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In Consideration of the Performance

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Abstract

In Consideration of the Performance

By Alyssa K. Bruehlman

From my earliest years as a dancer, I have been encouraged to embody and exude perfection. Endless hours of class and rehearsal all strived to prepare me for some final performance, an opportunity for technical and presentational excellence. However, as my training has continued at a university program based in modern and postmodern dance, I am everyday exposed to the concept of dancer as ordinary human being. As a performer, I am constantly confronted by the demands of diverse presentational vocabulary—from simplest walks to buoyant prances, from minutest gesture to full-bodied abandon. I am often asked to be both human and object, and I am not sure where the balance lies.

My research is an active and philosophical inquiry into this fluid role of the performer within concert dance. In a project-culminating concert on March 25-26, 2010, I present original work as a melding of three movement perspectives—everyday pedestrian, dramatic dancer, and vulnerable self—to consider how each persona enters and exists within the theater. With a combination of live and video-recorded performance, my research scans the spectrum between theatrical presentation and mundane reality. In moments both staged and improvised, I attempt to understand the possibility of being pedestrian, performer, and person. Through this dual-media investigation, I ultimately question 1) how the performer relates to both everyday world and stage, 2) where impeccable execution ends and a vulnerable reality begins, and 3) what it truly means to be a performer.

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I. In Consideration of the Self: Personal History of Performance

In my early dance training—from age three until high school—I was coached to perform with impeccable confidence. The principle of “smile and no one will notice your mistakes” was a particular favorite among my studio instructors. Personal appearance, advertised under the romantic guise of “stage presence,” was held above all else during show time. Coated in makeup, inches of hair gel plastered upon my head, wearing some dress that either recalled a fairy-tale time or sported enough sequins to stop traffic, I was never on stage as myself. Regardless of whether I was a gracefully dying swan or a happily tapping flapper, I entered every performance with the desire to be someone else, to be beyond human, to be perfect, to not let any mistakes show.

In retrospect, it exhausts me to even consider such a glaringly singular mode of performance. Since entering college, I have been encouraged to approach the stage from a different angle, adopting an internalized somatic method in place of a solely superficial one. Instead of performing to portray perfectly some feeling or idea, I have been taught to explore and embody it. In the years following my introduction to the academic approaches of dance at Emory, I have learned that the body can speak just as strongly as the face, that the raw physicality of dance is paramount. Still, my newfound explorations in modern and postmodern performance have come at a price. Because I more completely understand the power of the body as my greatest expressive and illustrative tool, I occasionally allow only my physical self to participate in performing. Meanwhile my face, mind, and personality can easily detach from my body and be relatively uninvolved. While on stage, I often assume an almost deadpan persona so as not to interfere with or to overemphasize my somatic expression. This detachment has become a habit over the past four years and is in many ways just as singular an approach to performance as the “smile against all odds” motto of my earlier training. While so many physical possibilities have been revealed in my college dance coursework, I now have trouble exuding performative confidence in any way other than physical ability.

I began to notice my tendency toward detachment on stage at the end of my second year at Emory. It has been a struggle ever since to find personal complexity, a fully realized performative self in body, mind, and soul. This struggle was further complicated when I studied abroad the spring semester of my junior year at Accademia dell’Arte in Arezzo, Italy. There, my teachers emphasized finding a relatable reality within dance. While the body remained the fundamental instrument of expression, my professors at the Accademia were interested in *l’umanità*, the humanity of the dancer while she is performing. In a composition class taught by choreographer Giorgio Rossi, my choreography was critiqued on performative believability and commitment as opposed to structure and vocabulary. “To dance is to be human,” Rossi endlessly repeated to the class. “Let [things] happen,” he would say, encouraging us to cease all over-analysis, any hint of over-forceful drive to be something extraordinary. Performing simply became an existential act—an act of being human as opposed to anything else.

This approach introduced an endlessly complicating aspect to my identity as a performer. For so long I have tried to be excellent on stage, whether in appearance or in embodiment, and now I am faced with *l’umanità*, the possibility of being mortal, merely an ordinary person on stage. How can I possibly perform as someone both virtuosic and vulnerable? Are those two extremes exclusive? Where does my own identity lie within this humanity I must represent? While at first the prospect of being human on stage seemed a terrifying admittance of limitation and mortality, now I realize the richness of possibility it offers me as a performer. As goes the famous adage, “I am human. Nothing human is alien to me.” Love, greed, happiness, lethargy, confusion, discomfort—so much lies within the spectrum of human emotions and ideas and thus also in the spectrum of human performance.

Confronted by the seemingly nonexistent boundaries of humanity within my dancing, I now wonder how to distinguish between the authentic and the ostensible, between depth and superficiality. One of the beauties of dance is showcasing technical ability, sharing the amazing range of the human body with others. Still, there comes a time when tricks and “wow” factors can be overemphasized and excessively frequent. Pauline Koner discusses this in her first section of *Elements of Performance*: “The technique must not overshadow that living breathing force – *the center of our being*…At present there is too much technique and not enough of the person on stage. A performance should never be an ego trip.”[1] Choreographic tricks and performative “wow” factors are often empty, for the emphasis is solely on the ego. There is little substance beneath or human quality to relate to, and the movement simply becomes an outward showcase of ability. If a choreographer creates a mood using inventive vocabulary or a performer presents movement through unfeigned commitment, then a work can possess an aesthetic reality all its own. However, if unnecessarily the choreographer inserts a familiar technical step or the performer seeks only to impress the audience, then the authenticity created by a work can be shattered. Such extraneous and abrupt shifts from something uniquely genuine to something so recognizably staged or forced can break and devalue the reality of a work. Thus, the choreographer and performer must make decisions to maintain the intent—emotional, aesthetic, intellectual—of the performance. The onstage disconnect between living human and technical automaton can be potently obtuse, and it must be addressed in order to maintain some integral intention of the work.

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[1] Pauline Koner, *Elements of Performance: A Guide for Performers in dance, Theatre and Opera*, (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 2.

Where do I stand as a performer? I consider this question my most pervasive current struggle. I am entrenched between the modes and impulses of two worlds. While the world of bravado and virtuosity can seem bound to pretension at times, the world of the mundane and the human can be difficult to access within the theater. There must be some fluidity within performance that can accommodate both of these realms and encompass all possibilities. And so I set out in my research to investigate who and what I am capable of being within performance, how there can be multiplicity and depth within the presentational.

II. In Consideration of the Beginning: Finding Clarity

In the initial stages of my project, I realized that my uncertain identity as a performer stemmed from how rarely I accessed my performative self. Hours of rehearsal within a studio can be very detached from performance. Presentational qualities and relationships are often the last elements a dancer considers as she must first learn the movement material itself. But I wanted to develop as a performer throughout my investigations, to consider constantly the performer in relation to self and to others.

I began my choreographic research as an incorporation of performance within the creative process and an exploration of performance itself. My initial ideas gravitated around taking dance outside of the theater, removing the familiar stage environment and perhaps the pretenses associated with it. In September 2009, I began rehearsals with a group of six other dancers. Our earliest investigations adapted core phrase material from the studio for performance in nearby public places—most frequently the Emory Village CVS and the intersection of North Decatur and Oxford Roads. Though these mini-performances were helpful in evaluating what movement worked outside of a studio space, I was not wholly satisfied by the investigation. I wrote in my rehearsal journal on October 19, 2009 that my ideas were beginning to seem “like mere changes of location,” that my considerations of performance identity needed to stem from “more than a change of space from private to public.” Nevertheless, as these early attempts continued, I began to clarify what I truly wanted to investigate with my research.

In October of 2009, I performed in a self-choreographed trio at Atlanta’s Le Flash festival for a project called Dance Truck, a presentation of dance and lighting in the twenty-six-foot bed of a rental box truck. In that particular performance, I felt a strange divide between the realms of presentation and everyday reality. Within the choreography, I was interested in portraying a visceral struggle and tension between body parts—bones, muscles, skin. The piece culminated as we threw ourselves into the walls of the truck, pounding against the boundaries of the space. Though these struggles attempted to access a raw physical actuality, they also seemed lost in a duality of real and altered time, both exposed and enclosed within the alternative performance space.

Because the Dance Truck happenings were only part of a neighborhood-wide festival, some of the audience members did not remain for my entire performance. These spectators’ obvious apathy and subsequent decisions to remove themselves from the performance highly intrigued me. Whereas concert decorum requires the audience to remain within the theater until a piece is finished, this setting did not obligate the audience to the same behavior. Though this did deliver an amusingly low blow to my performance ego, I found it a perfect launching point for further investigation. Is the act of performing shared experientially between doers and observers, or is it only necessary that the doer have an active role? Can the role of audience and observer be fluid somewhat?

III. In Consideration of the Fourth Wall: Experience Within Live Performance

After performing for the Dance Truck project, I began to question how I related with and portrayed myself to an audience. It was impossible to consider this connection without returning to past experiences. My personal history as a performer stems almost entirely from the theater, an environment where specific customs preside. Within a theater setting, there is an understanding between audience and performer. Rules are abided by (though sometimes deviated from), and there exists an essential and tacit duet between observers and performers. Regardless of how much a choreographer, composer, or writer attempts to muddle this duality, the roles of watching and doing remain entrenched within the theater. This environment is a complicated setting in which the audience assumes what they see is in some essence artificial, a mere representation of life outside. Though indeed the performing arts can be staged and secluded, they still possess an intrinsic basis in reality. In the case of dance, the audience watches movement—the living, breathing body—in its most raw and most daring forms. The performer is not so different from the audience that she does not share in the same *umanità*. Perhaps the inherent struggle of the performer is to overcome this obstacle, this quandary, that she can never quite be the same while acting or dancing or singing as she is in real life. Or perhaps the performer must search for equilibrium between the authentic and the ostensible, must pursue a constant give-and-take between ordinary and extraordinary self.

This plurality of the performer, the dynamic exchange between presentational and inherent selves, is difficult to understand within the theater alone. Yet it is not easily understood beyond the proscenium either. In an attempt to investigate these concepts, I re-sculpted my project to include an exploration of the relationship between performer and performance setting—both in the theater and beyond. I became consumed in fascination with the transformative moment from mundane individual to the exalted "performer," a person who demands attention and observation. I further wondered if that moment of transformation ever truly occurs, and whether it was bound more to performative action or to the space in which a performance takes place. Where does the boundary between performance and everyday existence lie? Is there some liminal state between those two realms or is some dual of state of performer and person possible? How do audience and performer relate?

The emergence of the flash mob phenomenon speaks quite pertinently to these questions. Grounded in the everyday world, flash mob dances are performed in public places and, prior to the event, are unbeknownst to the general passersby. As the introduction of a familiar tune blasts from disguised sources within a particular public locale, flash mob dancers reveal themselves out of the general masses and enter a choreographed routine à la any movie musical. Unsuspecting bystanders are instantly transformed into audience members solely through obligation of physical vicinity. This fundamental duet of naïve spectators with everyday performers is the essence of the flash mob's appeal and intrigue. When asked in a recent New York Times article, "Can dance still break boundaries?" choreographer Anna Halprin answered: "I think so. I love the flash mob. I think that's wonderful. That's another new way of opening up the boundaries. Everybody can dance and we can dance at any time."[1] While many contemporary concerts within the fine arts attempt to reconcile pre-established boundaries between performer and audience member, flash mobs do the opposite. The typical flash mob seizes a group of people within everyday unity and abruptly constructs a divide between performer and spectator. This reversal in approach, the obligatory interweaving of performance with everyday world as opposed to some removed space or time, is a key element to the flash mob's creative successes.

As I further considered the boundaries between performer and audience, between staged and real worlds, I turned to other performing arts—mostly theater and music—as launching points for inspiration and investigation. The most resonant of these other-disciplinary considerations was a triad of live music events I attended on December 3-4, 2009. Each concert approached the boundary between audience and performer quite differently. The first of the three performances was an Emory Symphony Orchestra concert.[2] Within this particular setting, the classic symphonic decorum was strictly adhered to—musicians enter and sit; conductor enters, bows, and approaches the podium; conductor cues musicians and music commences. Still, I noticed something during this particular performance which I had theretofore never considered within the symphonic domain. We watched as the musicians sporadically entered the stage, listened as they began to warm up, and I realized that I was witnessing the transformation of these musicians from everyday individuals to active performers. In a sense, the audience met the performers informally before the actual concert began, a luxury not often provided within dance and theater contexts.

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[1] Julie Bloom, "The Woman Who Influenced the Influential Choreographers," ArtsBeat Blog, NYTimes.com, entry posted March 12, 2010, http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/the-woman-who-influenced-the-influential-choreographers/ (accessed March 14, 2010).

[2] Emory Symphony Orchestra, directed by Richard Prior, Emerson Concert Hall, Schwartz Center for Performing Arts, Emory University, Atlanta, December 3, 2009.

Later that same evening, I went to a local jazz club called Churchill Grounds to listen to Pure Soundz, the bar’s usual Thursday-night house band.[3] As the musicians began their set, I became fascinated by the fluidity between the stage and the surrounding tables. At first it seemed Pure Soundz comprised four musicians, though as the evening continued musicians joined and augmented the mostly improvisational jam. At one point a man who had been engaged in conversation at a back table pulled a saxophone from out of nowhere and began to play as he walked toward the stage. There was a constant exchange of instruments between performers as well as an easy sense of flow between soloists and the group. I will never forget the way the musicians observed each other and sensed each other’s playing while maintaining individuality both in aural and in physical presence. While the Emory Symphony Orchestra concert had maintained the proscenium, the intimate space at Churchill Grounds allowed for a relatively free exchange between onstage and offstage realms.

After examining the performances of the ESO and Pure Soundz, I attended *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* in Emory University’s Glenn Memorial Auditorium to complete this musical triad.[4] As the evening of musical celebration began, the choir entered the chapel singing, using the same aisles through which the audience had just traveled. In this way, the concert began outside the stage space, and the performers and audience shared the same gateway into the performance. While lyrics throughout the program ranged from Latin to German to English, there was a ubiquitous sense of reverence and joy as each song commenced, an aura of communal catharsis which seemed to permeate the air. The attendees in the pews could join with the chorus in song, and so the performance became an experience of shared words, actions, and emotions.

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[3] Pure Soundz, Churchill Grounds, Atlanta, December 3, 2009.

Observing these three musical performances provided further insight into the relationship between performer and audience as well as the fluidity between onstage and offstage realms. I was particularly drawn to the potential for performer and observer to unite in both time and space. This notion of communal experience aligns interestingly with the philosopher John Dewey’s statements in his text *Art as Experience*. Dewey discusses the common mistake of relegating art to its object component, the “building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience.”[5] Though the performing arts are more inherently alive than material-bound art forms, they still can be easily objectified. Many spectators consider dance within the context of choreography alone, for example in a repertory work by Martha Graham or Josè Limòn. Symphony-goers attend concerts based on particular pieces being presented, and theater audiences gravitate toward works by famous playwrights. Performance is thus defined by author or concrete work and not by the unique experience of performance. The audiences of this approach take a passive observational role instead of an actively living and witnessing one. In an attempt to devalue this material view, Dewey argues that the essence of art and aesthetics lies in experience itself: “Life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it…Experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement.”[6] Dewey’s aesthetic experience is an inherent “movement” that is tied to a sense of cooperation and conversation within a particular context. In the case of the performing arts, this “interaction” is the fundamental dialogue between audience and performer. All performance “goes on in an environment” in which both doer and observer are present, and it is through the sharing of this present moment that the artwork comes to life.

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[4] *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*, performed by Emory Concert Choir and Emory Chorus, directed by Eric Nelson, Glenn Memorial Auditorium, Emory University, Atlanta, December 4, 2009.

[5] John Dewey, “Art as Experience,” in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 579.

As I became more comfortable with the fluid boundaries and interactions between real world and stage, I further wondered where the performer’s identity lies. Is the performer someone to be exalted through an obvious separation from the audience, or is the performer a relatable human being bound to the everyday? How can the audience share in experience of both bravado and humility? As I am already quite familiar with the emphasis of excellence on stage, I delved instead into the identity of the mundane within dance. In an attempt to consider the performer as ordinary human being, I evaluated the term “pedestrian” as it is used within concert dance today, a word which implies both complexity and simplicity.

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[6] Dewey, 587, 599.

IV. In Consideration of the Pedestrian: Postmodern and Contemporary

When the word “pedestrian” arises in our everyday lives, it is most commonly in reference to traffic safety—e.g. any sign sporting some derivative of “Stop for Pedestrians Within Crosswalk.” Indeed the pedestrian symbol, that iconic black stick figure frozen mid-stride, recalls only one thing for most Americans—the potential presence of a person on foot nearby. In contemporary Western concert dance however, the term “pedestrian” assumes a descriptive meaning beyond the domain of traffic regulation. Pedestrian movement can include not only the walking we so commonly associate with the term, but also gestures, jumps, and simple postures. It can be directly drawn from a real-life situation, or it can be entirely unrecognizable in abstractness. Furthermore, the pedestrian performance mode is dynamically muted and less impactive than the dramatic energies of more embellished or more classically technical approaches. In general, pedestrian movement implies a certain simplicity which counters preconceived notions of the exceptional.

The notions of the pedestrian within concert dance primarily took shape within the Judson Church era of the 1960’s and 70’s. The work of these postmodernists removed dance from the realm of staged drama and into a world of unmasked reality. The postmodernists emphasized the experiential nature of real time, of ordinary events without spectacle. Whereas earlier dance makers attempted to disguise technical shifts within performance—for example, an introduction of a prop or an alteration of scene—

the postmodernists embraced such instances: “Where preparation was necessary, it was simply incorporated into the activity, without any attempt to mask it.”[1]

Yvonne Rainer’s “NO manifesto” speaks directly to the ideas of this era. Rainer’s words endeavor to dispel previous notions of presentation and to establish a nihilistic approach in its place:

> NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.[2]

This bold statement became the foundation from which postmodern dance ideas stemmed. What was previously exalted in concert could now be discarded and revolted against. Rainer’s ideas worked to objectify the performer as a mere moving object. This pedestrian body, this ordinary human being, was a task-performer, a blank canvas for movement to exist within and upon. Rainer’s kinetic magnum opus, *Trio A*, is a testament to these ideas. No singular movement is given more emphasis than another; each motion has specific clarity and direction; the material rotates and uses different facings—all aspects contribute an egalitarian sense to the work.[3] Such an approach is somewhat analogous to a modernist novel, per say by Virginia Woolf, in which time is fragmented yet continuous. Each moment has equal emphasis yet possesses a descriptive specificity unique unto itself.

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[1] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 28.

[2] Banes, 43.

