

ABSTRACT

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SHARING A DANCE WITH YOU

Lynne Andrea Price, Masters of Fine Arts in
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Directed By:

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This paper outlines the emotional, creative and intellectual content and context for the process, presentation and reflection of my MFA in Dance thesis concert, *Sharing a Dance with You*. My focus lies in investigations of the whys: my choices, interests and transformations. In this paper, I will lay out how my early life experiences have lasting effects on my current interests, patterns and preferences, shed light onto my process and the interwoven nature of the work, and offer others the opportunity to make discoveries of their own.

SHARING A DANCE WITH YOU

By

Lynne Price

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University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Preface

“Hatred is not the opposite of love; it is the absence of love and the cruelty
of it which is piled up on us.” —Patrizia Pallaro

“He was ahead of his time I was behind my time we were
both in time” —Kenneth Koch from “The Circus”

Dedication

This paper and the concert detailed within it are dedicated to my greatest supporter,
my partner and love, Andrew Sargus Klein.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Sharon Mansur for her patience and careful, generous, and insightful guidance and support throughout this entire process. Thanks also to my committee Karen Kohn Bradley and Patrik Widrig; my Dance Movement Therapist Patrizia Pallaro; Production Coordinator and cheerleader Cary Gillett; and my teachers: Adriane Fang, Paul Jackson, Sara Pearson, and Miriam Phillips.

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Chapter 1: The Process

Identity

The Spring 2014 semester became an experiment in attempting to understand the role of “identity” and “gender” and “sex” in my self, my thesis, and the kitchen. I began thinking about all of these as practices: of cooking as a practice, of dance as a practice, of writing as a practice. There is no end goal, only a desire to expand my current use and familiarity of each of these and how they integrate together.

To assume the kitchen as a woman’s domain is to make a lot of assumptions. It assumes the kitchen is a place or a concrete, physical object; it assumes that “woman” can be understood widely by a concrete definition and visual representation or that space can be owned or dominated at all.

To suggest that identity, or an understanding of personal identity, is even something that can be achieved leaves less room for mutability. The searching for identity is important; the awareness of the ability to consider an identity other than the one given you by the outside world is incredibly important—but to search for one pure, complete, wholistic identity is futile and ultimately imprisoning.

I exist as an ever-shifting, evolving piece of the Earth as a whole. I am capable of both receiving and penetrating the world and I am connected to Earth by the same naturalness as the food that I grow. Like a flower that contains within its decidedly feminine structure both the penetrative and receptive capacities associated with Masculinity and Femininity, I, within my one structure, contain multiplicities of existence. Like a flower, I rise from the earth, I bloom, I penetrate the world with my

individual importance and offerings, I receive all that is offered to me with openness and I give back my own organic matter which enriches the soil for the next generation or the next reincarnation of my self.

I'm practicing fluidity.

I'm practicing the process; practicing embracing my existence; practicing forgiving my past.

I'm practicing healthful choices and mindful, conscious decision-making skills.

I'm practicing letting go.

I'm practicing moving powerfully through this world.

I'm practicing sustainable practices of care with the intention of sustaining bodies, sustaining environment, sustaining the self, sustaining humanity.

I'm practicing the sharing of my findings; practicing teaching by sharing my own experiences and offering a "place" for others to discover. Discover their own practices. Discover their potentials.

I'm practicing being a guide; I'm practicing "playing" different roles and noticing their overlaps, their redundancies, their discrepancies and oppositions.

I'm practicing duality and multiplicity and unity.

I'm practicing speaking, penetrating the world with my thoughts.

I'm practicing understanding and believing in my own validity.

I'm practicing compassion: for myself, for others, for Us.

I am impacting this world. I am building something. I am free.

Impact

how huge the Earth is

your body
its impact null

gravitational pull—
inward
—the Earth will swallow you

weightlessness, simulated by

an inward force:
is that centripetal or centrifugal?
[it's a matter of perception]

so minimal your impact

I built this

Which caged web?
Structure fragile

My mapping exposed—
insides, out
this bridge.

A bridge well travelled.

These sticks
abandoned, dropped
broken

We built this.

I am this building
building this
measuring this map in
mapping your feet.
A journey measured by
where we intersect—

in time
through mapping
which hands are your heart

Because

felt
seen
buried

my father.
My Body

shaking
I want
to climb
into myself

through my belly button
crawl down a dark
canal
into myself

to curl up into darkness
wrap knees towards head
face towards belly button
repeat spiraling inward

my life is not my own
my body is not my own

I notice how often
I lose myself;
hours gone—
poof

teleportation is a reality
for those of us who
no longer control our own bodies.

I take it back (my life)
world implodes
no
body explodes
no
mind ruptures
no
yes
all of that

And

I lie on the floor of the room I grew up in
everywhere I look are remnants

this is inscribed inside
my body

I am a scroll
parchment skinned
etched.
my muscles,
organs, bones,
the spaces in between:
truths

I take it back (my body)
and the ground unsteady

a woman—
we collect the
cellular shrapnel,
weep

And
now I move
dance
nestle

I hold his hand
wear my skin
proudly

I laugh
fly
move

I'm here
now
in spite of
because
he raped me.

The Dance

Sharing a Dance with You premiered at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in the Dance Theatre in October 2014. Though the performance part of my thesis is over, the work is a living entity. It will be remounted at the Creative Alliance in Baltimore in June 2015; it lives and resonates within me at all times.

The original cast was comprised of myself; four core dancers (Emma Coyle, Sydney Parker, Devin Seldon, and Nicole Turchi); and two satellite dancers, Elissa Orescan and Justin Le. All of the performers except myself were University of Maryland undergraduate dance students and all rehearsals took place in the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies studios. In addition to artistic and technical skill, casting was based on creating a racially, ethnically, and gender diverse cohort.

The first official rehearsal was on January 27, 2014, but the process had no official start date. Unlike most other work I've made, this piece never had a singular moment of inspiration but many miniature moments since beginning graduate school in September 2012 and even before that. This work became an extension of every piece I have ever made, every interest I have had, everything I have read and written and everywhere I have been. However, the first morsels of the imagined work were present in my proposal.

The Plan

[kitchens and food and sharing and gender and ritual and action and space and collaboration and sound and smell and color and surprise and taste and inclusion and

exclusion and present and sacred and words and feeling and humor and reality and surreal and illness and happiness and bodies and nonconformity and trauma and subverting and flying and falling and natural and community and healthy and aromas and striking and race and diversity and ethnicity and connections and audience engagement and love and hate and consciousness and femininity and intersection and participation and experience and integration and spirals and discipline and creativity and freedom and trust and transformation]

I imagined, initially, a sterile, monochromatic, chrome industrial kitchen; café tables available for audience seating; an aromatic and colorful assortment of raw ingredients displayed in an installation throughout the room; in-season and locally grown and fresh food; everyday lighting to limit distinction between the performance space or performers and the audience; and dancers dressed in anything other than what one might think of as kitchen attire. They would dance throughout the space, engaging the audience with discussion and poetry and cooking a meal. Over the course of the work, they would bring the audience into their world, make them feel part of a community and get them up and dancing and cooking right along with them. I thought the piece would close with a breaking of the bread and a sharing of food and drink, uniting us through the ritual of dance and meal. The work deviated from this outline slightly but held onto the integrity of this throughout.

I drew inspiration from numerous places, schools of thought, academic fields, and personal developments and wove them together. These included: poetry, Andy Goldsworthy, psychoanalysis and the conscious feminine, dancers and eating disorders, trauma and the effects on the body, queer and feminist theory, nutrition and

food, ritual and family/community, as well as my holistically-based experience on Lasqueti Island, and my own personal history.

The Fall semester of 2013, I decided to steer my independent study in the direction of understanding my obsession with gender. I could feel a connection between my visceral, negative reaction towards gender, my interest in feminist and queer theory and my own history and trauma. I also sensed a connection to dance and holistic approaches to life and art. I began reading about the conscious feminine, psychoanalysis and long-term effects and methods of treating trauma from child sexual abuse in *The Owl was a Baker's Daughter* by Marion Woodman and *Creative Group Therapy for Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse* by Bonnie Meekums. In these texts, I discovered connections that I knew instinctively were there but had not yet been able to deal with for myself. As I unpacked all of this information, I found that I was drowning in it all. I began dance movement therapy (DMT) as a way to help me sort through this abundance of discovery. Through DMT, I have found the links between my past, my interests, my illness, and the way into creativity and movement.

I have been examining the direct correlation between my experience of being raped by my father for years in early childhood; my battles with eating disorders; transitioning from ballet into modern and then into choreography and improvisation; my injuries; my obsession with sharing experiences; my autoimmune disease; accessing a more holistic sensibility; and my dissatisfaction with being labeled as anything, particularly as a gender. I don't connect with the applicable label of transgender, even though I don't associate with one specific gender.

One major theme that crept up was duality. I've experienced a separation of the body and the self for most of my life. As an intuitive person and as someone who learned how to dissociate very young in life for protection, my body was at odds with my mind; I repressed my Feminine consciousness; I was at odds with Masculinity. This left my body vacant and searching for some way to be filled. I spent most of my life finding superficial ways to fill the void—eating disorders, striving for perfection, promiscuity, abusive relationships, trying to inhabit the masculine—which only left me feeling emptier and less complete. My childhood trauma split me right down the middle and left traces of itself ingrained in my flesh, haunting my body, and manifesting itself physically as injuries, anxiety, illness, self-hatred, shame and ultimately, a split self.

My focus is now on unity as a means to peace. I am interested in a holistic mindset where I do not just look at my body as a vessel and my thoughts and emotions as a separate entity. My past is held within this structure and I must treat the body and mind as a whole in order to find peace. One of the ways I began this process was by looking at nourishing my mind and body simultaneously and accepting meals as ritual. I started to make choices about what to put in my body and became conscious of how those choices affect my physical self and my emotional self. I also found that I am more capable of and positive about this choice when I am sharing this ritual with others. The hardest obstacle I had to overcome in the past several years of this journey was to trust, rely on, and let in people around me. I cannot heal on my own—I cannot do everything myself. In fact, it is almost always easier and more enjoyable when I don't try to do it on my own. This is where my interest in

collaboration came in. I know I have good ideas, I know I can make something just fine on my own, but something magical happens when I share the process of creating, thinking and doing with someone else. I am able to dig deeper and find new connections. Outside energy catalyzes different ideas and I am able to watch someone else benefit from the process as well.

I wanted to collaborate for this project, but not just on costumes, research, menu, and choreography. I wanted to collaborate with the audience on the entire experience. I wanted to set this work in an industrial kitchen because it means we are all in it together. It takes away the traditional hierarchy of performance that is often present and opens the space to be shared by all. It offers the audience a place to comment, insert, react, add, complement and truly participate in the experience. Each person in the audience is important because they have a job— they add to the meal and the experience.

The kitchen tends to be the focal point of social relationships—the eye of the spiral. The ritual of gathering, preparing, sharing stories and meals, joking, fighting, dancing, laughing, singing, talking are all things I associate with a kitchen. I wanted to create a work that engages the audience in the practice and the performance. I wanted to create a community through my thesis. I wanted to share in an experience rather than present something for my audience.

I began thinking about a performance of this nature in February 2013 without a lot of understanding as to why I wanted to do it. The idea came while brainstorming a virtual collaboration for choreography class. I knew I loved poetry so I began there

with two of my favorite poems by two American 20th-century poets: “Having a Coke with You” by Frank O’Hara¹ and “The Circus” by Kenneth Koch.²

Having a Coke with You³

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne or
being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian partly
because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt partly because of
the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary it is hard
to believe when I’m with you that there can be anything as still as solemn as
unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it in the warm New York 4
o’clock light we are drifting back and forth between each other like a tree breathing
through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint you suddenly
wonder why in the world anyone ever did them

I look

at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world except
possibly for the Polish Rider occasionally and anyway it’s in the Frick
which thank heavens you haven’t gone to yet so we can go together the first time and
the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism just as at
home I never think of the Nude Descending a Staircase or
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank or for
that matter Marino Marini when he didn’t pick the rider as carefully
as the horse

it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I am telling you about it

Frank O’Hara’s poetry was greatly influenced by his close relationship to
dance. There is something special about the way he writes. It is sensed and felt; it
evokes sensations in the reader. He was an embodied writer. I often tear up when I

¹ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/frank-ohara>

² <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/kenneth-koch>

³ “Having a Coke with You” was first published in a small press magazine called
Love in 1960

read this poem. It is so simple yet so complex and incredibly emotional. In fact, this poem was written as one of a series of love poems to the dancer Vincent Warren. Aside from the emotional and sensorial nature of this particular poem, it also suggests exactly what I'm trying to get at with this work: I would rather share a simple, humble meal with this audience than perform on a grand stage in gorgeous costumes with amazing design elements and tour the world. I wanted the experience of sitting with my audience, noticing the colors of their clothing, the laugh lines on their faces, having an open discussion about art, gender, and their own experiences.

