolding my family's stories into universal myths and analyzing them through the lenses of dance, dream, and mythology played a vital role in the creation of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* Together, we built a world that was deeply personal and specific to my family's journey from Cuba while also abstract enough to point to ideas that encompass larger themes of humanity such as empathy, loss, hope, survival, and home.

I because we.

If you suffer and I see you suffer, then I suffer too.

If you hold on and I feel you hold on, then I will hold on too.

This is one telling of this story. Although specific in its accounts, it is universal to all who experienced it.

In my telling, words come in waves at times splashing onto the pages as poetry. As you will encounter throughout this paper, poetry has been a vital organ within my lifeline with this material. It has allowed me to find my voice within all of the history and stories. Poetry will at times lead you in or lead you out of sections of writings. I wrote all of the poetry in this paper within the last two years as I searched for the dance within this work.

There are many versions to this story. Here is one.



Photo by Geoff Sheil as part of the series of images from *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*

Nuestro día ya viene llegando.

## Dedication

*Through this...*

*I honor them.*

*I honor my history.*

*And I find myself.*

*This research and work is dedicated to La Familia.*

*Thank you for always sharing our rich history with me, and my younger brother, Brian. These stories, songs, recipes, and traditions will live on inside us for all time.*

*To my dad, for always believing, encouraging, and loving.*

*And Matt, for these past ten or so years of love, artistry, and adventure.*

*TEQ.*

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## ***This Story***

*In this story...*

*In this telling of this story...*

*Time is important.*

*Passage of time is important.*

*The lineage and history is important.*

*Waiting is important.*

*Darkness is important.*

*Light is important.*

*People are important.*

*The original nine are important.*

*Lela (Margarita) is important.*

*Tio Alberto is important.*

*Pa (Julio) is important.*

*Lela (Nilda) is important.*

*Madrina (Nildy) is important.*

*Padrino (Toto/Jesus) is important.*

*Mom (Vicky/Maria) is important.*

*Ito (Aurelio) is important.*

*I am important.*

*The new nine are important.*

*Matt is important.*

*Robin is important.*

*Jonathan is important.*

*Tarythe is important.*

*Robert is important.*

*Connor is important.*

*Mark is important.*

*Jeff is important.*

*Dylan is important.*

*1959 is important.*

*1980 is important.*

*1985 is important.*

*1986 – 2015 is important.*

*2016 is important.*

*2016 is very important.*

*And even after the process ended, the lights went down, and the performances closed, 2016 became even more important, for it brought down the lights on an era, it turned off the lights on a dictator, on the original spirit of the revolution, it closed a chapter in Cuban history, in my family's history, in my history. Meet me in "Versailles."*

## ***CHAPTER 1: Going Back To Move Forward***

*How do you prepare in twenty minutes to leave your home forever?  
What do you hold one last time, When you can't take anything with you?*

*An unsettling franticness erupts.  
The next twenty minutes are the most chaotic our Guanabo home has ever  
experienced.*

*Pacing and Pacing.*

*Racing and Racing.*

*How do you prepare in twenty minutes to leave your home forever?*

*Three officers waiting patiently and impatiently.*

*They had just called seven names.*

*And had just received seven "Yeses".*

*"Tu te quieres ir de Cuba?", "Do you want to leave this country?"*

*How do you prepare in twenty minutes to leave your home forever?*

*Llegaron Tio Alberto y Lela?*

*No, No estan en camino.*

*Mantenganlos ocupados.*

*Pues voy a ver si le puedo regalar el pato a uno de los policias.*

*How do you prepare in twenty minutes to leave your home forever?*

*Eyes locked. Throats closed.*

*Pajamas wrinkled. Hands clasped.*

*My family huddled tightly in the front room of our home.*

*The sun hadn't even risen yet.*

*I still feel my family's courage that morning.*

*The Genesis of Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*

As a Cuban-American artist, my research, creative activity, and ongoing professional development connects deeply to my choreographic and written work into identity as a hyphenated American and living between the lines. My research for the past three years has looked autobiographically into my maternal family's exodus from Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. Although my research stems from a personal place, out of this work flows the universal concepts of the exile experience, displacement, the concept of home, importance of community, immigration/emigration, cultural identity, and space as a container for memories. All these themes sit at the core of my research as an artist.

*La Familia*



From left to right: Lela, my grandmother, Nildy, my Aunt/Godmother, Vicky, my mother, and Pa, my grandfather outside their home in Guanabo, Cuba in 1960.

The earliest inspirations of this work come from my mother and her family, fondly referred to as La Familia. My mother and her family arrived by boat from Cuba in May of 1980. She was part of the “Mariel Boatlift,” a time in history when Cuban President Fidel Castro and American President Jimmy Carter allowed any Cuban exile residing in the United States to drive a boat from Florida into the Mariel Port in Cuba and claim their Cuban families. Those Cuban relatives were then to be set free and able to immigrate into the United States. The personal story of my mother and La Familia’s journey to the United States is described below as I know it. This story has been told to me over the years since I was young and the timeline and feeling of these events would become a pivotal backbone for the development of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*

### The Departure

My mother and her family had no time to pack or prepare that day. The announcement arrived early, around 5am, on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Aurelio Martell, my grandmother’s brother-in-law had rented a boat in Key West and driven the ninety-so miles to the Mariel Port to claim my family in Cuba.

Three armed policemen knocked on the house door in Guanabo, Cuba. They reported that a relative from the United States had arrived to the Mariel Port. My great-grandmother and my grandfather’s brother were sleeping at their apartment in Havana. They weren’t there. As my grandmother distracted the policemen by offering them a live duck, my grandfather ran across the street to call his mother and brother

about the news. They had to come as quickly as possible. They knew the drive itself was twenty minutes. The officers agreed to the duck. My grandmother went off to catch it. My great-grandmother and great uncle arrived. The officer read aloud the list of names that had been given to him at the port and asked each family member to acknowledge themselves when their name was called. My mother and her family stood in a small clump inside the front room of their Guanabo home still in pajamas as the officer stated that each person must answer a question aloud and alone. He called each name and asked them “Do you want to leave this country?” My grandfather was asked first. “Si” (“yes”). My mother when retelling this part always says that the family was ready to repeat whatever my grandfather chose to say. Although, my family didn’t know if they would be taken to the coast by the officers or taken somewhere else, the risk was deemed worthy of a chance at freedom and without much hesitation they all responded with an unsettled but firm “si”.

After being frisked for any extra belongings, they were loaded into a van and taken to a camp on the coast where they awaited their release for five long days until allowed to board the boat and be on their way. As they watched the shoreline recede out of sight, the only home they had ever known vanished on the horizon. They held one another tightly. All of their personal worldly possessions were gone but they had filled all the empty corners inside the boat with their hopes, their dreams of freedom, and their acceptance of the unknown. My mother, my family, and our Cuban history changed forever in that moment.

### Living Hyphenated

When I speak English you do not hear an accent anymore, which was strongly prevalent until I reached seventh grade; I do not have a Spanish sounding last name either so many friends, colleagues, and acquaintances assume that I am not of Hispanic descent. I am of a lighter complexion, although I tan easily, and I have green eyes and light brown hair, which streaks with blonde in the summer time. These traits are actually apparent in both my mother and father.

My father was born in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan in 1960 to a third-generation Scottish-American and a third-generation Polish/Russian-American. He lived in Riverview, Michigan until he graduated from high school. He had grown tired of the cold Michigan winters and as soon as he had the opportunity to, he moved south. He arrived in Miami, Florida in 1982; just two years after my mother and her family had arrived.

### What This Story Means To Me:

This story of my maternal family's exodus from Cuba brings up countless emotions. I find this story to be one of courage, of strength, of loss, of gain, of unity, of triumph, of sadness, of hope, and of freedom. It is essentially a story of family as well. I have heard this story recounted in many ways throughout my lifetime. The more I inquire, the more details and minute-to-minute descriptions I collect. There were seven family members emigrating from Cuba on that day in May. There was my great-grandmother, Lela, who I, unfortunately, never met; my grandfather, Pa; his

brother, Tio Alberto; my grandmother, Lela; my mother, Vicky; and my godparents Nildy (my mother's sister) and Toto (her husband).

The rhythms, sights, and memories of Cuba echo deep within the souls of all who are Cuban. Pride for the Cuban culture is present whether one has actually felt the caress of the warm Cuban breeze, touched *la tierra de mi patria* (the land of my native country), or experienced Cuba through oral storytelling, family traditions, the art of Cuban cooking, and personal photographs. Cuban culture and daily life is heavily surrounded by the sense of family, community, gatherings, stories, songs, and dance. The vibrancy of the Cuban people lives within traditions and the remembering of a time past.

Since 1959, when Fidel Castro overthrew the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship in Cuba and established the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere, thousands upon thousands of Cuban citizens have been fleeing the country in search of freedom. Many of which have made the United States, especially South Florida their displaced home. My family, in particular, settled and found comfort, resources, and a community in Miami, Florida. They, as well as many other Cuban immigrants, have never returned to their Cuba yet their heart still beats to the *tumbadora* drum (Cuban-style drums).

### Influences of Home

Growing up in Miami, Florida I was submerged deeply within my Cuban culture. Because the area had a strong Cuban population, I was surrounded and exposed to various Cuban traditions. I grew up speaking only Spanish until grade

school and the traditions we followed within my household were of my Cuban lineage. The spirit of Cuba flows through my veins. I am Cuban even though I have never seen or touched Cuba. As a first generation Cuban-American, I am proud of my Cuban heritage. I believe it is my responsibility to keep the Cuban culture and traditions alive within my family and for future generations.

Cuban culture is richly embedded in tradition, yet as Cuban exiles continue to make America home, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are continuing to assimilate. The more recent generations appear to be disconnecting from their Cuban culture as they become further influenced by modern-day American life. American-born Cubans also grow up learning and taking pride in the American traditions, songs, and historical stories as well as the Cuban ones. This creates a divide within generations where the importance of culture and language is spread out and influenced by media, friendships, and education. The Spanish language as a form of communication between families is also being lost, meanwhile being replaced by broken Spanglish. Interests in other societal and generational activities such as American movies, sports, and the Internet are taking precedence within a Cuban household. Also, as more families become culturally woven together, cultural trends get blended and in some extreme cases forgotten. This dilution of a culture is a situation that I am experiencing firsthand within branches of my own family and I see it occurring in other culturally diverse homes as well.

My parents make me half Cuban, half American. However, I connect 100% with both my Cuban heritage and my American heritage. Growing up in Miami, Florida submerged me deep within my Cuban culture. It surrounded and exposed me

in various ways to my own Cuban traditions. I grew up speaking only Spanish until grade school and the traditions we followed within my household were of my Cuban lineage. As a first generation Cuban-American, I am proud of my Cuban heritage. I believe it is my responsibility to keep the Cuban culture and traditions alive within my family and for future generations.

In 2014, when I started graduate school, I began to work on a series of research and dance investigations that allowed me to dive into my Cuban identity. I began to ask, what does it mean to be Cuban? What remains in the blood and DNA of a child of a Cuban exile? Did these stories and journeys get passed to me while I was developing inside my mother? Were they a part of my makeup by the time I was born? Is that why I see them so vividly? This research has given me the time to explore further my Cuban culture and identity. I can ask what does it mean to be Cuban? What values, traditions, and beliefs are important to preserve? What happens to a culture that is displaced? This research allowed me to start comparing from generation to generation what was being passed on and what was being lost, and how stories continue to disintegrate and decompose as years continue to pass. Time is an interesting factor within my research and in the creation of this work. Time changes the ability of remembering details, and so specificity of stories especially in my grandmother's generation shifts and gets boiled down to the essential moments. Only what has been engraved into their subconscious remains.

Taking time to hear their stories from their homes in Guanabo, Havana, and Pinar Del Rio, the start of Castro's communistic agenda and his effect on my family, their exodus from Cuba and the life they rebuilt in the United States and many

moments in between started to deeply inform and further reveal to me my Cuban identity. That allowed me to access new avenues to share stories and create work about Cuba and its impact on my family and my life. As hard as it is for me to say this, I know it is true: I would have never been born if Castro had not come into power. This thought has fueled me to passionately research my family, their stories, and their exodus, and in turn research and further discover my Cuban-American identity.

In the process of reflecting on my heritage, I realized that storytelling had been an impactful part of my childhood and one of my deepest connections to Cuba. The vivid storytelling allowed me to imagine, and in my mind see, the Cuba that to this day I have never truly seen. There are certain stories of triumph, of escape, of surrender, of love, of sadness, of friends, of family that are told time and time again and have gained importance within my own family. Stories and memories of a time past have become an open channel for my family to access their beautiful Cuba. Stories give room for remembering, coping, healing, and re-engaging with their past. It connects my family to one another. What are the stories that are remembered? What are the stories that have been forgotten? By whom? The re-telling of these stories is the preservation of the memory, of a time many years ago in their homeland of Cuba.

Cuban culture and traditions are openly and socially celebrated within my family. There is a great sense of community where the good of all is the good of one and the fall of one is the fall of all. My family has a deep interconnected rope that binds us together that has remained resilient at its core with the eldest generation and

has continued intertwining all the way down to its youngest members. Everyone always knows everything, which could be viewed as invasive, yet there is always support and assistance whenever called upon. This unity was an integral component within *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light*. Matt and I always said to the other two performers (or family members) before a run of the work that more than anything “Take care of one another.” This sense of unity found its way into the choreography, the themes, and the design of this work.

### The Things We Carry

The topic of Cuba and the diaspora and displacement of her people is complex in nature. Since the start of the revolution in 1959, Cuban people have flooded out of Cuba in search of freedom and in turn their stories have flooded into the pages of books, articles, movie screens, webpages, and more. Each story is unique and distinctive in its own right. Yet all stories deal with the search and discovery of Cuban Identity, Family, Exile and what was left behind, and at times deal with the idiosyncratic culture and traditions (“recipes”) that make the Cuban culture what it is. Commonalities coursing through most of the literature that I have come across are dealing with storytelling, shared journeys, and moments lost in time.

As the research continued to evolve, more discoveries and revelations occurred within the scope of personal and family identity. From the beginning, my hope was that as I continue to uncover and document more on my Cuban cultural heritage, I could open the scope of my project to find universal similarities, while still honoring the differences, within other exile cultures and their traditions.



This photo was taken during the celebration of my grandfather, Pa's birthday at my grandmother, Lela's house circa 2008. Within this photo are the three generations of family members that I am doing my research on. Going from left to right: My godparents, Toto (white shirt) and Nildy (black shirt), my mother, Vicky (peeking from behind the group), myself, Colette, hugging my godmother and grandfather, in front of the group is the celebrated birthday boy, my grandfather, Pa, directly behind him my grandmother, Lela, next to her my brother, Brian (yellow shirt), and the other man sitting at the table is Aurelio Martell, my grandmother's brother-in-law and where this entire research began. He courageously rented the boat and went to the Mariel Bay to collect my family back in May of 1980.

