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Saudade: An Exploration of the Choreographic Process and the Power of Dance

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Abstract

This paper serves as a reflection on my choreographic process as a LINES BFA senior and as an investigation into the innate power of human creative movement. I will document the challenges and joys of producing movement in the dancing arts, as well as illuminate the physical and psychological power of movement harbored within the practice of Dance Movement Therapy, an enduring form of psychotherapeutic movement used to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical well-being. The main goals of my personal choreographic experience, as well as those of my fellow Dance Majors were three-fold: 1) the cultivation of an encouraging and safe space for collaborative creation; 2) the development of understanding and expression of the inner self; and 3) the practice of active empathy, humor, and love. For me, this choreographic experience opened paths previously unforeseen and also led me further into the rich scholarly history and significance of Dance Movement Therapy. My Senior Project, saudade, evolved and grew to encompass thoughts and emotions that reflect life-affirming experiences shared by humans throughout time: namely, our relationship with time, the importance of relationships, the power of imagination, and the overcoming of fear. These experiences led to the creation of a dance that filled my dancers and me with undeniable gratitude, wonder, and deep satisfaction.

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saudade: an exploration of the choreographic process and the power of dance

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Abstract

This paper serves as a reflection on my choreographic process as a LINES BFA senior and as an investigation into the innate power of human creative movement. I will document the challenges and joys of producing movement in the dancing arts, as well as illuminate the physical and psychological power of movement harbored within the practice of Dance Movement Therapy, an enduring form of psychotherapeutic movement used to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical well-being. The main goals of my personal choreographic experience, as well as those of my fellow Dance Majors were three-fold: 1) the cultivation of an encouraging and safe space for collaborative creation; 2) the development of understanding and expression of the inner self; and 3) the practice of active empathy, humor, and love. For me, this choreographic experience opened paths previously unforeseen and also led me further into the rich scholarly history and significance of Dance Movement Therapy. My Senior Project, *saudade*, evolved and grew to encompass thoughts and emotions that reflect life-affirming experiences shared by humans throughout time: namely, our relationship with time, the importance of relationships, the power of imagination, and the overcoming of fear. These experiences led to the creation of a dance that filled my dancers and me with undeniable gratitude, wonder, and deep satisfaction.

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Introduction

My mother claims I was dancing before I was born and haven't stopped since. As a baby, I danced before I could speak. Movement was instinctual for me, and strong rhythms were calming in even my most agitated states. I responded to the sound of music with pure joy and was often soothed only by lying on my mother's or father's chest, close to the steady pulse of a heartbeat. As I grew older, I had a hard time being still and felt happiest when in motion and listening to music. I danced in our living room to whatever music was playing on the radio and to many of my parents' favorite CD's. I began creative movement classes at age four, but really only enjoyed the classes in which we learned ballet. The grace of ballet appealed to me and I found the pace and structure to be centering, a feeling that remains with me to this day.

While my interest may have been sparked by a desire to move, my relationship with creative movement has a pivotal force throughout my life. I have come to understand dance as living and moving wisdom that informs and transforms. When I dance, I often feel attuned to my body and my surroundings in a way that is entirely different than simply seeing and observing the world around me. I have experienced dance as a flow through space, time, energy, and emotion. Each aspect of our consciousness is available to be felt in a new way when we move mindfully, opening us to the potential for growth and change. We dance not only to express ourselves and experiences, but to take in the world around us. Dance is bidirectional, a giving and receiving exchange of the human experience. Dance can be a way of knowing just as much as a way of sharing. We can both speak and listen through dance, making it a rare and unique form of language. Dance allows me to digest the many happenings of my life, while also providing me with a way to ruminate, question, and move forward.

The majority of my experience in dance has been as a classically trained ballet dancer, intensively studying and attempting to perfect the technical aspects of ballet. Although my perfectionism and dedication to ballet allowed me to persevere and train for 12 years, I grew older and found myself falling out of love with the traditional and highly codified Russian technique I had long strived to obtain. I was no longer fascinated by ballet and began to feel burnt out, fatigued, and bored. At the start of my senior year of high school, I considered leaving dance completely, not understanding that I could never truly abandon creative movement. In retrospect, this disengagement with ballet had nothing to do with the challenges of dance itself, but everything to do with my narrow perception of the practice of dance and movement.

