

Writing Through the Body:

Flesh Narratives

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the cultivation of artistic methodologies centered in embodied movement practices. I worked in collaboration with dancers to inform the development of a movement vocabulary that is authentic to the individual as well as to the content of the work. Through the interplay between movement and subconscious response to elements such as writing, imagery, and physical environments I created authentic kinesthetic experiences for both dancer and audience. I submerged dancers into a constructed environment by creating authentic mental and physical experiences that supported the development of embodied movement. This was the impetus to develop the evening length work, *Flesh Narratives*, which consisted of five vignettes, each containing its own distinctive creative process driven by the content of each section. This project was presented January 29- 31, 2016 in the Fine Arts Center room 122, an informal theatre space, that supplemented an immersive experience in an intimate environment for forty viewers. This project explored themes of transformation including cycles, concepts of life, death and reincarnation, and enlightenment. Through the art of storytelling, the crafting of embodied movers, and the theory of Hauntology, the viewer was taken on a journey of struggle, loss, and rebirth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Eventually everything connects—people, ideas, objects. The quality of the connections is the key to quality per se

-Charles Eames¹

Personal relationships have always played an influential role in my development as an individual. These relationships operated as small systems of support; an environment without judgment where everyone felt free to be themselves. In these groups, dialogue became the basis of expression. We exchanged ideas, opinions, and personal narratives, which expanded our perceptions of the world we share. My need for building strong relationships with others shaped my way of being and understanding. I would seek out communal atmospheres where I could make meaningful connections with others who shared common interests. I found myself interested in groups such as sports teams and art collectives. The environments in which these groups functioned fostered values such as, healthy communication skills, freedom of expression and personal as well as collective achievement. This way of thinking encouraged ideas of individuality, teamwork, and success. They provided the conditions in which I was able to construct my own identity and sense of place.

My love for storytelling stems from these shared experiences. The Greek word, *eunoia*, which means, “to be of good mind”, refers to having good regards for someone, more specifically the goodwill a speaker shares with their audience (Kalimtzis 77). “*Eunoia*, in Greek, is something more than goodwill: it means approval, sympathy and readiness to help” (De Romilly 1). In order to create a safe environment where one can

feel free to share these personal narratives requires an element of eunoia to be present. Harvesting the well mind and excavating beautiful thinking from my dancers required that they had a holistic understanding of themselves as a body, mind and spirit. Through my own experiences of working within a framework of Embodied Movement Practices I discovered that it innately cultivates and stimulates beautiful thinking as movement is created or expressed. Louise Steinman states, “if we learn to ‘tap in’ then we can hear the thinking through, we can remember the dream, we might see the vision” (70). I hoped not only to awaken the physicality within my dancers but also to extract their unique movement signatures through the use of their personal history, emotion, and intention. I found that working within an embodied movement framework allowed somatic engagement to take place in my dancers. These awakened beings became embodied movers, and in return became authentic storytellers, which was important for the deliverance of the work that developed.

During the process of creating this work a colleague of mine introduced me to the theory of Hauntology. After viewing a draft of my project, he claimed to believe that my approach in constructing this work was innately informed by this theory. Hauntology, which has a symbiotic relationship with ontology, refers to “replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (Colin). In other words the content we explored in this process transforms from merely ideas into figures with characteristics. This dramatically shifts the way in which we interact with these ideas because in this context the content becomes its own entity that the dancers interact with. This informs the direction of the process in the same way the dancers unique histories shape the process. By

acknowledging the beliefs, ideas, and intentions of the dancers during the creative process allows each dancer to manifest their own thoughts into ‘figures of the ghost’ which heightens the potency of the narrative. As Wolfreys states, "To tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns" (Wolfreys). After digging into the theories behind Hauntology, I discovered that the ideas I am interested in: storytelling, embodied movement, cycles, concepts of life, death, reincarnation, personal history and enlightenment, along with my creative process, do in fact invoke an essence of ghosts. The space I created through the practice of embodiment and experiential immersion allowed my dancers to experience their past ghosts in a real and present way.

In this project I wanted to create an intimate, safe environment that would support eunoia, embodied movement practices, storytelling and the investigation or invitation of the proverbial ghost. Hauntology was not a concept that I was familiar with when I began this project, but I now understand that I used it intuitively during the creation of this work and that it underlies the development of my current methodologies. To achieve this environment I examined the interplay between movement and subconscious response to spoken and written dialogue, imagery, tactile stimulation and physical environments to create authentic kinesthetic experiences that brought light to the psychographics of the dancers and engaged all the senses. These artistic methodologies informed the development of movement vocabulary that was authentic to each individual. They also brought awareness to movement patterns and experiences that already existed within each dancer. Steinman states, “Within the consciousness of each of us dwells a common repertoire of images, themes, characters” (41). Working with these archetypal symbols

allowed the dancers to have a holistic understanding of the content and a sense of identity in and connection to the work. This gave them a sense of purpose within the piece as a whole and created an authentic relationship between the self and the creative process.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Embodied Movement

An embodied movement experience is created through the connection between thought and physical sensation (Steinman). This symbiotic relationship means one cannot have a physical experience with the environment around oneself without it affecting thought (2). Steinman states, “we come to experience our individuality initially by our movement, our sensual investigation of the world” (2). Life experiences do not exist without movement of the body, so the body becomes the source from which we understand ourselves in relation to the world. It is through and from this phenomenon of the body that we find meaning, understanding, and purpose.

In order for a dancer to have a true, authentic experience in performance, he or she must fully embody the movement from the beginning of the creative process. Steinman uses the phrase “the body as home” to describe searching within oneself to allow one to embrace his or her most fundamental needs as a body and soul (2). Through mental and physical transformative experiences one can begin to sense oneself on a primal, intuitive level. At this level the performance becomes what Steinman describes as “a vehicle for performers to transform aspects of their lives, their dreams, their experiences, in order to give them meaning or to find their meaning” (27). This way of thinking about performance was at the core of my project *Flesh Narratives*. My dancers were at the center of my process, which aimed to refine the individual signatures present within my dancers. Embracing my dancers unique voices was the initial step in crafting

knowledgeable, self-sustaining, embodied movers, which Steinman beautifully defines as “philosophers of the body”(3).

Choreographic Inspiration

My interest in crafting authentic, embodied storytellers led me to research artists who also work with storytelling and character building. Along my research journey I was introduced to author Christopher Booker who writes specifically on plot writing and examines the inner workings of storytelling. Booker states that there are seven plots that are universal in storytelling: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, tragedy, comedy, and rebirth. (Booker). Most stories do not stay within one plotline throughout the entirety of the narrative, thus these seven plotlines intertwine at times creating multi-layered narratives. We experience and tell these stories in a series of occurrences that is universal to plot writing. What is common to all seven of these plotlines is the sequence in which they are told. The sequence is listed as the following:

- A hero is called to the adventure
- Dream stage: the adventure begins, the hero has some success, and has an illusion of invincibility
- Frustration stage: the hero has his first confrontation with the enemy, and the illusion of invincibility is lost.
- Nightmare stage: the climax of the plot, where hope is apparently lost.
- Resolution: the hero overcomes his burden against the odds.

Because I knew personal narratives would drive this project, I began looking to artists who not only worked within an embodied framework but also possessed an ability to craft narrative work. Crystal Pite is known for her impeccable ability to craft works

that merge elements of dance and theatre. Pite speaks on her perspective of dance stating “I’m trying to create performances where audiences can connect to their own bodies through the dancer and to see themselves and recognize their own experiences and their own dramas translated into fierce physical language” (Pite). Similar to Pite, my intent was to reveal the body as the source from which the narrative was being drawn and physically articulated, essentially crafting a process that produced physically fluent storytellers (i.e. the dancers). Pite creates full sensory experiences for both the audience and performer. “It is this intimate exchange of *e*-emotional energy between performer and spectator that distinguishes Pite’s dance-theater as ‘feeling’” (Dickenson 79). She does this not only through the creation of visually stunning images with the body, but also within text, spoken language and with the use of theatrical set designs. These are concepts I explored in my work. However, I differentiated myself from Pite, who creates movement initially without any preconceived meaning, by generating movement that stemmed from a specific content source significant to each individual dancer. This particular component enhanced the embodied experience of the performers and the audience in my performance project.

