5-11-2013

An Exploration of Self-Empowerment and Truthful Expression through Movement and Rudolf Laban's Theory of Effort

Morgan Raquel Sicklick

Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses

Part of the Dance Commons, Performance Studies Commons, and the Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses/227

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact omacisa@butler.edu.
Applicant: Morgan Raquel Sicklick  
(Name as it is to appear on diploma)

Thesis title: An Exploration of Self-Empowerment and Truthful Expression through Movement and Rudolf Laban's Theory of Effort

Intended date of commencement: May 11, 2013

Read, approved, and signed by:

Thesis adviser(s): Cynthia Pratt  
Date: 4/17/13

Reader(s): Susan McGuire  
Date: 4/17/13

Certified by:  
Date: 9/13/18

For Honors Program use:

Level of Honors conferred: University Summa Cum Laude  
Dance with Highest Honors  
Departmental University Honors Program
An Exploration of Self-Empowerment and Truthful Expression through Movement and Rudolf Laban’s Theory of Effort

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Dance
Jordan College of the Arts

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Morgan Raquel Sicklick

April 2013
Table of Contents

I. Abstract. .......................................................... 1

II. Introduction.................................................. 2-5

III. Thesis Reflection and Evaluation.......................... 6-25

IV. Works Cited.................................................. 26
Abstract

My ultimate goal in completing my Honors Thesis was to make a very personal discovery: to feel and see what it was like to become self-empowered and thus, give myself and others within the field of dance permission to engage in truthful expression. To accomplish this, I used Rudolf Laban’s theory of Effort to explore, through movement, my “inner” and “outer” Effort life as well as created a large-scale choreographic work entitled “In the Moment of Not Knowing.” Creating this work allowed me to project my own journey towards self-empowerment onto a universal, physical and artistic canvas, and evaluate the success of my attempts at truthful expression. As a result, I have come to understand self-empowerment as more than just the releasing of insecurities and the development of a more secure connection between my mind and body. Rather, it is the transcendence of boundaries into a new stage of maturity. It is an understanding of how, within the context of the community at large, I can still be an individual and foster a sense of belonging to myself.
Introduction

Over the past year, I came to realize that something very important was being overlooked in my work as an artist; this aspect was my own voice. I thought to myself, “How do I gain the courage to express my own voice? What do I need to do?” As I continued to contemplate this predicament, I found that what I was really looking for was a way to become self-empowered. Thus, my thesis developed into an undertaking of a very personal discovery: to feel and see what it was like to become self-empowered and thus, give myself and others within the field of dance permission to engage in truthful expression. To accomplish this, I employed Rudolf Laban’s theory of Effort to explore, through movement, my “inner” and “outer” Effort life. To practice and measure the success of my attempts at truthful expression, I created a large-scale choreographic work entitled “In the Moment of Not Knowing” that projected my own journey towards self-empowerment onto a universal, physical and artistic canvas.

The movement-based portion of my research was completed in two stages. First, I participated in the 2012 Butler Summer Institute. Over a period of nine weeks, I individually explored my “inner” and “outer” Effort life through the use of Laban’s theory of Effort and created several movement studies. Laban’s work, formally known as Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), is a system for observing, describing, executing and creating movement. The major principle of LMA is the way in which one’s inner life influences her outer forms of motion. Laban’s theory of Effort is one of the most important aspects of LMA and is what truly inspired the work that was to become my
Thesis. Effort, in its simplest form, is expressive movement dynamics. The four Effort factors known as Weight, Time, Space and Flow each consist of two opposing Effort elements which describe the physical appearance of a movement dynamic. The Effort theory involves the whole body and forces individuals to become self-aware. This means that they are conscious of their personal movement tendencies as well as how those tendencies are reflective of their personalities and, in the case of choreographers, reflected in their works.