I soon realized, with plenty of encouragement from my parents and other mentors in the field of dance, that there was so much more the world of dance had to offer. After receiving multiple recommendations to read Alonzo King's philosophies of dance, I began to feel a new sense of excitement and curiosity I had not felt for years. I auditioned for the Lines BFA Program and immediately discovered just how much joy, freedom, and exploration I had been missing in my personal practice of dance. With just one ballet class, I became aware of how limited my previous years of studying had been and decided that although I was not certain of what my future would look like, pursuing a BFA in dance at Lines would allow me the chance to see where the complexity and generosity of dance could take me. I could not have imagined how much I would learn and develop during my four years in this program and look forward to documenting my personal experience of the Senior Project, the culmination of my time in this program.

In this paper, I will move through all that preceded the final performance of *saudade*, a piece of choreography that encompasses my time in the Lines BFA program and the power of creative movement. The three years of dance and life education following my senior year, the time spent in and outside of rehearsals, the music, literature, and experiences that inspired my ideas and exploration of movement, and the trials of this process are the backbone of what my dancers and I ended up crafting. I will describe how my senior project came to be and the gift this journey has been for me. My first piece of choreography, *saudade*, only exists because of the education and investment of the faculty. As I write this thesis and consider how much I have been touched by dance, I am struck with immense gratitude for the opportunity I've been granted to learn and grow in this program. I would not trade the last four years for the world and cannot wait to see where my love of dance takes me next.

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“Dance training can't be separate from life training. Everything that comes into our lives is training. The qualities we admire in great dancing are the same qualities we admire in human beings: honesty, courage, fearlessness, generosity, wisdom, depth, compassion, and humanity.”

-Alonzo King

With special thanks to the faculty of the Lines BFA Program, the class of 2019, and my wonderful cast.

My Ever Evolving Relationship with Movement

Since starting my education at Dominican, I have come to understand dance as a force of life, change, and expression rather than a technique to be mastered. I could write a whole thesis on how my understanding of dance has grown over the last few years, but will attempt to concisely capture the great depth of knowledge and passion that has been instilled in me since my first year in this program.

Learning to Live a Life in the Spirit of Dance

Before coming to the Lines BFA program, I had never been asked to improvise, come up with my own choreography, or offer my own opinions within a ballet class or rehearsal. I had a very hard time with these new challenges and felt overwhelmed at times. But looking back, I wish that I had been exposed to these creative tasks much earlier. Despite all the detailed training I had been given and the many years of experience, I had not been taught to make creative choices on my own. When it came time to venture out of the structure of following orders, I felt lost and unsure of what to do. I quickly recognized that I had very little experience thinking for myself within the context of dance and I also realized that I did not trust myself, that I lacked confidence in my own ability to make the “right” decisions. Casey Thorne, Lines BFA alum, captures this moment of realization brilliantly, “I was a trained ballet dancer; I was not a trained artist.”

One may ask, “what distinguishes the dancer from the artist?” I think of Kimerer LaMothe’s writings on accepting dance not only as a way of spirituality, but as a way of living. The capability of individuals to permit their spirituality to move through them as a vessel, to surrender, to trust in training and the work they have done, and to let all that they are flow

through themselves is necessary to be an artist. We must make ourselves available to the possibilities around us, to allow ourselves to not think and just exist in the moment, to be generous, and to have no apologies or regrets. These things can often seem challenging within the world of ballet, in which perfectionism is sought, despite knowing full well that we will never attain it. We learn to imitate and to mimic what is closest to perfection until we are able to become fully invested and make our movement our own, to truly show ourselves in our dancing.

The philosophies Alonzo King has imbedded into the BFA program reflect these ideas and have left a lasting impression on me not only as a dancer, but as a human of this wild and amazing world. Being able to witness the truths and shared experiences that dance can draw out from a place beyond words have reminded me just how important and human this art is. I had always respected dance as an art form of boundless range and significance, and though I saw myself as a dancer, I did not consider myself as a creator or a contributor to its infinite impact. The ideas that King emphasizes in his work and his teachings have helped me to understand that the impetus to create beyond myself is instinctual. King says that “art is the inheritance of every individual, it activates evolutionary growth, it is an intellectual virtue, and the fostering principle for all that is made, done, or known.” The fulfillment of human life is to create and to share that which brings us closer to one another.

