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The Moving Identity: Explorations in the Body's Capacity for Communication, Expression, and Understanding

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Abstract

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The topic of identity is often left to verbal and written means. Inspired by previous modern dance pioneers and pertinent historical examples that demonstrate the intersection of social change and identity, I challenged the conventions and employed movement as a vehicle to research the body's capacity for communication and expression of identity. Two separate explorations of movement and identity occurred. The first was a solo I created for myself surrounding my personal identity. The second was a four-part group piece with five dancers, which explored these dancers' individual identities, the contrasting relationships between identities, the dynamic tension of collective versus individual identity, and finally group identity.

In a highly personal, collaborative process, we created movement by sharing our own stories about what shapes and influences us, in addition to asking the direct, yet complex question, "Who are we?" Through the course of creating the work, performing, and receiving feedback from both the dancers inside of the process and audience members who witnessed the performance, I gained several insights. Identity is not solely about categorizing or labeling, though labels are an aspect of identity. One must also consider the space between the different intersections that constitute a human – their values, their relationships, and their histories. Additionally, the act of seeing and bearing witness to one another's lives carries a tremendous impact when empowering one another. Finally, authentic movement can be a powerful tool to communicate identity, foster understanding, and most importantly, breed empathy. Thus, its transformative power to act as a tool of social change holds great potential.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The expression of identity is often left to words. Identity is complex, layered, and constantly evolving based on history, experience, and imposed societal norms. How else can we communicate and discuss this topic other than through written or verbal dialogue? Through my thesis, I will challenge the traditional means of defining identity expression and communication by employing the vessel of the human body.

A commonality in the human experience is that we all are kinetic; we all are movers. Subsequently, leveraging the shared experience of movement can serve as a powerful means of illuminating and expressing identity, as well as understanding the identities of others. This thesis project culminated in a solo, *The Space Between*, researching my personal identity and a four-part group piece, *To Be Seen*, researching dimensions of individual identity, the relationships between different individuals' identities, and collective identity. Simply put, I asked the question, "How does movement act as a means of identity expression and communication?" Through the process and performance of creating dance, I have explored the body's potential in revealing identity, both internally to the dancer and externally to the audience.

In this paper, I will provide academic and personal context as to how I arrived at this topic, as well as my perspective into how I view and understand identity. For foundation, I will provide examples in the canon of dance regarding how movement has been used to create or affirm identity, using the case study of Pearl Primus to explore one example in depth. To further frame and broaden context, I will provide an overview of the psychology of human movement and Laban/Jung's movement psychology theory. This will provide a basic understanding of existing scholarship within multiple disciplines considering this question, purely for context.

The heart of this paper is my creative process while creating, performing, and evaluating the two pieces I created for my thesis concert. Firstly, I will explain the process and methodology for every section of this piece. I will then report and discuss findings from the dancers and audience members to assess how this project met its intended purpose.

My hope for this project is to explore how movement can reveal sub-conscious layers regarding identity. This will serve as a different point of entry for individual viewers to understand how our distinctive selves exist in the world.

II. TOPIC FORMULATION

A. *Dance and Movement Studies Major Coursework*

The coursework for the Dance and Movement Studies major sparked my interest in this topic. Significantly, DANC 220: History of Western Concert Dance encouraged me to contextualize my current dance training and education based on the work of the leaders, pioneers, and artists that came before us. I naturally found myself attracted to the modern dance pioneers who were distinctly political in their work. What I mean by “political” is to be acutely aware of the structures, cultures, and paradigms that exist in greater society. To further this, the “political” also means commenting on and/or protesting many of these structures, cultures, and paradigms.

A pertinent example that resonated with me was the New Dance Group, which was founded by a group of six Jewish women in 1932 to use modern dance as tool to promote left-wing political causes. They boldly proclaimed, “Dance is a Weapon of the Class Struggle.”¹ In Fall 2014, I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Victoria Phillips, leading dance scholar and author of the essay (footnoted below) speak about how New Dance Group members protested at rallies,

¹ Phillips, Victoria. "New Dance Group (1932-2009)." *Dance Heritage Coalition* (2012): n. pag. Web.

created pieces, and spread messages boldly calling for human rights and freedom of speech. In addition, I watched former Martha Graham Company members, Martin Lofsnes and Yuko Suzuki, both perform *Time is Money*. This piece was choreographed by a founding member of the New Dance Group, Jane Dudley and was set to the poem, *Time is Money*, written by leftist poet Sol Funaroff. Its thematic material focused on the “emotional physical wreckage left in the system’s wake.”² Later on in my DANC 250: Choreography I course the same semester, one of the dancers, Martin Lofsnes, taught my peers and me some of the choreographic material from the *Time is Money* solo. Embodying the movement reflected the tension, struggle, and intensity of this piece’s socio-political message.

In addition, the culmination of my coursework in DANC 220: History of Western Concert Dance concluded with a paper entitled, “The Political Body.” I co-authored this paper with a fellow student, Virginia Spinks, and our thesis was the political body can be a matrix to diffuse ideology, promote a sense of agency, and create and affirm identity. The latter part of this thesis, regarding creating and affirming identity, is the focal point of this thesis project and examples of this will be expanded upon in *Section III: Background*.

Another modern dance pioneer that sparked my interest in identity and the political body is Pearl Primus, a dancer, choreographer, and advocate from Trinidad who unapologetically paved the way for a new type of black dancing body and used dance as a means for protest and activism. My initial knowledge of Pearl Primus also began in DANC 220: History of Western Concert Dance, but I dedicated my final paper in DANC 329: Contemporary Issues in Performing Arts to narrating Primus’s contributions as an activist, revolutionary, scholar, and educator. Primus distinctly used dance as means to advocate for her identity as a black woman

² Maryanski, Maureen E. " Jane Dudley (1912-2001)." Dance Heritage Coalition (2012): n. pag. Web.

and fight against the toxic ills of society that face black women. My findings about how Primus used her body and movement to celebrate and make political statements about her identity will be further explained in terms of her contributions to movement and identity in the background information of *Section III. B.*

Another defining moment leading me to this thesis topic was in my DANC 240: Dance Literacy course with Lori Teague. At the beginning of this course, we learned about a significant performance involving dance legend, choreographer, and revolutionary of human movement, Rudolf Laban. A man of intense charisma, Laban was commissioned to create major, large-scale dance pieces involving thousands of people.³ Against the contentious backdrop of Nazi Germany, Laban attempted a façade of German nationalism to continue his dance making and artistic pursuits. He was commissioned to create an opening celebration dance for the 1936 Olympics involving over a thousand participants. Adolf Hitler and his sidekick, Josef Goebbels attended a dress rehearsal. The piece clearly held tones of Nazi opposition and Hitler demanded cancellation of the performance.⁴

While this was a horrible moment for Laban and his career, learning about this event sparked powerful realizations. Our bodies are powerful. Bodies together in a space can make a strong political statement. Art can profoundly impact the fabric of society. Dance can instill fear and intimidation in history's most brutal, cruel, and ruthless leaders. Dance and making dance can be radical acts.

Upon reflecting on the capability, impact, and power of dance through historical examples, I knew this had to be the topic of my honors thesis, if I was given the opportunity. I was determined to make a political dance. However, through conversations with one of my

³ Newlove, Jean, and John Dalby. "Laban." *Laban for All*. London: Nick Hern Limited, 2004. 11-16. Print.

⁴ Newlove 14

professors, Lori Teague, I decided to not conscientiously make a political statement. My desire to create dance to breed empathy and understanding coupled with my personal interest in identity (see *Section II. B.*) caused this shift. While I recognize that several artists that I reference did make intentionally make political statements, such as Bill T. Jones and Pearl Primus (see *Section III. A. and C.*), I decided to focus on the intrinsic experience of learning, revealing, and performing about identity. While making a piece about different identities may inherently be a political statement to some viewers, this ultimately was not my intention.

B. Personal Narrative

During an early thesis meeting with my major advisor, Lori Teague, we spoke about my initial thesis concept, which was broadly “the body as a political identity.” This began as an overly broad and unapproachable topic. Where would I begin? And what type of political statements could I humbly make? As a result, Lori encouraged me to hone and narrow my topic, to make it more real and personal to my life and my journey. Through our conversations and personal reflection, I quickly realized that the topic of identity was at the crux of my human experience.

The makeup of my identity has occupied the forefront of my mind throughout my life. I am the granddaughter of a Hiroshima survivor and an American soldier, who wed in the aftermath of a brutal war. Their daughter, my mother, married a Jewish man, my father. This resulted in me – a quarter-Japanese, half-Jewish woman, completely white-passing possessing an upbringing with enormous privilege, but with ancestral roots laden with enormous tragedy and hardship. Thus, the question of, “Who am I?” became more pronounced as I matured. How do I occupy space? How do these identities impact my day-to-day actions and lifelong experiences? What even is my identity?

Upon reflection, I realized that the values behind my identity shape who I am. I think of my grandmother's *kintsugi* artwork; a Japanese art practice where she filled in cracks of pottery with precious gold. How her creativity and artistic expression could repair an object, while still appreciating its history and its originality. I think of her enormous discipline, attention to detail, and unwavering kindness. In terms of my Jewish identity, I am drawn to my faith's ardent pursuit of community, to its opportunities for personal reflection, and to the ritualistic practice of my childhood Sunday mornings, where my late grandmother taught me how to read Hebrew. And in my womanhood, I reflect on the journey to achieve the delicate combination of strength and softness – learning how to live and carry myself with power coupled with authentic kindness and living with independence while still considering others.

Undoubtedly, my values constitute my identity and furthermore, I believe my contributions to this world exist in the space of affirming and empowering identities. A huge portion of my college career has been dedicated to advocating for the educational rights of undocumented students. I noticed after speaking to an immigrant at the Stewart Detention Center the extent that societal and institutional structures can denounce and harm us, based on our identity labels, whether they be racial, socioeconomic, or gender-based, just to name a few. An undocumented student cannot attend public college in Georgia because of the lack of a piece of paper and a nine-digit number. A young man, a father, a husband, is imprisoned because he is not legally documented. The identity of an immigrant, without documentation, is marginalized and targeted in our society. I decided I needed to do everything I could to ensure that my community, Emory University, celebrated, affirmed, and welcomed the identity of undocumented students. Advocacy efforts led to undocumented students now attending Emory with need-based,

institutional financial aid and other systems of support to ensure that these undocumented students come to Emory and prosper.

As Lori Teague suggested, I strove to find connections between these different parts of who I am. I found that identity was the connection between my social justice work and my personal history. Ultimately, I decided that within identity, I would tell my personal story and cultivate the storytelling through movement with the dancers.

For my solo, I used movement improvisation and phrase creation to discover deeper insight and explore the weighty question of who I am. I was curious about how my known identity (being a multiracial, half-Jewish woman) impacts what I believe, how I relate to others, and how I occupy space in the world. I would find the specific and personal nature of identity, within myself and foster this process in others. In the group piece, I decided I would tell the stories of the dancers in my piece. I would not seek to make broad-stroking, vague, or potentially appropriative generalizations about identities. This idea of lifting identity is at the core of who I am; in how I contribute to the world and in this case, how I would pursue my jointly intellectual and artistic thesis journey.

C. Science and the Nature of Evidence Final Paper

During fall of 2016, I took IDS 205W: Science and the Nature of Evidence with Dr. Arri Eisen. The culminating product of this course was a final paper where the premise was simple: ask a controversial question and attempt to answer it through original research. While I pitched several ideas for my final paper topic, Dr. Eisen noted that “my eyes lit up” when I spoke about my thesis topic of movement as a means of identity expression and communication. Ultimately the question I arrived at was, “Is how we move who we are?” To further deepen my analysis and add another dimension of understanding to my topic, he encouraged me to take an

interdisciplinary approach to my topic. As a result, I connected ideas surrounding movement psychology and psychology of movement (similar names, but not the same, see *Section III. C.* and *D.*) to my discussion of movement and identity.

The core of the research for that final paper came from three case study interviews with three different movers – one extremely trained mover, one moderately trained mover, and one untrained mover. All three interviews were conducted separately, beginning in the dance studio. The movement interviews were immediately followed by an oral interview.

I asked the movers, three friends generous enough to volunteer their time, to work through different exercises and prompts designed to get them moving through their identities. The first prompt was to simply think about everyday movement that they tend to carry out in everyday life – fidgeting, mannerisms, habits, etc. I asked them to perform this movement for me, and then I filmed their everyday movements. The goal of this was to encourage comfort; everyday movements serve as a familiar, comfortable kinetic form.

The second prompt was to think about actions, shapes, and pathways that define their identities. While this may seem abstract, rooting identity into something tangible (i.e. I am confused about my identity, therefore I think of a winding pathway) allows the movers a point of entry. Through this exercise, I asked the movers to consider incorporating the everyday movements they shared into this phrase. I noticed that giving the movers clear direction and different tools to use in their movement generation helped them create movement with the most clarity of intent. While this may not be true in every case, this was the pattern I noticed in this study.

The third and last prompt I asked of them was to think about their identities in a binary sense. The first part was thinking about the parts of themselves that they celebrate – where they derive

the most pride. The second part was thinking about the parts of their identities that they either wished they could change and/or society looks down upon and attempts to change. I then asked them to make a phrase using both sides of the binary in any way they chose, both in terms of the “good” and the “bad.” I explained that this might be an oversimplification, but the point of thinking in a binary sense was so the movers could access different parts of themselves. The tendency was to go toward and lean into movement that may have felt comfortable in the body and secure, but when asked to use the parts they may have resisted or ignored, it could reveal hidden aspects of their identity.

The final part of the interview was an actual spoken interview where I asked the movers numerous questions. While I had some pre-determined questions, such as “What was your thought process behind making certain choices?”, “What did this illuminate about identity?”, “What did your everyday movement say about you?”, and more directly, “What do you define as your identity?” The spoken part of the interview process allowed for further insights into the movers’ creations and another layer of analysis to answer the question of how movement can reveal and communicate identity.

I analyzed their movement based on their personal narrative and Laban/Jung’s movement psychology principles. Finally, I compiled findings from this research into a short video. Since I completed this research as part of a class, I did not receive IRB approval to use this information in my thesis and therefore, I cannot share my specific findings nor the video I produced for this project. However, mentioning this aspect of my topic formulation is crucial because this paper gave me great clarity and deeper insight into the discussion of movement and identity. Ultimately, a huge takeaway was how much memory and wisdom is stored in the human body. The dancers I “interviewed” made decisions to create movement, which was subconsciously

informed by their experiences. The dancers also spoke about how the act of participating in this exercise led to great personal insight into their identities.