I first utilized Effort Theory in a class called Introduction to Laban Movement Analysis, taught by Professor Cynthia Pratt. As I worked my way through the course material, I found that Effort theory helped me to step outside my comfort zone, explore new ways of moving outside of the classical ballet vernacular, and take risks. Most importantly, though, I developed a clearer method of communicating with my inner self; having to define my outer movement in terms of Weight, Time, Space and Flow brought forth emotions, thoughts and aspects of my personality I tend to keep hidden from view.

One exercise I found to be very helpful was poetic analysis. I was asked to find a specific theme and create movement from the perspective of Effort. Not only was I encouraged to push past the limits of my natural forms of motion, but also to make movement choices based on my internal response to the imagery in the poem. Using the Effort medium to do so helped me to gain a new sense of power and security in myself. I no longer felt like a tool used for someone else's work; I had found a way to express my own "voice" and began the transformation from tool to true artist. Furthermore, this exercise helped me to
bypass the intellectual aspect of literary analysis and focus on the artistic atmosphere of the poem. The words of the poem provided me with form and structure, but the imagery helped me to transcend such boundaries. Thus, I was able to develop physical, aesthetic content that was tangible to the eye and intangible to the mind.

Upon the completion of BSI and at the start of my senior year, I then generated a set of vocabulary from these initial movement studies in order to choreograph my full-scale work, “In the Moment of Not Knowing,” which was performed as part of the JCA Dance Department’s Senior Productions Showcase in early March 2013. The process of creating this work truly provided me with a sense of comfort, stability and encouragement. I gained confidence in myself as both an artist and a human being. However, I also came to discover that the most powerful choreography was that which left its overall meaning open to interpretation for both the viewer and the dancer. From the perspective of the dancer, a choreographer with this gift is essential to the manifestation of an honest performance because movement is the most basic and truthful universal language. Thus, in order to allow for such interpretation, my work needed to have specific intention. In other words, I needed to have meaning behind my movement choices.

However, this did not simply mean adding a pirouette here or a jump there because it looked “pretty” or because those movements were a dancer’s forte. In that case, my choreography would have provided little inspiration for the dancers and as a result, the dancers would have had little material to translate to the audience. Rather, intention was about the theme, message or emotion, for example, that I wanted to convey through
movement. Intention was also about making choices, perhaps ones that weren’t necessarily comfortable but ones that enhanced my work as well as helped me grow as an artist and a person.

The key to giving meaning to my movement, then, was to take risks that honored and validated vulnerability of my mind and body, allowing me to translate such exposure into movement reflective of my inner life. I can most definitely say that taking these risks was frustrating and challenging, but eventually helped me to achieve self-empowerment. In this case, self-empowerment was the ultimate release of my insecurities and subsequent development of a more secure connection between my mind and body.

Completing my Honors Thesis has been such a unique and personal experience for me, so I’ve gathered several quotes that I think represent how I felt and what I discovered at different stages of my journey.
“Chaos is rejecting all you have learned; chaos is being yourself.”

“Courage is the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair.”

The Butler Summer Institute marked the true beginning of my Thesis work. Before I started BSI, though, I had these preconceived notions about what I would expect of the project and myself overall. I thought that by the end of the nine weeks, I would come to some grand, profound conclusion that would completely change who I was as a person, and that everything would unfold in a nice, neat and orderly manner. I started off going through my resources from a fairly academic standpoint, always with a plan. My journaling was very neat and tidy, and I really thought I was headed in the right direction. Well, I couldn’t have been more wrong.

During the second week of the program, I received an email from Professor Pratt responding to some of my journaling, and I kind of had this gut feeling that I was in for a big shock. I read through all the comments and tried to process all of these “big” questions about myself and life in general that Professor Pratt had posed, until I realized that there was no point because I had absolutely no answer to any of them. All of a sudden, it was like my whole world had come crashing down before me. My mind, body, soul and emotions were all in this state of chaos. It hit me that I had no idea who I really was. I felt so lost, depressed, empty, confused, embarrassed, and upset all at the same time. It was absolutely the worst feeling in the world, but it made me understand just how personal my work was going to be. I realized that I needed to find the courage to be

vulnerable and explore these deeper, uncomfortable areas of myself if I was going to make any progress at all.