But to access the full potentiality of our art, whatever it may be, we must be able to move beyond ourselves and the confines of what is physical. King speaks of the dangers of dancers focusing on their appearance over their true self. I have fallen prey to such worries many times throughout my life, becoming unable to see myself as more than a body, valuing my outward appearance over who I am. When we forget the capacity of our inner self, our true identity, King

says that we are essentially “decided[ing] that what's inside is of little value, [we] can only try to approximate some kind of look.” My time in this program has enforced the ability to overcome self-doubt, the capacity for change inside me, and the overwhelming power of compassion for myself and others.

It is through the acceptance of myself as a valuable creator that I have been able to further understand dance in ways I never imagined. I now see the potential of dance as a kinesthetic intervention, a decisive act of agency that can be liberating and enlivening. Dance is not just something to be witnessed from afar, nor is it identifiable as an object or even a single phenomenon. That is the beauty and power of dance: it is so many sensations, emotions, experiences, memories, and viewpoints all at once. Kimerer LaMothe, one of the many dance scholars whose work I have had the chance to read in Dr. Gay Lynch’s course, “Dance and Spirituality,” a scholarly investigation into the relationship of creative movement and healing, writes that dance is a “living reality” and a “force in its own right” (140). Dance can generate knowledge, insight, moral clarity, relationships, meaning, and can influence emotional states. When we dance, we train our bodies, minds, and spirits to be fully present in the precious time we have here on earth. Thinking of dance as a transformative power has made me consider how we can be authentically present to ourselves and our place on earth even when we aren’t artistically moving or creating. Dance can help us to learn to extend our mindfulness into everyday life outside of the studio because it not only encourages authenticity and a sense of presence, dance itself is authenticity.

A particular passage that has remained in my thoughts is one in which LaMothe describes the potential space between stimulus and response, the gap of heightened possibility in which we

have the choice to share and the chance to decide what to share. When we dance, we find ourselves within that gap of heightened possibility. LaMothe writes, “we open that time and space. We cultivate the perspective that it provides, we nurture in ourselves resilience and a capacity to respond” to the world around us and within us. I am intrigued by LaMothe’s reference to Andrea Olsen’s beautifully articulated statement that, “we don’t create movement, we are participants in a dynamic universe, dancing on earth, moving between worlds.” The idea that we are not making something from nothing, but instead drawing movement from the many energies of this world, fascinates me. This ability to dance between what is seen and what is unseen, the known and the unknown, can grant us perspectives that might otherwise be closed off, thus bringing to light those inexplicable sensations shared by those who exist on this planet.

Although I had always assumed I knew what dance was, the last four years have given me the chance to reexamine and renew my appreciation for the practice of creative movement. Dance is no longer just movement to music or an artful combination of precise steps. Dance is an impulse, a language, and an expression of life. Time after time, I find that mindful movement has the ability to awaken what lies within us and to illuminate that which is not easily expressed. Isadora Duncan’s articulation of dance as a transformative power emphasizes that dance enacts the potential of life to create beyond itself, thus enabling us to delve further into that which makes us human, that which connects us. The dancing body manifests itself as a “luminous, moving cloud,” both fulfilling and reminding us of our humanity (Duncan). I have experienced this otherworldly feeling of connection to the space around me as I move and, even more so in the last few years, a profound connection to the people moving beside me. When I dance with my classmates of the last four years, I can sense their energy and love for creating radiating from

them with a warmth that never fails to inspire and amaze me. Being given the opportunity to write and reflect on my dance and life education throughout this program has reminded me what a gift the ability to move alongside such passionate lovers of dance has been.

saudade: a love letter to dance, empathy, and all that connects us

Brief Explanation of the Lines BFA Senior Project

The Senior Project serves as the dance majors' Senior Thesis or capstone project and is considered a culmination of our four years within the Dance Program. Each year, every dance student is cast in two Senior Project pieces and is gifted with the experience of the choreographic process with their classmates. Seniors are responsible for all creative and logistic elements of choreographing a piece: organizing the audition, casting, scheduling, communication, creating movement, choice of or creation of music, stage lighting design, costume design, and providing feedback to our fellow senior choreographers throughout the process. Though this choreographic journey officially begins in September each year, it is truly an accumulation of all the growth and personal research that starts our freshmen year.