III. BACKGROUND

Since the topic of movement and identity is multi-faceted and complex, this background is, by no means, exhaustive, however, it is designed to provide appropriate context for my thesis's background and connections to my Dance and Movement Studies major. Firstly, I will provide a few historical examples to demonstrate how movement can be used as powerful means of identity expression and communication. Then, I will use modern dance legend and pioneer, Pearl Primus, as a case study to demonstrate one example of an artist who was wildly influential in the intersection of movement and identity. Next, I will employ a psychological lens and briefly cover some key findings and highlight blind spots, regarding the psychology of human movement. Building on this thread of psychology, I will give an overview of "movement psychology," a discipline pioneered by dancer and choreographer, Rudolf Laban, and a psychologist, Carl Jung. Lastly, I will provide some pronounced ideas in the general discussion of what identity means and how identity is formed.

A. Examples of Dance and Identity

Historical examples suggest that movement and dance can be a means to express and communicate identity, often in protest or out of necessity. While much of my thesis explores individual identity, these pertinent examples will give perspective and help materialize the connection between movement and identity.

In modern history, one of the most prevalent narratives of oppression was the European colonial divide, and ownership of the African continent from the late 1880's into the late twentieth century. When the Malawian nation fought for independence from British colonial

rule, a unified community had to be organized to effectively gain this independence as a nation-state, thus establishing a uniquely Malawian identity. One of the ways of achieving this was to attract people to protests and rallies through dance, which was “already an important cultural practice at local public occasions”⁵. Dance groups were invited to perform at these events to bring energy and “evoke feelings of national identity”⁶ and to consolidate an effective political community and organize a political body of people. Additionally, groups from throughout the territory were invited to perform, emphasizing cultural diversity, but also unifying the nation as well, grounding the political community in the celebration of difference. These displays of cultural identity through dance also served to construct a distinctly African national identity separate from the imposed British culture and in opposition to colonial rule.

There have been other cases in which dance has been used to create a sense of national identity in the face of oppression and cultural threat. The Zionist movement of the early to mid-twentieth century, and subsequent creation of the state of Israel, sent many Palestinians into a panic to preserve their way of life. In the early 1960’s “traditional” folk *dabkeh* dance was integrated into the annual Ramallah Nights cultural festival as part ⁷of the pan-Arabist movement. However, after the Six Day War and the occupation of the West Bank by the Israeli military, the Ramallah Nights festival came to an end, along with all other cultural activities.

The Palestinians felt more than ever that they must construct a collective national identity that linked the West Bank’s cultural past “that was bound by the geographic borders of historic Palestine”⁸. Palestinians felt that they had to legitimize their claim to the territory through the

⁵ Gilman, Lisa. "Dance, Power, and The Creation of National Community in Malawian Politics." *Congress on Research in Dance* (2005): 100-03. Print.

⁶ Gillman 101

⁷ Rowe, Nicholas. *Raising Dust: A Cultural History of Dance in Palestine*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. Print.

⁸ Rowe n.p.

reclamation of certain cultural artifacts, like the *dabkeh*. What used to be considered a rural, peasant celebratory dance became “an emblem of Palestinian national identity”⁹ that transgressed all class divisions and became an “expression of political identity.” Thus, dance helped Palestinians develop a sense of national identity in its confrontation with Zionism¹⁰.

The above examples are by no means exhaustive and countless other modern dance artists, from past to present are creating dance to affirm identity, make political statements, and protest. These range from the New Dance Group, which was mentioned in more detail in *Section II* to artists still living today, such as Bill T. Jones.

Bill T. Jones, choreographer, dancer, and advocate, has always been known to ask controversial questions about the nature of human identity. Firstly, the sheer existence of himself, a black man, and his late partner, Arnie Zane, a Jewish man moving together and dancing on a stage inherently made a political statement. His work is known for “human diversity, personal revelation, and social comment combined with artistic values.”¹¹ His work, *Still/Here*, challenged social issues of the HIV epidemic and he addressed the most complex themes of racism, sexism, sexuality, and other issues of the American experience through *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land*.¹² This process is beautifully documented in the film *BILL T. JONES: Dancing to the Promised Land*, which we viewed in DANC 220: History of Western Concert Dance. This further inspired my interest in topic of identity because it illustrated an intersection between identity, politics, and dance. As Jones stated in an interview, “Everything is political to me. But that can’t be all it is. I have two feelings, one is that we can’t really change anything and the other is that we must try. How do

⁹ Rowe n.p.

¹⁰ Rowe n.p.

¹¹ Wilkinson, Kirsten. “Bill T. Jones (1952-).” *Dance Heritage Coalition* (2012): 2. Web.

¹² Wilkinson 2

those two notions cohabit? They can live on a stage together, but can they live in life together?"¹³

His philosophy is a personal inspiration for me, for my project, and for all who are seeking to make dances about identity. While his dance was more politically charged than my work intended to be, his research is relevant because he masterfully told the stories of human identities. These pieces inspired great emotion in all who was a part of and witnessed his work. Any research regarding movement and identity must acknowledge the work of Bill T. Jones.

B. Case Study: Pearl Primus

Pearl Primus has served as a personal inspiration throughout my career in college. She exemplifies how one person can use movement to advocate for human rights, to spread awareness and understanding regarding her identity as a black woman. She protested unfair constructs toward a black woman's identity in society.

One example of where Primus's intersection of movement and identity influenced the greater society was in her protest and rally performances, at the Freedom Rally in 1943.¹⁴ Following a series of charismatic speakers, Primus stepped onto the stage and performed a dance of social protest. She leapt into the air stunning and moving audiences, according to published narratives. Her movement was powerful, yet clear. The vigor of movement suggested she was carrying the "frustrations and aspirations" of the black struggle in her own body¹⁵.

This Freedom Rally was only the beginning of her involvement with social activism surrounding black identity and dance. She also had ties to the New Dance Group (See *Section II. A.* for more context about the New Dance Group). Later in her career, she auditioned and began

¹³ Wildman, Sarah. "Choreographer Moving to a New Beat." *The Guardian*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2008. Web. 31 Mar. 2017.

¹⁴ Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Pearl Primus: Dancing Freedom." *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists & Progressive Politics during World War II*. New York: Basic Civitas, A Member of the Perseus Group, 2013. 23. Print.

¹⁵ Griffin 23

performing at Café Society¹⁶, which was an integrated nightclub. In addition, she collaborated with great black artists, such as Mary Lou Williams and Langston Hughes. To create and perform this sort of work was a strong display of protest and activism – defying social convention in the most contentious of times. This was also an example of how she used dance as a vehicle to further bond and bring together the black community.

Primus managed to capture the struggle of being a black woman through her movement. She took advantage of the three dimensions of space¹⁷, physically representing the liberation blacks are unable to experience in society. She ran, slid, writhed, and leapt. The physicality and athleticism clearly and intentionally expressed her deep-seated intense emotions. Her movement became the physical embodiment of the internal struggle for black people. Another example of this was in her performance of the “Jim Crow Train.” Through her movement, she gave off the appearance of being in the confines of this train. Her dancing physicality reflected black enslavement and limitation – these brutalities of society. However, she also managed to fly with ease through her stunning leaps, seemingly out of this illusionary train. This represented another aspect black identity and experience – the idea of being displaced or forced to move¹⁸. Her words further emphasized the meaning behind her work, “Each one of us can wield a weapon against Jim Crow and Fascism and my special one is dancing”¹⁹. Primus recognized that her movement had a unique ability to communicate complexities of her identity and black culture to protest the current state of affairs. She used her talents and skills to raise and comment on social issues, thus demonstrating how she used the body as a tool to express identity and influence society.

¹⁶ Griffin 46

¹⁷ Griffin 25

¹⁸ Griffin 27

¹⁹ Griffin 30

Her body was effective because it allowed another point of entry for people to see and understand the struggle of a black woman.

Her activism through dance was so pronounced that it caught the critical, watchful eyes of the US government. Through her affiliation with the Southern Negro Youth Congress, the Communist Party, and various appearances at protests and rallies, the FBI tracked her for several years. She emphasized that her involvement with the Communist Party was a means to “best serve the Negro”²⁰. Her activism surrounding her black identity was a way of her life, permeating all aspects of her existence and coming at the cost of personal sacrifice. While the FBI eventually stopped tracking her because they realized she was too entrenched in her dancing to influence the Communist Party²¹, it proved her capacity to influence society and garner attention from even the highest governmental powers. This situation is tangential to the example of Rudolf Laban and Adolf Hitler in *Section II. A. Movement*, especially when it is advocating for the rights and end of unfair treatment of certain identities, can influence and impact society, thus terrifying even the most ruthless leaders and institutions. The striking nature of her activism through dance proves her unique ability as a distinctive art advocate.

In addition, Primus managed to break down many stereotypes in terms of black identity, specifically regarding the black dancing body. When Primus auditioned for Café Society, the owner, Barney Josephson was “unimpressed” by her appearance and did not even want to audition her.²² He noticed that her legs were “very muscular, like a man’s legs, power like iron, and bronze, her color.”²³ However, upon watching her dance, his mind was completely changed.

²⁰ Griffin 60

²¹ Griffin 61

²² Griffin 46

²³ Griffin 47

In more crude terms, in his own words, she “knocked me (him) off my ass.”²⁴ As a result, Primus, in her strong, muscular build paved the way for a new type of dancing, black body.

Primus could defy these racial stereotypes with what she could do with her body. Because she was so muscular, strong, stocky, etc. (these are just a few words used to describe her), her body had incredible capacity to do amazing things. Her leaps were known to be five feet, two inches in the air, which was the equivalent of her height.²⁵ This was a completely new conception of a dancing body, even distinct from the sultriness of her contemporary, Katherine Dunham.²⁶ The range of criticism flooded in: *Time* magazine labeled her as “a squat, powerful Negro girl,” a dance historian commented that she did not “have the body of a dancer” and another dancer described her as “chunky.”²⁷ However, in the true spirit of advocacy, Primus made her case for herself and other humans that looked like her as a dancer. The ability, skill, and artistry of her movement were simply undeniable. When Primus leapt, slid, ran, and glided through the space with undeniable power and strength, she proved herself as one of the greats. In addition, she was one of the first notable women to wear her hair naturally. While this was in part for practical reasons, as processed hair is hard to dance with, it helped give black women agency to wear the hair naturally if they chose. Primus recognized the influence and gravity her body held. She once said, “My body is built for heavy stomping, powerful dignity.”²⁸ As a result, a significant part of Primus’s advocacy was in her ability to dismantle myths surrounding dancers’ bodies.

²⁴ Griffin 47

²⁵ Creque-Harris, Leah. *The Representation of African Dance on the Concert Stage: From the Early Black Musical to Pearl Primus*. Diss. Emory U, 1991. Atlanta: Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, 1991. Print.

²⁶ Griffin 47

²⁷ Griffin 48

²⁸ Griffin 48

The case study of Pearl Primus demonstrates a significant example of how one woman managed to use movement to protest and advocate for black women. While Primus and I have entirely different experiences and I recognize my enormous privilege, her boldness, vigor, and clarity all deeply inspired me in this project.

C. Psychology of Human Movement Overview

As mentioned, identity is complex and somewhat elusive. It is difficult to study and scholars are searching for tangible, concrete methodologies. As mentioned in *Section II. C.*, Dr. Arri Eisen pushed me to consider another lens to understand my thesis topic of movement and identity. As per his suggestion, I also briefly connected movement to psychological study and further, connected psychology of human movement to Rudolf Laban's movement system. This information does not inform the analysis nor the process of creating my piece for my thesis. However, I include it because it is important to call attention to relevant scholarship on this topic.

There is a relevant field called the psychology of human movement. This is defined as, "a broad ranging field that includes both how the motor control system produces movements, and how the sensory system perceives these movements itself and from others."²⁹ As the definition suggests, this field can stretch in many ways, but what is important to note is this field is developed in terms of human skill, but not in terms of human identity.³⁰ Subsequently, this field involving the psychology of human movement parallels how Laban analysis can analyze movement. The crux of the psychology of human movement is the perceptual-motor skill, which centers on the relationship between the environment and execution of movement.³¹ Whereas in Laban analysis, movement can also be analyzed for skill or ability through factors such as range

²⁹ Li, Stan Z., and Anil Jan, eds. "Human Movement, Psychology." Encyclopedia of Biometrics. N.d. Print.

³⁰ Smyth, Mary M., and Alan M. Wing. The Psychology of Human Movement. London: Academic, 1984. Google Books. Web.

³¹ Smyth et al 7

of motion, power, intentionality, space, shape, emotion, etc. This constitutes the relationship between the body and movement efforts.

Psychology of human movement was present in the 19th century to observe Morse Code operators for their speed, accuracy, and efficiency. However, in recent years, psychologists have looked at chess players and a variety of sports. In other words, they study how some individual moves in terms of their ability to most astutely carry out a skill. As a result, this thread of psychology of human movement analyzes in terms of hierarchy – which individual movement achieves greater results.³² As a result, this discussion is not necessarily relevant to the conversation of movement's ability to express and communicate identity. However, psychology of human movement does acknowledge the complexity of the human body and its systems, and points out how difficult they are to analyze.³³ This presents a key fact about the subject of identity and movement – its complexity, abstract nature, multiple operating factors, and the need for more concrete analytical metrics.

D. Laban and Jung's Movement Psychology

While the psychology of human movement field is limiting for the purposes of this thesis, Rudolf Laban and Carl Jung's movement psychology field (similar names, not to be confused with "psychology of human movement" studies) strikes more relevancy in terms of what it can reveal about movement and identity. As mentioned, I have studied Laban in several of my courses and recognize what a key role he played in analyzing and contextualizing movement. Since employing a Laban-Jung movement analysis to my thesis would be incredibly time-consuming and difficult, I will not directly use any of this information in my process nor discussion of my piece. However, to provide background in the scholarship of movement and

³² Smyth et al 8

³³ Smyth et al 8

identity and to contextualize certain tools others have used to ponder these same questions, I will give a brief overview.

Rudolf Laban, as a dancer and choreographer, developed a new system of analyzing dance with an extremely simple concept: there is a direct correspondence between certain psychological concepts and certain physical concepts. To put it in the simplest terms, he theorized that psychology and the movement processes are associated.³⁴ Thus, to analyze movement, he concluded that in all dimensions, movement can be described using four motion factors – weight, space, time, and flow. Within these, he described the two distinct ranges of movement. For weight, he noticed that movement could be heavy or light, depending on exertion of the body, just as lifting any sort of weight in everyday life works. One lifts objects that may be described “heavy” or “light.” For space, he noticed a direction in space, either direct, with a straight trajectory in space, or indirect, with a roundabout, flexible, and/or circle path through space. With time, he noticed movements could be slow or quick, both in themselves and in relation to other movements. Lastly, he observed that with flow, movement was affected by coordination; either free-flowing or bound, halting, and tight.³⁵

Laban collaborated with psychologist, Carl Jung, who had four “Mental Factors,” which through several series of analyzing the movement of thousands of human subjects, decided that there were certain psychological processes associated with the movements. These correlations were sensing involved weight, intuiting involved time, thinking involved space, and feeling involved flow. This was purely experiential based on their observations, which they both

³⁴ Mirodan, Vladimir. "Acting the Metaphor: The Laban-Malmgren System of Movement Psychology and Character Analysis." *Theatre, Dance, and Performance Training* 2015th ser. 6.1 (2015): 30-45. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. 5 Dec. 2016.