[3] Yvonne Rainer and Sally Banes, *Trio A (the mind is a muscle, part 1)*, VHS, Yvonne Rainer, choreographed by Yvonne Rainer (Columbus, OH: Dance Film Archive, 2003).

Sally Banes writes of Rainer's work as "descriptive activity, rather than an attempt to probe beneath surfaces for mysterious, 'deeper' meaning."[4] Such a statement—that movement exists solely as itself, an impenetrable entity free from symbolic intent—is true of many of the Judson-era choreographers. This approach to artistic creation is strongly reminiscent of Roland Barthes' ideas in "The Death of the Author," an essay which emphasizes the importance of text over author's intention: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."[5] Just as the postmodernists worked to dispel any "attempt to probe beneath surfaces," Barthes writes that "everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*…The structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced."[6] In light of the eras of concert dance that came before—from romantic story ballets to Diaghilev's *Le Sacre de Printemps* to Martha Graham's Greek-inspired tragedies—*Trio A* and other postmodern works ceased to concern the presentation of a particular tale, character, or meaning and instead focused on the *action* of presenting itself. Each work was meant to provide an inlet to human experience as opposed to a narrative. Banes writes of another postmodern project, the Grand Union, regarding its incorporation of "actual" as opposed to "choreographed" movement: "The concerts were not about playing characters but about interaction, contact, behaviors…The added dimension of theater and dance as social forms meant that the social as well as aesthetic world invaded the stage."[7] Wearing casual clothes, conversing openly as the performance went on, allowing mistakes as well as successes to be spontaneously created on stage, the Grand Union joined in the postmodern secession from former dance theatrics and conventions. Instead, the postmodernists founded new dramatic structures involving ordinary action. They renovated the proscenium with happenings of the everyday and spotlighted the pedestrian in place of the star figure.

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[4] Banes,43.
[5] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Farrar, 1978), 147.
[6] Barthes, 147.

In the decades since the Judson era however, the sense of the pedestrian within dance has broadened beyond the original intent of artists like Rainer. The term "pedestrian" now seems less a statement about action itself and more an all-encompassing term for movement which does not stem from a particular school of balletic or modern vocabulary. While, thanks to the postmodernists, the concept of mundane and found movement is embraced in today's dance work, I find that this aesthetic still possesses a degree of the synthetic. The pedestrian, both of Judson-era improvisations and concert dances today, remains a modified version of the true person who exists beyond the stage. In my own performance, I often align a pedestrian persona with the detached, almost apathetic presence I described earlier. This mode of performance can be very successful in exuding nonchalance and ordinariness to showcase simple movement, yet the true self is shielded and kept at a distance.

While in Bebe Miller's repertory class at the Bates Dance Festival last summer, I was offered a new perspective on the pedestrian performer. As we discussed Miller's movement material one day in class, a student mentioned that the choreography seemed pedestrian in manner. Miller acknowledged the student's comment as valid, but she also admitted her wariness in using the term “pedestrian” due to its overused, nonspecific nature within contemporary dance. “Some pedestrians are ax murderers,”[8] Miller said to the class, implying that any ordinary human being is also extraordinary in some sense, that everyone cannot be lumped into a single nondescript category. Today’s concept of pedestrian performance, therefore, can be as similarly limiting as classically technical performance. Both modes only present a fraction of the overall capacity of human body and human condition.

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[7] Banes, 209.

Melanie Bales argues in her article “Ballet for the Post-Judson Dancer” that balletic and postmodern vocabularies and performance modes are actually quite similar—a result of coming full circle as well as living at opposite ends of the artistic spectrum. Bales cites writer Roger Copeland’s ideas of “aspects that postmodernists and ballet enthusiasts share: impersonality, lightness, verticality, theatrical legibility.”[9] Both forms maintain a degree of imagination and investigate specific modes of human movement. However, while ballet still resides in a highly codified realm, the postmodern approach is more fluid:

> In the much less organized world of dance post-Judson, where training is mostly self-styled, and choreographic material can come from anywhere, there is no such direct link between training and repertoire…Ballet’s idealization of form also opposes our contemporary notion of individual freedom and creative expression…This is surely in opposition to the postmodern or post-Judson everybody.[10]

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[8] Bebe Miller, conversation with author and others, Bates Dance Festival, Lewiston, ME, July 27, 2009.

[9] Melanie Bales, “Ballet for the Post-Judson Dancer,” in *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, ed. Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-fiol (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 70.

[10] Bales, 71,77.

The “everybody,” the average pedestrian of the postmodern movement, is allowed to be many and all things. However, this manifold nature of pedestrian performance can be so fragmented and diffuse that it does not address the depth of the entire person. Bales writes that the Judsonites “revealed parts of themselves that were not glamorous, theatrical, or presentational.”[11] Indeed, the postmodernists addressed only “parts of themselves,” only portions of the total human being. The postmodern pedestrian adds complexity and opportunity to human expression within dance, extending the scope of personality and experience on stage.

V. In Consideration of the Camera: From Silver Screen to Home Video

Perplexed by an increasingly blurry portrait of performer as mixture of perfection and pedestrian, I ached for a way to document and isolate performative moments for later, recurrent study. As I grew increasingly frustrated with my inability to recreate vital moments from outside and within the studio, I realized the possibilities a video camera could create for my project. I wrote in my rehearsal journal of using video to highlight “the subtleties of each movement, each posture” and to expose “the performer as less dramatic in dynamics yet still possessing huge range.”

The combination of dance and film allows the representation of moments that might otherwise be missed, making it possible for the creator to review and edit and splice. The camera can focus in on a specific detail that the audience might miss within the panorama of the theater, or it can catch motion from angles rarely offered in a proscenium space. However, some vital aspects of performance are lost in the transfer from living movement in three dimensions to recorded images in two. This inherent flatness drastically alters the vitality of performance, and it is a harsh tradeoff in exchange for the permanence and reproducibility of dance on camera. Nonetheless, I was drawn to the creative and documentative possibilities of recorded movement. I was most interested in using the camera as an archival tool, a way of preserving and reproducing what could not be created in the theater alone. I wanted merely to capture moments within the everyday world, to show the results of transplanting dance into public without prior warning. But as I began to review the history of dance on film, I realized that production aspects—editing, color, sound score, camera angle—heavily affect the audience's perception of the performers within the work.

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[11] Bales, 79.

The combination of dance and film has captured the interest of choreographers for years. Martha Graham treated film as an opportunity to focus on the dramatics of dance, to bring the audience ever closer to mystic characters and historical figures within her work. In the 1958 film of Graham's *Appalachian Spring,*[1] the camera maintains the proscenium at a smaller distance, preserving a sense of the fourth wall between performers and audience while offering a more intimate view. The camera occasionally views the dancers from above and below as well as partially obscured by structures within the set. For the majority of the film, however, the camerawork delves into angles from which the entire picture can remain in sight. A singular dancer is rarely pictured in a shot by herself. Instead, she is almost always framed within the scope of Isamu Noguchi's set and the configurations of other dancers present, maintaining a sense of the individual relative to the pioneer group dynamic. The cooperation and contrast between fore, middle, and backgrounds are essential in maintaining this all-inclusive scene as well as in keeping the sense of audience as observer. Furthermore, the black and white of the film allows a structural chiaroscuro to form. The shadows of Noguchi's modernist set, coupled with the shadows created by Graham's angular and shape-driven choreography, add to the construction and organization of the visual.

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[1] Martha Graham. *Appalachian Spring*, directed by Peter Glushanok, 1958, *Martha Graham Dance on Film*, DVD, performed by Martha Graham and others (Chicago, IL: Criterion Collection, 2007).

A final striking aspect of Graham's film work is its maintenance of a particular viewpoint or shot for extended periods of time. This further emphasizes the proscenium nature of her work, its removal from the everyday, its emphasis on being experienced as though in the theater, its place as a subject of artistic contemplation. This absence of sharp or quick cuts within the camera's view is more rarely seen in the films of today. A perfect example can be found within any popular American music video shown on MTV. In today's music video, the camera emphasizes certain aspects of a song, switching from one shot to the next in alignment with rhythmical cues or patterns. The camera often flashes quickly from scene to scene, never fully allowing the viewer to absorb a particular visual. However, with the average MTV video comes a heaping amount of fantasy—models and musicians combine in settings that are ostentatiously improbable. Such presentation aligns more with superstardom than with humanity, emblazoning a star image as opposed to capturing relatable moments.

Beyond the mainstream of MTV, much of dance on film today is not so grandiosely brazen. Still, dance on film uses similar rhythmical editing patterns, shifting between angles to establish a rhythm as a jumping-off point for development of tension and introduction of the unexpected. In *ALT I ALT* (*All in All*), a 2003 film by Norwegian director Torbjørn Skârild,[2] careful editing allows an auditory accumulation to build. Set in the blue coolness of a deserted swimming pool, a lone figure begins to jump on a diving board. The camera cuts from diver, to board, to underwater, to views of the pool from afar—all within a rhythm built from the sounds of the diver's feet hitting the board, the board's bouncing, and the moments of silence as the diver soars in between. These audio and visual aspects combine in anticipation as the diver bounces ever higher and seems ever closer to some perfect dive. In the film's final moments, the diver enters what seems like an endless flip, with shot after shot of his body continually turning midair. As his body is suspended within the flip, so too is the score suspended in silence. Then, just as it seems he will dip into the water, the diver lands atop a higher platform, takes a bow, and leaves the scene. The camera cuts again, and Skârild finishes with the same view as in the film's beginning—that of the lone pool. The film's editing is essential to this buildup of tension and unexpected resolution, emphasizing that "all in all" the conclusion is not as important as what comes before it.

The introduction of camerawork as part of the dance itself is one of the starkest contrasts between Graham's films and many more recent dance on camera investigations. Graham maintained a particular formality with her films, keeping the camera at a relative distance to maintain the entire visual of the work. This is not necessarily the case in contemporary dance on film. In "The Cost of Living,"[3] a work by the British company DV8 Physical Theater, the camera allows a flow between performance and real events—from a public pier to a dingy apartment to a dance club; from day to night to day again.

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[2] Torbjørn Skârild, *ALT I ALT*, DVD, Knut Reinertsen, directed by Torbjørn Skârild (Norway: Norwegian Film Institute, 2003).

[3] Lloyd Newson, *The Cost of Living*, DVD, Jose Maria Alves, Gabriel Castillo, and others, directed by Lloyd Newson (United Kingdom: DV8 Films Ltd., 2004).

Here, the camera is less an audience member and more a voyeur, following the characters as opposed to showcasing them. This allows a continuity that can be both uplifting and miserable, funny and poignant.

Another dance film in which the camera takes an integral role is “Touched,”[4] a 1994 collaboration between director David Hinton and choreographer Wendy Houston. Within the film’s crowded bar room scene, the camera not only follows but also participates in interactions between characters. The camera often swerves in and out of focus, sweeping back and forth to follow the dancers’ drunken interactions. Such swaying of the viewpoint suggests a drunkenness to the camera itself, that it is merely another character within the bar. In contrast to Graham’s film work in which the picture must be complete, Hinton never allows an entire body within the shot, focusing particularly on involvement of faces and hands as the dancers mingle. The film also plays with time, cutting intermittently to the bathroom of the bar in which music fades away and only real sounds of the physical scene are shared. This sense of separate worlds within the same work is almost impossible to create seamlessly in the realm of the stage; however with film these different environments are feasible and can be easily connected. Interestingly, though “Touched” is a post-Judson film, the performers involved are highly expressive and almost vaudevillian at times. Their characters are more expressively exaggerated in contrast to the egalitarian aesthetic of the postmodern pedestrian.

When considering the past and present of dance on camera, it is impossible to mention these examples without equally emphasizing the impact of Internet video dance. The immediacy of the Internet, its capacity to make material of any nature instantly available to the public, holds expansive implications for the dance world. In the few years since the inception of YouTube in February 2005,[5] video-sharing websites have risen to the forefront of dance on camera creativity and distribution. While theater-bound concerts establish a specific time and place for dance viewing, YouTube and other video-sharing websites do not impose a schedule or location upon the audience. The computer screen is thus the new theater. Additionally, the Internet allows more people than ever to be involved in dance construction. In her article "Dorky Dance, YouTube, and the New Vaudeville," writer Latika Young recognizes the Internet as a leading "forum for meaningful, non-profit driven, participatory communication and artistic creation."[6] Internet users can forward video links to friends, post comments underneath a video for all users to read, or even create a video response to a clip they have just seen:

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[4] David Hinton, *Touched*, DVD, choreographed by Wendy Houston (Great Britain: Airtight Films, 1994).

> The viewer, the new audience, often adopts a more active role in this cutting-edge virtual world of dance, transforming mere spectators into engaged dance collaborators…The posse of this much enlarged 'circle' now collectively improvise and fiercely riff off one another…without having to be in the same country, much less the same ballroom or street corner.[7]

The potential now exists for direct and continuous exchange between audience and performer, both through feedback and participation. Videos and typed comments can be either premeditated or improvised; yet their introduction and incorporation into online territory has immediate implications.

Young also acknowledges the Internet as "instrumental in promoting 'dorky dancing,' that is, what was once considered socially awkward movement is now being embraced and even celebrated."[8] This movement genre—championed and made popular primarily by adolescent- to college-age individuals with little or no dance training—has both similarities and differences from the postmodern pedestrian sensibility. According to Young, dorky dancing must be deemed, through a culturally specific lens, as movement that is awkward or odd or uncool. The emerging generation of YouTube dancers trademarks its inherent "dorkiness" both in embodiment and in appearance—combining disjointed, uncoordinated, off-tempo movement with peculiar body stature and/or sense of style.[9] This aesthetic is not a recent phenomenon, however, as it stems from a long history of awkward movement captured on film—from Charlie Chaplin to Napoleon Dynamite, from *America's Funniest Home Videos* to Spike Jonze's homemade mocumentary/music video for Fat Boy Slim's "Praise You."[10] The most recent movement of Internet dorky dancing extends this chronology, continuing the development of dance through peculiar abandon of social norms.

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[5] Latika Young, "Dorky Dance, YouTube, and the New Vaudeville," *Dance on Camera Journal* (January 2008): 18.
[6] Young,18-19.
[7] Young, 19, 26.

Young also strongly emphasizes the "indispensable ingredient" of fun within dorky dancing, that "its real purpose is to entertain."[11] While the dorky aspect of this movement toys with our ideas of proper aesthetics, it also does not adhere to the formalities and considerations of academic or even popular dance. In the concert dance world, the concept of body as object, not person, often dominates. With Internet dorky dancing, the person underneath the movement is exposed. There is a sense of unadorned humanity and life, an expression of the most basic of human emotions and desires. Furthermore, though dorky movement can be without a technical derivative, it exists as an entity separate from the concert dance pedestrian. Postmodernists used pedestrian movement to exhibit universality amidst human action—an everyman aesthetic. Contrarily, the dorky dancers of today use movement as a way to embrace their uniqueness, their individuality against the status quo.

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[8] Young, 18.
[9] Young, 20.
[10] Young, 21.
[11] Young, 20.

The unique combination of dorky dancing and personal video equipment allows the public to peek at performers we would otherwise never have been exposed to:

> These Internet dances indulge our voyeuristic tendencies and allow us the opportunity to watch a style of dancing that has often been considered taboo or socially inappropriate. We are literally getting a glimpse into dancing habits that are often left confined to the privacy of people's kitchens and dorm rooms.[12]

A particularly interesting example of this comes from one of my favorite YouTube contributors. Working under the username "doglover199709," a middle school-aged girl dances solo to pop songs in a bedroom decked with Jonas Brothers posters. Of her twenty-one video uploads to YouTube, only one has less than 100,000 views; her two most popular clips, "nobodys perfect" and "DISTURBIA!!!!!" have well over 4 million views each.[13] Doglover199709's videos are quintessential YouTube pieces, showing movement material that is not horribly exceptional in vocabulary but completely unique in execution and personality. Her body of work, while clearly presentational in nature, still provides the viewer with a glimpse of her everyday self. Clad in oversized t-shirt and pajama pants, doglover199709 oscillates between internal and external modes of performance. At times she becomes entirely self-focused and swept up in her own groove, while at other moments she clearly has the audience in mind—incorporating lighting changes using her bedroom light switch and making animated faces directly toward the camera.

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[12] Young, 25.

[13] Doglover199709, *Doglover199709's Channel*, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/user/doglover199709#p/u (accessed January 2010).

The flash mob is another example of video dance embraced through the Internet. The flash mob is tied to the World Wide Web as its primary forum for both organization and publicity. As discussed above, flash mob dances most immediately affect unsuspecting bystanders within the physical vicinity of a performance. However, many are filmed and uploaded to the Internet, allowing a rapid diffusion of dance to all corners of the globe. Websites of creative organizations like the New York City-based Improv Everywhere allow anyone to view and comment upon these impromptu performances. The website www.flashmob.com permits any Internet user to propose a flash mob scenario and to communicate with others who might be interested in participating. Through such instantaneous and widespread accessibility, increasing numbers of people are being exposed to and participating in flash mob experiences.

A final noteworthy component of Internet dancing, beyond its cult of dorky personality, is its lack of polished, professional production. Videos can now be taken on almost any personal electronic device—cell phone, digital camera, computer—which allows an overall increase in video production. As Young states, the amateur nature of these films adds to their novelty, their believability, their appeal:

> Dorky Internet dancers emit a sense of veracity, of being authentically amateur and genuinely vulnerable…[they] express an overwhelming sense of believability and give the spectator an invigorating opportunity to watch something without having to willingly “suspend disbelief.”[14]

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[14] Young, 21, 27.

Through production and performance, these Internet dances work to dispel the artificiality of the theater, removing all pretenses that we must believe or commit to what is being presented.

From Martha Graham's proscenium-maintaining grayscale work of early dance film to doglover199709's homemade videos of today, the potential of dance on camera is vast indeed. The camera can showcase movement in color or chiaroscuro, in focus or blur, in real time or slow motion. The viewer is allowed to be intimate or distant from the performer, and the film's approach can determine our ultimate perception and familiarity with the dancer on screen.

VI. In Consideration of the Concert: "A Question of Character"

As I began to understand the scope and myriad aspects of my research described above, I knew that a single concert could not encompass everything. Indeed, some portions of my project can only be described in words, and some can only be shared in performance. Regardless, I entered this process as a performer with the intention of examining that identity, and so I sought to create work for that purpose. The resulting pieces—dare I call them "findings" of my research—were presented in "A Question of Character," a concert on March 25-26, 2010 in the Schwartz Center Dance Studio. In three works—*Sociokinetosis*, *Here It Is*, and *On Falling*—I attempted to expose and culminate the explorations and ideas described above.