The Circus⁴

I remember when I wrote The Circus
I was living in Paris, or rather we were living in Paris
Janice, Frank was alive, the Whitney Museum
Was still on 8th Street, or was it still something else?
Fernand Léger lived in our building
Well it wasn't really our building it was the building we lived in
Next to a Grand Guignol troupe who made a lot of noise
So that one day I yelled through a hole in the wall
Of our apartment I don't know why there was a hole there
Shut up! And the voice came back to me saying something
I don't know what. Once I saw Léger walk out of the building
I think. Stanley Kunitz came to dinner. I wrote The Circus
In two tries, the first getting most of the first stanza;
That fall I also wrote an opera libretto called Louisa or Matilda.
Jean-Claude came to dinner. He said (about "cocktail sauce")
It should be good on something but not on these (oysters).
By that time I think I had already written The Circus
When I came back, having been annoyed to have to go
I forget what I went there about
You were back in the apartment what a dump actually we liked it
I think with your hair and your writing and the pans
Moving strummingly about the kitchen and I wrote The Circus
It was a summer night no it was an autumn one summer when
I remember it but actually no autumn that black dusk toward the post office
And I wrote many other poems then but The Circus was the best

⁴ "The Circus" (second poem with this title) was originally published in *The Art of Love* in 1975

Maybe not by far the best Geography was also wonderful
And the Airplane Betty poems (inspired by you) but The Circus was the best.

Sometimes I feel I actually am the person
Who did this, who wrote that, including that poem The Circus
But sometimes on the other hand I don't.
There are so many factors engaging our attention!
At every moment the happiness of others, the health of those we know and our own!
And the millions upon millions of people we don't know and their well-being to think
about
So it seems strange I found time to write The Circus
And even spent two evenings on it, and that I have also the time
To remember that I did it, and remember you and me then, and write this poem about
it
At the beginning of The Circus
The Circus girls are rushing through the night
In the circus wagons and tulips and other flowers will be picked
A long time from now this poem wants to get off on its own
Someplace like a painting not held to a depiction of composing The Circus.

Noel Lee was in Paris then but usually out of it
In Germany or Denmark giving a concert
As part of an endless activity
Which was either his career or his happiness or a combination of both
Or neither I remember his dark eyes looking he was nervous
With me perhaps because of our days at Harvard.

It is understandable enough to be nervous with anybody!

How softly and easily one feels when alone
Love of one's friends when one is commanding the time and space syndrome
If that's the right word which I doubt but together how come one is so nervous?
One is not always but what was I then and what am I now attempting to create
If create is the right word
Out of this combination of experience and aloneness
And who are you telling me it is or is not a poem (not you?) Go back with me though
To those nights I was writing The Circus.
Do you like that poem? have you read it? It is in my book Thank You
Which Grove just reprinted. I wonder how long I am going to live
And what the rest will be like I mean the rest of my life.

John Cage said to me the other night How old are you? and I told him forty-six
(Since then I've become forty-seven) he said
Oh that's a great age I remember.
John Cage once told me he didn't charge much for his mushroom identification
course (at the New School)

Because he didn't want to make a profit from nature

He was ahead of his time I was behind my time we were both in time
Brilliant go to the head of the class and "time is a river"
It doesn't seem like a river to me it seems like an unformed plan
Days go by and still nothing is decided about
What to do until you know it never will be and then you say "time"
But you really don't care much about it any more
Time means something when you have the major part of yours ahead of you
As I did in Aix-en-Provence that was three years before I wrote The Circus
That year I wrote Bricks and The Great Atlantic Rainway
I felt time surround me like a blanket endless and soft
I could go to sleep endlessly and wake up and still be in it
But I treasured secretly the part of me that was individually changing
Like Noel Lee I was interested in my career
And still am but now it is like a town I don't want to leave
Not a tower I am climbing opposed by ferocious enemies

I never mentioned my friends in my poems at the time I wrote The Circus
Although they meant almost more than anything to me
Of this now for some time I've felt an attenuation
So I'm mentioning them maybe this will bring them back to me
Not them perhaps but what I felt about them
John Ashbery Jane Freilicher Larry Rivers Frank O'Hara
Their names alone bring tears to my eyes
As seeing Polly did last night
It is beautiful at any time but the paradox is leaving it
In order to feel it when you've come back the sun has declined
And the people are merrier or else they've gone home altogether
And you are left alone well you put up with that your sureness is like the sun
While you have it but when you don't its lack's a black and icy night. I came home
And wrote The Circus that night, Janice. I didn't come and speak to you
And put my arm around you and ask you if you'd like to take a walk
Or go to the Cirque Medrano though that's what I wrote poems about
And am writing about that now, and now I'm alone

And this is not as good a poem as The Circus
And I wonder if any good will come of either of them all the same.

What I love so much about "The Circus" (which is actually the second poem
he wrote called "The Circus") is its humor; its inclusion of the reader in his inner
world; and the deliberately confusing and jumping narrative (he alludes to the first
version of the poem throughout the second). He interrupts himself. He asks and

answers his own questions—sometimes ones we never heard in the first place. I am often unsure whether he holds the past in reverence or is just stating facts and putting them in context. He makes us care about these people we’ve never met. He makes me want to follow his stories but I can’t because his story is not linear and then I laugh at myself because I’m not a linear thinker either so why do I feel like I need him to be? I love his very specific use of punctuation. There are so few punctuation marks in this piece. I feel like I’m tumbling down a steep hill as I follow the words and trains of thought and then, when there is finally a punctuation mark, I hit a wall—relief: a strong stop, pause, and breath.

This poem is inside me and it came out as I wrote some of the text for *Sharing a Dance with You*. My monologue plays with this self-interruption and non-linear storyline that is difficult to follow and introduces you to names of people you don’t know while revealing a felt sense of knowing me. This is similar to the felt-sense of knowing that often builds in dance relationships. We know each other fully before we know anything about each other. I wanted the audience to experience that with me—knowing me before learning the details of my life.

Often I find this to be most clear in dance retreat or workshop settings; there are condensed timelines and increased hours of togetherness. During the summer of 2013, I attended two weeks of intensive dance workshops on Lasqueti Island in British Columbia, Canada. Leviathan Studio is a beautiful retreat space made from sustainable materials and an all-in-one living/dancing/cooking/eating space. Participants camp, dance, sauna, hike, cook and eat together. In many ways, the bonding is as important an experience as the dancing and retreat aspects.

My experience on Lasqueti Island was a strong template for my thesis. Meals were an integral part of life on the island, particularly how the food was obtained. Vegetables were picked from the garden; chicken came from the coop next to my tent; wild sheep and goats were caught on the grounds, salmon from the ocean. Every step of the process was harmonious with the land, part of the life cycle, eschewing overabundance. There was a certain respect for the body and its needs, caring about what was put into it and at what time. Eating was a ritual in which all forty participants of the first workshop partook at the same time. Conversation was always spirited, lively and engaging. We talked about dance, gender, health, spirituality—important topics that require open minds and a safe, undistracted place.

With such emphasis on the importance and beauty of what we are putting in our bodies and how we are doing it, I wanted to create a piece of art with the food prior to preparing it. Visual/environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy's work⁵ is inspirational for me in that he arranges color and texture into beautiful structures that are intended to collapse and decompose. This is in line with the holistic mindset—not overproducing, not expecting things to last forever. I wanted to create an installation of ingredients that would be colorful, textured, aromatic, and extraordinary to look at, acknowledging the time and effort necessary to create it, enjoy it briefly, and ultimately break it down into a meal. Its lifespan as art would be short lived; the installation would have needed to be recreated each evening. Though this did not end up being a possibility, I still found pleasure in the setting and resetting each evening,

⁵ <http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/>

watching the ingredients transform, smelling the room transform, and feeling the energy of the space transform.

I was able to source the ingredients locally for the most part thanks to the hard work and support of TDPS Production Manager Cary Gillett in talking to Event Services on campus. This partnership was an interesting obstacle to navigate during the process. Since the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies has an exclusivity contract with Event Services, any food consumed by the audience was required to be cooked by the catering service. However, the work relied heavily on the theme of the food being cooked by the performers and audience members during the piece. We were also initially working with a budget that would not accommodate the cost as I planned on making the food ourselves and not paying for that service.

Cary and I began meeting with Event Services in mid-February 2014. I wanted to collaborate with a chef for the project so I thought working with them would be exciting. I quickly became disheartened. The prices were extremely high and I was not going to be able to feed the audience enough of anything to maintain the essence of my original proposal. They seemed to want to be involved in the piece with a chef teaching audience members how to chop and individually serving each member of the audience their plates. The chef made suggestions for more affordable foods including spring rolls and small salads, but I needed to cook with water to keep the thread of transformation. I also needed the food to be simple to cook so that performers and audience members could drop in and out of the process.

I began brainstorming ways to cut down the cost including using prop plates and silverware instead of renting those belonging to the catering service, and not

using catering staff at all during the work. These options were also more aligned with the goal of this piece. The process of deconstructing a catering service was both interesting and frustrating as I progressed. After three meetings with them, I realized the chef was not interested in collaborating with me on something that fit my desires and dietary needs and I did not know what to do. Then, more money became available for the food in the overall production budget. Once the budget was expanded, I was able to give the chef the recipes I wanted to make. It was decided that the food cooked by the dancers and audience members and consumed solely by dancers would come out of the props budget. The food for the audience would be prepared ahead of time by Event Services and wheeled in on tables by crew members when time to eat. The menu became the foods I served during my thesis proposal presentation to the dance faculty: a root vegetable mash and a spinach salad—perfect fall dishes.

I knew I wanted to perform in the fall for several reasons. One of which was the in-season produce selection. The colors, aromas, and flavors of the readily available foods are far more interesting and palatable. The fall was also the best way to pace myself and take care of myself. It was exciting and ultimately good for me to channel into my work my past and my healing from trauma—but at the time it was incredibly painful and stressful. With my autoimmune disease a direct symptom of my traumatic past with the potential to flare up as a reaction to stress, I wanted to ensure my health remained intact as I moved forward with this process. Additionally, fellow Dance MFA candidate Nicole McClam and I developed a wonderful dynamic and collaborative spirit and we wished to present together. We shared several

commonalities between the themes we were working with and were excited to create a duet during the intermission that would link the works.

On a macro level, my goals for this work were:

- to eliminate the fourth wall
- to create relatable, accessible and evocative work
- to ignite all of the senses
- to engage the audience
- to work collaboratively with dancers, designers, chefs and the audience
- to create work that would inspire discussion
- to blur the lines between art, dance, theory and life
- to nourish minds, bodies and souls

I was initially interested in investigating the presence of gender and race in kitchens. Who do you think of when you think: kitchen? Who do you think of in a home kitchen? In an industrial kitchen? What do you picture them wearing? What sorts of activities occur in the kitchen? My research never fully extended to answering any of these questions, even after beginning a related independent study in the Spring semester of 2014. This is in part because I learned that my work would not be occurring outside of the Clarice. After an exhaustive search by Cary to help me find an industrial kitchen space on campus, we received news that, due to production constraints, the thesis concerts were going to be required to be performed within the Clarice building. Since it does not have a kitchen, I had to drastically re-imagine the direction of the work. Instead, I decided to create a site-specific dance in the Dance Theatre and shift my focus from an industrial kitchen to a metaphorical kitchen. I

considered the Dance Theatre our (dancers') kitchen, our art studio; it is where we learn, practice, gather, and socialize; it is where we take class and watch performances. Through this lens, the questions about industrial and home kitchens were no longer relevant. I was still conscious of the discussion of who cooks but in a metaphorical sense. Who cooks meals? Who eats them? Who makes dances? Who watches them? Who practices these and who cares about them? What I began to realize was that we all do these, or are at least capable of doing them. I wanted to be mindful of the assumed answers while offering a space to encourage a more open mind. This shift in focus was only possible because of the openness offered by performing in the Dance Theatre.