³⁵ Mirodan 32

doubted at times.³⁶ However, for the purposes of this thesis, this movement psychology model provides a basic framework and point of entry for movement analysis.

Motion Factors	Motion Factor Ranges	Associated Mental Factors
Weight	Strong or Light	Sensing
Space	Direct or Indirect	Thinking
Time	Slow or Quick	Intuiting
Flow	Free or Bound	Feeling

Laban and Jung's Motion and Mental Factors

While I will not be conducting a movement analysis using the Jung-Laban Motion-Factors discussed above to derive conclusions about identity from movement, I include this to demonstrate a piece of scholarship where scholars have sought to make sense of identity, the body mind connection, through movement. My process of creating movement about identity will focus much more on imagery, words, memories, and specific situations rather than associated mental factors. However, I recognize that this process intersects with Laban's idea of sensing and feeling, mostly involving emotions or memories associated with my identity. For example, in moments of movement creation when I was seeking to feel an emotion, such as frustration, my movement was closely associated with either wild, unstifled "Free" movement or restrained, tension-filled "Bound" movement. While my process did not specifically use these tools, I recognize how they informed my process in hindsight.

E. Key Points on Identity

While the discussion of what identity is and how identity is formed could be an entire topic in isolation, there are a couple points to highlight for the purposes of thesis. Interestingly,

³⁶ Mirodan 33

the academic literature surrounding my lens of identity was only supported by the process of working in the studio independently and with the dancers. As mentioned, identity can feel elusive and difficult to define or discuss. However, from all perspectives, a theme arises: identity inherently has multiplicity.

Especially in the field of identity research through dance, the common understanding is that identity has several multiplicities. Movement researcher, Jennifer Roche, recorded in detail a process of creating an identity-driven book. She recognized that with “multiple configuration of selves to reform and be redefined temporarily,” that a “stable entity,” such as dance or a choreographic work served as an excellent medium to explore these multiplicities.³⁷ Psychologist, William James, who called this vast array of identities, “the multiplicity of ‘me’s”” also supported the idea of a variety of identities constitutes a single person.³⁸

IV. PROCESS

A. Phase 1: First Semester

The main purpose of my process first semester was to create an open, experimental choreographic laboratory to explore ideas and concepts that would later be solidified. I encouraged the dancers to experience freedom in this environment. During the first semester, we were not pressured by time and outcomes, so we took this opportunity to explore.

After spending much of the summer in conversation and thought about my thesis topic, I was eager to begin the process as soon as the school year began. I first recruited dancers that I thought were deeply sensitive and thoughtful movers, possessed maturity and willingness to collaborate, and had interesting and diverse movement. I felt these were key characteristics in individual dancers to create a community of movement and influenced the group identity.

³⁷ Roche 10

³⁸ Mirodan 41

During the first semester, we rehearsed for two hours every week. As I mentioned, my process was extremely open and flexible during the first semester. One of the first rehearsals, we discussed our identities. One of the dancers, Alfredo, succinctly said, “It’s not what I am. It’s who I am.” At that moment, I had a realization and I let go of trying to place anyone in a box and embraced the multitudes of identity (see *Section III. E.*).

We moved through a variety of movement exercises during the first semester. Much of our rehearsal process involved improvising, practicing partnering to become comfortable in each other’s bodies, and learning a small amount of my choreographed phrase material. This began the process of feeling comfortable and safe with one another. Most notably, we created a series of short duets based on the idea of how we can undermine or affirm one another’s identities. While this is an oversimplified binary, we used these two ideas for the purposes of this project. We explored the idea of using hand motions to communicate with one another (conversation with gesture). The purpose of this was to understand another way we could communicate using our bodies as opposed to our words. In addition, I asked them to generate content about their own personal identities. I facilitated this in three ways: the emotions they associate with their identities, the actions they associate with their identities, and the images that come to mind when they think of their identities.

In addition, I tasked them with making a three-part phrase: the first movement was inspired by an emotion that took them on a trajectory, the second movement was an emotion that was repetitive in place, and the third asked them to call upon an image that made them think about their identities. This movement phrase became the basis of the solos that eventually opened the *To Be Seen: I. each* section. A unique aspect of this solo creation process was I had the dancers learn each other’s movements. When dancers learned each other’s solos, I asked them to

embody the manner and approach to the movement as well. In this method, they fully embraced and strived to emulate one another, through movement. What surfaced is the dancers' ability and willingness to take risks. For example, one of the dancers, Alfredo, has electric and highly physical movement and another one of dancers, Hannah, tends to move more gently and methodically. I watched as Hannah pushed her movement affinities to emulate Alfredo. She mentioned how she felt like she better understood Alfredo from the experience of pushing herself to move like him. Overall, this exercise of teaching and embodying movement served as a powerful tool for the dancers to understand one another.

My process shifted significantly when Emory College Council reached out to me asking if I would like to perform during their CultureSHOCK event (See Appendix B and C). CultureSHOCK is a showcase of the cultural (ethnic, racial, national, sexual, gender, religious etc.) diversity at Emory expressed through student performances, speakers, art, and cuisine. This year, the theme of the event was, "8000 Stories, One Emory" and they were specifically looking for performances that explore the idea of human identity. One of the dancers was a member of College Council and made the connection. As a result, I had the opportunity to present an excerpt of my thesis to 400 Emory students, President Sterk, and Dean Elliott, whom attended the event. In addition, I received invaluable feedback from members of dance faculty, including Blake Beckham, Anna Leo, Lori Teague, and Sally Radell.

This was my first experience in receiving feedback from the audience. I was extremely apprehensive about presenting modern dance work to an audience of primarily non-trained dancers. As I sat in the audience watching other performances, I became nervous about how my piece would resonate. The dancers did a phenomenal job performing the excerpt, although it was on the WHSCAB Stage – a small and narrow space, with a hard-wooden floor and a podium on

stage left. Following the excerpt, I had an opportunity to speak for two minutes about movement and identity expression. After the performance, dozens of audience members, some acquaintances and some strangers, came up to me and expressed how moved they were by my piece. While I was unable to gather and process specific descriptions of what people said, they communicated to me that they saw the dancers' identities, felt moved by the piece, and shared enthusiasm to see the full thesis concert. This was an extremely affirming moment for me because being in the studio for a couple of months without showing my work to anyone, sans a couple trusted professors, started to become a challenging mental game. It was easy to get so wrapped up in going through different movement exercises and generating phrases that I lose sight of the question I am seeking to answer. This served as a powerful moment of affirmation and I needed to continue leaning into the process.

As my thesis advisor, Anna Leo, and I discussed, this performance opportunity was a necessary blessing beyond presenting the work and receiving feedback. For first few weeks of my process, the dancers and I were moving through different exercises and it was unclear how they were connected and what my strongest material was. For the process of creating this five-minute excerpt for CultureSHOCK, I threaded together several of my ideas briefly. This revealed the most central themes to expand upon during the second semester: individual identity, the relationships between identities, the different affirmative or antagonist relationships between identities, individual versus collective identity, etc. These ideas, that were mere moments during the CultureSHOCK performance, now constitute entire sections of my completed thesis.

Another small presentation of my work that occurred during first semester was the Emory Dance Department Fall Informal Showing. In preparation for this showing, my main task was thinking about how I would present the solos in the overall composition. Each dancer worked on

these solos throughout the semester. Initially, I thought I would have each dancer just walk into the space, show their solo, and leave. However, I worked during one of our final rehearsals to thread together the five solos in a cohesive, yet non-obvious way. My purpose was to show their individuality, but not present them in an overly formulaic way. What began as a fleeting, last-minute idea is what I ultimately set for the first section of my group work. I presented this draft of the solos and the CultureSHOCK piece to faculty and students in December 2016. The main piece of feedback I received was I needed more clarity about what exactly I was trying to say. This idea of clarity and remaining true to my question proved to be an invaluable piece of feedback that guided me through the rest of my choreographic process.

Two other events, while not directly related to my thesis, greatly supported my thought process about this topic of movement and identity. The first was my final paper for IDS 205W: Science and the Nature of Evidence with Dr. Arri Eisen and the second was the movement workshop I led at the Emory Scholars Retreat in November 2016. The discussion of the final paper for IDS 205W: Science and the Nature of Evidence was fully explained earlier (see *Section II. C.*).

As for the Scholars Retreat, I led a 70-minute workshop for 15 primarily non-trained movers entitled, “Empathy, Identity, and Understanding through Dance Improvisation.” Some scholars knew each other prior to the workshop and some were complete strangers. The event description I provided for Scholars to register for my workshop at the retreat was the following:

No previous dance experience is necessary; all are welcome. This session will explore complex facets of the human experience through the vessel of the moving body. After a brief, energizing warm-up, participants will be led through basic improvisational dance tasks as fuel to generate their own authentic movement. We will also collaborate and bear witness to each other’s work in a variety of ways. An intentional reflection will conclude our time together. This session will be uplifting and affirming; participants will leave energized with a heightened self-awareness and a new perspective on how we can relate to one another.

I designed a clear format to create comfort and community among the participants, building up toward the main goal of the workshop: to explore and witness one another's identities. I began the workshop by setting expectations and easing pressure; I assured them that every choice they made during that workshop was correct, accurate, and valid. First, I led them through a warm-up where I had them lie on their backs and slowly move each part of the body to gain awareness, sensing from the inside out, and help them arrive in their bodies. From there, we stood up and completed a modified version of flocking³⁹ where whoever was at the front of the group would carry out a movement and the rest of the group would follow that movement. When the group changed direction, there would be a new leader initiating the movement and the rest of the group would follow. We did this in small groups, large groups, and eventually the entire group moved together in the space. The intention of this was to ensure participants became comfortable moving with each other and following one another – the practice of being in a group?

After this, we sat in a circle and I had them write down actions, shapes, and pathways that they felt defined their identities. Then, I tasked them with creating a movement phrase based on these words. I also encouraged them to incorporate any everyday movements or ordinary mannerisms – blending pedestrian movement into a dance context.

From there, I had them partner up and bear witness to each other's movement. I encouraged them to observe in a nonjudgmental way, not attempt to “figure each other out,” but take in and observe what they saw. I also encouraged them to feel the energy of the movement in their own static, observing bodies while watching their peers. Then, I had partners blend their

³⁹ Flocking refers to a group exercise in movement improvisation where a group of movers changes in space and shape depending on the direction that the group is traveling. It is called “flocking” because it can resemble a “flock” of birds flying with clear direction, but no clear leader.

two phrases together in whatever way they chose. They had complete creative license in how they chose to do this.

Finally, each pair performed their duet to the whole group and we bore witness with the same principles in mind. I led a group debrief and reflection based on our experiences.

I received enormously positive feedback and I was in awe and moved by how open, vulnerable, and honest the participants were. Many of participants spoke about how through the experience of creating, watching, and learning movement they felt connected to one another and in fact learned something extremely intimate and personal about one another. Others spoke about the realizations they noticed about themselves. One young woman mentioned that she was attempting to isolate the parts of herself that she was proud of from what she is working on, but realized that the two naturally blended together and are connected. She realized how these two seemingly binary concepts, what she likes about herself and does not, worked together; and she had this experience through movement.

Scholars were required to submit a survey after the retreat and here is the feedback the Scholars program provided me with:

Based on participant feedback, 91% agreed or strongly agreed your session was intellectually stimulating. As you know, scholars were invited to provide comments about what they learned, and two of the many positive comments received are noted below.

“Dancing is liberating and empathy is best felt through movement”

“I learned that it is easy to open up your identity to others through movement, and when you start expressing your identity through artistic expression, you get in touch with more of yourself, going further than the go-to words you have to define yourself.”

While I could not directly incorporate this experience into my research because of Institutional Review Board restrictions, like my work in my IDS 205W: Science and the Nature of Evidence paper, this workshop provided valuable clarity and insights that guided my research in the studio. Specifically, the workshop showed me that my instincts about movement being a

tool for expression and community building were correct. It also demonstrated that non-trained movers also benefitted from the experience of creating and witnessing movement. It energized my thought process and set the stage for the rest of my creative process.

To conclude my reflection of the first phase of my process, the fall semester, the culmination of the IDS 205W: Science and the Nature of Evidence paper, CultureSHOCK performance, Scholars Retreat Movement Workshop, and rehearsing and experimenting with the dancers in the studio gave me a wealth of information and knowledge about the topic of movement and identity. It became my main task to synthesize, identify themes and patterns, and connect all these different ideas to create a cohesive, yet layered piece about movement and identity.

B. The Space Between (Solo)

Creating and performing my solo was undoubtedly the most difficult part of this whole thesis project. Choreographing a solo about my personal identity forced me to go to places that previously I preferred not to acknowledge and places that made me uncomfortable to visit. The dancers who also created solos echoed similar sentiments. Creating this movement not only was physically taxing, but also emotionally rigorous. However, I leaned into and embraced the challenge. The beauty of this process was that it demanded my full honesty and sparked realizations about myself.

The process of working on my solo during the first semester was tumultuous. Much of my process in the studio the first semester was ironically trying to figure out what my identities are and why I identify with them. Interestingly, in the beginning phase, writing down rough, visceral thoughts about my identity helped to inform my movement and the experience of embodying movement helped me verbalize my thoughts. I followed a similar process of

catalyzed by me for the dancers. I wrote down lists of emotions and actions that I thought were true to who I am, how I occupy space, and how I move through the world. These emotions and actions had a huge range, from “confusion” and “loneliness” to “joy” and “awe.” The actions ranged from “exclude” and “ignore” to “support” and “embrace.” Through the process of generating movement vocabulary based on actions and emotions, images came to mind: the physical opening of the heart, hitting a brick wall, and trudging through mud, just to name a few. For example, the physical opening of the heart denoted gentle, soft movement, but also tension and strain. Hitting a brick wall was physical, bold, and aggressive. Trudging through mud was bound, restrained, and tense. This process of embodying my movement led to me thinking in terms of imagery also helped inform the dancers in their solo work.