### *My Artistic Identity*

I live to create full-embodied visual landscapes through the lens of dance, film, and design. My passion for movement was awakened in me at a very young age. I was encouraged and supported, and this enthusiasm translated into a love for dreaming, directing, teaching, and investigating new ideas with community. As an artist and human being, community is vital. It informs and is integral to my work. Most times, it is the work.

With every new choreographic process or teaching practice I begin, my ultimate goal is to create a lab-like environment, rich in risk-taking and experimentation. Part of my artistic philosophy is “Let's be off our legs to find them. Let's be on our hands to discover right side up.” That investigative risk is what's interesting. This mantra enters all of my creative endeavors. Whether I am in a classroom, studio, editing room, or designing projections, I encourage my students, my collaborators, and myself to break out of our tendencies or places of comfort, so that we can spiral sideways into new corners of our bodies and minds. This is how I make art. This is how my students honestly excel. This is how my collaborators bring new ideas to the space. This is how we all, myself included, continue to grow. I strongly believe that I need to be in a constant state of growth and questioning to reignite my desires to teach and create. Allowing my work to flourish in a lab-like environment provides the community in the room the opportunity to think independently under the umbrella of the original concept.

I have passionately begun to view this lab-like environment as a “creative city.” Where if an outside observer were to zoom in they would come across a network of artists fostering a creative culture fiercely rooted in collaboration, inspiration, and innovation. This is how I make art.

My work is cyclonic. It draws people in. My choreography fuses together my conservatory style dance training rooted deep in the classics with my passion for the contemporary and the abstract. Creating complex performances, which weave together the rawness of the human body in motion through virtuosic and bombastic

choreography with the subtlety and nuance of the everyday, my work reveals and conceals. It pulls the viewer in.

For the past ten years, I have shared this creative process with my husband, Matt Reeves. Jointly we are the Artistic Directors of Orange Grove Dance (OGD), a multi-media dance company that creates athletic visual experiences through the lens of dance, film, and design. We set forth to create a company that supported our impassioned vision of creating work, whether for live performance, film, or exhibition, in this synergetic way. The mission of Orange Grove Dance is to engage our collaborators and audiences in a world that is fresh and absorbing. In turn making our artistic work compelling and provocative. We reimagine space and architecture through movement, technology, and design to immerse our audiences into a newfound landscape. Although Matt and I approach new projects from completely different entry points, these differences become strengths, heightening the creative work. This modality gives us the ability to soar, weave, and expand as we develop.

My work and daily life are one and the same. They enrich and supplement each other. This intertwining of creative practice and personal life allows me to find balance and totality. I am a dreamer and an artist. I love to connect. I live to create.



Myself circa 2006. Even to this day I feel this image captures my true essence.

### *History of Creating Work With Matt Reeves*

Matt Reeves and I met as undergraduate dance majors at the University of Florida in fall of 2003. For the next two years we shared classes, textbooks, projects, and stages connecting us as friends and artists. In the fall of 2005, I approached Matt with interest of creating a duet, unsure of much more than that. We spent countless hours in dance studio spaces and on front porches researching and finally completing

a work titled *I am; choices.*, where the audience prior to the performance fills out an index card that gets added to the work. Every time we performed it the prior index cards were shuffled in with the new grouping, slowly accumulating alongside the history of the work. *I am; choices.* was the work that catapulted us into twelve years of making work together. The concept of shuffling has become an important metaphor as we have continuously shuffled our lives and our ideas together, just like we did before every performance of *I am; choices.* For us, at the time the unknown was important, the collection of thoughts beyond our own, the history that continues with us as we continue the work, and the choice making by the audience and ourselves. We have kept those 500 or so index cards throughout the years and throughout the moves. They are part of our creative making history. Now that I am able to reflect back, I realize that Matt and Colette back then were embarking on a journey of research interests that are still deeply relevant to us as artists now.

In 2007, after graduating with our undergraduate degrees, Matt and I formed Orange Grove Dance. We were about to move to New York City and we knew, as we pondered the name for our duet dance company that we needed to remember our roots, and our lineage. We are both from Florida. Matt is from Tallahassee and I am from Miami. Those two cities are vastly different in population make-up, terrain, proximity to water, prevalent languages spoken, etc. But the one thing that anchored us both to the state was our love of the citrus groves in Florida, specifically orange groves.

With that Orange Grove Dance began, with a suitcase and memories. For the following 10 years, Matt and I created works both for stage and for film, as well as

travelled for residencies around the world – teaching, directing, and choreographing. When graduate school at the University of Maryland presented itself as an opportunity, we both applied and began the same year, Fall of 2014. We excitedly took the time throughout this three-year program to profoundly research ourselves as individuals, and our current interests. Collaborations and outside professional engagements continued as part of Orange Grove Dance, but within the university we dug deep into our research points. I spiraled fast and hard into autobiographical work about my maternal family’s history with exodus, displacement, emigration, and in turn my identity as a Cuban-American. Matt dove deeper into his work with Joseph Campbell, monomyth, and dream, dance, and mythology. When it came time to create our thesis, our culminating project in Graduate School, Matt and I thought what an interesting challenge it would be, as we are set to depart this chapter of our lives, to fuse back together all of our gained knowledge and research, and create one culminating work in full collaboration with one another. So the first seedling of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* was born from 2.5 years of research that had woven past one another and splintered back off. What an unknown. It harked back on our younger selves in 2005, knowing we wanted to collaborate to make something but having to discover it together.



Image taken circa 2005 during a performance of *I am; choices*.

## ***CHAPTER 2: Describing The Work***

### *The Essentials*

*Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* is a sixty-minute multi-media, evening length dance work created in collaboration with Matt Reeves, consisting of four performers, a wooden ladder, a rusty bicycle set in a wooden stand, four sets of moveable structures made of metal cans that serve as lighting instruments (the can lights), an immersive projection design landscape, a heart-pounding sound score, and a bare Kogod Theatre space with risers on one side of the black box space for audience to sit.

**Program Note for Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.**

*This piece speaks to the recurring dreams that tear through our homes awakening us from our sleep. Not necessarily nightmares but dreams, vivid ones. We can always find the taste in our mouths and the smell in our lungs for hours afterwards. These dreams are our bridge to the stories that we have been told since we were young and the places we've never touched.*

*We would like to invite you into the dark and into the places we don't always see but often times feel.*

*We invite you to wait, patiently and impatiently.  
We invite you to wait and then continue to wait.*

*We have waited for 55 years.  
We wait for others.  
We wait for help.  
We wait to come.  
We wait to return.  
We wade in the water.  
We wait.  
And will continue to wait.  
And still nothing*

*We are the dreams.  
We are the weight.  
We are the bearers.  
We are...  
Nadando y Nadando to another place...  
Another place...  
I remember...*

The Kogod space was struck of all soft goods. There were no black curtains or wings. The space was used in its barest form, exposing the maroon colored cement walls, the industrial grid above, and all of the bolts and pipes that were designed into the original architecture. What the audience did not know when walking in and taking their seats was that the space also held six projectors that would serve as another performer throughout the work adding content and information to the three walls as well as the floor.

The ladder and bicycle, which were set up in a rather unassuming way (the ladder was propped up against the back wall and the bicycle standing up front stage left in its stand) were rigged with sensor devices that at pivotal moments within the work were activated by the performers. Each rung of the ladder had a sensor strip attached to it that when touched would either initiate a projection cue or would affect the sound emanating in the space. For instance as the performer touches each rung of the ladder climbing higher, the frequency of the sounds accompanying each rung heightens. The result is that as the performer ascends the sound does as well. The bicycle had sensors attached to its back tire that would calculate the speed at which the performer was riding by measuring the tire's rotations. The speed of the performers pedaling would affect the speed at which the projection content could be played through the space.

This sensor technology used within the design of this work served a specific purpose beyond the impressive novelty of its' function. Although this work was technologically elaborate in its design, the purpose of the technology was to further the mission of revealing the human experience by allowing the performers to interact

with the design elements in the space. It made the dancers sensitive to the props, space, projections, and sound while it likewise made the props, space, projections, and sounds sensitive to the dancers touch and effort. At times the performers controlled the space, and at other moments the space controlled them. This relationship allowed key essential themes to shine through:

The trials and tribulations of change.

The wear of journeying.

The exhaustion of displacement

That through it all, it boils down to family, to taking care of one another.

At the core of this work is hope, determination, and the need for community.

*Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* takes the audience through a journey of holding on, falling through, letting go, and colliding as they experience four performers moving through the space yearning to remember.

### *The Experience*

The dance begins at the end of a long journey. The large loading dock door on stage right begins to open, and a sliver of intense bright light pierces the space.

Through the widening shaft of light, four performers – Robin, Jonathan, Colette, and Matt – enter, each carrying one of the metal can structures on their shoulders. Their clothes are sun-beaten and worn. The endless shaft of light they enter in from stretches back to a different life unseen by the audience. It is a surreal moment of the past being summoned into the present, of ‘55 years of waiting’ being carried into the Kogod Theatre. They pause mid step and solemnly place their can structures on the ground. As they stand facing the audience the door begins to close behind them. The

light disappears and darkness seals the space holding the audience and performers in its empty hollow grasp.

For the next fifty-five minutes the dancers find themselves falling, colliding, missing, yearning, holding, waiting, searching, reaching, controlling, suspending, pulling, embracing, grabbing, grabbing tighter, slipping, climbing, affecting, pounding, walking, waking, supporting, holding up and pushing down, looking, pressing, merging, rolling, lifting, releasing, letting go, pulling, and dragging their bodies through the space.

Early on in the performance Robin, Jonathan, Colette, and Matt move with complete abandon as they urgently “prepare in twenty minutes to leave their home forever.” Their gestures are frantic and desperate leading their bodies in multiple directions at once. Running out of time waves of light flash over them in the dark crashing them to the ground. The space, the darkness, and the circumstances make the performers lose one another, and in the separation you feel a great distance.

In another moment, Colette descends the ladder. There she reunites with Robin whose body has washed up at the feet of the ladder’s small shore. Colette is seen pulling the lifeless body of Robin out of the water at first but they both eventually hold on tight to each other as they reach the top. A final hand of Colette reaches the top rung of the ladder and casts the space into darkness. They wait...patiently and impatiently...they wait for the light to pass.

A climactic, pivotal moment occurs during a duet between Colette and Matt. It is a final love letter to Cuba. A strong warm light from above carves through the darkness and holds the space for them to dance. Matt enters into the light and

embraces Colette's hands to his forehead. This is a final farewell. Colette and Matt move through an entangled, passionate, and virtuosic duet. They move together knowing she (Cuba) will always be desired and she will always be loved. Traces of lifting, holding, swirling, missing, connecting, and touching are found bouncing back and forth between Matt and Colette's bodies. These two performers are deeply in love but it is a love in which you must say goodbye. With the passing of time, the duet transforms from patient and loving, to dire and gut-wrenching. The movement quickens and becomes desperate. Matt slips out of Colette's grip one final time and falls to the floor. A line of projection light is drawn between them and it gradually pushes them apart. Separation has occurred once again.

After sixty minutes the performance ends like it started, at the beginning of a long journey. It ends with a final moment of separation. 'The past', 'those we loved', and 'those we lost' are represented by Robin, Jonathan, and Matt as they leave Colette behind in a circular pool of projection light. They disappear one by one looking back at the circle, which is the memory of an island, they once new as home. Instead of the past pouring into the space through a shaft of light this time it floats out of sight into the darkness through the can lights. Colette watches as the three performers disappear into darkness one by one. The distance of more than ninety miles is felt. She decides to step out of the island of light towards a light fading out in the distance. As she steps out, the island begins to fade away leaving her in complete darkness. Walking. Waiting.



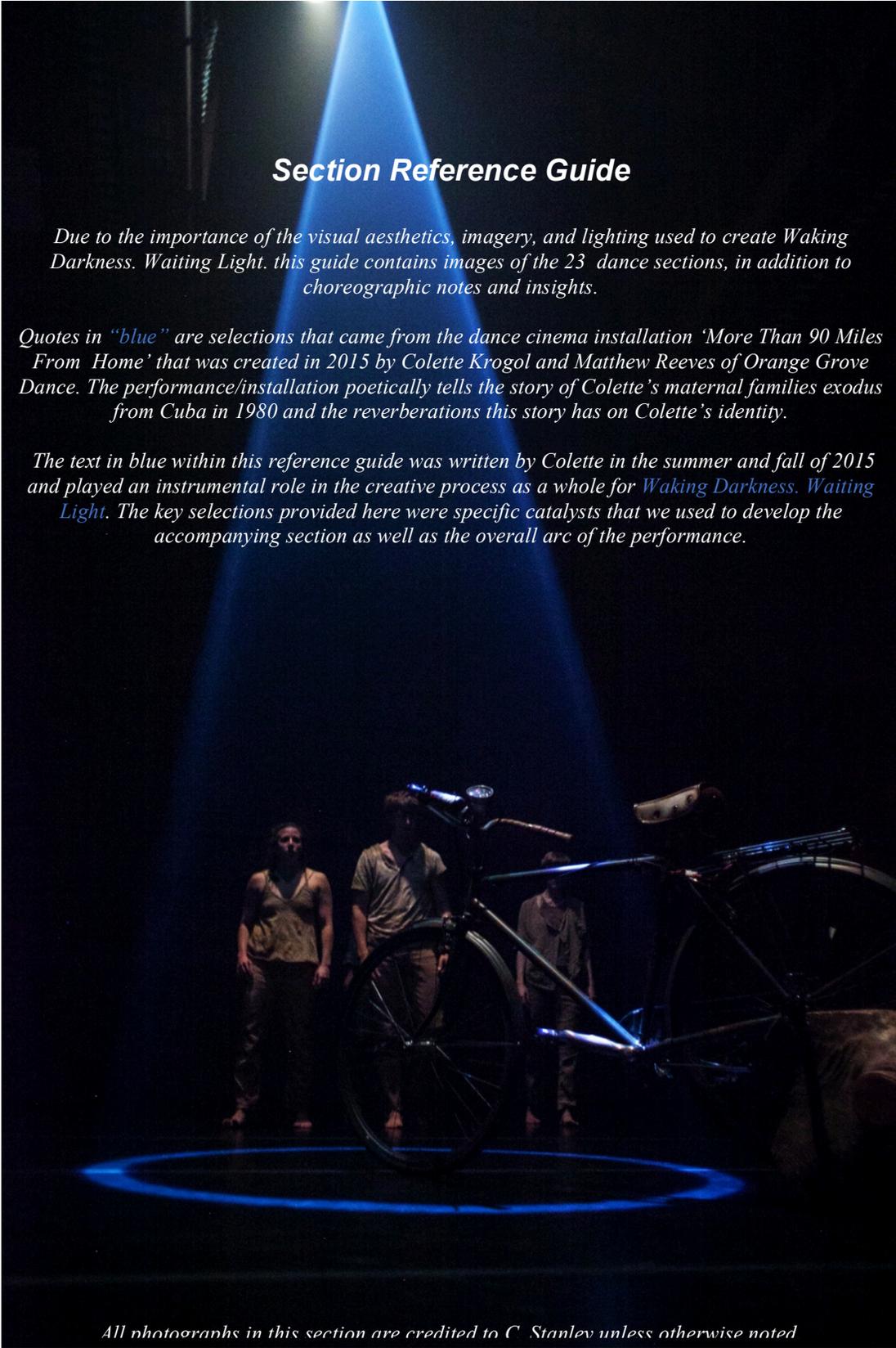
Poster advertisement for our show, created by The Clarice Performing Arts Center marketing staff. Image taken by Geoff Sheil

## Reference Guide To The Choreography

### **Images & Sections From The Choreographer/ Performer Perspective**

The purpose of this section is to act as a reference guide allowing the reader into the mind space of the choreographers and performers. The section uses headings as the choreographers referred to them during the rehearsal and design process. The work journeyed through twenty-three sections in total for *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* which were distinct in their tone and intention but to the audience flowed directly from one to another. In order to efficiently move back and forth through the work all collaborators involved used this specific language to speak with each other. This section sketches the twenty-three sections using a storyboard type approach by including a photo characteristic of the mood/quality of the section, along with some written description.