Sociokinetosis

Sociokinetosis, a pseudo-academic PowerPoint presentation about the maladies of social dance, stemmed from my extended thought process on the relationship between the norms of concert dance and those of dance beyond a structured or choreographed realm. After deciding I wanted to work with film and purchasing a digital video camera, I began investigating how to capture dance that was not previously rehearsed or created by myself. In an attempt to capture movement from a less codified vocabulary, I asked friends and roommates to improvise while I recorded them on camera. The ingenuity of many of these classically untrained movers further ignited my interests. Hoping to couple my attempts at amateur dance documentation with my love of dancing in a social setting, I decided to throw a house party to film these less polished moments of the college-age dancer. As any undergraduate student would do, I created a Facebook event.[1] I deemed the event "Dance Dance Groove-alution," and its premise was an hour-long dance marathon in which all party attendees must move without hesitation or fail.

On the evening of February 5, 2010 at 9:30 p.m., guests arrived at my house for the commencement of "Dance Dance Groove-alution." In a testament to the bizarre reality of communication within today's Facebook generation, the guests accepted a relatively impersonal Internet invitation which then placed them within a strongly interpersonal environment. Furthermore, these guests were everyday individuals who willingly entered a realm that demanded performative and creative energy. People were literally walking off the street and entering a performance with full commitment and zeal. What surprised me beyond this enthusiastic participation was the diversity amidst movers—both in confidence and in movement vocabulary. As with any improvisational jam, social dance settings allow individuals to showcase movement styles in which they are most comfortable and most skilled. Additionally, there were instances both of unity and individuality throughout the evening. The dancing was primarily improvised, yet moments of familiar and almost universal choreography (e.g. the classic arm movements of the Village People's "Y.M.C.A.") were also possible.

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[1] See Appendix A.

Once I had captured the events of the evening on camera, I was left to wonder how to present what I had recorded within an academic theater setting. As I perused the footage I had obtained from that single hour of social dancing, I was intrigued by the obvious discomfort of some of the trained dancers in attendance, those individuals who take movement classes on a regular basis. Why were these people so uncomfortable if dance was such a part of their lives in other settings? This unease highlighted an odd disconnect between performance within the theater—in which many dancers can mentally distance themselves and thus detach from the discomfort of being observed—and performance within an a social gathering—in which performer and observer are more fluid and the individual is tossed about between those two roles.

Thus *Sociokinetosis* became a satire of this separation between concert dance decorum and the less predictable nature of the average college dance party. I presented video clips of social dance as an illness, as something that would not be presented on stage under normal (i.e. "healthy") circumstances. Surprisingly, however, the modes from which I analyzed movement within a theatrical context were easily applied to the movement I had captured on film. By compiling and editing these social dance moments into a unified presentation, I created a work with a particular aesthetic just as I would with any other performance piece. As is stated in the Laban-based text *Dance and the Performative*:

> Extensive observation of people socially interacting has shown that tacitly agreed rules exist which govern what is regarded as civilized culture-bound behaviour. Against these rules the machinations of individuality, originality, comedy, tragedy and madness are judged.[2]

The presentation of my video findings examined the “tacitly agreed” aesthetic of that particular social dance event, just as any choreographer’s work examines a particular aesthetic within the theater. While initially I wanted to recognize concert dance’s disconnect from dance in other settings, I realized that these two worlds were not so wholly different. Though one audience feedback form described *Sociokinetosis* as being “believable because it is in the real world,” the social dancers (i.e. “patients”) in this work were no less performers than anyone we see on a proscenium stage. In both social and concert dance, an individual sense of exhibition communicates with an observational presence, and the performance itself stems from interactions and expectations between dancer and audience.

Here It Is

The group work of my project was by far the longest investigation of my thesis. I had been working with the same cast of six other dancers since September 2009, playing with structured improvisation and set phrase material in everyday contexts as a way to examine performance outside the theater. Though it took nearly a semester to solidify any specific movement in which my ideas seemed to resonate, our group finally found clarity within a gesture phrase of a mere thirty-two counts. Gesture has always intrigued me in its ability to be so simply unadorned and yet so endlessly diverse, and this short phrase offered a wealth of opportunity for reproduction and adaptation.

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[2] Valerie Preston-Dunlopand and Ana Sanchez-Colberg, *Dance and the Performative* (London: Verve Publishing, 2002), 64.

As we delved further into these gestures, I had a strong desire to present the phrase entirely in unison. I was initially worried and confused by this inclination because it seemed bound to pre-rehearsed pretenses of the stage as well as contrary to my project's explorations. In his book *Choreography and the Specific Image,* Daniel Nagrin writes warily of unison movement: "every individual in these groups has been told what to do, i.e., they are subject to the authority of another."[3] He contrasts theatrical unison to non-theatrical group movement—such as cheering at a sports event or kneeling at a religious service—stating that those real-life moments are unified yet ruled by individuality and entropy. However Nagrin also admits the layman spectator's fascination with unison movement:

> Audiences tend to love and even *admire* [unison]. Why? They know it is not easy for a mass of people to do the same thing cleanly and accurately. They appreciate this form of virtuosity. The foundation of Radio City Music Hall rests upon the precisely calibrated high kicking of a large group of women disguised as the same person duplicated thirty-six times.[4]

Considering Nagrin's perspective within the context of my project, I did not want to dissolve the individuality of my dancers through solely unison material. After discussing these concerns with my cast, we agreed to present the gesture phrase mostly in unison with only moments of deviation, a way of examining individual alterations to an established communal identity. We began as a unit, shuffling on and off stage in single file, yet we broke into separate entities at the piece's core. Costumed in black with accents of differently colored cardigans, we existed as an assembly of figures both unified and apart, a set of Rockettes gone awry.

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[3] Daniel Nagrin, *Choreography and the Specific Image* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 96.

[4] Nagrin, 96-97.

This examination of individuality within a group was also highlighted, perhaps less obviously, by the performative differences between video and live performance components of *Here It Is*. Whereas I asked my dancers to be as clean and actively present as possible in live performance, I did not worry so wholly about those aspects while filming. In fact, I enjoyed capturing faces in confusion or laughter just as much as capturing the rehearsed material. The film naturally documented flashes of transformation between performer and ordinary person, yet these were often so quick or so subtle that a first-time viewer could easily miss them. These instants documented momentary breaks in stage presence, comical imperfections, and subsequently a relatable humanity. As I assembled the video-recorded and live components of the piece, I attempted to distinguish the film's less polished, more human instants by assigning a detached, superficially stuffy persona to the dancers on stage. I asked my dancers to look intent and active in the face but to avoid moments of extreme expression or any admittance of mistake. The face was to be active but not over-expressive, the movement to be paramount in its presentation and the facials to be slightly more distant. Confronted by moments of relatable facial expression within the film, I asked my dancers to embody the postmodern pedestrian, to be a blank canvas for movement alone to adorn.

By filming the gesture phrase in different locations, I could further alter the audience's perspective and reception of material without changing the movement itself. Nagrin writes that the audience assumes "unison dance is not a spontaneous activity, but rather a recurrence or a ritual, that all the moves have been repeated and rehearsed prior to the time we observe them."[5] Thanks to the possibilities afforded by a digital camera, I was able to document these prior occurrences. Not only did the audience view the phrase as a final product, but they also saw its repetition and rehearsal. The gestures were presented in multiple locations from multiple angles, but the movement material remained the same, grounded in a sense of bizarre public ritual.

Presenting the video-recorded gesture phrase in tandem with both derivative and wholly different movement on stage posed an interesting challenge for my instincts as a dance viewer. In one sense, the audience could become familiar with the gesture phrase in depth because it was repeated in so many ways, across two media as well as within multiple scenarios. Conversely, however, there was a simultaneous fervor in presenting all these elements at once, a choreographic danger which could leave the audience in confusion. In retrospect of the concert, I am sure that moments of *Here It Is* were visually excessive, that the audience was forced to choose between live and video-recorded movement, between dancers on one side of the stage and others on its opposite. Nagrin warns against this visual over-stimulation with group work: "one of the central challenges is the ability to control the focal attention of the audience. If the audience does not know where to look, the key points of the work will be diffused or lost."[6] Though I understood Nagrin's point—it is a common frustration of my own as an audience member—and tried to minimize those moments of focal dispersal within *Here It Is,* I did enjoy the idea of making people choose what and what not to see. The concert's audience feedback forms echoed Nagrin's and my ideas. While some complained of the piece's "information and visual overload," others seemed to enjoy the chaos. Regardless of opinion, the word consistently written on the feedback forms was "decision." These audience members were all commenting on the decisions they were forced to make during the more busy moments of the work. Normally, within film and with theater-bound performance, we are given a singular viewpoint for any one moment. By combining both forms simultaneously in *Here It Is*, the audience became responsible for their fate as spectators.

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[5] Nagrin, 97.
[6] Nagrin, 97.

This concept of singular choice amidst over-stimulation is linked to personal experience within the crazed barrage of images and messages in today's society. Through Internet, television, radio, newspaper, and more, we are endlessly assaulted with information in streams and fragments, and as individuals we must decide what to truly absorb and what to entirely ignore. One audience member commented of *Here It Is*, "The video distracted from attention to the live dancers—like Smartphones/computers/TVs distract us from real life and people." *Here It Is* was a difficult piece to create and to perform and to watch, but I am still intrigued by that difficulty. As an audience member stated, "[*Here It Is*] challenged the dancers to interact with themselves and the recorded performance—just like the audience has to interact with the whole show." The most important aspect of the work has to do with the decisions and interactions made by those involved in the experience. Through this participatory watching and doing, audience and performer are brought ever closer.

On Falling

When I began choreographing the solo *On Falling*, I was at a perplexing point within my research. Up to that time, I had considered the performer solely as embellished virtuoso or blank pedestrian, and I was frustrated because both perspectives seemed limited. I realized that I was missing an exploration into a sense of human being. I wanted truly to embody *l'umanità*, to exist on stage not as an exception or an object but as a living, breathing person. Daniel Nagrin writes of solo work that "the inner life of the performance [must be] sustained throughout,"[7] yet I was unsure how to access this "inner life" while on stage. I had spent my entire performance career trying to be someone or something else, and now I struggled with any semblance of true self.

As I further pondered this, I realized that at the crux of my performative tendencies lied an issue of focus—primarily within the eyes. In recent years, as I have investigated more exploratory modes of movement through improvisation and release techniques, my focus as a performer has deepened in its potential to be fluid and internal. Oftentimes, in an attempt to truly experience a movement qualitatively, I abandon the simultaneous experience of looking and seeing while I perform. In *Elements of Performance*, Pauline Koner warns the performer against this, commanding, "Do not stare but *look*, not only look but *see*."[8] This active seeing she describes is exactly what I struggle with. However on the opposite side of the spectrum, if a work demands an outward focus, I frequently assume an impersonal yet confrontational persona on stage. In these more bold moments, I can detach from any interpersonal exchange between performer and observer. I dance without any attempt to connect to the audience before me, shouting a one-sided dialogue in which I allow the observer to experience only what I am presenting.

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[7] Nagrin, 97.
[8] Koner, 6.

As I became conscious of these two extremes—the indulgent insider and the impervious demonstrator—within my performance, I realized I was never truly interacting with the audience. I was shutting the audience out, and I needed to find a way to let them in. As Koner writes, “It is most important to be aware on stage of people as people and not as things."[9] I began playing with involving the spectator, finding ways for the audience to enter and to exist within a work in opposition to my usual methods of projection. I wanted to stare directly at the audience, to actually see them and let them see me, but I did not want such eye contact to be confrontational. For the solo’s final performance draft, I entered the house of theater, using the same door that almost every spectator had passed through, and in this way I established a connection with the audience before stepping on stage. Koner encourages, “The audience should come to you, the performer, and participate in that life.”[10] In accordance with such advice, I attempted to usher the audience into the piece alongside me instead of presenting them with more typical introductory cues of light and sound.

I investigated laughter during the solo’s initial section in a dichotomous endeavor to ease and build tension simultaneously. I also utilized laughter because I had never before laughed as a performer with an audience, and I was truly interested in this possibility. Laughter is a potent force for interaction, and its infectious nature invites and encourages the kind of participation I was interested in with *On Falling*. I hoped that this would ease any anticipatory tension of the work’s beginning; however, I soon discovered that such laughter also built a foundation from which the work’s crucial juxtaposition stemmed. Though I began by connecting with the audience in a liminal world between seats and stage, I eventually walked to a point upstage center where I could be as far away from everyone in the theater as possible. Not until I reached my destination and turned to face the audience with the first croons of Patsy Cline's voice did I realize how alone I was. The community and warmth of the piece's introduction suddenly dissolved and left me in isolation. As one audience member described, "It was just the dancer: alone, vulnerable, and exposed on stage for all to see." Koner discusses such solitude in both an emotional and spatial sense: "The area of *solitude* is a feeling of utter aloneness, of being apart, a sense of complete isolation…It is a very small space that separates you from the rest of the world."[11] Indeed, the powerful emotion I felt while slowly sinking upstage, that "feeling of utter aloneness," was directly aligned with my spatial removal from the audience, that physical "area of solitude." I could see the vast space I had traveled from downstage to upstage, but with the house lights long since faded I could no longer distinguish the faces which had once seemed so intimate. For the remainder of the piece I found myself searching for that same connection, peering past the glare of stage lights in an attempt to find some interpersonal warmth again. In this sense, the work transformed from a solo into a duet, a dialogue of introduction, withdrawal, and reconciliation.

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[9] Koner, 32.

[10] Koner, 21.

In further contemplating human vulnerability for this work, I gravitated toward the motion of falling as one often aligned with weakness or imperfection. I also considered how my modern technique classes have taught me to fall and to recover, to give into gravity as well as to control myself within it. In a somatic sense, I have been trained to fall with ease as well as to be ever prepared for some unforeseen descent, and this training complicated my notions of helplessness within falling itself. Still, there is an undeniably humbling quality to falling in its inherent surrender, whether conscious or inadvertent, to gravity. In considering this, the work became an investigation of resisting or yielding to an outside influence—the tumbling weight of my body due to gravity, the pulling of my hair with my own hand, the tangible force I felt between myself and the audience. Koner terms this concept "magnetic focus," a somatic state based in actions of pulling or repelling coupled with intrinsic qualities of counterbalance.[12]

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[11] Koner, 15.

Though Koner's discussion on focus in *Elements of Performance* guided and deepened my investigations within *On Falling*, I cannot fully agree with her statements on "dramatic focus," that the performer in a narrative work should wholly assume a character and "forget oneself" (31). Even within a character who is perhaps fantastic or excessive, should there not be a present element of the performer herself? Koner writes that "not believing becomes playacting and is transparent."[13] While I fully respect this argument for the commitment of the performer to a particular character, I believe there is also a depth to this transparency which must be addressed. In some sense, especially within a narrative work, the performer must adopt an alternate mindset or physicality than she normally possesses. However, the transparency of the performer, the tangible and relatable reality within a role regardless of narrative presence, can be the most engaging aspect of performance. *On Falling* was undoubtedly a portrayal of an oddly tragic narrative, yet I could not take Koner's advice to "forget oneself." Indeed, I could not perform, could not fully exist within the character, unless I wholly understood myself.

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[12] Koner, 25-26.
[13] Koner, 31.

VII. In Consideration of the Whole: Gathering and Continuing

As I look back at my research over the course of this year, I grapple with a project seemingly unified by personal thought process alone. I journeyed in consideration from sequin-clad perfection to experiential embodiment to relatable humanity. I sought further understanding through study of film, experience of live performance, reading of philosophical and historical texts, and the creation of my own work. At times my research has seemed too fragmented, too disjointed through its assortment of approaches. However, I believe that a cohesive and cooperative picture is possible—because of this hodge-podge nature instead of despite it.

In contemplating the simultaneously fragmented and unified nature of my research endeavors, I am reminded of a quote from choreographer Ohad Naharin. Naharin speaks of *Decadance*, a theatrical composite of his past work, in similar recognition of fragment and unity: "[*Decadance*] teaches me…about paying attention to details without forgetting the whole. It is like telling only either the beginning, middle, or ending of many stories and from the way it is organized, and glued together, comes its coherency."[1] This consideration of the whole not merely as the sum of its parts but as the method of their assembly is particularly striking and pertinent to my project. Throughout this research, my methods have been diverse indeed. Regardless of the approach, I was constantly searching for some new angle to consider, some aspect of everyday object or artistic endeavor or real life that could expand and deepen my overall considerations. Thus this project became more about action than result, more about the process than the polished whole.

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[1] Program, *Decadance*, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, Dance Studio, Schwartz Center for Performing Arts, Altanta, February 26, 2010.