I also asked myself several questions about my identity. In conjunction with a consistent theme in this solo process, I would seek to find those answers by writing or moving. Some of the questions I asked myself were, “*Why* do you identify with that aspect of your identity? What is it about those qualities resonate with you? How do people in your life relate to your identity? Do they build it up? Do they accept it? Do they question it? How do you relate to others?” For example, when I thought about the different labels I carry, I thought about being a half-Jewish, quarter-Japanese woman. For many solo rehearsals, as I moved through the studio, I found myself moving vigorously, even violently at times. In this experience, this movement affinity revealed that my attraction toward strong and powerful movement. Subsequently through this process of moving, I realized it was the strength within these labels that was my identity. It was the strength of the womanhood I have witnessed in my family members, teachers, and friends that fueled my identity as a woman. It was witnessing my grandmother’s strength and perseverance, after surviving a Hiroshima and fighting various health issues throughout her

elderly life that tied me to my Japanese identity. And it was the strong ties of a thriving Jewish community I had witnessed and experienced throughout my life that established my connection to Judaism. All of this illuminates a key point about my personal identity: it is more about the *why* than the *what*. I realized that it was not just the singular notion of being Jewish, Japanese, and a woman; rather, it was the power, history, and values behind these labels.

Another key aspect of the process for my solo was a physical hardship I faced. During the fall performance of Emory Dance Company in December 2016, I fell incorrectly and separated my left shoulder. As a result, I was forced to take two months off from dancing and stopped the process of creating my solo completely. I was unable to show the progress on my solo at the Emory Dance Informal Showing and my inspiration and vigor for this personal journey started to waver. However, the wise words of my thesis advisor, Anna, greatly helped me, “Use this injury. Think about how it now affects your identity.”

Ultimately my solo became a collection of these different aspects of my identity – my family history, how I overcame challenges, labels I subscribe to, such as gender, race, and dancer, and things that I value about myself. In dealing with the complexity of myself, ironically, I decided that the best way to express this was through a functional framework. I decided to use a very limited vocabulary, a set of movements with different intentions to express the different multitudes of myself. In addition, I thought about how similar movements can take on different meanings based on proximity, energy, and dynamic. For example, the first time I crossed the stage in the beginning of my solo, I intended to be fluid, gentle, and sequential to represent femininity and the subsequent assumptions about femininity. I embodied these qualities even though I often do not relate them.

The beginning image is an acknowledgement of oneself. My hand subtly points to my chest and as I lift myself into a backbend, physically strive to open my heart and I press my chest open repeatedly. The beginning part of my solo displays vulnerability as I expose myself to the audience. I become very close to the audience and my focus is facing outward toward the audience. I am soft and gentle as I make my first pass across the stage. However, as I travel across the stage, a delicate, sequential movement becomes stifled and stuck. Femininity comes up against an obstacle and transforms into another movement state – arguably my own conception of femininity. When I make my next pass across the next stage, I use the same movement vocabulary, but I have a completely different intention. I lean into the methodical, guarded part of myself – the part focused on the task at hand, organization, and order. I strategically arrange and place every part of this methodically. Then, this part of me starts to devolve. My touches become tenser and charged. I slowly slink across the floor, indulging, but with a deep source of worry and unease. I then acknowledge the fighter inside of myself, the one who has struggled, and faced challenges. My energy builds and then I make a third pass using the same movement vocabulary, but this time jumping and barreling through space quickly, powerfully and purposefully. I do not acknowledge the audience and retreated inside of myself. This was a moment of personal protest, as both a ballerina and a woman, because I was told my entire dance career that I am too heavy footed and should be more quiet and gentle. In addition, women are often told to be quieter and less assertive. In this case, I took every opportunity I could to be forceful, loud, and noticed.

The piece ends with a series of gestures – some suggesting a relationship with the outside world and some recognizing deeply internal struggle. These gestures build up in energy, speed, and intensity. For a moment, I also close my eyes as a genuine moment of reflection and

realization. The piece ends with these gestures resolving – the same gestures are gentler and more confident. The frustration disappears and I become at one with my movement. This was a journey, oscillating between chaos and order, eventually resolving and accepting my own personal reality.

Ultimately, this piece explores a woman who touches, cares for others, and exposes. But also shows a woman who wrestles, who struggles, and who fights. It feels unquestionably true to who I am and how I exist in my body.

Therefore, this provided the inspiration for the title, *The Space Between*. I realized that while I subscribe to different labels and do identify as Jewish, Japanese, and a woman, it is the intangible collection of these, coupled with my human relationships and values that make me who I am. I discovered that it is the unique space I occupy, the space between everything that constitutes, shapes, and informs me that creates my identity.

C. *To Be Seen: I. each.*

The first section of the group piece, *To Be Seen*, was *I. each.*, a series of five solos, each introducing the dancers' individual identities.⁴⁰ These solos were created primarily by the dancers with my compositional and dynamical suggestions guiding them throughout the process. Most of the creation of these solos occurred during the first semester when I led them through a series of exercises that encouraged them to involve emotions, actions, and images surrounding their identities to create movement phrases. As mentioned in Section IV. A. *Phase 1: Fall Semester*, many of the prompts I gave them.

Another part of this solo creation process that I sought to massage and draw out was the idea of “natural movement.” I asked the dancers to incorporate everyday movement and mannerisms

⁴⁰ This section focuses on the process of creating the solos. A deeper perspective from the dancers' point of view on creating their solos is included in *Section IV. H. Cast Narratives*.

into their “dance” movement. For a week, I asked the dancers to become acutely aware of their quirks and mannerisms and remember what physical tendencies they have. I asked them to blend these everyday movements into their solos, thus exploring the fine line between authentic dance movement and authentic everyday movement. In watching how the dancers incorporated their pedestrian movements into their solos, it did illuminate how fundamental and natural movement, in general, is to our lives. Whether we are dancing intentionally or naturally carrying out our lives, our movements are powerful indicators of who we are.

Another idea we worked with in the creation of the solos was movement affinities. While spending substantial time and energy moving together in the studio, we collectively identified what movements each dancer tends to favor and which ones they tend to avoid. Subsequently, as I guided them through the process of creating their solos, I asked them to both lean into and embrace their movement affinities and fully dance how they feel “the most themselves.” We observed one another and wrote down some general ideas about how we tend to move (see Appendix J: Rehearsal Snapshots, Figure: 2). However, I also intentionally asked them to incorporate movement that in contrast to their movement affinities. I framed this as a moment of resistance and protest, analogous to how society impedes our ability to truly be who we are. As I asked them to fight against their movement affinities, I challenged them to think about how they, as humans moving through the world, are often forced to abandon, diminish, or minimize their identities in their lives.

As we moved into the spring semester, my goal was to create more clarity in the dancers’ voices in their solos. Every couple of rehearsals, I gave them a prompt or an idea to continue the solo creation process. It was up to them to work on this on their own time outside of rehearsal or in down time in rehearsal. Even with my suggestions and prompts, I did not want to fully dictate

their creative processes. Rather, I suggested they use my prompts as a road map or a framework to develop their solos. Since it was a solo piece about their individual identities, I wanted to give them as much control and autonomy as possible. Some ideas I provided to refine and deepen their solos were: integrate points of contrast within their movements, incorporate stillness, indulge more in a particularly satisfying movement, create a moment of personal rhythm, and find a personal protest or resistance within their solo material. This helped to find more nuance in their work, frame images, and provide more tools to find meaning of who they are, at their core.

Observation was another key point of *I. each*. Since the beginning of the process, whenever the dancers would show their solos, we would all stand in a semi-circle surrounding the person moving. Each dancer would enter walk into the center, perform their movement, and then return to the semi-circle. The observers would hold space and bear witness to the mover. This was the conception of the theme of observation that manifested throughout the entirety of *To Be Seen*. When the dancers exited, I emphasized that they were holding space for the soloist and their presence was important, which served to also create empathy on stage. To further supplement this idea of bearing witness to one another's identities, I wanted my first soloist, Ben, to stand downstage,⁴¹ stage left⁴² for the rest of the four solos to further hold the space. His back facing the audience placed him in the same orientation as an audience member. As a result, he acted as a middle point of observation between the audience as observers and the other performers on stage as observers. These different layers of observation were allegorical to the different ways, we as humans and our identities, are observed and seen in society.

⁴¹ Downstage is a theater term referring to the front of the stage, closest to the audience.

⁴² Stage left refers to the side of the stage, from the perspective of the performer facing the audience.

In terms of the overall composition, a challenge was how to “tie” these solos together. I wanted each solo to exist as an autonomous unit, but I also needed to find a meaningful way to connect and cleverly transition between solos. I carefully watched each solo and found logical and effective ways for each dancer to enter – whether this was walking in a pathway around the current soloist, catching and following a movement, etc. This also served to foreshadow the relationships that were about to form on stage through contact and partnering.

D. To Be Seen: II. to.

One of the most fascinating, rich questions in this exploration of movement and identity was, “How do different identities relate *to* one another?” In other words, what are the different relationships between identities? In the beginning of this process, the words “entangled” and “intertwined” came into my head. I became interested in how when these different individual identities relate *to* one another, the different dynamics of love, conflict, or somewhere in between clearly manifest.

I fully recognize there are billions of ways relationships can manifest, countless ways we can treat one another, and the complexity of human interaction is never complete. However, for purposes of this thesis, I chose to focus on two extremes: how we *affirm* each other’s’ identities and how we *undermine* each other’s’ identities.

This exploration began in the first semester when I asked the dancers to write a list of words relating to how we can affirm and how we can undermine (See Appendix J, Figure: 2). I placed them in duets or trios and then asked them to come up with short movement moments based on the actions of these words. For example, within the theme of affirming, some examples were “reassure,” “acknowledge,” or “follow.” And within the theme of undermining, some examples

were “ignore,” “interrupt,” or “judge.” I quickly began to realize that each one of these ideas were rich and could yield clear movement that demonstrated acts of affirming or undermining.

II. to. was a series of four duets – an “affirming” duet followed by two “undermining” duets and closing with an “affirming” trio. Because each action involved in how we can undermine or affirm each other’s identities is charged and layered, we decided that the words for the “affirming” phrases would be “follow,” “support,” “reinforce,” and “appreciate” and for the “undermining” phrases would be “attack,” “dismiss,” and “interrupt.” The movement vocabulary was heavily driven by contact, touch, and partnering. Once again, the dancers created a framework of movement based on the words and I clarified and coached movement intentions and ideas helping to connect these different partnering moments. The movement did come from their bodies, which furthered the authenticity and the honest way they interacted with one another.

The first duet with Sara and Hannah expressed a great tenderness, gentility, and care when handling, touching, and supporting one another. This duet was also significant because it was the first time in the piece that physical contact between dancers was made. As Hannah finishes her solo from *I. each.*, Sara starts to come more into the space and more closely observe Hannah. Hannah’s head slips through her hands multiple times until finally, Sara catches her. This theme of support remains throughout their duet and significant moments of touch between the different surfaces of the hand remain. In their caring interaction, it allowed us to see how humans can build up each other’s identities by making them feel comfortable, loved, and supported.

Introducing touch in a gentle way was necessary to the piece. In an experiment where the first instance of touch was an “undermining” duet, it felt too sudden and jarring. I would reverse these two sentences. Hannah and Sara’s duet, was quickly contrasted with two “undermining”

duets – Alfredo-Ruchi and Sara-Ben. Whereas the “affirming” exchanges represent the beauty in which humans can empower and give agency to one another, these two “undermining” duets represented the ways that humans can ignore, interrupt, and judge one another’s identities. This was a moment where I asked them to think about how they might have been marginalized by members of society in the past. As a result, I pushed them to handle each other with a certain, intended roughness. We worked on accessing those emotions of being undermined and the struggle and frustration encompassed in this complex dynamic.

To close this section, Hannah, Ruchi, and Alfredo moved through another “affirming” relationship. Holding and supporting one another’s heads, limbs, and torsos was constant throughout. I constantly worked with them to acknowledge one another and see one another. Each individual gave to one another, once again contrasting the harshness and pain of the previous “undermining” duets to represent the power and necessity of supportive, identity-affirming relationships. I intentionally chose to include two affirming duets and two undermining duets to ensure compositional balance.

E. To Be Seen: III. other.

A theme that emerged after the CultureSHOCK performance was this idea of collective identity vs. individual identity. I began working with these different group dynamics that were briefly presented, in the five-minute version of the piece for CultureSHOCK. Similarly to *II. each.*, I realized that I could expand upon this idea and create an entire section exploring this theme.

Consistent with the rest of my process, I worked collaboratively with the dancers, but this time I was much more directive and involved in the actual construction. I fostered a format where each person would have their own phrase of movement. Once again, I wanted their phrase

to be authentic and feel true to their own bodies. As a result, I gave them three movement identities and we spent an entire rehearsal improvising with these ideas (see Appendix J, Figure 3). These prompts were points of tension and release within the body, exposing different surfaces of the body to different points in space, and working on internalizing the focus as well as externalizing it its maximum degree. From these prompts and the structured improvisation, I asked the dancers to each set a small amount of phrase work to act as a foundation for the exploration in this section. As I crafted this section, I intentionally looked for points of connectivity and dissonance across the different groupings of movers.

I placed the dancers into four different groups, two sets of four dancers versus one dancer (4 v. 1) and two sets of three dancers versus two dancers (3 v. 2). For the first of 4 v. 1 phrases, I used the solo dancer's movement as an inspiration for how I instructed the group. I was looking for moments where the movements could complement one another and movements that dynamically contrasted one another. For the 3 v. 2 phrases, I asked the dancers to each combine their individual phrases in whatever way they chose. After I had these two groups of movements, I engaged in a similar process as the 4 v. 1 phrases where I connected the two sets of movements, thinking about both connection and contrast.

However, I ran into an issue while creating this section. Due to the rich, dynamic, and layered movement, the theme of the different groupings and collective identities against one another was not clear. Implementing the suggestions of dance faculty member, Gregory Catellier, I incorporated a dumbshow⁴³ where I introduced the audience to the four different groupings that would occur throughout the section (4 v. 1, 4 v. 1, 3 v. 2, and 3 v. 2) by having them move into their different groupings and acknowledge one another within their groups and

⁴³ This theater term refers to a technique especially used in 16th and 17th century English drama to introduce and summarize the play through gesture and mime.

the other group/individual. This was also a moment for the dancers to pause and acknowledge one another in a pedestrian way – this established the theme of “other.” This simple, direct moment of walking and pausing, observed in silence established the theme and opened space for reflection. While I did not instruct the dancers to impose judgement on one another, naturally some moments created more tension, most notably the moment where the group of women looked at the group of men.

For the first 4 v. 1 phrase (see Appendix G, Figure 1), I closely wove the group’s movement into Alfredo’s solo movement. When he jolted suddenly, so did the group. When he moved from confined, gestural movement to open, expansive movement, I guided the group to also expand, billow, and become more physical in their movements. As he resolved and became still, the group found their own stillness. For both 4 v.1 phrases, I also introduced the idea of co-dependency by having all the movement exist in contact with another mover. Touch was intentionally present and the dancers supported one another. This fostered the idea of the group sharing a collective identity against Alfredo’s individual identity.