Another artist who has greatly influenced my process is Pina Bausch. She created works built from her own memory as well as that of her dancers’. Bausch, worked within the genre of Tanztheater creating “scenes that told serious psychological truths, but in an oblique, semi-abstract, wholly physical way, which made them powerful and discomfoting” (Acocella). Her works required the dancers to enter a psychological state of mind in order to support a true embodied performance. Through speaking, singing, acting, and eccentric set designs Bausch created alternate worlds through which the

human condition could be physically expressed and empathetically understood. Like Bausch, the purpose of my process was to produce works that expressed “psychological truths” but it is the manner in which I designed the work that distinguished my process from hers. These “psychological truths” were determined by the dancers I worked with and the history of experiences that lived within them as individuals. Unlike Bausch, who explores multiple mediums of expression in her choreography, I wanted to provoke somatically conscious beings who could express a full range of story solely through the medium of dance.

When I think of the raw intention that Pina Bausch dancers embody, I cannot help but also notice a distinctive innocence in their performance and an almost animalistic attentiveness, which they bring to their dancing. This primal kinesthetic awareness also reminds me of Gaga trained dancers. Gaga is a movement-based practice developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin. Gaga training is concerned with translating sensation through the body via image initiation as a way of creating infinite movement potentials with a specific vocabulary:

The dancers are fed with language that leads them through a wide range of images and cues that provoke investigation into different places in their body anatomy, intentional impulse, spatial relationships, physical sensations, textural awareness, and energetic possibilities. Examples of these cues include: feeling air bubbles in water, moving through the joints, pulling the bones away from the flesh, and catching skin surfaces in the light (Erwin 3).

A Gaga class is structured so that one is continuously moving, awakening certain parts of the body through facilitated movement exploration. The body is explored on

different levels skeletally, muscularly, and through the sensation of the flesh. Naharin says Gaga is about “thinking of movement as something that can heal. It is about the power of imagination and where you are in space. It is about the soul, about the connection between your demons and your passion” (Naharin). Gaga is an evolving movement research training where dancers are encouraged to discover and connect to themselves through sensory exploration, imagination and personal investigation. Gaga approaches movement from a physical, sensorial and imagery-based orientation. My approach to awakening the body was by triggering physical and mental sensations devised through the psyche of the dancers. This approach differs from Gaga in that the dancers’ experiences and world-views shaped the movement exploration, whereas in Gaga, the movement exploration shapes the way they see the world.

Finally, Authentic Movement (AM) and its connections with psychiatrist Carl Jung’s thinking have greatly informed the direction of my work. Looking at movement as having the potential to heal is at the heart this practice. AM, founded in 1950 by dancer and psychotherapist Mary Starks Whitehouse, aims to explore the psyche to find a deeper connection to oneself through expressive improvisational group movement practices (Stromsted). Wyman-McGinty states, “Authentic movement supports the individual in linking image with affect in that the individual re-experiences the somatic aspect of symbolization” (1). AM is said to bring “form to the body’s wisdom” (Stromsted) and express, what Jung refers to as, the “symbols of the self” which are deeply embedded in the body (Spottiswood).

Creating the Working Environment

In the fall of 2014 I enrolled in a course called Transformational Leadership and Embodied Activism, during which guest lecturer Daniel Schugurensky spoke about his research. A point made in his article greatly informed my own research and my creative process; specifically how I was shaping the space in which my dancers and I worked. Schugurensky touched on the fact that a graduate seminar course is built upon a foundation of transformation and can be the most successful structure for imposing change in short periods of time (Schugurensky). This idea helped to alleviate the pressure I was feeling about incorporating my passion for influencing change through my work in the short period of time (four months) I had to work. Schugurensky defined a seminar course as a system of non-formal learning that consists of structures commonly seen in community-based organizations, fitness programs, professional conferences and continuing professional development classes (Schugurensky). It came as no surprise that dance and sports collectives also function through non-formal learning structures, which make these collective atmospheres catalysts for transformation. Schugurensky's research allowed me to make a large connection between my experiences within these learning environments to my experiences with personal growth, which I touched on in the introduction of this paper.

In addition to the inspiration I received from Schugurensky research I also gained a lot of insight into the art of listening from Stephen R. Covey, which heavily influenced my creative process. Covey states that "Most people do not listen to understand; they listen with the intent to respond" (Covey 239). He claims that listening to empathize is a paradigm from which we have shifted. According to Covey empathetic listening not only

involves listening with the ears but also with the eyes and heart. He claims that 60% of communication is expressed through the body (241). In empathetic listening, “you listen for feeling, for meaning. You listen for behavior” (241). My objective with *Flesh Narratives* was to create an environment that allowed the performer as well as the viewer to empathize with each other through the work and through the language of the body; my interest was in fostering a specific kind of audience/performance dialogue through embodied empathetic listening.

I fostered these ideas in my choreographic practice, by creating a space and a structure that allowed the dancers to effectively express their perspectives within the creative process. Utilizing these concepts from Schugurensky and Covey allowed the dancers to organize their ideas into a collective effort that fostered a clearer understanding of their place in the world. I used this methodology to respond to large life questions and phenomenological ideas through and from the body. I found this approach to making work has kept my practice in constant dialogue with my everyday life. It also allowed for the potential to create work that served as a channel for self-reflection, analysis, and understanding. I believe this to be an enlightening process.

Creating this type of environment began long before the dancers entered into the creative process. I began by exploring and designing experiences and topics that would bring out the most authentic responses in the dancers in relation to the content of the work. However designing an inspiring, creative, and intimate atmosphere required special attention to the dancers. I knew the dancers’ unique movement qualities, personality traits, and creative capacities would shape the environment just as much as the creative process. In addition, I knew the dancers would utilize their unique movement language to

express ideas during the practice of embodiment. Therefore, I did some intentional casting to allow the unique qualities of each dancer to shape the environment, which I explain in further detail in the subsequent chapter (methodology).

Hauntology

Hauntology is an extremely complex and in depth theory which begins with the theory of ontology. Ontology is a branch of metaphysics concerned with identifying the nature of being (*English Department*). For example: What is the purpose of our existence? Is there a god? What happens after we die? These are essentially ontological questions people are constantly attempting to discover (*English Department*). In this project the dancers and I examined ontological questions to build the foundation of the work. According to Powell and Shaffer, “Hauntology does not surpass ontology; it reimagines it” (1). Using Hauntology as an epistemology to examine the content of the project allowed the dancers and I to reshape and reexamine these larger life questions.

Hauntology was originally coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (Miller 1). Its main components have been identified as the ghost, temporality, and ethics of hospitality (Powell & Shaffer 17). “Taken together, they create a new, or different mode of experiencing performance” (17). The ghost is defined as a figure that is neither being nor dead and has “the body of a ghost but its flesh exceeds our senses and understandings” (12). Temporality refers to a state of existence and the relationship to time, while hospitality refers to the consideration of others. Eunoia, which was defined earlier as having good regards to others, coincides with this idea of hospitality. In this context the potential of Hauntology not only permeates the liminal spaces between dancer

and audience but also dancer to self, or dancer to other which, as stated before, can be interpreted as the figure of the ghost. Having hospitality toward the other creates space for the performer to invite the figure of the ghost to be present. The return and manifestation of this figure transmits itself through the realm of temporality in order to communicate its truth. “In other words, the ghost needs a place, a stage whereupon to manifest or to perform (Hoag 18). Due to the complexity of this theory and the nature of this project I will not be going in depth about these concepts, however they will be discussed further in this paper as as these components were innately present within the project, *Flesh Narratives*.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Our voice first belongs to our bodies, only secondary to our native language.

-Louise Steinman²

The development of a movement vocabulary that is authentic to the mover played a significant role in my creative practice and was the driving force of how we collaborated. The word “authentic” is the Latin equivalent to “one who does things himself” (Wexler). Discovering an individual's inner impetus to move is the source from which one can begin building their individual movement vocabulary. Grimmett and Neufield define authenticity as "to draw on a 'body' of knowledge and to speak and act from those moral spaces with a confidence that is rooted in a conscious, collective understanding" (Grimmett and Neufield 208). In order to develop movement that was specific to each dancer, I used collaboration and dialogue to inform a creative process that drew out the unique intentions and motives of each mover. This dialogue built an ethical relationship that allowed me to better understand what moved each dancer at a deep, instinctive level. Within the process, the dancers shaped their personal movement vocabulary. I then utilized this lexicon as a choreographic tool.