Before this conceptual shift, I reached out to a female chef in the area. I interviewed her about what it's like to be a rare woman working in the industry as well as her experiences with gender, race and ethnicity. A couple of quotes from the interview remained relevant with the new direction: "Cooking is about trust, and I didn't trust him"; "Don't play chef with me today." These resonated with me as important concepts in the kitchen while also being deeply connected to my other research.

In addition to the quotes, she recommended a memoir, *Blood, Bones and Butter*, by Gabrielle Hamilton, a fast-rising female chef. This illuminated how our relationship to food shapes our health. Hamilton's deep reverence for high-quality ingredients and focus on food as central to family and community struck me. I then followed these themes and found Michael Pollan, a deeply influential food writer and researcher, and read several of his books, including *In Defense of Food: A Natural*

History of Four Meals, The Omnivore's Dilemma: An Eater's Manifesto, and Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation.

Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.
—Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food*

Michael Pollan's work reflected my discoveries with dance: do your own research—always, and about everything. When food is thought of as biology—as simply nutrients through a lens of health (which is a narrow concept), or eating scientifically under the guidance of experts—we lose food's capacity to provide us with pleasure, community, spirituality, family, a relationship to the natural world, and a means to express identity. These are vital components of culture. Interrogating what we consume and how we consume it is necessary and not frequently practiced. As it stands, particularly in the Western world, food is industry driven. The vast majority of our information comes from statistics and studies. The benefactors of this process of conflicting and evolving status quos are the food industry, journalists, and nutritionists. As these industries grow, the Western world grows fatter and less happy.

The human body is adaptable to a wide variety of diets. We can adjust to eating anything—except processed foods. This is one reason why the Western world is more obese than any other part of the world. This relates back to the process of misinformation. Packaging, marketing, food corporations, and even the Federal government are misleading, commercialized, and corrupt. We are breeding paradoxical cultures of orthorexics⁶ and nutritional industrial complexes. There is no one-size-fits-all, right answer when it comes to nutrition, and the more mindless we are in our practices, the less we are in control and connected to ourselves. While

⁶ According to Pollan, orthorexia is an unhealthy obsession with eating healthy

reading Pollan's books, I stopped purchasing food products and began making dressings, marinades, and snacks on my own. I started taking a closer look at the diet I was given to help manage my Crohn's/Colitis and exploring what might work better for me.

I used Pollan's research to drive my own experiments. In a sugar detox program run by an acquaintance, Richele Henry, an Institute for Integrative Nutrition certified life coach, I embarked on a four-week food experiment abstaining from foods containing sugar and other processed ingredients. Her program doesn't claim to be correct or incorrect—it only offers suggestions and opportunities to tune into your body, listen to what is best for you, and make conscious choices. Looking beyond the nutritional aspects of food, you are encouraged to address your relationship to food through a supportive community of women. It aims to teach you to: reframe your thinking of changing your eating habits from deprivation to setting loving boundaries for yourself; set intentions; stay positive when you slip up; reconnect with yourself and with the earth; and feel how important movement is to your overall relationship to food. I am still experimenting with what works and doesn't work for me. Just as there is no one-size-fits-all diet recommendation, I believe our bodies' needs fluctuate.

I was also interested in the blending of multiple art forms. I have a love for poetry—both writing and reading it—and have found it a useful source for creating movement from my intellectual and emotional research. It is like a stepping-stone for me, helping to bridge the gap between emotional thought and understanding and my body. I find a lot of poetry to be inspiration

for my process, both writing and reading it, whether as content, rhythm, visual composition or emotional processing. I think incorporating text into dance work helps access the primal, experience-based sense of understanding and adds symbolic meaning and communication. Combining poetry and dance and cooking and audience interaction was a way for the audience to access cross-modal perception.

Design

When the audience walked into the theatre, it is likely that they first noticed a large sculpture hanging from the middle of the Dance Theatre designed by Scenic Design MFA candidate, Katie R. Sullivan. This webbed collage of objects was a unifying force with Nicole's work and served to transform the space into a place of magic and wonder. It hung from the ceiling like a static wave. Dangling objects inspired by Nicole and myself represented our works and processes. Some items I specifically requested were dolls, mannequin pieces, kitchen utensils, high heels, clocks, phallic-shaped objects, and many more. The sculpture served as a physical link between our pieces, to highlight the height of the space, and as a way to make the room actually feel different depending on where you sat. It was one of many ways to give each audience member a unique experience.

Working with Katie was challenging but ultimately very positive. I loved her vision for the space and how she tied our two works together in such an impactful way. She was extremely communicative at first, meeting with me several times to show changes in the design prior to the production meetings, and then extremely supportive throughout the tech week. It was difficult to work with her between the

finalization of the designs in March 2014 and the tech week in October 2014.

Because dance works are devised and evolve constantly, it is important to stay in contact with the scenic designer and for her to keep track of changes being made throughout. I tried to be communicative about every change, but I was not given any of the timelines or any updates about the building/collection of set and prop pieces, so we had some tension as we all tried to get back on the same page. In the end, most of the concerns I had were resolved and I loved the final product.

As the audience re-enters after Nicole's work, they find that the mismatched chairs have been rearranged throughout the space and are now situated at café tables with no distinguishable front or clearly danceable area. There is no masking in the space. The mirror that runs the length of the back of the Dance Theatre is exposed, as is the wood floor and the areas typically designated as back stage. The lighting is like walking into a restaurant—warm, intimate, and even throughout the space. There is also a kitchen island in the center of the room. On the island is a hot plate, metal washbasin, cutting board and knives, mixing bowls, raw foods, spices, and aprons.

It is clear when you enter the space that what will unfold in front of you is unlike most traditional dance experiences you have had. It sets the stage for something a little different, possibly intimidating, but there is also something familiar and comfortable about it. This sense of comfort is set up largely by the lighting design.

Max Doolittle, Lighting Design MFA candidate, created something truly magical to support the work. His support and his thoughts in our early meetings really helped solidify my goals with this piece. He is an excellent listener. He distills

importance from a casual conversation and articulates his findings back to you simply. His lighting was very subtle in some ways and extremely dynamic in others, and I appreciated how deeply he was invested in the process.

The lighting design started with a world in balance—it is welcoming, understandable. As the piece goes on, we undress that world, little by little, in a way that is so subtle the audience isn't supposed to realize it until they have a moment where they can say, "How did we get here?" A new world is rebuilt by lighting the sculpture one lighting instrument at a time.

The lighting design took on three main sections which set different tones and helped guide the audience's attention and focus. The first section has few to no shifts in lighting at all, helping to eliminate that separation of performer and audience member, as well as performance and life. As the piece goes on, the lighting becomes more reflective of the emotional tone of the work, playing with light and dark, ominous and safe, vacancy and satiation. The lighting becomes more dynamic and dramatic as the work unfolds and the feeling of the piece heads towards a dystopia. The lighting is then instrumental in bridging us back from this world of self-hatred and introspection into a space for us all to share, reflect, and move forward into the world again. After a climactic moment in the work, the lights return to their starting point of warm, intimate, and even throughout the space in preparation of sending the audience back out into the world. As with the beginning, the piece has no blackout, no signifier pointing to a moment of beginning or ending.

The sound design is also minimal but crucial for moments of change within the work. Despite the length of the piece, Sound Designer Jeffrey Dorfman only had

to design four or five moments. The majority of the piece is performed in silence since the choreography produces an organic soundscore. Dorfman's overall design was built around helping the audience stay inside the emotional narrative. He created a sound of clinking glasses at the beginning of the piece to let the audience know that dancers will soon enter the space. He fashioned a quasi-percussive track of rattling pots and pans to help ease some of the nervousness that might occur when the dancers ask the audience to create their own dance moves. With a full and subtly chaotic background noise, the audience members don't feel singled out and exposed. We found a drone sound that could exist at a low level, growing slightly, almost unnoticeable until you feel an unsettling sensation in your stomach as the piece grows darker in tone. He picked out the absolute perfect song for the cathartic apex, which is "The Motherlode" by The Staves. Overall, Dorfman's greatest contribution was that he helped me feel confident that the piece supports itself, and that what we do with the soundscore helps the audience understand the mood.

Kate Fulop, Costume Design MFA candidate, collaborated well with me. Her knowledge and interest in feminist studies, as well as organic and sustainable mindsets, was a perfect fit. I had a strong desire to put the cast in long skirts that could clip up and turn into pants at any time, and she was excited to figure out a means to accomplish that. She brought to the piece the idea of naturally dyed fabrics patterned with stamped silhouettes of leaves, vegetables, and fruits. We discussed at length what the undergarments should look like given my interest in exposing our bodies—both as a vulnerable act as well as an act challenging convention. She

understood my inspiration from photographer Vanessa Beecroft's⁷ works of women in varying states of undress and sheer clothing. After discussing with faculty and advisors the difficulties surrounding nudity in a cast comprised of undergraduates, I brought to her the idea of using Ta Ta Tops, which are nude-colored bikini tops with realistic areolas. She found options for underwear that tied in nicely. She helped me decide on a structured apron for my cast and a clear apron for myself to act as a protective barrier while maintaining transparency and vulnerability.

Illustration 1:



Illustration 2:



⁷ <http://www.vanessabeecroft.com/>

Elissa and Justin's costumes were made from nylon gloves. This started because I wanted Elissa's costume to be able to inflate and/or release flower petals from it. I wanted their costumes to be grand, avant-garde, and conceptual. During the design process, this became less and less of a reality until we worked the nylon gloves into the same sort of concept as my clear apron—protective barriers that are still vulnerable in that they rip and come off. In the end, even the ripping-off was lost because of the repair time necessary, so they are just these significantly different costume pieces. Justin's chest plate was originally going to be made from broken plates with a bare chest underneath, but it was changed to just having the broken plate pieces sewn onto a vest because the costume department was worried about wire on his bare skin. While I am disappointed that we were not able to work with my original vision, the costumes are still intriguing, and we were able to fake Elissa releasing petals by hiding them up her rubber cleaning gloves and in plastic bags underneath that she could rip open.

Illustration 3



Intermission

Nicole and I created a duet in the Clarice's Grand Pavilion lobby to serve as a bridge between our works. We began by listing important themes and images we noticed from each other's pieces and discussing how our works were similar and different. We discussed phrases developed for our pieces that did not end up in the final versions. We also discussed our personality styles and patterns we have noticed after making several pieces together. When we work together, there is always a unique stamp so we tried to break it down and understand it without overthinking or prescribing anything.

When we walked into the lobby from the Dance Theatre, we tracked our experience of moving into that space. Where do we dance? How do we emphasize the space? How do we guide the audience appropriately? We settled on three benches lined up along a curving wall in view of the entrance to the lobby. The large, open space in front of it would be appropriate for the audience to gather and we could already be in motion as the first audience members came into view to establish the duet immediately. Nicole's dancers would be able to guide the audience out of the theatre and into the lobby.

We decided to investigate themes and images from our works—isolation, restriction and release, inclusion and exclusion, and escaping. We were interested in incorporating a phrase called “Blaxploitation” that did not make it into Nicole's work; a squashing gesture from her work; knitting, which was part of her process; and, from my piece, a hammering gesture and a movement I call “clamoring fematalia.”

The duet began with a repetitive unison phrase based on body postures, adding arms and focus to draw out and away from us and into the space and then shifting to us each flailing around in our own ways with high energy—playing with unison and separation. We played off of my exposition side and Nicole’s prudish side and we ran through the upper level of the Clarice lobby, giggling and talking to activate the full space. The duet repeats twice and we run off the second time to the backstage area, leaving the audience the rest of the intermission to transition from one work to the next.

