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Careful Communication: A Confrontation of Cartesian Mind/Body Dualism and Western Perceptions of Intelligence in the Dance Classroom

Sarah Lunceford
sarahelisabeth2019@gmail.com

CAREFUL COMMUNICATION: A CONFRONTATION OF CARTESIAN MIND/BODY DUALISM AND WESTERN PERCEPTIONS OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE DANCE CLASSROOM

by

Sarah Lunceford

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shani collins Jeffery N. Bullock

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Dedication

To my incredible collaborator, Madilyn Hiley, you have been an integral part of my life and this work, and I would not be here without you. Your contributions to this research and creative process have been invaluable. You are forever near and dear to my heart.

To my faithful thesis mentor, shani collins, thank you for your patience and grace with me throughout this entire process, your kindness and compassion in listening to my story, and for helping me to bring such deep issues to light.

To my wonderful parents, thank you for your kindness and support of my every artistic endeavor. Thank you for putting me in ballet when I was eight years old and supporting me ever since. Thank you for inspiring me with how you both continue to grow as humans and for your incredible demonstrations of love.

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This work would not have been possible without the contributions of innumerable individuals who have served as my dance teachers over the past fifteen years. This work confronts challenging experiences I faced as a student, yet I can only be in this space today because of the incredible people I have had the opportunity to learn from. I do not take a single experience for granted and am thankful for each incredible artist I have had the privilege of learning from. Thank you for who you are, for what you mean to me, for your passion and drive for what you do, and for giving me the space to become more of who I desire to be.

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Introduction

At eight years old, I began a journey. Externally, I was learning to dance in a formalized training environment. But internally, I was learning how to view myself, determine my worth, engage with myself, and alter myself to become what my teachers desired. Standing in the studio, week after week, staring across the room at the floor-to-ceiling, wall-length mirror led me to view something in that mirror. I saw a form to be manipulated, legs to be rotated and lengthened, arms to be extended, a tummy to be tucked in, a back to be lengthened, feet to be arched, and a body to be shaped and molded. But over time, I stopped seeing myself. I stopped seeing my wholeness and started seeing the parts of me defined as broken, imperfect, or weak. I started splitting my identity into form and content, body and mind.

As I write, I am actively pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in Dance degree at Hollins University. The accessibility I have to this space, to these resources, to mentorship and guidance, and to learn while subsequently challenging what I am or what I have learned is a privilege and a luxury. It is an opportunity I could not have accessed had I not spent the past fifteen years pursuing dance. My love of Western concert dance forms guided me into space after space of opportunity, learning, exploring, creating, and teaching. In these endeavors, my love of the art form has shifted, and my understanding of what dance can be has expanded. However, of great importance to this research is that my perception of and relationship with myself has and continues to shift.

The origin of this work began with the idea of teaching abstract concepts to dancers in Western concert contemporary dance classrooms. I based my original proposal on the goal of researching, defining, and implementing into choreography four specific terms that I have struggled to embody throughout my dance education experiences: expansiveness, fluidity,

groundedness, and clarity. Thus, my goal was to create a better mental framework from which to engage with the terms as ideas and then work to embody them in a more fulfilled and idealized way. Yet, through the evolution of this process, I realized how problematic my goal was.

In early conversations with my thesis mentor, shani collins, she remarked on how my topic seemingly reinforced Cartesian mind/body dualism. My original proposal sought to split my mind and body, perceiving my mind as more valuable, important, and significant in my learning process and devaluing my body as something simply to be manipulated through reconstructed ideas or definitions of what was being asked of me. As I considered the implication of what I had set out to do, I realized I was further reinforcing a very negative relationship with myself that had been building for years.

Thus, this work is one of healing but not of arriving at a destination of being fully healed. It is a process of growing through confronting language used in the dance classroom by synthesizing personal experiences with academic research on holistic, feminist, critical, and somatic pedagogy. I cannot wait for some idealized understanding of engaging with myself holistically to be fully realized before I begin learning to implement these ideas and ways of communicating into my pedagogical and creative processes. I am in the process of healing and living in a body/mind/spirit-centered self, and I am attempting, through my careful communication in classrooms and rehearsal spaces, to offer others the opportunity to do so as well.

Careful communication is imperative so that in teaching, we are intentional in how we communicate about the being, soul, or essence of our students. We must be careful not to imply any sort of separation of self that elevates mind over body or body over mind, creating a distinction for students between the parts they feel valued for and the parts that they do not. How

teachers speak to, about, and around their students can heavily impact the students' physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or psychological well-being. However, the external evidence of this potential negative impact to a student's well-being may be imperceptible. The consequences of having a negative relationship with any part of one's being is insurmountable and far too great for instructors to be ignorant of or callous to with the way they speak to their students.

Defining terms

For this work, my usage of the term contemporary dance reflects an amalgamation of my training in Western concert dance's codified styles, including Vaganova ballet, Graham and Horton modern techniques, and Broadway or competition-style Jazz, which reinforces ideas and shaping from these forms but blurs the lines between each one. For this work, I define Holistic as emphasizing the rejection of Cartesian mind/body dualism by centering the individual's experience through a first-person sensation-based understanding of self. For this work, Holistic pedagogy demonstrates the curation of spaces through careful communication, in which educators emphasize viewing the self as comprised of a multitude of parts, all innately valuable and complexly intertwined. Careful communication means critical reflection through acknowledging personal experiences and present engagement with students of various demographics. It also requires precise language specifically toward anatomical cueing and holistic perspectives on self that dismiss ideas of breaking the self into pieces varying in value, acknowledgment of personal bias as informed by culture, privilege, or personal experience, and attention to the way aesthetic preferences are given.

Holistic Pedagogy in Dance

Holistic teaching is an idea, theory, concept, or term with many subsets of understanding. A simple definition of holistic is "relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems

rather than with the individual parts."[1] Yet, what this translates to specifically within the pedagogical system in dance settings is unspecified and varies greatly. Careful communication demonstrates holism by rejecting ideas of separating the self into distinct parts with varying values. Engaging with myself as a body and mind working together, not to be manipulated but honored and created with and through, has required care and intention. Thus, as an educator, I must curate spaces where students seek to find their growth in dance from within themselves, inside of form-based classes that do not seek to separate body and mind, by emphasizing communicative practices that encourage students to have a holistic view of self. Mind/body dualism, as informed by a Western perception of intelligence, can cause a disregard for the body as self, and allow for extreme manipulation and disregard for care of the body within the technically demanding and rigorous process of dance training.

However, a holistic pedagogical practice cannot be standardized and acted upon as a formula that benefits all students in a classroom. My perspective, my window into dance, and ultimately, my window into life, is united with immense privilege. I come from a white, female, cisgender, heterosexual, upper-middle class perspective. While my larger, subjectively unaesthetic body proportions pushed me to the margins of some dance classrooms, the privileged experience I came from, alongside an incredibly supportive family, allowed me to continue pursuing my love of dance despite the opposition I encountered regarding my body. Nevertheless, this tension, the tension with my body, is ultimately what caused my sense of disassociation from myself. Thus, I cannot dismiss it, as the marginalization I experienced due to my body caused significant damage to my own mental, physical, and psychological well-being. As such, the urgency for this work rests on the effects of language and communication,

[1] "Holistic," in *Merriam-Webster*, accessed May 4, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holistic.

specifically pertaining to the body, on a student's self-perception. I am not suggesting that I can develop a communicative practice that is always safe, holistic, and open for every student. No space can truly be safe for everyone. This reality does not excuse me from confronting biases but acknowledges that I will fail and may marginalize students. But when I fail, I must admit my failures, accept responsibility for my mistakes, and change my habits. Even those with no explicitly marginalizing factors within the dance classroom can experience the severity of damaging relationships with themselves. Thus, as I confront my experiences and critically reflect on pedagogical practices that damaged my relationship with myself in the dance classroom, I must acknowledge that I cannot reconcile a singular understanding of holistic pedagogy that will benefit each student and prevent anyone from feeling marginalized. I will never succeed in creating a perfectly accommodating, safe, and welcoming space for all students. But if I never try, if I do not attempt to teach differently, if I do not critically engage in understanding the students in my class, seeking to learn how I can best accommodate their needs, and offer them a space in which they feel respected, what good am I as a teacher?