In order to be authentic it was important to me that the movement did not come from pre-existing dance technique. Covey claims that if a person is sensed “using some technique (he) senses duplicity, manipulation.” This false persona causes the other person to feel unsafe in being authentic or honest within them. He further states, “The real key to your influence with me is your example.... [which] flows naturally out of your character

or the person you truly are. It is evident in how I actually experience you” (Covey 238). I used this concept to foster what was genuine to each person’s specific physical ability and movement history to develop authentic performers who were able to reveal their true inner being. Generated from each person’s individual motivation, the movement did not emulate codified movement aesthetics. For the performance to be authentic, the movement had to come from a specific origin supported by the dancer’s personal history and perspectives. Drawing upon multiple perspectives, ideas and stories from each dancer through various methods of expression (e.g. writing, dialogue, and movement) gave the dancers the ability to make larger connections to art and life. This also gave the dancer the ability to imprint themselves within the work.

Designing a Collaborative Atmosphere

Connection through experience was important to my creative process and was one of my main objectives when creating *Flesh Narratives*. The objective of this project was to provide the dancers as well as the viewer with the opportunity to have a meaningful physical and psychological experience through the work. I did this by providing many access points for the viewer. I started from very broad, foundational ideas and slowly narrowed the concept to fit our dancer/choreographer collective vision. Starting so open allowed me to build many access points for the viewer and performer to enter the narrative and to make their own connections and meaning. Powell & Shaffer state:

Truth is not found in the identity of the thing as the thing itself but through our interactions with that thing. Therefore, perspective is shaped by interaction and how each interaction differs...[this] is not only to acknowledge that multiple

perspectives exist, but also to purposefully create spaces in our work where they [specters] might emerge and/or insert themselves.... Conversely, analyzing experience in terms of the ghost (being hospitable to the other), multiplies the possibilities for articulating experiences. (2)

I facilitated the rehearsals through imagery investigation, improvisation and writing prompts in order to pinpoint a source from which the dancers began generating movement. “A body that has meaning and significance, a body that writes, challenges the opposition between thinking and acting and gives body to the writer and the act of writing as well as to the performer” (Haviland). Through these experiences and pieces of writing I was able to unveil something new or unique within the dancer; I found ways to manifest their idiosyncrasies into an embodied language. In addition, acknowledging individual motives in the collaborative environment gave equal opportunity for the dancers to influence and insert their voice into the work. Covey states that when we find empathic understanding between one another “Our differences are no longer stumbling blocks to communicate and progress. Instead they become the stepping-stones to synergy” (Covey 259). The process built a creative environment in which the dancers felt safe to communicate a vision, which supported an authentic embodied experience. I constructed a working environment where the dancers were self-motivated to explore designated tasks igniting a sense of energetic connectivity or synergy which Covey defines as “...the essence of principle-centered leadership. It catalyzes, unifies, and unleashes the greatest powers within people” (262). I created content that was rich in imagery by generating movement which was grounded in the dancers’ personal

movement history. This component of personal narrative supported the embodied experience of both dancer and audience.

Designing Flesh Narratives

The nature of this work was story-driven and was arranged to be experienced like a book with chapters, multiple characters, and intertwining plotlines. Storytelling is embedded in our nature. We are wired to create, share and collect stories throughout our day-to-day life. Each section in the choreography represented a new stage of experience where my character would be faced with resistance, suffering, and ultimately transformation. Since the plot stemmed from my personal life journey, my character became the guiding thread throughout the story. Storytelling and plot writing from our life experiences are something we share universally. *Flesh Narratives* was rooted in my own personal history. It was derived from occurrences of loss and was inspired by a profound phase in my life from which I was recovering. I traversed stages of grief, mourning, melancholia, contemplation and reflection. The work not only served as a representation of my own transformation, but also tracked my time in graduate school.

These were the experiential foundations from which my artistic methodologies were built. I feel that the joys of life are easy to embrace. Yet, what I find most stimulating to my growth and understanding of my place and purpose in life is when I am challenged by more difficult life situations. “What stories can tell us, however, much more profoundly than we have realized is how our human nature works, and why we think and behave in this world as we do” (Booker 698). Working with this perspective

through my collaborative process allowed me to find common ground amongst others and their responses to life's trials.

Ritual Cycles and Transformation

Ritual processes, concepts of cycles, and transformation have long been an interest of mine, greatly influencing the way I structure my works. For example, I often employ an ABA structure. This can also be more appropriately defined as a ternary form (Burnette). "The general format of ternary form is *statement/contrast/restatement*, designated by the letters *ABA*. As with binary form, each piece will have its own internal characteristics with regard to key relationships and other smaller forms" (Burnette). The five vignettes that make up *Flesh Narratives* were created utilizing this ABA pattern. I saw this pattern as a small cycle of life and death, in this case, all arranged within a larger narrative or cyclical structure. Much like a spiral there are cycles on top of cycles, each feeding the next, elevating it to the subsequent stage. Like a process of ritual, this structure then becomes infinite. This pattern also creates a sense of incompleteness; the story is left unfinished or to be continued.

The arrangement of my dancers, set design, and lighting were elements intentionally crafted and driven by concepts of transformation. This included the change of seasons and concepts of life and death represented by the constant transformation of set designs, lighting, and the architectural use of space. Traveling floor patterns and group formations were a tool that accomplished many things. For example, they created dimensionality, such as borders, or the emphasis of depth in the space. They also guided the viewer's attention to specific spaces on stage much like the magic of cinematography

can drive our attention as a viewer. I used a large ensemble of dancers to flock and act as a transition between the various sections. They signified the change of seasons, carrying each chapter of the dance from one stage to the next.

My aesthetic choices in costume, décor, lighting design, and music, also drew upon methods of Hauntology. My visual preferences for many of my works often include sets, lights and costumes that are reminiscent of 19th century design references. For example, a chandelier, featured in the first section of *Flesh Narratives*, contained vintage inspired bulbs, which created a soft glow of yellow light (Appendix A-1). Antiquated costume influences along with the atmospheric ambient music provoked feelings of nostalgia pointing back to the past, a place where memories are stored, filtering images like old sepia photographs. Many of the musical composers I used in *Flesh Narratives* are artists who employ methods of Hauntology in their own work. I find this fascinating, as this has also been a recurring theme in many of my previous works. These aural landscapes have layers of old sounds, like a worn-out music box playing in the distance over a whispering blanket of white noise. These music scores provoked a sense of preoccupation with memories, images, or figures from the past.

Creating a stream of stories rooted in ever-transforming human experiences, both physical and spiritual was an integral part of my process. While these fleeting occurrences are difficult to express in words or images, I found that movement had a great power to express what was indescribable and intangible; a gut feeling of pain for example, or a distorted image seen in a dream. *Flesh Narratives* was rooted in the effects one might experience during a stage of reconstruction. Booker states:

“In fact the only archetypal pattern which directly shapes events in the real world in precisely the sense the archetype intends in that of Tragedy. Those who seek to further their ego-centered desires by way of fantasy, whether individually or collective, do unconsciously find themselves acting out the five-stage pattern leading to destruction, exactly as we see in story” (583).

The sections, or chapters, in the choreography reflected the five stages of grief, based on the model developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Other models that have been branched out of the development of the Kübler-Ross model can range from five to as many as seven categories. The following additional stages fit more accurately with how I used this concept to guide the plotline of *Flesh Narratives*.

1. Shock & denial
2. Pain & Guilt
3. Anger & Bargaining
4. Depression, Loneliness
5. Reflection
6. Reconstruction
7. Acceptance

The collection of works that made up *Flesh Narratives* stemmed from works I made while undergoing a journey of personal reconstruction. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross differentiates between mourning and grief stating, “Mourning is the external part of loss. It is the actions we take, the rituals and customs. Grief is the internal part of loss, how we feel” (115). Crafting a story of tragedy through the embodied performance of dance while

intuitively employing elements of Hauntology within the stages of grief became a critical part of my own healing process.