For the second 4 v. 1 phrase (see Appendix G, Figure 2), I engaged in a similar process. We collectively observed Ruchi’s solo phrase as having arcing, rising, flicking, and rolling movements. In addition, Ruchi’s individual movement had several jolts and sharp movements and I used these as clear signals for the dancers in the group to also engage in staccato, pronounced movements. When Ruchi carried out more sequential, fluid movements, I choreographed the group to move in an arcing pattern as a group. To contrast Ruchi’s slow crawling movement, the group moved sharply and directly. Finally, as Ruchi bent backwards, the group complemented this by supporting Ben as they⁴⁴ also bent backwards.

⁴⁴ Ben uses they, them, and theirs as pronouns.

For the 3 v. 2 phrases (see Appendix G, Figures 3 and 4), I explored the idea of call and response. One group's movement would impact the resulting "answer" of the other group's movements. Sometimes I chose to have stillness in one grouping to highlight what the other group was doing. Sometimes I strove to have absolute chaos.

The first 3 v. 2 group (see Appendix G, Figure 3), which was a moment that framed the gender of two groups separated in space, was the clearest moment of otherness – a somewhat antiquated, but present societal norm – men versus women. The spatial separation seemed to represent the struggle against two groups. However, internally the dancers said it highlighted struggle and power that existed within a strong group of women and a strong pair of men. I focused on highlighting the complexity of these individual dynamics and within the strength of these internal groups rendered tension in the groups' relationship.

For the second 3 v. 2 grouping and the final part of this section (see Appendix G, Figure 4), the three movers reacted in a minimalist way to the pair of movers, Hannah and Ben. As they exited from their duet, the two walked and weaved through the other three movers, supporting and holding one another. The "other" dynamic in this grouping raised questions about how to have a collective identity with the inevitable interruptions, interactions, and presences of other collective identities. The general theme of *III. other.*, fully driven home by this last grouping, explored the tension, difficulty, and potential within a society filled with multiple, vibrant communities. As we all belong to strong, distinctive communities, this section questioned our interactions and our capacity to relate to one other.

F. To Be Seen: IV. one.

The final section of *To Be Seen* explored the idea of group identity. As a result, I created a "oneness" using unison group work for the first time in the piece. As the dancers exited *III.*

other., they held one another in different structures as they walked around. Eventually they separated and came together as a collective unit.

This was the section where I created and taught the phrase material entirely and did not invite any input. I spent time meticulously ensuring that all the dancers approached and carried out the movement in a uniform way. However, I still wanted to ensure that this section was about them. Yes, it was no longer individual identities and the subsequent relationships between these identities. Rather, it was about the one, group identity, whatever unique and novel identity that is.

For a while, I struggled with how to do this authentically. What I eventually arrived at is yes, I would solely create the phrase material that the dancers would perform in unison. However, the inspiration for the phrase material would still come from the dancers; it would still be core to them and their identities. I decided to use written words they used to describe their identities to create the movement. During the first semester of the process, I asked the dancers to write about their respective identities. I gave them the following prompt:

*“During our last rehearsal, we discussed identity and we are shifting our lens based on your powerful testimony. Identity isn't necessarily always **what** you are, but **who** you are, as Alfredo astutely said. So, I am going to ask the identity question again - what do you feel are your most salient identities? These can be what you wrote on the paper (race, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.), but it can also basically anything else. What has shaped you? What experiences have you had? Is it where you're from? Is it your passions? Your dreams? Your relationships? If you had to tell someone who you were, what would you say? Anything you want to share is helpful and valuable for me. Please write some thoughts, either in bullet or paragraph form and send them back to me.”*

The responses were deeply personal, moving, and informed my lens through this whole process. Their vulnerability inspired my solo process, as well as informed me about the type of people they are. Every word of every response was important and meaningful; the emotion and depth in each written response could potentially provide enough inspiration for thirty minutes

worth of phrase material. Subsequently, I chose one short phrase from each person's response and used their words to create two long movement phrases that ultimately became the movement for *IV. one*. This embodied the identity that while this community had a group identity, they could respect and value the individual identities within this community. These are anonymously the phrases I used from each dancer are:

"I'd like to think that the definition of my identity is more internal, than external. I live life by my values, a couple of which are genuineness and passion. I'm driven more by my heart than my mind..."

"I am giver. Even a pacifist."

"The unconscious behavior that leaves questions running through the mind..."

"People don't know about my passions and I don't expect them to. Even now, I don't know all of them. I'm still discovering them..."

"Prefers organization but can get a bit disorganized at times..."

Much of *IV. one* was performed in unison. To resolve this section and the piece in general, the dancers had another moment of realization and acknowledgement towards one another. As they ended the piece with their backs facing the audience, they did gestures that were shadows of the material they created for their solo phrases in *I. each*. Their backs faced the audience to create distance, coupled with the vulnerability of deeply personal gestures. In this way, they shared a group identity, but remained as individuals.

G. Elements of Design

A guiding principle in the design elements and overall philosophy of this whole project, solo and group piece, was letting movement and the bodies speak authentically for themselves. As a result, I strove to make every aspect of the production effective and specific. This fueled my choice to not have any text, spoken word, or other externalities to communicate and express

dancers' identity. In addition, I knew that the music, costuming, and other design elements should be personalized and specifically designed to highlight identity.

Selecting the music for *To Be Seen* proved challenging because of the multiple sections and the need to provide background, but not overpower nor dictate the emotion or feeling of the piece. As a result, my thesis advisor, Anna, suggested that I commission an original score. I connected with Tom Zhang in Professor John Lennon's composition class and he readily and eagerly agreed to the daunting task of creating twenty-five minutes of original music for a four-part, modern dance piece. Parallel to the process of creating the piece, Tom and I worked collaboratively. After attending and observing a few of my rehearsals, Tom began drafting the score. He would create music, send it to me, I would give him feedback, he would revise, and the process would continue. Of the four pieces of music he made for each section, every piece went through 3-5 drafts before they reached their final forms.

Originally, I asked him for mostly ambient, neutral music for the entirety of the piece. However, upon seeing the piece with just this type of music, the piece started to take on an overly emotional, gloomy, and melancholy tone. Very close to the performance, I was forced to ask for entirely new pieces of music for *III. other.* and *IV. one.* These sections called for more energetic, tonal, and beat-driven movement. Tom, being the generous and talented composer that he was, always agreed and worked tirelessly to ensure the music fit my expectations and complemented the intention of the piece.

The first piece of music for *I. each.* combined ambient sounds that Tom recorded himself during a family trip to Japan (a subtle connection to the Japanese identity I explored in my solo), in addition to light, open piano music. The recorded sounds were from the Noboribetsu hot spring, the Fuji Mountain Trail, frogs, and boats. This created a soft, gentle environment for the

piece to begin and for the dancers to introduce their identities. The music for *II. to.* used soothing and rich synthesizer sounds, which was the ideal backdrop to introduce touch for the first time. It also served as a complement to the affirming phrases and as powerful contrast against the undermining phrases. A distinct tone shift occurred in *III. other.* and *IV. one.* where the music gained more energy, tone, and beat. The music for *III. other.* used the Wobble synthesizer and recorded audio of wind and thunderstorm sounds in Florida. The music for *IV. one.* used a Hybrid synthesizer. This tone shift was a necessary transition that matched the intensity of the movement of these two sections. However, I strategically ensured silence in between the sections to cleanse and not overwhelm the audience.

Another key design element was the costuming. I commissioned Atlanta-area costume designer, Marian Austin, to both design and produce the costumes. She came to several rehearsals to observe the dancers, garner a feel for how they move, and understand the piece's movement themes. She then sketched ideas (See Appendix H) and we worked collaboratively to ensure each costume was designed specifically to flatter each dancers' bodies. In addition, I wanted the costumes to match the dancers' skin tones closely to present the dancers' bodies as clean, open canvases. All five dancers were extremely comfortable and proud of their costumes and all felt they could be comfortable being themselves while performing.

A significant design aspect of my costume for my solo was the silts in the front and the back of my jumpsuit. Parallel to a theme in my solo, the silts represented a dualism – representing both vulnerability and openness but also acting as a representation of pain, harm, and unwanted exposure.

The last design element was the lighting. While the technical direction and lighting design was left to the genius and expertise of Gregory Catellier, I did provide meaning and

context for each section to guide Greg's choices. In addition, I made it clear that I needed distinct lighting between sections to distinguish their differences and create clear punctuation.

H. Entering Performance

As we came closer and closer to the performance, I was left with many snippets of movement, but was unable to communicate what I was trying to say. My thesis advisor, Anna Leo, suggested at the end of rehearsals, I run a "program" where I strung together everything I had. This illuminated what needed to be developed or edited.

During the final meetings, I had with Emory Dance professors, Anna Leo and Gregory Catellier, they encouraged me to find more clarity. These meetings inspired me to add simple moments of silence to allow the audience to digest the content and see the dancers as people. For example, the piece opened with the dancers standing in a line, acknowledging the audience, then acknowledging one another before beginning the introductions of individual solo work. Furthermore, the addition of the "dumbshow" preview was another addition to ensure the audience could see the dancers as people and their subsequent others.

In addition, towards the end of the process, I asked a lot of the dancers to drive the meaning and themes home. We went through every section and either independently or collectively talked about what that movement "meant." We asked, "Why are you doing that movement?" "What does this movement mean to you?" "What feeling do you have by giving or receiving this such?" These are just a few examples of the questions I asked and we discussed. I also encouraged the dancers to journal independently about the movement they were doing and create an inner narrative. Even though every piece of movement involved the dancer's identity, own movement, or ideas in some way, I still wanted to them to take ownership of the piece. I wanted to feel like every movement they performed came from within, in some capacity.

As we entered performance mode, I continued to discover and communicate the intention of each section with more clarity. I sought to ensure my voice was consistent. I made sure I had a reason and an intention for every movement, every choice, every transition – nothing was thrown into the piece without substantial thought and reasoning.

Another crucial piece that came together was this idea of observation, which inspired the title, *To Be Seen*. Towards the end of the rehearsal process, I encouraged the dancers to consciously pay attention to their focus, always. Bearing witness to one another was an integral tool to tie the piece together and to make a statement about identity. We are always bearing witness to one another's lives. As the dancers started to settle into this idea and really "see" each other, both while they were dancing with one another or observing one another on the side, the piece gained clarity and community.

In terms of my solo, Emory Dance faculty, Lori Teague, encouraged me to clarify my movement efforts (*Section III. D. Laban and Jung's Movement Psychology*) to properly express my identity and experiences. Channeling Laban language, I focused on being freer, light, and indirect in the moments where I sought to express vulnerability, gentility, and care and more bound, strong, and direct in moments where I sought to communicate struggle, fighting, and pain. I also reconciled with the question of where my solo should fit into the entire project as the solo and group piece are two separate explorations.

I. Performance

The cast performed twice on March 23, 2017 and March 25, 2017 at 7:30 pm. Performance nights involved a structured warm-up that I led and moved through with the dancers, as well as opportunities for the dancers to connect with one another. I would ask them to touch, hold, support, and be with one another with minimal talking. Since *To Be Seen* was so focused around

partnering and contact work, it was necessary that the dancers found those connections with one another prior to entering the stage. In addition, I encouraged them to find a group ritual of breathing together before going on stage to ensure cohesiveness and establishment of community.

The dancers executed both performances brilliantly. All the wisdom, knowledge, and memory stored in their bodies over the past six months became apparent as they moved through the different sections. I noticed the authenticity and honesty of the different sections. As I watched the dancers, seeing them fully invest their entire hearts and spirits was a moving experience. Who they are, their boldness and strength, came across so clearly and even after a long rehearsal process, I could recognize the depth of their performance. Especially in the second and final performance, I saw five brilliant movers deeply committed to a community of movement.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Cast Narratives

Since my task with *To Be Seen* was to tell the stories of my five dancers' identities, it was crucial that I spoke to each of the dancers in depth about their experience and takeaways. I had a one-on-one interview with each dancer following the performance and realized many common themes about their experience with identity through the creation of this piece.

First off, all the dancers spoke about how this experience was deeply personal. Because of my collaborative process, all the dancers felt like they had unique ownership in this process. Hannah said, "It felt good to finally dance like me on stage." Alfredo echoed these sentiments when he told me that one of the first rehearsals, I mentioned to the dancers, "I want you to be you." He said this resonated with him and even choreographers with collaborative processes

always strip away the movement and with this process, even as I refined and honed material, Alfredo felt he was moving true to himself. Sara emphasized that this choreographic process made her feel like “we were doing it for ourselves and the community (of fellow dancers in this cast).”

Additionally, when asked about most significant moments, every single dancer spoke about a duet they shared with another dancer and how that experience brought them together. Ruchi pointed out that by the end of the process, she felt like she got to know everyone in the piece well, even though we, as a cast, never sat down to have a heart-to-heart with this purpose in mind. Rather, it was the day-to-day creating and moving with and against each other that fostered these relationships.

Both Sara and Hannah spoke about the significance of their duet in *II. to.* and how moving through those tender, sensitive moments “fostered closeness,” as Hannah said. Sara spoke about how she too felt closer to Hannah, “just from the act of doing it (the duet),” without having to speak. On another spectrum of duets, Ruchi and Alfredo both spoke about the impact of their duet in *II. to.* where they were both aggressive and antagonistic in their movements. While they both were challenged by this idea of moving with “destructiveness, abruptness, demeaning, and rough quality,” as Alfredo stated, they mentioned that they developed trust as I pushed them go further. Ruchi also mentioned developing these subconscious moments of trust. Ben also stated that the duets that involved contact and partnering had a profound impact on them. They became more comfortable dealing, moving, and trusting other bodies.

Each dancer discussed the unique experience of creating and performing their solos. Interestingly, while I guided them through the solo creation by providing prompts and ideas, each dancer had a completely distinct approach. Ruchi, Ben, and Hannah both discussed how

they were more impulse-driven – going with their guts to “be true to self” in terms of personal movement affinities. Then upon creating and carrying out the movement, they would reflect and understand more deeply about what was going on inside of them. Ben said they ⁴⁵ realized that their personal experiences are very present in his day-to-day movements, actions and body and upon reflection, “All of my movement made sense.” They (Ben) noticed a distinct spectrum of repetitive, retreating motion to more combative, aggressive movement, which they said was reflective of their larger life.

In contrast, Sara and Alfredo had more concrete ideas that informed their movement. Sara spoke about her time in college – feeling stuck and breaking through, motivating and pushing herself. Alfredo spoke about how he thought about what he was trying to convey about his identity and what he felt was important and in turn, expressed that. He said he saw his solo, “This is me as a person. My movement speaks for itself and by watching, you’ll know or have an idea about what I am trying to say.” Specifically, he mentioned how much of his floor work represented the difficult times in his life where he was encountering sadness. In addition, all the dancers spoke about how they would offer feedback and affirmation to one another throughout the process of solo creation. This occurred not because I told them they had to, but it was part of the natural relationship and community that developed in this process.