Introduction

The work begins with an improvised score. The prompts for spontaneous movement choices in performance: pull text, movement, and emotion/motive from the entirety of the piece and/or any materials used throughout the process; join one at a time. This section is a prologue of sorts. My goal was to introduce the audience to all of the different themes we will be exploring in an indirect fashion. I wanted to set the stage for a little confusion and chaos, a little humor, and introduce the audience to the immersive experience. Love, humor, gender, chaos, poetry, cooking, food, and body image were the main prompts from which to source material. I wanted to take everything out of context and rearrange it, create interesting juxtapositions and word play. This is also an opportunity to call on many movement phrases and poems that did not make it into the full work. Elissa and Justin are present but do not participate in any movement. When the introduction ends, they quietly disappear from the space.

Alternate Realities

When I was young, like really young, an older kid introduced me to the concept of alternate realities. Specifically he was talking about the way we see color—i.e. what I see as red, someone else might see as purple. Because we are coming from different viewpoints, we agree to give it an identifying name: red.

I also started thinking about an alternate reality in which nothing of what we know or experience is real, that our entire worlds and lives exist purely in someone else's mind—someone else probably from a different universe. I would walk around and say, "I am touching my arm. I can feel myself touching my arm but neither I nor my arm exist. I can feel it because it is believed to be felt. If the belief is gone, so am I."

I was about six years old and this completely consumed me. I thought about these concepts nonstop until I was about ten or so. The theories were particularly appealing to me; I found a lot of relief in the idea that some reality other than what I had experienced could exist and took refuge in it.

The introduction is my alternate reality. It is an agreement amongst the performers to share a version of the story, the viewpoint being a lively, entertaining, humorous, chaotic, and confusing assimilation of the various important components of the work. The essence of the work is present without a clear emotional narrative; the result is an alternate version of the story.

Escape

I'm at home and I know he is coming to pick me up. I'm standing by the door with anticipation, excitement and fear. I'm waiting.

I'm in the foyer and he is grabbing my arm and pulling me up the stairs to the room I share with Karen. He is screaming at me. My arm hurts.

He is stuffing my red and blue suitcase with random articles of clothing. I am crying. We had an agreement. This is wrong.

I'm in his car in a booster seat I no longer need. He straps it down. He shuts the door and walks around the car to buckle Karen in. I squirm out. He closes her door and comes back around to me. I dive out the open window on Karen's side, land on the grass and run to my mother. He chases me. I cling to her. I'm screaming. I'm crying. I'm terrified.

My Dad (who is not my father) has the phone in his hand and is calling the police.

He is behind me. His eyes are fierce.

He is grabbing me. My mother holds on tight. It is a tug of war. I fear death. I fear worse.

He stops grabbing me. He retreats to the car, retrieves Karen and throws her at my mother. "You can keep this one too. She shits herself."

I am almost seven. Karen is almost five.

This is the last time I ever see my father.

I am at school in my first grade classroom. We have a substitute teacher. The class is out of control. I am quiet.

We are lining up at the door to leave the room for something. Patrick Murphy says he is going to kiss me. He comes towards me. I step back. I am against the counter in the kitchen area of the classroom. He comes towards me. I am in the corner. He comes towards me. I cannot escape. I punch him in the face. I duck under his arms and run into the hallway.

This is the first time I attend therapy.

Longform

The introduction ends with me joining Sydney, who abstained from the improvised score because she joined the process later and also missed many of the rehearsals over the summer during which we developed the score. Instead, she is at the counter preparing the food and retrieving a jar of spices from the sculpture. This

leads into what we call Longform. Longform is a journey of noticing the inside of our selves. It starts with a phrase created from an Authentic Movement⁸ exercise in the very first rehearsal. Humming was added after beginning Linklater⁹ training in June 2014 because I was looking for a way to draw attention towards the two of them after being spread throughout the space. I'm asking the audience to zoom in as we zoom in towards ourselves. Emma and Devin begin calmly rocking and humming but it soon grows into short, fast shaking—inner chaos and unrest shaking and bubbling up inside. Emma breaks the cycle by biting Devin's shoulder.

This image came from a lot of places: I bite my partner, Andrew, from time to time when I want attention or when I am stopping myself from saying something; I was hoping to suggest that as we cook and eat food, we metaphorically cook and eat our own selves and each other; I was looking for a discrete, strong gesture that linked the two of them and shifted their state; I was looking for something that is really weird. They maintain this connection as they walk forward, join with Nicole, and begin the Can-Can.

The Can-Can is a complicated metaphor for me. It is historically a specific dance with its own context and implications of gender, sexuality, and culture but I was responding to a specific context of its use within Shop-Rite commercials.¹⁰ These commercials have been around for decades and have stayed with me despite not having a TV or watching commercials in five years. For me, these commercials,

⁸ Created by Mary Starks Whitehouse, among others, Authentic Movement is a mode of somatic inquiry. http://www.authenticmovementjournal.com/?page_id=2

⁹ Linklater is a technique for freeing the voice created by Kristin Linklater in the 1970s. <http://www.linklatervoice.com/>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdpYxZzhATQ>

among many others, bring up the context of sexuality (specifically the female body in a sexual way) to sell a product, and beyond that, actually sexualizing food, and toxic food at that. The commercials are selling canned foods, which are severely processed and filled with preservatives. They're sold at insanely low prices, which means they are targeting low-income families. The commercials stir up anger, sadness, and frustration for me and I felt the desire to satirize them.

Food is a complicated subject for a lot of people. It can be symbolic of love. For me, the love my father showed me growing up was toxic—now, for my body, food is toxic. This is true regardless of its ingredients or level of processing. To put it in my body feels dangerous and yet to deny myself food leaves me physically and emotionally empty. The process of eating can also be broken down into receptive and penetrative, hence its relation to gender and sex. To receive food and nourishment is painful emotionally. To receive food that is not on my diet causes me significant physical pain.

I want so badly to accept the healing properties of food. I want to always remember to use the ritual for healing. I am not always there. Patrizia Pallaro, my Dance/Movement Therapist, was a little concerned as I started this process about attacking this issue in the work. She encouraged me to begin a daily Authentic Movement and writing practice. These were extremely important for me in working through my relationship with food and my past trauma gently as I was confronting it directly in the work.

When Emma, Devin, and Nicole break from the Can-Can, Sydney joins them. The four of them have large phrase work. Emma and Devin built their phrases very

early in the process. I asked them to develop a phrase that was big and moved into and out of the floor. I took their movement, which was generally lacking in momentum and flow or focus, and edited it to add these elements. I then spliced in a movement phrase that I created from the same prompt into different parts of their phrases so that they had shared material. Nicole's movement was an improvised score. Her score was to work with an explosive, big phrase, part of which was the same phrase I spliced into Emma and Devin's phrases, but perform it like her body was completely constrained. Sydney's phrase was an improvised score of mini explosions without stepping away from the counter. These explosive phrases were intended to be the release of internal chaos bubbling over for Emma and Devin while Sydney and Nicole were only just beginning to break from within. This phrase concludes and I hit the table bell, signifying a shift, a compartmentalization of the inner experience, and we all clip our skirts up into pants. This gesture suggests a shift in persona. We adopt a masculine silhouette, in contrast to the feminine one that we all begin with.

My cast begins a gesture. Originally created by Emma when asked to create a phrase of abstracted gendered gestures, it is an act of standing with straight legs and a deep crease at the hips with loose arms. One arm starts at the opposite shoulder and slides down the arm, making a swiping noise and a swinging sensation. The gesture is repeated on alternating arms four times and then the arms are left to continue swinging side to side for four swings. They join in one at a time until all have begun the action and then add a step to each swipe, allowing the swings to happen above a still base. Emma intended for this to come from brushing and braiding her hair but it

transformed fairly early on to mimic the sound of knives sharpening. This is the first true unison moment of the work, and they walk through the space offering audience members an opportunity to feel moving and hear them making sound around them.

After several of these swishing repetitions, I begin my monologue—an ambiguous discussion I have with myself about where and when the thesis process really began. Similar to the introduction, I’m intentionally tying in threads from the rest of the work but leaving mystery so the audience cannot follow exactly what is going on yet.

“This whole thing first started...” Something I still am not sure of is what “this whole thing” really is. My autoimmune disease? My gender identity? My body image issues? The healing process? My thesis? Being a dancer? “This whole thing first started when I was finally finding happiness. I guess it started before that, with Russell?” That is my autoimmune disease, the symptoms of which began as a malignant relationship fell apart. “No, it started when I was two,”—when my father began abusing me—“but this physical problem started when I found real happiness.” I started going to Al-Anon, claiming back my agency, and feeling reinvigorated by life; this corresponded with two major body issues: relapsing with anorexia and intestinal bleeding. “Well, not that then either; that started all the way back then as well but my realization of this problem was really at that point where happiness started to peek through.” Now I’ve shifted again, the anorexia started when I was ten; the anxiety and control issues started when he began abusing me; the issues surrounding gender started very young but I didn’t understand my thoughts on gender until this happiness period after Russell; understanding the connection between all of

these things occurred first semester of my second year of grad school. “The princess and her prince fell madly in love and lived happily ever after. That. That’s where I’m going to start.” Andrew. Andrew came back into my life at the right time, pushed me to ask the right questions, cared for me, and reminded me that some men can be safe. I choose this as my beginning. This was my moment of rebirth.

For Andrew

And by the time the punch line came around
all the waves had crashed
all the songs were sung
and the stars burned as brightly as the sun

She fell into the arms
of the octopus who carries the moon on his back
and he rocked her gently to sleep
for the first time

Breath washed over the sky
like paint on oily skin
and tears flowed down her cheeks like champagne
rinsing away inky stains of ancient sketches

[Everyone was reminded of the time
the world stood still for nearly three minutes
and their lives flashed before them like fiery kaleidoscope showers
only to find at the end they were still alive]

The reference to me as a princess is descriptive of my earliest identity. “This princess became overwhelmingly ill and found herself in the hospital within four months of her happily ever after.” Finally feeling safe, my body was allowed to experience the sickness it was holding in for survival for so long. I spiraled out of “health” very quickly. “Oh, and this princess was slowly rejecting her assigned role as princess, preferring instead simply ‘human.’” I’d been pushing away this princess persona I adopted early in life since I started doing modern dance when I was twenty years old but I didn’t consciously know what I was doing, why I was doing it nor was I making it a part of myself and identity.

That all started with Andrew. Early in our relationship we talked about fantasies and what makes us weird. I admitted that I had rape fantasies and an interest in putting myself in dangerous situations. Andrew admitted he liked dressing up in women’s clothing and wanted to feel beautiful. In that moment, I realized in a conscious way that my attitude towards gender was different. That sounded a lot like what I was doing with my own clothing and behavioral choices. We talked about this idea of not feeling like any singular character but actually like a lot of different simultaneous existences that somehow filtered down into a solid, clear, multifaceted identity. I started doing research about what this meant and realized I’d been searching for ways to fit into pre-existing boxes, which produced stress and destroyed any sense of identity. By declaring a more complicated, nuanced, and fluid identity, I started to feel more complete and comfortable. The first year and a half of graduate school followed this six-month period of understanding and only clarified my understanding of identity further. I became more confident in this multifaceted

identity, more eager to express it and claim it as mine. I became more interested in understanding where it came from, why I felt this way, how I could feel more comfortable, more confident, more clear and how I could help others who may be in my shoes.

The following is a quote from my Creative Process Book about the monologue:

My thoughts with this are that some speech like this where I'm kind of talking to myself but to the audience but interrupting myself will be my transition from dance performance to something else. I see this happening while I'm cooking. Maybe my dancers are still dancing. Throughout this speech I interrupt my own self—interruptions to ask an audience member to pass me something, cut something, maybe take over whatever task I'm doing. It will dissolve into questions to my dancers and the audience as well as instructions or directions or requests until they are participating in the cooking and a discussion. Perhaps dancing will occur as I pass off my duties to audience members. Maybe the instructions will turn into movement suggestions as well. Or a request to read a poem or create a sound offering.