Revisiting previous work and continuing to evolve the experiences that built them allowed my dancers and I to dig deeply into these concepts on a more personal level. Due to the nature of the piece, the series of events or vignettes did not follow a linear pattern but were a reflection of the unpredictable, incongruent, trajectories of life. Tere

O'Connor states:

...my use of fragmentation, more likely adopted from literature than pop culture, is a reflection of the human mind and its capacity to contain innumerable things.

The use of extreme fragmentation is for me a homeopathic remedy for the impossibility of coming to terms with the disparate nature of the events in a life (O'Connor).

In the following sections, I discuss the chapters that made up the story of *Flesh Narratives* and illustrate how they feed into the three models I have previously discussed: Booker's seven basic plotlines and sequence of a storyline, the stages of grief and the theory of Hauntology. I indicate how these structures and approaches influenced the trajectory of the work and how these structures intermingled with each other to create a multilayered narrative of tragedy, defeat, and rebirth.

Retrogression

Noun; the process of returning to an earlier state, typically a worse one.

Stage 1 of grief: Shock, Denial

Stage 4 of a plotline: Nightmare stage: the climax of the plot, where hope is apparently lost

Story type: Tragedy

Season: Transition Summer into Fall

The opening chapter of *Flesh Narratives* was called ‘Retrogression’. This section depicted a relationship between the male and female lead characters and could be interpreted in many ways (Appendix A-2). The characters might have been a romantic couple, or the representation of one single character experiencing struggle and destruction along the journey of the narrative. There were two other male characters in this work that were dressed in all black. They were also important personages in the story (Appendix A-3). These two men embodied antagonistic forces that influenced and manipulated the behavior of the man and women. Their actions more specifically impacted the actions of the protagonist male character (Appendix A-4).

The development of the two antagonistic forces were imperative to the delivery of this narrative. My purpose when designing the process was to mine for truthful intentions that these two characters could embody. This was a difficult task because these characteristics were hard to grapple with on a real level. At times, when performers portray these dark characters their performance can easily become fabricated and over dramatized. We built these characters from a series of writings and discussions around

the topic of vices, addiction and corrupt temperaments. We discussed our connection to these topics and how they relate to our own experiences both as a participant and/or as a recipient of their consequences. I was interested in how those qualities and feelings might manifest into physical language.

Not only did these characters shape the choreographic work itself but they also became decisive tools to shape the space and establish a particular tension in the atmosphere. I coached the performers in how to pace the perimeter of the stage and audience in a stalking manner, circulating in and around the space to create an aura of mystery, suspense and tension. These patterns helped to translate the characters' persona and represented the psychological attributes of the main male character, and also affected the behavior of the female character.

Through the lens of Hauntology, the intentions and feelings that the two men embodied manifested themselves through the figure of the ghost; their aura penetrated the entire space with the unsettling feeling of being watched. Even after they exited the space behind the audience, their presence and potential return lingered in the audience's collective imagination. Gordan states "[the ghost] makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" (6). I believe I achieved this desired effect as I received countless testimonials from audience members about how these characters created a sense of eeriness, making them feel immersed in the performance rather than separate observers of the piece.

Together the two men embodying the ghostly figure of the male character's psyche consumed his will and strength to progress toward a single light coming from the diagonal stage space (Appendix A-5). This "light" was considered a separate character in

and of itself, glowing and diminishing throughout the work but always summoning the couple forward. The couple constantly pushed and pulled, supporting each other as they struggled to progress forward toward the light. Although the pair possessed a great amount of will to stay attached, the two were torn apart (Appendix A-6). The two characters in black completely arrested the will of the male character (Appendix A-7). They then proceeded to deconstruct the set. They dragged the table set off stage as the male character followed, as if in a state of possession.

I wanted to start the dance at the climax of the story in order to provoke an immediate feeling of loss. The authentic embodiment of the main male dancer's character was key in this objective. I chose to work with this dancer because his connection to the role was established two years before the creative process of 'Retrogression' began. This character was originally developed for a work I created titled 'In Beautiful Destruction' which depicted the same narrative but from the perspective of the female character. His deeply imbedded connection to this role allowed him to access the desired state of embodied authenticity required for the depth of the role and allowed the audience to connect to his experience and feel the subsequent loss when he succumbed to the destruction. I struggled with the decision of introducing such a strong character and then immediately eradicating him. However, I realized that, like life, this was in fact how loss is experienced; it is sudden and is left unfinished.

Starting the work with the most narrative-based piece opened a door for reflection, connection and self-projection for the audience. As a point of access, this piece set the premise for the rest of the choreographic vignettes to unfold. It acted as a small

sudden moment of life and death within itself, and simultaneously acted as a catalyst from which further birth and rebirths could occur later in the piece.

Restless Ship Adrift

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.

- Oliver Wendell Holmes³

Stage 2 of grief: Pain and Guilt

Stage 1 and 2 of a plotline: A hero is called to the adventure & dream stage: the adventure begins

Story type: Overcoming the Monster

Season: Fall

The source of inspiration for 'Restless Ship Adrift' came from my fascination with fragmented dreams. During my time of grief, my dreams reflected echoes of my personal pain and guilt. I recounted profound experiences in my sleep through which I can only recall incongruent events and indescribable feelings of discomfort. Vivid images in shapes and colors provoked specific feelings that I wanted to evoke in the piece. To this day the feeling of this is so deeply and internally embedded that I have no way of describing it through oral or written text. Sigmund Freud states "We should regard it as an appropriate comparison, too, to call the mood of mourning a 'painful' one" (Freud 244). Louise Steinman states, "The road to recovery has taught me many lessons not dissimilar to what I learned from creating performance. Both experiences have to do with 'making whole' - bringing together bone, bringing together the disparate experiences and

sensations of one life” (1). She recalls a dream she had in which she envisioned a staff of Asclepius, a symbol of health and healing saying, “...I knew deep in my body tissue and unconscious mind, a process intent on my healing had commenced” (1). This statement reflects my perspective about my dreams. Fragmented scenes, distorted patterns and colors symbolically represent the array of thoughts and feelings I was rewriting within myself.

Attempting to amend these dismembered dreams was successful in the way I played with temporality in this work. During my choreographic process, the dancers and I had the privilege of presenting this work to a panel of professional artists. A comment from panelist Jan Eckert struck me deeply, reflecting the way I use time in my research. She said:

[This] choreographer leaves me space to imagine. We enter a period of time to negotiate midnight. I think about time. They are moving in slow motion. Then quick gestures. Waiting for time to pass. Time is something real right now. Time to wait? Or is it time to be? I feel like this choreographer is rendering time. I feel the sense of moving somewhere. I feel like I am inside a dream. Time moves forward because time won't let us move any other way but forward but I don't know where? All I know is we must go forward.

Without realizing it, Eckert's comments of my use of temporality was touching on the fundamental element of Hauntology. From the words of Derrida “The time is out of joint”, a phrase he uses repetitively to describe how the effects of temporality are seen and felt in the context of Hauntology. Martin Haglung affirms, “this broken sense of time is crucial to Hauntology...” (Fisher, 18).

The content and casting of this section in the piece called for an ability to embody unorthodox body patterns, juxtaposing movement dynamics and the capacity of the dancers to follow their intuitive impulses (Appendix B-1). Investigating the use of imagery from sources such as memories, the imagination and physical visuals to generate movement possibilities invited the psyche of my dancers to be at play. I was inspired to use specific spatial floor patterns for the dance. These were derived from my interest in Mandala designs (Appendix B-2). Mandalas are created during times of ritualistic celebration in which participants dance in a circular repetitive pattern for hours creating intricate shapes and patterns in the earth beneath their feet. “Mandalas reveal aspects of our personality which are normally beyond our awareness, allow greater understanding of our true selves, and provide us with information on how to heal ourselves” (Natale 77). The Mandala pattern is created by a person experiencing a higher state of mental and spiritual consciousness. This is in direct correlation to the trajectory of my work. Working logically with pattern and space while intuitively employing imagery from the world of dreams, I created an aura of mystery, a state where reality is pliable and unpredictable.

Booker states:

All these archetypal powers in the human psyche were identified by Jung, from his studies of dreams and myths. What he was thus able to show was how the pictures we see in our heads when we dream represent in symbolic form the archetypal elements in our unconscious, holding up a unique mirror to our inner state (555).