The foundation for careful communication, curating spaces where students feel valued for their entire selves, rests on respect. bell hooks writes, "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin."[2] Many traditional understandings of power structures within dance classrooms do not require this level of respect and care from the instructors for the students. Instead, a level of mandated authority is placed in the hands of the instructors, subjugating the students to the control of their authority figure. This practice ultimately leads to authoritarianism within the dance classroom. Clyde Smith, researcher and

[2] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 13.

alumni of Ohio State University's PhD in Cultural Studies and UNCG's MA in Dance and Performance Studies, writes about authoritarianism in dance classrooms, informed by his experiences and interviews with others in collegiate dance spaces: "I understood the dance classroom to be an ideal climate for authoritarian behavior. The student has already consented to being in a situation in which he or she is usually attempting to replicate as perfectly as possible the example and the demands of the teacher."[3] Thus, respect on the part of the professor for the student, helps curate an environment wherein the student feels valued rather than manipulated, and respect for the professor from the student helps curate an environment where anyone can share ideas. This respect also necessitates a level of vulnerability that requires intentionality on the part of both parties to curate a space of honesty.[4]

Teacher-Oriented Pedagogy

Looking within the collegiate contemporary dance classrooms, two primary models of pedagogical practices emerged as dance made its way into higher academia through the work of Margaret H'Doubler and Martha Hill.[5] In her article on collegiate dance pedagogy, researcher Donna A. Dragon articulates the different approaches used by these pioneers, specifically considering the influence of Hill on teacher-oriented pedagogy:

> [In behaviorism], student success is based totally on achievement of the teacher's objectives through the responses specified by the teacher. Behaviorism focuses on external output or products… cognitivism focuses on the accurate transmission of knowledge based on the objective reality of the expert teacher; the teacher knows the facts. Student success is achieved when students have the same mental perspective as the teacher.[6]

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[3] Clyde Smith, "On Authoritarianism in the Dance Classroom," in *Dance, Power, and Difference: Critical and Feminist Perspectives on Dance Education*, ed. Sherry B Shapiro (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1998), 128.

[4] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 21.

[5] Donna A. Dragon, "Creating Cultures of Teaching and Learning: Conveying Dance and Somatic Education Pedagogy," *Journal of Dance Education* 15, no. 1 (2015): 27, https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2014.995015.

[6] Dragon, "Creating Cultures of Teaching and Learning," 28.

Seemingly, behaviorism ties to an elevation of the body, and cognitivism ties to an elevation of the mind. The major flaw with any authoritarian perspective is that it associates art, specifically dance, with an objective standard. Objective means "expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations."[7] Dance cannot be this—each individual's biases inherently impact it. While dance forms have objective standards for movement, the individual teacher's perception of a student's adherence to said form is unique to their preference. However, these aesthetic preferences make art unique and give voice to specific expressions, ideas, and creative manifestations. Yet, how one communicates aesthetic preferences to students holds great weight on student self-perception. When a teacher ignores this fact, Jill Green, a Professor of Dance-Somatics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, notes that the pressured environment of a dance classroom can contribute to a "constant focus on an externalized view of the body, as reflected in the mirror, [that] objectifies the dancer's body and requires the students to strive to achieve a specific 'look' while being 'corrected' so that the students perform 'proper' dance technique."[8] Treating the body as if it is clay accessible to any form of molding provides the instructor with immense power over the form of the student.

Further, this pedagogy may reinforce uninformed practices perpetuated across generations without considering why a specific correction is given or how language is utilized, thus creating uninformed instructors and students. In contrasting these women's perspectives on dance education, one of the critical points that Dragon argues is the problem with "Teaching as I was taught." She emphasizes that students often become teachers and then teach future

[7] "Objective," in *Merriam-Webster.Com*, accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objective.

[8] Jill Green, "Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education," *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (1999): 81.

generations of dancers using the same or similar vocabulary, movement style, aesthetic preferences, and classroom traditions as their instructors without considering the implications of what those things could mean. This is where my goal lies. I want to be careful not to unquestioningly accept practices without first considering what they mean to me and what they could mean to a future student. Additionally, for many, despite having experienced harmful pedagogical practices as students, when an individual becomes a teacher, "[they learn] to habitually repeat the power relationships of those who came before us."[9] In a ballet classroom, I observed my instructor working with one particular student for five minutes, forcing the student to stand at the barre, while the teacher physically manipulated the student's body into a shape that was anatomically inaccessible, particularly regarding the student's lack of external rotation through the hip joint. The student was asked to hold the position, for an extended period while their classmates observed this manipulation taking place. While our instructor may have achieved results due to experiencing this sort of practice in their own education, it is inappropriate to continue utilizing this process of overt manipulation, specifically without extensive consent regarding physical touch, especially with students past their adolescent years whose bone structure no longer allow for progressive alternation potentially accessible to young children, though manipulation of children's bone structures can also prove problematic.[10] Despite evidencing aspects of effectiveness through externally perceived student success and achievement, these practices lack important tenants of careful communication, thus risking immense damage to the student's well-being.

[9] Green, "Somatic Authority," 92

[10] Rachel Fine, "Dancers and Bone Health," *Dance Nutrition* (blog), June 15, 2022, https://dancenutrition.com/dancers-and-bone-health/#:~:text=Despite%20its%20tough%20appearance%2C%20bone,late%20teens%20to%20early%2020s.

Student-Oriented Pedagogy

An alternative method of pedagogy to teacher-oriented practices that perpetuate ideas of authoritarian rule, fear-based classrooms, and objectification of the dancer's body is that of student-oriented pedagogy. Dragon identifies this teaching model as growing from the practice of holistic pedagogy in various dance forms: "Holistic learning emphasizes the interconnectedness of the individual's body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The goal of holistic learning is to assist the student in bringing forward her or his highest potential and to create a classroom culture where this is possible."[11] This definition clarifies that holistic classrooms require teachers to create an environment where students can flourish within their various strengths. Allana C. Lindgren, Dean of the Arts at the University of Victoria, considers the holistic pedagogical practices of Franziska Boas. Boas offered a method of educating that tears away from hierarchical structures "by absenting herself from providing an explanation or overt direction; Boas demonstrated her dislike for the pedagogy of emulation; she did not want to create replicas of herself."[12] This practice refers to a particular process Boas utilized with one student at the beginning of their modern dance training, in which she "told [the student] not to dance, but instead to sit with herself."[13] This perhaps unorthodox practice may not translate well to form-based classrooms. Still, unconventional practices may be necessary to avoid having students feel the need to become replicas. Further, "humanistic education processes can lead to a classroom culture of greater tolerance of ambiguity and difference, and a greater acceptance of self and others."[14] Perhaps these ideas seem more plausible within a somatic-based practice, where no performance

[11] Dragon, "Creating Cultures of Teaching and Learning," 28.