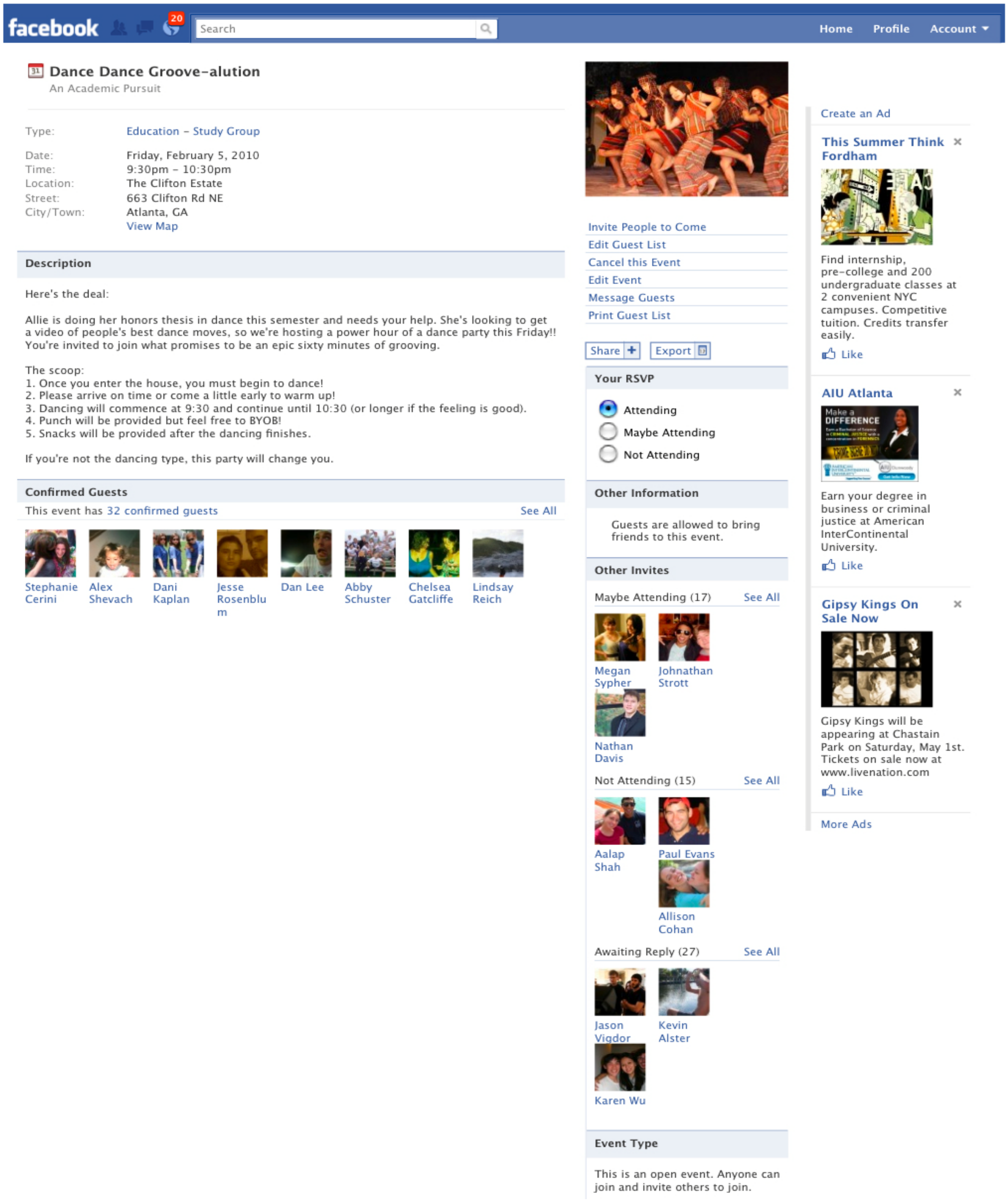
In recognizing my research as a convening of separate pieces, I have been reawakened to the scope and reality of this project beyond myself. For so long in this process I was solely driven by my own thoughts and feelings. I was trying so hard to understand myself as a choreographer, performer, thinker, and person that I initially missed the richness and expanse of the topic I was considering. Now, as I look back on my research, I see how influential the work and experiences of other individuals were within this process. I owe this project to the dancers I worked with, the performances I attended, the professors I consulted, the texts I reviewed, the everyday and extraordinary moments I experienced.

This project lives as both a personal narrative and a global composite, and I now see its intimate and more collective scope. In trying to find my own identity as a performer, I was also trying to find the identity of performance as a whole. On an intellectual level, I now more fully understand my relationship with the audience. I am more conscious of the depth and breadth in relating to others and in presenting myself on stage. On a grander scale, I recognize that performer and audience are inextricably linked by shared experience, and there can be either fluid or rigid structures defining the extents of this connection. I initially considered the identity of the performer to be limited by theatrics of the proscenium, believing that film and everyday settings could liberate a sense of ordinariness and reality within dance. While this can certainly be true, I have since found that the opposite is just as possible and valid. Indeed, the living and breathing moments of the performing arts can be a gateway to full experience, while the demands of contemporary information overload can leave individuals detached and desensitized. Furthermore, the sense of the authentic versus the ostensible in performance can be as much a creation of the performer herself as it is a byproduct of the theatrical infrastructure—choreography, costumes, lighting, et cetera. Finally, it is through communication with the audience that the performance develops. The performance is equally defined by audience and performer, and thus the presentational is pregnant with a multiplicity of meaning.

Even as I describe it above, I am awed by the diversity and complexity of my research. This affirms and reignites a consistent concern from my project—that there is still so much to consider. I have only begun to graze the surface of understanding performance, both on a personal and on a universal level. In order to more fully comprehend, to delve deeper, I must continue to question and to take action within my own work as well as to review and to contemplate the work of other artists and thinkers both contemporary and historical. To perform is to be many things—human, virtuoso, pedestrian, caricature, body—and to experience many things—interaction, seclusion, emotion, provocation. Like the universe that expands around us, the possibilities of performance are infinitely broadening to accommodate the ideas and endeavors of human creativity. Though I am but a minute particle in this colossal scheme, I will continue to explore performance in a persistent conversation between the microcosm of self and the macrocosm of human experience.

Appendix A

“Dance Dance Groove-alution” Facebook Event



Dance Dance Groove-alution

An Academic Pursuit

Type: Education - Study Group

Date: Friday, February 5, 2010

Time: 9:30pm - 10:30pm

Location: The Clifton Estate

Street: 663 Clifton Rd NE

City/Town: Atlanta, GA

View Map

Description

Here's the deal:

Allie is doing her honors thesis in dance this semester and needs your help. She's looking to get a video of people's best dance moves, so we're hosting a power hour of a dance party this Friday!! You're invited to join what promises to be an epic sixty minutes of grooving.

The scoop:
1. Once you enter the house, you must begin to dance!
2. Please arrive on time or come a little early to warm up!
3. Dancing will commence at 9:30 and continue until 10:30 (or longer if the feeling is good).
4. Punch will be provided but feel free to BYOB!
5. Snacks will be provided after the dancing finishes.

If you're not the dancing type, this party will change you.

Confirmed Guests

This event has 32 confirmed guests See All

Stephanie Cerini, Alex Shevach, Dani Kaplan, Jesse Rosenblum, Dan Lee, Abby Schuster, Chelsea Gatcliffe, Lindsay Reich

Your RSVP

● Attending
○ Maybe Attending
○ Not Attending

Other Information

Guests are allowed to bring friends to this event.

Other Invites

Maybe Attending (17) See All

Megan Sypher, Johnathan Strott, Nathan Davis

Not Attending (15) See All

Aalap Shah, Paul Evans, Allison Cohan

Awaiting Reply (27) See All

Jason Vigdor, Kevin Alster, Karen Wu

Event Type

This is an open event. Anyone can join and invite others to join.

This Summer Think Fordham

Find internship, pre-college and 200 undergraduate classes at 2 convenient NYC campuses. Competitive tuition. Credits transfer easily.

AIU Atlanta

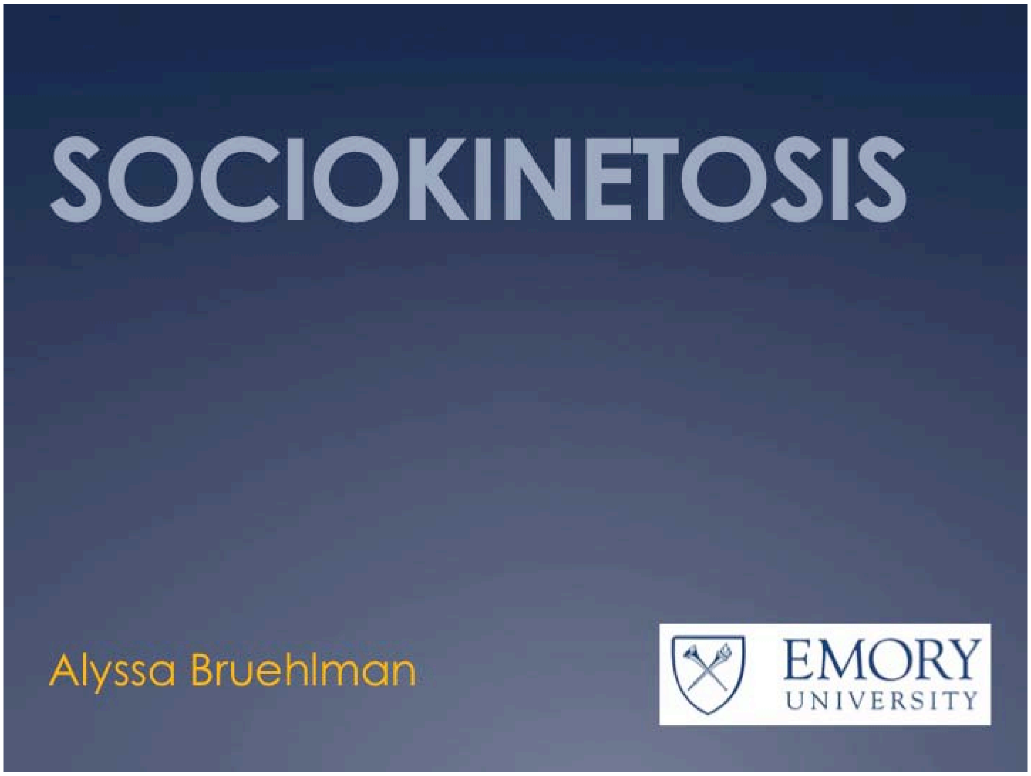
Earn your degree in business or criminal justice at American InterContinental University.

Gipsy Kings On Sale Now

Gipsy Kings will be appearing at Chastain Park on Saturday, May 1st. Tickets on sale now at www.livenation.com

Appendix B

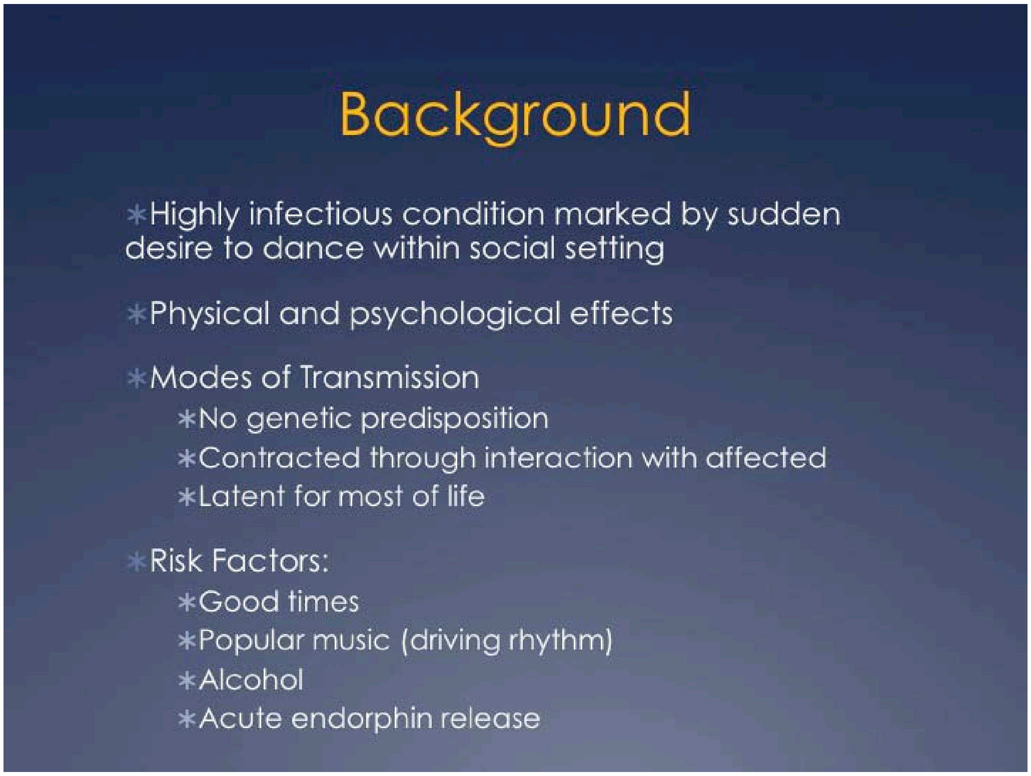
Sociokinetosis – PowerPoint Slides and Note Cards



SOCIOKINETOSIS

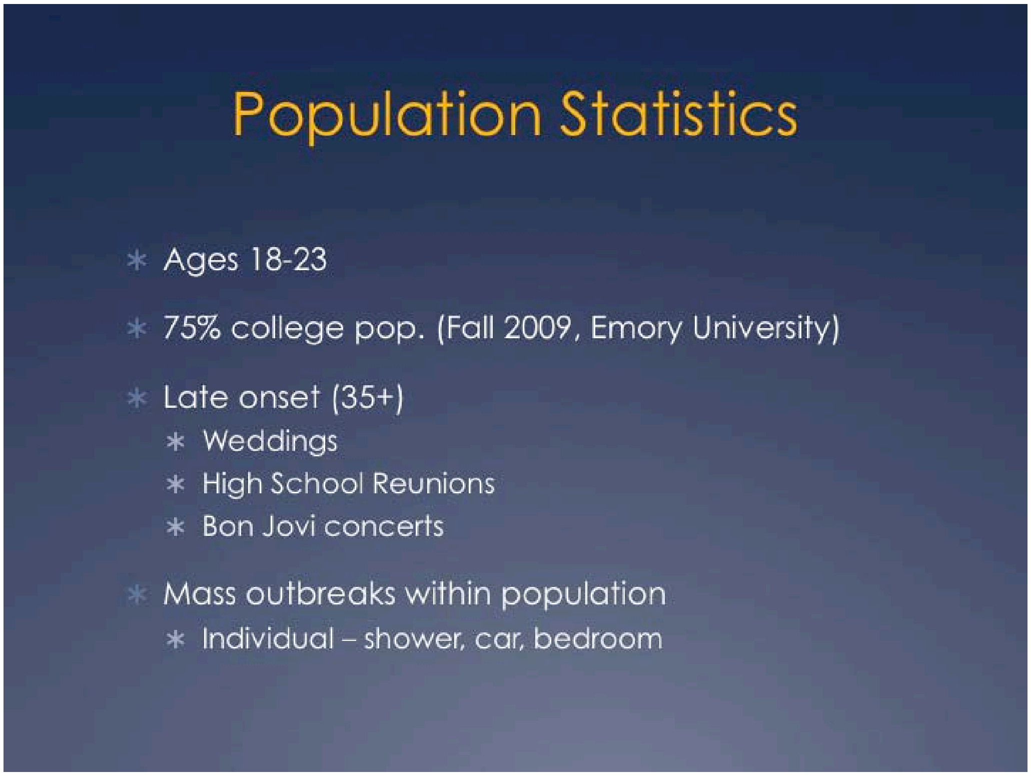
Alyssa Bruehlman

EMORY
UNIVERSITY



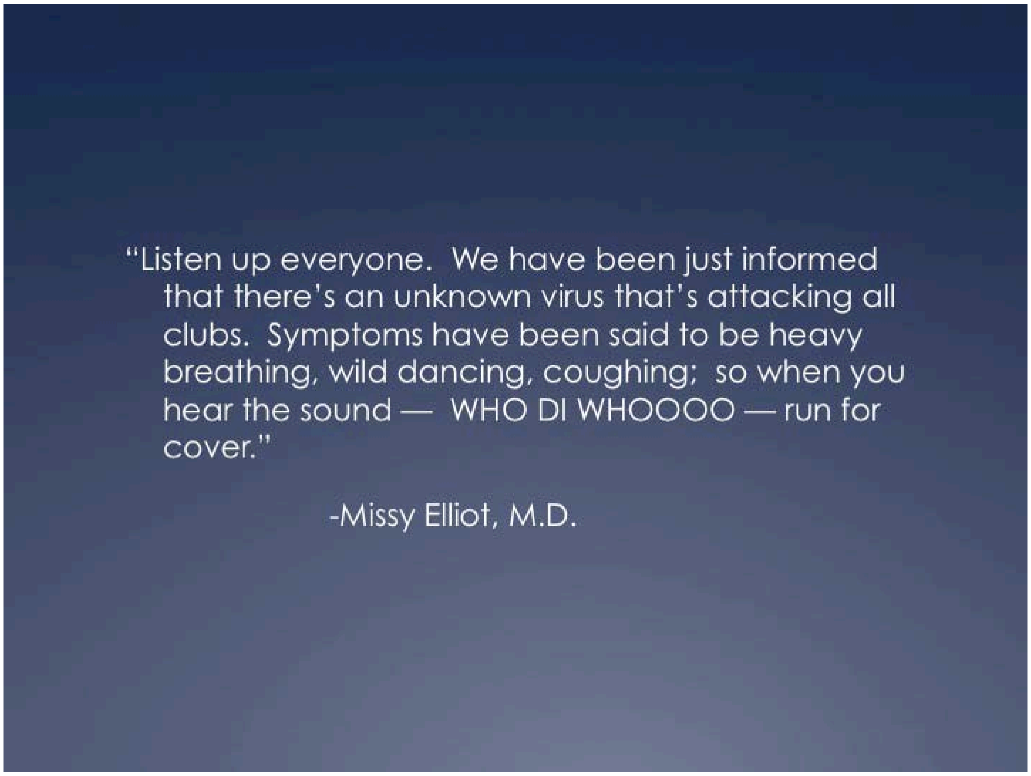
Background

- Highly infectious condition marked by sudden desire to dance within social setting
- Physical and psychological effects
- Modes of Transmission
  - No genetic predisposition
  - Contracted through interaction with affected
  - Latent for most of life
- Risk Factors:
  - Good times
  - Popular music (driving rhythm)
  - Alcohol
  - Acute endorphin release



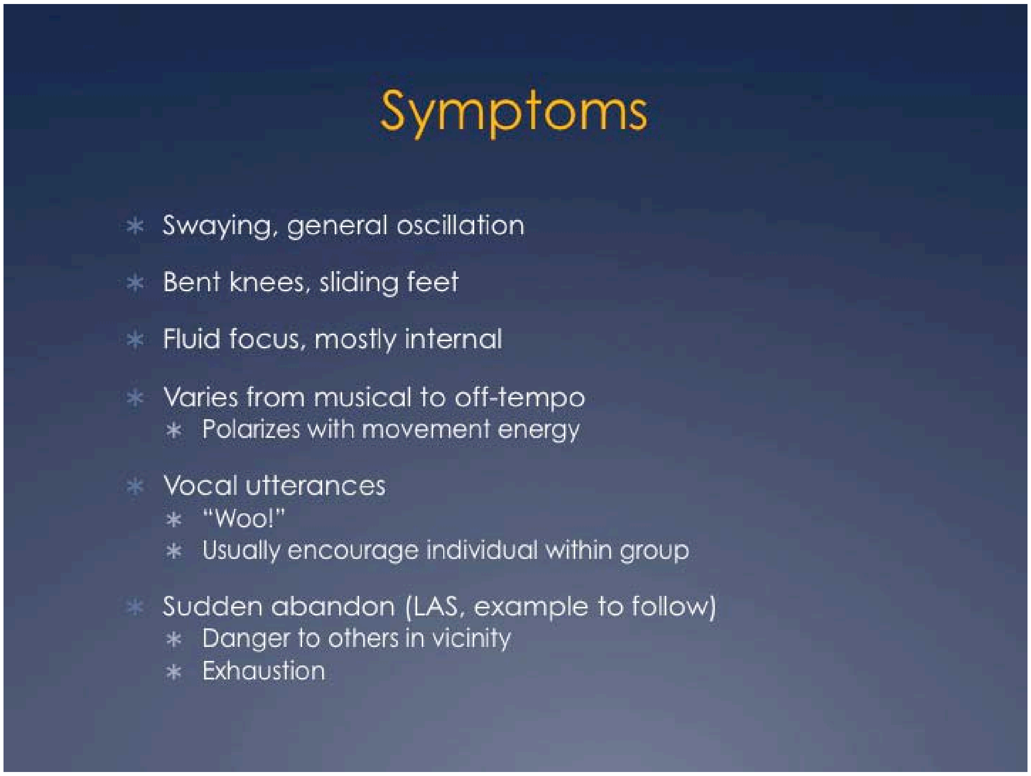
Population Statistics

- Ages 18-23
- 75% college pop. (Fall 2009, Emory University)
- Late onset (35+)
    - Weddings
    - High School Reunions
    - Bon Jovi concerts
- Mass outbreaks within population
    - Individual – shower, car, bedroom