In this way, the dancers were able to generate these feelings. Embodying them allowed connections to be made between the symbols that are embedded in dreams and ourselves. I believe this to be like the process of reflection whereby reflecting one's own thoughts back to oneself one can find restoration and balance in his or her psyche.

They say before you die you see the light

The wound is the place where the Light enters you

– Rumi⁴

Step 3 of grief: Anger & Bargaining

Stage 3 of a plotline: Frustration stage: the hero has his first confrontation with the enemy

Story type: Overcoming the Monster

Season: Fall

In 2013 I created the solo performance ‘They say before you die you see the light’. This was not only the first work I created as a graduate student but also the first work I made during this pivotal peak of change in my life. This climax in my development triggered a search for knowledge that would allow me to reshape my personal and artistic perspective. At this point in my life I experienced grief in the form of what Freud defines as a state of melancholia. This is when a person experiences loss not necessarily through death but having the entity removed from their reality and conscious mind. In this case Freud states, “. . .[the person] knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him” (Freud 245). This means that, although the person is conscious of the loss at hand, he or she is unable to identify the source from which the grieving stems because it resides in the unconscious mind. This was the period where my

fascination with the concept of enlightenment and higher truth began. At that point, symbols of light, life, death, and rebirth cycled through my mind.

Reading, free writing, and immersing myself in explorative methods of improvisation fed the process of this work. Reading about these philosophies brought forth deeper understanding of the content, while writing gave me the opportunity to reflect and make personal connections. Embedding these reflections in the choreography allowed for an innate connection to be made between the content and the philosophies of my personal existence. Using the insight gained from the reading and journal writing as informative layers I began working with the practice of improvisation to construct a movement score using memory recall. Entering a state of the unknown through improvisation meant the motives and impulses of my unconscious mind ultimately shaped each performance of the work. Steinman states, “improvisation is a form of immediacy, a discipline of spontaneity and awareness. The content of the work is the content of the present” (78). Witnessing the ephemeral state of improvisation within my body felt like a sequence of small deaths arriving and departing in milliseconds. While falling and rising I was unconsciously engaging outside forces such as momentum, gravity, and inertia, carrying me through the space.

By placing myself kinesthetically within real memories, I was influenced by true emotional surges during the performance. Steinman states, “memory is embedded in our very act of seeing and movement seems to be the particular potent force in unlocking memory’s vivid detail” (71). Although the score barely shifted my interaction with these memories, and my experience and performance within them was different every time, it became clear to me how intentions, feelings, dynamics, and movement qualities could

drive the shifts in performance (Appendix C-1). “Through repeated usage, transformation occurs in the usage itself. This theory of performativity depends upon repetition and not reproduction” (12). It is through the repetition and not the recreation of the performance that allowed the moments on stage to be truthful and real experiences. This way of creating is what I describe as a stream of journal entries allowing me to track my healing process. The memories, feelings, and images that I embodied through improvisation manifested themselves into the figure of the Hauntological ghost. Through repetition with these delicate concepts, the narrative began to take shape. Every time I performed the work I surrendered myself more and more to the performance process, sourcing on pure intuition (Appendix C-2). Returning back to the theory of Hauntology, Powell and Shaffer state, “the process of repetition and iteration are important when engaging the ghost. The importance lies in how the ghost is asking us to experience life, not in what it is saying itself” (16). The performance began to serve as a container in which I could capture, if only in brief, who and where I was in that very moment. Having been absorbed in a state of melancholia I found myself, in the process of creating this work and the experience of each performance thereafter, to be insightful and unconditionally healing. Avery Gordon said “If you let it, the ghost can lead you toward what has been missing, which is sometimes everything” (58). Each time I performed the work I felt that I made an instantaneous journal entry of images and feelings written in a language that words could never convey. Searching for a better understanding of this ambiguous, wordless, sensational power in dance has remained the catalyst for the work I continued to make.

Fragment/Ladder

For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.

— *Cynthia Ocelli*⁵

Step 4 & 5 of grief: Depression, Loneliness, and Reflection & Reconstruction

Stage 5 of a plotline: Resolution: the hero overcomes his burden against the odds

Story Type: Tragedy

Season: Transition Winter into Spring

‘Fragment/Ladder’ is a continuation of a previous work inspired by funeral processions and baptism. Qualities of the divine Buddhist figure, White Tara, also became important to the piece. According to Buddhist philosophy, the White Tara was born from the tears of the Lord Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. She was brought to earth to free people from suffering inflicted by the realities of the physical world (Purna). This divine female figure led me to the concept of burdens and how the weight of them are passed down through generations. The idea that we fight battles for our own progress and for generations to come, was a notion that stimulated me to go deeper with my creative research.

When I started making ‘Fragment/Ladder’ I knew that I wanted to explore qualities of water and personal perspectives about prayer that would be intermingled and layered within the section. I excavated these ideas mainly through writing and translation of discursive language into physical language. Although this tool was utilized in parts during all of my choreographic processes, this piece utilized writing as a constant throughout its creation. Because of the content, this creative process served as a means

from which the dancers and I connected the dialogue and physical exploration. This was a much more intimate process than any of my other pieces. We discussed very personal ideas around spirituality, individual belief systems, and hope. Marco Caracciolo states, “stories draw on our familiarity with experience by activating what psycholinguists call ‘experiential traces’ and the values that are entangled with them”. These concepts, especially that of prayer, are fed by vast amounts of personal valuation. Creating a space where we could feel open about sharing those values was pivotal in the success of this piece. In addition, choosing dancers with specific energetic qualities that would create a nurturing, peaceful atmosphere was important to building the type of environment necessary for the creative dialogue the work required. For example, one of my dancers is a mother. Having her maternal quality present in the work was invaluable in terms of its resonance in performance and in the process.

In July of 2015 I experienced the tragic loss of a friend to suicide. Losing her proved to be an emotionally difficult time for me. I found myself migrating inward toward mental spaces that drove me into the past, and into a state of grief. The process of grieving sparked a great desire to somehow impart a fragment of her story and my own personal struggles with her death into the work. Because our relationship sprouted from our common love for the art of dance, I found it significant and powerful to pay homage to her story through a dance.

In the midst of creating I had a beautifully haunting dream about my dear friend. In the dream she consoled and comforted me. We sat across from one another, face to face, patiently and honestly looking into each other’s in the eyes. She leaned over and embraced me with a strong, soothing grasp. This lasted a long time and I could feel the

physical response I was having in this dream. I vividly remember sensing every part of her as her rib cage pressed into mine as her hands spread wide across my back. I awoke, still having a kinesthetic experience from the dream. In my waking life I suddenly felt her absence, once again sending me into a deep state of grief. In that moment I felt that her presence was deeply imprinted on my memory. Derrida and Freud state that “the dead are not that dead, and in fact, may possess greater (rhetorical) force on memory than the living – *occupying* memory in a manner far ‘superior’ to the living, consuming one’s psyche via traumatic repetition and return” (Hoag 17). Many times when a person experiences the loss of a loved one or a beloved object they enter a state of what Freud defines as a state of mourning. In this state one may have trouble detaching themselves from the bond of unity that existed between both entities, which can leave the person “clinging to the object through the median of hallucinatory wishful psychosis” (Freud 244). Freud further states, “the existence of the lost object is physically prolonged” (Freud 245). I believe this dream was my unconscious mind “clinging” to her. “In order to attend to...these specters, these revenants, [I must] open my memory to them, to allow them to occupy it” (Hoag 18). During rehearsal the next day I decided to shape the creative process in order to unearth the physical and emotional sensations I experienced in the dream. In this way, I wanted to somehow prolong her presence.