[12] Allana C. Lindgren, "Holistic Pedagogy in Practice: The Curriculum and Ideology of Embodied Self-Discovery in Franziska Boas's Dance Classes, 1933-1965," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 4, no. 2 (2012): 162, https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.4.2.161_1.

[13] Lindgren, "Holistic Pedagogy in Practice," 162.

[14] Dragon, "Creating Cultures of Teaching and Learning," 28.

outcome is required. However, if this is the case, what must be considered is how the students are perceived. Are they simply limbs and flesh to be molded into a specific shape? Each student comes into the classroom with a unique background, dance experiences, physical structures and limitations, and emotional and mental standing each day. Students are not objects to be manipulated.

Mind/Body Dualism in Dance

Western concert dance classrooms perpetuate ideas of Cartesian mind/body dualism that strip away bodily autonomy from students and give the instructors the power to mold the bodies of their students without considering the implications of what effects the teacher's actions and words could have on a student's well-being. Green summarizes the effect of dualism:

> According to [theorists Don Johnson and Elizabeth Behnke], [the body/mind] split removes us from the experience of our bodies and disconnects us from our own inner proprioceptive signals as well as from our somas and living processes. Rather than simply splitting the body from the mind, there is an active obsession with the body as an objective mechanical entity. As a result, we are often numbed to the awareness of internal body messages and the power of our connected selves.[15]

Christine Caldwell wrote her book *Bodyfulness* to describe and elicit a new understanding of connections between the mind and body. "Mind/body dualism has become so entrenched in our conceptual library, *mindfulness* as a term cannot avoid reaffirming the cultural bias that mind is superior to body… *Bodyfulness* overcomes the bias toward the mental, while at the same time extending and greatly enriching the signification of mindfulness itself."[16] Mindfulness can entangle dancers who may tend toward feeling confident in mental and language comprehension skills to continue believing the mind/body split.

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[15] Green, "Somatic Authority," 82.

[16] Christine Caldwell, *Bodyfulness: Somatic Practices for Presence, Empowerment, and Waking Up in This Life* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2018), ix.

Dance, as a practice, is a primary example of something that ties together the power of the body and the power of the mind. Edward C. Warburton, Professor of Dance theory and technique at the University of California Santa Cruz, writes about the possibility of challenging ideas of intelligence. “The details of creating meaningful movement are related to the physiology of the brain and body: to the development of intelligence in our thinking bodies, dancing minds.”[17] Thus, the efforts to dismantle mind/body dualism in dance classrooms, as discussed in this paper, is in no way to devalue the importance of the contributions of the mind. Instead, this work aims to demonstrate how deeply rooted ideas of self-hatred can be tied back to a distorted view of the body/mind.

Intelligence is defined, according to Merriam-Webster, as “the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations: reason [and] mental acuteness.”[18] These definitions are seemingly vague yet carry with them the power of Western traditions of thinking regarding what intelligence is and what it is not. Intelligence is something I knew of from childhood; it was this elusive term that I was supposed to strive for, this idea tied to success, achievement, accolade, and ultimately, often, prosperity. While this term came to represent success specifically as tied to academic achievement for me, I never fully grappled with the reasoning behind this during my adolescent years.

Intelligence in Western culture is often associated with the Intelligence Quotient, or IQ, which Alfred Binet designed in the early 20th century.[19] Initially intended to determine whether students could succeed in school, the IQ test represented an idea of smartness. However, this understanding of smartness came to rest primarily on one’s ability to engage with “vocabulary,

[17] Warburton, "Intelligences Past, Present, and Possible,"13

[18] “Intelligence,” in *Merriam-Webster*, accessed May 4, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intelligence.

[19] Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 3.

comprehension, and verbal relations."[20] These testing methods prove exclusionary to those with lower reading comprehension, English literacy, or logical reasoning faculties and also lump people into categories of intelligent and not intelligent, simply based on a lack of propensity for engaging with particular material in a specific way. Western culture still prioritizes certain areas of knowledge as more valuable, most often language, math, and science.[21]

American Psychologist Howard Gardner defines intelligence as "a computational capacity – a capacity to process a certain kind of information – that originates in human biology and human psychology… the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community."[22] His theory of multiple intelligences offers that students may take a variety of avenues to engage with the material presented, thus encouraging educators to challenge personal bias toward student retention of material by providing information in multiple ways rather than enforcing a standardized method. In any classroom setting, teachers must not ask students to process material in the exact same way. Instead, teachers must offer various entry points to students so they can comprehend the material presented.[23]

Specifically, in educational settings, such as a university dance department or a performing arts high school, instructors may identify students as intelligent according to the Western understanding of the term, based on grades, attendance, or ability to excel in certain areas of study. However, this idea of intelligence can further link to mind/body dualism through its influence over students being perceived as mentally intelligent versus possessing body

[20] Edward C. Warburton, "Intelligence Past, Present, and Possible: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences in Dance Education," *Journal of Dance Education* 3, no. 1 (2003): 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2003.10387224.

[21] Warburton, "Intelligence Past, Present, and Possible," 7.

[22] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences,* 6.

[23] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences,* 56.

intelligence. This split can encourage dance students to play to specific strengths and discourage growth in areas perceived as weaknesses. In my experience, I was perceived as mentally intelligent, adept at comprehending and engaging with theoretical concepts, retaining information from lectures, and demonstrating that comprehension through test-taking or writing. In college, studying to receive a BFA in dance, I took numerous dance academic courses alongside my technique classes. My reputation in academic courses influenced the way I was taught in technique classes. I began to feel pressure from within and without to consistently demonstrate that I mentally comprehended what was being asked of me, even if I could not physically replicate it. This practice ultimately proved damaging to my holistic view of self, as I blamed my body for its weaknesses and considered it less intelligent than my mind. Students should not be categorized as academically or physically and artistically intelligent, for there are not only two ways of engaging with the world.

The theory of multiple intelligences does not categorize individuals into types of intelligence based on their chosen career path or hobbies. Instead, it introduces the idea that students or individuals can access the same material or concepts through multiple entry points, thus making learning more accessible and less standardized.[24] Even within dance, a strongly kinesthetic experience, there can be innumerable ways for students to demonstrate their ability to engage in the art form that does not relate directly to Gardner's category of Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence. For example, according to Gardner's theory, some students may be inclined to learn through musical intelligence. As such, some dancers may find opportunities to comprehend movement material through connection to the resonance of the music itself. Learning cannot be standardized, even within the dance classroom. The objectives of the class must be realized, both

[24] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences,* 142.

by the instructor and the students. Then, the instructor must work to provide students with access to the material through various lenses.

Bodies are integral to movement, to life, and to dance. The traditional Western concert dance technique classroom is an environment most prominently emphasizing the politics of bodies in space, often through unspoken though implied ideals. Dance classrooms are designed for teachers to look at students and observe their bodies. “Students in dance classes spend much time gazing in the mirror to perfect the outward appearance of the body and strengthen dance technique. They commonly wear leotards and tights or variations of tightly clad clothing that allow the teacher to view the body from an outside perspective.”[25] However, due to the nature of dance corrections, instructors' interactions with students’ bodies do not stop at simple observations. In a study conducted with undergraduate students, Jill Green notes a common thread of experience with collegiate dancers. “Many dancers have been told by teachers that their stomachs are too large. This may cause them to constantly suck in the stomach, leading to body alignment problems or difficulty breathing.”[26] Through this conditioning, dancers often come into the space and present themselves in an easily perceptible and manipulatable manner. For students with an excellent physical capability to adhere to structures, forms, and an instructor’s aesthetic preferences, their bodies may become of greater importance or value to themselves or those they are learning from, than their minds.