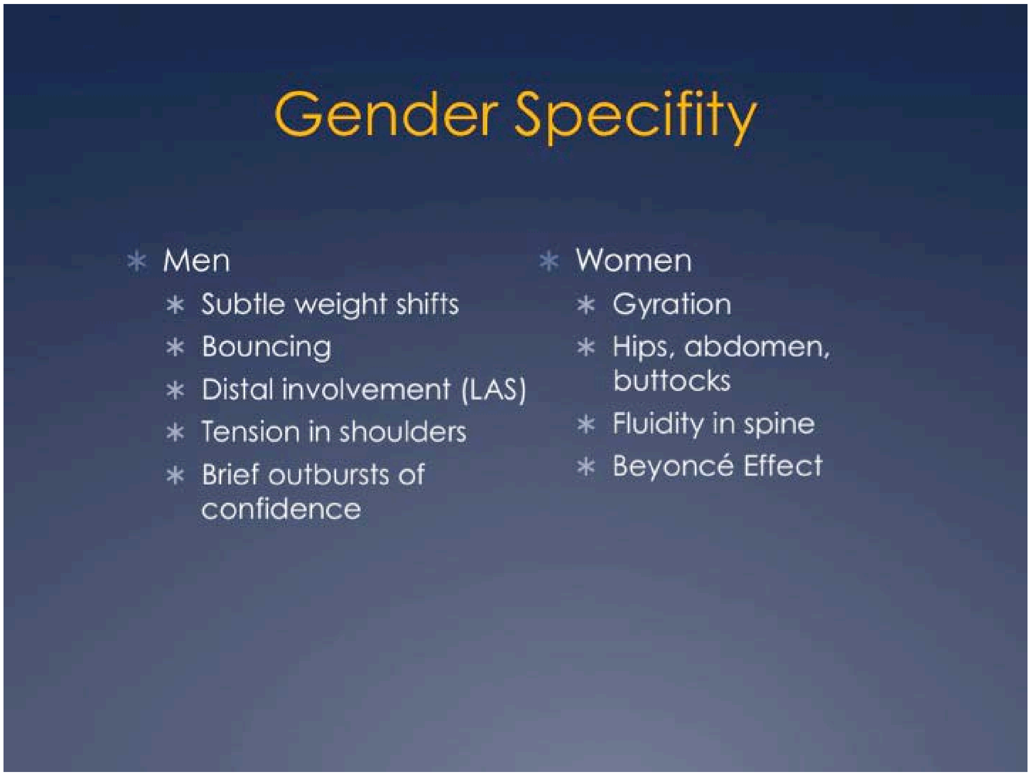
"Listen up everyone. We have been just informed that there's an unknown virus that's attacking all clubs. Symptoms have been said to be heavy breathing, wild dancing, coughing; so when you hear the sound — WHO DI WHOOOO — run for cover."

-Missy Elliot, M.D.



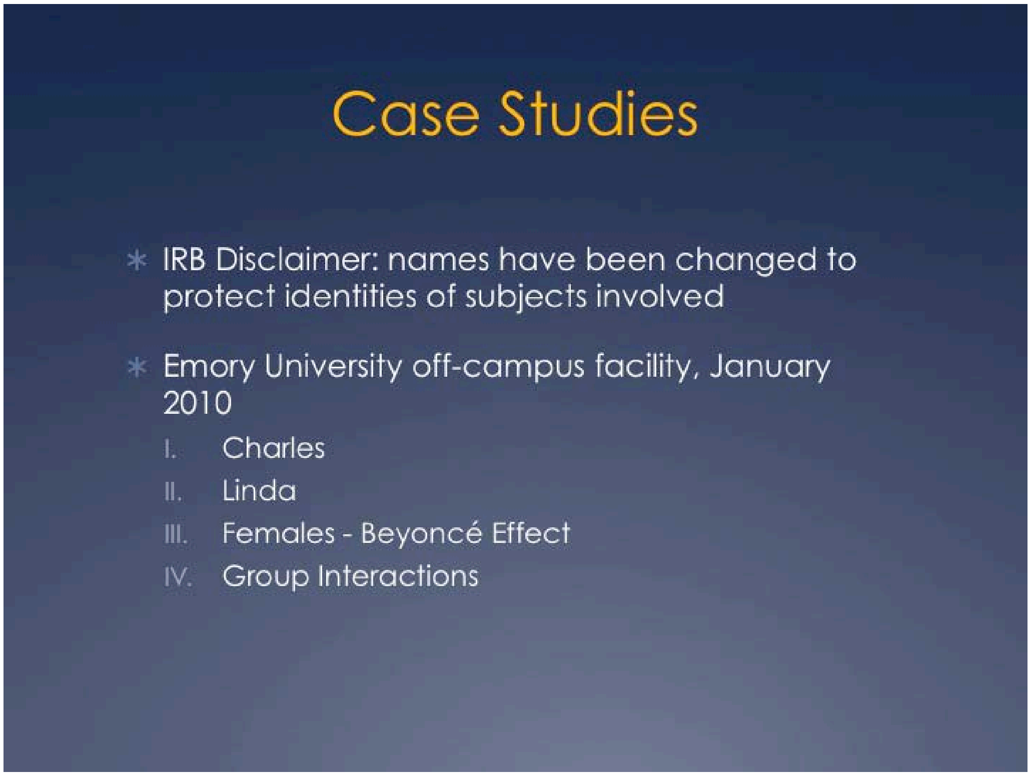
Symptoms

- Swaying, general oscillation
- Bent knees, sliding feet
- Fluid focus, mostly internal
- Varies from musical to off-tempo
  - Polarizes with movement energy
- Vocal utterances
  - "Woo!"
  - Usually encourage individual within group
- Sudden abandon (LAS, example to follow)
  - Danger to others in vicinity
  - Exhaustion



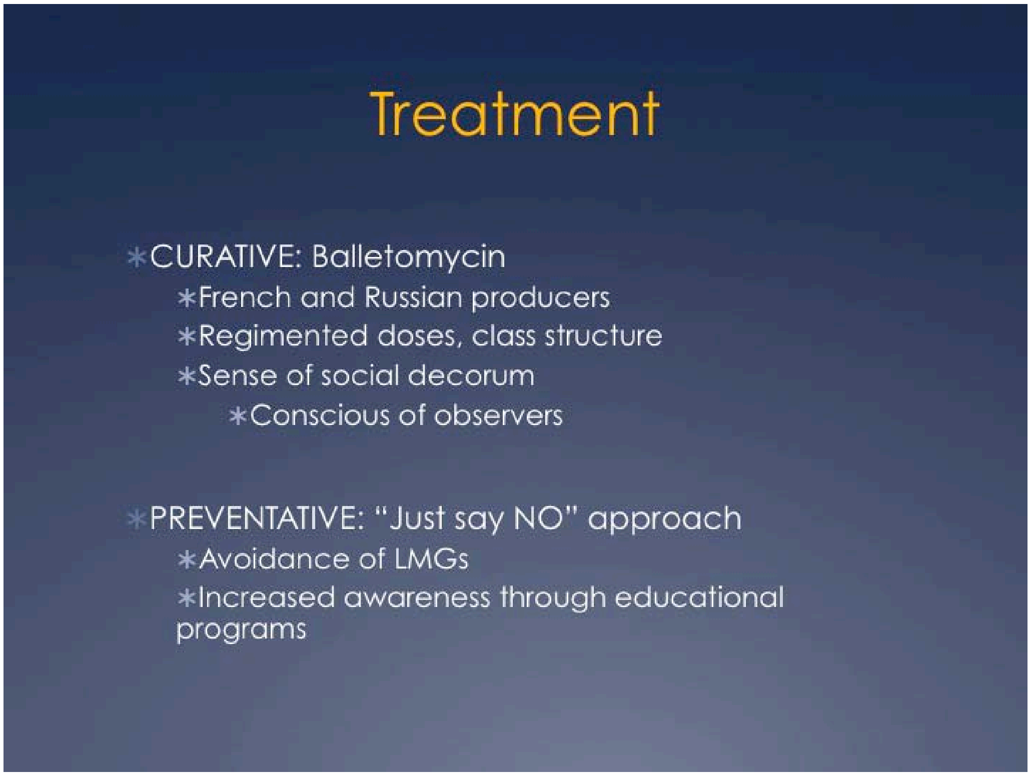
Gender Specifity

- Men
  - Subtle weight shifts
  - Bouncing
  - Distal involvement (LAS)
  - Tension in shoulders
  - Brief outbursts of confidence
- Women
  - Gyration
  - Hips, abdomen, buttocks
  - Fluidity in spine
  - Beyoncé Effect



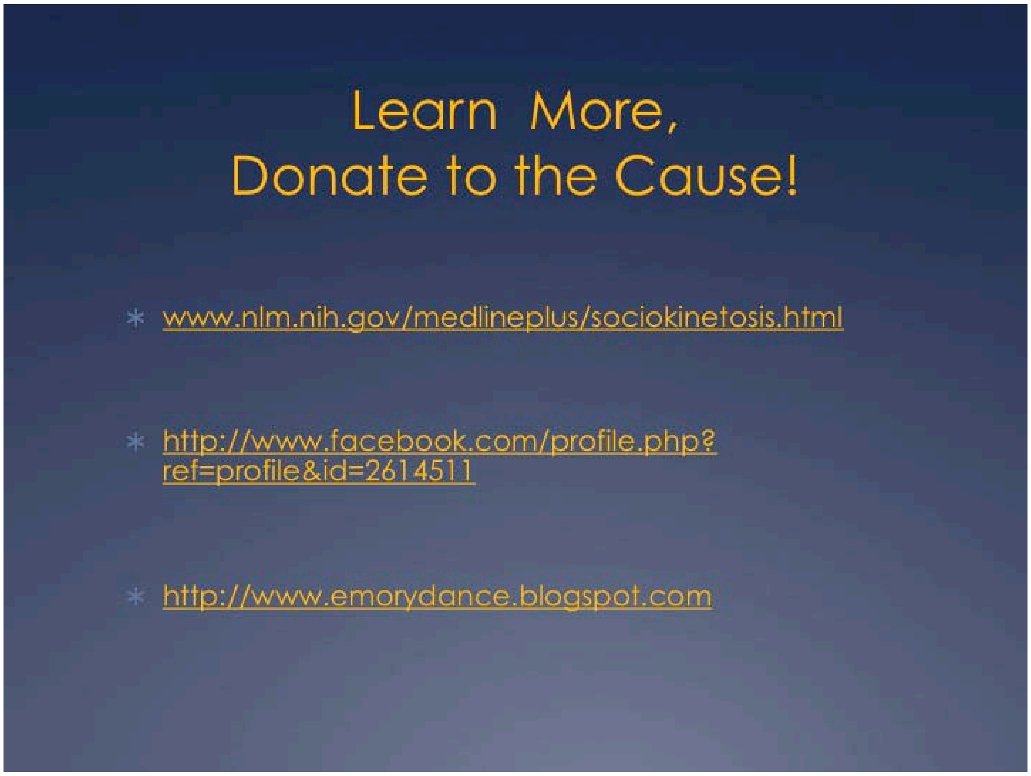
Case Studies

- IRB Disclaimer: names have been changed to protect identities of subjects involved
- Emory University off-campus facility, January 2010
  - I. Charles
  - II. Linda
  - III. Females - Beyoncé Effect
  - IV. Group Interactions



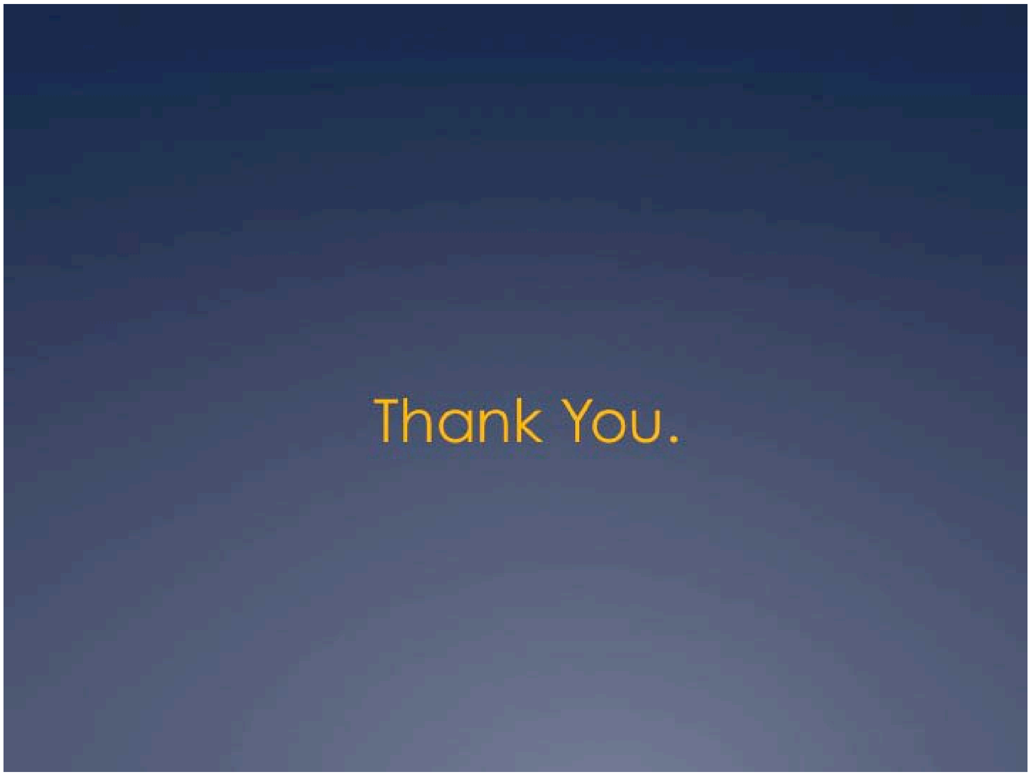
Treatment

- CURATIVE: Balletomycin
  - French and Russian producers
  - Regimented doses, class structure
  - Sense of social decorum
    - Conscious of observers
- PREVENTATIVE: “Just say NO” approach
  - Avoidance of LMGs
  - Increased awareness through educational programs

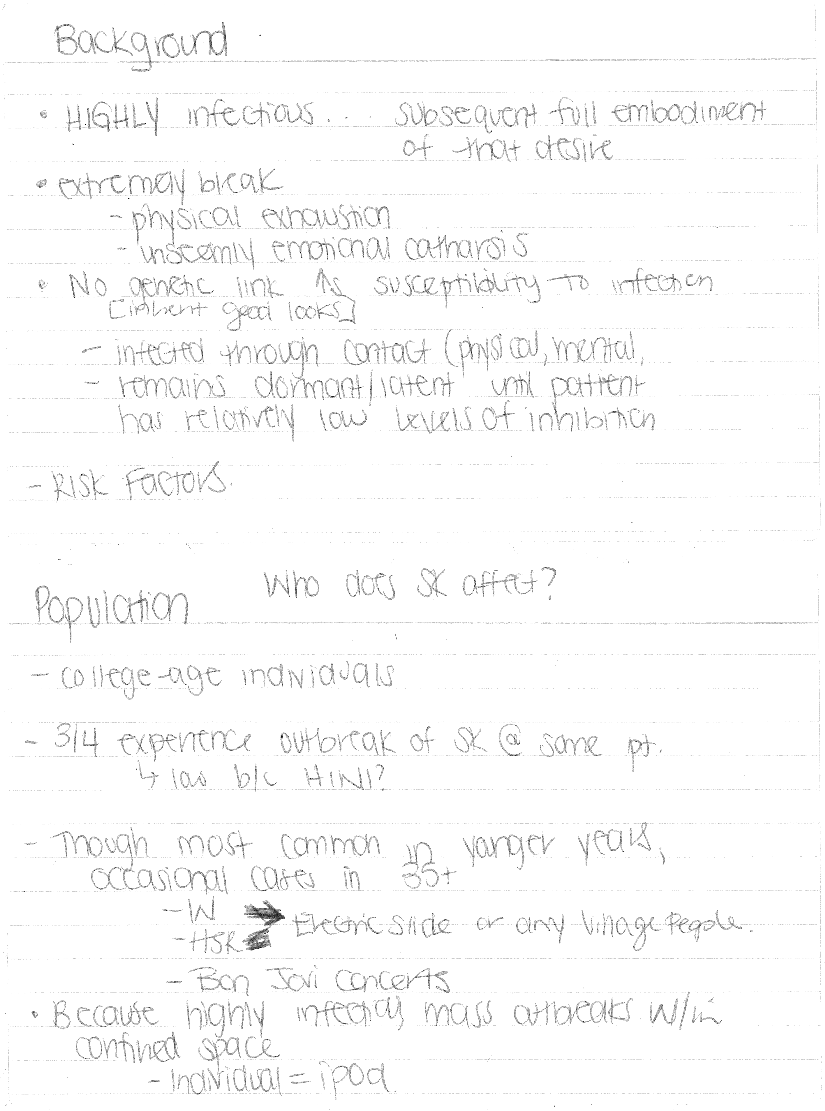


Learn More, Donate to the Cause!

- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sociokinetosis.html
- http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?ref=profile&id=2614511
- http://www.emorydance.blogspot.com



Thank You.



