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### Oscar. Delta. Echo. A Study on the Physical Poetics of Gratitude

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# Oscar. Delta. Echo. A Study on the Physical Poetics of Gratitude

## Abstract

This document chronicles my choreographic process during my final year at Dominican University of California. It explores how loss can be understood through the embodied experience and expression of gratitude. The arc of relationships, through the process of introductions, intimacy, and absence, is communicated as a tender ode, expressed both in words and in dance.

The primary source comes from the finished dance and the choreographic process itself. The themes also draw inspiration from the works of Oscar Wilde, John O'Donohue, and Kimerer LaMothe as well as the poetry of David Whyte, Mary Oliver, and Jane Hirschfield. Through this process, corresponding ideas about language, impermanence, and resilience naturally became integrated into this thesis, so that gratitude becomes deeply intertwined with feelings of loss and absence.

Following the three stanzas of a Pindaric ode, the thesis unfolds in three sections that correspond with the strophe, antistrophe, and epode. The first section, "Oscar," introduces the people. "Delta," relating to change, conveys how these people impact our lives and change the shape of our worlds, both when they come in to our lives and when they leave. The last section, "Echo," shows that these changes continue to resonate long after the individuals have changed, dispersed, or disappeared. In physical and introspective reflection, both the finished dance and the written thesis connect these three sections through the underlying theme of gratitude. Paying tribute to those no longer present provides a way to transform loss into profound expressions of gratitude.

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Before reading on, watch the corresponding choreographic work that inspired this thesis:  
<https://vimeo.com/327397561/b88d1fbf4c>

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## Introduction

### A Note to the Reader

If I had dedicated this work to anyone, it would have been to you, but as you begin reading, you will instead find that the thesis itself is written as a dedication. For you, these words have been written. Without you, the stories spilling from this project would have remained unexpressed, clumsily lost and forgotten. Because of you, these stories found their voice, echoing ideas that are at once as universal and as intimate as a heartbeat. In light of its origins and influences, this work chronicles a chapter of my life and occupies a large part of my heart. As you continue reading, if you continue reading, I hope some of these words resonate with you.

### Prologue to the Choreographic Process

The idea of this thesis originated more than a year ago and over ten thousand miles away. The concept of gratitude, shaped by an ode, began there. It started as a poem and grew into a piece of choreography with the collaboration of my cast and a corresponding thesis. With five dancers and the seed of an idea, the process took flight.

### A Note on the Aviation Alphabet

In the aviation alphabet, also known as the phonetic alphabetic, each letter corresponds to a specific word. For example, the letter 'O' is 'Oscar' and so on. One encounters this alphabet in international military communications, as well as in travel, where airport announcements and airline pilots favor the clarity of its communication. Like Morse Code, it is a way to convey information while only representing, and not directly conveying, the source information itself.

The aviation alphabet was first developed in the mid-twentieth century for the clarity of communication. This alphabet is applied in my thesis as a way to communicate symbols of

flight: from paper planes to the wings of a swan, flight can represent forward motion, both supported and free, carrying the echo of the past into the trajectory of the future. With reference to the ways in which people travel in and out of our lives and reflecting how journeys become weightless when supported by something not immediately apparent, flight adds useful imagery to the ideas of loss embedded within this thesis.

Paper planes, in particular, carry particular meaning because of their appearance, like a motif, throughout my life. They suggest whimsy and the memories of childhood when, in early 2000, my father taught me how to fold a paper plane. From those moments shared with him, I learned that, in the flight of a paper plane, freedom comes from letting go and the object is almost always ultimately lost.

Flight celebrates both the path one has taken as well as the skybound direction ahead. An ode to paper planes initiated the journey that led me to where I am today: at school, studying and dancing. The following is an excerpt from my college application: it is a personal statement that applies as much today as it did when I wrote it four years ago, yet it also folds in the many stories of change that have occurred since. Including the Ode to Paper Planes as part of this project serves to document an element of the journey that ultimately culminated in this thesis.

### An Ode to Paper Planes

1. A blank foolscap piece of paper.

Something magical, a moment of beautiful whimsy, occurs when a plain piece of paper transforms into a paper plane. Childhood memories unfold in each fold of paper.

2. The first fold: the exactitude and confidence with which the paper is folded in half evokes a certain amount of expectancy; the hope for what will be, or what can be, created from the simplest materials and smallest actions.

The first time I flew in a real plane, he took me to New Zealand. I was not even a year old. What I enjoyed even more than flying in a plane was the feeling of

flight and freedom as he would push me on the swing in our backyard. Though I had barely grown old enough to run, I rocketed through the trees with his hands propelling me forward as the wind rushed past me.

3. After the first fold, the corners come together, united along the center crease.

As a child, I remember him teaching me how to press the side of my thumb along the edge of a piece of paper to create and reinforce a firm and accurate fold. With the logic and intellect of an engineer and with the caring patience of a friend, he sat me on his lap as he taught me the order of the folds.

4. To make the wings, the edges of the paper are folded down with care and precision so as not to create any unnecessary bows or imbalances that could hinder flight.

Ladybirds flew through the air as a box of ashes was rested in the earth. One tiny ladybird landed on the floral sleeve of my dress, its two identical wings joining in symmetry along its back. I, a little girl who had not yet seen her fourth birthday at the time, was enchanted by the creature. Though I wanted to hold it, to catch it and keep it, I simply watched it bustle between the folds of fabric before its delicately shaped wings lifted in a flutter of red and black, and it flew off with thoughtless freedom.

5. After every fold has been made, the paper has transformed into a miniature weightless plane, ready to fly out of its maker's hand.

Memories of flying and folds of paper and family soar through my mind as, with the slightest release of my thumb and forefinger, the makeshift aircraft leaves my grasp and takes flight, gliding along the surface of my breath. I do not really remember who he was, but my thumb and forefinger still remember everything he taught me and I will never forget the importance to take care when making wings. Now freed from the two dimensional confines of paper, the plane catches air as if its flight were the whisper of a wish.

6. A paper plane.

The power in each fold of the airplane imprints memories in the paper, propelling it forward. From the hands that created it, it soars like a child on a swing. I am on the back of those paper wings and the journey is evermore exciting than my first flight because this plane hasn't landed yet.

## Ode

“Pindaric, in Poetry, an Ode form’d in Imitation of the manner of Pindar... The Pindaric Manner is distinguish’d by the Boldness and Height of the Flights, the Suddenness and Surprizingness of the Transitions, and the seeming Irregularity, Wildness, and Enthusiasm of the whole”  
(Chambers).