Precision of Language: Anatomical Cueing

A primary example of this distortion of self-perception and a distancing between a dancer’s first-person understanding of their own movement experience and their drive for and

[25] Green, “Somatic Authority,” 81.

[26] Jill Green, “Emancipatory Pedagogy? Women’s Bodies and the Creative Process in Dance,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 3 (200AD): 127.

desire to achieve a particular physical look can result from cueing. “In a sense, dance students give their bodies to their teachers.”[27] Yet, it is left to the teachers to determine how to engage with this intimate level of access to the body. Consideration must be given to the way cues are offered to students. What words are being used? What tone of voice is used? What tactile corrections accompany the instructor’s words? Do the students understand what the instructor is looking for based only on the words the instructor uses? Of particular interest to the topic of body and cueing the body, a necessary practice within dance training is the importance of educating students on and utilizing anatomical cueing. For example, as a student growing up, one of my ballet instructors commonly used the term tummy to reference core engagement. However, this term, a shortened version of the word stomach, the organ associated with food consumption and digestion, risks the potential of connecting to weight rather than abdominal engagement. If students are made aware of the anatomical makeup of their bodies, even to a basic level, instructors can use anatomical language as a more neutral ground from which to provide comments, thus steering away from potentially harmful and un-useful language. This practice can further aid in injury prevention by giving students the knowledge of what body parts create what actions. For example, encouraging external rotation to come from the hip joint, and more specifically, the six deep outward rotators, can decrease the risk of injury and improper technique that students may develop through less clear cues, such as being told to squeeze their butt to achieve more rotation.

Perspectives on the Body

Within human experience, we have the unique opportunity to perceive the body from a two-fold viewpoint. We have a first-person lived experience of our bodies and a third-person

[27] Green, “Somatic Authority,” 81.

external view of the body. However, when one's self-perception becomes solely externalized based upon conditioning towards curating specific shapes, techniques, and forms with the body that distract an individual's attention from acknowledging internal sensational understandings of the body, that self-perspective can be lost and instead become a reflection of the presumed perspectives others may carry of the self. Within this distorted view of self often comes a hyperfixation on comparison. "Comparing oneself with others on important qualities (such as one's body size, intelligence, or talent) gives people the illusion of objectivity in assessing themselves."[28] In the dance classroom, the instructor has two perspectives: the first-person internal perspective of their own body and the third-person external perspective of their students' bodies. Yet, the issue arises when their third-person perspective of their students becomes informed so heavily by their first-person perspective of their own experience that they do not learn to adapt to the variations of learning modalities necessitated by the diversity of the classroom:

> In Western dance training, the external often becomes predominant, and the internal journey or body-intelligence of the dancer becomes secondary or negated completely. Dancers are often judged from the outside based on the correctness or 'beauty' of their external movements and their physical body attributes – height, weight, size of various body parts, and so forth. Mirrors… might serve to further encourage dancers to view themselves from a third-person, external perspective.[29]

In my experience, this third-person perspective of the self can lead to disconnecting to internal sensations and contribute to dualistic perspectives. If this understanding is fostered, the mind may be viewed as the self and the body as the other, or vice versa, contributing to neglect of the othered part of self.

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[28] Laura Van Zelst, Alison Clabaugh, and Beth Morling, "Dancers' Body Esteem, Fitness Esteem, and Self-Esteem in Three Contexts," *Journal of Dance Education* 4, no. 2 (2004): 49, https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2004.10387256.

[29] Anne Burnridge, "Somatics in the Dance Studio: Embodying Feminist/Democratic Pedagogy," *Journal of Dance Education* 12, no. 2 (2012): 39, https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2012.634283.

Dr. Celeste Snowber Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University writes extensively about the importance of engaging with the body, respecting the body, and valuing the body as the self rather than as a distinct thing that is simply to be manipulated. In her "Let the Body Out: A Love Letter to the Academy From the *Body,*" Snowber writes in first person, speaking from the body itself. She calls her readers to reconnect with themselves: "The deeper truth is that you were all born with the knowledge that you *are* bodies, not that you *have* bodies. This is the birthright of being human."[30] This level of connection to the body mandates a first-person present tense engagement with sensations, breathing patterns, physical aches and pains, and overall attention to how the body experiences and carries itself through life. Western cultural tendencies are directly rejected when one honors the body as the self rather than just as the numb structure housing the self. Snowber writes, "You find at an early age that what is important is the external body, not the internal body, and it does not take one long to make even a subconscious contract to NOT pay attention to the sensing, pulsing, and breathing body… it is not so easy to be attentive to what is going on from the inside out."[31]

No Manifesto

Certain pedagogical approaches are not readily applicable to specific codified Western concert dance classrooms. A primary example is the structure of a ballet classroom. To work through the necessary movement exercises in a traditional ballet class, specifically in a collegiate setting, time for reflection, conversation, and dialogue may need to be cut down. Pursuing technical proficiency requires challenging the body through rigorous movements, and as such instructors may need to challenge students' physical capabilities. Further, providing visual

[30] Celeste Snowber, "Let the Body Out: A Love Letter to the Academy from the *Body*," in *Epistemologies of Ignorance in Education*, ed. Erik Malewski and Nathalia Jaramillo (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 191.

[31] Snowber, "Let the Body Out," 192.

examples by asking students to demonstrate exercises may prove highly beneficial to the learning process, especially for students with a propensity for comprehension through visual demonstrations. Some educators may be able to craft classrooms that avoid these potentially problematic practices through somatic-based classes or movement practices with less rigid codified structures. However, as an educator teaching in various codified classrooms, the emphasis must remain on language, communication, and care. Through this process, I am learning how I want and ultimately need to educate and communicate. Through this research, I have created a No Manifesto, a clearly defined, written, fluid, and definitive set of parameters for myself as a teacher and creator. Inspired by the definitive and emphatic and insistent language of Yvonne Rainer's No Manifesto, created in 1965 as a part of a choreographic process,[32] my manifesto serves as evidence of my experiences as a student, teacher, and researcher, taking ideas and uniting them through the commonality of directives that I, as an educator, desire to implement in all my pedagogical communication within Western concert dance classrooms.

NO to systemized pedagogical approaches that only offer information to students by giving one explanation and refusing to provide alternative entry points to the material.

NO to using ambiguous language around the body that is not centered on anatomical understanding.

NO to asking students to leave their thoughts at the door and only bring their bodies into the space.

NO to comparing any part of a student's being, mind, body, or soul, to that of any other student, publicly or privately.

[32] Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called 'Parts of Some Sextets,' Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 168–78, https://doi.org/10.2307/1125242.

NO to giving students unsolicited and uneducated health, fitness, or dietary advice.

NO to presenting oneself as perfect, unflawed, or failing to acknowledge personal weaknesses or struggles.

NO to asking students to present themselves as perfect, unflawed, or never to acknowledge personal weaknesses and struggles.

NO to presuming that because you experienced something as a student and survived it, your students should also be able to.