Immediately, I began to brainstorm for a process that would allow my dancers to feel the tactile trace resonating within me from the dream. Steinman states, “for the performer it is an important technique for entering the world of dream and vision...and if the performance is to be realized in collaboration with others, then they too must feel the weight and the texture of the dream” (74). The following exploration is an example of

how I engaged the dancers' senses in order to find an authentic source from which the dancers could begin developing movement, intention and story. In the rehearsal studio, I turned off all the lights and asked that we all walk about in the space. Devoid of sight, the dancers' awareness was heightened; their skin was more sensitive, their breathing was more apparent and their sensitivity to others in the space became much more alive and active. Slowly, I prompted connection through touch between the dancers by suggesting very simple hand to hand, shoulder-to-shoulder contact. This progressed into embracing one another for roughly two minutes, sensing each other's expanding and contracting torsos. I then asked the dancers to pile onto one another. The first person laid on their belly as the others stacked on top, belly to back. With six dancers the amassed weight for the person on the bottom was very intense, however focusing on their breath made it manageable. Having each dancer experience this pressure while I coached them to find ease in their breathing and expansiveness in their torsos created physical sensations similar to those from which I wanted to derive choreographed movement. Once the pile of people trickled off the person on the bottom, the feeling of a sudden rush of fresh air entered their lungs, expanding their torsos in the front and backspace of the body. This action fostered a return to a sense of volume they were unable to experience under the pressure of accumulated weight in the pile-up of other dancers' bodies. I connected this exercise with the image of waking from a dream; a sudden inhalation brings one's awareness back to its previous state of reality (Appendix D-1). After these sets of experiences, we engaged in reflective writing and dialogue. I then sorted these ideas and words so they could be translated into a physical language and lexicon for the dance.

Generating material in this manner created space for the dancers to have a poignant corporal relationship to the philosophies and beliefs learned through the process. The movement was so serene and quiet, deeply rooted in nurturing qualities, similar to a relationship between a child and mother. This vignette created a moment within the narrative for the audience to experience a shift in tone - transitioning into a state of rest (Appendix D-2). Performing this section became a moment to truly reflect on my state of mind and physical exhaustion. I vividly remember the second night of the performance as one of the most intense experiences that I have experienced. I have never cried on stage before until that day. The overwhelming feeling to express myself in such a way happened suddenly and in that moment I felt like a channel, as if my friend allowed me to share a part of her story, a part of her pain. (Appendix D-3). Powell and Shaffer said, “Perhaps they [specters] desire recognition of their unending sorrow; perhaps they simply require recollection; perhaps they urge one to just cry—or to cry justly” (2). Hoag further states, “like an idea, *you cannot evict a memory* so easily; it holds on...No wonder it is foolhardy to believe one is ever done with trauma, mourning, and/or loss. The other *comes back*, sometimes crying for justice” (18). This overwhelming feeling of heartache was so honest that it led me into one of the most vulnerable states I have ever experienced on stage.

I also recall that night in performance in which one of the dancers, Michelle, also had a profound experience on stage. As I mentioned before, my casting process is very intentional and my choices have meaningful reasoning behind them. In January of 2016, the same month as my Thesis performance, I found out that she also lost a friend to suicide. After reading a news release about her friend passing, I knew immediately that I

had to have Michelle be a part of this work. Due to time constraints she was unable to be a part of the creative process of the piece and her insertion into the work happened the week of the performance. Because of this, the content that made up ‘Fragment/Ladder’ was unknown to her and my reasons for casting her in the work were left unsaid. She was not aware of the true intention behind her last minute presence in the piece until the day of the show when I revealed to my entire cast the roots from which *Flesh Narratives* stemmed. When I shared my process for ‘Fragment/Ladder’, which included my friend’s story, I could not help but notice tears falling down Michelle’s face. I remember looking at her across the circle and telling her about the day I found out about her friend’s passing and how I knew she had to be part of this project. That night, during the performance, I remember being placed into the bucket of water; as I felt multiple hands pour water on my body, I could hear Michelle begin to shush me to sleep as she bathed me with the water of baptism (Appendix D-4).

After performing the work, I spoke to Michelle and asked her about her presence in the piece. I asked her if she thought she had a profound experience while performing the work. She answered by stating:

I can certainly say that I did [have an experience on stage]. Especially because it happened at a time when my friend passed away. I cried during the performance. I felt a heaviness and sadness during the baptism followed by this more freeing light feeling when we took you off stage (Appendix D-6). I can honestly say I have felt more personal emotion in this piece than any other I have performed. I felt in that moment that I was acting as a vessel for her to witness her friend and in this process she was able to say goodbye, putting her friend to rest and finding peace in the

process. The ghost is not a static identity, rather it haunts as a “non-sensuous sensuous... the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other. (Powell and Shaffer 13). This moment for me was evidence that my dancer also had a profound personal and spiritual experience on stage. Trevor Hoag said:

...the ghost of memory is called forth via various rhetorical means, and illustrate how its haunting return constitutes an uncanny performance, one whereby it possesses, occupies a space/place, through its mnesic echo. Quite crucially, it will likewise become apparent how the attempt to give the ghost its stage-time constitutes an attempt to mourn/grieve (2).

‘Fragment/Ladder’ closes with an emotional scene in which I drag my body down a long aisle of light, struggling to get through the collective of dancers pacing back and forth as they pluck petals, dropping their remnants on the ground beneath my brittle body. As I come in contact with each dancer, they pause, kneel down, and place a stemmed flower in my mouth (Appendix D-3). This gesture represented the taking of burdens, each dancer represented the infinite histories, triumphs, and tribulations of our ancestors. Once the flowers were exchanged from the dancers into my mouth they released a gasp of air, signifying their release from the burdens they carried. After each dancer was released from their struggle, they lifted me up off the ground and into a tin bucket of water where the baptism commenced. This scene concluded with Michelle removing the flowers from my mouth (Appendix D-5) and leading the procession with the remaining dancers; they carried my lifeless body off stage. Before my exit Michelle passed on the handful of flowers to a dancer in a bronze gown initiating the beginning of the next vignette, ‘Reign’. This handful of flowers which represented our cleansed burdens, once passed

off, transformed into a gesture representing a crown. Our burdens became our greatest powers, preparing my character for her “reign”, and final transition into a new phase of life.

Reign

The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself.

— *Carl Sagan*⁶

Step 6 & 7 of grief: Recovery, hope and Acceptance

Stage 5 of a plotline: Resolution Continued: the hero overcomes his burden against the odds

Story Type: Rebirth

Season: Transition Spring into Summer

‘Reign’ was a work that stemmed from my enchantment with a painting, ‘The Birth of Venus’ (Appendix E-1), from Italian painter Sandro Botticelli. This portrait is a representation of the goddess Venus transitioning into womanhood. She is seen being carried by an angel and emerging from a seashell preparing to be robed by another female figure. This gesture signified the advancement to a new phase and was a ritualistic, and triumphant moment. I was introduced to this painting while I was traveling in Italy for a summer dance intensive. This month long experience overseas had a profound effect on me, and resulted in one of the most life changing experiences I have had within a dance community. It was during this trip that I first experienced Gaga Movement Language. As I mentioned before this practice reveals a lot to the dancer by investigating the body at a deep somatic level while also challenging the imagination through imagery investigation.

Working with so many new teachers and techniques during the intensive opened my body and mind in a very profound way; I discovered parts of myself that I never knew were absent. This new sense of personal awareness, and self-assurance was something I wanted the dancers to experience through the making of 'Reign'.

The painting of Venus, a goddess, a divine entity led me to the heavens to find further inspiration. The heavens led me to the stars and the stars led me to constellations. I turned towards the examination of one's identity through the use of celestial astrological philosophy, which I believed would give each dancer a greater understanding of themselves and their movement for this section. The astrological signs of each dancer were used to develop a solo phrase as the beginning point in the creative process for 'Reign'. I began this process by making task cards for each dancer, which I developed based on elements associated with their astrological signs. These components were modality, element, anatomy, ruling planet, and other keyword characteristics embedded in the scheme of their self-portraiture.

- **Modality** would determine whether their solo would move through space (Cardinal) or stay in one place (Fixed).
- **Elements** would determine the quality of their movement: Water, Air, Earth, Fire
- **Anatomy** would determine where in their bodies the emphasis of movement would stem from- for example, ribs, heart, head, stomach, etc.
- **Ruling planet** would determine which dancers would be able to either carry and wear the "crown" as represented by a specific gesture (Appendix E-2). This was based upon which dancer had Venus as a ruling planet as part of their astrological profile.