An ode is both a shout of celebration and a tender whisper of thanks. This ode, danced and accompanied by a tangential thesis, is an explicit exhibition of gratitude, in tribute to the dancers and to those who have influenced our movement.

The ode is simple in structure and sound, yet it also carries a weight that appreciates individual voices. As a reader or an audience member, receiving a message becomes a choice of interpretation: appreciate or appreciate, two verbs, as in increase or as in value. Or both.

Through modern use, the meaning of the ode evolves to apply to any lyrical poem, most often in its celebration of a subject. In historic literature, an ode was a structured poem made to be sung. In this case, it is a collective story made to be danced. In poetry, the ode traditionally consists of three parts that provide a structure for the song and chorus: the strophe, antistrophe, and epode. Its structure is attributed to many ancient poets including Horatio, Archilocus and, most notably, Pindar, who, to this day, is remembered through Pindaric form.

Using the tripartite structure creates unique possibilities when applied to an essay. The conceptual division into thirds also superimposes itself into the choreography. This structure separates ideas into sections to be conveyed to the audience. Conveniently, or coincidentally, the word “ode” itself contains three letters. The division of three, with the respective stanzas and alphabetical characters, offers an expedient outline around which this thesis will take shape. As a reader and as a dancer the expression of words and meanings becomes the play between physical shapes and abstractions. Each letter becomes a metaphor.

The letter O, representing the first stanza or opening strophe, stands for the section titled Oscar. In the first weeks of the choreographic process and in the first section of the finished piece, I explore the introduction of personal expression. Through the stories we tell, different forms of communication offer new ways to connect with others and express ourselves.

D, standing for Delta, expresses change. The middle section of the process investigates the ways in which our lives impact one another, both in presence and absence. Through the choreography, we question how our movement and our experiences are guided by those who come into our lives, as well as asking how loss, too, shapes our interactions.

The last section, E, ends the ode with an unending Echo. Having shared stories of personal expression and experienced the changes that occur when our lives collide or intersect, there is then a residue of every interaction and encounter that continues to color our movement through the world. In a process of healing and resilience, the last section looks at how we can find strength in the people who have influenced our lives in order to move forward.

This process served as a study of gratitude. Building a dance piece around the structure of the ode offers the opportunity to embody the experiences from the past four years of university while integrating inspiration from the relationships made along the way. Even when people are no longer with us, their impact on our lives supports our stories, our capacity to change, and our strength to continue. In physical and introspective reflection, both the finished dance and the written thesis express these three sections with underlying gratitude.

“I dance for the same reason the poets write:  
to be taken up in the mysteries of life;  
the mysteries about which nothing can be said,  
but about which we should never stop speaking.”

Nick Blaylock.



## O.

## Strophe

## The First Ode: Gratitude for Summer

Oscar: Ode to the people who come into our worlds and to those who shape our worlds

“Strophe, in the Greek and Latin Poetry, a Stanza, or certain Number of Verses including a perfect sense; succeeded by another, consisting of the same Number and Measure of Verses, in the same Disposition and Rhythmus, call’d the Antistrophe...The Word is Greek, I turn; because at the End of the Strophe, the same Measures returned again; or rather, as the Term related, principally, to the Music or Dancing, because at first coming in, the Chorus or the Dancers turn’d to the Left, and that Measure ended, they turn’d back again to the Right” (Chambers).

## The First Ode: Gratitude for Summer

Summer’s gratitude is keen.

It lives in the color of strangers’ eyes and the vowel sounds of a long exhale. It is the story of the beach goer and the voice of pebbles, tears and salted eyelashes. It is dance. (Will I remember how this feels?) Overflowing gratitude for the generosity of the ocean and the priceless currency of sea glass.

Summer’s gratitude spills.

It tastes of pawpaw.

Summer’s gratitude is the winter storm that surprises the desert and the rain that calms the drought. Rainbows become ordinary reminders of everyday beauty. Heartbreakingly beautiful. Gratitude for every broken heart that belongs – among other imperfect parts we find our home – we fit perfectly. I am grateful for each moment alone and I am grateful for the loneliness that brought us together. Gratitude for the shy tenderness of budding friendship. Long lost friends.

The devastating difference between last and lasting.

A deep appreciation for the difference between burnt and burning.

Summer’s gratitude is light, a light, alight.

The gratitude does not give up growing. It takes root in the shoots of untold stories. Just wait until it blooms. Look up and gratitude is there: in the stars, in the faces of those I love, in a jungle of unidentified plants.

Ask me what I am grateful for and I will tell you that the story lives in the space between, or beyond, words... Summer’s gratitude is incomplete, ever changing. And I am grateful that it continues.

- V.M.

## Oscar

In the strophe, the first section introduces the language and style with which the rest of the ode will unfold. For this thesis and for the performed dance piece, the opening section introduces the poetic approach to gratitude, loss, and resilience. It also literally sets the stage with the dancers who are, after all, both the writers and the recipients of the ode.

To connect with others, start with a name. This is the introduction. The name signifies the individual and acts as the first point of connection.

Take, for example, Oscar Wilde. His name has come to represent a myriad of embedded meaning. Not only is his name synonymous with the aesthetic movement and literary criticism, but his story is remembered as tragic and complex while the true experiences of his life are forever lost within the folds of history, “The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple” (Wilde). A complete enigma, a character of dreams, an impossible cynic and an advocate for imagination, he is at once larger than life and yet little more than the words he left behind.

In his work, I found a voice that speaks with startling volume and heartbreaking vulnerability. Rather than turning away from heartbreak, Wilde writes about experiences of loss with acuity and perceptive care. With indulgent flippancy and audacious authenticity, his essays manage to be both smart and smarting with buried feeling, which may reveal much about his character, yet may also reveal nothing at all. He lived an artistic life riddled with loss, but with grace he claims that, “Hearts live by being wounded” (Wilde). In studying his life and his work, I found myself moved by his unapologetic expressions of love and loss.

When the choreographic process started, I sought to emulate what I had come to admire in Wilde's work. His artistic voice influenced me and my approach in integrating physical poetry with a written thesis.

### Expressions of Identity in the Choreographic Process

Inspired by Wilde, the expression of identity with authenticity and artistic abstraction initiated my exploration of odes. To create a physical ode, created for and performed by the dancers, I wanted to begin the process by exploring their individuality.