NO to demanding, suggesting, or implying students manipulate any part of their external appearance to appease personal aesthetics, including but not limited to: body shape or size, skin tone and complexion, hair texture or length, body piercings or tattoos, and religious articles of clothing covering more than what may be traditionally permitted within the dance studio.

NO to teaching without intentionally considering how students receive and engage with material as *whole* beings, rather than asking them to unnecessarily separate their bodies from their minds.

NO to mandating unnecessary, unhealthy, and unethical practices regardless of traditional dance classroom norms, including but not limited to: students not being permitted to drink water or use the restroom at their discretion.

NO to requiring students to push their bodies through injury or potentially harmful pain without considering the student's history with the injury or pain, and offering needed modifications that allow all students to continue engaging with overall course material.

NO to labeling students as intellectual or unintellectual.

NO to physical demonstrations that compare self to students or asking students to replicate the movement exactly.

NO to being unwilling to listen to student feedback or criticism.

NO to calling out students to repeat a combination for the class to watch, with the primary goal of critiquing their body openly or idolizing it and asking other students to replicate said student's movement.

NO to implementing rigid class plans with no room for variance within any dance class setting without giving ample room for listening to students' specific needs and desires.

NO to using dismissive or degrading language to talk about any part of my being as the instructor, internal or external, in the presence of my students.

NO to any physical manipulation of a student's body that inflicts pain or unnecessary stress on any part of the body.

Creative Manifestation

The creative manifestation accompanying this research demonstrates my journey with myself. The work can be divided into eight sections, representing moments of my experience relating to my body and, ultimately, other's bodies through literal and abstract viewpoints. The visual simplicity of the work mandates attention to the body. It is stripped down but wholly features every part of my being. I created a work that I would perform on a proscenium stage to challenge myself to confront the dualistic mindset I held for years. I believed my academic achievements were what validated my presence within the collegiate undergraduate and graduate dance worlds. But, in this work, I use my creative manifestation to honor my entire self without hiding behind excess costumes, props, intriguing alternative spaces, or other dancers performing

my choreography. This work resists my fear-based urge to hide or distract from any part of myself. My body is essential, my mind is essential, and my spirit is essential. No one is of greater or lesser importance.

Why it Matters: Extreme Effects of Mind/Body Dualism

The urgency for this work rests in the reality of the extreme effects that can occur when mind/body dualism festers within one's self-perception. The creative manifestation reflects snapshots into a trying and ultimately destructive relationship with myself. I chose to give visibility to the internal destruction I encountered, not as a process of glorifying the manipulation of the body but of shedding light on the complexity and implications that language can bring to the human experience.

As referenced above, my reputation as an undergraduate student was tied to external markers of success. To the external eye, I was the epitome of a good student. I had perfect attendance throughout all eight semesters of undergrad. I turned in every assignment on time and most assignments early. My GPA was one of the highest in my class. I volunteered within the department, responded to emails promptly, clarified assignment questions or discrepancies with instructors with plenty of notice, and came prepared for every advising meeting, knowing which classes I needed to register for to graduate in the timeline I desired. I had many incredible friends within my department, many of whom I am still close with today; I had the support of family members, specifically my mom, who tried to travel to almost every show I was in while in undergrad. Externally, I was a good student with a strong support system, an intelligent mind, and a bright future ahead.

Internally, it was a much different story. I first went on a self-imposed diet around the age of eleven years old. For the following seven years until high school graduation, unbeknownst to

my family, I continually chose to go on and off diets based on what I saw others doing around me, and also as my relationship with myself morphed, specifically based on what I saw and heard in the dance classroom.

March of 2020 was the spring semester of my freshman year of college. I went home for six months and, during that time, became obsessive about everything relating to my body. From weighing myself morning and night to obsessive dieting, calorie counting apps, and working out three or four times a day, I slowly turned my obsession for pursuing what I thought would make me a more physically-accepted dancer into disordered eating patterns that damaged my life. Throughout the following two years of college, I struggled with anorexic and orthorexic disordered eating patterns. By my senior year of college, I had developed a full-fledged binge eating disorder. I hated every part of my body.

In my attempt to rectify my poor relationship with my body, I tried to start seeing my body as myself, something to be loved and cherished, not objectified or othered. However, my attempts failed, and rather than loving myself, body included, I ultimately struggled greatly with hating all parts of myself. In this place of disordered eating, my intense self-loathing caused an increase in the frequency of my anxiety, often manifesting itself in bouts of uncontrollable shaking. Ultimately, these cycles of anxiety contributed to depressive spirals, resulting in suicidal ideation. Combined with the prevalence of grief in my life, my suicidal ideation grew more frequent and intense. While I ultimately was able to get help through therapy and the support of my family, the journey I had gone on to hating my very existence and wishing my life away was something that had deeply rooted implications tying back to things I had been told about myself in dance classrooms.

No one knew. Despite struggling with disordered eating patterns for years, I never looked underweight. However, the fact that it did not appear that I was visibly starving did not hinder the prevalence of disordered eating in my life—the common belief that one must be underweight to have an eating disorder is misguided and intensely dangerous.[33] This was reflected in my body's reaction to the way I ate: as while my weight fluctuated, it did not do so in such extreme numbers or speeds as to be concerning to an external eye. Additionally, my reputation as an academic student masked the underlying reality of my fracturing mental health.

No one thing is to blame. No one person is at fault. I cannot point out one thing someone said to me at one point in time as being the thing that pushed me over the edge toward hating my body and ultimately hating myself and my life. But life experiences are complex, interwoven, and cannot be compartmentalized. Words have power. Every word spoken to me, about me, or comparing me to someone else resonated on some level with my being. Every comment made about the size of my legs, the visibility of my stomach, the size of my costume, my inability to move fast enough, my supposed need to eat more vegetables, my need to stretch more to de-bulk my muscles, the comments praising my appearance and perceived weight loss while I was actively living with disordered eating, every cue about matching my line and my look to dancers with vastly different anatomical structures than my own, every conversation about weaknesses in my dance technique that turned into praise of my intellect, every comment about how much self-control I had around food publicly while privately I binged nightly, every compliment about how I was a pleasure to have in class that was met by low evaluation scores, every suggestion of a new workout method I should try, every comment complimenting my personality or the beauty of my face that neglected to acknowledge the rest of my being hurt. Every word stuck with me.

[33] Frances Gatta and Amy Gopal, "Anorexia Nervosa: What to Know," WebMD, April 4, 2024, https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/eating-disorders/anorexia-nervosa/mental-health-anorexia-nervosa.

Words had and continue to have power over me, whether in or out of the dance classroom. I give words too much power. I know that now, but I haven't always. I thought I gave them the right amount of power. This is where I am to blame. This is where I have failed myself. I cannot blame those who spoke these words over, around, or to me for the deep sense of pain and brokenness I have experienced in life. For, in my case, the people who spoke these things were also the people who believed in me, celebrated my successes, and encouraged me in my endeavors.

My past instructors have never known of my disordered eating or mental health battles. They never asked, I never told. I will not suggest that it is a teacher's responsibility to know everything about all of their students on a personal level. That is impractical, potentially problematic, unprofessional, and often impossible. I failed myself by taking to heart the hurtful things they said carelessly. But I am not solely to blame, just as they are not solely responsible. No student is ever above correction. There is always room for growth within this art form, for anyone. Thus, the goal of careful communication is never to avoid offering cueing or commentary on ways for students to improve in their movement capability. But, what I will suggest is that it is a teacher's responsibility to curate their classroom environment intentionally. If the goal is to curate a space where holistic mind/body integrated self-perception is encouraged for students, educators must confront their own biases, actively work on healing their relationship to themselves, and communicate to students with care toward all parts of the student's being, while learning to honor student's individual experiences, and respect the impact their personal lives have on their role as a student. These experiences are what this work makes visible.