This reference guide was created in collaboration with Matt. As both of our thesis papers reflect and respond to the creative process of the same work, we decided it would be best to create one anchoring section that would be the same in both papers. This is that section. This section guide was the melting pot of our collaboration. This is the way we construct the work. We visually needed to see the sections and have the language speak to our designers.



## Section Reference Guide

*Due to the importance of the visual aesthetics, imagery, and lighting used to create *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*. this guide contains images of the 23 dance sections, in addition to choreographic notes and insights.*

*Quotes in “blue” are selections that came from the dance cinema installation ‘More Than 90 Miles From Home’ that was created in 2015 by Colette Krogol and Matthew Reeves of Orange Grove Dance. The performance/installation poetically tells the story of Colette’s maternal families exodus from Cuba in 1980 and the reverberations this story has on Colette’s identity.*

*The text in blue within this reference guide was written by Colette in the summer and fall of 2015 and played an instrumental role in the creative process as a whole for *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*. The key selections provided here were specific catalysts that we used to develop the accompanying section as well as the overall arc of the performance.*

*All photographs in this section are credited to C. Stanley unless otherwise noted*

## 1. Establishing Neutral (Preshow)

*A neutral starting point was necessary in order to transform the space for the audience and the performance. We created a baseline of experience that would appear mundane and unimpressive. The space needed to feel ordinary and almost forgotten. Key props were already in the space.*

- *A ladder left in the space.*
- *A can catching water dripping from the ceiling.*
- *A rusty bike appearing to grow out of a stump. This would be more interesting but the unshaped lighting of the space makes it appear flat and ordinary.*



Photos are stills from video by Paul Jackson

## 2. Calling Of The Bike

*Like a droplet of water, light drops and circles the bicycle. The first pools of movement are seen here in the still waters of the mind. This leads to a hurricane of clouds, light, and movement, tracing and filling the space. This idea builds until it is vacuumed out of the space in a bright flash of light leaving everything black.*

*The water came crashing in.*



Photos are stills from video by Geoff Sheil

### 3. Falling Into The Abyss

*Setting the tone for what won't be seen, as well as what will be seen. It was very important to plunge the audience into darkness so that the next moment of light would feel intense and blinding. High contrast was a specific lighting goal of the piece, and just like establishing the neutrality of the space during the preshow, it was important to set the ranges of dark and light at the beginning of the show.*

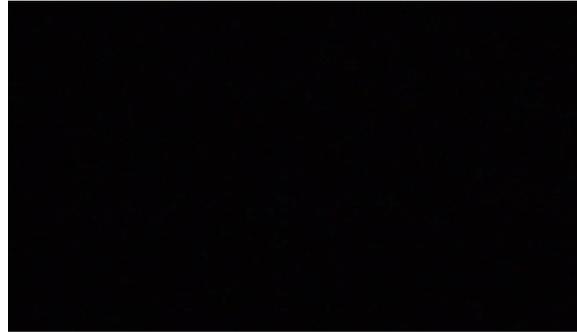


Photo is a still from video by Geoff Sheil

### 4. Assembly

*(AKA The Entrance and Emerging From The Light.)*

*Once the space was dark for a minimum of 15 seconds, the door was then opened and light poured through. This is the first entrance of the performers. First Robin, then Jonathan, then Colette, and finally Matt. Once we all entered and set down our cans Matt went and pulled the chain down on the Elephant Door closing it vertically as the Sound Door closed horizontally. Sealed into the space the performers begin the slow assembly phrase to the upstage right corner of the space.*



Photo is a still from video by Geoff Sheil

### 5. Kicking Up The Dust

*First Sounds of Ticking.*

*Tick...Tick...Tick...*

*This is a key moment where performers transform the space. Pedestrian movements now grow into dynamic dancing. The dancing feels like a conjuring up of the past. The movement is repetitive and shifts from side to side as the space fills with haze. The hazing of the space added particles to the air, which makes this once empty space feel charged with energy and possibilities that were not apparent before.*



### 6. The Storm

*(AKA Hurricane/Flood)*

*This section is derived from Colette's poetry and her story of waking up when a window broke in her grandparents' bedroom during a hurricane. We used projections of waves and interrupted movement phrases to wash and toss our bodies through the space. Water washes over the dancers transforming them into the "four recurring dreams that awaken" the show from sleep.*



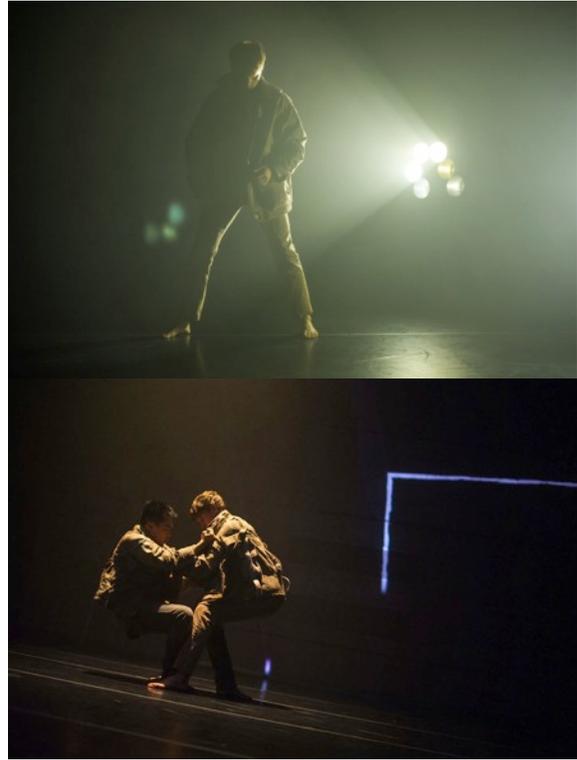
Photo is a still from video by Geoff Sheil

## 7. Ito Reunion (Brothers Pulled Apart)

*ITO Reunion/ Two Generations Of Exiles  
(Matt & Jonathan Duet)*

*Ito is Colette's great uncle that went to retrieve the family from Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift. He was actually left behind trying to retrieve family members and had to reunite with the family days later. As the can-lights ominously approached, this section started with a Matt solo that evolved into a duet. Matt crashes, falls, surrenders, and reaches out into the dark. Finally another body steps out of the dark and they embrace like brothers that haven't seen each other for many years.*

*This duet's physical actions represented moments of reuniting and being pulled apart. It focused on the struggle of holding on and moving with and through each other. The coats on the dancers become vital in this section as they were pulled upon to hold the dancers' weight.*

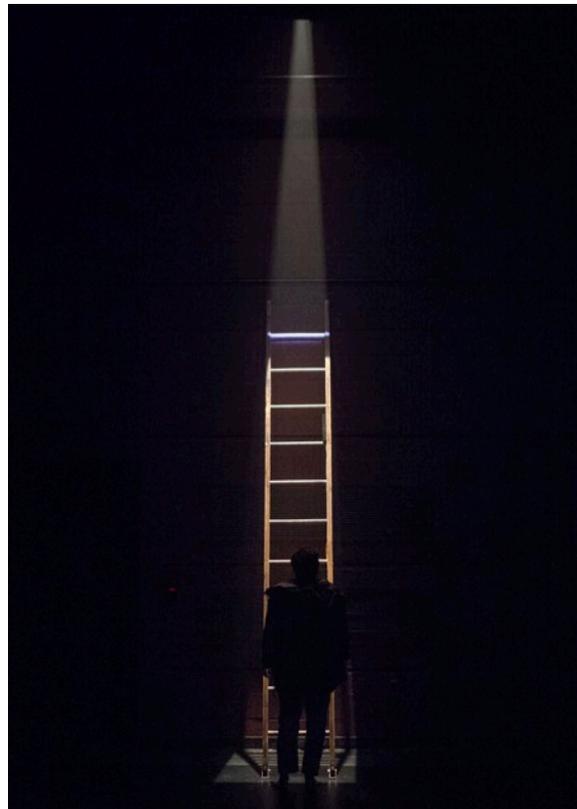


## 8. Calling Of The Ladder (A Window Home)

*"The Ladder is our bridge to the stories that we have been told since we were young and the places we've still never touched."*

*This is quoted from Colette's poetry and story. Instead of using the word dream we made the ladder the dream that would be our bridge.*

*This image starts in darkness. A single rung of the ladder is illuminated calling Colette to climb up and touch it. As she touches it a memory is released into the space. The ocean waves...a woman on the shore.*



## 9. Pulling The Sons Of Cuba Home/ Bodies Rolling

*"The beach waits to say goodbye to more of her children only to see some wash back ashore."*

*When Colette releases the ladder rung the memory/video of the space starts to slowly decay. Jonathan and Matt start rolling. Robin and Colette start reeling the bodies back home. It's the image of mothers pulling their sons' bodies back home.*



## 10. Wall Duets (The Pressure of Living)

*The pressure of living.*

*Matt and Jonathan push Colette and Robin upward and they walk across the wall and back down. Tableaus of longing, love, and loss take place as the wall continues to finally decay/ dissolve away.*

*These duets deal with pressure and time. It takes pressure to keep Robin and Colette's bodies firmly grounded to the wall. The pressure can crush you or you can use it to walk up and over the space.*

*The projections emphasize time. They are actually distorted video recordings of the dancers performing the duets, which means the dancers are dancing with a past version of themselves doing the same material. This creates a sense of chasing or leading memories as the dancers move just out of sync with themselves.*



## 11. Calling Of The Bike 2

*The island of the bike calls the performers to it. This is a glimpse of the exit and climax later to come. Repeating this element gives a sense of the performers' fate.*

*Performers walking slowly downstage towards the bike. A small memory of the final quartet affects their progression downstage. Slowly they arrive at the cone of light surrounding the bike. Just when it seems like they might cross into the light it disappears.*



## 12. Searchlight

*"Waiting patiently and impatiently. Waiting for the light to pass. Oscuridad. Darkness. Now.*

*Swimming and Swimming... Leaving the shore. Swimming and Swimming.... Leaving her behind. Swimming and Swimming.... A fin rises up beside him, me. Swimming and Swimming side by side with the revolution. Nadando y Nadando.*

*Swimming and Swimming... If it's a shark I'm dead. If it's a dolphin it means no sharks. Swimming and Swimming... The fin stays with me till the end. No sharks tonight except the searchlights that pulled me back home. Manolo fué capturado y fué a la carcel. Manolo fué capturado y fué a la carcel. Manolo was captured and sent to prison."*

*This section starts with a rigorous, driving, contained march that the quartet eventually breaks out of, and then they are cast into survival mode as their bodies flash in the dire presence of the searchlights flashing in the space.*



### 13. Calling Of The Ladder 2 (Diving Into The Still Water)

*All rungs of the ladder light up. Colette goes behind the ladder. Four rungs remain lit. As Colette grabs each rung a body falls into the water (back wall projection).*



*Colette climbs the ladder again for a final rung. This time the ladder rung activates projection searchlights emanating from the bodies on the ground. Colette climbs down the ladder and begins pulling Robin's body by her jacket. Robin and Colette ascend back up the ladder.*



### 14. Calling Of The Bike 3

*Fate interrupts again. The calling of what is to come interrupts this memory and moment of reflection. The well drop sound and the circle of light call out in the darkness.*



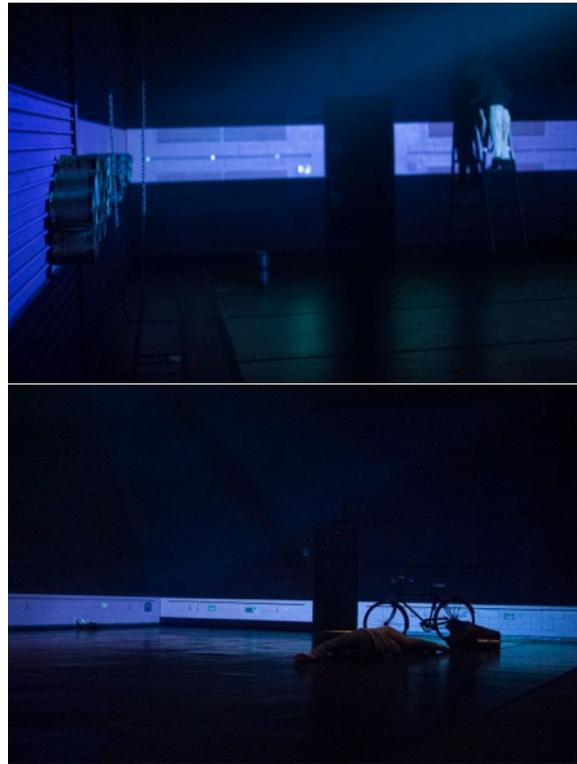
Photo is a still from video by Paul Jackson

## 15. Waiting...

*"Waiting patiently and impatiently. Waiting for the light to pass."*

*Waiting is a main theme of WDWL that was revealed in different moments. This particular section forced performer and audience to wait for the light to pass. A light bar slowly revealed itself from the ceiling and scanned the space at a consistent pace over the course of 3 minutes. It was accompanied by the sound of a slow ticking watch whose space between ticks grew slightly longer over the course of the 3 minutes.*