The dancers' vulnerability to share and express their stories embodied the united spirit that we cultivated throughout the choreographic process. In an interview, John O'Donohue notes, "We see compassion in an openness to the greater mystery of the other person. The present situation, deed or misdeed is not the full story of the individual, there is a greater presence behind the deed or the person than society usually acknowledges" (Nurrie Stearns). As the cast started working together, stories were exchanged with compassion and vulnerability, both through movement and through words. Together we crafted our own movement vocabulary with which to express these experiences. Over time, this led to the creation of new stories, so that there is a story behind every individual involved and a backstory connected to each movement.

The first rehearsal began with a choreographic task designed to express a narrative behind their own individuality. They wrote a pair of six word stories, one about how they see themselves and one about how they believe to be seen others. Sharing their short narratives in rehearsal, they developed movement based on another's written material: interpretations of autobiographies becoming new biographies. Abbreviated memoirs encompassed a wealth of expressive individuality for each dancer: Gaby, Sierra, Grace, Rowan, and Kennedy.

Here is a collection of their stories:

Time well spent, adventures all around.  
She felt the quake of women.  
A process, looking, growing, knowing, questioning.  
Foreign knowledge made me very independent.  
Lost in her thoughts, cautiously courageous.

The dancers interpreted each other's stories, abstracting meaning in order to create interconnected phrases. With five pairs of solos, the early outline of the piece started to grow, through explorations of communication, language, and the various means we use to share our stories with one another.

In another section, the rhythmic language of Morse Code dictated the movements of a phrase where each letter, composed of short or long units, became transposed into gestures that reflected the syncopation of dots and dashes. With movements corresponding to letters O, D, and E, the dancers could speak with their bodies, dancing a literal ode and subsequently spelling out their own names.

The music track accompanying the movement also included units of Morse Code. In the track, the scratching sounds of pencil on paper can also be heard. To include their artistic voices, I recorded the dancers as they wrote their own stories. The aim of this sound is to underscore the ways in which the voice, as well as personal narratives, can be expressed in various ways. Communications do not necessitate spoken word nor do they need to be blatantly apparent: a person's name can be represented in the gesture of an arm or their experiences of loss can be shared in the whisper of pencil on paper. Through the choreography, our stories and our individual forms of connection became expressed in subtle detail: the cross of a t and the dot of an i, the touch of a hand and the tilt of the head.

With communication and personal expression as the frame of reference for this process, the piece started to take shape. With little choreographic experience myself, I watched wonderstruck as ideas manifested through movement.

“Beauty is the symbol of symbols.  
Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing.  
When it shows itself, it shows us the whole fiery-colored world.”  
Oscar Wilde.

### A Note on Language and Communication

Language, as a phenomena central to our interactions and as the most apparent means of communication, plays an important role in the development of this thesis. Functioning as the foundation for shared stories, symbolic language facilitates both individual and collective expression. Because of language, humans can recognize, identify, and categorize the objects or ideas they encounter so that they can make predictions and adaptations that support effective engagement with their environment. Language connects us with the legacies of history, passed down through stories that stretch across generations.

In a few lines and curves, words are translated into replicable stories, which can then withstand the limitations of time. In the novel *The Word Exchange*, the narrator reflects that, “Every word is itself a memento of the past” (Graedon 95). Through the words we use, we assign meaning and value, differentiating the notable from noise. At the same time, because of semantics and the diversity of literary devices, the words of language can be applied with customized specificity and complete originality.

Realizing that the alphabet itself stems from one shared history that has come to exist in a myriad different languages underscores the incredible plasticity of the application of letters. Writing about the evolution of the alphabet from its origin in the fertile crescent, David Sacks says, “Letters are mere convention, changeable according to need,” (Sacks). With astounding

evolutionary adaptability, the strokes and shapes of letters changed over the centuries to accommodate the medium with which they were written. We have adopted the legacy of the letters that ancient civilizations left behind and applied this symbolic language to our own communications.

In its abundant application, language serves as the paradigm for communication. However, in language, as in communication, there is space for uncertainty, ambiguity, and miscommunication. Any one word or any one action can have a multitude of meanings. Depending on the context and tone, as well as the system of delivery and the recipient, the meaning can change. The possibility of implications adds layers of meaning to the complexity of language. “The distinction between what is said and what is conversationally implicated isn’t just a technical philosophical one. It highlights the extent to which human communication is pragmatic and non-literal” (Kasmirli). In this way, the gap between definitions and implications can lead to misinterpretations. While there are moments when such misinterpretations prove inadvisable, the possibility for multiple interpretations also offers fodder for art and imagination. In the words of Oscar Wilde, “I live in terror of not being misunderstood” (Wilde).

A wonderful corollary to language, complete with miscommunication, is the development of word play and metaphor. Because of the possibilities for interpretation or misinterpretation, dictionary definitions create only an illusion of understanding. “Metaphors and other creative uses of language are typically designed precisely to generate such rich indeterminate implicatures” (Kasmirli). Language itself uses metaphorical representation, recruiting the imagination to approximate an understanding or a frame of reference with which to interact with the world. In practice, the ambiguity of communications makes it possible for multiple meanings to exist at once.

It is through words that we can let our imagination intersect with the world around us. However, words alone are inadequate in expressing ourselves and our experiences with one another. Even Wilde, an artist whose medium was words themselves, recognized that language was an “incomplete instrument of expression” (Wilde). Limited to words alone, language and communication can only say so much.

Beyond words, both language and communication exist in other expressions, such as body language and nonverbal communication. There are sensations that cannot be explained in words and ideas that cannot be communicated through conventional language. There is the space between the lines and the unspoken implications of anything from punctuation to pagination.

In alternate modes of communication, there still remains effectively endless room for interpretation. Looking at the piece that is the source for this thesis, it could be interpreted in any number of ways. Language and communication, while not central to the themes of gratitude and loss, offer the frame of reference through which the entire project can be seen and interpreted. It is through language, both verbal and physical, that expressions of gratitude and loss can be shared with others. Through the communication of the cast, working together in the unity of several individual voices, this piece cultivates a vocabulary of its own, attaching unspoken meaning that translates approximately into gratitude. It is the physical equivalent to word play or an embodied thank you note.