Collaboration

In creating this choreographic work, it was imperative to me to work with someone else. In this practice, what matters is my evolving ability to communicate within the dance setting about hard, beautiful, or painful things in a way that honors the personhood of the individual or individuals in the space, while curating a work that is my own. This work necessitated my presence in the space and the choreography due to the deep ties between my personal life experiences and the manifestation of my research. But, it also required someone else to create with. My friendship with my collaborator, Madilyn Hiley, began in our first weeks of undergraduate work as dance majors in August 2019. Yet, through the past five years, our lives have changed; we have encountered deep pain, immense heartbreak and challenges in our individual lives, had beautiful success and joy, and grown in our ability to relate our shared perspectives and experiences while challenging each other in our growth processes, through our differences. Our relationship as individuals gives us the space to create something that touches on fear, hatred, anger, pain, joy, love, passion, and relationships with others.

Madilyn's contributions to this work have been immense, particularly through open dialogue throughout the creation process. As mentioned above, honesty was pivotal in this work, as through my research, I deeply desired to avoid the potential negative impacts of engaging with a dancer in a studio from a place of disconnected personhood. Rather than split myself into choreographer and person, I brought my personhood into the space by giving voice to my fears and anxiety, simultaneously offering Madilyn space to do so as well if and when she chose. While our lengthy relationship heavily aided this level of openness throughout our process, I am eager to continue pursuing open communication in future processes. Even with newer relationships, I believe that through acknowledgments as simple as "I have had a rough day," we

simultaneously offer grace to ourselves and give students or cast members insight into the reality that things external to the studio may impact our ability to communicate well during a particular rehearsal. Similarly, by offering cast members the opportunity to express any necessary realities of their personal experience on a particular day, we, as choreographers, may be better able to communicate with grace in our interactions with cast members.

Tension

This is where the tension rests. The gift I have to create this work is something I could have never achieved without the immense support, care, and love of the many teachers I have had throughout my dance education experiences. Words some of them have spoken have proved highly damaging to my well-being. Yet, simultaneously, these people supported me, encouraged me, and helped me push myself. Thus, there are many things I desire to emulate from their practices in my pedagogy; the encouragement, love, and support I felt have gifted me the chance to be here today. In this work, I am not critiquing a singular person or group. I desire to honor and show respect to those who have poured their lives into me. However, I also hope to do what I can to help my students avoid the damaging effects of careless communication I have experienced at various points throughout my dance education. This tension is painful. I never want to appear ungrateful, but I also cannot stand to replicate harmful practices. So, I create in the unease of this situation. I hope those who have instructed me see the value of their efforts through the passion I still carry for this art form, but I hope they are able to consider the potential effects their communication has had on my, and others', self-perspective.

Yet tension not only rests in my complex relationships with my teachers but also in my choices within the curation. My initial instinct in the choreographic process was to pursue a movement quality that I found intriguing. Gentleness as a movement quality has been, in my

experience, devalued in comparison to specific quality counterparts, particularly those that evidence greater range, versatility, variance, or dynamics. It may prove monotonous, repetitive, and lacking complexity. Yet, in my choreography, I was drawn to the idea of seeing it as valuable, worthy of being pursued, and intriguing to investigate in my body. While I still wonder at the simple beauty that I believe can be found through engaging with gentleness, I realized that my pursuit of this quality for this work was heavily influenced by a mistrust of myself and my ability to move in a way other than gentle.

In many classroom or rehearsal experiences, I have found myself scared to try to do something that requires effort. I waited in the background, watching others, learning as much as possible, processing the information in my mind, asking questions to try to understand what was being asked of me, and yet, I waited. Too scared to try, too scared to fail. Then, I would begin to try things tentatively, taking up as little space as possible, hoping no one would watch me. This fear further evidenced my separation between mind and body, fearing my body's failure and relying on my mind's ability to comprehend. Ultimately, my pursuit of gentleness as a quality allowed for a festering of my fear of failure. I allowed myself to hide in the slowness or softness of the movement rather than asking myself to be proud of what I can do with who I am.

Gentleness also proves problematic as the sole initiator for holistic pedagogy. In terms of communication, gentleness can result in a sense of passivity that negates the importance of an individual in the space, the teacher, who is responsible for curating the space, providing material and promptings, and offering information to the students. As such, gentleness is no longer a central tenet of this work.

Reflection within Process

A critical reflection on personal experiences, past and present, was of great importance to the work to connect with the self in the present and heal from pain in the past. From our first rehearsals, Madilyn and I engaged in journaling, beginning and ending our time together by journaling responses to a series of questions. At the beginning of our rehearsals, we responded to the following four questions: What do you feel? How do you feel? Where do you feel? What do you need? At the conclusion, we answered three questions: Has anything changed? Do you feel any excess tension? How do you feel about yourself? This ritual allowed us to check in with ourselves in a way that honors both the mind and the body as the whole self rather than segmenting ourselves and only focusing on one part or the other.

Additionally, a large part of this process required intentional recollection of past experiences and dialoguing around those experiences throughout the choreographic process. Conversation became integral to our rehearsal process, necessitating an immense level of authentic vulnerability. From the onset of our rehearsals together, I was very open about my desires for the project and the creative process, even as they morphed, evolved, and encountered challenges. This level of authenticity in my creative process allowed the process to be centered around honest dialogue surrounding the implications of personal life on this creative process, critical reflection on how to deal with challenges, as well as finding ways to honor the legacy of those who have poured their heart into teaching both of us. Many days, I found myself in rehearsals, feeling overwhelmed by the depth of personal pain attached to the work I was doing. Yet, this process is a gift.

Section I: In Memory

The work opens with me on the stage, swaying in silence, and then continuing to sway gently as the melodic sound of a piano is heard playing the tune of Rogers and Hammerstein's "Edelweiss" from the musical and, ultimately, the film adaptation of *The Sound of Music*. While conversing with my thesis mentor, shani asked me to consider my relationship to dance and movement before the influence of externalized pressures and aesthetics as informed by the dance classroom. In considering this, I chose to have my work begin with an idyllic rendering and imaginative revisiting of the time before I knew that my body would be criticized by others and manipulated by myself through my love of dance and movement.

In crafting this section, my song choice came before the movement creation. This particular track resonates significantly with my childhood and ideas of peacefulness before chaos. Growing up, I repeatedly watched Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* (1965) and fell in love with the story and the music. While my nostalgia for this film is important, what runs even deeper is my ancestral connection to the nation of Austria and the implications of the meaning behind the lyrics that describe the idea of being in a place of home but knowing that what is known as home is about to change. This resonates deeply with my experience of myself as a child slowing my evolution from experiencing a place of joy-filled exploration to be a relationship with self built on distrust, fear, and, ultimately, hatred.