Many of the dancers spoke about the observation piece of this process and performance as significant. Ruchi mentioned how my encouragement for everyone to see each “really did it for me.” She said she felt vulnerable throughout and witnessing the movement of others revealed things about them and in turn, influenced how she moved with them. She mentioned how it allowed for her to be emotionally present and described a moment during the performance when

⁴⁵ Ben uses the pronouns, “they,” “their,” and “theirs,” not “he,” “his,” and “him.”

she and Alfredo finished their duet from *II to*. and as they exited they slowly sat down and looked at one another for an extended amount of time, simply because they wanted to – it was not forced or staged. Hannah felt like the gaze of her peers gave everyone “equal attention” and Sara said it felt “supportive.” While Ben said they were not as aware of the observation, the presence of observation forced him to go deeper inside of himself.

Overall, dancers raved about the personal illumination, freedom, vulnerability, and individuality this highly collaborative process offered them. In addition, they continually reiterated how much they learned about themselves and each other. As many of the dancers are seniors, they expressed how this was perfect closure to their time at Emory Dance and our alumnus expressed how refreshing it is to get to know other people beyond the monotony of a full-time job. A dancer told me with utmost sincerity, “I am really going to miss this.”

B. Audience Feedback

Following both the Thursday, March 23 and Friday, March 25 performances, I asked the audience to fill out a short survey based on what they saw and felt from watching the performance. The questions asked the audience members what was revealed about the dancers’ identities in the performance and if the audience felt emotions towards the dancers as people (see Appendix I for the exact survey questions). In total, from both nights, I received 81 responses. I fully recognize that my sample size of survey respondents is skewed because many of the people who attended either knew me, knew the dancers, and/or had a connection to the arts. However, I still recognize the power and honesty in their words.

For the first question, 88.9% of respondents agreed that the performance revealed something about the dancers’ identities (72 answered yes, 7 answered no, and 2 gave invalid/incomplete answers). For the second question, 85.2% of respondents agreed that viewing the performance

allowed them to feel the dancers as people (69 answered yes, 10 answered no, and 2 gave invalid/incomplete answers). A clear majority could realize something about the dancers' identities and view them as human beings through their performance.

However, even more relevant than the quantitative data, what struck me about the survey responses was some of the qualitative information respondents provided. For the first question, some audience members claimed to see distinct labels, such as in gender, race, religion, and ethnicity. A few surveys made remarks about the identities they saw in terms of those identities. However, most feedback connected with identity in terms of larger themes. Words that came up: "struggles," "fear," "aggression," "conflict," "tension," "power," "vulnerability," "compassion," "apprehension," "passion," and "connection." As a previous discussion parallels, respondents connected identity with relationships and noticed how the dancers' connections with one another impacted how the audience viewed the dancers' identities. For example, "They were lost on their own, but when they were seen by others, they became more confident," "Individuality within group mentality, how acceptance and belonging impacted/influenced them," "I saw relationships, othering, emotion in their attitude to each other," and "How each individual developed a sense of self by intensely feeding off the energy of each other." In addition, many saw the movement speaking for who the dancers are. For example, "Different movement vocabulary = different story," "Unique vocabulary for each individual, revisited as motif through four movements," "The style and flow of movement reflected truth about the dancer and how they interact with themselves and others," "Individual movement proclivities (power, subtlety), willingness to release weight, focus tendencies, comfort with stillness/isolation," and "The movement felt organic to each individual, and so revealing of their affinities." One survey's response summed it up beautifully, "They were all connected to the spaces and the others on the

stage and yet, I felt I understood their individual as well as collective hearts at a deeper level. I felt their struggles, their loneliness, their moments of connection.”

Also in terms of the first question, I received feedback that mentioned how my solo, *The Space Between*, revealed my identity. For example, many surveys mentioned that they saw my “struggles in life,” how I “experienced turbulence, which was resolved at the end,” and noticed “a sense of external control.” One survey’s words deeply moved me, “In the solo - her measured/calculated gestural motif and repetitive sense of mass and weight allowed me to feel this human's organized strength.”

For the second question, like the first, much of the qualitative writing illuminated powerful feedback about the audience members’ connection with seeing the dancers as people. Perhaps the most powerful takeaway from the answers to this question was that ten separate surveys (over 12% of the total surveys and 15% of the surveys that provided additional written feedback for this question) all said that viewing this piece allowed them to “feel empathy.” Several audience members also mentioned my solo specifically in responses to the second question and mentioned also having empathy for my individual struggle. I did not prompt the use of this word in any form, but I was beyond thrilled to see this strong pattern.

More themes developed for the qualitative aspect of the second question. Firstly, many pointed out how significant their facial expressions, breath, acknowledgement of the audience, and the eye contact contributed to seeing the dancers as people. This “sparked levels of curiosity/acceptance/unity.” Many could sense the “spectrum of support and struggle,” and reacted accordingly. Words that came up were “conflict,” “connection,” “pain,” “tension,” “reconciliation”, and “freedom.”

In addition, a clear driving force was seeing the dancers' relationships with one another. For example, "group dynamics – wanting to belong or being able to separate from others with each," "a greater sense of humanity; in-group/out-group bias," "some needed to be protected/comforted," and "Hannah and Sara grasping hands revealed a touching sense of connection and poignancy." Many sensed the strong sense of contrast between different partnering. However, at the same time, the individuals' movement seem to stand by themselves. Audience members described their movement as "sincere," "courageous," "bold," full of "emotion," revealing of their "personalities," and a feeling of "maintaining comfort in themselves."

The range of emotions and relationships, as someone referred to as "the ups and downs of relationships," rendered a wide variety of emotions and feelings from audience members. As one respondent eloquently and simply put it, "I saw pain, I felt empathy. I saw struggle, I felt solidarity."

I also had the opportunity to receive more in-depth written feedback from my peers in DANC 423R: Modern Dance IV. I asked them the same questions from my audience survey. I also asked for general observations, images that lingered, and their interpretations of relationships.

For my solo, *The Space Between*, my peers noticed how my gestural movement, specifically with my hands and angular movement with "sharp corners," "articulately defined vertices," and "clearly defined edges." This "architectural body" contrasted with a "struggle" (a word almost every person used) of how I encountered "resistance." One respondent expressed curiosity about what that struggle was. Many also brought up this idea of confinement. They

wrote I was “being fixed within” or that I “moved within the confines she drew herself, while trying to emerge past them.” They saw an “inner conflict” in a single body.

For the group work, *To Be Seen*, many mentioned how the beginning solos were the way the dancers “introduced themselves” and allowed the audience to see the dancers as individuals and their unique identities as movers. One respondent described it as “refreshingly natural.” However, most of the feedback I received was regarding their relationships to one another. They noticed the contrasts in relationships, “chaotic” versus “intimate,” “overtly conflicted” versus “mediators.” Many noted how the relationships were more cohesive and connected throughout the piece. They also noted the individual versus collective dynamic – “grappling with togetherness and how we co-exist.” Both statements confirmed what I was striving to capture. One identified this as, “The tension between being an individual and belonging to a group.” Many pointed out that it was the approach to relationships and specific movement dynamics of each relationship that illuminated identity. All could connect with the dancers as people and a couple responded that witnessing this also made them “feel empathy” towards the dancers.

Another theme I received was surrounding the idea of eye contact and observation. One respondent said the eye contact “created a strong sense of care and warmth” and another felt “the importance of witness in the formation of community.” Another interpretation was “the directed focus of the dancers shifted from skeptical to curious,” as she explained the evolution of how the dancers’ eye contact evolved.

Many mentioned the use of gesture stood out, whether it was “holding the face/chin/forehead,” “Alfredo rubbing his wrists,” or Sarah and Hannah’s gesture of overlapping hands, on top of one another, which occurred several times throughout the piece. One respondent said, “It brings up so much about how we choose to encounter people in the world.”

Another said that the gestures reminded her of a family tradition and the familiar sentiment could teach her something about the dancers as people.

C. Discussion

In short, I am thrilled that the feedback I received from my cast, from the audience, and from my fellow dance peers completely supported the meticulous intentionality, clear-stated concept of each section, and the overall purpose behind striving to create work like this.

In terms of the dancers' feedback, I am thrilled and touched that they took ownership of this process and that they felt that their movements belonged to them. The fact that they felt like themselves and expressed that multifaceted identity is exactly the intrinsic experience I was trying to create. My goal was to ensure that their identities were physically manifested. In addition, the fact they not only learned about themselves, but about one another and that they created a community could not be a more telling outcome about the power of movement. They formed these connections with themselves and one another because of their experience in creating and performing movement. While the external validation from audience members is certainly appreciated, and affirming, knowing that I accomplished my goal of understanding, community, and expression from within the process is rewarding.

In terms of feedback from the audience and my peers, their observations fed into my intended goal. I do recognize that this is a skewed sample size since people in the audience knew myself or dancers, but I was still impressed with the detail and clarity of their responses. People resonated with the idea of bearing witness and observing one another, which was a simple, yet effective tool I employed throughout to establish relationship and humanity. The audience could connect with the different relationships between identities, in their conflict or struggle or in their support and care, while simultaneously seeing the dancers' individuality. Simple hand gestures

that spoke volumes were about how people related to one another. Much of the more detailed feedback I received demonstrated that the nuance behind each of the four sections of *To Be Seen* resonated and was communicated clearly.

With an overwhelming majority of audience members seeing the dancers' identities and seeing them as people, my question was answered – yes, we can learn and engage with identity through the abstract means of the human body. However, to further this, in answer to the question about seeing the dancers as people, over ten people (including the feedback I received from my Modern IV) peers said that they felt empathy watching this performance. I did not prompt the use of this word, but this was genuinely the experience that people reported. Empathy is deeper than compassion or understanding; it is about putting oneself in the mind, body, and spirit of another to not just understand, but experience. Empathy is challenging to achieve, but I am thrilled so many claimed to feel this deep emotion. This inspires great hope because empathy allows us to handle one another with kindness and respect, to understand a different perspective, and to live with a deep consideration for others' truest expression of self.

In terms of my solo, once again, people's observations reflected my intentions in terms of communicating struggle or a journey using an architectural framework, both in terms of structure and movement choices. Once again, the audience noticed my use of different gestures toward myself and on my body, especially in my hands and how I used building intensity and focus to communicate different facets of my identity.

The topic of movement and identity is so complex that I have not even scratched the surface with this project. I encourage the continuation of dance making surrounding human identity and subsequently, the understanding it can bring. In addition, a valuable point of further study would be to bring this piece to a different audience, outside of Emory, and outside of a group of people

who primarily know me. An area of further study or dance research would be to use movement experiences, or witnessing performances as innovative tools in seeking peace, intercultural understanding, and consensus. I encourage all artists not just to make art, but to bring this art to those who have not been touched. I encourage us all to consider art and dance as not just luxuries of civilization, but as practical tools to enact tangible, societal change.

VI. CONCLUSION

This project yielded so much fulfillment, richness, and meaning surrounding the complex, timely topic of identity. To answer my research question, based on the process of working on this piece, my experience of creating a solo about my personal identity, and synthesizing feedback from the dancers and audience members, I say with complete certainty that the movement and the body can be a powerful means to express, communicate, and understand identity.

Identity is not about labels. A conception about identity that was almost immediately broken down is that identity is merely a summation of different labels. Yes, this is part of it, but it is also a summation of our experiences, values, histories, relationships, aspirations, and outside experiences that constitute the expression of who we are. How we occupy that space between these different intersections of personhood, the space that only we as our own unique individual can occupy, is what makes our identities. This is who we are.

The fundamental nature of movement allows us all to connect. Identity is complex, but words are not the only way to engage with identity. The body and movement, as fundamental entities of existing, are shared by every human being. As a result, we can rely on the physical nature of life to communicate and express who we are. While movement is not always as tangible as words, movement can stir deep emotions, thoughts, and feelings at the core of our

beings. Even if movement does not act as the sole communicator, it forces us to think deeper and think differently.

How we bear witness impacts who we are. Our relationships are an integral part of who we are. How we see each other, how we relate to one another, how we bear witness to each other's lives are powerful forces to empower, enliven, and uplift one another. The converse is true and our challenge is to leverage connection for goodness.

Movement has transformative power. Movement can create and affirm identity. Movement can foster understanding. Movement can communicate the most difficult, unapproachable topics. Movement reminds us of our own personhood. Movement fosters life-changing experiences. Movement can breed empathy. In recognizing and believing in the power of dance, beyond the stage and studio, we are charged with leveraging this power to ensuring that our human experience can be good.

Appendix A: Thesis Concerts Promotional Flyer

The Emory Dance Program Presents
HONORS THESIS CONCERTS
 March 23-25, 2017

Dance Studio, Schwartz Center for Performing Arts

PROGRAM A March 23 & 25, 7:30pm

Clara Guyton

an investigation of the boundaries between dance and poetry

Julianna Joss

analyzing the body's means for communication & identity expression

PROGRAM B March 24, 7:30pm & March 25, 2:00pm

Rosie Ditre

translating a modern dance work
 from the stage to the screen

Cherry Fung

an exploration of personal
 identity in the context
 of a divided political
 relationship

Eliza Krakower

an exploration of the
 intersections of musical
 theater, jazz, and
 modern dance



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www.dance.emory.edu



EMORY
 arts

no admission charge and no tickets required

Appendix B: CultureSHOCK Publicity



NOV 11 | 6PM | WHSCAB

CultureSHOCK

8000 STORIES, 1 EMORY

FOOD | PERFORMANCES | ART | MUSIC

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: CLAIRE STERK

John Mizuki	ACES	Suri
Dark Arts	Julianna Joss	Dooley Noted
Mulan Dance	Zeebah	Aural Pleasure
Talia Green	Rocco English	AHANA
Ngambika	Shea Fallick	Dennis Kamara

RSVP on Facebook

This, along with the accompanying image, was posted on the Emory College Council's Facebook page:

SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT: Come to CultureSHOCK on Nov. 11 at 6pm in WHSCAB auditorium

to see Julianna Joss and the dancers in her piece: Ruchi Ahuja, Alfredo Takori, Hannah Gold, Ben Stevenson, and Sara Pengelley!