“The word last is a very versatile word.  
Among other more unexpected things – like the  
piece of metal shaped like a foot which a cobbler  
uses to make shoes – it can mean both finality and  
continuance, it can mean the last time, and  
something a lot more lasting than that.”

Ali Smith.

— — — — ° ° °

## D.

### Antistrophe

#### The Second Ode: Gratitude for Time

Delta: Ode to the possibility of change and to the possibility to be changed

“Antistrophe, a figure in Grammar, whereby two Terms or Things mutually dependent one on another, are reciprocally converted.

Antistrophe was also a kind of Dance in use among the Ancients; wherein they stepped sometimes to the Right, and sometimes to the Left, still doubling their Turns or Conversions, see Dance” (Chambers).

#### The Second Ode: Gratitude for Fall

Gratitude for fall fades in: a gift in measures.

Twenty years ago, I said. Fall is a time to begin anew, no matter what they say, each morning is pale but perfect. Glowing light tacked to the sky. Rain. She says there is disappointment but there is not. There is gratitude too big to contain. She’s trying, she is. Something breaks into tears because there’s no other way to respond to the sun cutting through the skyline.

If you were there you would’ve seen it.

Well. Happy. And free.

Hers is the hand over hand steering. Who taught ten and two? Whoever taught confidence, who taught the bird to build a nest.

Ten years ago, I said. The only difference between flying and falling is the direction. Grace and gratitude are twin blossoms.

This is gratitude for fall. For paths crossed and braided. Chance encounters that change everything: the lift of a plane, the tilt of the planet. For hands held without holding on. (Can we keep in touch?)

- V.M.

## Delta

Turning back, the antistrophe is the change that happens as a response to the initial expression of the strophe. The return of the antistrophe is an inevitable part of the ode, just as change is an inevitable part of movement and moving forward. Within the context of this thesis, the delta represents the possible changes that individuals experience when their path is affected by the presence of others.

Everything changed when one of my dancers could no longer participate in the work: the cast of five became a cast of four. I found myself wondering how to continue creating the same piece when there was such a conspicuous absence, not only in the choreography itself but also in the structure of the cast. I did not want to keep generating new movement as if her absence did not affect the choreography already set, yet I also could not justify discarding the material we had created for the sake of starting a new piece with four dancers.

The question became how to honor the work we had done so far while continuing to build a piece with the four remaining dancers. The answer, in many ways, came from the question itself. Rather than choreographing a piece that expressed gratitude for the stories we tell and the means of communication we use to connect with one another, I shifted my focus to the ways in which we express gratitude for the people we know, those who change us, and continue to move our lives even when they are no longer with us.

In researching how gratitude appears in our lives and the effects it can have on our relationships, I also discovered the connection between gratitude and grace: “The word gratitude is derived from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness” (Harvard Health). This apparently trivial detail is of particular note because of the change that took place during the lifecycle of the choreographic process. The dancer whose presence is embodied in the movement even in her absence, her name is Grace.

“You can have the other words –  
chance, luck, coincidence, serendipity.  
I'll take grace. I don't know what it is exactly,  
but I'll take it.”  
Mary Oliver.

## Expressions of Change in the Choreographic Process

Gratitude, central to an ode, gained sensitivity and relevance in this process when it became attached to the immediate awareness of each other's presence or lack thereof. In the face of change, my cast and I came together to rework our choreography so that the movement embodied the absence of the fifth dancer. We sought to maintain the integrity of her artistic vision within the movement, while altering and fragmenting certain sections to reflect the sense of loss. Her movement influenced the choreography just as her presence had impacted each of our lives. When she left, her influence remained.

The piece began to reflect the process itself. In the rehearsal process, the dancers first united as a cast in September, then after the cast lost one dancer, the remaining dancers drew strength from their sensitivity and innate resource of grace. Likewise, the finished piece opens with the dancers coming together, followed by a motif of one dancer separating from the group.

As a result of the cast's connection, collaboration, and compassionate presence, they came to know that, even when one separated from the group, neither their movement nor their performance was theirs alone. The joys and the losses are shared with one another, forever changing those involved and creating imprints on their individuality. The relationships made along the way, in the process and in the finished piece, offer systems of support that continue to offer strength even after the individual relationships have changed, dispersed, or disappeared.

For the costumes, the dancers wore different styles of outfits. Each garment was chosen specifically for the dancer, reflecting her individual preference and personality. From the beginning of the process, I felt that the movement and the concepts lent themselves to the poetic imagery of white. The reasoning behind this relates to light, openness, and our capacity to be imprinted upon. White cloth gathers dirt and catches the light. Shadows become visible and there

is a suggestion of transparency. Following that intent, the dancers also performed barefoot. With nothing between themselves and the earth, their soles could collect dust and dirt.

To allow the residue of experiences to accumulate by remaining light, open, and impressionable enables us to grow from every encounter. Each moment creates a unique stain. Especially when facing loss, the ability to embody whatever accompanying emotions creates resilience. Coping with loss colors our capacity to experience the spectrum of our world.

During the middle section of the dance, corresponding to Delta, the movement focuses on change and the changes we affect in others. The movement explores how these changes can happen actively or passively, with aggression or with sensitivity. Through movement, our lives inadvertently shape one another's experience and create a collective narrative. At times, this process may be painful. Other times it happens without notice. No matter what, the connections made between one another change the landscape of the narrative. The cruelties of complicated relationships, whether intentional or not, force us to encounter how inevitably connected we are. There are gestures throughout the piece that depict a sort of violence, however the intention of these movements comes, not from cruelty, but from the need for connection. In the apparent aggression there are layers of embedded stories that relate less to trauma and more to the miscommunications and mistakes inevitable in intimate relationships. The collision of lives, on stage or in life, offer an opportunity for connection and all that that entails, filled with trials, forgiveness, a sense of play and ultimately an expression of grace.

In the choreography, the dancers have moments to express points of contact where they actively affect change. Engaging with one another in an equal distribution of effort, the dancers create the community on stage that extrapolates the collaborative environment of the rehearsal studio. The passive movements, where one dancer is physically manipulated by another, reflect

how changes can happen to us even when we least expect them. One dancer may affect a movement change in another even when they are facing away from each other. There is a visceral experience of being seen, of being found, and of experiencing loss, all of which are explored by these four dancers and their interactions.