Thus, this section is like a glimpse into my memory. As I began creating this movement, I became challenged to remember what it was like to move and to dance before the external pressures of aesthetic ideals came to bear on my relationship with myself. As a child, I used to love spinning. I would twirl around my living room, bedroom, kitchen, or basement, sometimes challenging myself to keep going for as long as possible until I fell. As a child, I loved balancing

on my toes. I was particularly inspired by my memories of visiting the beach and the pleasure of creating footprints in the sand with my feet. Before beginning dance training, I played T-ball and basketball and loved running, jumping, and skipping around. As such, the movement within this section came from experiencing the freedom and joyfulness I was privileged to find in my childhood. Yet, ultimately, this joyful foundation serves as a platform from which a dive into distortion occurs.

Section II: Form

The first section of the work morphs into the second through a driving sound score that begins to pulsate as the first song fades away. In crafting this section, I began to think of the idea of shapes, fitting into shapes, fitting into a mold, and crafting myself in the pursuit of form. The beginning movements in this section resemble familiar shapes I have replicated throughout my dance training in ballet and modern dance classrooms. Moving through the gestures the first time, my face remains relatively emotionless; my body has become an object simply working to fulfill the form. This is not positive or negative, but instead, it starts to bring in evidence of disassociation through a hyper fixation on bringing my body to the forefront of attention, putting it through tasks, and asking it to create the shapes set before me. Yet, as I repeat the movement a second time, I become stuck. I begin to move my hand up my body, starting from my pelvis, up my abdomen, across my chest, and over my face, creating a gesture that portrays manipulating myself into something unfamiliar. This gesture came directly from a video I have of myself as a child, in my first year of ballet classes, standing at the barre, balancing in *sous sous*, running my hand up my belly and overhead to third position over and over, trying to apply the common correction of "pulling up." Seeing this clip several years ago brought to the forefront of my mind the reality of how early in my dance training my relationship with my body became broken.

While in the video, I am beaming, thrilled to have the chance to dance; the familiarity of comments within a dance classroom about engaging the belly, sucking in the stomach, and the ever-illusive concept to my young mind of remaining pulled up in movement, infiltrated my understanding of myself very early.

Following this movement, I come to cover my eyes with my hand. This gesture can be read in various ways, symbolizing blindness to seeing oneself clearly, ignorance of the pain one might choose or is pressured to experience, or resistance toward recognizing the unattainability of certain aesthetic ideals in Western concert dance. Ultimately, this section climaxes as I repetitively run to the upstage right corner, then *chassé* and leap downstage. This action is a nod to the frequency with which dancers are told one more time in a rehearsal or classroom setting and the frustration that occurs with being unable to do something correctly despite being told to do it repeatedly. The choice of leaping came from a time during my adolescence, wherein I spent hours in my parent's basement practicing my leaps, filming myself, finding problems, and repeating the movement to fix the flaws I saw.

Section III: Manipulation

The third section illustrates the painful reality of dragging myself through movement, seeking to manipulate my body into shapes that I realized were not designed for bodies like mine. After leaping I fall to my knees, and cross my arms over my chest, placing my fingers on the ground bridging my hands up. As I begin to move, the sound of paper tearing can be heard. As one of the most bothersome sounds to my hearing, this repetitive sound reflects the reality of continuing to drive oneself forward toward a goal while having to deal with hearing things over and over that make one uncomfortable, miserable, or feel anything less than valuable. The movement displays remnants of how I have tried to force my body into new shapes, drawing

from extreme stretching, overtraining to exhaustion, and constant pressure to work out to burn excess calories.

Additionally, a second sound can be heard in the score during this section. Though faint at first, the sound of a wooden metronome increases in volume throughout the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth sections. This driving force symbolizes the pressure of time and resistance to rest due to the fear of losing time. During this section, Madilyn first appears on the stage, slowly walking back and forth upstage of my solo movement in a robotic and calculated way, with the lights dimly lit above her. The pulsing metronome drives her movement. We do not acknowledge each other beyond simple glances, for while we exist in the space together, simultaneously experiencing an overwhelming pressure, we work independently at first, so consumed with ourselves that we cannot focus on anything but our bodies in space.

Section IV: Manipulation

The fourth section of the work carries over the same context and idea as the third, though the roles are reversed. Madilyn moves through a solo of her creation reflecting the same ideas of manipulation as reminiscent of her personal experiences. Simultaneously, I walk back and forth through the space in the upstage wing. The sound score also changes; while maintaining the driving metronome, a crackling water bottle becomes the prominent sound, evidencing something that bothers Madilyn's hearing. Madilyn's experiences with the problematic usage of mind/body dualism are unique to her. Through innumerable conversations in rehearsals and day-to-day dialogue, we have encountered many similarities in our damaging journeys with our self-perception through experiences in dance classrooms. The movement throughout this work resonates in complex ways with both of our journeys; however, her story in written words is hers to share and not my own. Nevertheless, hearing her experiences reaffirmed my urgency to do this

research and this creative work to honor the challenges I would propose many dancers face, specifically within collegiate settings. As Madilyn's solo concludes, we return to a brief mechanical running pattern, ultimately running straight downstage toward the audience and stopping on the stage's apron.

Section V: Segmenting Self

Eventually we come face to face with the audience. The creation of this portion of the work came in the final weeks of the process. Despite extensive conversations surrounding ideas of how to make visible the wounds that words leave through marking on our skin, I struggled to grasp the purpose of this section throughout much of our process. Madilyn and I discussed at lengths various options, including writing words on our skin on stage, having words pre-written on our skin at the top of the work, speaking words live on stage, and having a voice recording of words spoken to us within the sound score. However, as I crafted the work, this section always had a sense of uncertainty. Would the audience be able to see words? Would the speaking of words become too performative and inauthentic? Who would we be speaking to? And how does the audience fit within this narrative? In the final version of the work, Madilyn and I use a large black marker to make marks on both our own skin and each other's. The specific words become less important in this process, but the implication of splitting the self into pieces remains. We draw lines, both straight and curved, all over our bodies, reflecting the brokenness of identity.

In this process, there is an intentional nod to the influence of comparison within poorly chosen communication. Simultaneously, as we draw on our bodies, we move in a circular pattern, circling ourselves and each other. The sound score during this section reflects pieces of the self. Three sounds play over top of one another. A mechanical sound reflects the driving and task-oriented nature of the mind. The sound of a rushing wind demonstrates the passion and

mystery of the spirit or soul. Finally, a portion of a work entitled “Human Harmonic,” produced by Josh Jevons, represents the body. At the same time, the sound of the metronome continues to increase in volume, in a subtle nod to the ever-present urgency of production within art in a capitalistic society.

Section VI: Confronting Bodies

As the circling movement fades, Madilyn and I come face to face with one another. We are standing straight, mimicking the movement of the other. In this section, we repeat a gesture phrase three times, each time evidencing a further step away from this space of separating the self. The metronome remains throughout this section, yet it is joined by a more melodic and softer instrumental song. These two contrasting rhythms and energies permeate our movement. The first time we move through the gestures, the robotic tension unfolds from the indwelt pressure of conformity. Yet between the first and second set of gestures, there is a glimpse of acknowledgment, realizing the body in front of each of us is not a body but a person, and it is not a mirror image of ourselves. In the final repetition of the movement, we begin to intertwine ourselves, bringing our bodies together in space and via touch.