"We are faced, not with a situation that can be overcome by rational or moral arguments, but with an unleashing of emotional forces and ideas engendered by the spirit of the times."³

As a result, I started to journal with a completely new outlook. The main question I kept asking myself though, was, "Where is my passion?" Where and what is my passion for life, and where and what is my passion for movement? As I started exploring, I found that my idea and feeling of passion came from my love and appreciation of community, human relationships, a sense of belonging, and the idea of ritual. I realized how strong of a connection these aspects of my outer life, the "spirit of the times" occurring around me, had to my inner journey and my passion. There is a sort of harmony between "inner" and "outer" that manifests itself. These ideas are extremely important to me, and consequently, are actually the values upon which Rudolf Laban's work is founded.

It's so inspiring that movement is such an innate human need and has the ability to take me to this place where I become someone and something more than myself. My understanding of my persona, presence, my soul becomes so much deeper and more dynamic. This whole experience and sensation is really so difficult to articulate into words because it's something so extramundane. Like Joseph Campbell said, "the best

things can’t be told.’ It’s not even something that can necessarily be understood rationally because emotion is so embedded in it. Trying to do so take away from the spiritual quality of movement that I believe can only be truly understood on a personal, individualistic level.

“Come, are you too dainty for these swift currents? I jumped in long ago.”

"Absolute reality has predominantly the character of irregularity.”

Now that I had come to recognize and appreciate the true purpose of my project, it was time for me to dive in to the movement portion. I’d have to say the hardest aspect of this part of my project for me was the fact that I was working without a definite plan or even a specific outcome. I constantly had to remind myself that the mystery, the irregularity that lied ahead of me was yes, intimidating and a little scary, but also welcoming and exciting. I had to stop planning and trying to find meaning in everything, and just “let life happen” to me like Rilke said.

To create the basic structure of my movement study, I used a motif, basically a sentence made up of Labanotation symbols, defining where I should move in space.

---

I then created movement for each of these places in space and explored what they felt like if I performed them in near, mid, and far reach space. Once that was done, I assigned motivations to them, meaning that I came up with an image, a story, or an emotion that I associated with each movement. When I combined elements from each trial to see what felt most natural, I found that most of the motivations I assigned dealt with ideas of submission, uncertainty, struggle and inferiority. Please see Chapter 1 on the accompanying DVD for a clip of this movement study.

Because these motivations didn’t represent any sort of self-empowerment, Professor Pratt suggested I take this basic structure and turn it into something representative of conflict and rebellion. Using these same places in space, I created movements that rebelled against and conflicted with these motivations, my so-called “normal” personality, and my
natural forms of movement. I think I surprised myself because the study I came up with evoked anger, strength and determination from within me. This emotional, inner intent felt perfectly natural, not forced in the least.

My next step was to take the movement study even further, make the movement deeper, more expansive, more powerful, and more expressive. First, I created three masks that reflected the intention of the movement study. I didn’t really have a plan going into the process or know exactly what I was looking for; I just found different materials from the Dance Department’s costume shop that I thought were interesting and had something to do with rebellion and conflict.
When I went to perform my movement study with each mask, I experienced something new. I tend to hold my breath when I’m dancing, and this was precisely one of the elements that were missing from my study. Partially, it had to do with the fact that the masks physically constricted my breathing and made me feel a little bit like I was going to hyperventilate, so I had to focus on breathing deeply. But, I noticed that my breathing patterns changed to match the dynamics, or the Effort behind my movement. When I let a breath out, the contraction of my body became deeper. When my breath was more fluid
or sharp, my movements followed suit. I even ate up more space with my body. It was as if my breath and my body had become one in the same; they moved in harmony with one another. In essence, my study became alive. Please see Chapter 2 on the accompanying DVD for a clip of this movement study.