Physical manipulations, close interactions, and the sharing of weight guide the development of choreography. Shaping the space to reflect physical absence also influenced how the dancers were placed on stage and how they interacted with one another. The middle section starts with the four dancers sitting together in a uniform line, except that their spacing leaves a conspicuous gap where the fifth dancer used to sit. Likewise, the four dancers create and continue to manipulate architectural shapes in this section that structure physical placeholders to emphasize both presence and the power of absence.

The exploration of presence also occurs during moments of stillness, where change happens almost unnoticed. For example, the last image of the middle section shows the dancers lying together in a pile in apparent stillness. However, their intimacy, collective intentionality, and physical proximity affect their breathing so that, even in stillness, their lives create an interwoven experience.

The piano track for the middle section covers two popular songs: “I’ll Be Seeing You” and “The Way We Were.” The choice to use these particular songs recollects a cascade of tributes, referencing fond memories and significant points of connection. The pianist is my grandfather who, at 92, continues to play the piano every day. He also played an integral part in my childhood, so I wanted to pay tribute to him. Living on the other side of the world, we do not see each other often, yet his unseen presence still influences my life on a daily basis. In the words of Christian Burns, “Being together can mean a lot of different things.” Even when we are

not physically together, there are other ways to connect with and pay tribute to those who change our lives.

In “The Way We Were,” a sense of nostalgia and the emphasis on interpersonal relationships that change over time lent itself to the direction of the piece. “I’ll Be Seeing You” describes the memory of a loved one and the imprints that that person made on the world, seen in everything from “the chestnut trees” and “the children’s carousel” to the moon (Kahal). This sentiment beautifully articulates the inspiration for this piece. Furthermore, this song provided the soundtrack to the very first choreographic material we developed over a year ago. Before I had a cast or even an inkling of choreographic intent, I worked with Grace and Sierra in a two-hour composition workshop. Sierra then suggested that the duet we created be set to Billie Holiday’s version of this song. During the initial rehearsals with my full cast, I planned to incorporate this duet; however, when Grace left our cast, the duet required deconstruction. The result is that Sierra dances the same movements that she did with Grace, but the role of Grace is filled by each of the other dancers, in turn stepping in to fulfill the duet. The instrumental version of this song provides a backdrop, paying tribute to the process and all the changes made along the way.

Throughout the middle section, the sounds of a pencil writing on paper underlie the instrumental music: stories on stories, communicating narratives of change, loss, and remembrance without any words at all. For the entire piece, from one section to the next, the music choice also reflects the passage of time as a function of change. From Bach to the Beach Boys and through the musical eras in between, the track takes into account the evolution of harmony through time. As my grandfather learned in his years as a student of music, “the progress of harmony is the progress of discord” (Jewell).

## A Note on Loss and Impermanence

In researching the ways that loss is embodied, I encountered questions of grief and impermanence. With presence comes the inevitability of loss: the loss of time, the loss of a feeling, the loss of a friend. A certain sadness is felt with each day ending. While grief may manifest differently depending on the relationship between what was lost and what remains, the occurrence of loss is inevitable and the presence of grief may saturate our experiences.

In response to the consuming presence of loss, movement alleviates the feelings of pain and transforms absence into a source of inner strength. During the first year of university, the saliency of this statement became strikingly apparent. Hearing the news that my best friend's classmate had been murdered on her campus sent shock waves of loss through my carefully constructed college experience. Reeling from the effects of this loss, I struggled to find a way to cope. Only when one of my professors, seeing my apparent distress and grief, encouraged me to embrace dance as a practice of presence, was I able to find strength from moving through loss. Arriving in the studio every day offered me an opportunity to heal, reminding me of the inevitable, often painful, and always important appreciation of change.

Understanding absence allows us to embrace confusing, even contradictory feelings as they arise within us. When I asked my dancers to explain their own experiences of loss, they described a paradoxical array of emotions that exist beyond words and include sensations of overwhelming numbness and burning loneliness. Rowan reflected on how the feeling can be at once too much and also nothing at all. Because the experience of loss encompasses the body and overwhelms thought, movement offers a conduit of expression that circumvents the conventions of words. Kennedy Howard offered her own insights: "As far as expressing feelings of loss, I am someone who hates to admit to myself that things have come to an end ... The hardest part of

dealing with loss is letting myself settle into the absence of it. I struggle to let what was left behind resonate with me the way it was, which should really be enough” (Howard). Through movement, dance offers an approach to healing where grief can be encountered and experienced in all its various forms.

Without a medium of expression, such experiences of loss can protract pain in unforeseen and often subconscious ways. Traumas are deeply embodied, which can have lasting physiological effects as well as psychological consequences. The issue of trauma is the subject of Bessel Van Der Kolk’s book, *The Body Keeps the Score* in which he asserts that those who have experienced trauma, “cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations of their bodies” (Van Der Kolk 102). With the understanding that experiences are embodied, physical movement offers an avenue for recovery. While his book seeks to address traumas on a larger scale, the research about the devastating consequences on both the mind and the body apply to any experience of loss. Championing compassion through interpersonal connection helps us deal with traumas, grief, or loss. Through movement, we can listen to the experiences of loss, enabling them to be addressed in ways that cultivate healing and empowerment, rather than pain and embitterment.

Encountering the traumas of loss facilitates an appreciation for presence and reminds us about gratitude. Frank Ostaseski, the founding director of the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, authored a book about encountering loss with gratitude: “Stories of people meeting impossible conditions with grace uplift us and inspire hope in the basic goodness and altruism of human beings” (Ostaseski 48). These stories that we share with one another shape the very understanding of our existence and texture the fabric of our being. Embodying loss with gratitude transforms it into an embrace of impermanence. Losing something offers the

opportunity to reflect on presence and contact the powerful connection of absence: “Absence and presence are sisters. The opposite of presence is not absence, the opposite of presence is vacancy. Vacancy is a void, a space which is hungrily empty, whereas absence is a space of spatial emptiness, but there is a trail of connection toward the departed one, the lost one, the absent one. To feel absence is to feel connection with the one who has gone...The feeling of absence can create an incredible feeling of compassion” (Nurrie Stearns). With gratitude, linked to compassion, impermanence becomes a beacon of absence that connects us to the people who change the journey of our lives.

“It's turning the thunder into grace,  
knowing sometimes the break in your heart  
is like the hole in the flute.  
Sometimes it's the place  
where the music comes through.”  
Andrea Gibson.

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## E.