*Goals here were to make the audience wait...so many thoughts and questions can arrive in this slowed down space of the mind with seemingly so little happening. Robin and Colette are eventually revealed holding on to each other on the ladder in the dark. Holding. Waiting.*



## 16. Lifted Out Of The Waves. Waves Into The Light.

*Robin and Colette descend the ladder and begin a slow migration to stage-right.*

*Jonathan slowly rises out of the waves and collects Matt's body so they can both stand together. Gestures and a walking pattern are then performed in unison; recollecting moments from Matt's earlier solo within the 'Ito Reunion/ Brothers Pulled Apart' section that was performed in front of the can-lights.*

*All four dancers slowly make their way into a line to the far stage-right wall, each with a can-light facing back at them from the wall.*



Photo is a still from video by Geoff Sheil

## 17. Assembly 2

*"Yo me recuerdo...I remember...  
Yo me recuerdo...I remember...  
Yo me recuerdo...I remember..."*

*The ticking motif from the beginning of the show reemerges.*

*This section repeats the earlier walking phrase from the 'Assembly' section at the beginning of the show but this time the audience is exposed to the material from the profile view of the dancers. Instead of calling the audience to come with them, they are gesturing solely to the light to come with them.*

*The dancers break their assembled formation leaving Colette behind to start the phrase material from 'Kicking Up The Dust,' this time alone.*

*Matt, Jonathan, and Robin begin removing can-lights from the wall and walking backwards across the space leaving Colette behind.*



## 18. Colette Solo/Searchlight Solo

*Colette reprises 'Kicking Up The Dust' into a series of phrases that were created with 55 gestures in response to her mother's experience of the 55 years since the Cuban Revolution. Jonathan, Robin, and Matt create a moving landscape of light with the three can-lights. Colette is exposed from different angles by the three lights and as she moves she is often momentarily cast into darkness.*

*The final moment finds Colette backlit by three can-lights and caught up in intense ticking/banging music.*

*The flashes of the memories are overwhelming her. A brief moment of heavy celebration and the difficulty of trying to remember while still moving to the pulse of life. This is felt in the small shifts of hips and salsa rhythms found in Colette's movement.*



## 19. He Venido. A Love Letter To Cuba

*Last Love Letter To Cuba. One Story Becomes Two.*

*The words of the song He Venido, performed by Los Zafiros, ring true in this moment.*

### **SPANISH**

*He venido a decirte  
que te sigo queriendo.  
He venido a decirte  
que te sigo amando.*

### **ENGLISH**

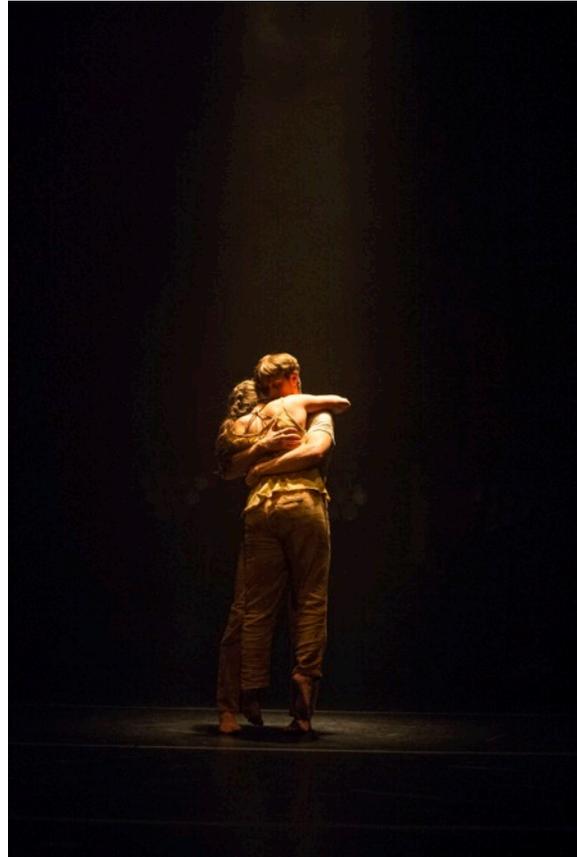
*I have come to tell you.  
That I continue to want you.  
I have come to tell you.  
That I continue to love you.*

*The slow crashing of Colette's hands into Matt's head is a moment of taking her story and embracing it as his own.*

*The duet is intimate and is about saying goodbye. Goodbye to Cuba. Goodbye to "tierra de su patria." Saying goodbye to the only home you have ever known and loved.*

*Time is used as a challenge within the confines of the choreography. Matt and Colette perform a sequence of material with time to embrace and take care of each other. The sequence of dancing is then forced to repeat but this time they are forced to perform it much faster than appears comfortable, which leads to desperate embraces and slipping/falling away from each other.*

*How do you prepare in twenty minutes to leave your home forever?*



## 20. The Divide

*A moment of the great divide; Distancia Infinita.*

*“90 miles separate the Cuban coast from Key West. Ninety miles of darkness, hope, waiting, and light. In here, those 90 miles could be ninety thousand.*

***Distancia infinita.***

*Because that water that is there, separating one from the other is something that if you touch it, it will break your heart, your courage, everything you believe.”*



Photo is a still from video by Geoff Sheil

## 21. 55 Years In 5 Minutes

*Matt rides the bike through 55 years in five minutes. This crumbles the world (which is the space of the Kogod Theatre) and breaks it. Colette, Robin, and Jonathan walk slowly from the back to the front of the space.*

*This is a pinnacle moment of the journey. Leaving and there is no turning back. The projection and sound design here accumulated media to feel like 55 years had culminated in 5 minutes. It feels fast and slow simultaneously as the projections spiral through a high volume of footage yet the dancers walk slowly in the face of this footage.*



## 22. The Other Side/ Ladder Duet

*The world is changed and broken. The performers must find a way to start everything over. The same elements in the room must find a new way to be used as their old potential and purposes are forever changed. The ladder becomes the driving force of this section as it supports and divides the dancers in the center of the space rather than being propped against the wall.*

*The ladder serves as a shelter, a restraint, a vehicle, a frame, and a foundation.*



### 23. Distancia Infinita

*Carrying what you can.  
Remembering the island.*

*A diagonal quartet takes place, performing phrases referred to as the 'Exodus Phrases.' This moment was alluded to early in the show at the first calling of the bike, but now it is happening in its full effect.*

*"And with that my family watched the twinkling lights of Cuba fade away in the distance. Only left with each other, the darkness of the night, and the few twinkling stars reflecting off the water."*

*What are the things we carry?  
Something is lost. Something is left behind.*



## ***CHAPTER 3: The Creative Journey***

### *Finding The Dance*

Miriam Phillips, University of Maryland Assistant Professor in Dance, asks me the question “Where is the dance?” It is fall of 2014. I have just presented my first layer of research to my DANC600 class, which Miriam is leading. My research is already personal, deep, and covering the topics of identity, exodus, displacement, family, stories, and home. However, movement, dance is nowhere to be found. As this is a course for my Master in Fine Arts in Dance, embodied research is encouraged as a form of research. My research is currently unfolding and restricted to text, in paragraph form. A visual image or photograph appears here and there. Movement, authentic movement in regards to this research is not emerging. Miriam is incredibly patient but thankfully throughout the semester continues to ask the same question, “Where is the Dance?” The semester ends and the closest I arrived at a dance was cooking picadillo, a traditional Cuban dish, for my class to close out my final presentation on my research. That and my Prezi presentation had a playful way of moving from slide to slide, which by this point was filled with written research and dozens of photographs. The movement in my research was static, like a collection of images frozen in time.

From the start of my deep investigation on family, stories, and identity, I strived to honor authenticity in myself. I worked to write from this place. Since the material was deeply personal, more personal than I had allowed myself to journey

before, I wanted to acknowledge this journey within myself, and work from an authentic place. In regards to embodying the research, I was not interested in making for the sake of moving. I didn't want to force output, and/or make for my ego's sake. At first, where the research was leading me continued to be verbal, written, possibly gestural. I would reserve studio space, walk in, tell me myself "Alright, time to find the dance.", and then from deeper inside I would respond "But to what... a Celia Cruz song? Gloria Estefan? Willy?"

Looking back, this was my first inquisition into my Cuban-American identity. As I dove into this research, which revealed more about myself, I found myself questioning more and knowing less. I was awakening parts of me I didn't remember or ever know. I had to patiently and impatiently wait. As well as continue to dig deeper into the darkness to find the light.

### *Diving into Poetry*

My first discovery of movement arrived in a form I wasn't expecting. Until now dance had been my most prominent form of expression and release. However, since dance was not an option at that time for my uncovering, movement began to flow in the way of poetry. This was my first layer of finding the dance, my first discovery of light from my dark research cave. Poetry allowed me to find flow and a play with rhythms. It gave me distance from sentence structure and predictable paragraph writing, and it opened a new door – getting me one step closer to movement, to dancing. As I wrote in poetic form, I could see the words dancing on the pages. I could feel myself in a freer place than ever before with this material. I

realized that the poetry was allowing me to find my own voice within all of this. It was opening up the part about my story, my identity. I was finding myself. Without realizing it, poetry was allowing me to choreograph. Through the words I was exploring space, context, energetic qualities, timing, and phrasing. Poetry was driving my discovery of identity. I found myself writing in both Spanish and English with full freedom. A freedom I had not found before. This was a taste of the fusion of Cuban and American aspects within my identity.

When my family retells their stories or when I have replayed them in my mind, I see myself in them. Sometimes I see them in first person as an experiencer of that moment and sometimes I can see myself within the narrative. I never say anything or alter the original story. But in my dreams of these stories, I was there. I connect that deeply to this family history. I sometimes wonder if younger child Colette actually wished to be there and so she inserted herself within them, but to not alter history she did not speak or change the plot line. I wonder if it was my longing since I was young to see the places, smell the sights, touch the land that has made these stories so vivid in my mind.

But alas the writing of these poems allowed me to tell my version of what I heard. Sometimes actually inserting myself as the protagonist and other times allowing my opinion on the history to flow out. The dance my hands, fingers, heart, and mind were doing allowed for me to break free of my movement paralysis.

*More Than 90 Miles From Home*

My second journey into the dancing and diving of this material came in the form of a dance cinema installation titled *More than 90 Miles from Home*, which I created and presented formally in fall of 2015. *More than 90 Miles from Home* was a thirty-five minute gallery-esque creation where the audience entered the space and went visually on a journey through dance and film about my family's history. It is told narratively through my perspective. I shared many of the stories that shaped and formed me as a person. Many of the poems that I wrote through my first dance journey found their way into this work.

In this second journey into dance, the dancing I was discovering was in my way of speaking, creating choreography for the camera, and editing the content. My safety net was not having to be live in the space, revealing this personal story to people. I could create this entire work alone, away from judgment, judgment and insecurities mostly within myself. Then I could install it and hide. I could depend on Matt to run the cues.

I realize now with *More than 90 Miles from Home*, I wasn't ready as a researcher, performer, choreographer, director, and artist to be LIVE in front of an audience. There were gradual steps that were necessary. The material put me in a vulnerable place where I still needed distance, or at least the removal of the LIVE self. We had hung a black curtain in the space to allow the stage manager and Matt to run all the cues and not be seen. At every performance, I would sit or lay down on the other side of the black curtain. I would usually sweat and try to calm my breathing. Apparently I had to be in the space but not in front of others. The night my mom saw

the show for the first time (she had flown up from Miami to see it) I wept on the other side of the curtain. I told her very little about the show. She knew in a general sense what the content was about, but I knew that this work was going to come as a surprise to her. In the end I realized I made *More than 90 Miles from Home* for my mom and for myself. If she had been the only one to see it in an installation for one, I would have felt fulfilled. So the fact that my mom flew up to see it, which was a last-minute decision, gave me closure to this stage of my research. I felt open, prepared, and ready to move on to the next chapter of this work. I was ready to further discover the dance of this research. I felt open to being live, vulnerable, and living in this material for others to experience. This led to the dreaming and making of *Waking Darkness*.

*Waiting Light.*

Every moment before had to occur to lead me here.





Images from *More than 90 Miles from Home* dance cinema installation. Photos by Mark Costello

### *The Original 9 And The New 9*

A coincidence occurred as the team of collaborators for *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*. was coming together. The number nine had a powerful presence in this work. Ninety miles was articulated often when sourcing context to research ideas about journeying, distance, displacement, and home. However, one night as I sat jotting down lists of people who are important to this process, and remembering my family and their stories, I was struck that the two columns both equaled exactly nine. I named one group *The Original Nine* and the other group *The New Nine*. There were and are other supporting characters not on these lists that did carry on, support, and

drive this process. However, without these specific eighteen people it would have been impossible to create this work.

***The Original Nine:***

**The people that were a part of or helped in the creation of the original content and stories. – My family and myself. The inspiration for *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*.**

Nilda Barrera Chang (Lela)  
Grandmother  
August 15, 1930  
Placeta, Las Villas, Cuba

Julio Barrera (Pa)  
Grandfather  
May 27, 1924  
Habana, Cuba

Alberto Barrera (Tio Alberto)  
Great Uncle  
April 3, 1922  
Habana, Cuba

Margarita Trobat (Lela)  
Great Grandmother  
September 10, 1894  
San Jose de Las Lajas, Habana, Cuba

Nildy Arceo (Madrina)  
Godmother/Aunt  
June 11, 1959  
San Miguel del Padron, Habana, Cuba

Jesus Arceo (Padrino/Toto)  
Godfather/Uncle  
October 26, 1943  
Pinar del Rio, Pinar del Rio, Cuba

Maria Krogol (Mom/Vicky)  
Mom  
August 7, 1956  
San Miguel del Padron, Habana, Cuba

Aurelio Martell (Ito)  
Great Uncle  
March 24, 1935  
Santa Clara, Cuba

Colette Krogol (Coly)  
Myself  
July 25, 1985  
Miami, Florida, USA

\*Note: I am in *The Original Nine* and not in *The New Nine*. In my understanding of this research and the creation of this work I existed as part of the history long before this work was conceived, and so in my connection to original and new, I belong in *The Original Nine*.