But, I still had to take the study further. The next step was to create a costume and add a prop. I wanted to maintain the archetype I had started to develop with the masks, namely that of a warrior or a fighter. Even though I felt like this character I created was strong and independent, there was still an underlying femininity I didn’t want to ignore. With the masks, I felt very animalistic and grounded, so how could I keep that image going?

I used the same approach as with the masks for the costume, just finding materials that I thought matched the archetype I was trying to achieve and then playing around with design and shape.
When I went to perform my study with this particular costume, though, I felt too pretty. The skirt made me feel too feminine, my movement felt superficial, and my attention to Effort dynamics wasn’t as specific. I knew this costume wasn’t going to enhance my movement, so I tried out some more unconventional costumes. I tried just the leotard, the leotard with black shorts, a black top with the black skirt, putting the masks on different parts of my body like my hands, arms and legs. I even went out into Holcomb Gardens for a change of scenery to see if that would give me some more insight. I knew I was getting closer, though, because I was becoming more and more in tune with the warrior princess archetype. I felt both energized and exhausted after performing the study.

My favorite and most successful costume, though, ended up being when I used the black skirt as a poncho/cape/veil. Something about being able to play with the skirt as I moved and having my hair down added to the development of the archetype. I felt free, explosive, rebellious, slightly cynical, grounded, spontaneous, liberated, and most importantly, I felt pretty empowered. It was a real moment of excitement and joy. Please see Chapter 3 on the accompanying DVD for a clip of this movement study.

The last element I added was a prop, which I chose to be a thick, long band of elastic. I really liked the duality inherent in the elastic. There’s the snap effect that goes well with the rebellious and conflict oriented nature of the study. But, the elastic can also be elegant and ripple in the air, kind of like a ribbon. There’s a gentler, more feminine side to it that I wanted to explore further. I kept asking myself, “Is the elastic a friend or an enemy?” I wasn’t sure yet, but I knew this idea would be important as I progressed with my Thesis.
“Vitality...the freedom to experience spontaneous feelings.”^8

So where did these nine weeks leave me? I couldn’t say my project turned out the way I planned, because I threw away that plan long ago and was taken in so many directions since then. I couldn’t say that I found meaning in everything that I did, read, watched or experienced either. I didn’t really know when I would find meaning, but most likely, I figured it would be years from now when I’ve had some more life experience. I could at least say that I thought I was on the road towards achieving self-empowerment, even though I had only taken baby steps.

However, I had uncovered one overarching theme important to achieving self-empowerment, represented by this quote by Alice Miller. I couldn’t describe how many spontaneous, unexplainable feelings I experienced over those nine weeks that completely caught me off guard but made me feel alive. One would have been the never-ending cycle of chaos and order. Just when I thought I was starting to make sense of something, I would lose hold of reality and find myself heading in another direction. But, I realized that this was the only way that I could have actually made new discoveries. Another feeling I often experienced was anxiety. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly what caused my anxiety, but I’m sure it had to do with the uncertainty of what lied ahead, feeling like my identity was threatened, and the fact that I was constantly putting myself in uncomfortable situations in order to take a risk. At least I knew I wasn’t alone in feeling this way, because as Rollo May stated, “Creative people, as I see them, are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety, even though a high price may be paid in terms

---

of insecurity, sensitivity, and defenselessness for the gift of the ‘divine madness…’

Finally, I became more and more accustomed to the feeling of solitude. I realized that solitude could be a place of comfort, a safe haven for self-reflection, and a sacred space.

With all this talk of feeling, I reflected on the rational mind’s role. After some thought, I found that the rational mind could sometimes be more hurtful than helpful if I allowed it to become too strong. I originally thought I would be consciously thinking about and analyzing Laban’s Effort theory to create movement when quite the opposite occurred. My inner and outer Effort life developed naturally in response to movement, transcending the ideas of form and image. As Martha Graham stated, my movement inspired moods.