I wrote the monologue and thoughts on it the day after my first rehearsal on January 27, 2014. Aside from a couple of edits, this idea really carried through to the final product. Some of the first ideas for figuring out how the audience could take over some of the cooking were simmering already. These did not end up finding their place during the monologue but do turn up later in the Longform section.

When I finish my monologue, I hit the table bell again, signifying another shift. We all, for the first time in full unison, begin walking in a low, wide squat, arms dragging on the ground like apes, in direct pathways towards the risers. This is another reference to a moment later in the work where we access our animalistic sides. When we arrive at the risers, our focus follows them up, bodies following focus, until we are standing, staring at the ceiling. I was interested in referencing the

height of the space and I was interested in the suggestion this particular series of events might give towards evolution.

We break this trance with each of us choosing an audience member and then walking through the space on a direct path towards them. When we reach our mark, we bend in low, one hand cupped around our mouth and their ear and hold our breath. After arriving in shared stillness, we break on our own timing and repeat with a new mark. This came from a sense of wanting to share, wanting to tell my story, wanting to scream but not knowing how to speak yet. I also was looking for a gentle way to initiate the first direct relationship with individual audience members. I wanted something that was not confrontational or scary but made them tune in to their own bodily experience. What does it feel like to have someone suddenly so close? What happens to your body when you are prepared to listen? Are you excited to hear what we have to say? Are you nervous? I added Justin to the almost-whispering section as well. I was interested in introducing him in this surreal way, inserting him into the main cast's actions with no explanation and having him disappear again. It is highly likely some audience members never saw him.

We created a character for him to inhabit which was still being developed and refined during the performance's run. We settled on constant bound flow, a wide base, somewhat robotic movement and a stern face. I wanted to exaggerate Masculinity, as defined in Jungian psychoanalysis¹¹—a strong, heavy force that penetrates the space. Masculinity is aligned with creativity, strength, power, and an overall sense of LOUD.

¹¹ Jungian Psychoanalysis is a method of psychotherapy developed by Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung. <http://www.jungnewyork.com/what-is-jungian-analysis.shtml>

Devin zooms in on an audience member in an orange shirt, screeches in a high pitch, and rushes to them. This was a different scenario every night. Pre-show, we scoped out the audience to see if there was anyone already wearing an orange shirt. If there was, it was Devin's job to find that person by his fourth whisper. If there was not anyone in an orange shirt already, Nicole brought one in during the introduction and picked someone to ask to wear the shirt. This still provided a surprise to Devin but the audience member had an entirely different experience. I'm really interested in using the audience to affect how the work unfolds, even if it is just subtle differences like this. Devin then runs over to that person and recites Frank O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You" to them. The orange shirt came from a line in the poem about an observational, mundane reason to love someone.

Devin's scream is the signal for the rest of us to run to the island in the middle of the room. We grab cotton aprons from the shelf below and put them on. We then begin a series of cooking tasks. There are four stations: chopping, washing, mixing, and stirring. We each take on a task and talk to each other like we are long time friends or family members, which at this point we really are. At unknown points throughout the poem and cooking, I hit the bell on the table again, which signifies us all to change. At the counter, we turn around ourselves and shift to the task station one position to our left. Devin also uses the bell to change which audience member he is reciting his love poem to. This was a suggestion from Sharon that I really enjoyed when I implemented it. It allowed more audience members an opportunity to have attention turned towards them; it gave the original mark the opportunity to be relieved of the attention after a shorter length of time; it added a comedic element that I

enjoyed in the moment; and it suggested that perhaps Devin's love was not as much about one person, but could shift at the slightest impulse or, perhaps, his love reached beyond one single person. I enjoyed the ambiguity of what this signified. Is he narcissistic? Is he just shallow? Is he pansexual? Is he polyamorous? All of these answers are outside the accepted norm and are therefore interesting to me and important to offer as possibilities of human existence.

When the poem concludes, those of us at the counter step back and brush our hands on our aprons in perfect unison. We then break and grab an audience member asking them to take over our cooking tasks, quickly describe what we were just doing and abandon them as we spread out through the space; I take the seat of the person who replaced me and we dissolve to the next section.

The kitchen island in the space is an important anchor. In his book, *Healing Trauma*, Dr. Peter A Levine suggests that when we are traumatized, the body feels like a dangerous place rather than a safe one. As a way to learn how to regulate feelings, we use a special, tangible object that we consider comforting, called an island of safety. When we experience a state of fear, panic, or paralysis, this object can help bring our focus out of the danger of our own body in the immediate sense and to something outside of ourselves. We then can track back and forth between our inner feelings and the safe, tangible, out-of-body object to bring us out of this state and into a place of safety again. I use the kitchen island to create an island of safety within the work.

This island is a place where the audience usually knows what is happening. In the rest of the room, anything can happen anywhere, at any time, but at the island, the

audience can relax; our expectations of them are clearer. When the dancers are at the island, the audience knows they will most likely not be called to act nor have a dancer too close for comfort.

Illustration 4



Islands of safety

Butchered blocks
of stone in my pocket.

Finger-
tips;
rub

smooth
oiled protectors

Safety
in the form of islands.

This island: a stone in my palm
a cart in my kitchen.

This stone: an archipelago
an island in my thesis
storing my pots and pans

This island stores
in the pocket
of my pants.

Wave Phrase

The next section is the wave phrase. This section came directly from my DMT sessions. In *Healing Trauma*, Dr. Levine talks about allowing yourself to ride emotional waves. He compares moments of extreme stress, or even extreme happiness, to the crests of waves and suggests envisioning yourself surfing the wave. If you panic at the height of the wave, you will crash, things will not end well, and you will probably leave with as much—if not more—fear of the situation again. However, if you remain calm and ride the wave fully, you will come back down on the other side and will have the experience of having lived through it, making each time less scary and more manageable. This was the basis for the wave phrase.

I asked each of my core dancers to tell me their stories: “What makes you who you are?” I asked this at the beginning of a rehearsal and gave them several minutes to write as I worked on new phrase material. I then sat with each of them individually and asked them to tell me about what they wrote. This was early in the process, mid February 2014, and it was the first time I was asking so much in such a personal way from each of them. I knew that my goal with this was multi-fold. I wanted to learn about my dancers; I wanted to make sure they trusted me; I wanted them to learn something about themselves; I wanted us all to bond, to create a community, to level the field; I wanted to encourage them to create phrase work that truly means something to them; I wanted to include their voices in the work.

What I chose to take away from Nicole’s story was a fear of taking up space, or possibly worse, a fear of tainting space. I also saw a correlation between those thoughts and her struggles with bulimia. From Emma, I focused on her need to collect

and hoard which I think stem from the unpredictability and unrest of her home life growing up. She spoke quite a bit about collecting all sorts of things as special objects and expressed fear of them disappearing. Sydney remained relatively surface level with me but we were able to discuss her discomfort with confronting her own image and turning her focus towards vulnerability as a positive trait. Devin discussed a refusal to feel emotion and how he seeks external comforts in order to soothe his internal needs. He acknowledged that this does not make him feel better but is like a bandage. He talked about aggression and food as being difficult topics for him but was unable to reveal some of the deeper sources for this discomfort.

Once I had some information about each of them, I paired them up. This was done according to who was in rehearsal at the same time so Nicole and Emma and Devin and Sydney were paired together. This became the primary relationship pattern for the work after this point. In pairs, they were to share the concepts I pulled out as interesting or pertinent information and then asked them to each create a phrase based on something from their partner's story that they could relate to. I asked for them to be gestural and small.

Once they created those phrases, we worked with the wave concept. I worked with each of them to create six variations on the phrase. Each variation had a subtle difference in size, energy and space so that there was an overall sense of gradually growing from something quiet and calm to intense and large. Four phrases increased in size and energy and then they began decreasing again but on their own pathway. We talked about it as a cumulative transformation of the phrase work. Each level, whether up or down, was changed with no knowledge of the phrase before it so that

as it came back down in energy it was an entirely different phrase, rather than retreating to the original gestures.

In context, the phrases were performed spread out through the entire space making it difficult for the dancers to keep track of where they were in their phrases. I began experimenting with different vocalizations to try to find something that fit the concept and added to the movement. We started with numbers, then tried random words, random noises, and even combinations of these. We eventually settled on numbers but spoken in increasing volume levels until the wave crested, then dropped back off. After spending the summer improvising with an assortment of different artists, I came back with an experiment that proved successful in addition to the numbers. Between speaking the numbers for the iterations, the dancers talk constantly and improvisationally under the instruction to narrate themselves at volumes equivalent to the height of the wave they are at. This was humorous at the low levels but as the levels increased, it became quite disconcerting.

Sydney hits the crest of the wave but does not follow it through. She thrashes her body until she throws herself onto a table. She maintains her extreme volume and continues to count upwards in a state of panic as the others subside and calm down until I interrupt her.

Elissa is the catalyst for this wave of energy and force coming through the space. Her pathway is a diagonal across the full length of the space. For source material, Elissa wrote a “Recipe for Self-Destruction” before our first rehearsal. We then turned her recipe into a series of gestures that could be performed while walking. We worked hard to develop her character as femininity. This was determined based

on the qualities that define femininity in a greater sense as understood in psychoanalysis. We worked towards receiving energy rather than putting it out which translated to a light, airy quality without feeling like she would float away. I coached an indirect focus from her and an inquisitive face, which helped in the receptive quality. She walked on her toes at all times so that her base was narrow, making her vulnerable. We talked about being a massive power but in a quiet way. I wanted her to feel the effect she had on the other dancers just through her presence and understand that she did not need extra; she is a quiet strength. She passed through the space as the dancers increased in volume and energy and size. They all come back down in energy as she leaves.

We placed one table in her direct path. When she arrives at it, she slides the chair in front of her out of the way, whether the person in it decides to get up or not, moves the table to the side and pushes the chair on the other side out of her way again. These audience members are left completely unsure what they should be doing. Before they have too much time to worry, Sydney throws herself onto the table counting wildly and Elissa exits the space.

When the other dancers have settled back down to a quiet simmer, I jump back up from my seat in the audience and interrupt Sydney's moment of panic. This is the second suggestion of community in the work. The first with us cooking and laughing during Devin's poem was establishing a clear sense of our relationship. This mirrors my own process of getting stuck in a heightened state of panic or distress and being unable to get myself back out of it. Sometimes I need someone else to come by

and ground me again in the real world, or at least a distraction or something new I can jump into.

Illustration 5



Apartment

Bedroom 1.1

Egg crate foam pad on the mattress. Drop ceiling. So many speckles.

The bed is next to the door. It faces away towards the windows. The walls and ceiling are white. The sheets are light blue. Or grey? I see the orangey egg crate foam pad. I know nothing else about his room in this apartment. I'm only in here when it is dark out. The streetlights shine in through the blinds. Car headlights move across the walls.

Kitchen

the window sticks.
the fire escape painted forest green.
the cabinets shift white to oak then fade. emptiness.
the stove: black grills,
orange coils, a tile backsplash.
how many eggs have been fried in this
pan that lives on a shelf and my floor?
pancakes poured like bunnies. their blueberry smiles
stare back into sunken eyes.

Bedroom 1.2

Two twin beds. A window.

Living Room

Christmas morning and Grandma and Grandpa are here from Kansas. There is a Christmas tree. They slept on the pull-out sofa. There are gifts under the tree.

Why do I get a drum set? It is kind of like bongos but also not at all. There are drumsticks and everyone is trying to teach me how to hold a steady rhythm with one hand and create something else with the other hand. No one understands why I can't do it.

Debbie is there.

Let me be clear: my Father is not my Dad.

Dining Room

How can a room have something and also not have it at the same time?

I know that the dining room had a breakfast counter/pass-through window between the kitchen and the dining room. I know it to be fact. I also know the kitchen had no such breakfast counter/pass-through window. I know it to be fact.

It is possible the breakfast counter/pass-through window was between the dining room and the living room. The living room had no such breakfast counter/pass-through window.