**The New Nine:**

**The people that were a part of or helped in the creation of the new content and stories. – The collaborators of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.***

Connor Dreibelbis  
Lighting Designer  
April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1987  
Erie, Pennsylvania, USA

Robert Croghan  
Costume Designer  
August 21, 1989  
Pentone, Calabria, Italy

Dylan Glatthorn  
Composer  
March 25, 1987  
St. Petersburg, Florida, USA

Matthew Reeves  
Choreographer, Performer  
June 18, 1984  
Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Robin Neveu Brown  
Performer  
March 28, 1985  
Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

Jeffrey Dorfman  
Sound Designer  
June 10, 1988  
Arcade, New York, USA

Tarythe Albrecht  
Stage Manager  
July 15, 1985  
Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA

Jonathan Hsu  
Performer  
March 4, 1992  
Columbia, Missouri, USA

Mark Costello  
Projection Designer  
June 15, 1988  
Rochester, New York, USA

### Recipes

Recipes are fused throughout my Cuban culture and this idea of recipe was layered into the creation of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light*. “Recipes” throughout my research imply traditional Cuban cuisine recipes as well as imply family recipes for gatherings and events, such as a “Recipe for a *Noche Buena*”, “Recipe for *Los Reyes*”(Recipe for Three Kings Day), “Recipe for *Mis Quinces*”(Recipe for a Quinceñera celebration- a girl’s fifteen’s party, a coming of age within Hispanic cultures), “Recipe for *una Fiesta para Año Nuevo*” (Recipe for a New Years Eve Party), as well as a few others. My family has perfected “recipes” for many cuisines as well as events in life. There is a “recipe” for each family event. Just like there is with a cooking recipe, these celebration “recipes” consist of a list of ingredients (elements, factors, props, food items, people that are required), a set of instructions

(detailed directions, guidance, information to smoothly create the “recipe”), and an order to the preparation and execution of an event.

With *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* there were also a great deal of recipes being created. A collection of recipes was being worked on by various people throughout the process and collated together in a massive potluck style. Like my grandmother and my mother, Matt and I had our fingers in all the pots, tasting the concoctions, checking them for taste, texture, and visual presentation. The recipe was continuously changing as we discovered new ingredients. As I learned more about the “new dish”, certain elements would take charge. The thrilling part of creating a new work is that the recipe is being created in real time. But as I have experienced in my grandmother, Lela’s, kitchen even with new recipes, motifs from past recipes linger and develop.

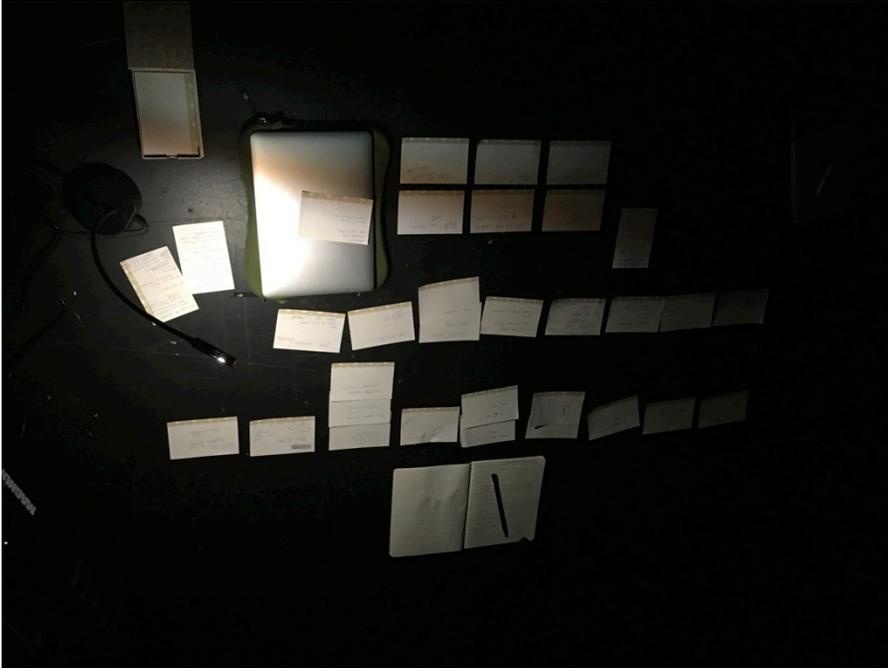
In the context of my research, the word “recipe/s” also represents the instructions or preparation for the creation of a particular event, such as *Noche Buena*, *Año Nuevo*, *Quinceñera* parties, as well as common family gatherings. “Recipes” for these moments in life are etched into Cuban culture. They become traditions due to the formulaic preparation and execution of the “recipe.” One could ask me to describe my *Año Nuevo* (New Year’s Eve) experience from 1999, 2013, or any year in between and I would tell the same story. The “recipe” for a fun-filled, energetic, music blasting, community gathered *Año Nuevo* (New Year’s Eve) has been the same since I can remember. The order of events, the music played, the people dancing, and the traditional rituals are the same. Every year we take to the streets and go running with the *maletas* (luggage) down the block to bring good fortune of travel for the

New Year. We throw a *cubo de agua* (bucket of water) into the streets to let the negative events of the year get washed away as we welcome the new. We scream together the final ten-second countdown of the year, followed by hugs to every person around, and continued by the wishing upon and eating of twelve *uvas* (grapes). These recipes were a part of the childhood and continue to be a part of my life today. The idea of a “recipe” for an event or work is something that I honored throughout the creation of this work. I viewed my collaborations and what was being generated as new ingredients to *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light*. The order in which decisions were made and content was created was all part of this new recipe for this new event that was being created by the New Nine.

Creating Recipes for *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light*.

Throughout this section all images used, unless stated, were taken by me during our creation process. I developed an interest in documenting moments that might otherwise be forgotten. Whenever I remembered, I would snap a photo to recall the recipes that were being cooked up. The selected images below are some of a sea of photographs that I took over the course of the ten-month creative process. In this work I was gathering, remembering, and searching for lost memories in time. I feel that the images below give insight into moments from the process.

## Building of Choreography and Movement Content



Our choreographic cards of the twenty-three sections of the work. Throughout the creation process we would at times move sections around to understand flow and arc. These cards allowed the entire new nine to visually see the shifts that were occurring by name.



The moment before we dove into the water at The Eppley pool as part of the creation building of the projection content. Holding one another, waiting to jump together. Photo by Geoff Sheil



Our actual first day of rehearsal during the Kogod Residency. Discovering the space and what it had to offer choreographically.



Robin, Jonathan, and Matt diving through the space.



My choreographic notebook in the foreground, myself trying to figure out my solo in the background.



Figuring out the partnering sequence for Jonathan and Matt. A lift from one of Matt and Jonathan's duets.



Dividing and conquering. Robin is working on solo material, while I assist in the creation of the first duet between Matt and Jonathan. All this while Jeff and Dylan (sound designers/composers) are working on new sound.



Creating and running the ladder duet with Robin and Jonathan. At the time the ladder wouldn't turn without a mat underneath it so we always had to drag in a mat from outside when running this section.

## Costume Building



Robert looking at our costume rack. This was our first costume fitting where layers and garments were selected.

Throughout the creation process, Matt and I had discussions with Robert about the necessities of the costumes. We spoke about the importance of layers. The importance of the coats and their sense of weight. The costumes also needed to be durable as they were put through pulls and drags. We collectively decided:

Shadows of things now gone in the remnants of the textures, deterioration, holes

Influences from Cuban, Caribbean textiles/fabrics

Salt water affected

Sand affected

Deterioration

Journeyed

Faded

Muted

Imprints of pieces now gone

We dreamed of a sense of unification while still allowing each performer to carry a unique silhouette.



A photograph of one of Robert's inspiration collages for the costume design. Images from Cuba. Looking at textures, colors, deterioration of the walls.



Trying on all my layers for the first time. Moving through some of the choreography to understand if these layers work.



Matt and I looking at our layers together. Seeing the different silhouettes and the garments side-by-side.

## Building Projections



Mark working with a test image to map the space. This was the beginning of the Kogod Residency for projections.



Projection rehearsals. Time allotted and called rehearsal when Matt, Mark, and I would work in a studio to create the content for the projection design of this work.

The goal of the projections were to allow us at times to see past the confines of the Kogod walls and at other times restrict the confines of the physical space.

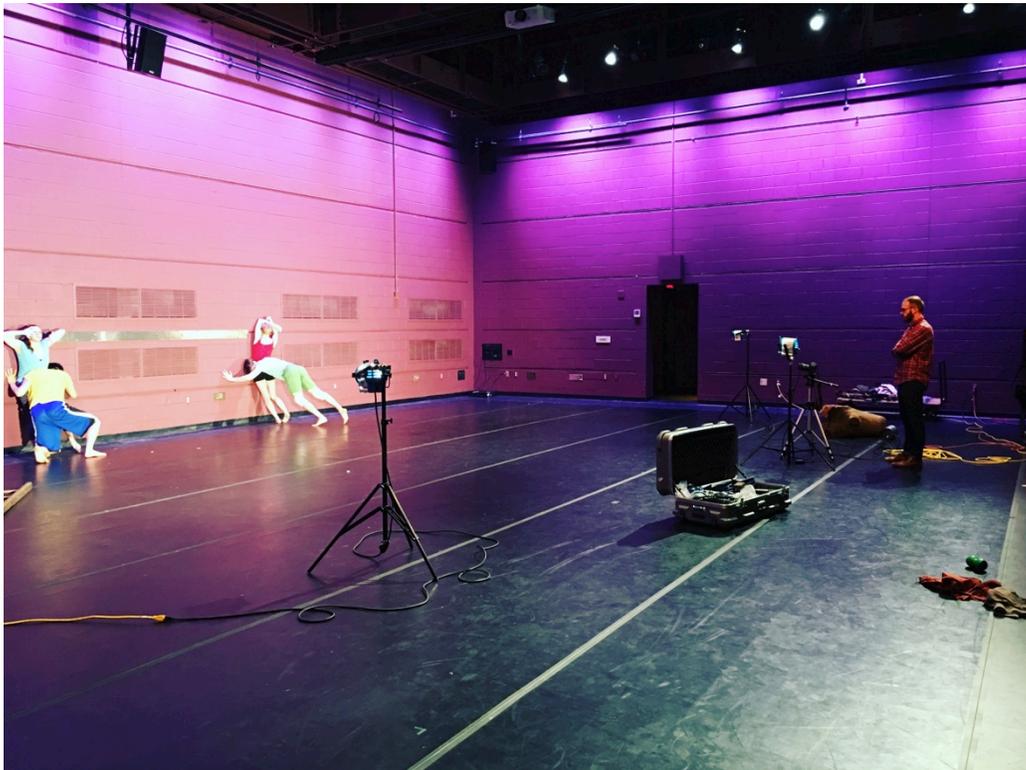
From the start we spoke of the projections as another performer within the work. The projections were used to reveal, conceal, divide, intersect, connect, break through, demonstrate passing of time, architecturally shift the space, oppress, magnify, and provide dream-like imagery.



Collage from The Epley pool film shoot with Mark, Robin, Jonathan, Matt, and myself. Jeff (sound designer) also joined to record the sounds created from jumping in, diving, splashing, etc. Another example of the “creative city.” No one moment is limited to one collaborator; in fact all are encouraged to participate.



The outcome from The Eppley pool film shoot with Mark. We needed a sense of weightlessness, of bodies floating, of being submerged, of holding on. This projection content provided that for us. Photo taken by C. Stanley

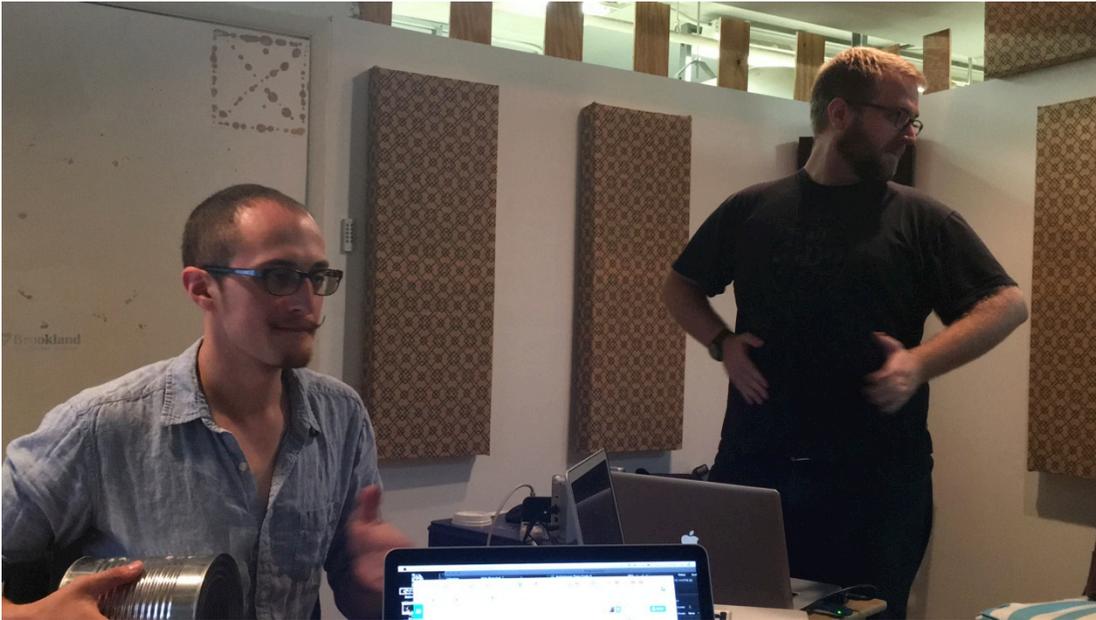


Another film shoot with Mark. This one occurred during the Kogod Residency. We filmed the wall duets to create the white orbs that followed us during that section. We needed to wear colorful, solid garments to pop us out from the wall, so that Mark could design the orbs.



This is one of the last moments of the work, and the last time that the four of us are together. The circle projection is a constant driver throughout the work. This is the first time the four of us enter it together.

## Creating Sound



Jeff and Dylan in Jeff's studio explaining their idea for the sound during the "Waiting..." section of the work to Matt and I. This section was seamless driven by the sound score and the projection design.



Jeff and Dylan moving through more ideas for sound in Jeff's studio. Many times they had to physically show us the sound idea.

Sound was another vital driver in *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*. From the beginning of the creation process with sound, Matt and I wanted to think of it as one over-arching score, although there were sections we were interested in the cinematic

feel as a whole and what motifs or themes developed that could heighten or juxtapose a moment. Just like with projections there were moments within the work where sound became the main performer.



Since Dylan lives in NYC, Matt and I scheduled check-ins with him throughout the process to discuss feedback or new ideas.

### Finding the Light



Connor, Tarythe, and Matt pensively looking at footage of a run to figure out lighting cues, and when Tarythe should call them. This photo makes me laugh as Connor and Matt both have the same posture and finger in mouth.