Never that I know have you led me

Gently down paths that are easy.

To test all things, we are urged from above,

Thus fortified to learn to give thanks for everything,

And to know we are free

To go wherever we decide.

---


At the conclusion of BSI, I believed that I would gain a better sense of wholesomeness and totality of myself as I continued to progress with my Thesis. I also believed that the outer influences of community, belonging, and ritual would become more apparent when I started to work with other dancers, peers and faculty members. I was truly hoping that by the time my Thesis was completed, I would be even closer to achieving self-empowerment, closer to knowing what it was like to experience harmony and unity of my mind, body and soul.

"Every work of art needs a spine – an underlying theme, a motive for coming into existence. It doesn’t have to be apparent to the audience. But you need it at the start of the creative process to guide you and keep you going."12

Once the school year started, I knew that it was time to establish the spine of my piece using the vertebrae that I developed throughout the course of BSI. I now had my own set of movement vocabulary, ready to be used in a choreographic setting with music, spatial design, dynamics, tempo, and of course, other dancers. As I looked back over my journaling in response to both the academic and movement-oriented research I had completed over the summer, I realized that two major questions had arisen. The first question was the foundation of my research during BSI and one that I had already answered: “Where and what is my passion?” My second question was, “Is there such a thing as a moving mandala and can I create one?” I took an Honors class my junior year called Hands-On Spirituality with Professor Paula Saffire, and the experience of drawing

I decided to draw a second mandala as a means of further and more current inner exploration, taking a more Jungian approach.

Coincidentally, the pictures that I drew dealt with concepts related to my earlier discovery of passion: optimism, a chain of unbreakable connections, as well as a sense of openness and trust. However, I also found an underlying sense of insecurity and curiosity of the unknown in these pictures. At this point, I knew that the physical structure of a mandala would be a perfect tableau to start my piece.
"The most productive artists I know I have a plan in mind when they get down to work...but there's a fine line between good planning and overplanning. You never want to the planning to inhibit the natural evolution of your work.”¹³

As I continued to develop phrases of movement and progress with my piece, everything was going smoothly, perhaps even a little too smoothly. I felt like I was working quickly and efficiently and before I knew it, six out of the eight minutes I had planned for my piece were completed. I really thought I had everything under control.

Of course, I should have seen this coming, but I soon discovered that I had some significant editing to do. I decided to revisit the prop from BSI, the thick elastic band, and find a way to incorporate into my piece. I wanted the elastic to represent some sort of enemy to my dancers, and I thought that adding it to already existent movement would naturally create some sort of conflict and tension. Well, it certainly did create conflict because the elastics became so difficult to work with. They were constraining and became an obstacle to feeling any sort of passion. I felt like I had to force the elastic into the movement, and soon, I was making changes to suit the elastic as opposed to the theme of the work. I was trying to make the elastic move in interesting ways that really had no intention behind them. Once this became apparent to me, I realized that I had completely lost sight of the meaning of my piece. What was I trying to communicate? What was my intention? I had no answer and needed to go back to the drawing board.

“Creation comes out of rage; order is created out of chaos. This is why artists are feared; they are willing to go there.”

Much like my experience during the second week of BSI, I was frustrated and wanted clarity. As I continued to ponder the situation, the image of a boundary kept surfacing in my mind. More specifically, I kept thinking back to something that I had learned about when I traveled to Israel two years ago. In Orthodox Jewish religion, there is what’s called an *eruv*, which is an area within which observant Jews can carry or push objects on the Sabbath. Often, an *eruv* is enclosed by natural boundaries or by some sort of string placed around a specific area.