### Epode

#### The Third Ode: Gratitude for Spring

Echo: Ode to the people we will become because of the people we have known

“Epode, in Poetry. In the Lyric Poetry of the Greeks, the Epode is the third part, or end of the ode: their Ode, or Song, being divided into Strophe, Antistrophe, and Epode. The Epode was not confined to any precise Number, or Kind of Verses; as the Strophe and Antistrophe were... But when the Ode contain'd several Epodes, Strophes &c. they were all alike. As the Word Epode, the, properly signifies the End of the Song; and as in Odes, what they call'd the Epode, finish'd the Singing... But the signification of the Word is extended still further; Epode being become a general Name for all Kinds of little Verses that follow one or more great ones, of what Kind soever they be” (Chambers).

#### The Third Ode: Gratitude for Spring

Within these hills, stories of the wars. Massive. Structures. Systems of support. Rusted. Gratitude for the Eastern sun. And for the bayed sea, corroding with endless care, systems of support like suspension bridges.

Cars trespass. She stands. Litter glints. She is.  
She is not trespassing.

The clouds reflect every color within, every color of the world distilled. The weight of their presence is not ominous but enlightening. A reminder of what it really means to be invisible. Weightless.

She can't see the bridge, the journey taken, the paths crossed. She can't see the structures of support. She can't see the rising sun.

But she knows they are. She is. There on the horizon and she knows she has come from herself. Exactly where she needs to be. As she is meant to be.

And. But. If. Are the directions.  
(Will I ever see you again?)

Only every day. In a million different ways.

Mourning comes from the end of something unending. Morning comes. Too. And today is going to be a beautiful day. And.

- V.M.

## Echo

In response to the previous stanzas of the traditional ode, the epode completes the movement. The epode accumulates what has been said to unify an ending. The echo, like the epode, returns and repeats, with each iteration dependent on the original sound as well as shaped by the container in which it is held. Within the context of this thesis, the echo is interpreted as a symbol comprising the past and resonating into the future. It exemplifies the space in which both change and continuation exist together.

When experiences resonate within our body, physical echoes are embodied through individual movements and through our contact with others. Habits and memories resonate in the ways we move and interact, connecting us with those who have shaped our world and further shaping the space in which these echoes exist. As we continue repeating habits and echoing our experiences, connections amplify or dampen certain aspects of our voice. Repeated words or actions create meaning, accentuating ideas that would otherwise fall silent without the support of collective resonance.

In my own expression there is the echo of everyone whose words have left whisper marks on my life. From strangers on a plane to best friends and family, from favorite authors to inspirational teachers, my voice echoes with their words. If mine is a vital voice it is only because of the stories they have shared with me. There are certain words I embrace into my vocabulary because they remind me of specific people; the sound of a word becomes reminiscent of that person I love. The same applies to habits and movement. We become repositories of characteristics adopted from those we love, of those who have loved us.

“Whether you know it or not,  
we leave parts of ourselves wherever we go.”  
Simon Van Booy.

## Expressions of Continuance in the Choreographic Process

Following the structure of this paper and the way that the process itself reflects the three sections of an ode, the last section serves as a reflection of what has come before. In the rehearsal process, the first two sections were essentially finished in the first semester. The first rehearsal of the following semester after a six week break enabled us to start a new section from scratch. However, starting from scratch after having already had a semester generating movement in collaboration with one another meant that the new section was deeply influenced by and reflective of our experiences together.

In the same way that language and voice reference past experiences and previous connections, much of the choreography itself references the people and experiences that have guided me through this process. With nods to the legacy of concert dance and theatrical traditions, as well as to childhood playgrounds and daydreams, the movement collects past experiences into a collage of inspiration.

By cultivating sensitivity and awareness to the ways in which the people around us move our lives, the personal stories of each individual dancer then revealed the repository of stories that they have received from others. Inherent in their movement is a rich inherited history of everyone who has moved their life, in however profound ways. Especially in respect to graduation, an accumulation of the past four years of information is embodied. As a culminating expression of thanks, the finished dance, in convergence with the thesis, pays tribute to those who have led me to where I am today.

To create the effect of this physical tribute, the piece uses embodied echoes in multiple different iterations. Through repetitions and recollected habits, shadows and the reminiscence of

past experience, the choreography pays tribute to the individuals involved and to those who informed the work even in the absence of their physical presence.

By using repetition, the work captures how the things that influence us continue to reappear in our lives in various iterations. The people, relationships, experiences, and ideas that we encounter create a lasting effect, changing how we see the world or which path we take to move forward. The opening shape, for example, is repeated three times throughout the piece, but the systems of support change or are changed by the shape in each variation. Another example of repetition is found in the shadowed gesture phrase, where two soloists abstract shadow puppets. Later on, these same dancers come together to create a duet with the same movement, repeated but different because of the connection they make.

Playing with shadows enabled the dancers to explore the way they can affect their environment and change the visual landscape without physical manipulation. Shadows suggest indirect presence. The choice to incorporate light and shadow also related to the desire to appreciate the performance space itself. Limited in its facility and lighting options, Angelico Concert Hall is home to our performances. Having performed at this theater at least three times a year for the past three years, it seemed only suitable to include the space in the design of the choreography itself. Through the movement and the intentional manipulation of shadows, the space is appreciated and becomes part of the piece, integral to the performance.

Another choreographic device I used in order to honor past experiences was the abstraction of previous choreographic processes. Borrowing from what other dancers have taught me, I edited movements into the piece as beacons of appreciation for those who have inspired me. The signature shake of a leg or wave of an arm reference specific memories that imprint themselves on the physical narrative of the piece. Even taking movement habits from people who

are not dancers, there are gestures in the choreography that are miniature odes to my dad, my grandfather, my friends, and my cast themselves. Specific gestures mirror those of famous lineages within dance while others humbly reference the habits of a family member.

In the last section, the soundtrack transitions from instrumental to vocal, with the introduction of The Beach Boys' song, "The Warmth of the Sun." The story behind this artistic choice involves both the lyrics of the song itself and the overall emotional atmosphere of its score. The words describe an experience of love that, like the warmth of the sun, will never die. Even when night falls, the power of that love continues to offer warmth. For the accompaniment of the last section, this felt appropriate, perfectly pitched. Furthermore, it was important that this study of love and losing did not dwell on sadness. Instead, the experience of relationships, through the process of introductions, intimacy, and absence, is ultimately a tender ode to one another. Finishing the piece with the Beach Boys' song, with its wistful harmonies, celebrates the lasting joys that remain with us even after encountering loss.