Background

- HIGHLY infectious . . . subsequent full embodiment of that desire
- extremely break
  - physical exhaustion
  - unseemly emotional catharsis
- No genetic link ↑s susceptibility to infection [inherent good looks]
  - infected through contact (physical, mental,
  - remains dormant/latent until patient has relatively low levels of inhibition

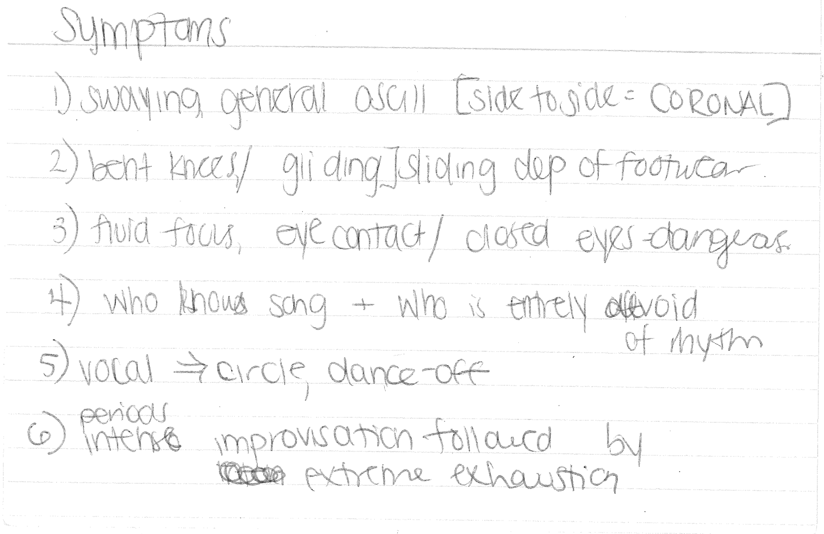
- RISK Factors.

Population   Who does SK affect?

- college-age individuals

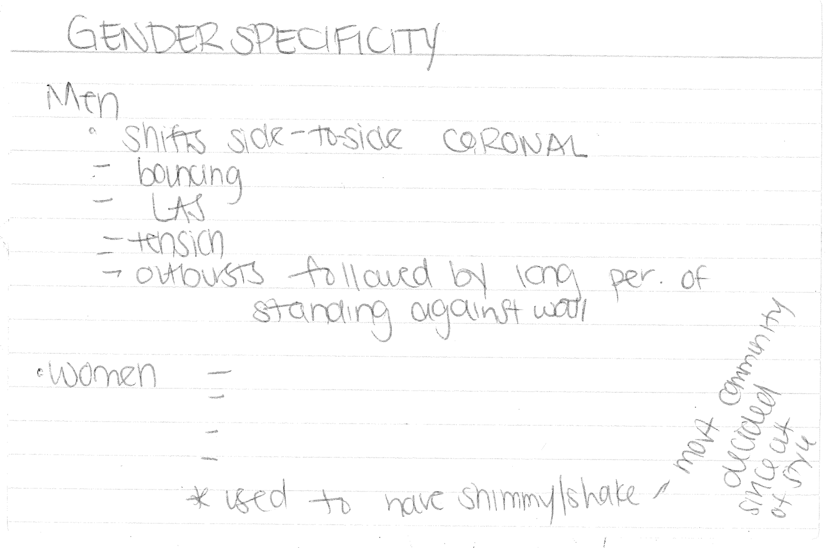
- 3/4 experience outbreak of SK @ some pt.
  - ↳ low b/c H1N1?

- Though most common in younger years, occasional cases in 35+
  - W → Electric Slide or any Village People.
  - HSR
  - Bon Jovi concerts
- Because highly infectious, mass outbreaks w/in confined space
  - Individual = iPod



Symptoms

1) swaying, general oscill [side to side = CORONAL]
2) bent knees/ gliding]sliding dep of footwear.
3) fluid focus, eye contact/ closed eyes-dangerous.
4) who knows song + who is entirely devoid of myth
5) vocal ⇒ circle, dance-off
6) periodic intense improvisation followed by extreme exhaustion

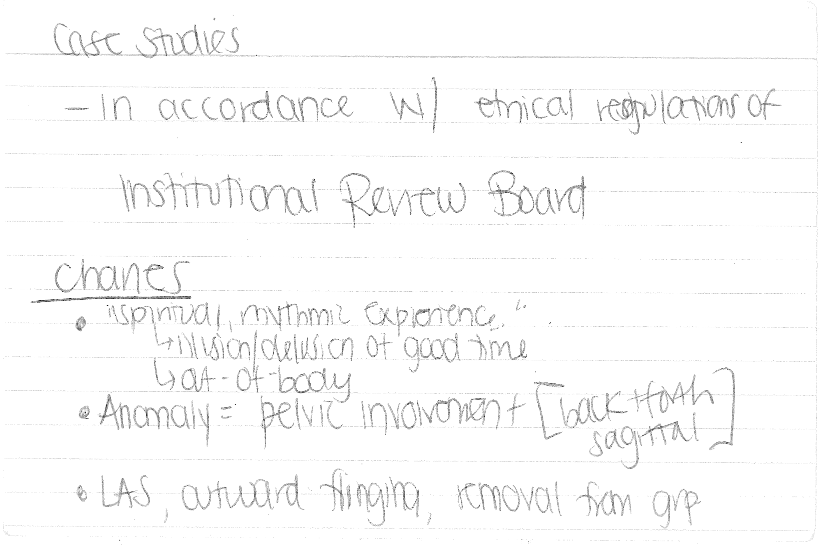


GENDER SPECIFICITY

Men
- shifts side-to-side CORONAL
- bouncing
- LAS
- tension
- outbursts followed by long per. of standing against wall

- Women
  -
  -
  -
  -

* used to have shimmy/shake / most community decided since out of style



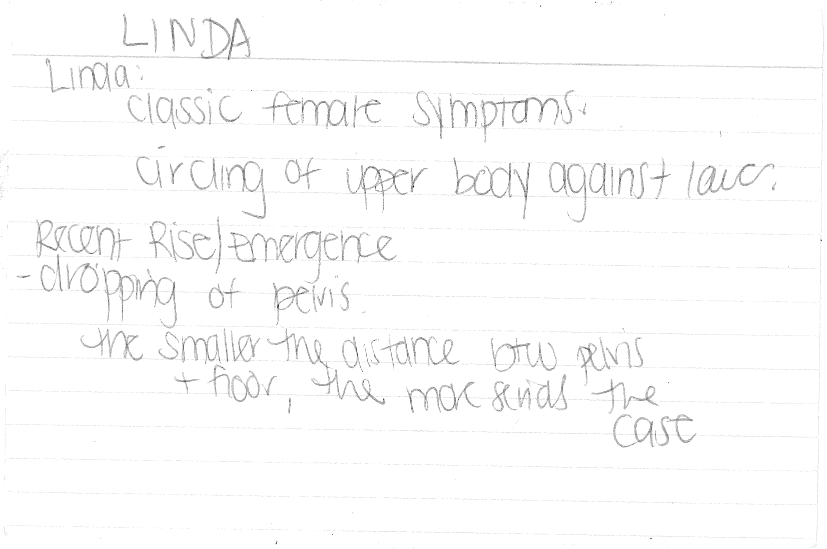
Case Studies

- in accordance w/ ethical regulations of

Institutional Review Board

Chanes

- "spiritual, rhythmic experience."
  - ↳ illusion/delusion of good time
  - ↳ out-of-body
- Anomaly = pelvic involvement [back + forth sagittal]
- LAS, outward flinging, removal from grip



LINDA

Linda:

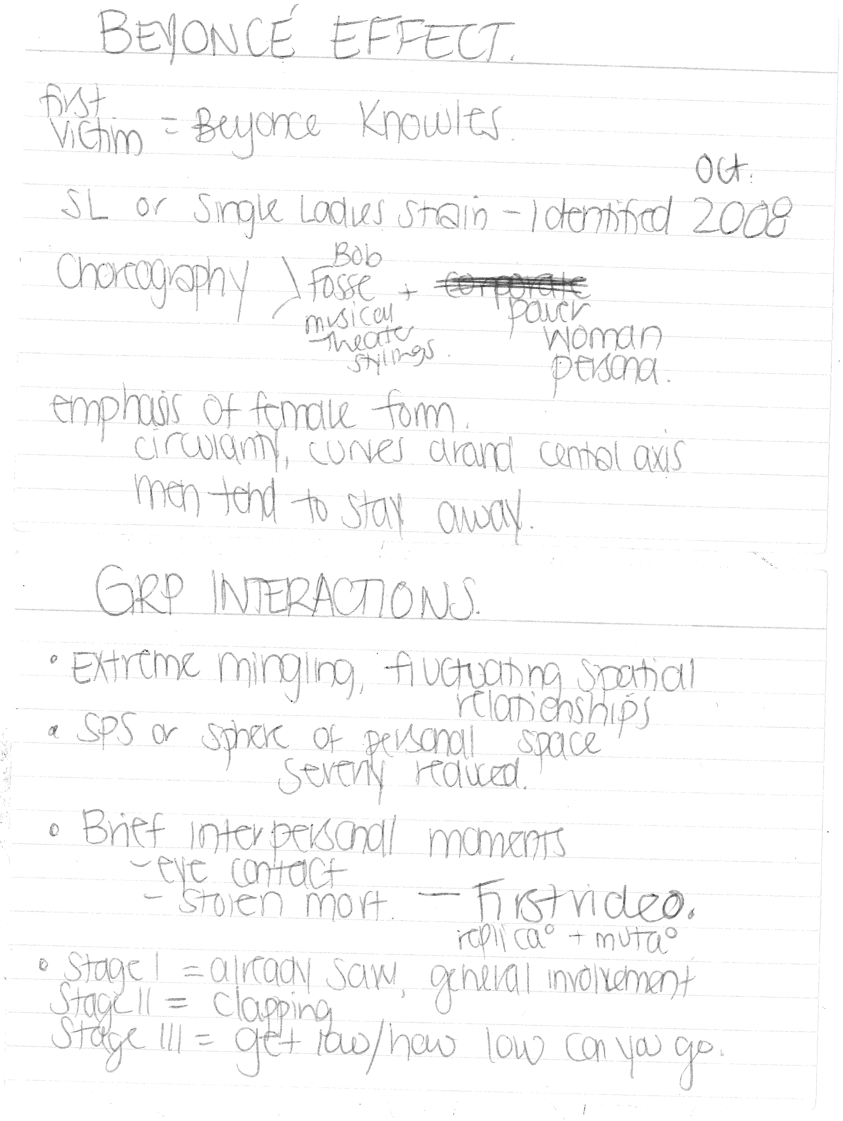
classic female symptoms.

circling of upper body against lauc.

Recent Rise/Emergence

- dropping of pelvis.

the smaller the distance btw pelvis + floor, the more serious the case



BEYONCÉ EFFECT.

first
Victim = Beyonce Knowles.

Oct.
SL or Single Ladies Strain - Identified 2008

Choreography } Bob Fosse + ~~corporate~~ power woman persona.
musical theatre stylings.

emphasis of female form.
circularity, curves around central axis
men tend to stay away.

GRP INTERACTIONS.

- Extreme mingling, fluctuating spatial relationships
- SPS or sphere of personal space severly reduced.
- Brief interpersonal moments
  - eye contact
  - stolen mo'nt. — First video.
replica° + muta°
- Stage I = already saw, general involvement
Stage II = clapping
Stage III = get low/how low can you go.

Appendix C
Performance Photographs

Sociokinetosis

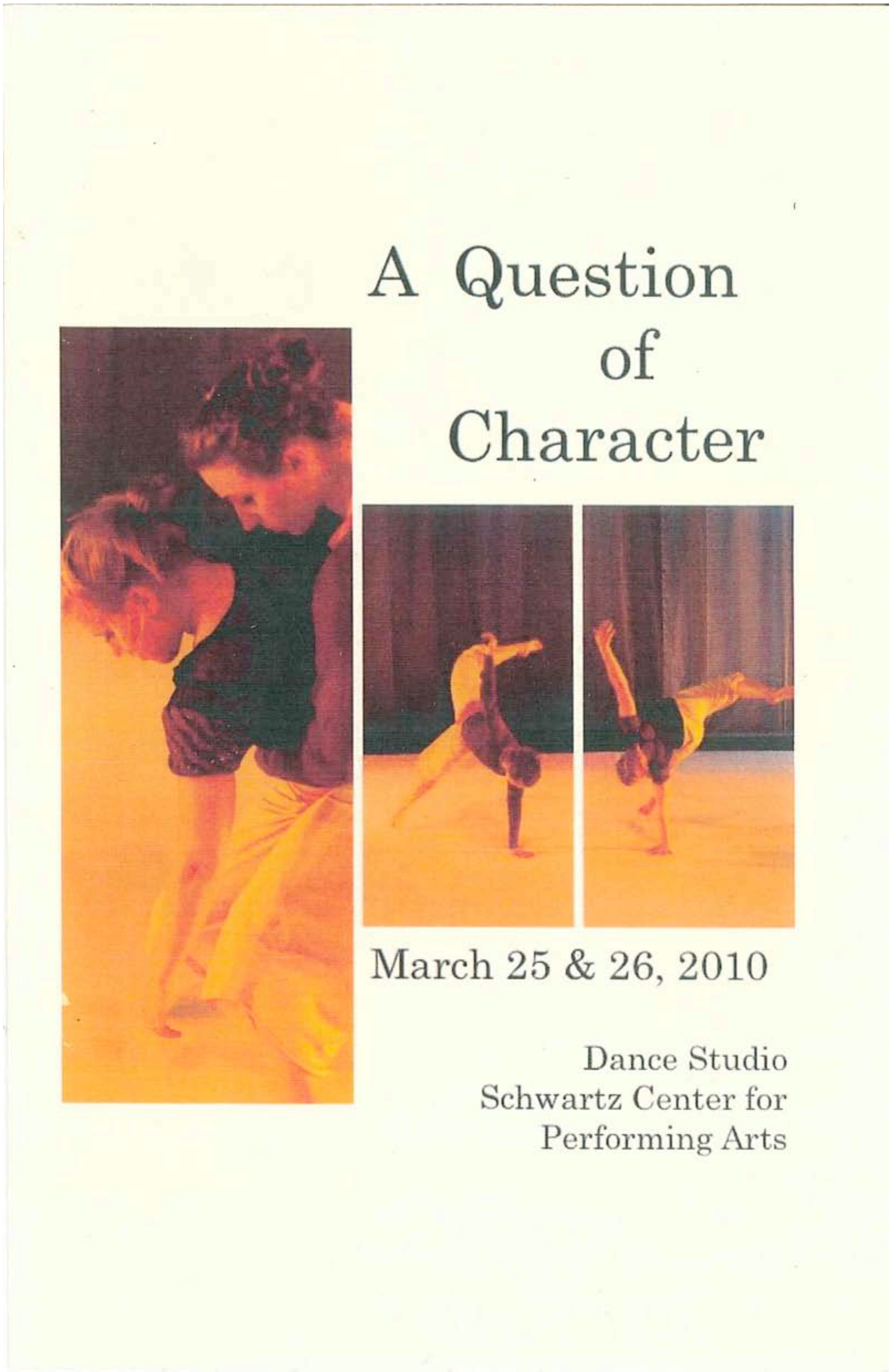
Population Statistics

Sociokinetosis

Here It Is

Appendix D

Concert Program



A Question of Character

March 25 & 26, 2010

Dance Studio
Schwartz Center for
Performing Arts

A Question of Character

Alyssa Bruehlman presents work as a melding of three perspectives—ordinary pedestrian, dramatic dancer, vulnerable self—and considers how each persona enters and exists within a performance. Through this dual-media and mixed-cast presentation, Bruehlman scans the spectrum between the theatrical and the everyday, questioning how the performer interacts with both stage and reality.

Kaitlyn Pados investigates the use of dynamics in this choreography and performance project. In four solo works, she delves into a wide range of movement qualities, exploring the subtleties within each. Shifts between sustained movement and sudden abandon, limiting tension and uninhibited release, decisive clarity and wavering disposition—all create stark contrasts within various characters, revealing the broad spectrum of her research.

The pieces within this concert investigate a variety of characters. Italicized subtitles are provided to give insight into each role.