The reason I thought of this was because while in Israel, I had watched a short film about a young man dating a young non-Orthodox Jewish woman. On the Sabbath, the woman refused to step into the *eruv*, but wanted to give her boyfriend a gift. Legally, he was prohibited from holding the gift, and if he stepped outside the *eruv* to do so, he broke the Sabbath. I don’t remember the outcome of the whole story, but the important aspect for me was that the young man felt restrained by tradition and formality. This community he loved being a part of wasn’t allowing him to make individual choices. This tension between inner and outer and the fact that ideals associated with each just couldn’t match up was something I could relate to.

---

I’m kept thinking about how I’m currently at the point where I need to make some big decisions about my future. There’s the outer pressure of not wanting to let down the people around me, wanting to take every influence and apply it in some way to this next stage of life. I have this strong desire to be a member of a community. But there’s also the inner pressure of wanting to please myself and do what I want to do, a strong desire to be an individual. The tension between the two is so great that it’s difficult to just “let life happen” to me. It’s difficult to not judge myself before anything even happens. However, I knew that this tension between inner and outer needed to be released. I knew that the breaking of this boundary is what I wanted to communicate through my choreography.

I then started to analyze my piece with this perspective and the image of the eruv in mind, but not really knowing where it would lead. First, I took a look at the relationship between inner vs. outer, and how what I was feeling could be translated into something more universal. I knew that the outer dealt with the fact that my dancers created a community on stage, one that was comfortable and stable but associated with a sense of secrecy. A special bond existed between its members that no one else could possibly understand. Additionally, there was a sense of ritual. The mandala and circular motif I set up at the beginning of my piece created this sort of sacred space for the dancers, much like the sacred space defined by an eruv. Most importantly, though, each member was on an equal playing field. No one was superior to or working against one another, but instead working towards achieving the same goal.
But how they were to reach that goal would be different. This is where the inner comes into play. I needed my dancers to understand that I was giving them the freedom to explore their own *eruv* complex. I encouraged my dancers to think of a time when something they were feeling on the inside didn’t fit with what was going on around them. What did that tension feel like? What emotions did they associate with that situation? How did they want to break that boundary? It was completely up to them, within the context of the movement, of course. In essence, though I was asking them to expose themselves and become vulnerable.

“This first step into the open produces much anxiety, yet she feels a great need to throw over her former restraints. There are feelings of shame and embarrassment.”  

Vulnerability, in my opinion, is an extremely deep and powerful emotion. I’ve always had trouble accessing vulnerability because I naturally associate it with failure, and I’ve always hated failure because it makes me feel weak. I am a perfectionist by nature and do not like making mistakes. Furthermore, my method of avoiding vulnerability is to disassociate myself from any type of emotion. That way, I feel like I’m staying strong and immune to any type of consequence. But, I knew that I couldn’t treat vulnerability this way, especially as a choreographer. If I wasn’t being honest with myself, how could I expect my audience to watch and listen? Moreover, how could I expect my dancers to give an honest performance if I wasn’t the one setting a good example? Like I came to realize during BSI, I knew that I too needed to become vulnerable.

Of course, my biggest obstacle in becoming vulnerable was the elastic. I really didn’t know to how to make the elastics relevant without loosing the intent of the movement or being too literal. I knew I needed to use them more sparingly, but I was running out of time. So, for about twenty minutes the night before one of our choreography showings, I met with my dancers and told them to perform the same movement just without elastics. I still wanted that same tension in the movement to be present, so I told them to feel as if there were invisible bands attached to the ends of their fingertips. I also had to change some of the choreography, so I just went with the first idea that came to mind and even told one of my dancers to improv. I was too tired to think of anything else, so I let it be.

This was the riskiest move I could have made. I had no idea how people would react to the changes because I myself didn’t know what any of it meant. I was terrified that I had made a huge mistake, terrified that I could have just exposed myself and would get a slap in the face in return. But, this was probably the best thing that could have happened because my piece turned a corner. Suddenly, the purity of the movement and the intention behind it became clear. All of the broken parts now fit together. Because I was limited with time, I didn’t have time to judge what I was doing. I just followed my instincts. This was a big moment for me. The wall between my inner and outer struggles was disappearing, all because I didn’t try to plan or analyze. I just let my mind relax and ultimately, let myself be vulnerable.
“The beauty in every form is one in the same.”  