Initial Challenges

As the Senior Project process approached its beginning, I was nervous to lead my peers, friends, and fellow lovers of movement as a choreographer. I doubted my ability to choreograph, anxious to be directing movement as the individual responsible for the outcome of our time in the studio. Although I was not sure how I would accomplish it, I had an image of my ideal piece of choreography: a dance that captured how it feels to be human; an ode to movement and imagination filled with detailed graceful gestures that surpassed predetermined steps; a reflection of my time in this program; a piece that would impress but also move an audience and the dancers. I found myself trying to model my creation after past Senior Projects, despite knowing that, as much as I wanted to replicate the successes of my upperclassmen, I had to find my own way to choreograph. I felt burdened by the weight of expectations I had for myself while

simultaneously feeling great excitement over the opportunity I had. I recognized that there were infinite possibilities, a freeing though overwhelming thought. It was challenging to narrow in on what could be created with so many unknowns, difficult to know what I could realistically materialize from my imagination. As much as I hoped to accomplish, even greater was the fear that I would fail.

Although I am a seasoned and experienced dancer, choreographing has been a challenge for me. I have always been drawn to movement and found dance to be a natural method of expression, but have come to understand that the established clarity of performing movements directed by others and the freedom of improvising appear in my mind as completely different entities than the task of decisively crafting my own choreography. As I began preparing for the task ahead, I aimed to understand why the act of choreographing seemed to be an insurmountable undertaking by reflecting on the ways in which my relationship with dance has changed since starting the Lines BFA Program, as described in the previous section.

Learning to embrace my own individual style of movement outside of the format of ballet has been a process that is still moving forward. As I considered the way in which improvisation has freed me from the confines of predesigned movement and the trappings of being a follower in classical dance, I realized that I was apprehensive to attempt contemporary choreography because would require me to contain the unrestricted and deeply individual ways of moving I have worked to liberate and investigate on a personal level. Choreographing on others would not only mean translating what can often seem like indescribable experiences into digestible and applicable concepts that my dancers would understand, but would require me to work towards

incorporating the elements of improvisation I have come to love with the structure of predetermined dance, the next step forward in my practice of creative movement.

Inspiration and Influences

Once I knew the dancers that would make up my cast, I began to feel less nervous and I could happily anticipate the start of our choreographic journey together. I was fortunate enough to have dancers I felt would compliment each other well and contribute to a warm and lively environment. Confident in, and trusting of, my dancers, inspiration began to strike following our first rehearsal. I realized that I might not know what the final product would look like, but I knew what I wanted it to feel like. It would reflect my movement and ideas, but I also knew that I wanted it to reflect my dancers' own styles and thoughts just as much. I knew the messages it would express: human experience, the power of imagination, love, and memory. These themes later became more focused and developed into a narrative throughout the piece.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moments that have influenced the ideas explored in *saudade*, I know that many were introduced or further explored in Dr. Gay Lynch's course, "Dance and Spirituality," previously mentioned in the section above. This course greatly influenced the themes of my Senior Project and the literature from the class helped to make up the foundation of my choreographic process. The first work that struck me as I approached the choreographic process was a poem by David Whyte entitled, "What to Remember when Waking." I was especially moved by the first stanza, "What you can plan is too small for you to live. What you can live wholeheartedly will make plans enough for the vitality hidden in your sleep." When I read these words, my heart soared. I felt recognized, understood, and encouraged. The first stanza reminded me that every human experiences the phenomenon of facing the

unknown future, and many of us attempt to understand it, to plan out our future, despite the fact that so much of life is unknowable. We seek structure and familiarity even though half the magic of living is in the curiosity and the vast possibilities waiting to be discovered in the world and inside ourselves.

This idea also led me to remember the words of Christian Burns, one of our dance faculty members in the BFA Program. As we were discussing the start of Senior Projects he said something along the lines of, “if you already know how the piece will turn out, what’s the point of choreographing it?” I had not thought about choreography this way before. Instead of viewing it as something to be achieved and perfected, it could become an unplanned experience that would take me and my dancers on a journey that of which we could never plan. It was at this moment of realization that I knew I wanted to approach the process of my Senior Project and the remainder of my senior year embracing the unknown and trusting in the process to bring out what is meant to be.

As I prepared for our first rehearsal, I read about the significance of environment on creation throughout Twyla Tharp’s *The Creative Habit*. She emphasizes that creation is only possible through proper preparation to support creative impulses and spontaneity. She writes about the paradox of establishing a creative habit, as “we think of creativity as a way of keeping everything fresh and new, while habit implies routine and repetition” (Tharp). Tharp also writes that as much as creativity leads to great works, skill is just as necessary. Skill is not something we are born with, but something we practice and develop through hard-work, patience, and time. Although there is no single environment or method for optimal creativity, each individual must make it as easy on themselves as possible by finding an condition “where the prospect of

wrestling with your muse doesn't scare you, doesn't shut you down" (Tharp). Take the time to find a place or environment that you want to be in and feel productive in. And if you cannot find one, make one for yourself.