Maya
The Tireless Achiever

Choreography: Rob Kitsos
Music: "Ceremony of Passage" by Vas
Restaged By: Rebecca Enghauser
Performer: Kaitlyn Pados

Sociokinetosis
The Academic

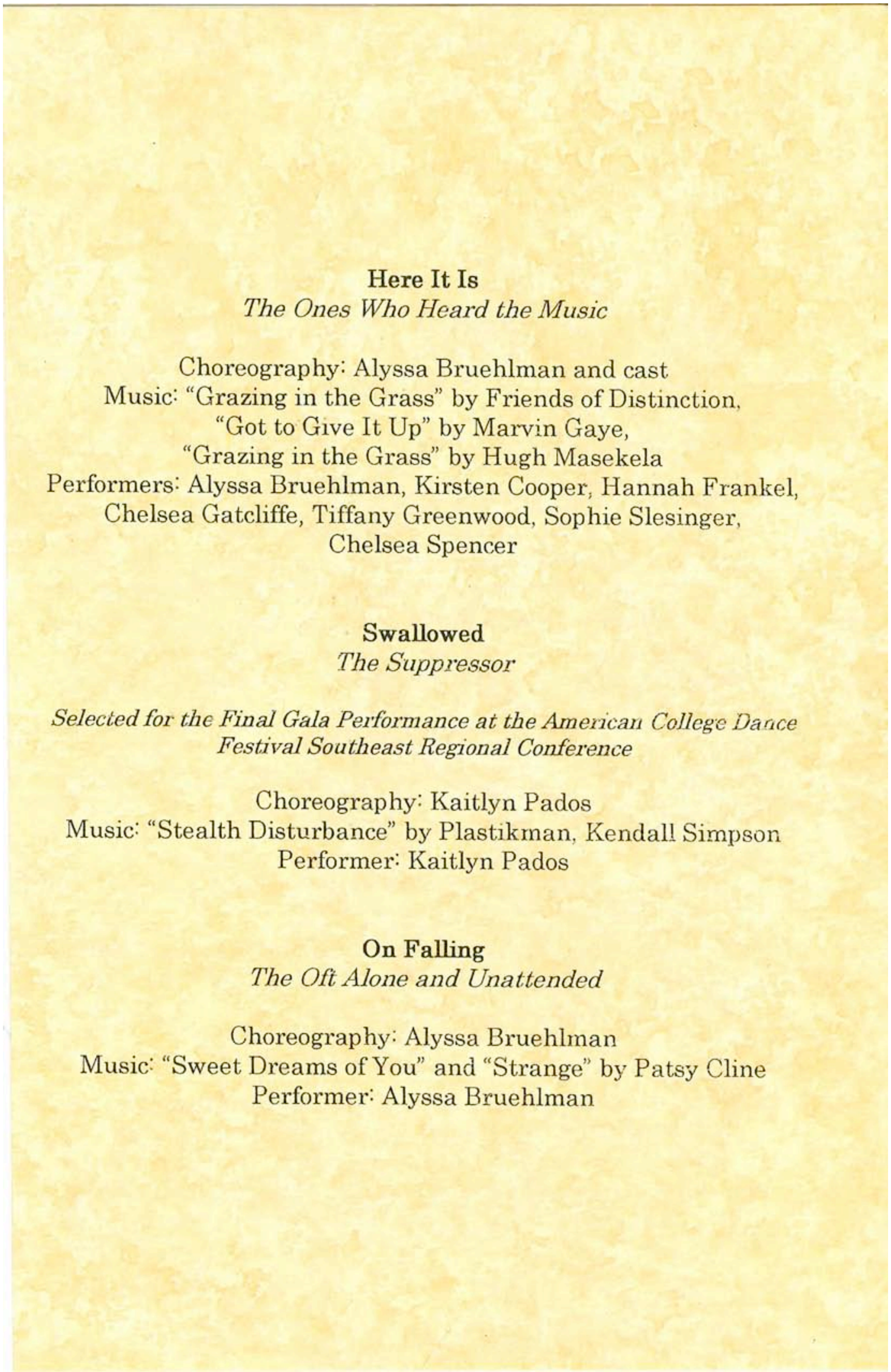
Performers: Emory undergraduate students
Music credits included in presentation

Solo for Pop Music #2
The Nearly Defeated

Choreography: Gregory Catellier
Music: "Come As You Are" by The Mammals
Performer: Kaitlyn Pados

Solo for Pop Music #3
The Outraged

Choreography: Gregory Catellier
Music: "Guns of Brixton" by Nouvelle Vague
Performer: Kaitlyn Pados



Here It Is
The Ones Who Heard the Music

Choreography: Alyssa Bruehlman and cast
Music: "Grazing in the Grass" by Friends of Distinction,
"Got to Give It Up" by Marvin Gaye,
"Grazing in the Grass" by Hugh Masekela
Performers: Alyssa Bruehlman, Kirsten Cooper, Hannah Frankel,
Chelsea Gatcliffe, Tiffany Greenwood, Sophie Slesinger,
Chelsea Spencer

Swallowed
The Suppressor

Selected for the Final Gala Performance at the American College Dance Festival Southeast Regional Conference

Choreography: Kaitlyn Pados
Music: "Stealth Disturbance" by Plastikman, Kendall Simpson
Performer: Kaitlyn Pados

On Falling
The Oft Alone and Unattended

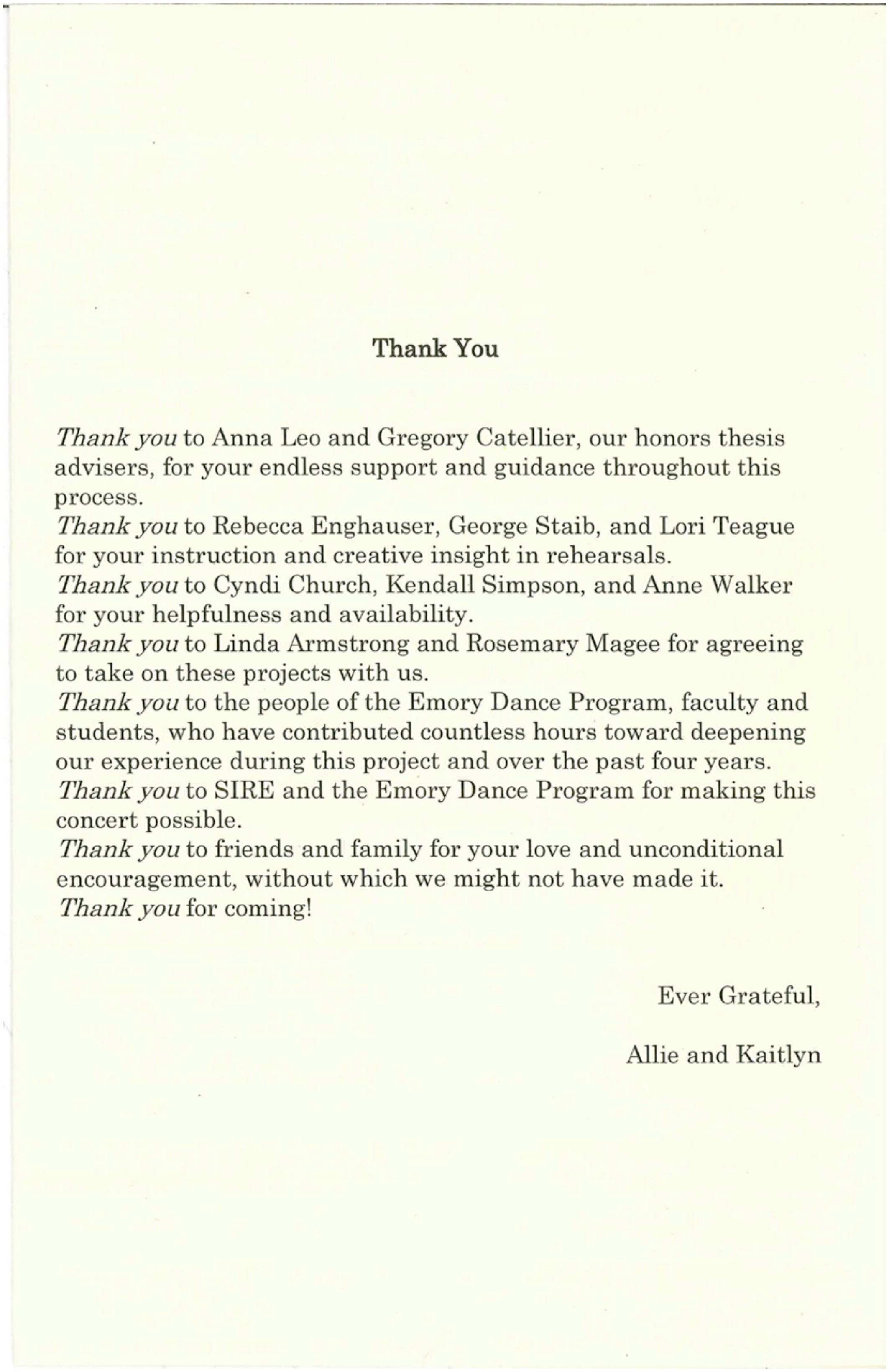
Choreography: Alyssa Bruehlman
Music: "Sweet Dreams of You" and "Strange" by Patsy Cline
Performer: Alyssa Bruehlman

Production Staff

Technical Director/Lighting Designer: Gregory Catellier
Stage Manager: Haley Scott
Assistant Stage Manager: Audrey Christiansen, Ellen Lyle
Light and Sound Technician: Richard Burnett
Technical Assistant: Kasey Davage
Costume Coordinator: Cynthia Church
Dance Program Director: Anna Leo
Music Coordinator: Kendall Simpson
Dance Program Office Manager: Anne Walker
Promotional Assistance: Sally Corbett, Jessica Moore
Arts at Emory Box Office: Stephanie Patton, Katie Storey
House Management: Dorothy Sheffield, Nina Vestal
Videographer: Lily Ransijn

This concert is funded in part by SIRE Undergraduate Research Grants as well as in-kind donations from the Emory Dance Program.

© Gartner Studios



Thank You

Thank you to Anna Leo and Gregory Catellier, our honors thesis advisers, for your endless support and guidance throughout this process.

Thank you to Rebecca Enghauser, George Staib, and Lori Teague for your instruction and creative insight in rehearsals.

Thank you to Cyndi Church, Kendall Simpson, and Anne Walker for your helpfulness and availability.

Thank you to Linda Armstrong and Rosemary Magee for agreeing to take on these projects with us.

Thank you to the people of the Emory Dance Program, faculty and students, who have contributed countless hours toward deepening our experience during this project and over the past four years.

Thank you to SIRE and the Emory Dance Program for making this concert possible.

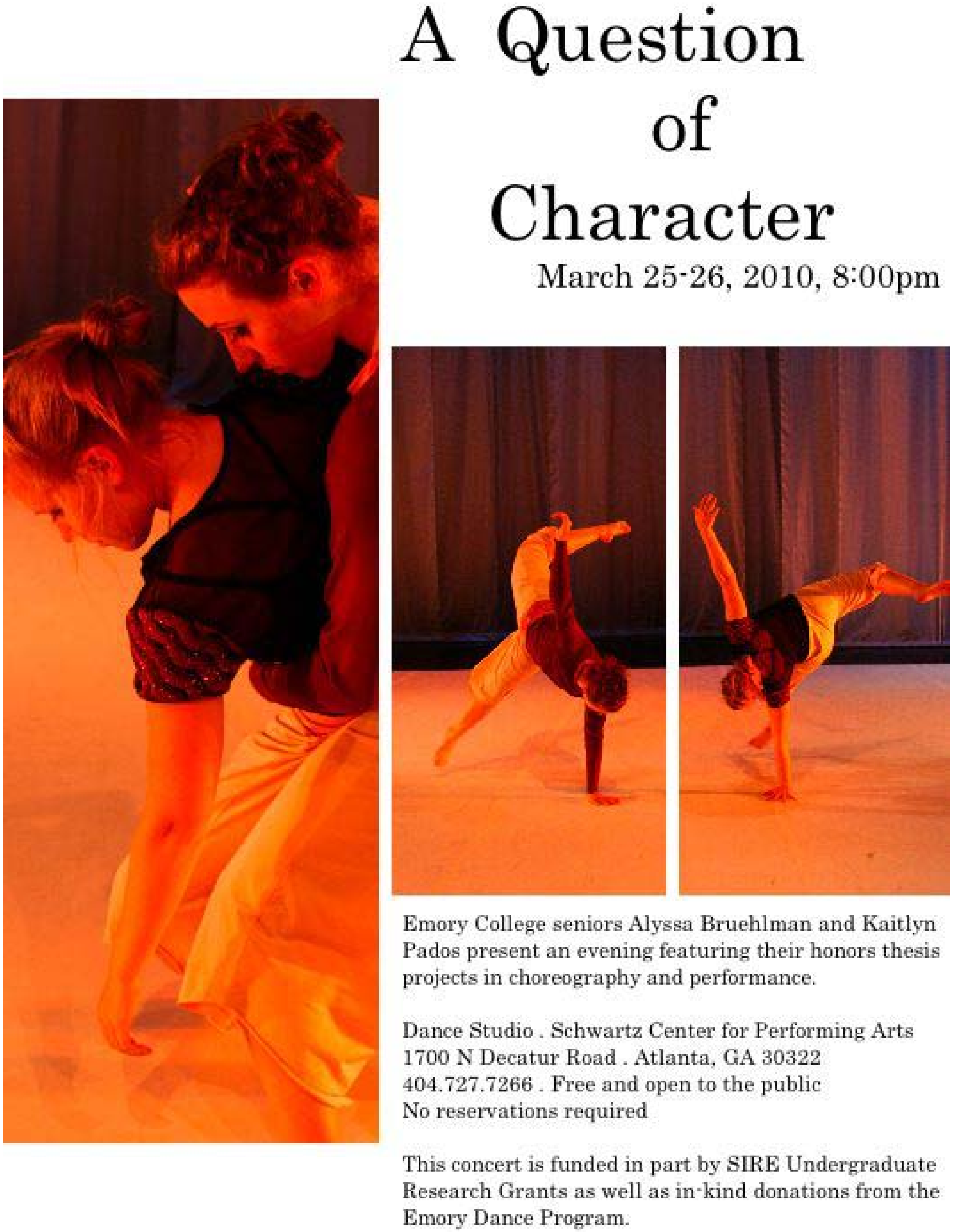
Thank you to friends and family for your love and unconditional encouragement, without which we might not have made it.

Thank you for coming!

Ever Grateful,

Allie and Kaitlyn

Appendix E
Concert Flyer



A Question of Character

March 25-26, 2010, 8:00pm

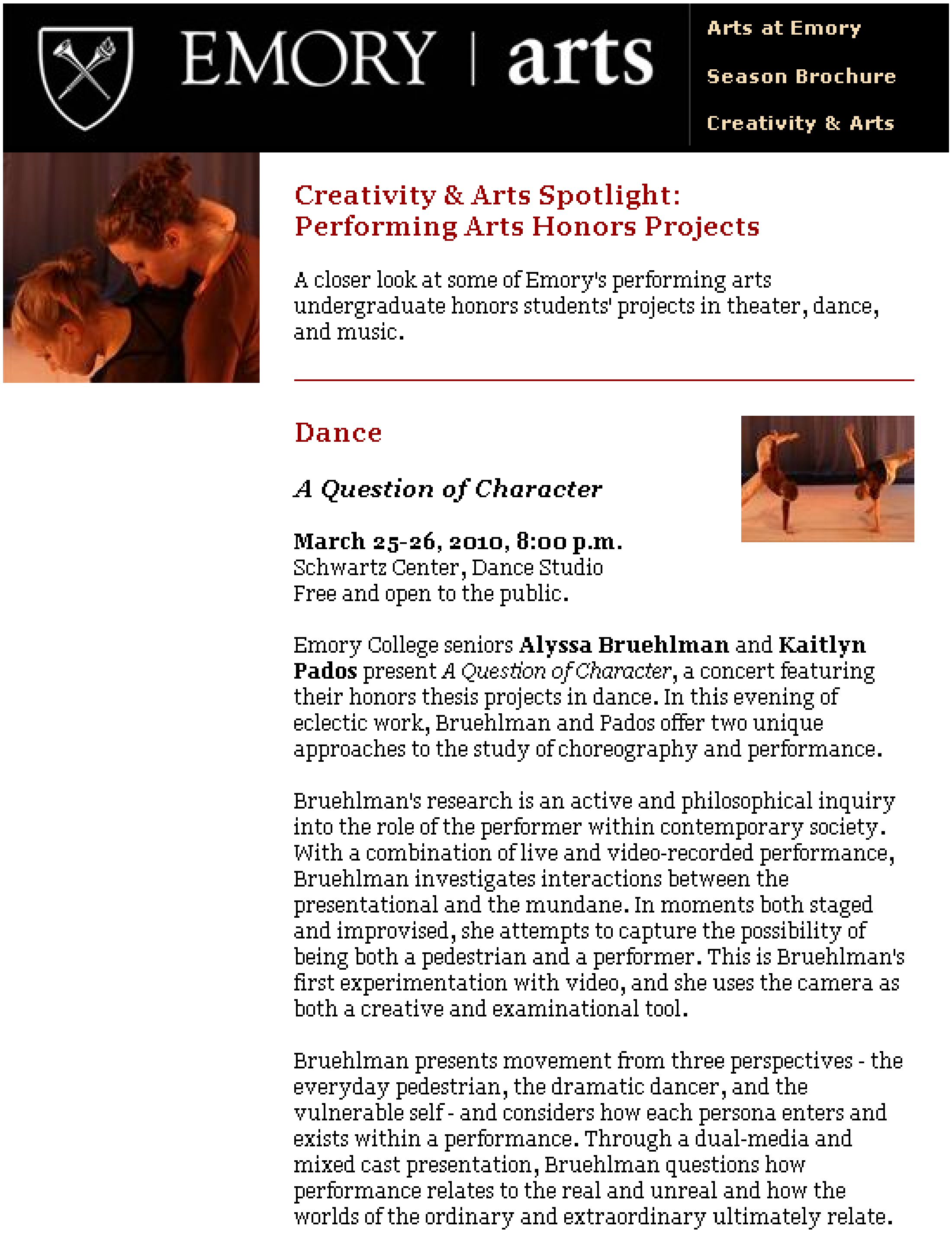
Emory College seniors Alyssa Bruehlman and Kaitlyn Pados present an evening featuring their honors thesis projects in choreography and performance.

Dance Studio . Schwartz Center for Performing Arts
1700 N Decatur Road . Atlanta, GA 30322
404.727.7266 . Free and open to the public
No reservations required

This concert is funded in part by SIRE Undergraduate Research Grants as well as in-kind donations from the Emory Dance Program.

Appendix F

Arts at Emory – Spotlight Article



Creativity & Arts Spotlight: Performing Arts Honors Projects

A closer look at some of Emory's performing arts undergraduate honors students' projects in theater, dance, and music.

Dance

A Question of Character

March 25-26, 2010, 8:00 p.m.
Schwartz Center, Dance Studio
Free and open to the public.

Emory College seniors **Alyssa Bruehlman** and **Kaitlyn Pados** present *A Question of Character*, a concert featuring their honors thesis projects in dance. In this evening of eclectic work, Bruehlman and Pados offer two unique approaches to the study of choreography and performance.

Bruehlman's research is an active and philosophical inquiry into the role of the performer within contemporary society. With a combination of live and video-recorded performance, Bruehlman investigates interactions between the presentational and the mundane. In moments both staged and improvised, she attempts to capture the possibility of being both a pedestrian and a performer. This is Bruehlman's first experimentation with video, and she uses the camera as both a creative and examinational tool.

Bruehlman presents movement from three perspectives - the everyday pedestrian, the dramatic dancer, and the vulnerable self - and considers how each persona enters and exists within a performance. Through a dual-media and mixed cast presentation, Bruehlman questions how performance relates to the real and unreal and how the worlds of the ordinary and extraordinary ultimately relate.

Pados investigates the use of dynamics in her own choreography and performance project. In four solo works, she delves into a wide range of movement qualities, exploring the subtleties within each. The first piece is choreographed by Rob Kitsos, currently an assistant professor at Simon Fraser University in Canada. This work, entitled *Maya*, portrays a frenzied individual relentlessly interrupted by a new idea. The driving nature of this work pushes the character to finish all of her tasks before the percussive music comes to an end.