- **Characteristics** would determine the intention, narrative, and the choreographic choices made within their solos.
 - Example: Aries: Warrior Goddess, Determined, Leader
 - Cancer: Motherly, Nurturing, Feeling

Once these solo phrases were built I began arranging them into group phrases. Based upon astrological logic, the way in which the dancers interacted with one another was determined by how the different signs would interact. For example, Scorpio and Cancer signs have great compatibility, whereas Scorpio and Aries tend to resist one another. This knowledge influenced who would make connections in the piece and would determine how the dancers were placed and divided in space. Individual characteristics of each sign determined each dancer's particular spatial location in the piece. For example Scorpio has Venus as its ruling planet, which determined that she would be the dancer who became the centerpiece of the tableau section. In this case Venus is represented by an empress figure, which is defined by being crowned at the beginning the piece. The crown has significance because it is a thread line of connection between the pieces 'Fragment/Ladder' and 'Reign'. The handful of flowers Michelle removed from my mouth were handed off to one of the goddesses from 'Reign', then transformed into a crown as signified by a specific movement gesture (Appendix E-2). The tableau was a literal representation of 'The Birth of Venus' portrait, portrayed through the active stillness of the dancers (Appendix E-1).

'Reign' consisted of a cast of five women: an Aries, a Libra, a Scorpio and two Cancer signs. Patterns of the constellations and image glyphs of astrological symbols also shaped the choreography (Appendix E-3). Having two Cancer signs and three dancers

whose element was water influenced many of the qualities in the work. The dancers with water signs created a nurturing and supportive collective, carrying, swinging, and lifting each other throughout the space (Appendix E-4). These qualities are representative of the final stages of grief from the Kübler-Ross model - recovery, hope and acceptance.

In the storyline of the entire work, 'Reign' followed 'Fragment/Ladder' seamlessly. The element of water aided in a fluid transition from one piece to the next. 'Reign' represented the preparation for new life, similarly to how 'The Birth of Venus' represents the goddess' transition into maturity. The five women of 'Reign' each represented the reincarnated version of the dancers from 'Fragment/Ladder', which also contained five women. The dancers were dressed in long gold and bronze gowns. They created very precise tableaux and filled the negative space with a kind of designed specificity (Appendix E-5). The contrast of these elegant gold and bronze gowns with the physicality and strength of their movement was some of the most interesting qualities in this work. It showed the versatility of the feminine, symbolically representing the complexity of the female nature.

Flesh Narratives from concept to completion

In the concept stage of development I had hoped to manifest the theme of transformation in more than just the movement. I wanted to immerse the audience in a sense of intimacy and yet still create enough distance to evoke a feeling of voyeurism. Originally, I wanted to achieve this by limiting the number of audience members in the space, dividing the audience into various smaller spaces. I imagined the audience could wander through the set and experience the works from a close proximity. Eventually, this

concept developed into the creation of a modular physical structure, designed in collaboration with architect, Nicolas Haddad, that would house the choreographic work. We envisioned the structure with walls and ceiling panels that would be rigged to form a grid, creating an enveloping environment that would shift and transform throughout the work (Appendix F-1). The structure was meant to reflect the concepts of intimacy, immersion and transformation. Due to logistical reasons such as time, budget, and technical assistance, we were unable to realize such a grandiose structure. Thus, I had to reconsider and find a new method to achieve these objectives as the use of the set design and props became crucial to how I would finally design the environment.

Another large shift that occurred was my personal presence in the work. Originally, I was only going to be in the first section with short interventions during the rest of the work. However, since my personal story played such an integral part of *Flesh Narratives*, my added presence became crucial to the delivery of the piece. As the choreographer and the protagonist in the piece I acted as a central entity through which the audience could find common ground or through-line in the work. Inserting myself in all the sections of the work allowed me to define my place in the narrative, which also helped to determine the dancers' roles in relationship to me. Secondly, by making myself vulnerable and sharing my story in an intimate manner, many barriers that might have existed did not become evident. This insertion also solidified the work by bringing all the elements together and giving them meaning. Christopher Booker states, "Groups of human beings develop a sense of common identity, shared values, shared assumptions of what they believe to be true or important. And in this respect they develop a collective ego-consciousness" (Booker 589). Through this process everyone felt his or her story had

a place in this work and that personal empowerment would shape the deliverance of this piece.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Currently, I continue to work with my dancers on a very deep level, unearthing their personal experiences, perspectives, and psyche to develop the movement that builds the work. The choreography acts as a time capsule, collecting fragments of ideas and stories, and then arranging them into a narrative. In this way, by honoring the personal history of my dancers, we are already working within the “realm of ghosts”. Like the strata that form Hauntology such as music, layers of stories and ideas can provoke various emotions and images for the dancer as well as the viewer. My research on the subject has led me to a variety of artists and mediums like music, cinematography, photography and other visual arts but there does not appear to be much research on the subject of Hauntology in dance. In this context, the role a choreographer plays has much deeper implications than one may think. Choreographers can be seen as shamans, keeping memories and ideas alive that come from somewhere beyond us individually; socially and culturally they reveal our common histories through the art of storytelling. I believe, as a choreographer, I can utilize elements of Hauntology in my work to unearth these deeply embedded memories within my dancers to continue evolving the authenticity of embodiment and performative expression.

The transmitting of these deeply embedded memories and feelings is a fragile exchange and is hard to describe. A new concept called Flashbulb Memory has helped me better understand how the dissemination and imprinting of ideas happens on an unconscious level. “The flashbulb memories are stored on one occasion and retained for a lifetime. What makes the flashbulb memory special is the emotional arousal at the

moment that the event was registered to the memory” (“Flashbulb Memory”). The term ‘flashbulb’ is a clear and descriptive one. In a flash of a second, a memory, image or feeling is imprinted into the mind of the viewer. This calls to and stimulates the memory bank one has in their consciousness. When these flashes of memory are witnessed, in the case of *Flesh Narratives*, through the relationship of narrative and movement, the mind and body can re-experience the memory as their own. As Neisser put it, "The flashbulb recalls an occasion when two narratives that we ordinarily keep separate -- the course of history and the course of our own life -- were momentarily put into alignment” (qtd. In “Flashbulb Memories”). Through Hauntology the manifestation of one’s history can be revealed in the form of flashbulb memories. The ghost presence brings with it stories and recollections of our individual and collective pasts. Many times I have heard testimonials from audience members claiming that they felt they were projecting their own stories onto the choreography. Many in the public felt deep connections to the story. Others even had a physical/emotional reaction to the work, such as feeling fear, or the need to cry. Inviting the audience to empathize with the work was one of my most important objectives in making *Flesh Narratives*. Finding unity through our experiences by witnessing the art of dance is a powerful connection that imbeds itself in the sensate memory within the body.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

We are not going in circles, we are going upwards. The path is a spiral; we have already climbed many steps.

— *Hermann Hesse*⁷

Working within an embodied movement framework reveals patterns and habits that become the language of one's authentic being. I believe this is a process by which dancers realize their personal movement language. This is what makes my methodology distinctive. By using a Hauntological lens to examine philosophical ideas, archetypal symbols, and related themes, my work created an existential experience for the dancer. Creating experiential activities by which the dancers were able to tune in to their sensate perception is how one can achieve what I describe as an authentic embodied experience. According to Steinman, in cultures that practice Shamanism the performer "goes somewhere else for the sake of healing the individual or the tribe" (45). It is through and from the body that we understand our place in the world and find connections between each other, and the schema of life, which is the current of all living history.

Sharing intimate ideas in a safe space creates a profound experience for both the dancer and the audience. One of the most important aspects of storytelling is the role of the reader or viewer. If we return to the literature aspect of my choreography this can also be identified as a narrator and reader relationship. A storyteller must aim to make those who listen or watch experience the physical or emotional aspects of each story (Steinman 104). Aristotle believed *eunoia* to be an underlying element in creating healthy relationships (Kalimtzis 77). Powell and Shaffer state, in "the 'now' of performance there

are individuals experiencing performance with each other. Derridean logic assumes the audience and performers call each other into an ethical relationship that transforms the notion of ‘responsibility to the audience’ from understanding to experience” (13). This condition of receptivity between dancer and audience creates a powerful connection that has the potential to communicate ideas that go beyond oral and discursive translation. This level of human-to-human receptivity, I believe, can have tremendous transformative powers.