I was also inspired by Veta Goler's *Love Poems to God* and the focus on contemplative practices as doors to creativity. Goler describes contemplative practices as "actions and experiences that absorb our focus which is usually directed outward toward the activities of the world - and then turn that focus inwards to the invisible world inside each of us." This idea might seem difficult to put into practice, but we are able to experience this invisible world inside us as an awareness of our hearts, empathy towards others, or even simply "an awareness of awareness itself" (Goler). Within this state of awareness, we have the most clear access to our creative impulses and creative problem solving. When we aim to be present to the world around us and the world inside ourselves, we awaken the spirit within us and our connection to creation.

As our first meeting drew closer, I wanted to begin by establishing a safe and encouraging environment that each dancer would feel comfortable to create in. The ideas of Goler and Tharp reminded me that we would need to work together to be conscious of the state of our minds and souls and foster a preserving awareness of our presence in the space to be most open to our creative impulses and spontaneity. To have this awareness, it would be important to gain understanding of each unique soul in my cast. Therefore, the goal of our first meeting would be to start getting to know my dancers as individuals and express my hopes for our collaboration. I realized that truly knowing the women in my cast would be a gradual process, but wanted to start by asking about what brought my dancers happiness. Even before

our first meeting, I requested that each one send me an email with a list of some of their favorite experiences in life and what they hoped to accomplish in our time together.

September to February: creating together

On the night of our first rehearsal, I shared my hopes for our time together and then set to work right away. I knew that because I was blessed with such a talented cast, I would want to highlight each member's personal style of dance. We began by reflecting on our own unique ways of moving, how our movement styles have changed, and how we hope for them to grow in the future. I then asked my cast members to take some time to create a short solo that captured their own inimitable, one of a kind way of movement. I was so excited by the movement my dancers came up with after a period of focused creation and knew right away that I would want to include these solos, these encapsulations of each dancer, in the final work in some way.

The last thing I wanted was for these solos to begin to feel stale and detached. I recalled a similar numbing I'd experienced in past senior projects I had been a part of and thus wanted to emphasize that the repetition of these phrases was for the sake of investigation and familiarity, while still giving dancers the option to refresh their movement as well as work one-on-one to add more depth and focus to their movement.

We continued to work on each encapsulation as the weeks went on, making additions and changes if so desired, breaking down and reconstructing. I was in awe of my dancers' varied and distinct ways of moving and wanted them to know how valuable they each were as creators by emphasizing these solos as the foundation of our piece. I also made an encapsulation that I felt clearly represented my movement style and taught it to my dancers. I noticed that it was challenging to make what I had hoped to be a unison group section truly be in perfect unison. My

movement was not being mirrored the way I had thought it would be, but this was another chance to emphasize the individuality of my cast. As dancers, we often consider how and when to maintain individuality while dancing with others. For this specific choreographic process, I wanted to highlight our ability as humans to work together as a community while still remaining true to ourselves. This phrase became a multitude of voices expressing the same feeling, resulting in a powerful image of unity and shared experience.

As the individual encapsulations continued to grow and develop, we worked to adapt each solo into a duet with another cast member, merging two very different styles of movement into a completely new phrase of dance. These duets incorporated the choreographic tools of repetition, changes of speed and dynamics, and spatial translations to create a relationship between each pair of dancers that would be later be placed throughout the piece. As the weeks went on, I realized that my early expectations for how we would generating material had changed. I had planned to show up with predetermined phrases and teach my cast the movements in extreme detail so that my personal style of movement would be captured effectively. I had hopes of choreographing so closely with the music that each dancer's movements would be a visualization of each note. I very quickly let go of both of these ideas once I actually was able to share the studio space with my cast. It was so satisfying and exciting to create alongside my dancers instead of on my own and I realized that I could place my trust in my dancers' instincts and creative choices.