In the last seconds of the dance, a dancer repeats a movement from the previous section. With arms spread wide, Sierra leans her weight forward and falls into the arms of the other three dancers. Where previously no one had been there to catch her, she is now suspended in an embrace. Gradually, each of the other dancers walks away, leaving her alone but supported.

The final image of the dance shows Sierra with arms raised in the memory of an embrace. She is still, standing strong on her own two feet. Her strength comes from the systems of support that developed throughout the dance, so that even in the physical absence of the others, she now embodies the stories of their shared experiences. To understand structures of support without seeing their presence offers us a bridge that connects our loss to the resilience of our love. John O'Donohue describes this in his interview about spirituality, compassion, and absence: "In

coming into the gift and grace of friendship, you enter into your own fullest completion. ...The visible presence of the body is the sign of the invisible presence of the eternal, the divine. One of the fascinating tasks in every human life is to engage and experience oneself as a unity” (Nurrie Stearns). The movement of this dance follows a trajectory in pursuit of this unity that, even in the face of loss, generates a strong connectivity within the community.

Sierra is left on the stage alone, an embodiment of grace. Rather than depicting the hostile indifference of vacancy, the physical loss at the end reflects the compassionate absence that unites an individual with an infinite network of interconnected histories.

### A Note on Resilience and Healing

Before exploring the ways that dance can act as a pathway to resilience, it is important to understand the contexts and limitations of resilience. As a way to champion perseverance without normalizing pain in moments of loss, resilience can provide vital strength and coping mechanisms; however, when taken too far, hedging behind resilience threatens to desensitize us to proactively responding to issues that matter. Resilience must be applied with care and awareness so that it does not defer to suffering and inhibit progress. In its best form, resilience forges a way forward with grace and strength.

When attention is invested in our attendance to the world and support for each other, the resilience of the body and mind gains the strength to facilitate healing. Dance is the capacity to engage attention; movement has the power to refocus energy during times of crisis. In her studies of dance and movement practice, Kimerer LaMothe observes how dance can transform obstacles into valuable and generative parts of our very selves: “It is when we are forced to respond to obstacles and challenges, disappointments and fears, that we do the kind of singular work that resonates with universal meaning. The moves we make make us into people who can. No loss is

simply a loss when we create through it” (LaMothe). Creating through loss is a generative opportunity of grace and healing. Emphasizing the power of absence enables us to reframe our understanding of presence, so that loss becomes a source of strength that continues to guide us into the future.

The process of recovery in pursuit of resilience inevitably takes both time and the ability to identify vulnerabilities. David Whyte writes that “our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully” (Whyte). The very physical practice of dance is a choice to trust the body and they very essence of presence. In doing so, an awareness grows identified and embraces vulnerabilities, enabling the innate intelligence of the body to recover and rejuvenate itself: “Bodies are constantly healing. Constantly regenerating” (LaMothe). Dancing with partners requires further vulnerability, leaning into the weight at each point of contact and letting connections develop between people. This empowering process reveals our internal resource of untapped resilience.

Through my experience as a dancer, I have intimately experienced how attending to the beauty of movement and the healing processes of the body create a foundation of resiliency in the face of change or loss. In his research about grateful coping, Emmons explains how this process offers strength in the face of adversity, a means to cope in the face of loss: “In the face of brokenness, gratitude has the power to heal. In the face of despair, gratitude has the power to bring hope. In other words, gratitude can help us cope with hard times” (Emmons). More than coping, gratitude contributes a feeling of being full alive. Whether movement is approached as dance or undertaken as a ritual, the practice encourages healing.

The study of healing through dance is the focus of Anna Halprin’s Tamalpa Institute in the hills of Northern California. Since the 1930s, when she participated as an active voice in the

postmodern dance movement, Anna Halprin continues to explore the transformative nature of dance. Through cancer and illness, through encounters with death and the loss of loved ones, Halprin teaches movement as an avenue of healing. In a workshop I attended at her Tamalpa Institute, I encountered the timeless power of movement to connect us with others, even in the lack of their physical presence. Engaging in a transformative ritual together, the community offered an intense experience of healing. That experience exemplified what Rowan had observed during the rehearsal process: “When someone passes they almost become more alive because we are reminded in our souls of what it felt to be touched by them. You evaluate your time with them, and they put a little mark on you, they build further upon your essence” (Williams). In the movement practice at the Tamalpa Institute, physicalized expressions of gratitude offered me an opportunity to connect with those who have passed and to recognize the mark that remains alive within myself. To encourage the embodiment of sensations, whether they be grief or gratitude, enables us to feel fully alive in the experiences of loss.

Because it is a universal language, dance can be practiced by anyone, not only dancers, as a grateful celebration of life. In this way, dance can saturate our culture with resiliency, focusing our attention and giving us the strength to move forward as we continue to explore the empowering possibilities of movement. The embodiment of feeling, surrendering the body to whatever emotions may arise, invites the experience of loss to find a voice of expression.

Art, and especially embodied movement, has the power to turn the collective spirit toward the generation and practice of grace. In attending to artistic pursuits and committing to the embodiment of movement, practicing dance encourages our humanity to flourish in the cultivation of resilience. The poet, Jane Hirshfield, reflects on the importance of art as an avenue of resilience: “In this spirit, poetry itself is an instrument of resilience, reflecting life's

continuing embrace of its own implausible, risky existence” (Hirschfield). Dance, in its expression of manifest poetry, offers the same strength.

“More and more I have come to admire resilience.  
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam  
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous  
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,  
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.  
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,  
mitochondria, figs -- all this resinous, unretractable earth”  
Jane Hirschfield.

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## And the Ellipsis

... Ode to endings and continuance

“Ellipses (leaving out, defect) is the suppression of a word or of several words of minor importance to the logical expression of the thought, but necessary to the construction. Ellipsis gives brevity, force, and liveliness; it is usually readily to be supplied, often unconscious, and appears especially in common phrases, constructions, and expressions of popular speech” (Smyth).

Common usage rules for punctuation debate the correct format and proper use of the ellipsis. Whether typed with three period points or the shortcut colon key, with or without spaces between, or followed by a fourth period to finish a sentence, an ellipsis indicates embedded meaning. These three dots can be inserted into text to represent any number of editorial signals: “Traditionally, an ellipsis indicates an omission of words. It means there’s something missing here. In a way, the ellipsis is nudging you to fill in the blank by entering your own words” (Saito).