In a course I took as an undergraduate dance student, we were asked “if you had no limitations keeping you from achieving your biggest dream what would you do or be?” I vividly remember saying that if I could be anything I would want to be a revolutionary and lead profound change in our world. The great thing about this dream is my love for dance is a relationship that does not limit me from being able to achieve something this great. The body is a powerful source from which transformation occurs, making dance a catalyst for socio cultural change. Derrida says, “Hauntology supplants ontology as a mode of experiencing life” (14). Looking at Hauntology through an epistemological viewpoint means, “concern for the other dictates that the event must also be experienced out of concern for future generations of others”(17). Combining the art of storytelling with the powerful source of the body I hope to unveil the light people have within themselves. I believe provoking this level of reflection is the initial step in awakening oneself. Further, I believe this awakening can lead to great change within oneself and beyond. We are living vessels of infinite experiences and the greatest gift is the power to share those stories with others.

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APPENDIX A
RETROGRESSION

A -1



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

A-2



A-3



Photographs by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

A-4



A-5



Photographs by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

A-6



A-7



Photographs by Tim Trumble

APPENDIX B
RESTLESS SHIP ADRIFT

B-1



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photograph



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

B-2



Photograph by Tim Trumble



Zentaurius. "Cersei - Mandala Design"

< <http://zentaurius.deviantart.com/art/Cersei-Mandala-Design-526462642> >

APPENDIX C
THEY SAY BEFORE YOU DIE YOU SEE THE LIGHT

C-1



C-2



Photographs by Tim Trumble

APPENDIX D
FRAGMNET/LADDER

D-1



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

D-2



D-3



Photographs by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

D-4



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

D-5



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography



Photograph by Tim Trumble

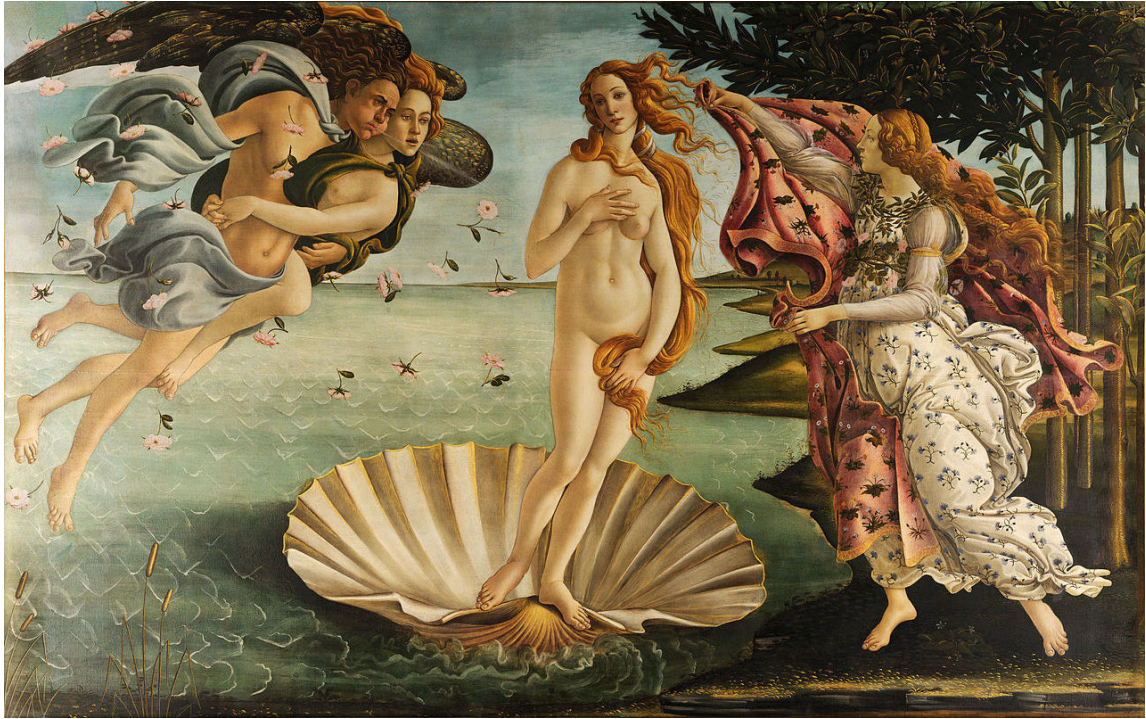
D-6



Photograph by Tim Trumble

APPENDIX E
REIGN

E-1



The Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

E-2



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

E-3



Photograph by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

LIBRA



This is an example of how their astrological symbols influenced the choreographic choices that were made

E-4



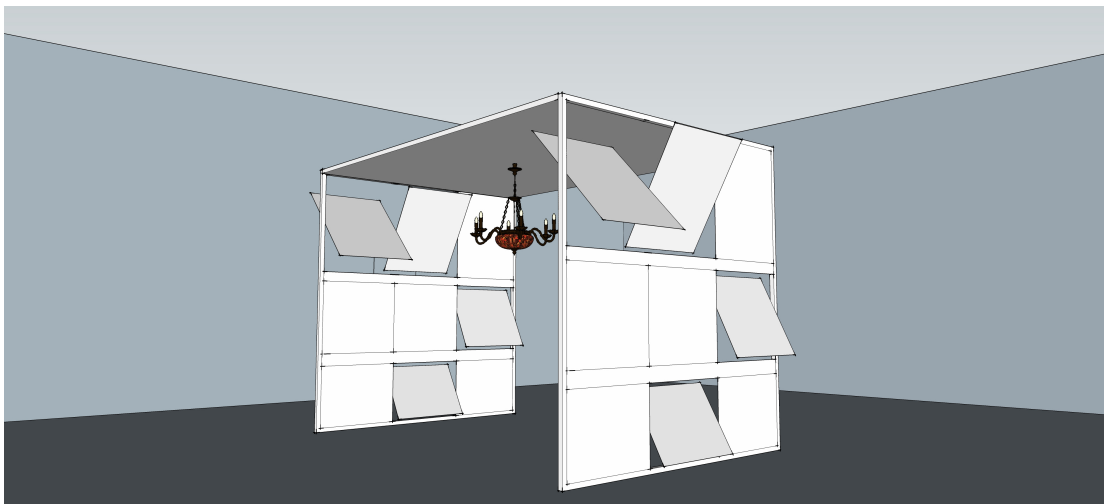
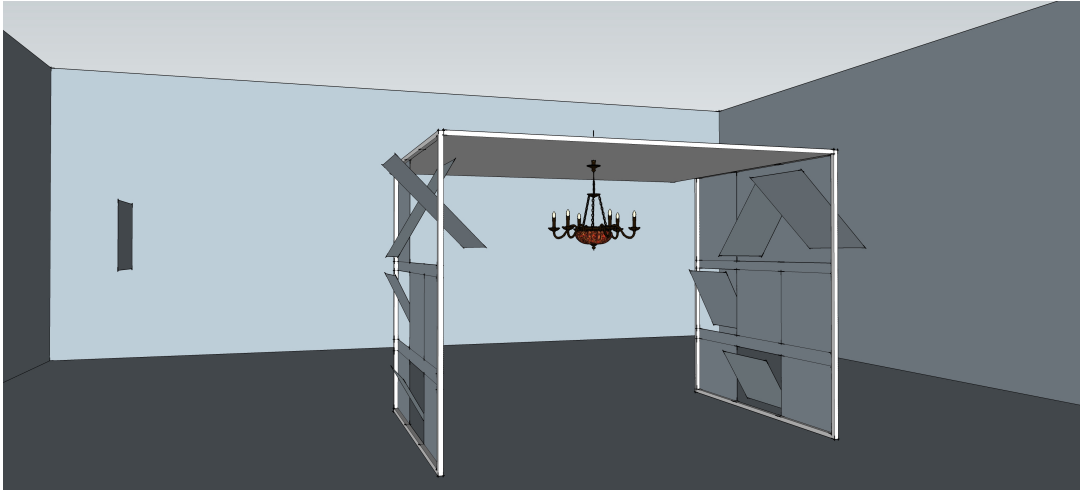
E-5



Photographs by Anna Jones of AnnaKmac Photography

APPENDIX F
FLESH NARRATIVES FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

F-1



Concept and design was done in collaboration with Nicolas Haddad 75

75

75