I gradually became more and more comfortable coming up with movement on the spot, also allowing myself more patience with myself when these attempts did not pan out the way I had hoped. Learning to let go of the sense of ownership over my movement allowed our work to

truly become a collaboration in which the dancers were just as involved in the process as I was. I also became comfortable with directing my dancers to choreograph for themselves and for others, realizing that I was surrounded by artists of great experience. Another way we generated material was through the creation of a series of gesture phrases. These simple upper body movements were made by each dancer with the encouragement to explore interesting shapes and familiar gestures and were then learned by the rest of the group. These gesture phrases would be recalled throughout piece, gradually growing in range and dynamics.

Though it might not be the most glamorous or exciting part of choreography, the time we spent together before moving soon became indicative of the energy of each rehearsal and empowered us to create as a community. My own particular leadership style and the temperaments of my dancers allowed for an environment that might have been perceived as relaxed and playful. Although I was acutely aware of how little time we really had together, I had the benefit of understanding how difficult these extra rehearsals can be on top of every other class, work, homework, and time for self care. I made it a priority to do everything I could to make rehearsals enjoyable and comfortable. I tried to have some kind of food or treat for my dancers each night of rehearsal, as I was well aware of how difficult it could be to be in the studio so late at night. Rehearsals usually started with dancers trickling in a bit before our start time, gently warming up while hearing about each other's days, joking around, and eating together.

Although the creation of movement was the focus of our rehearsal, I am grateful to have had time with my cast to get to know them outside of their movement. Although the dance majors see each other almost every day, I often notice that most of our conversation revolves

around dance, a very significant aspect of our lives, but we spend little time discussing other topics with our fellow students, especially those outside of our class. Having time to hear about everyone's day, their highs and lows of the week, the funny things that happened in their academic classes or with their roommates, and their interests outside of dance provided more insight into each individual and furthered the sense of community within our cast. In retrospect, it was these shared moments of discussion and laughter that helped shape the overarching themes of our piece of human relationships and shared experiences.

Overarching Themes and Ideas

As mentioned previously, the understanding, expression, and value of the self were fundamental to the creation of my senior project, all leading to a reflection of each individual's movement style throughout the piece. As a dancer that has only recently found her own unique way of moving outside of ballet, I wanted to recognize that the natural way we are called to move does not need to be changed, only encouraged and developed further. One of the valuable moments throughout my dancing career was the day I realized that while allowing myself to respect, appreciate, and adore the way another dancer moves is wonderful, I must never forget how unique and special my own movement is. As in most aspects of life, dance is most effective and joyful when we refrain from comparing and instead focus on sharing. When we dance, we share our inner selves with the world and with those around us. If we cultivate our individual styles of movement, dancing feels like returning home. These ideas were vital to the creation of *saudade* and to my growth as a human and dancer.

Another thought, though quite transcendent, that guided my creative impulses and ideas throughout this process was, "what does it mean to be human?" So much of the literature I have

been exposed to during my time in college have involved this age-old question and I have come to some of my own conclusions. To be human is to struggle, empathize, collaborate, overcome, and create. As I reflect on my time on this planet, though it has not been long, I have consistently found myself returning to empathy and imagination. Our ability to actively empathize with others is a uniquely human trait, a power that allows us to develop bonds and learn to understand each other in ways no other creature can. We can take the world we see in front of us, filled with its share of happiness and tragedy, and we can imagine better, we can create to improve and to grow.

In retrospect, David Whyte's poem has had so much more of an influence than I could have imagined. Although I considered it at the start of my process, I did not actively think about its message throughout the last six months. Reading the poem in whole again as I write this paper has left me feeling overwhelmed by how perfectly this poem mirrors the themes *saudade* intended to capture. I am suddenly experiencing a sense of clarity and awe at the wondrous ways all the different parts of our lives come together without our knowledge. Now I can see that the first stanza expresses not only our desire to know the unknown, but also recognizes the value of fully enjoying the present, despite how challenging it can seem.

This idea became the leading theme of the piece about three months into the process as my roommates and I were discussing how remarkably fast the end of our college life seemed to be approaching despite how long each day felt. We found ourselves torn between wanting to take pleasure in every second of our last year together and the pressure to have clear plans for our future. This dual sense of time is so familiar to humans, yet so strange nonetheless. We began talking about how difficult it can be to manage all the thoughts in our head at the present time

while planning for tomorrow, and still considering the past. I continued to think about the complex relationship we have with time and began to see how it connected to ideas regarding the human experience my dancers and I had been exploring in rehearsals. My cast and I reflected on the challenge of living fully in the present when there is so much to look back on and forward to. These discussions culminated in an idea that would become the inspiration for the title of our piece and continue to hold my curiosity: as humans, we are blessed and burdened with the rare ability to exist in our pasts, presents, and futures all at once. We are not just defined by who we are at a specific moment, but by an accumulation of an inestimable number of moments that have shaped us into the people we are at heart. We often find ourselves pulled into memories of our past and just as often propelled into imagining what our futures might look like. *Saudade* started to become a reflection of this paradigm, with each section representing a different timescape and the sensations often accompanied by them.