I know I sat on a stool and ate Golden Smacks at a counter or window. I could see the dining table. I know it was a separate space. I could have also been sitting at the dining table. I don't know whether there was a window in the dining room. There was definitely maybe a chandelier.

I know where the cereals were in the kitchen. They were in the high cabinet right next to the stove which was across from the dining room. They were in the high cabinet on the wall between the dining room and the kitchen.

I know I hated Golden Smacks. I only ate them at his house. He had a lot of cereals. I liked Raisin Bran. I do not know why I ate Golden Smacks at his house. We always ate cereal in the dining room. I don't remember eating any meal other than breakfast at this apartment.

Ingredients

The next section we call Ingredients. I direct each dancer to a corner of the space. When we arrive in our designated areas, we approach the audience members with bright, open faces and positive energy. We quickly explain that we are going to build a dance together so just react when we ask you for something, don't think about it. We then turn to a group in our section and ask them to perform a gesture. Once they participate, we turn to a second section and ask them to do a gesture. Finally we turn to the third section and ask them to gesture. We rotate through these three sections as quickly as we can and try to take in as much information as possible until we drop into an improvisational score. The score is to try to move into and out of the floor while using as many of the audience gestures that you were able to hold onto.

This score persists for a short time and then we break and go back to speaking to our groups. We tell them that we are now going to build a dance together and ask for three favorite gestures. These get strung into a phrase, often with repetitions of each gesture, and we practice them. When everyone is comfortable with the new phrase, we get the attention of the whole room and each group shares their phrase with the rest of the audience. There is a playfully competitive vibe to keep the energy high and create a sense of friendly teams. This section is also the first time we have any sound design. The sound is a rhythmic percussion of banging pots and pans and helps supply a rhythm for everyone to follow when performing their phrases but is subtle and almost difficult to notice.

When all five groups have shared their phrases, the five of us core dancers stand facing the center of the room, outstretch our arms, and yell, "What rich

ingredients!” This marks the end of the section but also serves to tie in the themes that I was interested in highlighting. Making a dance and cooking are very similar. Anyone can do it, you just need a few ingredients that you like and throw them together and you have a meal or dance that you can share with friends and family. It brings everyone together and engages the audience at a deeper level of investment in the work.

I first tested this Ingredients section with my monologue and having audience members taking over my cooking in mid-February at an art soiree with a group of friends in DC. They gave me really valuable feedback.

“It was so great to see you take on our gestures. My gesture wasn’t fluid but then you strung them together and they became fluid. It really made me feel capable of making a dance.”

They also threw words at me such as gender, community, groups, hive mindset, building together. They told me they wanted to be participants, including one person who said he did not generally like to participate in performances but by the third round of gesture harvesting, he was actively offering gestures and smiling.

Illustration 6



Recipes

Once we make that connection, we turn back to our own groups and casually talk to them while Justin enters the balcony above the risers. He performs a simple gesture phrase created from his own “Recipe for Detachment.” When he finishes moving, Devin grabs the room’s attention with his “Recipe for a Disaster.” This shifts the music from the rhythmic pots and pans to a slowly growing, ambient “unsettled” score and also is the first major shift in lighting, causing the room to become much darker with stark lighting on Devin. Devin performs his recipe really beautifully every time with a clear, loud voice and emotion that resonates in the space. He stumbles, falls, and seems generally insecure.

This is the first truly dark moment of the work and is a big transition into going deeper with the work. It also required more depth from Devin. By the time we wrote the recipes, we were more bonded, everyone knew my story and understood what I expected of them and why I wanted it. Their prompt was to write a recipe inspired by visual artist Suzanne Bocanegra’s Recipe Card Library,¹² a project in which she assigns obscure recipe titles to different artists to fill out in their own way and return to her, and create a phrase with it. I then worked with each of them to develop what their recipe looks like in the context of the work. Devin’s recipe evolved over several iterations—us joining him, us dancing around him, him isolated and separated—but the end result with us in stillness, attention turned toward him, performing it once with the text and a second time in silence is poignant and clear.

¹² <http://women-artists.org/post/9422950750/the-suzanne-bocanegra-recipe-card-library>

As he finishes his recipe, Devin walks through the space and we each join the wave of his energy as we make our way to face the mirror for Sydney's recipe. Meanwhile, Elissa enters the balcony on the other side of Justin and performs her gesture phrase without the walking for her "Recipe for Self-Destruction."

We make our way right up to the mirror along the wall in the Dance Theatre, Sydney sits down only a foot away from it and we file in, standing just behind and around her. Sydney's "Recipe for How to Cry" begins with "Take off all of your clothes so that you are completely naked." The five of us follow her instructions and take off our clothing. Emma and Devin disrobe to their underwear and Tata Tops, Sydney and Nicole are in their Tata Tops and skirts, and I strip to fully nude. As Sydney continues through her recipe of movement and words, we all stand behind her gazing at our own reflections. Sydney's last line is, "Say 'yes' to vulnerability." I immediately respond with a strong "yes" while Nicole, Emma, and Devin join Sydney in her last movement which takes them into a low squat with one arm swinging, drawing light circles on the ground with fingers and I am left staring at my naked body. One by one they each push onto their hands and come up to standing, say "yes" on their own timing, and then walk to the island in the middle of the space.

There was a lot of discussion and concerns surrounding my choice to be nude during this work. This decision was not made lightly. The concert invites the audience to be vulnerable with me and engage in critical dialogue about difficult things. I am asking them to strip themselves of their protective layers to be vulnerable, to engage, to question. I am offering myself as an example of that. This is what art is. This is why nudity.

Nudity is protest; it is activism. It can be a symbol of equality and vulnerability. It is empowering and it is rebirth.

At the center of nudity is this question: why is the naked human body sexualized? Isn't it just when we are the most pure? Does it have to be a sexual act to take off your clothes? And if it is to be something sexual, why do we think of sexuality as taboo? Why must we cover up? Sexuality is part of humanity yet this system of Western society encourages embarrassment and shame around it.

Why is there a difference from one sex to the next in how nudity can be performed? What is the real reason for hiding women's nipples while men's may be exposed? And if I am someone who has a female body but identifies as an alternative gender that can fluidly slide along and between the dichotomy of feminine and masculine, where do I lie in this?

I want to embrace the body as beautiful, empowering, special and equal. This is a gift to the audience; I am leading by example. It is also a challenge and gift for myself. To stand in front of a crowd of people and a mirror and confront the body that I have spent my entire life tormented over and hating and now accept and love it for what it is—this is a moment that I was both terrified of and unbelievably excited for. I have been on a very long and very tough journey and reflecting on it and sharing it with the world is overwhelming.

Concepts: protest, activism, equality, vulnerability, offering, eating disorders, empowering, gender, biological sex and oppression, rebirth.

A.
Nude
this rebirth
this shared state

state this

home is
space
body
flesh
architectural abuse
healing joints
questions

Who tells me who I am?
Only those who've seen me bare

B.
I'll hold
your gaze
[flashes breast]

Scarred here
—I learned my place.
A-round-ness
carves space
teaches duality
singularly.

Say yes,
vulnerably.

As the dancers walk to the cooking island and leave me staring at myself, the audience's attention is drawn towards them. They relieve the audience members who have been cooking in the middle of the room since the wave phrase and the dancers resume cooking. When I sense that they have settled into their tasks, I release my gaze in the mirror and begin to put on my own Tata Top and pair of nude colored underwear with faux pubic hair that were hidden near the mirror. As I am putting these garments on, I begin telling my truths, some of which are: "It is true that my father raped me as a child. It is true that because of this, I now suffer an autoimmune disease. It is true that I have always hated this body." These are somewhat improvised based on how I feel in the moment or from the audience, but I have a clear idea of the

messages I want to get across. After three or four of them, I make eye contact with Emma and she begins her “Recipe for Tender Buttons.” I slowly walk along the edge of the mirror, continuing to share truths that become interspersed within her recipe, sometimes interrupting her, sometimes being interrupted by her, sometimes in the spaces between or even at the same time.

Emma yells her recipe through an old fashioned cheerleader’s cone-style megaphone. When we were initially designing the recipes, Emma expressed an interest in being separated from the others; maybe they are all cooking at a different station, while she cooks; maybe she is using obscure objects like flowers, Coca-Cola, dirt, and glitter while they make edible food. This was left open for a long time. At some point, I realized I was not going to be able to coach Emma to be loud enough by the show so I decided to give her a megaphone and have her yell her recipe. I was interested in the feeling this evoked of Emma being unseen and unheard by her “family” standing right next to her. Her “Recipe for Tender Buttons” comes from stories and triggers her family retells and continues to push. For her to stand at the center of the room and shout them in this way was really powerful.

The megaphone and Emma shouting also provided an interesting challenge for me as I continued with my truths. I wanted to have a moment where multiple people were sharing their own stories simultaneously but unrelated. I did not want all of the focus on me during my truths. It was important to me that the work included these, but that they were not highlighted in a way that they were the central focus or the only reason that this unrest might exist. I believe we all experience trauma and are affected by it in our own way. No one person’s experiences are worse than any

other's; no one's feelings are more valid than any other person's. To have myself and Emma both telling our own stories at the same time, and the audience needing to struggle to be able to listen fully to either one of us was a way to show that.

Illustration 7



Whale Song

Circles and strewn
articles that magazine that Time
bass clef marks on her inner ear
played naked cowboy songs on horseback.
Times ran that article where horses
based circle marks strewn in inner songs
playing magazine ears.

Everything shouts
and this is my whale song.

Painted outside porches
porch roofs and guest room light buzzings.
New Yorkers stacked single noted
stashed with mustaches on car tiles.
My splinters splint and sew broken joints
til Time claims them healed and your
tuning fork buzzing counts fractured ears.

Everyone shouts
and this is my own.

My chest harpoon
slays Harper's intents as
Time jumps to springing salad boxes.
Heirloom tomatoes sing praises
of horse coupons and fridge lights and
we hoard the New Yorkers like New York does
until eruption occurs and we drown.

Everywhere shouts.
We hold our ground.

When Emma begins her story, Elissa and Justin also begin moving again. They perform their gestural phrases based on their recipes but in a more full-bodied way, moving across the balcony and weaving through the chairs. Their paths align over the railing and Justin shakes Elissa, causing her to drop purple fabric petals over the edge and onto audience members below. This is repeated with different pathways so that they meet up three times, each time dropping petals over the audience in different places. The petals are symbolic of the feminine structure with both masculine and feminine reproductive capabilities. I wanted to bring them in here because their presence correlates with the darker shift in the work. They symbolize forces of Masculinity and Femininity, and at this stage they are representative of conflicting forces within myself. I am battling these forces rather than embracing them, and later I will find a way to accept both simultaneously. Because they are out of balance and not conjoined as in a union or marriage, there is unrest, dissatisfaction, and an overall darker feeling in the piece.

In Marion Woodman's work,¹³ specifically in *Conscious Femininity*, she addresses the need to have a balanced sense of both sides of the human psyche—of its receptive and penetrative capacities—and warning that when they don't exist in balance within the self, one is not at peace and often will search for external ways to fill the void created by that disconnection. As Elissa and Justin run through the space in this way, they are battling to fill that space rather than finding a way to coexist.

¹³ Marion Woodman is a Jungian Analyst, teacher, and prolific writer and theorist of feminine psychology.

Nicole's recipe, "Recipe for Healing a Broken Heart," is added on top of Emma's recipe, my truths, and Elissa and Justin's duet. Nicole expressed a desire to keep her secret private. I ran with this idea and decided to have her ask an audience member to read it for her while she performed her movement. We decided to have it become a private secret for one table so we included the direction to read it in a whisper. With Emma shouting and me speaking loudly, Nicole's recipe becomes a secret for that one special table. Her recipe ends with "Learn to love again." As this line is recited, Emma, having finished her recipe, walks up to Nicole, grabs her hand, and leads her away.

Falling

Emma and Nicole engage in an intimate duet as I recite "Mostly, She Practices Falling" by contemporary poet Kerrin McCadden.