“The purpose of life, as I understand it, is to care for the human as opposed to the robot...a mass of life in which all the celebrants in communion of thought, feeling and action, seek the way to a clear goal, namely to enhance their own inner light.”

As I looked at my finished piece of choreography, I knew that I still had a few more questions left to answer. The first was what is an individual’s function within a community? Everyone wants and needs a community. Otherwise, life can get pretty lonely. But it’s not easy to be part of one either, as shown by the example with the young man and the eruv. Not everyone agrees all the time, and sometimes sacrifice and/or compromise is needed for the community to be in harmony. However, that doesn’t mean that the individual is any less important or necessary to this harmony. It’s like strings on a guitar; when one is out of tune, the whole instrument can’t function. If even just one member is estranged, the whole community suffers. Therefore, I think the individual serves to offer unique thoughts, opinions and actions while still helping to further the overall goals of the community.

So how, as an individual within a community, could I manage to find harmony between my inner and outer life? I thought back to what was preventing this from happening: a boundary. But what does a boundary even mean? After some thought, I’ve come to realize that boundaries are not necessarily something physical, or something that I’m aware of on a daily basis. Often, this is because I unknowingly create the boundary for

---

myself. But, they will always be there, kind of guiding the way I live until I come to realize that they can only provide so much guidance. Then, I’ll eventually reach the point where I’m mature enough to step beyond these boundaries, mature enough to take responsibility for myself, who I am, who I’m trying to become, who I don’t know I am, my mistakes, my triumphs. Boundaries are there to teach me the basics, but it’s ultimately up to me, the individual, to take a risk and step beyond them in order to become something more than the person I am right now, right here.

Once that happens, I’ll need to figure out how to break that boundary. But is it really correct to use the word break? Thinking about it now, I don’t believe it is. Break is much too harsh of a word. It implies a sort of negative connotation with finding a balance between inner and outer that doesn’t have to be present. Instead of breaking the boundary, I’ve realized it’s more of a transcendence, more of a maturity and an evolution. It’s not even that a boundary has been broken; it’s that a new door has been opened. There’s no longer a sense of trying to understand what it means to be an individual in a community. There is simply, just a sense of belonging. That is how I will find harmony for my inner and outer life.

“Right now, I would say to you, remove all marks of identity, whether of provenance or faith, from your outward sense of yourself, i.e. from how you feel seen.”18

---

This whole idea of a sense of belonging is very relevant to where I am in life right now. As a senior getting ready to graduate, I don’t necessarily feel like I belong anymore. I feel like I already have one foot out the door and there’s no turning back. It’s an extremely uncomfortable and frustrating feeling because I feel like nothing is in my control. The idea of the “future” is just looming over me at all times and I constantly doubt my abilities. But, I’ve discovered that all of this is just a figment of my imagination. It’s certainly natural to feel this way, but I don’t have to drown in it. I’ve come to view a sense of belonging as something that I carry with myself at all times. It’s more of a sense of belonging to my own self, a sense of unity between inner and outer. I’ll live in different cities, meet different people, move in and out of different communities, but I’ll always have myself, my thoughts and ideas, my confidence, my own authority to make choices. To me, this is what it means to become self-empowered. To me, this is what I think I have physically represented through my choreography.

Please see Chapter 4 on the accompanying DVD for a full-length performance clip of my choreographic work:

“In the Moment of Not Knowing”

Composer: Daniel Kobialka

Dancers: Stuart Coleman, Katie Currier, Taylor Fengya, Amanda Hickey, Conner Horak, Zach Kukla, Isabelle Overstreet, Celine Spinka
Works Cited