Can Lights coming towards Matt, bringing on an ominous presence. Photo by C. Stanley



Connor created this intense strobe light effect that would wave past all three walls during the end of the Search Light section, which added to the frenetic, heart-pounding feel of the section. Throughout the process, Connor would be inspired by the concept of waves and he would create it with lighting. Photo by C. Stanley



This section of the work was driven by the lighting and the ladder. Photo by C. Stanley

## Building Family

Robin and Jonathan were already family when we started this project as they had danced for us many times before, and we had grown to love them as people and artists. This process and this work, however, demanded something unexpected out of the performers. We needed to be able to depend on each other in a physical, mental, and emotional way. Through the process my bond with Robin and Jonathan deepened to where I couldn't imagine not seeing them everyday once the show closed. They had become (and continue to be) integral to my life and my creative making. I am thankful for them. Through this process they became my collaborator, my teacher, my sibling, my rock, my ladder, my bike, my light.



Warm up time at the start of rehearsal



Moment during the creation of the Wall Duets. Although they didn't do this part together, we created it by watching them physicalize our ideas.



The moment right before we jumped in the pool for the last time during our Eppley pool film shoot. We were soaked, tired, but together. Photo by Geoff Sheil

## *Creative City*

I feel incredibly fortunate to work with the designers that I had collaborating with me on this work. With all of the designers, Matt and I had an established rapport. We weren't meeting any of these people for the first time. We had had conversations, coffees, and projects that had created a relationship and bond between us. A similar vocabulary and language was already cultivated. All of our designers had either collaborated with us on an Orange Grove Dance project, or they had seen a work of ours. There was a mutual understanding of aesthetic, interests, and drive when entering the creation phase of this work. Matt and I, too, had seen all of their work as well. This allowed the entire collaborative team to step into design meetings with ideas that they knew could challenge the status quo as well as ideas that could expand an element or moment that had been brought to the table. Another marvelous aspect of this "creative city" structure was that the designers felt comfortable enough within their expertise and with each other to cross-investigate. Jeff (sound designer) would give Mark (projection designer) a thought or idea, and Mark would give Connor (lighting designer) an idea, and so on and so on. This occurrence wasn't an every rehearsal situation but the door was left open to cross-pollenate information and ideas. This component of the creative process allowed every aspect of the work to become everyone's. The entirety of this work was original, from the choreography to the sound score to the projection design. All content was created during a ten-month period, which occurred in this deeply collaborative way.

### Images That Called To Me

From the very beginning I knew water, waiting, weight, darkness, and light would be images, motivators for creation. These five elements had a powerful presence within all of my research. They revealed themselves time and time again. They became bridges and barriers. They are the language, which most of my dreams, and most of the stories told by my maternal family stemmed from. They became the language in which collaborators and I would use to describe. They were involved in all of the design collaborations and in the choreographic process as well. They found their way into the sound score, projections, costumes, lighting design, and choreography.

### **Water**



## Waiting



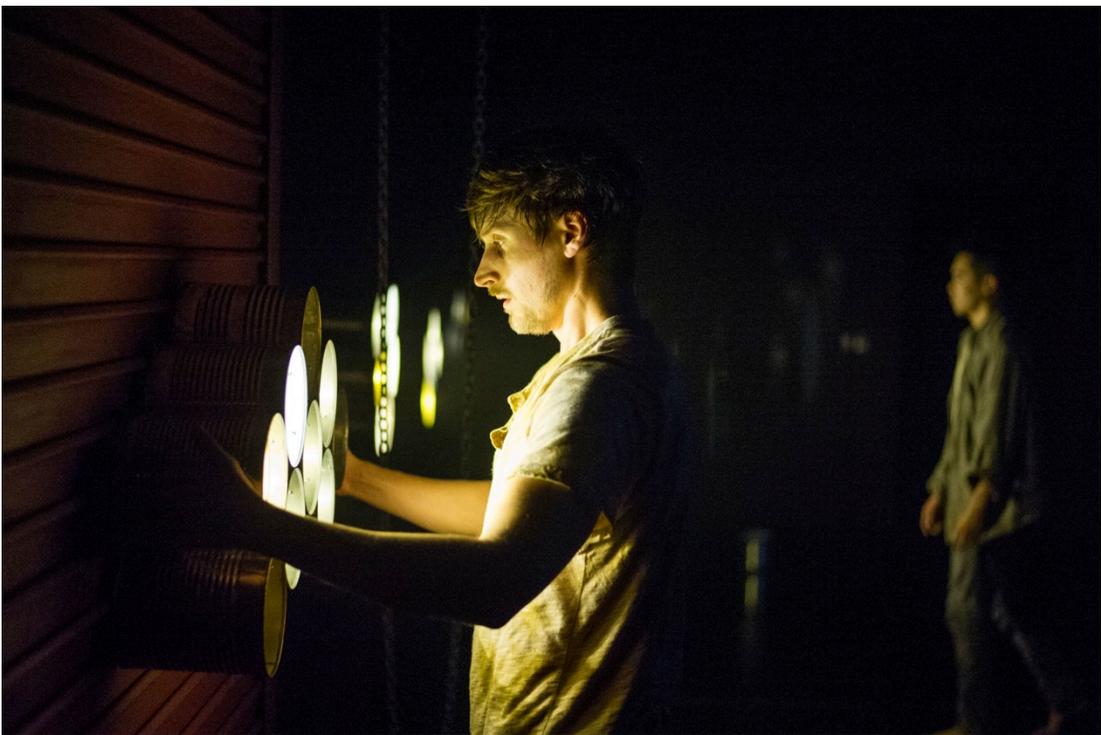
## Weight



## Darkness



## Light



### Collaboration With Matt

The creation and collaboration process between Matt and myself extended far past the studio space and/or confines of the workspaces within The Clarice Performing Arts Center. It filled the twenty-four hours of a day, seven days a week for the entirety of the creation of *Waking Darkness*. *Waiting Light*. It was a completely immersive experience, as are most of our projects. Since we share an apartment, a car, a dog, and an office, our development of this work came in sparks and slow burns at any hour of the day. We have the luxury of not having to hold onto an idea but allow for a gestation period to begin as soon as the idea presents itself, which also can take a toll on sleep and decompression time. This has been our way of working for over a decade so we have grown accustomed to our current project becoming a member of the family, needing tending to and attention. However, the project arrives as a newborn, so the amount of time, dedication, and nurture it requires far exceeds what an adult human requires. For example, on many occasions I found myself having ‘AHA!’ moments during my late-night showers, which would cause me to spring out to inform Matt of my discoveries. There were other late-nights when as we lay down to go to bed Matt would read me inspirational text from Joseph Campbell’s *Myths to Live By*, which would begin a writing session or conversation. Dog walks and cooking became essential and fruitful dream, brew, strategize, and question time. In those moments we had one specific task at hand and at least twenty minutes, which allowed our minds and bodies to percolate. Fresh air or spices triggered thoughts.

With *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*, the creation period in its entirety lasted approximately ten months from the evening in early December when both Matt and I separately presented our thesis proposals to the faculty to the final performance in the Kogod Theatre on October 9<sup>th</sup>. After the initial proposal presentation, this ten-month process began with two months of dreaming with light pressure to produce, reveal, or present, which then led into a three month design collaboration process, where Matt and I met personally with each of our designers, attended design meetings, and formally decided on the design elements and equipment requirements. After the design meeting and cost out occurred, Matt and I returned to a two month re-dream period with the beginnings of choreographic development. This included creative conversations with dancers and designers and ultimately led to a vigorous final three-month creation intensive.

We were incredibly fortunate to have an intensive residency in the Kogod Theatre during our final three-months of rehearsal leading up to the performances. From the beginning of our investigation into *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*, Matt and I knew that this work needed to live and breathe inside the Kogod Theatre space. We were magnetized to the Kogod Theatre for its intimacy and the rawness. The Theatre offered a blank canvas for us not bound by the conventions of a traditional concert stage. It allowed us to mold and craft the work from unexpected directions. By stripping the space of its most recognizable theatrical elements such as curtains, wings, and prosceniums we eliminated any preconceived notions of how an audience understood the space to work. Without these elements the Kogod Theatre is a black box with concrete maroon walls and a hanging metal grid above the performance

space. The space itself is industrial and everything is exposed. yet the space is unpredictable. We were incredibly drawn to this unpredictability. No fourth wall. No soft goods. No curtains. No booms. Nothing for the performers or the work to hide behind. And in turn, within my artistic journey with my research and work, I needed a space that would provide just that for me. A blank canvas where through projection, sound, choreography, lighting, costumes, and props everything and anything could and would be revealed or concealed from the audience.

The unpredictability of the Kogod Theatre turned out to be the most transformational element of the work for us. Throughout the creative process, we spoke about wanting the work to be transformational both from a performer's perspective and also from the audience's experience. I was completely transformed within the performance process of the work especially from final dress rehearsal through the final Sunday performance.

During the final four weeks leading up to the performances, the company ran the work every rehearsal we had. We knew that we needed to truly live inside of this world and continue learning about it through the doing. Also, it being a sixty-minute work where no one leaves the space required strength and endurance. The strength and endurance needed was physical, mental, and emotional. This journey that the four of us took every time we began the piece was exhausting down to the core.

One of the most impactful collaborative effects Matt had on my experience within the creative process was his assistance in my breakthrough of seeing my research and choreography on a macro level rather than micro. Although I knew that *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* was a further abstraction of my autobiographical

research into my maternal family's history and Cuba's history in *More than 90 Miles from Home*, I found myself deeply attached to specific stories and linear timelines, which were stunting my choreographic process. I was too anchored. I needed distance. Matt revealed the idea of seeing these stories, people, and moments in time as folklore or myth. This breathed new life into my understanding of this work.

He chiseled through the hard, protective shell of each of these personal stories, and allowed me to see the colorful truths that lay inside. We took certain stories that were embedded in my poetry and writings and examined them for universal themes. What is important in this story? What happens? What is this story about at its core? This further examining gave me the distance I needed to identify common themes and the importance of the story outside of my family's history. Certain truths were revealed about the human experience, which I was then able to boil down to a singular word. The simplicity of a word within this ocean of complexity helped me create movement as well as more clearly talk to my collaborators. I now had the duality of speaking both from the original source – my family's story – the micro level – with endless amounts of details, and also being able to distill that particular story to one word, one sentence. This created a clearer language. Some of the language that emerged was:

Waiting

Holding On

Letting Go/Separation

Journey/Exodus

Deterioration

Water/Waves/Swimming

The Things we carry

Darkness

Light

Time/Duration

Courage

Identity

One example of how looking at this research through a macro level assisted with the collaboration process was with Robert Croghan and the costume design. We collectively discovered that the costumes weren't so much pedestrian clothing and colors that you would see in Cuba, but the textures and natural elements of Cuba that had affected the clothing. The costumes needed to have layers to represent the peeling layers of paint on deteriorating buildings in Havana. The textures Robert chose for the costumes, in addition to the heavy coats, were breathable, light, warmer climate garments. The deterioration of the costumes was inspired by sand, salt water, chipping paint, and years of travel. We needed it to have history. Years of journeying. The broadened perspective on the costume design helped Robert, Matt, and I communicate what we were imagining.

When we first began the design meetings, the direction we were leading Robert in was Cuba, Cuba, Cuba. But what we realized is that Cuba and these stories had to be sewn so deeply into the fabric of the work that one could not notice it with

the naked eye. This is what Robert, Matt, myself, and all the designers attempted to do.

After these conversations I created one of the most critical gesture phrases of the work, which found itself as a motif throughout the sixty-minute work. Cracking open the research and viewing it from a macro level, I created this phrase where each movement represented a year in my mother's life beginning in 1959 when Fidel Castro came to power through 2014. An interesting conundrum was that I could not make gestures for 2015 or 2016, as much as I tried. 2014 was when all of this research into my family's history began and maybe that is why it stopped there. I was too immersed in 2015 and 2016, finding my voice in it all as my mother's experience gradually transferred to me. Regardless, I allowed myself this thought and let the choreography live through 2014, and it remained that way through the performances. One vital moment in the work when the gesture phrase is performed is right at the beginning of the work when the four performers move into a tight clump and begin shifting left and right for the "Kicking Up the Dust" section. The four glide side-to-side while the upper half of the body moves through this Maternal Gesture Phrase in unison.

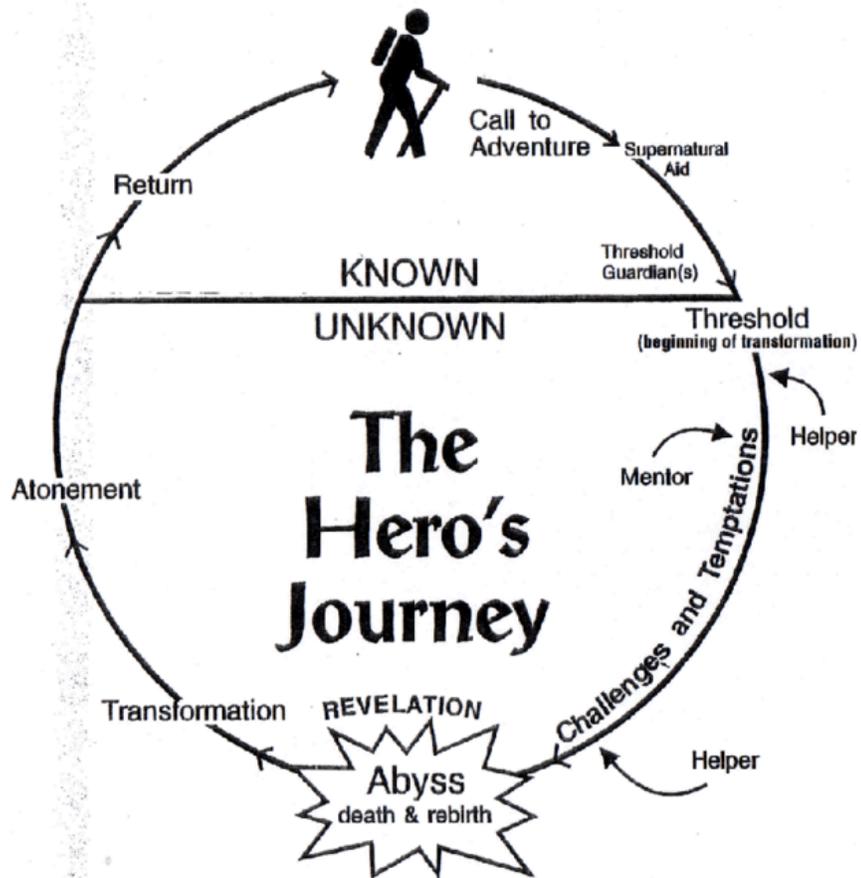
#### *Matt Brings Light to my Research*

The creation process of *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* was completely woven together from both Matt's individual research as well as my own. Throughout the process usually outside of the dance studio space, Matt and I would share text, images, and research concepts that were drivers within our creative process. The

research of the other would enter our subconscious and assist in our understanding of the work we were in the process of creating.