Mostly, She Practices Falling

And it is true that we are incredibly lonely.
That man walking the sidewalks of your town
with a tangle of bicycle innertubes
over his shoulder like a map of his heart,
running errands, studying a nest of bowls
in a shop window, which is also like a map
of his heart, may tell you he's given up on love.
It is the way he can go home and make rice
and sit with a book and not care that he is alone.
He says he has given up on love. He practices
saying this. What is true is that I have figured out
how to do it, how to live alone. I sponge off
the table, wash the plates, and go to bed.
Sometimes there is a cat. Sometimes
an extra blanket, which is a map as well,
folded and unfolded as needed, showing
the borders of one body within the state
lines of the bed. I am the marker—"you are here."

The rest of the bed shows what we call
up north “the flats.” This is the topography of rest.
I am in my car, and the woman on the radio
talks about wanting to feel the most
intense physical sensation she can.
Instead of dancing, she practices falling.
She wants to make moves she can’t help
but complete— mostly, she practices falling.
How far can she fall and not get hurt?
She wishes there were a way to measure
the intensity of pain. Before she dies, she wants
to feel it all. How far can a person fall onto a mat
and not die? This is the topography of grief.
Where is the edge of the heart, is what we want
to know. We are not afraid of words, we say.
All we can do is draw lines we cannot cross.
The words on the page are cursive,
the innertubes of thought we build into
what fine things we wish for, the trajectory
of our falling bodies, the edges of what we
can say, the things we say to the night.
Once, I held a bird in my hands. I held its wings
to its sides. Its feet dangled like the stems
of letters. There was no heft to it, just a cage
of bones. Just a cage of bones and feathers.
Just a house of air, craning its head forward
knowing something, staring into the middle
distance, suddenly calm. This is all I know.

The movement includes pieces of each of their wave phrases. At all times, one of them is “carrying” the other. *The Things They Carried* is a collection of semi-autobiographical, fictional short stories by American writer Tim O’Brien that follows returning Vietnam War Veterans as they attempt to re-assimilate to civilian life and deal with post-traumatic stress disorder. It inspired this carrying theme. I first read this during my junior year of high school. After reading it, I began to have nightmares of my father. It was not until this point that I had any concrete ideas about what happened to me. After this book, memories, images, and sensations began flooding back and completely disrupted my life. One story in particular stuck out for me: I

would replay an image of myself as a man from one of the stories, driving in an open-air Jeep in circles around Lake George, trapped in an endless loop, not having a place anymore, unable to stay but not free to go. My then-boyfriend encouraged me to seek help when he pointed out I'd stopped eating for several weeks. I admitted to this therapist that I was having issues with a recurring eating disorder and he told me there was no way I could have an eating disorder; girls with eating disorders are always victims of sexual abuse. This sentence in itself is ridiculous and I have been unpacking it in my current therapy for a while, but it did happen to be a push for me to say for the first time, "I think my father raped me."

McCadden's poem spoke to me in a way that was very similar. When I happened to play around with how to bring these two elements together—the carrying phrases and the falling poem—they unintentionally synced up in some really beautiful ways and I knew I wanted to hear the poem while seeing this duet. I also knew that I wanted the poem to be coming from somewhere removed from the movement, that the voice of the poem was alone, isolated, distant, removed, trapped. I started wandering through the space, looking specifically for places along the perimeter where we had not explored yet and I realized the space under the ladder offstage-left in the Dance Theatre was open, removed, and not yet used. When I stood in that spot and recited the poem, my voice suddenly carried. There is an acoustic anomaly in the space that was able to bounce my voice out into the space, despite standing in a corner and talking to a wall.

Illustration 8



Illustration 9



I worked with Sydney and Devin on the same exercise to create a duet for them as well to be performed during the middle section of the poem. This duet had a lift in it that was a really interesting teaching experience for me as Sydney was also in my Contact Improvisation¹⁴ (CI) course that semester and was able to directly apply our class exercises into figuring and smoothing out that lift. I really enjoyed this experience. Most of the time, I don't bother trying to teach many lifts because I don't have the luxury of a long rehearsal process and lifts can take quite a lot of work to figure out if you don't have a lot of partnering or CI background. This was a time where I could teach a lift and then spend two months teaching the techniques that are necessary in order to successfully complete it. I watched Sydney's movement change

¹⁴ Contact Improvisation is a duet movement form instigated by Steve Paxton in the early 1970's <http://www.contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/>

from being scared of the vertical plane and her side body to enjoying those spaces and trusting Devin in these open, vulnerable positions.

Emma and Nicole rejoin for the third section of the poem by performing a more gestural version of their duet standing on the island in the center of the room. It was important to me to use the extra height in the space the counter afforded us since the ceiling is so tall in that room and the island was directly under the sculpture. The lights black out for the first and only time in the work.

Solo

The lights come back up on me, standing just in from the upstage-left wings. The layers we built up are peeled back to reveal a single body, eyes closed, breathing in stillness. This solo takes me on a journey. At this point in the work, I've exposed myself physically and emotionally and I have both connected and isolated myself. For my health, as I am still healing, I included an opportunity to step inside my body and experience what I need to in the moment.

I do have an improvised score I work from for this section. I am focused on moving from a state of paralysis into movement with a softness and lightness that suggests vulnerability and possibly a lack of grounding as I make my way over to my clothes. I put my skirt on and I transform to a more grounded and strongly weighted movement quality. This quickly shifts into a series of falls of my own in which I aim to awaken sensation in my body and actually attempt to measure pain. These slams into the ground also awaken a primitive side and I connect with the ground and my animalistic tendencies. My main dancers all pick up on this energy shift and follow suit, allowing this to become anger and harnessing the transformative power of this

anger. We rush to one of the walls in the Dance Theatre that is covered in a fabric for sound absorption and begin to bang our heads, pelvises and arms against it in near unison.

Transformation

Justin and Elissa enter the room and walk, together, to the island and ring the table bell. This breaks our state and we resolve to positions throughout the room with each of us entering our own world. Justin and Elissa proceed to have a duet that moves them towards a resolution of their own. Their duet plays with pulling from each of their phrase work to blend them together. I was interested in beginning to build a more unified concept of the principles of femininity and masculinity. Their previous duet was a collision of opposites; this one is the result of a blending of their characteristics. Elissa and Justin are the most linear part of the work. Their presence tracks my journey of understanding gender and what it means for me. When I started facing my past, my sense of self was in a state of unrest; there were even times I felt two sides of myself dueling. By confronting these things, holding them inside and listening to my body, I finally began to find peace with the oppositional forces and am striking a balance; I've opened a new paradox.

Union

Studio Art

Justin and Elissa leave the space together and the attention shifts back onto the five of us. We are each in our own world in different areas of the space. Devin is walking around on his tip toes à la Elissa with a piece of ham on his face with holes cut out for his facial features; Sydney is laying on a table counting to ten on her

fingers in a soft whisper over and over again; Emma is standing on the counter wielding a knife to sharpen the heel of a high-heel shoe from the sculpture while rotating slowly; Nicole is seated on the floor putting objects into their place below the island and removing herself gradually more and more from the present; I put on a clear apron, unlike everyone else's, and paint the mirror with applesauce. These individual worlds came from lines pulled out of a poem I wrote called "Studio Art."

Studio Art

Your gentle reminder
filed away—
tick.

“Gender is a studio in which poetry is made.”

My studio built
a body of work,
today.

“...a studio in which poetry is made.”

Clamoring fematalia
organize suit coats
and knee pads.

“This must be what wedding shoes feels like.”

Behaviors learned and
saved like please and
thank you and opening
wide.

“...what wedding shoes feels like.”

So you sink into me
supple and rich—
I fill with you.

Autobodygraphical:
this comm-united act.

A good daughter and
a good wife and
none of the above.

Sexual poetics render degendering anarchy.

Your little reminder
in gentle tocks.

[STUDIO HERE]

Each dancer chose a line or phrase they personally felt connected to. I asked them to “unleash their weird” and come up with a way to embody that line that exposed their weirdest self. I worked with each of them to expand on and deepen their inner weird. For my role, rather than focusing on my inner weird, I focused on using food to transform my own image in an embodied response. I smear applesauce on the mirror as an extension of the art therapies I have been practicing with no attention to space or composition but from a place of listening to the body and allowing it to come out. I also wrote the word fluid on the mirror because it felt important to emphasize the fluidity of humanity as a reason for the possibilities of transformation.

Fluidity

After existing in these worlds for a little while, I step away from the mirror and towards Nicole. When we arrive together, we transform our skirts back into pants and take on a squatting, heavy, strong walk with wide legs, a hammering gesture, and bring back the head banging gesture. We stop. Emma climbs down from the island, passes her sharpened high heel to an audience member, and joins us. We raise up onto the balls of our feet, put our hands on our thighs as if to pull our skirts upwards and step backwards unevenly. “This must be what wedding shoes feels like.”

We then drop our heels and walk forward on a diagonal towards the table Sydney has been laying on. She gets off the table and we begin a sweeping pathway of movement as we tumble along the diagonal from upstage right to house right and run back to the starting position. Devin joins us after the first sweep. We continue tumbling and sweeping until each dancer collapses onto the floor in exhaustion. I am left standing by myself.

In a logistical sense, I found that creating this work within an academic system showed me that points of inflexibility exist in large institutions, particularly concerning new ideas coming late into the process. For example, during this section of the piece, I wanted to climb the risers in the Dance Theatre but came to that conclusion just two months in advance of the performance. Since it wasn't in my original proposal, there wasn't enough time to go through the proper channels the Clarice required to make that a possibility. The real world doesn't necessarily always require you to jump through as many hoops for such an addition to a work, but when I let that idea go, I found this rush-of-energy sequence and discovered that I liked it better than my original plan of climbing the risers at this moment.

The Hug Line

After the rush of energy I'm left standing alone, exhausted. I close my eyes as I stand there and begin to breathe again. Soon Emma raises herself off the floor, walks towards me, and pulls me in for a hug. Without opening my eyes, my body responds with arms coming to meet her frame. She ducks out from under my arms, which remain and Nicole ducks underneath them. Each dancer files through in this way. They continue to rotate through coming in to me, sometimes for a hug, sometimes a kiss. Gradually a soft, nostalgic sounding song, "The Motherlode" by The Staves,¹⁵ begins, the lights begin to shine through the sculpture piece by piece, and the dancers begin to invite the audience to come and "support Lynne" with a hug or a kiss.

¹⁵ <http://www.thestaves.com/>

Illustration 10



Illustration 11



This image came from contemporary choreographer David Roussève's¹⁶ *Stardust*, performed at the University of Maryland in January 2014. There is a section in this work where one dancer stands with his arms outstretched in a hug while other dancers duck in to hug him and then slide down him to the ground and back away in a sort of backwards crawl. There are about fifteen dancers and hardly any space between each hug so they just sort of wash across the stage in waves. I also had dance theatre artist Pina Bausch's¹⁷ *Café Muller* images in my head with the repetitive sequence of hugging, holding, and dropping a dancer in a heart breaking image that brings up sensations of love and loss and one-sided relationships and star-crossed lovers, among other emotions.

¹⁶ <http://www.davidrousseve.com/about.html>

¹⁷ http://www.pina-bausch.de/en/pina_bausch/

Justin and Elissa are the last two to hug me, Elissa bringing me back into the present and helping me open my eyes. I wanted them to be the last ones I hug to resolve this battle of the genders in myself and to give myself an opportunity to unite with them now that they are more united with each other. As I open my eyes and look around the room, I'm able to take in and use my gaze to thank the audience members. It is a lot to process and I have cried every time at this point, if not earlier.

I was interested in this idea as a way for the audience to really feel part of the work. I wanted to offer a space for them to take what they needed from me. Though the prompt for them to hug me is, "Will you support Lynne?", when they act on this, they are also acting for themselves. It is a chance to get back into their bodies after taking in a work through their minds that is difficult to process. What is so special to me about DMT is the opportunity to feel an emotional experience in an embodied way, sometimes relying on the felt sense of a situation without articulating it through words. This experience often trumps using logic or language to understand a topic.