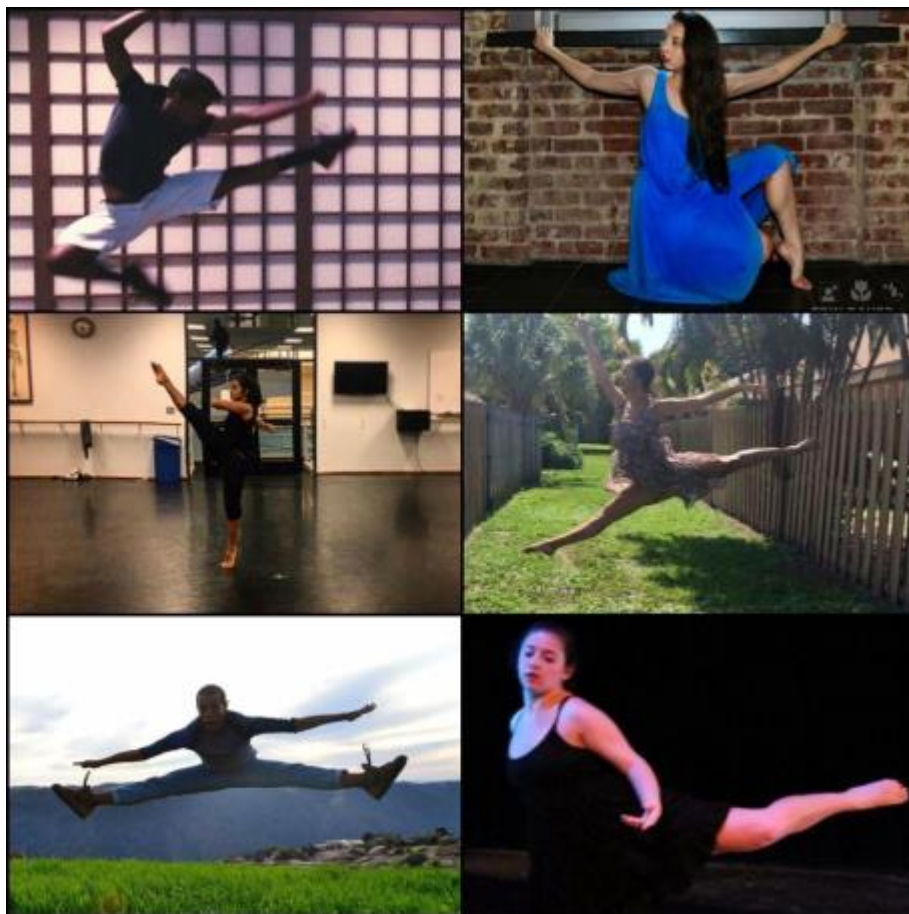
RSVP here:

<https://m.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1117690421649631&tsid=0.04131242912262678&source=typeahead>

Julianna Joss is a senior in Emory College working on her honors thesis in the Emory Dance department. In addition to Emory Dance/ Emory Dance Company, she is extremely involved in efforts of social justice and community building on Emory's campus and the greater Atlanta area, as well as the Student Government Association.

The piece, *A Movement Meditation on Identity*, is an excerpt from her thesis, which explores movement as a means of expressing and communicating identity.

"The piece you will see is a deeply personal collaboration with the dancers, where we used a variety of exercises and tools to generate original movement centered around the dancers' identities. I am ecstatic to bring to the student body what I hope is an example of how the vessel of the moving body can communicate and provoke thought regarding complex topics, such as identity."



Appendix C: CultureSHOCK Photographs









Appendix D: Concert Program

The Moving Identity: Explorations in the Body's Capacity for Communication, Expression, and Understanding

Choreographer: Julianna Joss (and dancers for *To Be Seen*)

Costume Design and Production: Marian Austin

The Space Between

Performer: Julianna Joss

Music: "Enginn Vildi Hlusta Á Fiðlunginn", "Því Strengir Hans Vóru Slitnir (Getiði Ekki Verið Góð Við Mómmu Okkar)" by Múm

To Be Seen

- I. each.
- II. to.
- III. other.
- IV. one.

Performers: Ruchi Ahuja, Hannah Gold, Sara Pengelley, Ben Stevenson, Alfredo Takori

Sound Design and Original Score: Tom Zhang

Lighting Design: Gregory Catellier

Emory Production Staff

Technical Director: Gregory Catellier

Light and Sound Technician: Luke Reid-Grassia

Stagehand: Sharon Carelock

Costume Coordinator: Cynthia Church

Dance Program Interim Director: Sally Radell

Dance Program Coordinator: Anne Walker

Music Coordinator: Kendall Simpson

Promotional Assistance: Nick Surbey and Emma Yarborough

House Management: Nina Vestal

Videographer: Hal Jacobs



Emory Dance Program
dance@emory.edu
www.dance.emory.edu

Appendix E: Project Budget

Due to an extraordinary year of five thesis candidates in the Dance and Movement Studies Department, the Emory Dance Program provided the in-kind, financial support for the following items:

- Technical Needs – Stage Manager, Light Board Operator, and Technical Director salaries, Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts Dance Studio space and lighting
- Promotion and printing for flyers and programs
- Videographer, Hal Rodgers

Due to their respective student statuses, four of my five dancers received course credit in compensation for their time and performance. My composer of the original soundscape, Tom Zhang, also received course credit for his composition work.

Expenses:

Costumes

Original Design and Production for 6 costumes: \$550

Because I wanted to create costumes that were individualized to each dancer, flattering of the different body types, and close to their skin tones, I commissioned Atlanta costume designer, Marian Austin for the costuming needs of my project. The cost of this included fabric, design, and labor for six costumes.

Photography

Photography and digital access to photo files for 1 rehearsal: \$150

Erin Baker, a friend and gifted dance photographer based in Atlanta, agreed to take photographs during cue setting to ensure I have access to proper documentation of my work.

Artist Fees

1 alumni stipend: \$325

Because Alfredo Takori is an alumnus and cannot receive course credit on compensation, we agreed upon \$300

Total Expenses: \$1,025

Income:

Emory Scholars Program: \$1,025

Due to the surplus funds from my Robert W. Woodruff Scholarship each semester, I used these to fund the additional expenses of my project

Appendix F: Emory Dance Blog Post

3/27/2017

Emory Dance


[More](#) [Next Blog»](#)
julianna.joss@gmail.com [Dashboard](#) [Sign Out](#)


Wednesday, March 22, 2017

The Emory Dance Program Presents: Honors Thesis Concerts

This weekend (March 23rd-March 25th) the Emory Dance Program will present honors theses by seniors, Rosie Ditre, Cherry Fung, Clara Guyton, Julianna Joss, and Eliza Krakower! These projects include the explorations of dance on screen, political relationships, poetry, identity expression, and the intersections of dance genres.

Check out one of our featured theses choreographers, Julianna Joss, as she shares insight on her concept and process!

**The Moving Identity:
Explorations in the
Body's Capacity for
Communication,
Expression, and
Understanding**

By: Julianna Joss



Photography by: Erin Baker

"It's not what I am, it's who I am." Back in September 2016, during the first official rehearsal of this thesis concert process, I asked my dancers to talk about their identities. One of my dancers, Alfredo, responded with these simple, yet powerful words.

The process of creating dance about identity began as a daunting and overwhelming task. Who am I, as a privileged, white-passing woman, to create art about one of the most complex, controversial topics of the human experience? How could I do this topic any justice? With so many people creating about this topic right now, how could I possibly add anything original or meaningful?

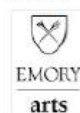
But with this one sentence about the *who* rather than the *what*, I let go. This process would be about my

<http://emorydance.blogspot.com/>

Emory Dance Program's Fan Box

[Emory Dance Program on Facebook](#)

About Me



Emory Dance Program

Atlanta, Georgia

The Emory Dance Program provides a range of opportunities for students to experience dance, from performance and production to technique and theory. The mission of the Emory Dance Program is to provide a curriculum that interweaves both the practical and theoretical to foster students' creative, intellectual, and communicative powers in the field of dance.

Offering a bachelor of arts degree, the program develops skilled and uniquely expressive individuals who move and act with intelligence and sensitivity, think independently, and value original thought and diversity. Please explore our web site (www.dance.emory.edu) for complete information about Dance at Emory, including academics and admissions, faculty, and events. (header graphic designed by Kathy Garrou; images by Mark Teague)

[View my complete profile](#)

Blog Archive

▼ 2017 (2)

▼ March (2)

[The Emory Dance Program Presents: Honors Thesis Co...](#)

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► 2016 (6)

► 2015 (9)

► 2014 (11)

► 2013 (9)

► 2012 (6)

► 2011 (3)

► 2010 (36)

► 2009 (20)

Followers

3/27/2017

Emory Dance



Photography by: Jake Rosmarin

dancers' stories and my story. This discussion about identity would not about categorizing, labeling, and drawing lines in the sand. Rather, it is deeply personal and unique to each individual, the culmination of experiences,

relationships, histories, and values, and I would find my humble voice in this conversation by honoring that and simply that. I conducted my research on movement and identity in two separate branches: a four-part group piece exploring individual identity, relationships between identities, and group identity, in addition to a solo I created based on my personal identity.

The process of working with my five wildly talented, bold, and intelligent dancers, Ruchi, Hannah, Sara, Ben, and Alfredo, was highly collaborative. While this may be "my" thesis, I firmly believe that the group piece, *To Be Seen*, belongs to all of us



Photography by: Jake Rosmarin

equitably. My method is I would give my dancers a prompt or an idea to work with and they would create movement, by themselves, in duets, or in larger groups. "Create four movements that suggest 'affirmation,' such as 'following' or 'noticing' actions." "Find a moment of protest within your solo movement." Then I would massage and finesse the material usually by asking dancers to indulge or expand upon certain ideas or clarify intentions. Organically, our process yielded dozens of snippets of movement moments and it was my job to look at this material and find the connections, themes, and patterns. And the mystery of the creative process somehow revealed itself. In the final weeks of my rehearsal process, I started to understand how I could tell this story – the story of five humans in four, interconnected parts.



Photography by: Erin Baker

The most challenging part of my thesis process was creating my solo, *The Space Between*. Ironically, in dealing with the complexity of myself, the best tactic was simplicity. I used all my choreographic tools, clearly, but directly – proximity,

repetition, focus, gesture, dynamic, and use of space. However, within this functional framework, I have found the emotion, feeling, and uniquely personal nature of self. I discovered a woman who exposes, who reveals,

Followers (11)



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Emory Dance

who touches, but also a woman who wrestles, who fights, and who struggles.

The words that come to mind as I close my reflection on movement and identity are *witness* and *nuance*.

Witness. We are who we are because of how we relate to one other; how we see one another and bear witness to each other's lives.

Nuance. We are complex, the space we individually occupy between all our identities is what makes us, uniquely us.



Photography by: Jake Rosmarin

Posted by Emory Dance Program at 1:16 PM No comments: [Links to this post](#) 

 Recommend this on Google

Appendix G: Performance Photographs

All photography by Erin Baker

The Space Between





To Be Seen: I. each.



To Be Seen: II. to.





To Be Seen: III. other



Figure 1: First 4 v. 1



Figure 2: Second 4 v. 1



Figure 3: First 3 v. 2



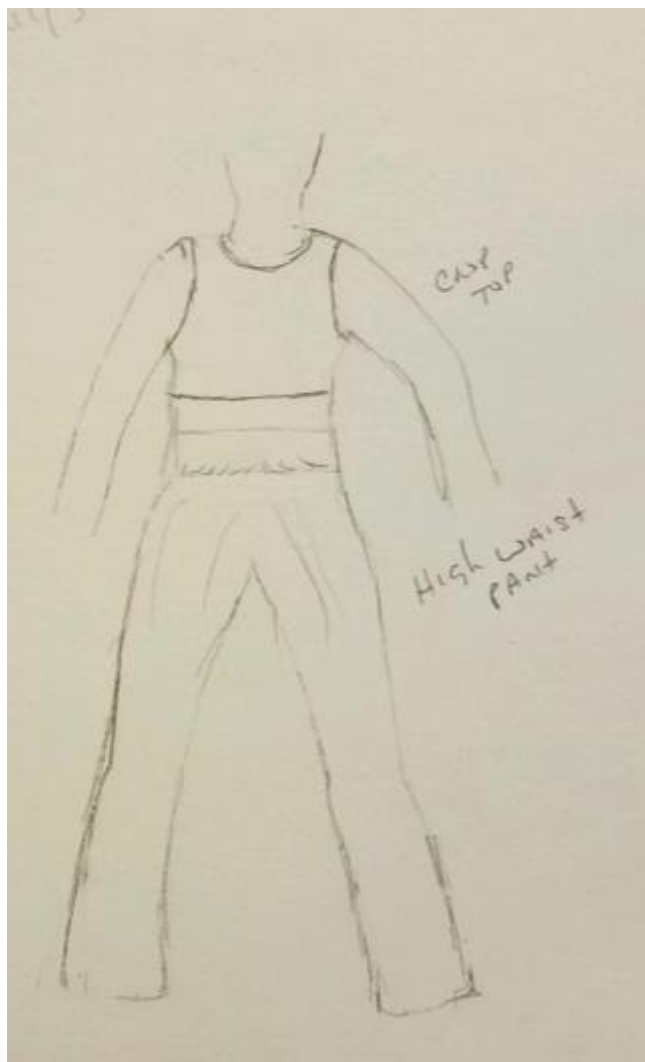
Figure 4: Second 3 v. 2

IV. one.



Appendix H: Costume Sketches

Sketches and Design by Marian Austin, in collaboration with Julianna Joss



Alfredo



Ruchi



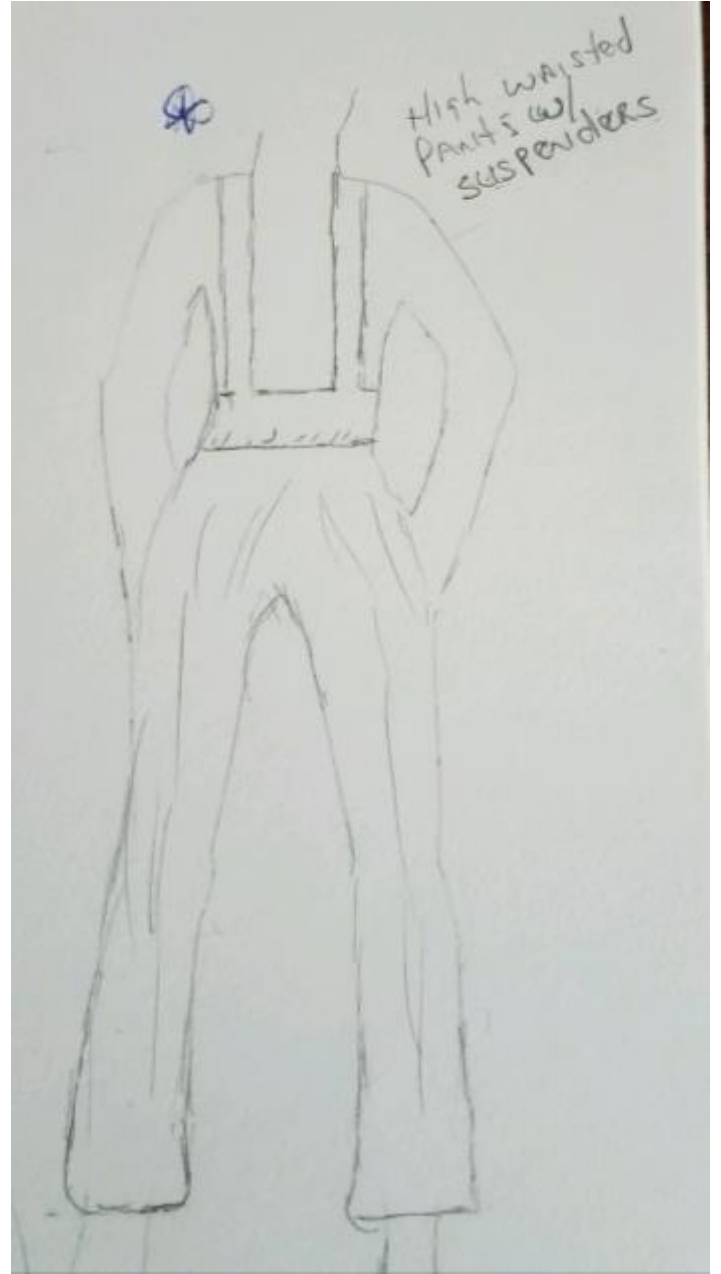
Hannah



Sara



Julianna



Ben

Appendix I: Post-Concert Audience Feedback Form**The Moving Identity
A Senior Honors Concert by Julianna Joss**

1. Did watching the pieces reveal anything to you about the dancers' identities?
Yes **No** (*Circle one*)
2. If so, briefly explain what you felt was revealed:

3. Did witnessing these dances allow for opportunities for you to see and feel emotions towards the dancers as people? **Yes** **No** (*Circle one*)
4. If so, briefly provide examples about what you saw and felt:

If you are willing to provide more feedback on the performance in the next couple of days, please provide your best mode of contact for Julianna to contact you (email, cell phone, etc.).