saudade

As the end of the senior project process came near, I was suddenly faced with the task of naming the piece we spent had the last few months creating. I was lucky enough to stumble into the word, “saudade” while reading about the power of nostalgia and memory. This Portuguese word captures many sensations at once: the longing to be near someone, somewhere, or sometime far from your present moment, and the love that remains. I was immediately struck by how closely this word seemed to the ideas regarding the multiplicity of time we experience as humans and even more so moved by the last part of its definition, “the love that remains”. As this journey was coming to an end, and even still months later, I am overcome with a resilient love for my cast and the art we created together, for my fellow seniors, and for the immense power of

dance. *Saudade* truly is a reflection of our experiences together and the love that we will forever share.

Part 1

The opening section of movement and music represent the often humdrum routine we fall into as humans and the memories and worries that can interrupt our habitual experience. The dancers are arranged in a formation so that each individual is in their own space, or their own world. The movement starts with dancer in the center, Madison, and the rest join one by one, all performing the gesture phrase at their own pace. This section establishes Madison as not the main character, but the mind that is initiating the move through these timescapes. The lights gradually light up the group as a whole and the distinction between the movements each dancer is doing is emphasized. A low top light makes movements look robotic and mechanical. As the dancers go through these gestures with their arms and upper body, the rest of the body remains relatively still. Their legs and feet are rooted into the ground, established, though not stuck. Small trills in the music enter into the space and the dancers are affected by these seemingly small but unignorable glitches, representing forces that take the dancers out of the present moment. There is one final, prolonged glitch in the music that takes every dancer out of their gestural pattern and extends the last gesture position they were in, as if they are being pulled out of this monotony, routine, uniformity, and into larger full-bodied movements that signal a change in the dynamic on stage. As the melody begins to fade, the dancers' pattern on the floor disintegrates. Madison is pulled to the back of the stage and weaves her way through a line of dancers, wandering through each space to find herself in a realm of memory and nostalgia

Part 2

The second section of *saudade* aims to reflect the sentiment of the storied past, simpler times, the warmth of a memory that has since faded. The dancers' movements capture the familiar efforts of humans to relive the past and to look back with rose-tinted glasses, the power of nostalgia, and the joy and freedom of youth. As we choreographed this section, I wondered, "how do we convey memory in movement?" We explored the familiar closeness of photographic poses, emulating family portraits as well as the concept of moving polaroids. As formations are built throughout this section, Madison seems to be involved, but almost as if she is outside, looking in. It seems as if the other dancers are more like figments of memories that she is exploring. They are placed by Madison like puzzle pieces, and while they embody very real connections, experiences, and emotions, it becomes clear that they are ephemeral and unable to remain. The rhythm of this nostalgia-filled section cycles through moments shared by a collective as a solo is simultaneously performed, as if a story is told or a memory is recalled by an individual.

Part 3

The third section represents the chaos and unpredictability of the future and our attempts as humans to seek certainty in an uncertain world. It is marked by eeriness and strangeness, the stage dimly lit from the stage right. We worked to make the movement of this section inhuman and to highlight the conflict between chaos and order, we made use of improvisation as well as set material throughout this section. Dancers begin emerging from the darkness and eventually making their way to the light by the end of the section. The movement ranges from urgent and

sharp, solemn and restricted, to creature-like, embodying the overwhelming possibilities and fears we face when considering the future.

Part 4

The final section in *saudade* hopes to capture the coexistence of the past, present, and future all at once. A wave of calm washes over the stage as dancers enter from the light of stage right, bringing with them a renewed sense of smooth and calm energy. The dancers' movement embraces all three of the timescapes, returning to partnerships previously explored and culminating in new relationships on stage. The conflicting timescapes find balance within a state of holistic awareness, radiating compassion and grace as the dancers move together.