This moment is cathartic. For the audience, and for my dancers, this catharsis is necessary to be able to shift from such a dark space into the joy of the rest of the work. For me, this is one of the most difficult moments. I am incredibly vulnerable standing in just my Tata Top, a skirt and a clear apron. Having shared my most intimate secrets with a room of strangers, and then having that much support without being able to see each person and find my grounding through sight, I am at the mercy of the audience. If they don't want to sit down when the music ends, if they want to whisper in my ear, if they want to cry into my cheek, if they want to kiss my lips or

lift me in the air, I just experience it all. They are supporting me, but in that moment I am holding the space for their pain and their needs.

Sing Out

When I'm ready after Elissa brings me back, I squeeze my hands closed and my dancers surround me and carry me through the space while a cover of Cat Stevens's¹⁸ "Sing Out" by Ghost Mice fills the theatre. I begin singing along in a careless, free way, half laughing/half crying and my dancers carry me in a full circle around the island before finally sitting me on it. They manipulate my hands to continue the cooking and eventually join me in the singing. Once they join, I take back control of my hands and we all sing and finish preparing the food. We are joyful, giddy, and silly as we scream-sing this protest song and try to finish our task. After the song ends, we acknowledge the audience and tease them about joining us as three different tables filled with food are wheeled into the Dance Theatre from different doors.

The Meal

The audience has the option to grab a plate of food and begin to talk about the work while still inside it. The dancers all wander through the room engaging them in discussion as well. This was a particularly overwhelming section for me since I was getting feedback while still in performance. Numerous strangers came up to me to discuss their own experiences, to thank me for sharing this, and to offer me support in different ways. Many of them wanted to hug me again or wanted a chance to hug me

¹⁸ <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/cat-stevens>

because we had to stop the line before they had their turn. It was a magical section for me. The eating and merriment is interrupted by Mary Lambert's¹⁹ song "Secrets" which cues the dancers to invite the audience to participate one last time with us and learn a dance.

Community Dance

We are not alone anymore. We complete the ritual with a meal and celebrate the closing with a dance together.

We create a large circle along the outside edges of the space and teach a simple phrase, step by step, calling out names of moves and counts. The whole cast, audience included, performs this dance over and over again, throwing in favorite gestures from earlier in the piece, laughing, counting together, talking, and helping each other out. Once we are sure the audience can keep the phrase going without us, the dancers move to the outside of the circle and make our way as discretely as possible out of the Dance Theatre. The piece is left unresolved: it's all a process.

¹⁹ <http://www.marylambertsings.com/>

Chapter 2: Processing

In the end, this made the conclusion of the piece all the more powerful and heartbreaking as I finally pieced everything together and realized the meaning behind the dance (or at least what it represented to me). As I watched her simply stand towards the center of the room, her back slightly slouched and her arms lifted up as if to hug someone, and the growing line of people duck under her arms and fit themselves into her embrace, when she would finally move and embrace them back, it hit me that this dance was for her. She had given it everything she had, exposed herself for all of us to see, and now she was happy to accept whatever love we might choose to give to her. The simple action of ducking under her outstretched arms to fit ourselves into her embrace, and Lynne moving to meet us halfway and embrace us back, symbolized a relationship of giving and taking where both parties end up having gained something. The beauty of this moment, the simplest yet most awe-inspiring bit of choreography I'd ever seen, was enough to move me to tears. In that moment, it was not her and then the audience, but all of us together, exploring our pain collectively and taking comfort in one another so that we could finally heal. It was truly an amazing piece!

—Excerpt from a student letter to me

This was the first time I have seen a piece with nudity in dance that I understood and thought brought something to the piece. I have no idea how you found the courage to deal with your upset, horror, loss, damage so publicly, but I am glad and a little grateful even that you did. You can no longer hide from this incredible betrayal and with our support and the support of those around you, I can only hope this process has begun.

—Excerpt from an email response from my mother

Creating a full-length work is, I imagine, very similar to having a baby. I don't mean to reduce the miracle of life and the experiences of motherhood, but rather to elevate the experience of producing a piece of art. Like childbirth, making art is a transformative and complex process. There is a moment of conception, a long period of gestation, and finally a moment of birth. The process is private and intimate; you hold it all inside, nurturing it, caring for it, listening to it, and then, in one fleeting

run, it is public and you are left vacant. The moment when it is no longer your very own is bittersweet.

This is the place I find myself now. Months after “birthing” this dance, I have mixed emotions. In the first minutes after the performances, I was ecstatic, filled with joy and pride, and wanting to share it with everyone. Soon after, my emotions shifted. I fell into a darker place, becoming more reclusive as I experienced vulnerability and exhaustion. Doubts about the piece and myself crept in, often oscillating between shame and pride—it wasn’t good enough. I could have done more, done this or that differently. Did I just peak? Will I ever make anything this good again? I’m so ashamed of how terrible this whole work was. I am so hurt by the people who did not show up to support me. I am so grateful not too many people saw such an epic failure. And on and on. I was bereaved and it affected me mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally—deeply and all at once.

While not gone, these thoughts have decreased in both volume and frequency. I suspect they will continue to lessen over time, especially as I begin the project again for its future lives. I believe this is natural, especially with this lens of birth.

I have noticed a fluctuation in the ease with which I can talk about the work. In the beginning, talking about it was like trying to find a tiny object on the bottom of a murky lake. As the process continued, it seemed easier to discuss succinctly; I found talking about it helped to clarify the concept, which then helped make it easier to discuss. By the time the concert arrived, I felt like I could explain it in a sentence or two to most people, though my explanation shifted depending on my mood or who

I was talking to. After the concert, I had so little energy I would sometimes answer the question with one word: vulnerability.

I had forgotten that my answer could be so compact, so concise. As I got farther away from the birth, this process began reversing. My explanations grew until I felt like I could not put them into a linear paragraph again.

Then, I spoke to a large group of people at a Contact Improvisation workshop in February 2015. After repeating myself to a couple of people, I started changing how I was describing the work—and then Jennifer asked me what my research was about. Having her phrase the question like this was such a shift. I paused, thought about gender, psychotherapy, poetry, movement, community ... but I let myself cycle through these buzzwords before responding. When I did respond I said, “I’m researching vulnerability.” This moment was a breakthrough for me; suddenly I saw my research and concert in a new light.

It was important to me that this process give my dancers opportunities to look within themselves, learn about themselves, and have a creative outlet to keep discovering. It was also important that they have a platform from which to share. Beyond sharing with the audience, I wanted each dancer to feel connected to the work, connected to the other performers as a family, and to have a community to help and support them with their own healing. The reciprocity of this was important too—the more vulnerable and open I was, the more vulnerable and open they were, the more they gave to the work, and the more vulnerable and open the audience was able to be. This proved to be true on all counts: we are bonded, strongly; we are all

stronger individually; the audience responded with vulnerability, support, and catharsis.

In addition to the overwhelming love experienced during the concert, audience members were able to heal in their own ways. Two undergraduate students from the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies came up to me after the performances to discuss gender and thank me for representing them as gender non-conforming performers. Three audience members also came up to me after the show to tell me that they too had experienced sexual assault in some form or another during their lives but had never shared it with anyone before. To be a role model in that way—to offer myself to people who have been hurt and show them that they are not alone, that they can be strong, and they can have their voices heard—is unbelievable. It is exactly what I hoped to do.

In the next versions, I am interested in exploring different sites—potentially performing in a kitchen one day. The work will shift every time depending on cast and performance venue but the essence of the work—vulnerability—will always carry through.

The Masculine and Feminine essences are the components I will make the most changes to moving forward. Their purpose was not clear and often they were not even seen. I do not know whether I will keep them as two individual performers or whether they will undergo some other transformation—one thought I have explored recently is replacing the physical bodies with lighting or soundscore to signify shifts or moods and metaphorically embody those essences.

The sculpture will also change in the next versions. If I have the budget, I will recreate the sculpture with more ability for interaction between the dancers and the objects within it. Most likely, however, I will not have such an accommodating budget and will need to find a different way to impact the space above the island.

Despite this weakness, *Sharing a Dance with You* is absolutely my strongest work to date. It is cohesive, impactful, and deep. In the past, I have spent a lot of time concerned with fitting my work into other organizations' mission statements. I have never had the opportunity to make a work that did not represent an organization in some way. I felt a lot more freedom with this piece to push the audience and to have a clear, direct voice. I also had much more time to spend with a work than I have ever had before. I am used to having approximately ten rehearsals (sixty to ninety minutes each) to develop a piece from beginning to performance, often much less than that. To be able to rehearse closer to four or five hours a week for nine months allowed me much more space: space to play, develop, edit, and rest as needed. I lived with this work. It infused my being.

The collaborative nature of this work—sourcing text, movement, and emotional stories from my dancers' conscious and subconscious bodies—meant that the piece reflected all of the artists involved, filtered through my lens. It meant that my dancers were connected to this work in ways they had never experienced before. This was the most challenging work any of them had ever been involved in on emotional and creative levels. Though we didn't all share the same point of view on everything (gender, for instance), the open discussions and the reading materials I sent them allowed us to discuss new and difficult topics and inspired them with

different ways to make work. They were not performing in my work; the work was theirs too. This sharing of that gestation and nurturing of the piece brought out beautiful, committed dancing from them.

The dancers always had the option to “opt-out.” I knew I was asking a lot of them and that they had not signed on for therapy sessions (nor was that the sort of atmosphere I wanted to create) so I made it very clear that they were in charge of how deep they went every time. I wanted to push them to find some depth and connection without putting them in danger or asking more of them than they were ready to offer. I brought this concern up in my own therapy sessions many times so that I had confirmation that I was keeping certain boundaries in place. The option to opt-out was one of the reasons I think they gave as much as they did. They appreciated having the ability to control their experiences. They appreciated being respected. They wanted to dive in for themselves and for me—no one was forced. They also had the option to opt-out of being discussed in this paper at all (or even named) and they all opted in for me to share everything. Their generosity (of bodies, of minds, of creativity, of emotion, and of love) made this work what it is.

This openness and the bond we established did become an issue briefly. The summer months revealed some problems with understanding expectations, commitment, and communication, but these issues were used as a learning experience and were resolved once we were back in classes.

I prefer to be both a director and a performer when I make work because I am able to see what the work needs from the inside. This time, it proved to be far more challenging. The difficulty was due to the simultaneity of sections and the physical

impossibility of seeing everything occur at performance level from within. While difficult, I would not have changed my role at all. I would, however, have cast an understudy for myself in order to see the work in its entirety.

Sharing a Dance with You is nothing like what I thought it would be. It was also exactly what I'd hoped it would be. What I have now is a solid skeleton. The essence of this work is clear. I know how to achieve it. The rest will continue to evolve, shift, expand, contract, spiral, and respond to the people and spaces it encounters. As my research continues, I'm sure it will continue to shift. I am proud of where it went. I am satisfied that I followed where it needed to go rather than forcing it to align with my original vision. I have something unique, relevant, relatable, and enjoyable and I wouldn't dream of hoping for anything more.

I'm now looking forward to re-engaging in the process of this piece. I will be working with a different cast in different locations as I restage and re-contextualize it. I feel a sense of closure and simultaneously new doors opening. I'm learning and growing and practicing.

I am practicing letting go.

I am practicing moving forward.

I am practicing the process.

Ready.

Brave?

Vomit.

My face!

Caught.

[the camera made me do it]

Immortalized.

Melancholy.

Ready?

Brave.

My nose drips.
A shadow hides my face.
I watch a bear eat a woman
across the street.
I stare like it's nothing
and wonder whether to call.

I forget; I hate him.
It feels convenient to
blame myself & not believe.

He googled me.
A letter came a few years ago
to my office
[certified mail].

Imagine signing for hate-mail.

You can't hide from me—I'll always try.
Don't forget me—I'll always try.
You're mine.

He declares theft!

I stole from him—
health insurance.

Now
trained by him (& secrecy & silence)
the specifics
[the dialogue, the impact, the outcome]
are gone.

Survival is forgetting & burying.
(It may be unearthed.)

It can crawl out from the grave
of un-tackled issues, a zombie memory.

Be Ready

Be ready for battle. Be ready to defend your body from being devoured.
Be ready to rip off your own face. Dangle it as bait. Prepare to heal.

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