Appendix J: Rehearsal Snapshots

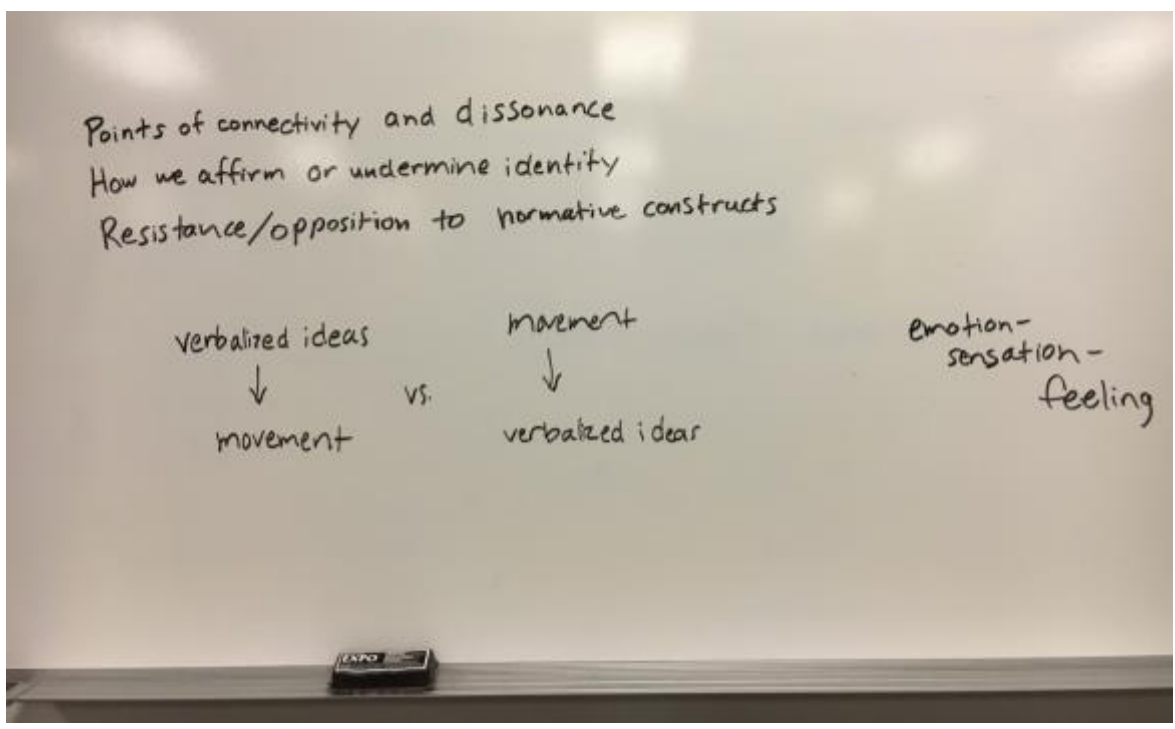


Figure 1: Beginning Inspiration

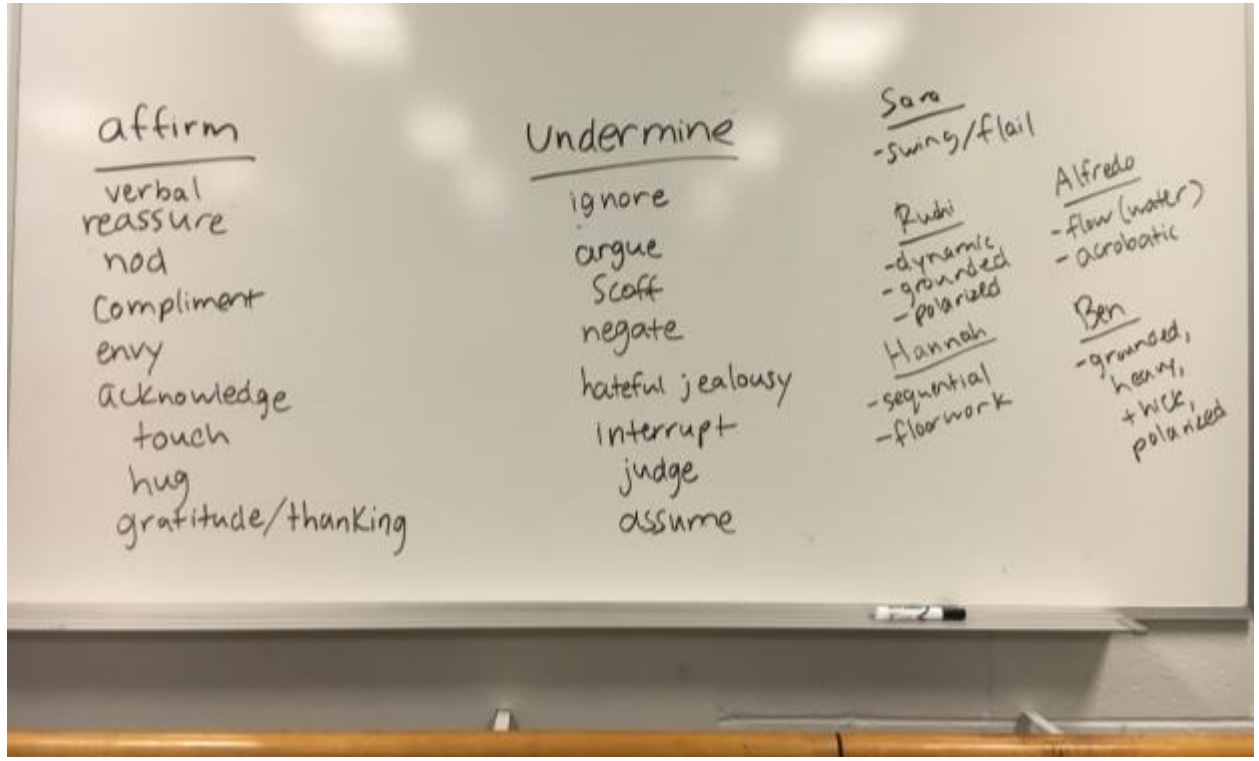


Figure 2: Affirm and Undermine Words, Movement Affinities

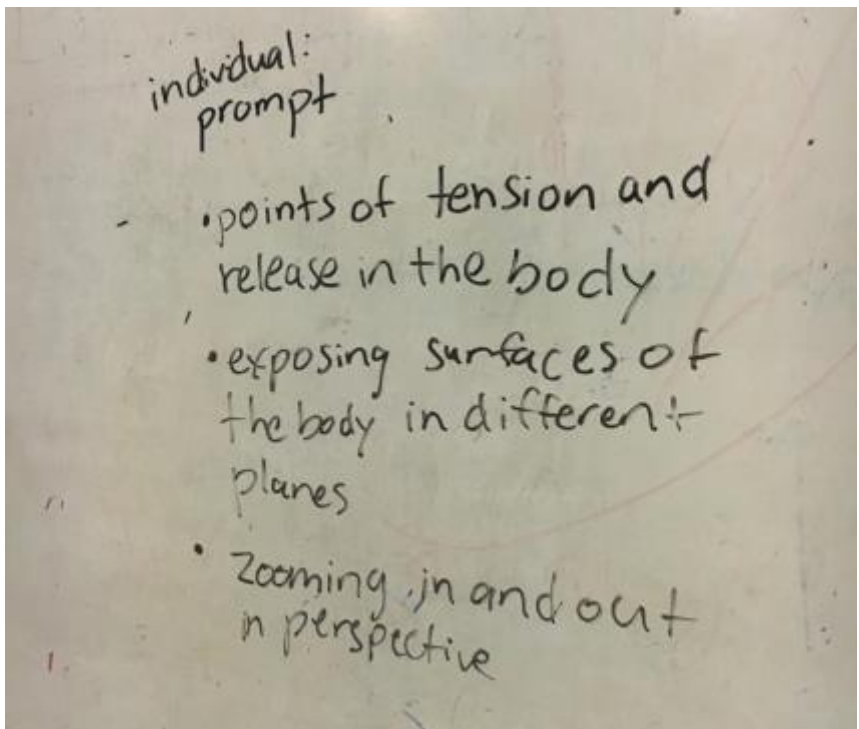


Figure 3: Prompt for III. other. Foundational material

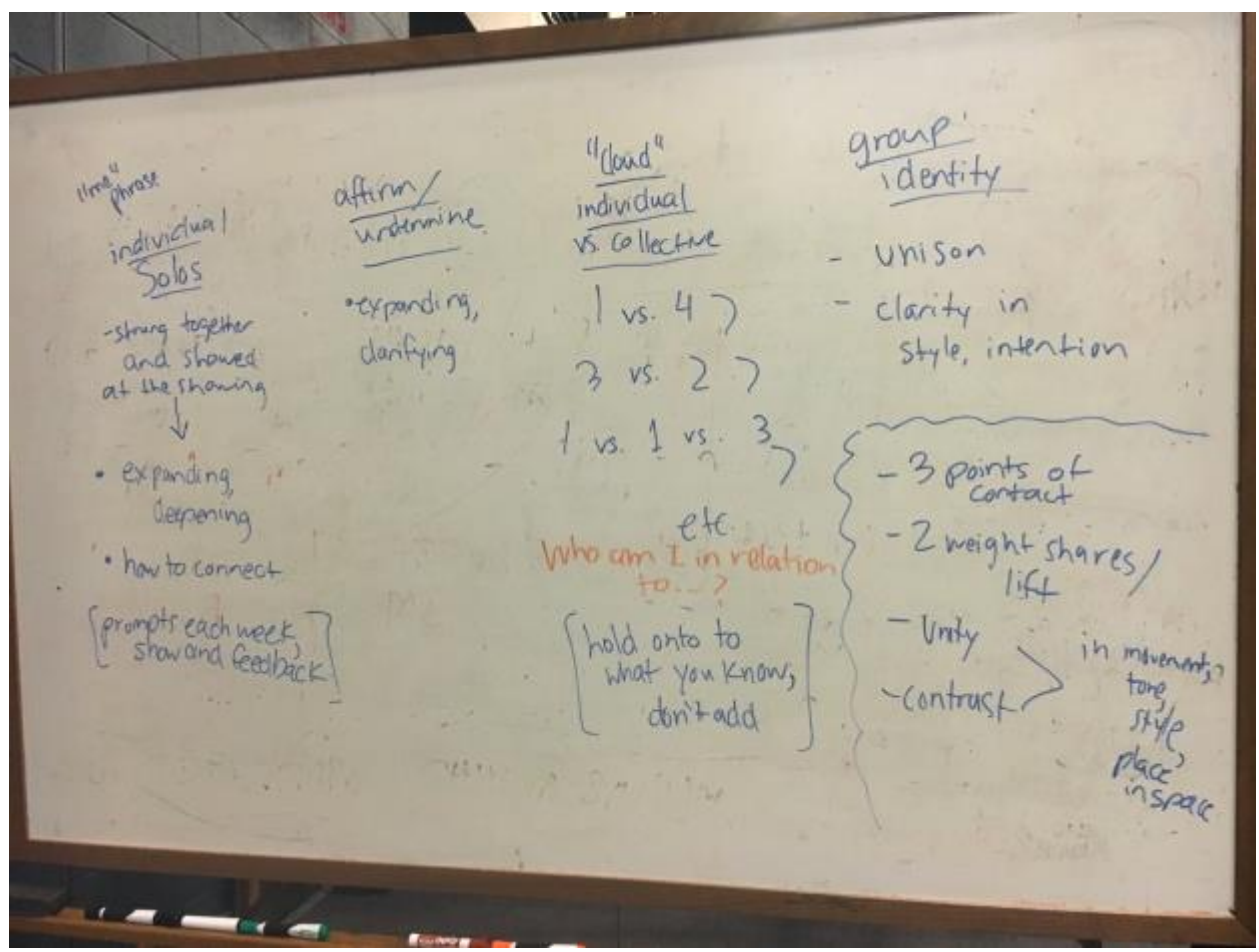


Figure 4: The piece taking shape

Appendix K: Rehearsal Schedule

Group Rehearsals:

Fall Semester:

- Tuesday, September 6: 8:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, September 13: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, September 26: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, October 4: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, October 18: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, October 25: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, November 1: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, November 8: 5:00-7:00
- Tuesday, November 29: 7:30-9:30 pm

Spring Semester:

- Tuesday, January 10: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Tuesday, January 24: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Saturday, January 28: 2:00-4:00 pm
- Saturday, February 4: 2:00-4:00 pm
- Tuesday, February 7: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Saturday, February 11: 2:00-4:00 pm
- Wednesday, February 15: 8:00-10:00 pm
- Saturday, February 18: 2:00-4:00 pm
- Tuesday, February 21: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Wednesday, February 22: 8:00-10:00 pm
- Tuesday, February 28: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Wednesday, March 1: 8:00-10:00 pm
- Tuesday, March 14: 7:30-9:30 pm
- Wednesday, March 15: 8:00-10:00 pm
- Saturday, March 18: 2:00-4:00 pm

Solo Rehearsals:

While I did not keep a formal record of my solo rehearsals, I can estimate I averaged about 1 hour a week working in the studio, with an additional hour on my own time – journaling, writing, and reflecting.

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