The three dots between each word of the title and between each initial of O.D.E. become the ellipses at the end of sentence, the pauses between, the continuance of the echo. Even in the silences, there is substance in what is unsaid; in the stillness, there is depth in whatever remains unmoved. At the end, there is an implied closure and finality; however, nothing ever really finishes. Taking into account the contextualized meanings and the abstractions, the definitions and the tangents, the ellipses allows space for an interpretive ending.

“‘It’ll be all right in the end’ ...  
 ‘It doesn’t feel all right’ ...  
 ‘That’s because it’s not the end.’”  
 David Mitchell.

## A Note on the End of the Choreographic Process

After a year of working with a cast to develop movement and present a finished piece of dance in front of an audience, the process finally came to an end. Countless rehearsals and conversations had been shared. Hours of experimentation and play had led to happy mistakes and humble achievements. Seeing the four dancers on stage filled me with overwhelming and inspiring gratitude. In their white costumes and integrated movements, they reflected and embodied the past year of work while also paying tribute to all those who have influenced the process along the way.

Two weeks after the piece premiered at Angelico, the cast had the opportunity to perform again at the American College Dance Association in San Jose. Alongside a program where other university dance programs presented works, my cast brought this piece to life again at The Hammer Theater. While the work had been choreographed specifically for the space at Angelico, its performance in a much larger theater gave the work a chance to change, to grow, and adapt. In the different space, voices resonated differently. Amongst the different audience, the stories were shared and heard with different interpretations.

The reception recognized the work of the dancers and appreciated the poetic functions of the ode. Called a postmodern melodrama, a work of excruciating nuance, some saw it as deeply sorrowful while still others saw it as a pure expression of love. The feedback revealed a wide range of interpretations, reemphasizing the power of communication to convey a multitude of meanings. The full depth of detail behind every movement and each artistic choice might not appear to the audience, or they may see their own stories reflected in different ways. Often invisible influences create the impulse in the work, embodying stories that may never be fully expressed in anything but the movement itself. This experience underscored the extensive reach

of our voices, affecting others in ways we will never know and being affected by more elements than we can identify. Reflecting on the process after it is over offers more insight into the ways the experience influenced me and the people around me.

After the last performance of the piece, there remained a profound feeling of gratitude. Even though the dance itself was fleeting, its impermanence offers a reminder about the difference between last and lasting. “There is a possibility of loss but the essence of someone or something lives on forever” (Williams). As the dancers walked off the stage for the last time, the emptiness of the stage was eclipsed by the fullness of something else, something that will last, something beyond words that exists in the space between people. The end was a relief, in the artist’s sense of the term: the experience created an imprint on those individuals whose life it touched.

Reminiscing about Oscar Wilde, whose work offered so much inspiration at the onset of the rehearsal process, I felt that the piece had lived through a lifecycle of growth, loss, decay, and continuance: “It has an independent life ... the only history that it preserves is the history of its own progress” (Wilde). In its life, the piece had created a space for the expression of gratitude and the exploration of change, reflecting past experiences and the heartening unity of the cast. It served as an ode, completely invested in expressing thanks to those involved, both present and absent. Even as the cast dispersed and the piece becomes another story of our collective past, we maintain the shared experience that unites us and changes the trajectory of our future, however slight or profound that change may be. To the dancers and for the integrity of their work, I will be more grateful than words could say.

## A Story about Grace and Gratitude

To end this ode, there is one more story to share. To start this story, I should go back to the night of September 21<sup>st</sup>, the night of our senior solo concert. Floating on the cumulative energy of my class, I felt my heart expand as gratitude replaced the air in my lungs. In “What to Remember When Waking,” David Whyte writes, “To be human is to become visible while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others” (Whyte). The dancers on stage presented wordless gifts, communicated through movement. Watching each dancer perform, I was acutely aware of being in the presence of people who had and would continue to profoundly change my life.

When I stepped onto the stage to dance my own solo, becoming visible in front of the audience, I felt an invisible gift, the presence of grace. That night, I danced with gratitude for those I had just seen perform and with the love for those I could not see but who continued to inspire me nevertheless.

After I came off stage, I received the message that one of my friends from high school had just lost her life to cancer. Hearing this news both took my breath away and reminded me to be grateful for every breath. In retrospect, I think the solo was for her, a hidden gift. Without knowing it, I danced for Rachel. I know it cannot change anything, but I have to believe that some of the grace I felt on stage was because of her, it was for her. The convergence of such empowering growth and such inescapable grief somehow enabled me to embody the experience with grace.

The profound power of dance exists in its ability to connect us with that grace. Not only can dance move us forward, but it can move us together. Being connected through movement offers a gift beyond words, a heartening presence that outlasts reason. Dance helps me to cultivate the bravery to love someone I cannot see and accept the love from those who are no

longer with me. Somewhere deep within me, I had always known this: dance is one of the only ways I can imagine my father. He could see that I wanted to dance as soon as I could walk. In his last letter to me, he encouraged me to dance. He died before he ever saw me perform, but in the nineteen years that have passed since then, dance is the one thing in my life that continues to echo everyday. Dancing connects me to him and the child he had known. Hidden gifts, dancing for him, for Rachel, for the people I love who I cannot see.

The gratitude for those who have influenced my life gains magnitude, especially in relation to potential or present loss. Dance continues to offer a means of expression for that gratitude and this piece is the culminating work for the experiences of gratitude that occurred over the past year, in reference to the multitude of elements and influences that brought this year to life. “I believe that gratitude comes from a place in your soul that knows the story could have ended differently, and often does” (Lende). If any single aspect of any individual history changed, the people involved in this piece and the process we experienced together would have been different. As it was, it ended just the way it felt it should; with grace and an ongoing sense of inspiration.

People remain in our lives in different ways, where communicating with one another can take various forms and staying together can mean any number of things. “The real heroes in human life are the mainly silent, unnoticed ones who draw no attention to themselves but through their daily acts of love and gentleness and compassion keep the tissue of humane presence alive and vital” (Nurrie Stearns). Beyond everything else, after all is said and done, it is about how our lives touch each other in a million, everyday, unknown and immeasurable ways.

“Trust yourself to know the moment when nothing else  
matters but holding life gratefully in your hands.”

Brian Andreas.

This was an ode to that moment. Spelling it out gives it meaning and changes its meaning, both.

Oscar. Delta. Echo. O. D. E. Ode.

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