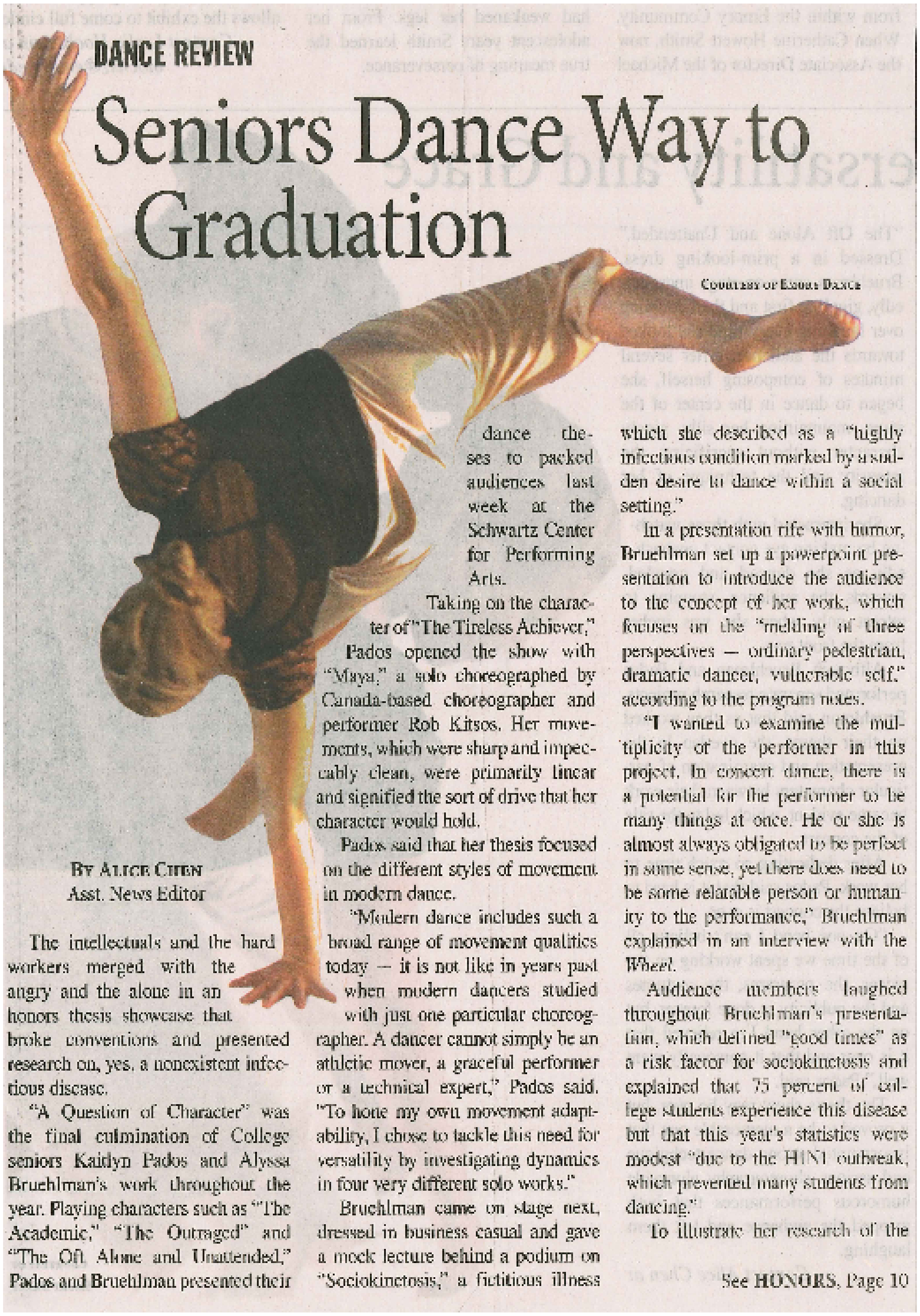
In her second and third solos, Pados performs two works choreographed and re-staged by Emory dance faculty member Gregory Catellier. *Solo for Pop Music #2* presents a persona reminiscent of a teenager, wavering between anger and exhaustion. Resilient movement is interspersed with moments of debilitating tension. *Solo for Pop Music #3* is from the same series of Catellier's solos, however this piece presents a more explicitly outraged character.

Pados finishes the evening with an examination of extreme dynamic range in her own choreographic work, *Between Tides*. Originally performed in 2008, she has reconstructed the piece to further question the presence of control in dance. Shifts between sustained movement and sudden abandon create a stark contrast, revealing the broad spectrum of her project.

The concert is funded in part by a Scholarly Inquiry and Research at Emory (SIRE) grant.

Appendix G

Review by *The Emory Wheel*



DANCE REVIEW

Seniors Dance Way to Graduation

Courtesy of Emory Dance

By Alice Chen
Asst. News Editor

The intellectuals and the hard workers merged with the angry and the alone in an honors thesis showcase that broke conventions and presented research on, yes, a nonexistent infectious disease.

"A Question of Character" was the final culmination of College seniors Kaitlyn Pados and Alyssa Bruehlman's work throughout the year. Playing characters such as "The Academic," "The Outraged" and "The Oft Alone and Unattended," Pados and Bruehlman presented their dance theses to packed audiences last week at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts.

Taking on the character of "The Tireless Achiever," Pados opened the show with "Maya," a solo choreographed by Canada-based choreographer and performer Rob Kitsos. Her movements, which were sharp and impeccably clean, were primarily linear and signified the sort of drive that her character would hold.

Pados said that her thesis focused on the different styles of movement in modern dance.

"Modern dance includes such a broad range of movement qualities today — it is not like in years past when modern dancers studied with just one particular choreographer. A dancer cannot simply be an athletic mover, a graceful performer or a technical expert," Pados said. "To hone my own movement adaptability, I chose to tackle this need for versatility by investigating dynamics in four very different solo works."

Bruehlman came on stage next, dressed in business casual and gave a mock lecture behind a podium on "Sociokinetosis," a fictitious illness which she described as a "highly infectious condition marked by a sudden desire to dance within a social setting."

In a presentation rife with humor, Bruehlman set up a powerpoint presentation to introduce the audience to the concept of her work, which focuses on the "melding of three perspectives — ordinary pedestrian, dramatic dancer, vulnerable self," according to the program notes.

"I wanted to examine the multiplicity of the performer in this project. In concert dance, there is a potential for the performer to be many things at once. He or she is almost always obligated to be perfect in some sense, yet there does need to be some relatable person or humanity to the performance," Bruehlman explained in an interview with the *Wheel*.

Audience members laughed throughout Bruehlman's presentation, which defined "good times" as a risk factor for sociokinetosis and explained that 75 percent of college students experience this disease but that this year's statistics were modest "due to the H1N1 outbreak, which prevented many students from dancing."

To illustrate her research of the

See **HONORS**, Page 10

Honors Theses Employ Humor, Versatility and Grace

Continued from Page 9

psuedo-illness, Bruehlman showed clips of people with sociokinetosis and who were victims of "Limbs Akimbo Syndrome," or LAS, which involves the flinging of the limbs.

Videos displaying individuals dancing wildly at parties, of females with the "Beyonce effect" or women dancing to "Single Ladies" and of groups of people going through the "clapping phase" and the "get low phase" were presented as examples of those affected by the disease.

Pados performed three more solos during the show to portray "The Nearly Defeated," "The Outraged" and "The Suppressor."

"Solo for Pop Music #2," choreographed by senior lecturer in the dance department Gregory Catellier, featured much floorwork to portray Pados's defeated character. Catellier also choreographed "Solo for Pop Music #3," to showcase the "Outraged" which began with a shaking of the hips that was almost comical but harsh.

> **"I wanted to examine the multiplicity of the performer in this project. In concert dance, there is a potential for the performer to be many things at once."**
>
> — Alyssa Bruehlman,
> Emory College senior

Performed in jeans and a T-shirt, "Solo for Pop Music #3" quickly evolved into something confrontational when Pados slid across the floor with her foot kicked out, inches away from the audience. An extreme attention to detail, such as the curling of her fingers and toes, made even the smallest movement seem more significant and large than it might have otherwise appeared.

Pados' "Swallowed," a self-choreographed solo portraying the "Suppressor," was performed with an emphasis on sustained choreography, which exaggerated her sudden outbursts of uninhibited, wild movement.

The juxtaposition of movement styles kept the audience in suspense because it was difficult to tell what was coming next. The layers and chunks of fabric on her costume stood still during Pados' sustained moments and flew with her choreography when she erupted into movement.

Rehearsing as a soloist was challenging, Pados said, because it involved a self-evaluating process with which she was not familiar.

"During the rehearsal process, these characters started to emerge," she said. "It seemed as if there was a different persona in each of my solos. Perhaps this was because they were solos rather than group works, and people are more likely to associate a character type with only one body on stage, but nevertheless, that was a development mid-rehearsal process that gave me something new to explore."

Bruehlman showcased both a group piece and a solo, both choreographed by herself. "Here It Is" focuses on the characters, "The Ones Who Heard the Music." A video played as the backdrop of the piece, which made it difficult at first to focus on what was happening on stage, but with the strategic use of repetition, soon began to complement the dancers.

The video showed footage of the performers dancing on the lawn by the Goizueta Business School, in CVS, on the street and other locations. The choreography was an exploration between pedestrian-like actions and dance vocabulary, mixing the action of typing or drinking from a cup with more conventional dance movement.

> **"On one hand I can't believe all of the time we spent working...is done forever, but on the other hand I'm relieved"**
>
> — Kaitlyn Pados,
> Emory College senior

According to Bruehlman, "Here It is" changed dramatically from the beginning of the process to the end. Rehearsals began with "small, impromptu performances of simple phrase material" but evolved into something with a greater meaning.

In her solo titled "On Falling," Bruehlman took on the character of "The Oft Alone and Unattended." Dressed in a prim-looking dress, Bruehlman came on stage unexpectedly, giggling first and then doubling over laughing every time she looked towards the audience. After several minutes of composing herself, she began to dance in the center of the stage, maintaining her silly, giggly character without sacrificing the integrity and the technique of her dancing.

She interacted with those watching by making eye contact unabashedly as she danced and crawled towards the audience, stopping to retreat only when she was inches from the front row.

Although Bruehlman and Pados performed separate research projects, Bruehlman said that as they worked on their theses, the overlap in the presentation and examination of particular characters between their work became evident, which led to the title of the concert.

After dedicating so much time to her work, Pados said that it is hard to believe the concert is over.

"On one hand I can't believe all of the time we spent working on the pieces, the programs, the costumes and the publicity is done forever, but on the other hand I'm relieved that it is over and that it personally went well," Pados said.

The thesis show may be over, but it proved to be a memorable one that incorporated strong dance technique and serious choreography alongside humorous performances that both gripped the audience and left them laughing.

— Contact Alice Chen at

Courtesy of Emory Dance

Appendix H

Audience Feedback Form

A Question of Character
Feedback form – Alyssa Bruehlman

This project is an investigation of:

1) how performance can be both real and unreal, something relatable for the audience as well as something entirely foreign.
2) how performance can take place both off and on stage, in real as well as in recorded or altered time.
3) how the performer can be both ordinary and extraordinary, a genuine human being as well as a figure set apart.

Of the pieces you saw, which seemed the most staged/theatrical/presentational?

☐ *Sociokinetosis* ☐ *Here It Is* ☐ *On Falling*

Which seemed the most unaffected/nonpresentational?

☐ *Sociokinetosis* ☐ *Here It Is* ☐ *On Falling*

Do you feel that the performers were believable and/or relatable in their performance? Why or why not?

How did the presentation of both live and video-recorded movement affect your experience as an audience member?

Please write one verb or adjective to describe each work:

Sociokinetosis:

Here It Is:

On Falling:

Feel free to leave additional comments anywhere on this form.
Thank you for coming!

Appendix I
Materials – SIRE Undergraduate Research Grant

Alyssa Bruehlman
SIRE Project Proposal

Performer or Pedestrian?
An Exploration of Movement's Role In and Outside the Theater

"Walking is something that everyone does, even dancers when they are not 'on.' Walking is a sympathetic link between performers and spectators, a shared experience that allows for personal idiosyncrasies and individual styles. There is no single correct way of walking."
–Sally Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers

When I submitted my honors thesis proposal to the Dance and Movement Studies Department last spring, I deemed my project "an examination of performance as an extension of the creative process." My ideas for this research stemmed from an oft-experienced frustration as a dancer, that the works I rehearse so tirelessly for are merely fleeting in performance, and that months of thought and energy culminate within ten minutes of stage time. Too frequently, the method and rigor of the creative process seem to be lost in performance, and what remains is a product with a terminal vitality. And so, as I began my thesis studies more intensely, I sought to investigate how to affect performance in ways which would inform a piece instead of finalizing it. I began rehearsing this fall with a core group of seven dancers including myself, hoping to create a dance work not only from practicing in a studio space, but also from continuously performing in both the traditional theater setting and in more ordinary public locations such as parks and commercial centers.

Since beginning my rehearsal and performance process this fall, I now have another looming question which I hope to incorporate into my research—when dance is taken outside of the theater, at what point does the pedestrian become the performer? In recent weeks I have performed for my thesis in two nontraditional settings. The first was in the Emory Village CVS—a dance ambush of sorts in which the dancers repeated and played with a phrase of set movements while confined to a specific aisle. The second performance was at Atlanta's Le Flash festival for a project called Dance Truck, a presentation of dance and lighting in the back of a twenty-six-foot rental truck. In both performances, I felt a strange divide between the realms of performance and everyday reality. I became intrigued by the moment in which someone transforms from a mundane individual to the exalted "performer," a person who demands attention and observation. Yet does that moment of transformation even truly occur? In my performances at CVS and Le Flash, there were plenty of people who completely ignored me and walked ambivalently past. Though this does deliver a humorously low blow to my performance ego, I find it a perfect launching point for further investigation. Where does the boundary between performance and everyday existence lie? Is there some liminal state between those two realms? When does movement cease to be ordinary and begin to be a dance?

Of course, I am not the first to consider such questions. Postmodern dance choreographers investigated the line between performer and pedestrian over forty years ago, and their work was merely a continuation of previous decades of creativity. Thus I intend to supplement my own creative work with that of artists and thinkers before me. Through reading and video research, I hope to examine the tradition of dance both inside and outside the theater as well as the interplay of ordinary "pedestrian" and virtuosic "dance" movements within those performances. Though dance will be my way into these studies, I hope to consider not just my field but also the greater scope of performance's role in the arts. John Dewey's text *Art as Experience* speaks directly within this vein, stating that art is something which must be actively experienced, and I intend to draw from that source as well as others for both inspiration and challenge.

Over the next five months, I will continue to work with my dancers on creating work that examines the boundaries of performance and pedestrian existence. The kinetic vocabulary will explore a spectrum from movements unnoticeably ordinary to undoubtedly masterful. I plan on performing regularly to delve deeper into the puzzling places where art meets the everyday, searching for the transformation or lack thereof from pedestrian to performer. I am currently in contact with the High Museum of Art, coordinating an evening of small dances throughout the museum's space which would occur during spring semester. This and other performances will be important in further informing my observations about how the realms of performance and the everyday interact.

In addition to these performances, I have become increasingly interested in capturing dance on camera—both as an archival and a creative tool. I would like to explore how film can preserve performance and somewhat counteract its fleeting nature. Film can make dance permanent and repeatable, an experience that can be returned to again and again. Furthermore, film allows for specific direction of the audience's focus toward details that might be missed when faced with the panorama of the theater. However, some vital aspects of performance are lost in the transfer from living movement in three dimensions to recorded images in two. I plan on investigating that disparity through my work as well. I would like to use two portable cameras to capture dance from both removed and integral perspectives. These cameras could be placed at a fixed distance with a specific angle and zoom, or perhaps held by one of the dancers as she moves during the piece. Having two cameras would help me to view each performance from more than one angle rather than limiting my filming to one particular shot. Also, due to time constraints on video equipment loans for Emory students, having both these cameras designated solely for my project seems the most helpful option. Emory Information Technology's website states "for individuals who need equipment for extended periods of time – or for special projects – we suggest you consider purchasing your own dedicated equipment." Therefore I have researched several digital camcorders and found that the Flip MinoHD camera offers good picture quality while still being small and compact enough to be held as a dancer moves through a piece. Through the use of these project-specific cameras, I hope to find additionally new opportunities from which to view performance.

Though the myriad of rehearsals and performances and filming will be a huge emphasis of my work, it is important to note that my project will culminate with a final presentation in the Dance and Movement Studies honors thesis concert on March 25-26.

(The presentation of my work will be in conjunction with that of Kaitlyn Pados, the Dance Department's other honors candidate.) Regardless of my interest in looking beyond the theater, that traditional setting is still very valuable because it is what the majority of the performing arts call home. My training as a performer stems almost entirely from the theater, and so it is important that I apply my research to the enrichment of my education in that familiar environment. I will be responsible for organizing this final concert presentation, and so I will investigate not only the creation of dance work but also its formal production in a theater space. At that point I can compare earlier project performances with this final one, analyzing how dance makes the leap from the world outside to a world apart, how movement changes from everyday to theatrical, and how the human transforms from pedestrian to performer.

Project Timeline

Fall 2009 – Continue rehearsals/performances with dancers

January 2010 – Finalize performance logistics with High Museum of Art
January 14, 2010 – Meeting with Cindy Church about costume ideas
January 20, 2010 – Begin formal filming of site-specific performances

February 2010 – Meeting with Greg Catellier about lighting concepts for Schwartz Center show
February 12, 2010 – Press release draft submitted for Schwartz Center concert
February 25, 2010 – Final press release submitted

March 1, 2010 -- Flyer announcement submitted
March 5, 2010 – Final program format submitted for print
March 5, 2010 – Final costume decisions
March 21, 2010 – Costumes completed
March 22, 2010 – Tech Rehearsals begin in Schwartz Center Dance Studio
March 25-26, 2010 – Final showing of work in honors thesis concert

April 14, 2010 – Submission of thesis writing portion to honors committee

Alyssa Bruehlman
Project Title: Performer or Pedestrian?
SIRE Budget Sheet - Final

BACKSTAGE ASSISTANT **$250**
For technical rehearsals and shows in Schwartz Center
Stipend for Sunday March – Friday March 26
*Two backstage assistants are needed for the Schwartz Center show. Kaitlyn Pados and I are splitting the costs, assigning one assistant's costs to each of our budgets. The total cost for backstage assistants for this show is $500. Should one of our projects not be funded, we would need $500 to pay for these costs.

PAPER **$25**
Program printing materials

ALL PRINTING COSTS -- IN KIND **$0**
From Emory Dance and Movement Studies Program

SPACE RENTAL -- IN KIND **$0**
Schwartz Center Dance Studio Sunday March – Friday March 26
From Emory Dance and Movement Studies Program

TRANSPORTATION **$85**
Transport 7 dancers to and from High Museum of Art
3 trips in total, 2 for rehearsal and 1 for performance

- Parking at $10 per car, 2 cars, 3 trips --$60
- $.55 per mi, 3.5 mi to High from Emory, 2 cars, 3 trips back and forth --$23.10

VIDEO EQUIPMENT **$265**
For archiving performances and creation of dance film

- 1 Flip MinoHD camcorders at $200
- 1 USB Cable -- $25
- 1 Flip Power Adapter -- $25
- 1 Tripod -- $15

TOTAL FUNDS **$625**

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