Section VII: Freedom in Words

The following section represents a reclamation of words, exploring voice, and engaging with movement through personal exploration. Early in the rehearsal process, we created phrases by responding in movement to a series of words I chose spontaneously and connected the movements into one long phrase. While the phrase had no specific resting place within the work at the time of its crafting, I ultimately chose to situate it before the culminating moments to bring a sense of separation within unity. This phrase begins on the floor and finishes with us standing. As we conclude the phrase, I speak the word step a second time, and we start walking through

the space. The act of walking resonates throughout this work on multiple levels, earlier as a robotic movement driven by time. Yet, in this section, the walking is driven by curiosity and intrigue. As we move through the space, we alternate back and forth, calling out action words spontaneously and embodying them in an improvisational score. These words are chosen randomly, offering a moment for exploration within the performativity of the work.

Section VIII: Utopic Vibrancy

The work's final section is a combination of phrases created at the onset of the process. While the thesis has shifted throughout the process, and gentleness as a movement quality has been removed, my desire to create movement that felt good in our bodies remained. The peaceful pleasure within this movement builds an anticipation for what can be. There is a sense of utopia within this section. The black pen marks are still readily visible on our skin. Like scars that never heal, the wounds of the past remain but are given less thought. We are who we are, and we can become something more than the words that labeled us in the past. I built each phrase independently and then ultimately strung them together. While interweaving these movements, we had never set a song. We practiced with various songs that curated ambient spaces but were not specifically tied to the choreography. Around early May, I chose to use a particular piece of music and set counts for the entire phrase. Yet, in this choice, something fundamental was lost. The necessity for communication between bodies through breath, the sound of our footfalls, visual focus, and an overall attunement to one another was gone, and our movement relied solely on functional relationship to the counts in the score. During one rehearsal, due to technical challenges, we moved through the final section to maintain our familiarity with the movement, with a different song playing in the background. In that run, we rediscovered the importance of

our attunement to one another, and we chose to use this new song instead, while removing the counts altogether. Our synchronization rests on our attention to each other and ourselves.

In the final moments of this section, the music fades, and Madilyn and I enter into an improvisational score centered on two themes: moving in a circular pattern and reflecting the idea of expansiveness. This entire process began with the word expansive, my fear of it, hesitation to use it, and confusion when being told to embody it. Yet, we return to this word, resisting the fear of taking up space, acknowledging the complexity of the various definitions of the term, and allowing ourselves to embody what arises within the moment of performance.

There is a rise and a fall to this section. An ebb and flow to the energy is present from the first moments of our hands shaking from behind our backs to the large jumps near the end of the phrase. Herein lies the potentiality of what could be. Through careful communication throughout this entire rehearsal process, I was able to craft a work with my collaborator that honored each of us and gave us the chance to connect to the work and one another in the performance.

Performance Reflection

In the weeks leading up to the performance of this work, the culmination of my creative manifestation on stage, I found myself confronting innumerable bouts with my anxiety. While preparing to demonstrate the fruition of my research into the impacts of Cartesian dualism and Western perceptions of intelligence, I found it hard to fight against my tendencies to fall into old habits. Over and over, I found myself just wanting to prove that I had done enough, that I had explored something important, that I had presented valuable information, and that what I had to say and perform mattered. In this line of thinking, I was challenged by the tech and dress rehearsal process.

As Madilyn and I moved through the work during our dress rehearsal, my thoughts kept running to other people's perceptions of me. I thought of my previous teachers, students, and fellow cohort members and my thoughts drifted to the few people sitting in the theatre. I became consumed with fears over what people may think of me and my work. I could not clear my head. But that is not my goal for myself or my students. I cannot always silence the noise in my head, but I can learn to have grace with myself in how I relate to the noise and communicate to others in a way that honors the fact that they may have just as much, if not more distractions in their own minds. While the dress rehearsal did not allow me to experience the sense of freedom and joy in movement that I desired, specifically from the final section, the resonance of realness that I experienced in confronting memories of real figures from my life was evidenced through my emotional investment into the work. The performance, however, was a different experience.

The morning of my thesis performance, I was reminded of the beautiful gift of life. I was reminded of the fact that there have been far too many days in my life when I had no desire to be still alive. Yet, I still live. For that, I hold immense and unmatched gratitude for the loving people in my life and the faithfulness of my creator for carrying me through the darkness I experience. On June 22, 2024, I had the privilege of stepping on stage at the Hollins University Theatre to perform my thesis work entitled *Stones and Sticks,* with one of my dearest friends in the world by my side, my family in the audience, and the incredible Hollins MFA dance community all around me. That is why this work matters, because there is a chance I may not have been here. But I am.

The performance itself did not go off without a hitch. Instead, during the work's final section, I skipped a portion of the choreography and moved to another phrase while Madilyn continued with the correct choreography. In this moment of performance, my mind flooded, but I

continued moving through the phrase I was on and returned to the correct choreography as soon as possible. In this failure, there was a deep-seated reminder. I am not and never will be striving for perfection, whether as a mover, as a teacher, as a choreographer, or as a human. While working to honor my mind, body, and spirit fully without valuing one more than another, each part of my essence, or my entire being, may fail or make a mistake. At this moment, some may say my body failed to move through the familiar movement patterns we had rehearsed innumerable times, some may say my mind failed to recall the correct cues based upon what I was seeing and hearing, some may say my spirit failed by being too emotionally driven and not focused enough on the work at hand. Regardless of what part of me, if only one, may have failed, I made a mistake. But mistakes and failure are not reinforcements for a disregard of any part of the self. They are not grounds for manipulation and ill treatment of myself, trying to discern my weakest link. But they are an opportunity to learn, and to see the value in continued progression.

Performing the work itself was a gift. Working through the emotional range of revisiting so many snapshots of my life experiences is beautifully tragic. As I embodied my experiences throughout my dance journey on stage, I was struck by the urgency to convey truth. It is not the truth, as if there is only one way I could have experienced the dance classrooms of my youth, but it is the truth of what occurred in my life. Based on contexts and situations, some prescribed to me and others chosen by me, the life I experienced is a truth of what can happen when communication is not always careful.

Conclusion

Careful communication is imperative in pedagogical practice. Without it, the risk of splitting a student's identity into segments varying in value is too significant, and the implications too detrimental to be ignored. The influences within Western culture, specifically on

perceptions of intelligence and the implied belief in Cartesian mind/body dualism, have direct ties to dance classrooms, specifically in collegiate settings or performing arts schools, where students receive academic and technical dance education within the same setting. While this work ties heavily to my experiences with having a perception that elevated my mind over my body, the potential implications of having a perception that elevates the body over the mind are significant and should be explored more fully.

Dance pedagogy cannot blindly replicate itself generation after generation. Yet, this statement acknowledges that certain practices utilized in previous generations may have served specific purposes, such as pushing dancers toward aesthetic ideals of perfection and artistry. But it refutes the idea that those practices were unharmful. Through more care in communication, students can still pursue technical excellence more holistically in a classroom where a codified movement form is being taught if educators use careful communication practices to inform a more holistic engagement with their students. This work serves as the urgency to create my system of pedagogical communication, evidenced specifically through my No Manifesto. While begun within this process, this document is incomplete and will continue to be refined as I grow as an educator. The urgency to refine pedagogical practices must never end. Educators must always continue to learn and evolve; if we do not, we will simply become robotic imitations of those who have come before, contributing nothing more of ourselves. This is where I stand. I desire to use myself, to use my pain, to use the deep self-hatred I have experienced as the foundation for a lifelong process of learning to communicate in a way that honors the students in the space and that honors the wholeness of who I am. I am mind/body/spirit, altogether important, valuable, and integral to my roles as a dancer, artist, teacher, choreographer, writer, and human being.

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