Matt's research into Comparative Mythologist Joseph Campbell's work, monomyths, dream analysis, archetypes, and *The Hero's Journey* all found their way home within my understanding of this work. His research helped illuminate the universality in my maternal family's stories, and how they can be interpreted as myths in and of themselves because they reveal struggles, transformations, and triumphs. These are powerful themes that are woven into ancient as well as modern-day myths and folklore. Understanding this gave me a deeper sense of humanity and self. Through this work, I was searching for a deeper awareness of my identity as well as looking for how this knowledge of self connected to the greater world. Matt's research opened the scope of my research and allowed me to see it through a mythopoetic lens.

One particular notion that influenced me from Matt's research was how Joseph Campbell identified a narrative structure that appears in storytelling, myth, drama, religious rituals, and psychological development. Campbell calls this structure *The Hero's Journey* and recognizes it as a template or monomyth; the one great way a story is told.



As seen in the visual above, the story unfolds between known and unknown for the character(s), there is a call, there is a threshold – start of transformation, there are challenges, a revelation, then darkness, and from that darkness an abyss. At the darkest moment the light begins to pierce through revealing the character transformed in this place of unknown. The journey ends with a return to the known but the character is forever transformed. *The Hero's Journey* represents the arc and structure of many myths and also in part it reveals the narrative structure of many family stories, which I have been told since I was young. My maternal family's exodus follows this epic structure though it seems their story is still being told as the return

has yet to come. My maternal family is on the verge of crossing from the unknown to known with hopes to one day see their homeland again. As I reflect back on this process and on the work *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.*, I see *The Hero's Journey* laid before me. Matt and I with our group of collaborators followed this monomythic structure subconsciously, and the four performers (Matt and I included) experienced it personally. The work provided the structure for known and unknown as well as the space for transformation, struggle, and triumph. And as with every great story, unexpected, unpredictable changes shifted the landscape for the performers during each performance, making it that no two performances were alike. This, too, brought home the idea of *The Hero's Journey* and being cast into the unknown. As there were four performances, we experienced four different journeys as performers.

The Kogod Residency



Our “creative city” collaborating together in the same space during the Kogod Residency. Building something can be viewed as messy. In this image I see endless possibilities. Photo taken by me.

The Kogod Residency, which spanned over two weeks at the beginning of August, was truly a time to play, experiment, challenge, push, and ultimately learn design-wise about what belonged in this world and what didn't. Early within our process, sometime in the spring, Matt and I knew that time to work inside of the Kogod Theatre prior to tech was going to be critical with the creation of *Waking*

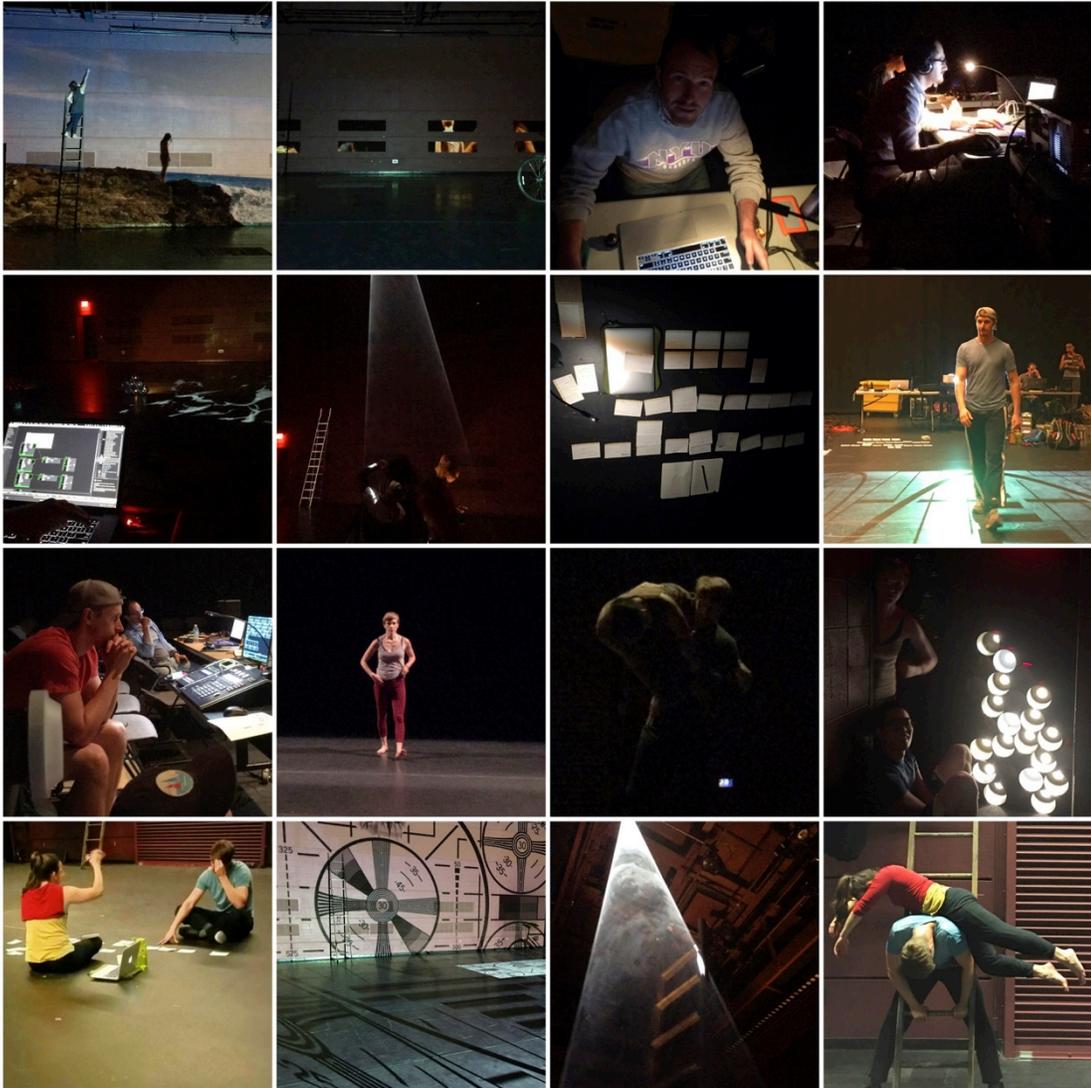
*Darkness. Waiting Light.* We knew to fully comprehend all the moving cogs of the work we needed to test them and challenge them within the space itself.

As an artist, my ideal situation is to create the work in the space where it will live, instead of transplantation. This, of course, is a rare occurrence, but when scheduling and space allow, we immerse ourselves within the space for as many hours of the day as they would let us. In the spring, we sat down with Cary Gillett, the production coordinator, and expressed our interest in locking ourselves inside Kogod with all of our designers. As the Kogod Theatre is an incredibly busy performance venue we knew that we would take however much time would be offered to us, and be flexible on whether we could play with lights, roll out a marley floor, use haze, and/or bring in projectors. Fortunately, we were able to reserve:

WEEK 1: Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup> through Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup> – Approximately eight hours a day

WEEK 2: Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup> through Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup> – Approximately eight hours a day.

From the beginning Matt and I knew that we wanted to run this residency as a lab, rich in investigation, exploration, and play. We decided on the hours collectively with our dancers, designers, and stage manager. We needed everyone offering their talents and ideas in the space together.



Collage of images personally taken during the Kogod Residency

### *Robin Reveals A Tool*

A tool that Robin revealed to us within our Kogod Intensive was that we were creating and editing both from an internal and external perspective. As we went into our Kogod residency period, Matt went in for a foot surgery, which would keep him off of his foot entirely for two weeks and in sneakers for another two. Although at first Matt and I felt this procedure would cause stress and strain on our creation

process, it actually allowed for more concentrated research from multiple angles. The weeks that Matt was off his foot we worked from this internal/external modality, where I fed the process from inside the work while actually executing the material and Matt fed by giving immediate, intuitive visual feedback. This inside/outside experience made for profound discoveries from various levels, which revealed more about what we were making.

As I was executing choreographic ideas physically, I wasn't judging it for what it looked like, for I had Matt's eyes to give feedback to that aspect. I was able to truly experience it from a physical, emotional, psychological, and visceral place, which allowed me to find a genuine, present state to move and create from. More specifically we described this internal/external creating as:

Colette's internal role: Responsible for keeping the dream/physical ideas vividly there.

Matt's external role: Responsible for looking and seeing those images and grabbing hold to what is there, processing, and then translating.

This official internal/external period only lasted between two and three weeks at the start of our three-month intensive period but it came at a pivotal point within the process when we were working in a deep manner. We were seeing the cast and designers almost every day of the week. This way of perceiving the world we were

creating through these internal/external lenses helped pave the path for the rest of our process. We found ourselves, whenever it was not detrimental to have someone step out of the work, using this internal/external lens to gather information and discover/understand more about a moment, both choreographically and with our designers.

### *Searching for the Heavy Celebration*

For the entire thesis process I searched and clawed to find this section “Heavy Celebration”. I knew deep within what it felt like and what the experience should feel like but I didn’t know how to authentically create it. Matt would ask me the tough questions that I needed to hear: “Is this maybe a solo since you know inside what it is?”... I pictured more people. “How can you create choreography or an experience for three people (Robin, Jonathan, and Matt) to live in the heavy celebration who have never experienced it or seen others experience it?” I was trying to uncover choreographically what I witnessed at family celebrations and reunions. There was a desire to move passionately with others to percussive pop charts usually by Cuban exiles, but within the dancing they are remembering people who are not present, whether they have passed or are living in Cuba and can’t be seen. They are also acknowledging the years gone by since the revolution started and since they have seen Cuba. This “Heavy Celebration” is created through facial expressions, through conversation, through speaking aloud to the whole group gesturing towards the sky, and through dancing. But most of all, it is seen by emphatic singing along to sections of songs describing Cuba, returning to Cuba, yearning to see Cuba, or the Cuban exile

experience. I wasn't sure how to find this in a rehearsal process with dancers who hadn't lived through these moments. There was a small gap in the understanding, or in my ability to execute it. Perhaps I was discovering what it was for myself? Until this point I had been more of an outsider to this idea of "Heavy Celebration." I would witness it occurring to my relatives but now I was searching for my interpretation of it.

Throughout the process we tried different ideas for this heavy celebration section. We tried exhaustive choreography to Celia Cruz. We tried long improvisational scores. I spoke to the cast about my understanding of this heavy celebration and the ways I have witnessed it throughout my life. I talked to the collaborators about this idea of "Heavy Celebration". Looking back, I remember having brought it up in the first design meeting for *Waking Darkness. Waiting Light.* and multiple meetings following. It is a part of this work. I know it is. But what the audience witnessed in the Kogod Theater on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> did not include a section titled "Heavy Celebration". The feeling of it was sprinkled throughout, and I did have a solo that yearned towards it but the section wasn't there. It never made it in. I never made it.

**Mama Nadando**

*Yo me recuerdo...*

*I remember...*

*Yo me recuerdo...*

*I remember...*

*Yo me recuerdo...*

*I remember...*

*I remember in Cuba my mother, with only a mask and flippers, swimming and swimming... out into the ocean, not turning back until she was unable to see the shore. Floating alone, embraced by the sea. A salty taste of release. A moment to govern the self.*

**ORIGINAL IN SPANISH:**

*Empecé como un minnow.*

*Pequeña y hambrienta. Nadando y nadando tocando la orilla.*

*El fondo muy lejos pero quería llegar.*

*Entonces crecí a ser un pez.*

*Con más coraje y más largura.*

*Nadando y Nadando queriendo tocar el fondo*

*No tocando la orilla.*

*El agua y yo.*

*Seguí nadando y me hice tiburón.  
Nadando y nadando tocando el fondo.  
Mis manos tocando, mis pies empujando.*

*Respirando el aire.*

*Queriendo nadar.*

*Y acabé en ballena.*

*Brincando de afuera.*

*Bajando al agua.*

*Entrando y entrando.*

*Nadando y nadando.*

*Queriendo más el agua.*

*Nadando yo y ella.*

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION:**

*I started as a minnow. Tiny and hungry.*

*Swimming and swimming. Always touching the shore/edge.*

*The bottom was very far but I wanted to get there.*

*And then I grew to be a fish, with more courage and more length.*

*Swimming and swimming, wanting to touch the bottom. Not touching the edge.*

*The water and I.*

*I continued swimming and I became a shark.*

*Swimming and swimming, touching the bottom.*

*My hands touching. My feet pushing off.*

*Breathing the air wanting to swim.*

*And I finished as a whale.*

*Jumping from the edge diving into the water, deeper and deeper.*

*Swimming and swimming wanting/loving more the water (indulging in the water.)*

*Swimming me and her.*

#### ***CHAPTER 4: Memoirs From Performance***

##### *The Unknown, The Open Sea, Take Care Of Each Other*

My mother used the words waiting, darkness, light, and hope when describing her eight-hour journey across the ocean from Cuba to arrive on the shore of Key West. Whenever she recalls those moments on the boat she speaks to waiting in the camp, waiting to be called, waiting to board, waiting to leave the shore, waiting to arrive, and waiting to return. She mentions a darkness she had never experienced when the boat was travelling those 90 or so miles. Night had fallen and besides a few stars in the sky all around her was darkness. She could barely see her hands in front of her. She remembers the lights of Cuba twinkling in the distance as the boat pulled away from the Mariel Bay, and them slowly fading to darkness as the boat gained

distance. And lastly, she speaks of the hope that boarded the small ship with her and our family on that day in May of 1980. Although they had to leave all material objects behind, hope filled their pockets as they set towards the unknown. All they knew as they travelled toward the unknown was that they had each other. Although they didn't know what lay ahead, they knew that they had to take care of each other.

This truth became a ritual for the four of us performers before beginning each show. We would huddle tightly together, holding one another. Quiet. Eyes closed. Breathing. And before letting go usually Matt would say: "Take care of one another out there." It was a ritual that bound us together. Every time it not only bound me to these three people, but it gave me pause to remember the original nine; to remember my mother describing that night and their journey. There was a transformational element to their voyage that ended up ringing true in our journey of this work as well.

I find it interesting that we gave ourselves this challenge, without realizing it at the time. Entering through the giant sound door didn't allow us to see the space or the audience beforehand. The door would slide open when called by Tarythe, our stage manager, and we would have to go in, first Robin, followed by Jonathan, then myself, and finally Matt. Once we had all entered the space the large door would slide closed, sealing us into the space. The timing of the opening of this work always felt out of my control, because it was. Whenever Tarythe and Front of House crew decided to close the audience entrance (there was no late seating for this performance, as we wanted the audience to seal themselves into the space with us at the top of the show) the show would begin with the opening projections that would quickly follow into our entrance. We mostly knew where we were when we heard the sound score

for the opening projections begin, which gave us an approximately 45-second cue to enter the stage. The feeling of waiting patiently and impatiently swelled through me each night. The unknown on the other side of the door. The waiting.