Dance Movement Therapy

I have found that, although I sometimes experience mental and physical exhaustion dancing in such a rigorous program, there are always moments in which dance serves as a rescue, a motivation, an instigator of gratitude, or a moment of healing. I know that I will always come back to dance. It has been one of the most constant parts of my life, or perhaps it has been the aspect that runs throughout all spheres of my experiences. There are times in which I so deeply wish that my friends and family had the understanding of dance as not only an entertainment, art, or sport, but as a way of life, healing, and a way of better understanding each other. I believe this desire has culminated in my interest in dance therapy. I want to learn how to introduce dance as meditation or a release for those who do not have experience with it like I do.

I hope to share the joys and freedom of moving and the deep connection between the body, mind, and soul through the practice of Dance Movement Therapy, “the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which furthers the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual” (ADTA). As a dance movement therapist, one focuses on movement behavior as it is perceived throughout a therapeutic relationship and investigates the underlying issues that are causing pain. Expressive, communicative, and adaptive behaviors are all considered for both group, individual, couples, & family treatment.

Dance provides a space for expression of what often remains internal, lessening emotional tension. Through dance we can visualize and physicalize the grief, doubt, stress, and other unpleasant emotional states we experience, and create the opportunity for transformation. Creative movement allows us to deepen our relationship with our bodies, which in turn affects our psychological and physical health (Poyner). In many cultures of the world, dance plays an

important role in healing as well as being used to prevent disease and promote health for those who are relatively healthy as it helps to stimulate the life energy in our bodies. Christine Caldwell, author and founder of the Somatic Psychology department at Naropa University, states that, “any recovery is incomplete until we re-inhabit and enjoy being in our bodies.” My years as a dancer have granted me the gift of being fully present in my body and have helped me to recognize just how powerful the human body can be. I am filled with excitement and passion when I consider the potential benefits of creative movement for those that have never enjoyed it like dancer do. My studies and experiences in the Lines BFA Program have encouraged me to seek out a future in Dance Movement Therapy, a culmination of my years of dancing training and my desire to improve the lives of others. The length of this paper has limited that which I can share about the history and development of DMT over the years, so I encourage you to investigate it further and leave you with these words on healing by the always articulate and inspiring, Dr. Gay Lynch:

“Healing is movement that immerses vulnerability in the nurturing energy created by community. In isolation vulnerability withdraws and finds no resonance, whereas in community it resounds and becomes whole. Spirituality and healing cannot be separated, for spirituality provides the only framework large enough and safe enough for the healing arts.”

~ Dr. Gay Lynch

Conclusion

For the first few years of college, I was often overwhelmed by nagging fears and doubts regarding my choice to pursue a degree in dance, despite not knowing if I even wanted to dance professionally in the future. I have since learned that there are so many more ways in which I can use the talents and the strengths I've developed through a life in dance. The vast variety of teachers, styles, opportunities, and challenges have equipped me with the necessary skills to adjust to my surroundings as well as provided me with knowledge and perseverance to seek out the spaces in which I feel comfortable. I know now that if I cannot find a space that feels right for me, I have the ability to create one for myself and those seeking for a similar space.

My personal experience of creative movement is no longer focused on following rules or the pursuit of perfection but the practice of risk taking, commitment to my unique artistic voice, and the exploration of the endless possibilities harbored in all kinds of movement. I believe that these changes are largely due to encouragement and instruction we receive to think for ourselves and improvise in this program. Although I may not have a clue what I'm doing sometimes, everything I have learned in this program has set me up for an exciting and fulfilling future. I have learned so much about how to challenge my habits, my ways of thinking, and the way in which I work. I have learned not only to work smarter instead of harder, but to value effort and difficulty at the same time. I have been taught that further flexibility, the ability to let things go, and a sense of humor can go a long way as we navigate the complexities of adulthood and independence.

Throughout this program I have been reminded of the interwovenness of all things in this universe and the sheer strength of combined awareness, agency, and empathy found in human

compassion. The moving body is not rigid or compressed, but softens into gentleness to extend and reach inward, upward, and outward. Like dance, compassion is an open, expansive, and flowing energy that has a ripple effect. When we act with compassion, we are transforming the experiences of those around us just as much as we transform our own reality. Dance and compassion are each universal languages that can reveal or recover something that is hiding, awaiting discovery. Compassion and movement are gifts that bring light and joy into our lives, but both must be practiced and cultivated by an actively empathetic mind. As I embark on the next chapter of my life, I hope to continue dancing and learning about myself and the wondrous world around me, nurturing these gifts and sharing them with others.

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