My performance nerves were heightened with this show more than the usual “performer” or “choreographer” nerves that I usually get because every performance that we did from dress rehearsal until the closing Sunday matinee show was different. I don’t mean the usual “the dance is never the same twice since it is bodies in motion and the human body shifts and changes” different but impactful, transformative shifts occurred that changed the experience of the journey for us on the inside of the work.

Right before dress rehearsal our can light bulbs blew out, which caused two of the four cans to not work and one can to work at 30% while the fourth can remained unaffected. This situation meant that our dress rehearsal performance was done 50% in almost complete darkness. Talk about really getting to know the work in a totally unique way. The darkness throughout the work was transformational. I never felt so present and so alive within a work. Every ounce of me needed to be there so I could take care of myself, and the others.

The lights were replaced for opening night.

On opening night, approximately fifteen minutes into the work, all sound cut out for twelve WHOLE minutes. The sound score for this work is another performer. It informs. It drives. It takes us through this journey. The sound disappeared, as I was about to climb the ladder for the first time in the work. It was a sold-out audience and that moment was the first time in performing this work that I felt watched. The first time that while I was performing I realized there was an audience. I immediately felt

like I was in a fish bowl. There was nowhere to go. I was here. In that moment I didn't know if the sound would ever return but the one thing I knew is that I needed to keep going for myself and the other three.

The second performance, which was the Saturday matinee, was the closest we came to how we had conceived it. All the intrinsic elements – sound, projection, and lighting were present when they needed to be. Saturday evening is another example of transformational moments, of being unable to predict, of the unknown that might surprise you at any moment. There is the section of the work “Wall Duets” that is only lit by a pre-recorded light orb, which traces our entire bodies as we partner and scale the wall.



Saturday evening, the projection board operator clicked past this cue, and as the wall duets began the space went dark. Once again left in darkness, only with each other. These approximately five-to-seven minutes were another testament to the unknown

transformational moments that this work would provide us. As I began to realize what was occurring with the projection, I held on tighter to Jonathan, became more in tune with my listening, and in the short distance away from me I could begin to make out Matt and Robin's figures. This allowed us to stay together, unified. In the darkness, we were merging closer.

Each of these moments was a powerful reminder that the world around us is and will continue to be unpredictable. The only constant is each other. With each performance our pre-show ritual became more important for me.

The final performance, the Sunday matinee brought on yet another different experience for the four of us inside of the world. As we waited to begin, we overheard on the crew's headset that the SL (stage left) projector was malfunctioning. They assured us that it was being taken care of. Someone went up to the catwalk and restarted it. The projector responded positively and we proceeded as normal. The four of us did our pre-show backstage ritual, grabbed our cans, listened to the opening sound, which indicated we were about to enter, the door opened, and we went in. As we moved through the section "Kicking Up the Dust", I felt someone get out of their seat, and exit the theater. "Kicking Up the Dust" is the highly specific unison section, so bringing any other thoughts into my mind was rather nerve-racking. As quickly as the curious thought entered, I forced it out, and continued as normal. I was to find out later that the person who exited the theater was Mark Costello, our projection designer. Apparently the SL (stage left) projector had malfunctioned during the opening projection sequence after all. Since there is no moment within the work for him to return to the catwalk and restart the projector without completely distracting

the audience, we had to move forward. Again a situation that completely brought presence and transformation. In these moments I was transformed as a performer, choreographer, artist, and human.

*Distancia Infinita*

*90 miles separate the Cuban coast from Key West.*

*Ninety miles of darkness, hope, waiting, and light.*

*In here, those ninety miles could be ninety thousand. **Distancia infinita.***

*Because that water that is there, separating one from the other is something that if you touch it, it will break your heart, your courage, everything you believe.*

*Those waters, especially the ones around the coastline of Cuba, are filled with sharks fed by the revolution.*

***Ellos devoran más que carne y hueso.** They devour more than flesh and blood.*

***Ellos pueden ahogar tus esperanzas y sueños.** (They can drown your hopes and dreams.)*

Remembering The Exodus

*I remember...*

*I remember... the seven.*

*I remember...*

*Yo me recuerdo... my great-grandmother, Lela, who I met only through stories and photographs. But as a child I thought we had shared in our own memories.*

*Tio Alberto, my grandfather's brother, who drove furiously that morning from*

*Havana to make it in time.*

*I remember... my grandmother, Lela.*

*My grandfather, Pa*

*My godmother, Madri*

*My godfather, Padri*

*And, of course, my mom.*

*The seven family members that arrived together soaking wet to the shores of Key*

*West, Florida on May, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980 with nothing but hope filling their pockets...*

*Well and a glow stick.*

*They spent five days and nights in a holding camp with no showers or bathrooms right off the shore of the Mariel Bay in Cuba. They waited for their boat named "Ray Allen", who had been rented by my great uncle, Aurelio Martell in Key West to come claim them and bring them to the U.S.*

*They waited for “Ray Allen” to be called and filled by the officers.*

*They waited patiently and impatiently.*

*And on the 5<sup>th</sup> day they were escorted to the boat.*

*Twenty people boarded.*

*My seven family members. Aurelio, my great uncle, who had come to claim them had gone into Havana that day and was left behind. He was able to get on a different boat two days later.*

*So on the “Ray Allen” were:*

*My seven family members*

*The captain and 3 crew members*

*A Peruvian Embassy worker*

*Four other Cubans*

*And three convicts.*

*Castro emptied his prisons and insane asylums and placed these people on the boats heading to the United States. If the captain refused to take the convicts, the boat would not be allowed to leave.*

*The captain and his crew tied a large rope on the front section of the boat separating the three convicts from the rest of the group. He told them that they were “not allowed to cross the rope.”*

*That is when my family all sitting on the deck floor realized what was occurring. (who those men were.)*

*Evening was quickly turning to night as the boat pulled off the dock.*

*The captain handed each person a glow stick. He broke his and told everyone aboard,*

*“if we capsize on this journey to the US make sure to illuminate your glow stick so*

*that you have a better chance of being found in the ocean.”*

*And with that my family watched the twinkling lights of Cuba fade away in the*

*distance.*

*Only left with each other, the darkness of the night, and the few twinkling stars*

*reflecting off the water.*

*The ninety-miles of open sea took them 8 hours to cross.*

*I remember... my great-grandmother, Lela, sleeping in the cabin.*

*Tio Alberto, sitting up, keeping watch.*

*My grandmother, Lela, too scared to sleep.*

*My grandfather, Pa, holding the edge of the boat trying to slow down his heart rate.*

*My godparents, Madri and Padri, huddled close.*

*And my mother curled up by the buoys on the boat waking up soaked by the massive*

*waves.*

*I remember...*

*Their courage,*

*Their determination,*

*Their love for Cuba,*

*Their displacement,*

*Their desire to return,*

*Their love and gratitude for the United States.*

*I remember...*

*Them,*

*Their stories... as if I lived them too.*

*And through this...*

*I honor them.*

*I honor my history.*

*And I find myself.*

*I am thankful for this courageous exodus. For making me a child of an exile. I have this culture, these traditions, and these stories tightly wrapped in my DNA. I am proud to be a hyphenated American. I am Cuban-American. I live inside the hyphen. I am 100% Cuban, 100% American. What connects me to these two worlds is that line, the space, that journey between. Those ninety or so miles.*

*I am proud to be a child of a Cuban exile. There is so much to celebrate.*



*Yo soy una mujer sincera. (Yo soy un hombre sincero.) - I am a sincere woman.*

*De donde crece la palma. – From where the palm trees grow.*

*Y antes de morirme quiero. – And before death takes me.*

*Echar mis versos del alma. – I want to let the poems soar from my soul.*

*Yo vengo de todas partes, - I come from everywhere.*

*Y hacia todas partes voy: - And everywhere I go;*

*Arte soy entre las artes, - Art I am among the arts.*

*En los montes, monte soy. – And among the mountains, Mountain I am.*

*Todo es hermoso y constante, - All is beautiful and loyal,*

*Todo es música y razón, - All is music and reason,*

*Y todo, como el diamante, - And all, like the diamond,*

*Antes que luz es carbón. – Is charcoal. Before being light.*

*- Jose Marti (Yo Soy Un Hombre Sincero excerpt)*

## *Postscript*

### *Meet me in Versailles: Finally Finding the Heavy Celebration*

“Cuando Fidel se muera, meet me in Versailles.”

Not until November 25, 2016 in the late hours of the night and into the early hours of the morning of November 26<sup>th</sup> did I truly understand and experience the heavy celebration.

I had decided to travel to Miami for Thanksgiving week in 2016. I had not been back home to Miami since the Christmas prior. I had plans to be in Miami for nine days. Friday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 around midnight leading into Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> was like no other late night when I visited home. My mother and I were up late chatting on my bed. As we were convincing ourselves to head to bed my mother received a text from one of her good friends, Mercedes. Mercedes texts: “Turn on the tv.” My mom found it odd to receive a text so late into the night but dismissed it. Not seconds later did she receive a second text from Mercedes reading: “Fidel se murió.” (“Fidel has died”)

Without hesitation my mom read it aloud to me and began running towards the television. She pulled open the coffee table drawer, grabbed the remote, and turned on the news. As soon as the television turned on there was a news anchor announcing the death of Fidel Castro, and playing and replaying Raul Castro’s video announcement to the people in Cuba. We both sat in shock. My focus slowly shifted to my mother. I stared at her. After all this time what is she feeling? I decided to wait

to hear from her first. I felt as if I was experiencing this monumental moment through her. But now here is a moment in Cuban history that I get to experience with my mom. At the moment there was nowhere else I would rather be.

The news began to broadcast the hundreds of people beginning to take to the streets after hearing the news themselves. My mom turned to me and said: “We have to go.” Within minutes we had gotten dressed, ran from room to room to let my younger brother, Brian, and Roni, my step-father know the news, and we were in the car on our way to La Carreta. Within the Cuban exile community there have been sayings swirling around for years that said “Cuando Fidel se muera, meet me in Versailles”, which translates to when Fidel dies, meet me in Versailles. Versailles is a very popular Cuban restaurant in Miami among the Cuban/Cuban-American community. Versailles had been labeled the main concentration point for this moment but La Carreta, another popular Cuban restaurant had been named the other. Since it was about 1:30am as we left home we headed to the closer one, La Carreta. The sight and sound emanating for blocks surrounding La Carreta was like nothing I had ever experienced.

Waves of people arriving.

Waves of people driving by.

Waves of Cuban flags.

Waves of American flags.

Waves of people chanting, singing, sharing stories.

Waves of people remembering those gone or far away but never forgotten.

I was churning within these waves.

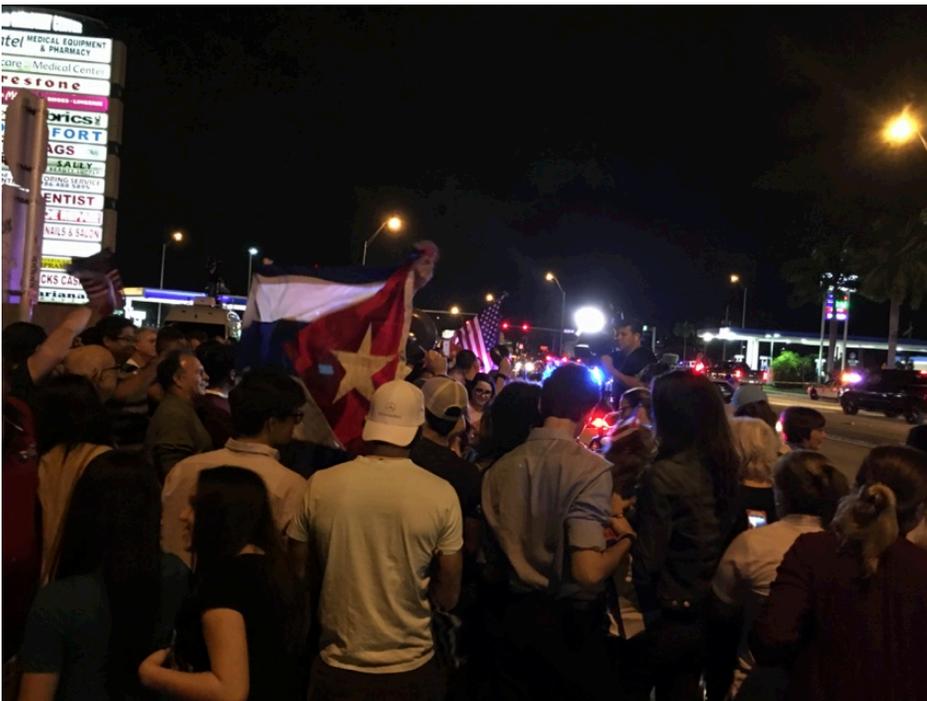
My relatives and I in the open sea of people, mostly Cuban exiles and family members of Cuban exiles. All generations celebrating together.

For the days I had left at home in Miami before returning to Washington D.C., I returned with my mom and other family members to these concentration points where all were gathered. Seas of people came and went. As we heard from relatives back in Cuba that the Cuban government had enforced a nine-day silence over all of Cuba in respect of Fidel's death, and that they weren't able to speak above a whisper, play music, sing songs at church, continue with celebrations that had been planned, the people in Miami spoke up about it and decided if they can't celebrate, we will celebrate for them. And so, the waves of people in Miami continued to gather, continued to dance, continued to sing with heavy hearts as they felt the weight of the fifty-five years or so of waiting, and the more than ninety miles of deep ocean and distance that was still there between themselves and their beloved Cuba.

Meet me in "Versailles."



Selfie of my mother, my godmother, and myself outside of La Carreta in Miami, Florida



Waves of people arriving outside “LaCarreta”



My godmother, Madri, waving the Cuban flag alongside hundreds of others who came to join the “Heavy Celebration” outside “La Carreta”



Newspaper web photo by David Santiago/El Nuevo Herald of the “Heavy Celebration” outside “La Carreta” the night the news broke of Fidel Castro’s death.



Top left: Lela, my grandmother with Nildy, my Aunt/Godmother sitting in front of her and Vicky, my mother next to her in their home in Guanabo, Cuba circa 1962.

My dreams have allowed me to see through the small group of black and white photographs that my family has been able to collect over the years. Through my wild imagination and my deep yearning I have seen these stories, these captured moments in color. Vivid color. I paint patterns and textures over faded or washed out images. What is left is in my heart yearning to be set free. Yearning to see what is inside of me.

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